

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

April 15, 2024 12:00 p.m.

Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall



Alexandra Joan, piano

Prelude and Fugue in D Minor, BWV 875 (c. 1740)
from *The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book II, No. 6*

J.S. Bach
(1685–1750)

Sonata No. 17 in D Minor, Op. 31, No. 2 (1801–02)
Largo – Allegro
Adagio
Allegretto

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770–1827)

Ballade No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 10 (1854)

Johannes Brahms
(1833–97)

Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op. 42 (1931)

Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873–1943)

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

This concert represents an afterthought of my dissertation work, which is centered on Brahms's Piano Concerto in D Minor, Op. 15. The following recital program relates to the anxiety of influence, a topic inspired by Harold Bloom's eponymous book, to influence and to motivic connections in general, which I explore in my dissertation. Some of the associations in the program are obvious, such as the key of D minor, common to all the pieces, but some are less overt. The key of D minor comes with an array of expressive implications and has arguably permeated the collective unconscious with connotations of tragedy for centuries. W. A. Mozart's Requiem in D Minor is only one of the many examples. This program, however, offers a wider narrative.

J. S. Bach's Prelude and Fugue in D Minor, BWV 875 opens with exuberant running sixteenth notes in the right hand, initiating a vivid dialogue with the left hand. The contrapuntal interplay between the two hands is maintained until the last measure. The buoyant character of the prelude contrasts with that of the fugue. The fugue's subject features a plaintive, lament-like descending chromatic scale.

L. v. Beethoven's Sonata Op. 31, No. 2 in D Minor, known as "The Tempest", was not named by the composer, and the programmatic nature of the piece should therefore be taken with a grain of salt. When Beethoven's biographer A. Schindler asked the composer how one should attempt to understand the piece, Beethoven allegedly replied that one should first read Shakespeare's *Tempest*. It is possible to hear the eerie echoes of Shakespeare's spirits in some of the first movement's sections, especially in those where the composer provides with unusually elongated pedal marks. The first movement starts like a *recitativo*, with great harmonic ambiguity. The key of D minor only feels asserted when the left hand presents one of the main ideas of the movement: a high-energy ascending arpeggiated triad (also called a "Mannheim rocket" in the second half of the eighteenth century). This motive could remind the listener of the first left-hand gesture heard in the Bach Prelude BWV 875. The second movement is an emotional demonstration of *chiaroscuro*, and features a fascinating orchestral approach to the instrument. The last movement is a *moto perpetuo*, which recalls motivic ideas found in the first movement, notably a recurrent "Phrygian" or Neapolitan sound created by the chromatically altered second degree of the D minor scale (E flat instead of E).

In 1854, a few years before the inception of his first piano concerto, **J. Brahms** wrote his **Four Ballades, Op. 10**. It is difficult to ignore the parallel with F. Chopin's Ballades, completed over a decade earlier. Brahms's Ballades, in contrast to Chopin's, are more directly inspired by poetry. His Ballade Op. 10, No. 1 in D Minor is based on the Scottish ballad "Edward", which describes the increasingly tense dialogue between Edward and his mother, culminating with his confession of parricide. The open fifths and octaves convey an arcane quality to the opening measures. Remnants of this atmosphere can be found in the first solo theme of the first movement of his Piano Concerto Op. 15.

La Folia stems from an early improvisational practice, which became more defined during the Baroque era. It consists of two eight-measure phrases in triple meter following a specific chord progression. A. Corelli exemplified the use of this scheme through the 23 Variations embedded in his Sonata for Violin and Continuo, Op. 5, No. 12. **S. Rachmaninoff**, like other composers, followed that tradition. His **Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op. 42** (although the *Folia* theme is not actually composed by Corelli) are dedicated to F. Kreisler, who also wrote his own variations on the same theme. Rachmaninoff documented his performances of the piece and pointed out his frustration at his own playing, which seems ironic given the pristine pianism he is known for. Unfortunately, he

ected not to record these variations. The reference to Corelli dissipates as soon as the theme is over. Nevertheless, Rachmaninoff's extreme preoccupation with counterpoint, exquisite approach to voice leading, and orchestral vision transpire throughout the whole set of variations. The piece is interrupted halfway through by an *Intermezzo*, another instance of *recitativo*, with touches of Scheherazade, followed by two variations featuring a bold key change to D flat major, before the music returns to D minor.

About the Artist

“Elegant... refreshingly temperamental” (The New York Times) French-Romanian pianist **Alexandra Joan** is an active soloist and sought-after chamber player who performs extensively in Europe and in the United States. She has appeared at major venues and festivals in Europe, Israel, and the United States, including Weill Hall at Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, Bargemusic, The Greene Space, Dame Myra Hess in Chicago, Perlman Music Program, La Roque d'Anthéron Festival, Colmar International Festival, and Tel Hai.

Her recital and chamber music performances have been featured on Radio France, Radio Suisse Romande, Arte TV, and WQXR in New York. She has won prizes at the Andorra International Competition, the Arriaga Chamber Music Competition (First Prize), and the Josef Suk International Competition in Prague (Second Prize).

Her first solo CD “Dances and Songs” was released in 2014 on the Victor Elmaleh Collection and was one of the “Critic’s Pick” for the New York Times.

An advocate of new music, she works regularly with young composers and has premiered a number of chamber works. She is the pianist on "Sea of Reeds", an album of Gerald Cohen's music for clarinet and chamber ensemble released by Navona Records in November 2014.

For three consecutive seasons, Alexandra successfully curated “Kaleidoscope,” a concert series at the WMP Concert Hall in New York, exploring diverse themes with a multidisciplinary approach.

Ms. Joan received degrees from the Paris Conservatory and the Juilliard School. Her principal teachers include Rena Shereshevskaya, Brigitte Engerer, and Jerome Lowenthal. Alexandra Joan is a DMA candidate at the CUNY Graduate Center where she studied with Ursula Oppens and Richard Goode. She currently teaches at CUNY John Jay College in the music department and lives in New York City with her husband, a jazz guitarist, their two daughters and their miniature dachshund.