

The Ph.D./D.M.A. Programs in Music

April 21, 2017 7:30 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall



Nicolas Namoradze, piano

Sonata no. 17 “Death’s Lullaby” (1956)

Vladimir Drozdoff
(1882-1960)

Humoreske, op. 20 (1839)

Einfach; Sehr rasch und leicht

Hastig

Einfach und zart; Intermezzo

Innig

Sehr lebhaft; Mit einigem Pomp

Zum Beschluss

Robert Schumann
(1810-1856)

Etude II, “Mostly Triads” (2017)

Etude III, “Major Scales” (2016)

Nicolas Namoradze
(b. 1992)

INTERMISSION

Partita no. 6 in E minor BWV 830 (1731)

Toccatà

Allemande

Corrente

Air

Sarabande

Tempo di Gavotte

Gigue

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the D.M.A. degree.

Please switch off your cell phones and refrain from taking flash pictures.

Notes on the Program

Russian-American composer and pianist **Vladimir Drozdoff** moved from his hometown of Saratov to St. Petersburg in 1898 to study composition with Rimsky-Korsakov and piano with Anna Esipova at the Conservatory. Following his graduation Drozdoff spent a few years in Vienna under the tutelage of Theodor Leschetizky, and in 1907 returned to the St. Petersburg Conservatory to become the institution's youngest ever professor, where his students included Maria Yudina and Emanuel Bay. Drozdoff fled Russia after the 1917 revolution, eventually making his way to New York, where he made a highly successful career as a pianist, teacher and composer. His works – written exclusively for piano or piano and voice – are enjoying a revival with the efforts of the recently-established Drozdoff Society.

The one-movement **Sonata No. 17**, composed in the memory of Drozdoff's friend Alexander Gretchaninov, is subtitled "Death's Lullaby" – an appropriate name for this brooding work. The unsettling, mysterious lyricism of the opening is briefly arrested by a startling, portentous ringing of bells that heralds impending tragedy. A soaring, pathos-filled second subject soon takes over, concluding with a defiance that resists the implications of the previous musical material. A tortured, densely chromatic development section leads to a recapitulation of the opening theme, now recast as an ominous growling in the keyboard's low register. Following the reprise of the second subject comes a departure from the otherwise strict sonata form structure – the development section is repeated in its entirety, now functioning as a transition to the glittering and ethereal coda where the conflicting forces of the work reconcile and the music gently takes off into another world.

By 1838, the budding relationship between **Robert Schumann** and the love of his life, Clara Wieck, had come up against an obstacle – the refusal of Clara's father to allow them to marry. In March 1839, Schumann – despondent at not having seen his beloved for several months due to an extended and difficult trip in Vienna – found himself feverishly writing a new piano work, as he explained to her in a letter:

Not to have written to you for a week, is that right? But I have been rhapsodizing about you, and have thought of you with a love such as I have never experienced before. The whole week I have been sitting at the piano, composing and writing, laughing and crying all at once. All this you will find nicely portrayed in my Op 20, the grand Humoreske, which is also about to be engraved. You see, that's how quickly things go with me: conceived, written out and printed. And that's how I like it.

-Translation by Misha Donat

While the title **Humoreske** was common in literature, this was the first such usage in music. Rather than denoting a work of a humorous nature, the title alludes to the deft juxtaposition of a great number of contrasting characters; the influence of Jean Paul, one of Schumann's favorite writers, is especially evident in this work. The piece is hardly cheerful throughout – in fact, Schumann described it in a letter as perhaps his melancholiest work to date.

Though the Humoreske is, strictly speaking, a single, 963-bar movement, it is not without clear subdivisions. Most of the resulting six shorter pieces are set in recursive forms. The palindromic structure of the first piece is especially remarkable. It opens in medias res, with a touching song-like melody appearing as if in mid-stream. After a harmonically daring detour this vocally inspired introduction gives way to a sprightly, gamboling theme – *Sehr rasch und leicht* – that seems to trip over itself a few times before finally becoming buoyant and taking off. This is in turn succeeded by an

ever quicker section – *Noch rascher* – that juxtaposes a number of different characters, including ominous grumblings in the lower registers, a bright march, and a dizzying hurtle through many different keys. This vertiginous section forms the center of the palindrome, being succeeded by a reprise of the *Sehr rasch und leicht*, the decelerating conclusion of which dissolves into a recapitulation of the song that began the work.

The uneasy, searching opening of the second piece – *Hastig* – contains a mysterious feature that has led to much speculation: an “inner voice” marked in the score only to be imagined by the performer, not played. After a central section of inexorable growth in speed and tension a harmonic skeleton of the opening returns in the form of a series of quiet, hauntingly pure arpeggiated chords. The third piece similarly juxtaposes serenity and excitement, with lyrical passages framing an energetic, driven *Intermezzo*.

In the fourth piece – a miniature rondo – a touching theme that gently climbs up the register of the piano alternates with sections that are sometimes puckish, sometimes pensive. The headlong rush of the fifth movement masquerades as an exciting finale – Schumann disorients the listener by upstaging a conclusive-sounding cadence with an imposing march that unexpectedly crashes in and eventually grinds proceedings to a halt. Only now does the real denouement of the work begin: an extended, movingly expressive passage emblematic of the composer’s “story-telling” style. This sixth piece ends with a brief but majestic flourish that rounds off the whole work.

