

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

May 6, 2024 6:00 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall



Robert Brooks Carlson, piano

Vers la flamme, Op. 72 (1914)

Alexander Scriabin
(1872–1915)

Etude Fantasy (1976)
For the Left Hand Alone
Legato
Fifths to Thirds
Ornaments
Melody

John Corigliano
(b. 1938)

Hymne à l'amour, from *12 New Etudes for Piano* (1986)

William Bolcom
(b. 1938)

INTERMISSION

Prelude (2007)

Kaija Saariaho
(1952–2023)

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.

Szálkák (Splinters), Op. 6d (1978)

Molto agitato

Sostenuto

Vivo—Prestissimo

Mesto. In memoriam Ștefan Romașcanu

György Kurtág

(b. 1926)

Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 36 (rev. 1931)

Allegro agitato

Non-allegro—Lento

L'istesso tempo—Allegro molto

Sergei Rachmaninoff

(1873–1943)

Notes on the Program

***Vers la flamme*, Op. 72 - Alexander Scriabin**

A breeze releases a shower of red-hot sparks from a few resilient glowing embers. With coy enthusiasm a fire catches hold, taking flight toward the sky. Hungrily, the flames crusade into the beyond, lapping up every bit of energy held within the land and the air above. The blaze reaches greedily over every continent, producing such inescapable heat—what was once the Earth has become totally enraptured in a glowing ball of fire. The blaze rages furiously, until nothing is left unspent.

As reported by Vladimir Horowitz, Alexander Scriabin's (1872-1915) *Vers la flamme* was inspired by a certain mystic inclination that a gradual accumulation of heat would result in a spontaneous combustion of the world. *Vers la flamme* is one of his final works for solo piano, and the culmination of decades of musical experimentation.

While mostly preoccupied with mystic philosophy and the contemplation of rapture, Scriabin, himself, was no exception to the most sobering of human necessities—that being the need for a paycheck. Originally intended as the opening movement of his eleventh piano sonata, Scriabin elected to forgo with the later movements so that he could sell it to a publisher for some quick cash. Scriabin later premiered the work in March of 1915, a month before his death on the 27th of April.

***Etude Fantasy* - John Corigliano**

Note from the composer:

My *Etude Fantasy* is actually a set of five studies combined into the episodic form and character of a fantasy. The material in the studies is related most obviously by the interval of a second (and its inversion and expansion to sevenths and ninths) which is used both melodically and in the building of the work's harmonic structure.

The first etude is for the left hand alone — a bold, often ferocious statement which introduces both an opening six-note row (the first notes of the work) and a melodic germ (marked "icy" in the score) which follows the initial outburst. This etude reaches a climax in which both the row and the thematic germ are heard together, and ends as the right hand enters playing a slow chromatic descent which introduces the next etude — a study of legato playing.

In the short second etude both hands slowly float downward as a constant crossing of contrapuntal lines provides melodic interest. The sustaining of sound as well as the clarity of the crossing voices is important here.

The third etude, a study on a two-note figure, follows — a fleet development on the simple pattern of a fifth (fingers one and five) contracting to a third (fingers two and four). In this section there is much crossing of hands; during the process a melody emerges in the top voices. A buildup leads to a highly chromatic middle section (marked "slithery"), with sudden virtuosic outbursts, after which the melody returns to end the etude as it began.

The fourth etude is a study of ornaments. Trills, grace notes, tremolos, glissandos and roulades ornament the opening material (Etude I) and then develop the first four notes of the third etude into a frenetically charged scherzando where the four fingers of the left hand softly play a low cluster of notes (like a distant drum) as the thumb alternates with the right hand in rapid barbaric thrusts. This leads to a restatement of the opening 6-note row of the fantasy in a highly ornamented fashion.

After a sonorous climax comes the final etude, a study of melody. In it, the player is required to isolate the melodic line, projecting it through the filigree which surrounds it; here the atmosphere is desolate and non-climactic, and the material is based entirely on the melodic implications on the left hand etude, with slight references to the second (legato) study. The work ends quietly with the opening motto heard in retrograde accompanying a mournful two-note ostinato.

— John Corigliano

***Hymne à l'amour*, from *12 New Etudes for Piano* - William Bolcom**

The crowning jewel of his set of *12 New Etudes for Piano*, William Bolcom's (b. 1938) *Hymne à l'amour* (Hymn to love) is a transcendent example of the composer's iconic American style. Bolcom won the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for this set of etudes, and has received extensive critical acclaim for his work blending popular and contemporary classical styles of the 20th century. As one will discover in *Hymne à l'amour*, jazz, ragtime, expressionist, and impressionist tropes tend to bump shoulders in Bolcom's music, a feature that speaks to the unique sensitivities and eclectic palate of the modern day listener.

