

Music in Midtown

**THE
GRADUATE
CENTER**
CITY UNIVERSITY
OF NEW YORK

Elebash Recital Hall
The Graduate Center
365 Fifth Avenue (at 34th Street), NYC
Thursdays 1:00–2:00 PM



Thursday, Sept. 26, 2024, 1:00p.m.

Three Rivals: Debussy, Ravel & Stravinsky **Rolf Schulte, Violin** **James Winn, Piano**

Program

Suite italienne <i>Introduzione</i> <i>Serenata</i> <i>Tarantella</i> <i>Gavotta con due variazioni</i> <i>Scherzino</i> <i>Minuetto e Finale</i>	Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)
Three Movements from <i>Le Tombeau de Couperin</i> <i>Menuet, Forlane et Rigaudon</i>	Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)
Sonate posthume (1897)	Maurice Ravel
Two Pieces from <i>Préludes I</i> <i>Minstrels</i> <i>La fille aux cheveux de lin</i>	Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
<i>La plus que lente</i>	Claude Debussy
Sonate, L. 140 <i>Allegro vivo</i> <i>Intermède: fantasque et léger</i> <i>Finale: très animé</i>	Claude Debussy

Music in Midtown is a series of lunchtime concerts spotlighting the highly regarded musical performance program at the CUNY Graduate Center. Presented in the warm, intimate, acoustically rich Elebash Recital Hall, these performances feature the music program's renowned faculty, alumni, outstanding performers selected from students in the DMA program and noted guest artists. Some concerts are followed by a master class, which the public is invited to observe. Norman Carey is Director and John Musto is Assistant Director.

About the Program

Three rivals – three friends! Although Claude Debussy was Maurice Ravel's and Igor Stravinsky's senior (by 13 and 30 years), he maintained friendly relations with the two younger composers – of Ravel he said, "He has the most refined ear that ever existed!" Of Stravinsky, more acid-tongued: "He's like a spoiled child – he talks about my Firebird, my Sacre. He's a young barbarian who wears loud ties, kisses the hand of women while stepping on their feet. But I repeat: his talent is enormous!"

Of Ravel and Stravinsky's relationship: when Ravel played the piano version of *La Valse* for Diaghilev, his commission for the Ballets Russes in 1920, Francis Poulenc, who was present, recalled Diaghilev saying, "Ravel, it's a masterpiece, but it isn't a ballet. It's a portrait of a ballet, a painting of a ballet!" The extraordinary thing was that Stravinsky, who was also present, did not speak up on Ravel's behalf! (Their relationship henceforth was never the same as during the time spent together on Lake Geneva some seven years prior...)

When Debussy died in 1918, *La Revue Musicale* commissioned several composers to write works for *Le Tombeau de Claude Debussy*, and Ravel wrote the first movement of his *Sonata for Violin and Cello*, and Stravinsky his *Symphonies for Wind Instruments*, both in 1920.

Stravinsky, Suite italienne

The ballet *Pulcinella* is one of Stravinsky's most popular works, and was conceived at the behest of Sergei Diaghilev, the Director of the Ballets Russes: after a momentary spat with Diaghilev about the production of *L'Histoire du soldat*, during which they had no contact, Diaghilev surprised Stravinsky in 1919 with fragments by Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710–36), the precocious composer of *La Serva Padrona* and *Stabat Mater*.

Stravinsky was immediately taken by the freshness and 'Spanish' quality of the music (although it turns out that of the 21 pieces chosen, only 9 were by Pergolesi...). In the style of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, Stravinsky finds his own inspired voice in each of these character pieces, perhaps most typically in the *Minuetto* in which, after a gentle opening, he stacks up more and more intense quadruple-stops toward the end, leading directly into the spirited *Finale*, which is reminiscent of the "Danse Russe" from *Petrushka*.

After the successful première on 15 May 1920 at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris with sets by Pablo Picasso, and choreography by Léonid Massine, *Pulcinella* was soon played all over Europe, leading Stravinsky to write a *Suite* for chamber orchestra in 1924, followed by the *Suite d'après des thèmes, fragments et morceaux de Giambattista Pergolesi*, which he dedicated to the Polish violin virtuoso Pavel Kochanski (famous for his collaboration with Karol Szymanowski on his two *Violin Concerti* and *Mythes* op.30) in 1925. After Stravinsky met Samuel Dushkin, the Polish/American violinist for whom he wrote his *Concerto en Ré*, they started touring with it and the *Duo Concertant* from 1932. Later, several arrangements were added, including their version of *Pulcinella*, the *Suite italienne* which will be heard on this program.

