

FORBES CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY®

School of Music

presents the doctoral recital of

Norman Charette, *piano*

Sunday, February 28, 2021
8 pm
Recital Hall



Program

Intermezzo in A Major, Op. 118, No. 2

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

Sonata in C Minor, K. 457

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756-1791)

Molto Allegro
Adagio
Allegro assai

Le Tombeau de Couperin

Maurice Ravel
(1875-1937)

Prélude
Fugue
Forlane
Rigaudon
Menuet
Toccata

L'Isle Joyeuse

Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)

*This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts.
Norman Charette is from the studio of Dr. Paulo Steinberg.*

Program Notes

Brahms: Op. 118, no. 2: Intermezzo in A Major

Born in Hamburg, Germany in 1833, Johannes Brahms was largely influenced by the works of Beethoven among other composers, although he was also inspired by earlier composers such as Bach. He experimented with several large scale forms before turning to shorter character pieces of his Op. 116-119. This Intermezzo comes from his op. 118, a set of six pieces for piano composed in 1893, about 4 years before his death. Brahms built this Intermezzo from a single motive (C#-B-D), by using Baroque compositional techniques such as inversion, augmentation, and imitation. His compositional writing was criticized for returning to old techniques when most Romantic composers at this time were headed in a different direction. In this work, we see many traits associated with the Romantic Period, including long legato melodies with written-in rubato, chromatic lines, suspended harmonies, and contrasting moods that range from calm to passionate.

The first section from this ABA form opens with the C#-B-D motive which gets varied immediately by a longer leap (the 3rd interval becomes a 7th). By using motivic development, the composer creates variety and manages to build longer lines while adding organicity to his writing. Brahms' strong understanding of counterpoint is displayed from the beginning, opening in 4-voice texture, with a duet in the right hand between the soprano and alto voices. After a warm A section, a darker passage emerges in the B section, maintaining a duet between the soprano and alto voices, this time becoming a bit more prominent, with the alto entering one beat late in the style of a canon, and echoing the soprano. Suddenly, we arrive at a chorale with as many as six and seven voices, possibly representing a moment of peace, prayer, or even a lament which, in turn, is interrupted by another canon passage that reaches the climax of the piece. An effective transition leads to the return of the A section, which finally comes to a close without almost any change.

Mozart: Sonata in C Minor, K. 457

The Piano Sonata in C Minor, K. 457, composed by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in 1784, was first published together with his Fantasy in C Minor, K. 475. This sonata is only one of two of his 20 piano sonatas that were composed in a minor key. The first movement opens with a "Mannheim Rocket": an ascending sequence of notes outlining a chord. This forward-propelling line is followed by a contrasting chordal response, a compositional technique that Mozart used in his operatic overtures. The second thematic area is in the relative major key of Eb Major, and provides a warm and lyrical contrast to the dark key of C Minor. The second movement is marked Adagio, and is in the style of an aria. In this movement, we see Mozart displaying his love of opera with a beautiful melody, sharp contrasts, and clearly defined characters. The Rondo movement is highly syncopated such that it hides the downbeat and gives a sense of fluidity to the opening statement. The piece concludes with a dramatic coda that leaves the listener empowered yet unsettled.

Program Notes *continued*

Ravel: *Le Tombeau de Couperin*

Maurice Ravel wrote his *Tombeau de Couperin* between 1914 and 1917. This title translates directly to “Couperin’s Tomb”, referring to the French composer François Couperin, who lived from 1668-1733, during the peak of the Baroque period. This work is a suite of six pieces that pays homage not only to Couperin the composer, but also to the keyboard suites and musical styles of the Baroque and early Classical periods. While the work as a whole is an homage to Couperin, each individual piece is dedicated to a friend of his who died during World War I. The suite functions as a whole, starting off mysterious, passing through periods of loneliness and depression, and ending in a grand celebratory cadence. Much of the music was actually written before the outbreak of the war, and when asked about why the overall tone isn’t one that reflects grief, Ravel said that “the dead are sad enough, in their eternal silence”.

The suite opens with a *Prélude* and *Fugue*, a common pairing used especially by J. S. Bach. A *Prélude* is a short piece often based on a single idea and usually serves as an introduction or opening to subsequent pieces in a set, though during the Romantic period, they began to be composed individually, or as a collection of preludes (such as Chopin’s *24 Preludes*). This prelude’s texture is thin, typical of Ravel’s style, and revolves around an ornamented circular motive. The piece covers nearly the entire range of the piano as Ravel displays various colors and textures. A *fugue* is a piece in which a main subject appears in different voices and can be varied in several ways through different compositional techniques such as inversion, augmentation, and diminution. One possible image that one could associate with this piece is that of birds speaking in the night. The third movement is a *forlane*, which is a lively Italian folk dance in 6/4 or 6/8 meter, with frequent repetitions of phrase segments, simple harmonies, an implied drone bass, and often beginning with an upbeat. Ravel’s most obvious modifications to this genre are his harmonies, including the use of ninths and augmented chords. The fourth movement is a *rigaudon*, which originates from a French folk dance in duple meter with four bar phrases, and usually beginning with an upbeat. Ravel created a 2-measure introduction with strong fortissimo chords in both hands, which quickly turns into a 16th-note passage, with the left hand crossing back and forth over the right hand. A middle contrasting section marked “*Moins vif*” (“less lively”) has a single thin melody with ornaments appearing often, and similarly to the opening section, this section is also accompanied by chords in the left hand that constantly cross over the right hand. The fifth piece is a *menuet*, which is a French dance in moderate or slow triple meter. A *musette* arrives as a contrasting middle section, with the right-hand chords accompanying a left hand solo line that constantly appear in different registers, creating a combination in which one could imagine distant bells accompanied by explosions heard during the war. After the *musette*, the themes of both sections are combined. The final movement is a *toccata*, a piece that originally had an improvisatory style combined with virtuosic elements. Here, Ravel uses a freer form structure and repetitive sixteenth notes to keep the piece moving forward. The technical challenges throughout this piece make it very difficult to play, including repeated notes, hand crossing, single melodies played by two hands alternating each note, broken octaves, broken chords, and arpeggios. The final coda brings the suite to a close with a statement that is full of strength and triumph.

Program Notes *continued*

Debussy: *L'Isle Joyeuse*

Composed in 1904, *L'Isle Joyeuse* is one of Debussy's most virtuosic works. In a letter to his publisher, he wrote, "But God! How difficult it is to perform... that piece seems to assemble all the ways to attack a piano since it unites force and grace... if I dare to speak thus!" There have been suggestions that this work was inspired by a painting by Watteau, titled "The Embarkment for Cythère". E. Robert Schmitz wrote that while this painting contains "gaiety, animation, and sensual atmosphere of the Watteau painting (*Cythère* is the birthplace of Venus), music is alive and does not abide by the momentary fixation of canvases." Many of the typical Debussy-esque qualities are found in this piece, including the use of whole-tone and chromatic scales, sometimes simultaneously in different voices. The opening is in the style of a cadenza, which includes a trill followed by a descent on a whole-tone scale, leaving the listener wondering what the key is. The first theme has the character of light and playful dance that returns throughout the piece in different characters. A second theme made of long, beautiful melodic lines supported by full chords contrasts the first theme. The final section brings one of the most passionate and joyful closing passages in music, perhaps a celebration of pagan libations as Schmitz suggests, or a ritual to the god of love, or simply the greatest dreams one may have for this life.

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