

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

March 17, 2023 6:00 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall



Alexei Tartakovsky, piano

Symphony No. 6 in F Major, op. 68, “Pastoral” (1808) Ludwig van Beethoven
*transcribed for piano in 1839 by Franz Liszt (1811–86) (1770–1827)
Awakening of cheerful feelings on arrival in the countryside
Scene by the brook
Merry gathering of country folk
Thunder, Storm
Shepherd's song. Cheerful and thankful feelings after the storm

INTERMISSION

Theme and Variations in E-flat Major, WoO 24 (1854) Robert Schumann
(1810–56)

Etudes-tableaux, op. 33 (1911) Sergei Rachmaninoff
Allegro non troppo (1873–1943)
Allegro
Grave
Moderato
Non Allegro—Presto
Allegro con fuoco
Moderato
Grave

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

Beethoven-Liszt: Symphony No. 6 in F Major, op. 68, “Pastoral”

“The name of Beethoven is sacred in art.” This is the first sentence in **Franz Liszt’s** own preface to his piano transcriptions of the complete Beethoven symphonies. Transcribing them all was a task that had occupied Liszt for nearly thirty years, beginning with the Fifth Symphony in his prime as a young virtuoso in 1836 and finishing in 1863-1865, at which point he was in devotional studies in a small cell at the Oratory of the Madonna del Rosario outside Rome and had entered the Holy Orders at the Vatican. The Sixth was completed in 1839 and became something of a warhorse in Liszt’s own recitals. It was Liszt’s publishers Breitkopf & Härtel who urged him to complete the entire set. The genre of piano transcription was in fact a prominent one in the nineteenth century. Before the advent of recordings, this was one of the ways that the public could become familiar with orchestral repertoire, as piano playing and ownership was much more widespread than it is today. Liszt’s most celebrated pupil, Hans von Bülow, said: “The piano, of course, is the best of all orchestral instruments, and when one is a good pianist, he has at his command, the whole of the literature of music.” Nevertheless, Liszt’s transcriptions of these symphonies would have been completely beyond the reach of any amateur pianist, and were clearly intended for concert performance, rather than just casual domestic music-making.

These were not the first piano transcriptions of **Beethoven’s symphonies** for the piano, however. Those that preceded Liszt’s were by Friedrich Kalkbrenner, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, and Beethoven’s own pupil Carl Czerny. All were renowned as virtuoso pianists and prolific composers in their own day, but one need only to compare Liszt’s version to theirs to see that Liszt’s transcriptions were the product of a meeting of two masters, rather than of a master and a subordinate. The amount of fine orchestral detail and color incorporated into their textures is unprecedented, and the solutions of seemingly impossible technical problems are carried out in the most pianistic way. Liszt’s own fingering and pedal markings serve as a master-class in piano playing. The result was something that could only have been produced by someone with an intimate and superlative knowledge of orchestration, the piano, and the art of composition, as Liszt certainly was.

These transcriptions are not mere “piano reductions,” or pale imitations of the orchestra. Liszt understood that, rather than create a literal facsimile of orchestral textures on the piano, the true task was to capture Beethoven’s thought and the sweep of the orchestra. He himself remarked: “In matters of translation, there are some exactitudes that are the equivalent of infidelities.” In Liszt’s hands, these transcriptions transcend the limits usually encountered by attempts to transcribe orchestral works and have risen to full-fledged piano masterpieces in their own right and into the realm of great art. Liszt concluded his preface with these words:

I confess that I should have to regard it as a rather useless employment of my time if I had produced just another version of the Symphonies in a manner up to now routine. But I shall think my time well spent if I have succeeded in transferring to the piano not only the grand outlines of Beethoven’s compositions but also the multitude of details and finer points that make such a significant contribution to the perfection of the whole. I will be satisfied if I stand on the level of the intelligent engraver, or the conscientious translator, who grasps the spirit of a work and thus contributes to our insight into the great masters and to our sense of the beautiful.

Robert Schumann: Theme and Variations in E-flat Major, WoO 24

The five variations on an original theme, also known as *Geistervariationen*, or “Ghost Variations,” is the last piece of music **Robert Schumann** wrote. For much of his life, he had been suffering from episodes of mental illness of various degrees of severity, but at the time of this work’s composition in 1854, his condition had dramatically worsened to the point of nervous breakdown. He experienced visual and auditory hallucinations, as noted by his wife Clara in her diary:

On the night of Friday the 10th and Saturday the 11th, Robert suffered from so violent an affection of the hearing that he did not close his eyes all night. He kept on hearing the same note over and over again, and at times he heard chords. By day it became merged in other sounds.

On February 14, Ruppert Becker, concertmaster of the Düsseldorf orchestra, noticed at a restaurant that Schumann’s “inner concert started,” such that he could not read his newspaper. Clara wrote the following entry in her diary on February 17:

On the night of Friday the 17th, after we had been in bed for some time, Robert suddenly got up and wrote down a theme, which, as he said, an angel had sung to him. When he had finished it he lay down again and all night long he was picturing things to himself, gazing towards heaven with wide-open eyes; he was firmly convinced that angels hovered round him revealing glories to him in wonderful music.

Clara continues on the following day: “Morning came and with it a terrible change. The angel voices turned to those of demons and in hideous music they told him he was a sinner and they would cast him into hell.”

