

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

December 1st, 2021 1:00 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall



Ari Livne, piano

Vasaras vakara mūzika (Music for a Summer Evening) (2009)

Pēteris Vasks
(b. 1946)

Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 33 (1911)

Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873–1943)

1. *Allegro non troppo in F minor*
2. *Allegro in C major*
3. *Grave in C minor*
5. *Moderato in D minor*
6. *Non allegro in E-flat minor*
7. *Allegro con fuoco in E-flat major*
8. *Moderato in G minor*
9. *Grave in C-sharp minor*

INTERMISSION

Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 39 (1917)

Sergei Rachmaninoff

1. *Allegro agitato in C minor*
2. *Lento assai in A minor*
3. *Allegro molto in F-sharp minor*
4. *Allegro assai in B minor*
5. *Appassionato in E-flat minor*
6. *Allegro in A minor*
7. *Lento lugubre in C minor*
8. *Allegro moderato in D minor*
9. *Allegro moderato, Tempo di Marcia in D major*

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

Notes on the Program

Vasaras vakara mūzika (“Music for a Summer Evening”), composed in 2009, is the final piece in a cycle of piano works that **Pēteris Vasks** began composing several decades earlier, titled *Gadalaiki* (“Seasons”). The first piece in the cycle - *Balta ainava* (“White Scenery”) - was composed in 1980, when Vasks’s native Latvia was still under Soviet occupation. Intimately concerned with the suffering of his people, Vasks consciously attempts to deliver his listeners to a higher plane of existence, writing that “[m]ost people today no longer possess beliefs, love and ideals. The spiritual dimension has been lost. My intention is to provide food for the soul and this is what I preach in my works.”

Vasaras vakara mūzika begins with a slowly descending progression, which returns multiple times with slight variations. The harmony is mostly static, changing only at structural points in the piece, and even then only by one or two notes. Subtle wrenches appear in the placid texture as the music progresses, leading eventually to a passionate and nostalgic climax, before the peacefulness of the opening returns to guide the piece to its conclusion. Here is how Vasks characterizes it: “[*Vasaras vakara mūzika*] describes the quiet end of a summer day. The sun sets. Slowness. Memories of previous experiences rise. With the memories’ appearance comes an increase in intensity. Towards the end, a kind of folksong is heard: ‘We have survived the time of tyranny and have kept our identity’. The ending is quiet, everything is asleep.”

In the summer of 1911, having recently completed his cycle of 24 Preludes, **Sergei Rachmaninoff** turned his attention to the Etude for the first time. It was his custom to spend the summers at his country estate of Ivanovka, which had belonged to his aristocratic relatives and had only passed into his ownership a year earlier. Ivanovka, described by Rachmaninoff as “an infinite sea where the waters are actually boundless fields of wheat, rye, [and] oats”, offered him a reprieve from the dizzying pace of performing and conducting that he maintained during the rest of the year, and allowed him to focus his attention on composing.

Etudes were originally exercises intended to help instrumentalists develop or refine specific technical skills, making them more suitable for the practice room than the concert hall. That began to change in the 19th century with the contributions of Clementi, Moscheles, Chopin, and Liszt, each of whose Etudes were more musically compelling and less didactic than what had come before. By 1911, the genre of the “Concert Etude” - a fully formed musical work that could also be valuable as a study piece - was well established, but Rachmaninoff chose to call his contributions to the form “Etudes Tableaux”, which translates to “Picture Studies”. Although he was not explicit about which images he may have been attempting to convey, the **Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 33** are multidimensional and filled with evocative textures, which often support and interact with a unified, soaring melody. It is in creating these dense and unique textures that Rachmaninoff merges the Etudes’s requisite virtuosity with the musical aim of painting pictures in sound.

The first etude in F minor begins as a march, with a steady figure of left hand octaves alternating with staccato right hand chords. A sustained melody enters immediately in the middle register of the piano, but unfolds at a much slower and less regular pace than its martial counterparts, giving it a searching, even meandering, quality. The first part of the etude eventually dissolves into silence, giving the melody an opportunity to climb into the upper register for a brief moment of fantasy before the march texture aggressively returns, leading to a climax full of rhythmic unpredictability and harmonic tension, followed by a gradual dissolution.

The second etude in C major features a repeating sixteenth note figure in the middle of the piano, watery in texture, out of which fragmentary bursts of luscious melody appear mostly in the upper register, but sometimes in the lower register as well. The notes of the watery figure are predominantly played by the left hand, and the etude's primary difficulty stems from the increasingly wide range of notes contained in this figure, requiring the hand to stretch beyond its usual shape. This etude also dissolves, after the sixteenth note figure has finally evaporated into the upper register of the piano and been replaced by a trill, below which the left hand issues a final statement of the melody with rolled chords that span more than two octaves.

The third and fifth etudes, in C minor and D minor, were withdrawn from publication by Rachmaninoff at the last minute and only published after his death. The fourth etude in A minor was also withdrawn from the Opus 33 set, but was published later as the 6th Etude in Opus 39, which is why the numbering of Opus 33 often jumps straight from 3 to 5. The third etude in C minor begins slowly and in darkness, with pianissimo scales in the bass leading to fragmentary chordal proclamations, echoed by open fifths in the treble. The chordal proclamations eventually develop into a more extended statement, which ascends in register and dynamic to a brief climax before descending again, eventually resolving on a C major harmony. The C major section thus begins with a whisper and continues for four slow measures before the harmony finally changes, and for the remainder of the piece time is suspended in a spacious dream. The D minor etude emerges from this dreamlike atmosphere, but soon offers a contrasting mood in the form of a jagged polka, full of offbeat accents and striking chromatic lines.

The sixth etude in Eb minor begins with an otherworldly series of four dyads, after which the right hand races uninterrupted through a swirling presto, evoking a windstorm. The left hand interjects at irregular intervals, sometimes with single sustained chords, other times with spooky chromatic lines, and finally with staccato broken octaves juxtaposed with a series of parallel chromatic triads in the right hand. The two hands often play right on top of one another, adding to the already substantial technical challenge. In the aftermath of this storm, the seventh etude in Eb major cleanses the palette with revelry, merriment, and bombast.

The eighth etude in G minor is one of the most famous of the set. It introduces the G minor mood with an accompanimental sixteenth note figure in the middle register of the piano, and the melody soon emerges in the same register. The registration soon expands to encompass the entire keyboard, but the textural layers continue to blend a misty accompaniment full of open fourths and fifths with a piercing melodic lament. After a virtuosic outburst that leads to the distant key of C# minor, and a subsequent return to the original foggy texture, the etude culminates with a quotation from the end of Chopin's First Ballade in the form of a rapid, unison G minor scale followed by pianissimo chords. When the ninth and final etude in C# minor begins, it takes up the mantle of the C# minor episode from the previous etude. This etude is menacing, full of abrupt silences, sudden transitions, and crashing dissonances. The virtuosic element lies primarily in a left hand figuration that requires the pinkie finger to leap rapidly anywhere between one and three octaves without betraying the continuity of the texture. The etude speeds through an extended chromatic progression, into a final C# minor flourish encompassing the entire keyboard.

The **Etudes-Tableaux, Op. 39** were composed in the summer and fall of 1916, at the height of World War I and just one year before Rachmaninoff would leave Russia forever and abandon composition for over a decade. Denser in texture and significantly more harmonically adventurous than Op. 33, these etudes paint vivid scenes of turbulence and instability. The motives upon which each etude is built seem to take on consistent personalities, behaving as characters in a thrillingly dark

drama. One of these characters seems to be change itself: a continuous and unrelenting undercurrent. The impossibility of achieving lasting stillness or consistency lurks behind the irrepressible, bubbling energy of the entire set, which routinely bursts forth only to recede again, biding its time.

The first etude in C minor begins in a flurry of activity, with a chromatic line embedded in the rapid right hand figuration while the left hand plays syncopated octaves. It is as though matter and consciousness have emerged in their undifferentiated states. There are few discernible melodies, only whirling textures and growling voices from the depths of the keyboard. The second etude in A minor offers a partial reprieve from the frenzy. The left hand plays the “dies irae”, which was a fixation of Rachmaninoff’s and can be found cleverly disguised in many of the remaining etudes of the set. Meanwhile, the right hand comments from both above and below. Its lyricism is achingly beautiful in a way that sometimes veers into the sinister, as if to say “such things cannot last”.