Each piano etude is inspired by a specific technical, pianistic challenge that serves as a basis for the textures and figurations. “**Mostly Triads**” is a mostly unbroken succession of mostly triads. A study in frequent changes of hand position, it fades in at the top of the keyboard and makes its way downwards, departing at the bottom of the piano’s register; a special guest makes an appearance along the way. In “**Major Scales**” the pianist’s two hands traverse the gamut of major scales at different rates. An increasingly chaotic interaction between the two hands leads to the eventual disintegration of the passagework.

Bach’s Partitas, a set of six dance suites, were written between 1726 and 1731 while he served as Cantor of the St. Thomas Church in Leipzig. Despite being the last set of suites that Bach composed, they were in fact the first works to be published under the composer’s supervision. Of Bach’s three sets of keyboard suites (the others being the English and French Suites) the Partitas are the most creative in terms of structure, with several unique opening styles and a variety of interspersed dances featured across the set of six suites.

The final suite of the set – the **Partita No. 6 in E minor** – is among Bach’s greatest achievements in the genre. In the opening Toccata an extended Fugue is framed by potently dramatic declamatory sections. The Allemande weaves its way through a number of key areas with a chromaticism of beguiling subtlety, while the following Corrente revels in delicate, nimble passagework. An energetic Air precedes the suite’s center of gravity: the profound and highly expressive Sarabande. A sprightly, graceful Tempo di Gavotte brings the listener to the final movement: a powerfully driven Gigue in the form of a Fugue.

About the Artist

“An extraordinary artist.” – Emanuel Ax

“Never have I heard such a Liszt Sonata as I did from Nicolas Namoradze... The strength of the conception and the sheer level of artistry compel me to take my hat off to him.” – Zoltán Kocsis

24-year-old pianist and composer **Nicolas Namoradze**, whose performances have been hailed by critics as “sparkling... sensitive and coloristic” (New York Times) and “simply gorgeous” (Wall Street Journal), has given recitals at prestigious venues in several countries around the world. He has appeared as a soloist with renowned orchestras and conductors in Europe and the United States, and his performances in Hungary, Georgia, Spain and the US have been broadcast on radio and television. His compositions have been commissioned and performed by leading artists and festivals in the United States.

Nicolas performs regularly in the United States following his critically acclaimed American debut playing Messiaen’s “Oiseaux Exotiques” with the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra under the baton of Ken-David Masur at Tanglewood’s Ozawa Hall in 2012. Highlights of the current season include multiple engagements with the Albany and Newburgh Symphony Orchestras, solo recitals in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, appearances at New York’s Chelsea Music Festival and the Bravo! Vail Festival in Colorado as an inaugural Piano Fellow, and a set of concerts with Rolf Schulte at The Graduate Center and Bargemusic in New York City.

This past season Nicolas was a featured composer at New York’s Chelsea Music Festival for a second year in a row, with premieres of his “Partita” for Keyboard Ensemble and the “Gravity Concertino” for Double Bass and String Ensemble. Other recent premieres include “Major Scales” at the Bravo! Vail Festival, “Notturmo” for Piano and Orchestra and “Theme and Variations” for Violin and Piano (commissioned and performed by Tessa Lark) at The Juilliard School, the electronic works “Spiele im Spiegel” and “Overtunes” and the electroacoustic “An Unlikely Friendship” at the The Graduate Center. He was recently awarded Budapest’s “Fidelio Fortissimo” prize for young composers. This season Nicolas also composed and produced the music for Walking Painting, a film by Fabienne Verdier.

Enthusiastic of innovative programs and technologies that expand the reach of classical music around the world, Nicolas has been closely associated with Juilliard Global Ventures: he has represented Juilliard students in the Juilliard-Nord Anglia Performing Arts Program, featured in the most-watched episode of Juilliard Open Studios with his teacher, Emanuel Ax, and will appear as a guest educator for a forthcoming online course on piano music.

Nicolas’s interest in contemporary music and lesser-known works of the piano repertoire has led him to present original and exciting programs that have included works such as Godowsky’s infamous Chopin Etude transcriptions, sets of Ligeti Etudes, rarities such as Dvorak’s Piano Concerto, and many works by his contemporaries. Keen in communicating the content of his programs to audiences, he frequently writes program notes and gives pre-concert talks for his recitals.

Nicolas’s awards include Top Prize (while the youngest contestant) at the inaugural Young Artists Competition at Budapest’s Liszt Academy; the Budapest Philharmonic Society’s Fidelio Award; Frankfurt’s “Blaue Blume” Award; the Budapest Liszt Society Scholarship; Tanglewood Music Center’s Paul Bottenwieser Scholarship and New Fromm Fellowship; The Juilliard School’s Joseph Luis Spencer & Zylpha Allen Spencer Scholarship, Louise Chisholm Moran Scholarship and Byron

Gustafson Scholarship. Nicolas is a laureate of several major international piano competitions, among them Jaén – Spain, Budapest Liszt – Hungary, and Ettlingen – Germany.

After completing his undergraduate studies in Budapest, Vienna and Florence, Nicolas moved to New York for his Master's at Juilliard. He now pursues his Doctorate at The Graduate Center under the tutelage of Emanuel Ax and Yoheved Kaplinsky, holding the Graduate Center Fellowship, and serves on the faculty of Queens College.