The theme that Robert wrote down was the theme of these variations, but despite his belief that it was new, it was actually one he had composed previously. It appeared in his String Quartet, Op. 41, No. 2, in his *Lieder-Album für die Jugend*, and in the slow movement of his violin concerto, written just four months earlier. In his lucid moments, Schumann composed four of the five variations. In between work on the fourth and fifth variations, he walked out of his home and attempted suicide by throwing himself into the frozen Rhine River. His doctors advised Clara, who was pregnant, to move out, and shortly afterwards, Robert was committed to an insane asylum in Bonn, where he remained until his death of pneumonia two-and-a-half years later. During this time, he was visited by Johannes Brahms, among others, but Clara was only permitted to see him two days before his passing.

The *Geistervariationen*, dedicated to Clara, were not published until 1893, as part of a complete collection of Schumann’s works edited by Brahms. They are still infrequently performed.

Sergei Rachmaninoff: *Etudes-tableaux*, op. 33

These “**picture-studies**” were written in 1911 at **Rachmaninoff**’s Ivanovka country estate, where the rural idyll always stimulated his work and where he composed a large portion of his oeuvre in pre-revolutionary Russia. Rachmaninoff did not disclose the programs, or “pictures,” for these Etudes, stating “I do not believe in the artist that discloses too much of his images. Let the listener paint for himself what it most suggests.” Nevertheless, he did share the programmatic content of several Etudes from both opuses 33 and 39 with the Italian composer Ottorino Respighi, who had taken up the task of orchestrating several of them at the request of the conductor Serge Koussevitzky. The only one from opus 33 that was among these was No. 6 in E-flat Major which, predictably, was

titled “The Fair.” The resemblance of this Etude to the Shrovetide fair scenes in Igor Stravinsky’s ballet *Petrushka* is remarkable, considering that *Petrushka* premiered in Paris the same year, Rachmaninoff would not have yet known it, and it is Stravinsky who is commonly thought of as an innovator, while Rachmaninoff is often dismissed as “regressive” (is there a destination to which music is supposed to progress?).

The rest of the Etudes share a similar clarity of scene and hardly need explicit titles, especially if one is already familiar with Rachmaninoff’s musical language. Although many of the Etudes from both opuses 33 and 39 could just as well belong to Rachmaninoff’s Preludes opuses 23 and 32 based on their style, they tend to be more unpredictable, more contrapuntal, and more incisive than the Preludes. If anything, the Etudes are less overtly virtuosic and flashy than many of the Preludes, and certainly less demonstrative than the etudes by Liszt or even Chopin. Rather, they require a refined pianism of greater precision of expression and tonal control. The technical demands of Rachmaninoff’s Etudes are completely at the service of the musical meaning, and the music is of striking freshness and originality.

About the Artist

Laureate of the 2021 International Beethoven Competition in Bonn, Germany, Russian-American pianist **Alexei Tartakovsky** has been called a “fantastic musician and pianist” by Martha Argerich and “truly exceptional...superb playing...a thoughtful and serious musician” by the New York Concert Review. His tonal palette, superb technique, and profound musicianship have enthralled audiences worldwide and established him as one of the brightest talents of his generation.

He first brought attention to his artistry by winning three top prizes in a one-year span (2006-2007) at the Rolf and Brigitte Gardey International Competition in Daytona Beach, Florida, The New York Piano Competition, and the American Fine Arts Festival (AFAF) in New York, which resulted in his performing at Weill Recital Hall (Carnegie Hall).

Immediately after, he won 3rd prize at the James Mottram International Piano Competition in Manchester (UK) and 1st prize at the Heida Hermanns International Piano Competition, which he won with unanimous decision by the judges, who called him a “phenomenal, first-rate pianist” and “a monumental talent”. Additional prizes include 1st prize at the New York Concert Artists International Competition in 2011. In 2012, he swept all three prizes at the San Jose International Competition: 1st Prize, Audience Prize, and prize for the best performance of a Russian work.

Since then, he has given concerts both solo and with orchestra in the USA, Canada, Mexico, Russia, Europe, China, and Japan at halls that include the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, the Warsaw Philharmonic, Yokohama Minato Mirai Hall, and Carnegie Hall. His playing has been broadcast on Dutch Radio 4, Polish Radio 2, Russian Radio Orpheus, Chicago’s WFMT, and New York’s WQXR. Among the orchestras Tartakovsky has performed with are the Jacksonville Symphony, the North Czech Philharmonic, the Beethoven Orchestra Bonn (Germany), and the Symphonic Orchestra of the Voronezh Concert Hall (Russia). Conductors Tartakovsky has collaborated with include Gerard Schwarz, Hans Graf, Fabio Mechetti, Nurhan Arman, Maurice Peress, Yuri Androsov, and Clark Rundell.

A highlight of his career was his outstanding performance at the 2015 Chopin International Competition in Warsaw, where he was a semifinalist. In 2016, Tartakovsky was awarded the French Prize at the Cleveland International Piano Competition. In 2021, he received both the 2nd Prize and the Deutsche Telekom StreamOn Beethoven Award at the International Telekom Beethoven Competition in Bonn, Germany.

Among the musicians he has studied with are Matti Raekallio, Nina Lechuk, Boris Slutsky, Boris Berman, and Horacio Gutierrez. Tartakovsky completed his undergraduate studies at Juilliard and Queens College (CUNY), received his Master of Music degree from the Peabody Conservatory, and an Artist Diploma from the Yale School of Music. He is currently a doctoral candidate as a student of Richard Goode at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York, where he was awarded the coveted Graduate Center Fellowship.

Tartakovsky keeps an active concert schedule, is music director at Church of the Holy Spirit in Lebanon, NJ, teaches at Brooklyn College (CUNY) and maintains a private studio in Raritan, NJ.