While the 'amour' referenced in the title of this etude is not specified, the work abstracts this most intimate of human emotional experiences—love—with themes of compassion, anticipation, indulgence, and obsession rising to the fore. The etude is composed of two distinct alternating sections: the first, a circling ostinato interrupted by disparate fragments, and the second, a chorale, made up of complex jazz harmonies that progressively become more and more perverse. The work is ever-expanding, driven by an insatiable, obsessive desire for more, and the stubborn belief that love is worth it in the end, whatever the cost.

Prelude - Kaija Saariaho

The second of only two works for solo piano, Kaija Saariaho (1952-2023) composed her Prelude for Solo Piano in 2007, dedicated to the pianist Tuija Hakkila. The piece is extracted from the first movement, *Attente* (Longing) of her song cycle *Quatre Instants* for soprano and piano. The text of this song expresses a longing desire for an estranged lover, and the hopelessness and confusion that accompanies loss. The text paints an image of a boat stranded at sea, surviving only by the mercy of the waves beneath it. Extracting material from this song, Saariaho notably does not incorporate the vocal line into the Prelude. As a result, there is a sense that something is missing—a tangible sense of loss and desire define the work.

Szálkák (Splinters), Op.6d - György Kurtág

Originally written in 1973 for the cimbalom (a stringed percussion instrument), György Kurtág's (b. 1926) *Szálkák* (Splinters), Op. 6d is a set of four miniatures transcribed for piano in 1978. As suggested by the name of the work, each movement is defined by angular, fragmented gestures that, at least in theory, once functioned as a component of a larger, cohesive musical idea. The writing at times becomes pointillistic, as sequences of gestures become increasingly detached from one another. While this style of writing may often be characterized as being arbitrary or emotionally sterile, there is a prevailing sense of emotional desperation to reassemble a musical thought, using only the splintered fragments of what must have once been a beautiful phrase.

The final movement, dedicated to the memory Stefan Romaşcanu, is a poignant, devastating work. Marked with the tempo marking *Mesto* (mournful), it is here that the listener is finally confronted with a series of cohesive musical ideas. The tone is dark, sorrowful—a momentary acknowledgment of the grief for a friend who has passed. The work concludes with a collection of fragmented ideas accompanied by a single repeating pitch in the bass, ultimately fading into silence.

Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 36 (rev. 1931) - Sergei Rachmaninoff

A work that requires little introduction, Sergei Rachmaninoff's (1873-1943) Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 36 is one of the most significant pillars of the standard piano repertory, and is one of the final great piano sonatas in the Romantic tradition of the early 20th century.

Originally composed in 1913, the sonata was a prominent feature of Rachmaninoff's recital repertoire for much of his life. Following the Russian Revolution of 1917, Sergei Rachmaninoff fled to the United States, eventually taking up primary residence on 84th street in the Upper West Side of Manhattan until his death in 1943. As he was touring extensively as a concert artist, Rachmaninoff only finished six works during this period in addition to continued revisions of earlier works—in 1931, Rachmaninoff returned to his second piano sonata.

While this Sonata was very successful in its original form, Rachmaninoff was dissatisfied with the work, worried about its length, sense of proportion, and the distraction of superfluous passagework. In his revisions, Rachmaninoff streamlined the sonata, eliminating about five minutes of material, and reorganized a few thematic elements to further intertwine the three movements.

Nearly all of the work's architectural features and decorative filigree is derived from its opening six-note thematic statement. While Rachmaninoff is perhaps best known for the expressive, dramatic qualities of his work, he was also a composer who toiled endlessly with his craft, with a particular

concern for form and coherence. As a result, this sonata is as carefully sculpted as it is thunderously dramatic—the very reason for which it has endeared itself to pianists and audiences alike over the past 90 years.

About the Artist

Originally from a small town in central Virginia, Robert Brooks Carlson began playing piano at the age of eight. Currently, Robert resides in New York City where he is a Graduate Teaching Fellow at the CUNY Graduate Center and a student of Soyeon Kate Lee.

Robert has performed extensively throughout Europe and the United States. Recently, he completed fellowships at Music Academy of the West, Olympic Music Festival, and the Gilmore Piano Festival. Additional festival appearances include Saarbùrg, Gijón, Art of the Piano, Bowdoin, and Holland Music Sessions.

A devoted chamber musician, Robert has appeared alongside artists such as Alexander Fiterstein, Julio Elizalde, Alexi Kenney, Jennifer Culp, and Vicki Powell. From 2020-2022, Robert proudly served as the collaborative artist for *Hear Us Hear Them*, a choir based in Cincinnati with the mission to highlight works by underrepresented and marginalized composers. Previous notable concert engagements have included the James Madison University Wind Symphony and the Rapidan Orchestra of Orange, Virginia.

Prior to his studies with Soyeon Kate Lee, Robert received his Bachelor of Music degree from James Madison University magna cum laude with Paulo Steinberg, along with minors in Mathematics and Honors Interdisciplinary Studies. Previous teachers also include Emily Yap Chua and Nicholas Ross in Lynchburg, Virginia. Besides piano, Robert enjoys baking, coffee, and relaxing with his cat, Olive.