Maurice Ravel, Three movements from *Le Tombeau de Couperin*

In 1917, freshly released from his service in the military, which he joined the year before as a munitions driver, Ravel composed *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, a suite of six movements, each one dedicated to a fallen comrade, three of them in dance form: “Forlane” is a Renaissance, gentle courting dance (there is one in Bach’s *Orchestral Suite No.1* in C major) and “Rigaudon” a rustic Provençal hopping two-step, named after the dance master Rigaud who introduced it to Parisian audiences in 1630. Both these movements appealed to me so much that I asked my good friend, Randa Kirshbaum, to arrange them for violin and piano; I edited the violin part. Preceding these two will be Samuel Dushkin’s version of the charming “Menuet”.

Maurice Ravel, Sonate posthume

In 1897, while in André Gedalge's counterpoint and orchestration class at the Paris Conservatoire (before joining Gabriel Fauré's composition class the following year), Ravel wrote a movement of a violin sonata, either as a class assignment, or intended for his classmate Georges Enescu, the eminent Roumanian violinist, composer, conductor, and pianist, who premiered it with Ravel at the piano that same year at the Conservatoire. Never intended to be more than a one-movement essay, as he had written only short piano pieces and a few songs up to that point, it is sort of a fantasy, though in standard sonata form. Its lyrical opening theme, presented by the violin alone, is in 7/8 meter in the Dorian mode of a-minor and reminds some experts of the opening of the magnificent Piano Trio. It is magically transformed into 3/4 meter in the development as a duet with the piano's left hand, showing remarkable skill and imagination for a 22-year-old! The piece lay dormant until its discovery by the Queens College musicologist and Ravel biographer Arbie Orenstein and publication by Editions Salabert in 1975, Ravel's centenary.

Claude Debussy, Two Pieces from *Préludes Book I*

Among the many arrangements on this program, “Minstrels” is Debussy’s own! Showing remarkable knowledge of the violin, and precision in the notation (pizzicato, double-stopping, *sulla tastiera* and *ponticello*), it is a quirky essay whose tempo marking: *Modéré (Nerveux et avec humour)* says it all.

The beguiling charm of “*La Fille aux cheveux de lin*” (*Très calme et doucement expressif*) never fails — Debussy’s close friend Arthur Hartmann arranged it for violin and piano (adding two measures at the end). It was later championed by Jascha Heifetz and David Oistrakh, among others.

Claude Debussy, “*La plus que lente*”

What is it about French composers being such masters of the waltz form...? From Charles Gounod’s “*Ah, je veux vivre*” from *Romeo et Juliette* to Berlioz’s “*Un Bal*” from *Symphonie Fantastique*, and Ravel’s *Valses nobles et sentimentales* and *La Valse*, these are quintessential essays on the Viennese waltz. Debussy’s “*La plus que lente*” follows in this line: an original piano piece in G-flat major, it is transcribed by Léon Roques, half a step up for the violin. Again, the tempo marking is wonderfully indicative: *Lent (molto rubato con morbidezza)*. This, too, has become a favorite of many violinists.

Claude Debussy, Sonate

Almost 100 years after its creation, Debussy’s *Sonate* remains the ‘gold standard’ of twentieth century violin sonatas – in spite of strong competition from Stravinsky’s *Duo concertant*, Bartók’s two great sonatas, and Ravel’s in G major. The last of six planned sonatas for various instruments, of which only three were completed, the others being one for cello, and one for flute, viola and harp (a fourth was planned for oboe, horn and harpsichord), it was to be his last instrumental work, and he premiered it himself with the violinist Gaston Poulet, which was to be his final public performance. Deathly ill with stomach cancer, he said it had “only documentary interest, as what a sick man would have written during the war.” Proudly proclaiming himself “*un musicien français*” in the score — it was 1916-17, in the midst of World War I — the intent was to revive the hallowed tradition of the *concerts* by Jean-Philippe Rameau, sonatas for various instrumental combinations.

Throughout the piece there is a succinct, almost caustic quality, ready to erupt at a moment's notice, such as the gloriously "Spanish" C major episode at the end of the first movement. In a pseudo-sonata form in languid (Aeolian) g minor, a second 'episode' jumps to luxurious E major! The Intermède features a multitude of "fantastic" and droll elements, such as 'ragtime' in the piano, accompanied by violin pizzicati, reminiscent of "Minstrels" or "Golliwogg's Cakewalk" from Children's Corner.

The finale brings back the first movement's theme before building up to and "exploding" into its main motive, a fulminant G major, a theme that Debussy himself described as "an ouroboros, a serpent biting its own tail." In a later languid episode one can hear an almost verbatim quotation from Ravel's Rhapsodie espagnole. Magical permutations of the serpentine theme follow, *sul tasto* in the violin, getting more and more agitated... An augmentation of the main theme follows, before a rousing finish!

