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

November 5, 2021 1:00 p.m.
Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall

THE GRADUATE CENTER
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Gregory Hartmann, piano

Preludes, Op. 41 (2006) — Lera Auerbach (b. 1973)
I. Moderato
II. Presto

Sonata Op. 22 in B-Flat Major (1802) — Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
Allegro con brio
Adagio con molto espressione
Menuetto
Rondo. Allegretto

Polonaise, Op. 44 in F-Sharp Minor (1841) — Frédéric Chopin (1810–49)

Fantasien, Op. 116 (1892) — Johannes Brahms (1833–97)
I. Capriccio. *Presto energico*
II. Intermezzo. *Andante*
III. Capriccio. *Allegro passionato*
IV. Intermezzo. *Adagio*
V. Intermezzo. *Andante con grazia ed intimissimo sentimento*
VI. Intermezzo. *Andantino teneramente*
VII. Capriccio. *Allegro agitato*

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

Notes on the Program

Though it is not performed as often today as many of his other sonatas, **Beethoven** considered the **Sonata Op. 22 in B-Flat Major** to be one of his best early works. He declared to his publisher that "Die Sonate hat sich gewaschen" - "the sonata has washed itself." This is slang that Tovey suggests be better understood as something like "this sonata takes the cake."

The first of the four movements is an *Allegro con brio* in sonata form that begins with an opening gambit that introduces two main motives which are developed extensively throughout the movement: a sixteenth note figure in one voice and the outline of a melodic third in another. One might listen for how these motives are used throughout the piece. For instance, descending thirds feature prominently in a passage in the secondary theme area, and the sixteenth note figure is used extensively at the climax in the development. In addition to presenting important motivic content, the opening establishes the lively, ebullient mood that pervades this movement.

The slow movement, in 9/8 time and E-flat major, is operatic. A cantabile singing melody, freely ornamented, rides atop a relatively simple accompaniment. The connection to opera might bring to mind another of Beethoven's slow movements: that of the sonata Op. 31 No. 1 in G Major. In that case, the movement seems like a parody of Italian opera, with the ornamentation extreme to the point of ridiculousness. While this movement in Op. 22 is highly ornamented, I think the piece is sincere, and probably not intended to be a parody or satire.

As expected, a minuet and trio form the third movement. The lovely and graceful minuet is contrasted by a more stormy middle section in the relative minor. As is typical, the sonata concludes with a Rondo movement. Again, this movement also has a *grazioso* character. One might listen for the upward-looking, rising lines, like the one first introduced in the second measure, that characterize much of this movement.

Among the most celebrated composers in the Western classical music canon, **Chopin** is unique in that he wrote virtually exclusively for the piano. This, coupled with his characteristically gorgeous melodies, explorative chromaticism, and mastery of intimate, small forms, has earned him the sobriquet "the poet of the piano." And while much of Chopin's music is lyrical and vocal, the **Polonaise, Op. 44 in F-Sharp Minor** is violent and angry, almost grotesque. If it's a poem, it's closer to an epic than to his typical sonnets.

Chopin is unique also in his heritage: in the small group of most-performed composers, Chopin is the lone representative of Poland. And Chopin's early life in Warsaw and Polish heritage are evident in his compositions of in Polish dance forms, like the polonaises (with their characteristic *Bum, da-da-dum dum dum dum* rhythm) and mazurkas. And this brings us back to our polonaise at hand. It has a somewhat unusual form: loosely in three parts, the middle section is actually a mazurka, flanked by polonaise sections.

Following the introduction, which opens the piece like the slow stirring to life of a long-slumbering dragon, the polonaise proper begins with a resolute declaration in F-sharp minor. This militant theme concludes with a cadence in F-sharp minor before the music suddenly changes color and texture, yielding to a somewhat more lyrical, dream-like section that once again dissolves into the militant theme from before.

Another alternation of the militant and dreamy ideas occurs, and each time a previous idea is revisited it is developed—always growing in complexity and agitation. And then, we suddenly find ourselves at a totally new section, this time in A major and with the hands in unison. The polonaise rhythm remains here, and is the driving force of the section, but there is no singing melody line.

Once again, we thereafter find ourselves in a completely new section. In the large ternary or "ABA" of the piece, we are now in the "B" section—the mazurka. A simple waltz-like left hand pattern accompanies a two-voice duet in the right hand. Here we are finally treated to the *cantabile* operatic qualities so characteristic of Chopin which we have been missing in this work so far. And while we are far removed from the dramatic storm and stress of the polonaise, this major-mode section is nonetheless tinged with melancholy.

One of the striking features of the construction of this piece is that while the sections are radically different in character and texture and the form is not standard, there is nonetheless a constant sense of coherence and unity. Each idea melts into the next. This is perhaps most evident in the retransition back to the F-sharp minor theme. The "awakening" material from the introduction emerges slowly and seamlessly from the mazurka.

