

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

April 21, 2023 6:00 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall



Joseph Vaz, piano

Miroirs (1905)

Noctuelles

Oiseaux tristes

Une barque sur l'océan

Alborada del gracioso

La vallée des cloches

Maurice Ravel

(1875–1937)

Valses nobles et sentimentales (1911)

Modéré – très franc

Assez lent – avec une expression intense

Modéré

Assez animé

Presque lent – dans un sentiment intime

Vif

Moins vif

Épilogue: Lent

Piano Sonata, Op. 45 (2020)

Introduction – Theme and Variations –

Intermezzo –

Rondo-Fantasia

William C. White

(b. 1983)

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

Maurice Ravel: *Miroirs*

French composer Maurice Ravel's *Miroirs* (“Mirrors”) is a suite of five solo piano pieces, written in 1904 and 1905. A remarkable achievement in impressionist piano composition, the pieces showcase Ravel's innovative and masterful use of harmony, rhythm, and timbre at the instrument. Premiered by the pianist Ricardo Viñes, a key figure in the Parisian avant-garde, the suite garnered widespread recognition, and along with his String Quartet (1903) and the other piano set *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908), helped establish Ravel as one of the most important and influential figures in French music. Inextricable from the composition of *Miroirs* is Ravel's membership in the group of young composers and artists known as *Les Apaches* (“The Hooligans,” or “The Gangsters”), who were known for their experimental and counter-cultural approach to the arts. As the story goes, the group (whose core membership included Ravel, Viñes, and the writer Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi) proudly took their name from a newspaper salesman who mockingly insulted them with this epithet as they returned from the premiere of Claude Debussy's opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, a progressive work that they celebrated and promoted. Each movement of *Miroirs* is dedicated to a different member of *Les Apaches*, as detailed below.

The title *Miroirs* reflects the impressionistic nature of the music, which is inspired by the reflections and distortions of light in mirrors. The first piece, *Noctuelles*, (“Night Moths”) dedicated to the poet Léon-Paul Fargue, depicts the fluttering movements of a specific species of nocturnal moth (the owl moth) whose members have dull forewings and colorful hind wings. Rapid, swirling figures in the upper register of the piano create a sense of bug-like restlessness and agitation. The second piece, *Oiseaux tristes* (“Sad Birds”), slowly and melancholically evokes mourning birds with occasional figures of stylized bird call, rarely straying from its plaintive mood. Despite its relative simplicity, it is dedicated to the virtuoso Viñes. Following this is the popular gem *Une barque sur l'océan* (“A Boat on the Ocean”), which vividly depicts a boat floating on the sea, in calm and not-so-calm waters. Undulating rhythms and arpeggios suggest fluidity, as well as images of crashing waves and turbulent depths, as found in the paintings of its dedicatee, Paul Sordes. The fourth and most popular piece, *Alborada del gracioso* (“The Jester's Morning Song”), dedicated to Calvocoressi, is a lively and colorful piece that evokes the image of a Spanish jester singing and dancing an *aubade*, accompanied by guitar strumming. *La vallée des cloches* (“The Valley of the Bells”), imitates the sounds of various bells ringing in a distant valley, combining to produce shimmering and haunting harmonies, and was dedicated to fellow composer Maurice Delage.

Maurice Ravel: *Valses nobles et sentimentales*

Six years after *Miroirs*, in 1911, Ravel published the *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, a beloved work both in its original piano form and in its orchestrated ballet version. The piece comprises a series of eight waltzes played without pause, each with its own unique character and mood. The characteristic terms ‘noble’ and ‘sentimental’ in the title were taken from two collections among Franz Schubert's hundreds of piano waltzes: the 34 *Valses Sentimentales* (Op. 50, D. 779) and the 12 *Valses Nobles* (Op. 77, D. 969). The piece was first performed in Paris by its dedicatee, the pianist and composer Louis Aubert, at a concert sponsored by the *Société Musicale Indépendante*, a musical society co-founded by Ravel as an express antithesis to the more conservative *Société Nationale de Musique*. At this particular

concert, the composers of new works were not identified, in order to free critics from the burden of authorship labels. In addition, the audience voted on probable authorship of each piece at the end of the concert. Though the *Valses* were not received well by the crowd, he later wrote that his authorship was recognized “by a slight majority.”