– Notes by Rolf Schulte

About the Artists

German-born **Rolf Schulte**, whom The New Yorker has called "one of the most distinguished violinists of our day," started playing the violin at age five under his father's tutelage. He later studied with Kurt Schäffer at the Robert Schumann Institute in Düsseldorf, attended Yehudi Menuhin's summer course in Gstaad, Switzerland, and studied with Franco Gulli at the Accademia Chigiana in Siena before moving to the United States to study with Ivan Galamian at The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. At age 16, he made his orchestral debut with the Philharmonia Hungarica in Cologne, playing Mendelssohn's Concerto. Under the auspices of Young Concert Artists he gave his New York debut at Town Hall to great acclaim.

He has since performed with the Berlin Philharmonic, Munich Philharmonic, Frankfurt Museums-Orchester, Stuttgart Staatsorchester, Bamberg Symphony, Orchestra del Teatro La Fenice in Venice (in Stravinsky's Concerto under Robert Craft), RTE Irish National Symphony in Dublin, and the Radio Orchestras of Berlin (RSO), Cologne (WDR), and Stuttgart (SDR) under conductors Christoph von Dohnányi, György Lehel, Tamas Vásary, Max Rudolf, Dennis R. Davies, Daniel Nazareth, Alexander Lazarov, Guido Ajmone-Marsan, Hiroshi Wakasugi and many others. In 1990 he performed Roger Sessions' Violin Concerto with the Radio Orchestra of the USSR in Moscow under the direction of Lukas Foss and presented American music in recital.

After many years of collaborating with the leading composers of his time, such as Elliott Carter (whose Fantasy he premiered at Harvard), György Kurtág (whose Kafka-Fragments he gave the American première of at Tanglewood), Milton Babbitt (whose The Joy of More Sextets and Little Goes a Long Way he premiered at the Library of Congress and Harvard), Donald Martino (whose Violin Concerto and Romanza he premiered), Mario Davidovsky (whose Synchronisms No.9 he premiered at MIT), Aaron Copland and John Cage, Rolf Schulte happily now returns to the repertoire of his early adulthood, applying the lessons learned from intensive work with living composers, to the music of Schumann, Beethoven, Schubert, Mozart, Brahms, Bartók, Janáček, Stravinsky, Debussy, Ravel, Webern, Schönberg, Berg, etc.

Mr. Schulte has appeared multiple times with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and their Columbia MD Festival of the Arts, as well as the 1990 Kuhmo Music Festival in Finland. His numerous recital performances include the cycle of ten Beethoven sonatas at Harvard, Dartmouth, and Middlebury Colleges, and the complete violin works of Igor Stravinsky at the 92nd St. Y and Berliner Festwochen, among other places. From 1999-2001 Rolf Schulte held a residency at Harvard University during which he presented new works by Carter, Donald Martino and Milton Babbitt. More recently, he performed two recitals in Tokyo and one at the Arnold Schönberg Center in Vienna.

His long and distinguished discography includes recordings of Arnold Schoenberg's Violin Concerto with the London Philharmonia (Naxos), Robert Schumann's Works for Violin and Piano (Centaur Records), and several pieces of Elliott Carter: Violin Concerto (with the Odense Symphony), Four Lauds and Duo (all on Bridge Records), Schönberg Phantasy, op. 47 and String Trio op.45 (Naxos, nominated for a 2010 Grammy award), Violin Concerto No.1 by Paul Ruders (Bridge) and the Concerti of Roger Sessions and Donald Martino (available on iTunes). The most recent releases are The Violin in Stravinsky's Life on Aldilà Records and American Violin Music 1947-2000 on Centaur Records.

Mr. Schulte performs on a 1780 violin by Lorenzo Storioni, Cremona.

James Winn, piano and composition professor at the University of Nevada, Reno since 1997, made his professional debut with the Denver Symphony at the age of thirteen, and has been performing widely in North America, Europe, and Asia ever since.

With his duo-piano partner, Cameron Grant, he was a recipient of the top prize given in the two-piano category of the 1980 Munich Competition (Musical America wrote about the team "Not since Josef and Rosina Lhevinne regaled us in the thirties have we heard such technical prowess paired with such genuine musical values").

Dr. Winn has been a solo pianist with the New York City Ballet, a member of the New York New Music Ensemble, of Hexagon (woodwind quintet plus piano), and the pianist and resident composer of the Telluride Chamber Music Festival, as well as a frequent guest with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Speculum, the Group for Contemporary Music, Cactus Pear Chamber Music Festival, La Musica International Chamber Music Festival, and Bargemusic. Well-known as a specialist in new music, he has been involved in numerous world premieres and premiere recordings by many renowned composers, among them 13 Pulitzer Prize winners.

He is currently a member of Argenta, UNR's resident piano trio, a founding member and regular participant in the Nevada Chamber Music Festival, and performs regularly in recital with internationally acclaimed New York based violinist Rolf Schulte. An active recording artist, Winn is featured in more than four dozen CDs as soloist, chamber musician, and composer. He has received numerous career recognitions including an Artist Fellowship from the Nevada State Council of the Arts and the Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts.