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

May 13, 2024 6:00 p.m.
Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall

THE GRADUATE CENTER
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Ryan Jung, piano

***Please hold applause until each half has concluded.*

Aria variata alla maniera italiana, BWV 989 — J. S. Bach (1685–1750)

Piano Sonata No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111 (1822) — Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
Maestoso-Allegro con brio ed appassionato
Arietta: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile

INTERMISSION

Mazurkas, Op. 27 (2009) — Thomas Adès (b. 1971)

Barcarolle, Op. 60 (1846) — Frédéric Chopin (1810–49)

La valse (1920) — Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

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

J.S. Bach, *Aria variata alla maniera italiana,* BWV 989

During much of his life, Bach was exposed to many different styles of music and wrote many pieces in styles other than his native Germanic language. The *Aria variata,* written in an Italian style (*alla maniera italiana)* is yet another example of him channeling his "chameleon-like" ability. The piece, consisting of ten variations, was also probably conceived by Bach as he was copying scores by well-known Italian composers of his time. In addition to Vivaldi and Frescobaldi, he might've also encountered another important figure, Bernardo Pasquini, who was also a prolific writer of vocal and virtuosic keyboard music.

Whether or not Pasquini was a direct source of inspiration, Bach's treatment of his aria variations has all the trademarks of the Italian baroque: affectuous harmonic progressions, virtuosic finger passages, and elaborate ornamentations. As the variations develop, the rhythmic situations get increasingly intricate-- each one containing faster rhythms and wilder counterpoint than the previous. By the penultimate variation, the two hands chase each other up and down the keyboard in a rapid canon that is reminiscent of Italian toccata style. Bach then closes the piece with a final variation; a plangent, four-voice chorale setting of the original theme.

Though the concise *Aria variata* never got quite the attention as Bach's other set of variations in the *"Goldberg",* I believe that it is equally as captivating to listen to, and perhaps even more charming.

Ludwig van Beethoven, Sonata No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111

The last piano sonata written by Beethoven, completed in 1822, not only marked the end of a cycle-- but also served as a farewell to a deeply personal relationship with the form for the composer. Along with the other two late sonatas written prior (Op. 109 and Op. 110), Beethoven had already opened many doors into new possibilities within composition. The last sonata departs from the typical three/four movement archetype and instead, pushes the limits of form in an expanded second movement.

Op. 111 is in many ways a study in *chiaroscuro* within music- two movements that are juxtaposed in mood and character. The first movement is dark and brooding, full of passion and virtuosic passagework that uses the entire span of the keyboard. From the opening *Maestoso,* syncopation and interruption become essential features of the music, on the verge of being pushed over the edge of stability.

The second movement is largely a theme and variations which unfolds from a homophonic chord progression, to broken chords that eventually get divided into smaller rhythmical subdivisions. Over the course of the variations, one cannot help but feel like Beethoven is constantly searching for something- an existential answer to the question that was posed at the beginning of the first movement. The theme and variations suddenly stop, and a series of long trills chromatically ascending the right-hand and the music begins to modulate to the relative major. The descending fourth motif from the theme is now fragmented and continues to modulate until we settle back to C Major. During the final recapitulation, the theme returns now accompanied by a wave of arpeggios, but still interrupts with the descending motif. It isn't until the very last bar that Beethoven answers his own question: a *rising* fourth in the left-hand from G to C, dominant moving inexorably to tonic.

Thomas Adès, Mazurkas, Op. 27

Originally commissioned by Emanuel Ax for Frederic Chopin's bicentenary, Adès' set of three mazurkas is a stunning reinterpretation of the original Polish dance form.

The first Mazurka is the most dance-like of the three, written with discombobulating rhythms and high leaps in both hands, as if it were to be danced by a marionette. It is awkward, and outwardly expressive in an exaggerated fashion; stark dissonances throw punches where you would least expect. After a raucous climax, the hands scurry off into the mist on opposite sides of the keyboard as if nothing happened.

In the fast second, Adès makes ornaments the defining characteristic, imbuing the melody almost entirely of mordants, giving the music a bird-song quality. The complexity then increases when he weaves the left-hand into the fold, creating a polyphonic texture made entirely of two melodies, with the occasional bass-note that defines the tonality. Boisterous and playful, this "hyper-mazurka" also shifts the strong pulse of the dance constantly, leaving the audience to guess which beat is the true downbeat.

The last Mazurka delivers a stark contrast to the prior, as if the dance was slowed down to a point where the silences become the points of interest. In many ways, it functions as an "anti-mazurka", in that the leaps and descents become purely functional as symbolic gestures. The middle section delivers faint whispers of melodic material that shimmer in soft dynamics, only to give way to a large climax that then fades away into silence again.

Frédéric Chopin, Barcarolle, Op. 60

The title *Barcarolle,* is most likely a reference to the nineteenth-century Italian gondoliers, who sang love songs as they rowed their boats through the waters of Venice. In this late work by Chopin, the gentle rocking of the boat is depicted in the rolling arpeggiated-figures in the left hand, whilst two lovers sing a duet in the right hand. While much has been said of the gorgeous melodies and modulations in this piece, the form is quite remarkable in and of itself. Unlike any other work by Chopin, this Barcarolle has three distinct tempi, each one getting progressively faster until the end where the water settles. Because of this unique aspect of the piece, I believe this makes the work special and even programmatic. Perhaps it tells a story of a young couple who discover romance, quarrel, and eventually make amends and sail happily into the sunset.

Maurice Ravel, *La valse*

Maurice Ravel's *La valse* (1919-20) was originally commissioned as a ballet work under the infamous impresario Sergei Diaghilev-- but after telling Ravel that the music was not suitable to be danced to, the composer took umbrage with his remarks and swiftly ended the collaboration altogether. Many of Ravel colleagues and contemporaries have dubbed *La valse* as a product of the socio-political ramifications of wartime, interpreting the raucous outbursts and the eventual disintegration of waltz meter as a caricature of Viennese waltz. Despite these claims, Ravel insisted that the piece was a tone poem that portrays a crowded dance-scene that suddenly bursts with light.

The piece begins with distant murmurs and intimations of a waltz, starting in the low register of the piano. Gradual shimmers of a dance start to appear with cascading arpeggios, and even melodic fragments written with *hemiola*, giving a lilting and uneven quality. Eventually a fully formed waltz

breaks out with flair, but only to be interrupted with occasional outbursts of loud dynamics and disjointed rhythms that oppose the conventional triple meter. Eventually, the music gives in to this bombastic quality and the piece swirls until the dance spirals out of control. This monumental work is equally captivating as a historical sound painting as it is a musical choreography.

About the Artist

American pianist **Ryan Jung** is currently based in New York City and enjoys performing repertoire of diverse backgrounds and genres. He is especially dedicated to new music, and has given premieres by renowned composers such as Tyshawn Sorey, Nico Muhly, Thomas Ades. Recently Jung has participated in the IMS Prussia Cove (UK) twice and has also worked with notable artists such as Richard Goode, Claudio Martinez-Mehner, Dénes Várjon, and the Aeolus String Quartet. He is currently a candidate in the ongoing 2024 Orleans Concours in France, and was also a prizewinner of the Wadsworth Piano Competition in 2022. Jung made his Lincoln Center debut in Alice Tully Hall in 2021 and has since performed at the Lucerne Festival in Switzerland, Music Academy in Santa Barbara, the Aspen Music Festival, among many others. Other performances this year include a recital with cellist Aaron Wolff at Elebash Hall, and a residency at the Yellow Barn Music Festival during the summer.

Mr. Jung completed his Master's degree from the Juilliard School with Jerome Lowenthal and Hung-Kuan Chen, and received his BM from the New England Conservatory with Haesun Paik. He is currently pursuing his doctorate at the CUNY Graduate Center with Conor Hanick and Jeremy Denk, and holds a staff position at Juilliard under the Music Advancement Program. In his spare time, he enjoys watching basketball analysis and plays competitive chess.