

Program Notes for Doctoral Recital #1, CUNY Graduate Center, Spring 2013

Sonata in G major, H.XVI: 39 (1780) - Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1812)

In 1780, Franz Joseph Haydn was reaching the height of his international popularity. The sonata H.XVI: 39 was written this year along with three others (numbers 35 through 38) for two talented students, Maria Katharina and Franziska Auenbrugger. The Auenbrugger sisters were accomplished pianists and daughters of a prominent Viennese physician. While not the best known of the sonatas from this set, (that title would go to the D major, number 37) the G major sonata exemplifies Haydn's talent for balancing wit and elegance. The outer movements exude charm and virtuosity while the central movement displays quiet elegance and hints at something deeper and more exploratory.

Bagatelle (1989) - George Tsontakis (b. 1951)

"I composed this Bagatelle in 1989, thinking it was to be a movement of an extended work, or a piece within a set of light, colorful pieces, for piano. Instead, I decided to go a different way entirely and abandoned the first concept in favor of a large-scale formal work which was to be more serious in intent. The eventual result of my change of heart was *Ghost Variations*, a thirty minute work for piano. I found myself modeling Debussy in the [Bagatelle], hoping to gain a bit of his fluidity and aquatic textures. At the same time, there can be heard a hint of Brahms, I think, in the strong and warming harmonic *verticalities*."

-George Tsontakis

*Fanfares* (1985) - György Ligeti (1923-2006)

Etude in F major, op. 10 no. 8 (1833) - Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)

*Harmonies du soir* (1851) - Franz Liszt (1811 - 1886)

Through their visionary collections of studies, the composers of this program's three etudes are credited with changing the face of the genre and bringing it to the forefront of the concert repertoire. In *Fanfares*, an ostinato with the oddly accented grouping 3 + 2 + 3 is present at all times, accompanying horn-like "fanfare" motifs, often with opposing articulation and phrasing. In Chopin's attractive op. 10 no. 8 etude, known to some by the nickname "the sunshine etude", a breezy melody plays out in the left hand underneath brilliant arpeggios and filigree in the right. Never content to understate, Liszt's *Harmonies du soir* is the most grandiose and essay-like of the transcendental etudes. Obscure and restless harmonies in the opening give way to a fluid arpeggiated melody and several sweeping dramatic climaxes, each outdoing the last.

Selections from *Out of Doors*, Sz. 81 (1926) - Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

The *Out of Doors* suite, Sz. 81, was written during Bartók's "piano year," 1926. This period of intense compositional activity also saw the birth of the piano sonata, *Nine Little Piano Pieces*, and the first piano concerto. The drums and pipes of the first movement of *Out of Doors* can be heard quite clearly as the thumping dissonant clusters of the opening subside in favor of more singing, legato

lines in the middle section of the movement. The *Barcarolla* begins in a customary 6/8, but quickly veers off course, ultimately changing meter no fewer than seventy-nine times throughout the movement. Despite this wholly modern take on a familiar idea, this movement conveys the impression of moving water with astonishing eloquence. *The Night's Music*, without doubt the most stunning and imaginative piece in the set, opens with a faint cluster ostinato over which several distinct insect or animal noises appear. Throughout the course of the movement, these elements repeat and combine with each other in layers. Though Bartók took great care with the construction of this movement, its beauty lies in the entirely patternless sound of occurrences and interactions between its elements.

English Suite no. 5 in E minor, BWV 810 (1715) - Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Bach scholar David Schulenberg calls the fifth English suite the most “ambitious” of the set after number six. The English suites were begun during Bach’s determinative Weimar years and were revised and completed later in Cöthen. According to Schulenberg, despite their formal severity, they lean towards the emerging galant aesthetic. The Prelude, a *da capo* form, imitates a concerto. Its opening and closing material carries the full sonority of the orchestra while the middle sections correspond to instrumental solos. In the Allemande, the winding succession of intervals in the theme create some striking passing dissonances between lines. The bold Courante gives way to an understated yet affecting Sarabande. The airy passepieds, especially the pastoral Passepied II, display simplicity and elegance. The suite finishes with a thorny gigue, a strict three-voice fugue bristling with thrilling chromaticism.