An abbreviated repeat of the militant polonaise theme and dreamlike alternations occurs, with the final statement rising to a climactic high point. In a moment of gorgeous synthesis, this climax actually quotes the opening of the mazurka motive, the melancholy from before now transformed into full-throated grief. As if spent, the music recedes into the distance, ending with one final dramatic outburst. Perhaps this last note represents a triumph of some sort, but is it a triumph over grief, or a triumph of the grief itself?

During the course of the 19th century, large-scale works for piano like sonatas declined in popularity. Displacing the older, large scale works, was the romantic character piece—small-scale, intimate works, often evocative of a particular mood or idea. Indeed, this change is apparent if one considers **Johannes Brahms**'s compositional output. His earliest published works for piano include three large-scale sonatas in the tradition of Beethoven: Opp. 1, 2, and 5. After Opus 5, though, Brahms would not write another solo piano sonata. His latest works, Opp. 116, 117, 118, and 119, are all sets of character pieces.

Op. 116, titled ***Fantasien***, is a set of seven pieces. Though the first three pieces were initially published separately from the rest of the set, there are strong connections between all seven that mean they work together as one coherent whole quite well. For instance, the first and last pieces both have the tonic of D, which provides a sort of tonal unity to the work as a whole.

The fourth through sixth pieces are all in either E major or minor, which connects them tonally. They are also related motivically: the rising chromatic line B-B#-C#, introduced at the opening of No. 4, appears in all three, perhaps most noticeably in the tenor voice at the opening of No. 6, although the melody of No. 5 also opens with the notes B-C.

Perhaps another reason the pieces work so well as a set is the balance between fast and slow movements: the fiery *Presto energico* (No. 1), intense *Allegro passionate* (No. 3), and concluding *Allegro agitato* (No. 7) are well balanced by the calmer *Andante* (No. 2), introspective *Adagio* (No. 4), dreamy *Andante con grazia ed intimissimo sentiment* (No. 5), and tender *Andantino teneramente* (No. 6).

Following in the tradition of J. S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, many composers have written cycles of preludes in all keys for piano. These include, for instance, Chopin, Scriabin, Rachmaninoff, Shostakovich, and Hindemith, to name but a few. With her set of **Preludes, Op. 41**, **Lera Auerbach** has added her name to this illustrious list.

A Russian-American composer, Auerbach was born in 1973 and immigrated to the United States in 1991. While the preludes are in each of the 24 keys, and they each center on a given tonic, they are "tonal" in a fairly loose sense of the word—dissonances are used freely. One can hear the influence of many Russian composers in these pieces.

A virtuoso pianist herself, Auerbach's writing makes great use of different techniques and textures possible on the piano. The first prelude, marked *Moderato*, sets the stage with an opening chordal figure that returns in the 24th prelude, to conclude the set. In addition, the opening prelude is improvisatory, and relatively short. In contrast, the second prelude, marked *Presto*, is clearly in a more tight-knit form from the opening. This piece, in the relative minor, forms a natural pair with the first. The tempestuous scales that open the second prelude mark it as a much more agitated and vigorous piece compared to the spaciousness of the first. Nonetheless, it wears itself out quickly, and by the end, the scalar figure from the opening outlines a major seventh A-G#, which is clear reference to the melodic major seventh that concluded the first prelude (in that case, A-flat - G).

About the Artist

Pianist **Greg Hartmann** is currently pursuing his doctoral studies at the Graduate Center, CUNY, as a student of Julian Martin. Greg recently won first prize in the 2018 Memphis International Piano Competition, third prize in the 2019 Thousand Islands International Piano Competition, second prize in the top division of the 2019 Schubert Club Scholarship Competition, third prize in the 2018 High Point University Piano Competition, and received the Jung-Springberg Award for Outstanding Musicianship in the 2018 Kuleshov International Piano Competition. He was also the first prizewinner in the 2016 Walter A. and Dorothy J. Oestreich Concerto Competition, 2016 Rochester Symphony Young Artist Competition, and the 2016 Lakeshore Wind Ensemble Young Artist Competition. Also an accomplished composer, Greg won the 2018 Paula Nelson-Guenther Young Composer Competition, and as a result his orchestral work *Requiem for a Memory: Nocturne for Orchestra* was recorded by the Duluth-Superior Symphony Orchestra. He has performed concerti with the New Albany Symphony Orchestra, Rochester Symphony, Lakeshore Wind Ensemble, Concord Chamber Orchestra, and Waukesha Area Chamber Orchestra. He also maintains an interest in Music Theory, and recently presented a paper of his at the 2018 conference of Music Theory Midwest. Greg has performed in masterclasses for many renowned artists including Robert McDonald, James Tocco, Daniel Shapiro, Eugene Pridonoff, Roland Krueger, James Giles, and Douglas Humpherys, and has participated in music festivals including the Aspen Music Festival and School, Pianofest in the Hamptons, the Bowdoin International Music Festival, the Sejong International Music Festival, Euro Music Festival and Academy, and the Gijón International Piano Festival. In his free time, Greg enjoys tennis, running, and ping pong.