Despite Ravel’s stated “intention of composing a series of waltzes in imitation of Schubert,” one would be hard pressed to name similarities between these particular works of the two composers. Nor is his approach to the form remotely similar to that of the traditional 19th century Waltz King, Johann Strauss II. However, the genre clearly intrigued Ravel. As early as 1906, he had begun composing what would eventually become *La Valse* (1920), in which he attempted to epitomize the genre itself. Though the *Valses nobles et sentimentales* pre-date *La Valse* by almost a decade, the works are clearly related as steps in Ravel’s grappling with the genre. In the *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, Ravel’s harmonic writing is notably ambiguous and uncertain, with a high degree of chromatic writing leaving few moments of full rest. Exotic and unusual scales populate the eight waltzes, and the superficial simplicity of waltzing belies the depth and complexity of his harmony and rhythm, a perfectly blended mixture of Impressionist and Modernist composition on the eve of the first World War.

Two of Ravel’s quotes frame the pieces differently. About the layers of impression that a long acquaintance with a complex piece (like this one) can give, Ravel once wrote: “On the initial performance of a new musical composition, the first impression of the public is generally one of reaction to the more superficial elements of its music, that is to say, to its external manifestations rather than to its inner content. The listener is impressed by some unimportant peculiarity in the medium of expression, and yet the idiom of expression, even if considered in its completeness, is only the means and not the end in itself, and often it is not until years after, when the means of expression have finally surrendered all their secrets, that the real inner emotion of the music becomes apparent to the listener.” A rather less piercing quotation, actually excerpted from the symbolist poet Henri de Régnier, appears in the first published edition of the piano version of this piece: “...*le plaisir délicieux et toujours nouveau d'une occupation inutile*” (“the delicious and always new pleasure of a useless occupation”).

William C. White: Piano Sonata

I was William White’s student (on double bass!) in the Cincinnati Symphony Youth Orchestra for three years in high school, and since each of our departures from that city/organization, he and I have remained in touch and become good friends. During my senior year of high school, we collaborated on two concerto performances, and I recently visited him and performed with members of his orchestra in Seattle in a chamber concert he arranged.

Sometime during the first year of my master’s degree program at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, we started discussing the idea of his writing a piece for me and eventually settled on the idea of a sonata. Will listened to lots of piano music to fill the gaps in his knowledge about the existing repertoire, and we were in regular conversation and analysis about this music.

He had not intended to compose the sonata until much later in 2020, but his work was able to begin ahead of schedule due to COVID-19. For very unfortunate reasons, Seattle had one of the earliest lockdowns and it quickly became apparent that he and his orchestra were in it for the long haul. He quickly pivoted to “composer mode” and the sonata was the first major work of what turned out to be a particularly prolific compositional period.

Being thoroughly acquainted with Will's compositional powers, I can say how lucky I am to have the chance to have collaborated with him on a work of this scope. This piece is a testament to his creativity, force of expression, and ability to compose exciting music for a specific performer.

Program note adapted from William White

About the Artist

Described as “a performer of complex repertoire” (Isle of Wight Arts League Creative Voice), pianist **Joseph Vaz** has performed internationally as a soloist and chamber musician in the United States, Canada, Austria, and Italy. He has performed in venues from Carnegie Hall to the Arnold Schönberg Center in Vienna.

Born in Faro, Portugal, Joseph now lives in New York City and studies at the CUNY Graduate Center with the renowned pianist and pedagogue Julian Martin. He is a laureate of several national and international competitions since 2012, most recently at the Seattle International Piano Competition, the West Virginia International Piano Competition, and the upcoming Teresa Carreño International Master Piano Competition.

Joseph frequently performs at international festivals, including recent appearances at the Internationale Sommerakademie in Reichenau, the Orford Music Academy, Bowdoin Music Festival, and the Chautauqua Piano Institute. Joseph has performed for several acclaimed artists and pedagogues, including Byron Janis, Jerome Lowenthal, Jon Nakamatsu, John Perry, and Natalya Antonova. His orchestral debut came with the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra in 2015, and he has also performed as soloist with the Seven Hills Sinfonietta and other orchestral ensembles.

An active collaborative pianist, he has worked with all types of musicians in chamber music and with multiple orchestras and choirs for operas and concert programs. Joseph is a proponent of new music, working closely with several composers on pieces for world premieres. Interested in many genres of music-making, Joseph enjoys working in contemporary music ensembles, musical theatre, and popular music. Outside of music, Joseph holds a bachelor's degree in mathematics and a minor in French from Indiana University, and can often be found reading on the 6 train.