The third etude in F# minor and the fourth etude in B minor both play with demonic characters, mixed with passion in the former and irony in the latter. The F# minor etude is an explosion of energy, featuring double note textures and an unceasing triplet motor that runs through both hands. Mischievous and sometimes doleful, it unfolds with childlike impulsivity. The B minor etude is a morbid gavotte, more restrained and deliberate.

Some might argue that the climax of the set arrives in the Etude No. 5 in E-flat minor. A rich melody - propelled at first by rapidly repeating chords in the lowest registers of the piano, then by increasingly inventive and virtuosic accompaniments - weaves a mournful tale of love and devastation. When it finally recedes into memory, a stealthy chromatic scale culminating in a harsh minor chord announces the Etude No. 6 in A minor. Later revealed to be based on the tale of Little Red Riding Hood, the etude is a riveting chase throughout. At first it alternates between chromatic scales in the deep bass of the piano and scampering textures in the treble, signifying Little Red Riding Hood and the Big Bad Wolf, respectively. Then, in the middle, a more systematic chase ensues as the wolf taunts and snaps from the depths with martial regularity. The whole etude is a series of pursuits that only ends when Red thinks she has escaped and permits herself to slow down, only to be snapped up by the wolf at her moment of reprieve.

The Etude No. 7 in C minor begins as a funeral march, with austere chords and frequent silences. A wistful and discreet meditation follows, after which the unceasing staccato sixteenth notes begin and serve as the motor for the whole remainder of the piece. The inevitability and severity of these sixteenth notes evokes industrial productivity while a series of winding, searching melodies attempt to assert their humanity. The piece eventually reaches a climax in which the industrial sixteenth notes transform into the clamoring of the famous Russian bells. Etude No. 8 in D minor is filled with memories of a better past, evoked in part by the frequent use of modal harmony. The double notes in the right hand create two independent voices, whose unusual interaction permeates and drives the etude, even when one of those voices devolves into a repeating three-note descending pattern that drives the majority of the final scherzando section. The final Etude, No. 9 in D Major, seems to end the set with a surface level air of triumph and martial optimism, but the harmonic colors betray the darkness underneath, retaining the dense textures and crunchy dissonances of the whole set.

About the Artist

Active as a solo artist, collaborator, and chamber musician, **Ari Livne** has performed extensively throughout the United States at such venues as Benaroya Hall and the Kennedy Center. His diverse set of interests and skills has allowed him to become equally comfortable as a performer, opera coach, and lecturer. He has worked as repetiteur for Don Giovanni and Butterfly with New York's Heartbeat Opera, and has presented lecture-recitals on themes from psychoanalysis for the Northwestern Psychoanalytic Society and Institute.

Ari was a Gold Award winner at the youngARTS competition, and subsequently was selected as a Presidential Scholar in the Arts. While at Juilliard, Ari was recognized for his inventive programming; he premiered a new set of songs by the composer Cyrus Von Hochstetter at one of his recitals, and presented a recital consisting of Brahms' last four completed works. He was one of two Juilliard students selected to be a featured performer at the Kyoto International Music Festival in Kyoto, Japan, and he has been invited to perform multiple times at the Hudson Chamber Society in New York and at Piano on Park. Ari has appeared twice at the Juilliard Focus Festival, and in April 2012 he performed for Dr. Alexander Scriabine and Dr. Christine Scriabine, close relatives of the composer Alexander Scriabin. He has also been a faculty member at the State College Piano Festival (State College, PA), where he performed both a solo recital and a recital of Beethoven Violin Sonatas on successive evenings.

Ari Livne received his Bachelor of Arts from Yale University in 2012 and his Master of Music Degree at The Juilliard School in 2014. He is currently working towards a doctorate at the CUNY Graduate Center, where he is the recipient of a Graduate Center Fellowship.