

THE GILMORE 2018.2019 SEASON

RISING STARS SERIES

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Sunday, September 16, 2018 | 4 PM
Wellspring Theater, Kalamazoo, Michigan

LUCA BURATTO, piano

J. S. BACH *Italian Concerto* in F Major, BWV 971
I. [untitled]
II. Andante
III. Presto

T. ADÈS *Blanca Variations*

L. v. BEETHOVEN Sonata No. 23 in F Minor, Op. 57 ("Appassionata")
I. Allegro assai
II. Andante con moto
III. Allegro ma non troppo – Presto

: INTERMISSION :

T. ADÈS Mazurkas, Op. 27
I. Moderato, molto rubato
II. Prestissimo molto espressivo
III. Grave, espressivo

R. SCHUMANN Sonata No. 3 in F Minor, Op. 14
I. Allegro
II. Scherzo. Molto commodo
III. Quasi variations. Andantino (de Clara Wieck) con quattro
variazioni
IV. Finale. Prestissimo possibile

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ABOUT THE ARTIST



Photo: Colin Way

LUCA BURATTO

Since winning the 2015 Honens International Piano Competition, Italian pianist Luca Buratto has received warm praise. His debut recitals at Wigmore and Carnegie Halls heralded the pianist as “a name to watch” (The Guardian) and “no ordinary virtuoso” (The Telegraph). Described by International Piano Magazine as “masterly,” Buratto’s interpretations of prolific British composer Thomas Adès reveal his versatility as “an artist who is both illuminating and unafraid.”

Buratto’s 2017-2018 symphonic season included the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Sinfonica Giuseppe Verdi (La Scala Milan), the Toronto Symphony, Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Winnipeg Symphony.

Buratto’s festival appearances and residencies include Progetto Martha Argerich at the Lugano Festival (Switzerland), Busoni and Primavera Beethoveniana Festivals (Italy), Marlboro Music Festival (USA), and the Ottawa Chamber Music Festival (Canada). In 2018, he was an Academy Musician at the 25th Verbier Festival Academy (Switzerland).

Buratto’s discography includes Schumann: Davidsbündlertänze, Humoreske & Blumenstück (Hyperion Records). Alex Baran from *Wholenote Toronto* said: “Buratto plays with such a conviction that you immediately know he is certain he has revealed Robert Schumann’s true voice. It’s a deep connection that he sustains effortlessly through the entire recording. Hear him live if you can.”

Following graduation from the Milan Conservatory in 2010, Buratto earned a master’s degree from the Bolzano Conservatory. As a Theo Lieven Scholar at the Conservatorio della Svizzera Italiana (Lugano) under the guidance of William Grant Naborè, he also received a Master of Advanced Studies.

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

1685-1750

Italian Concerto in F Major, BWV 971

Published 1735

Bach's *Italian Concerto* perfectly demonstrates his voracious musical appetite. Keenly interested in the music of his time, he assiduously sought out the works of other composers. Perhaps the most important were those of Venetian priest Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741). While serving as Kapellmeister in Weimar, Bach began his serious study of Vivaldi's music when a wide range became available to the orchestra he was conducting. Of Vivaldi's many instrumental concertos, Bach chose six to transcribe for harpsichord between 1708 and 1717. The *Italian Concerto* was the culmination of this effort. It was published in 1735 as the second part of Bach's *Clavier-Übung* ("Keyboard Exercises"), along with an overture in the French style. A dedicated teacher and thorough pedagogue, Bach supplied his pupils with a well-rounded system of the kinds of music they should know. In the *Italian Concerto* Bach deliberately captures the spirit and style of Vivaldi, with its concise rhythmic construction and straightforward, Italianate themes. Bach must have enjoyed delving into the lively, tuneful and energetic works of his Italian counterpart and using them in the creation of his own personal style.

In typical 18th-century concerto form, this one is in three movements (fast-slow-fast.) The bright, open, and optimistic key of F major sets the stage. The first movement is based on a ritornello, a recurring theme, interspersed with free episodes of contrasting material, all the while moving from key to key, and finally coming back

home at the end. This memorable theme makes each return crystal clear, with its clear melody on top, a propulsive bass line, and inner voices providing imitation that is polyphonic but never fugal.

The middle movement is in the introspective key of D minor. With an arioso melody, serene, expansive, and intimate, perfectly supported by a pulsating accompaniment, it is a true song without words. His students could have used it as a model for the kind of improvisation expected of 18th-century musicians. The third movement leaves us with the happiest of endings: a jubilant dialogue of extroverted ascending scales, cheerful trills, and regular harmonic sequences, propelled by an irresistible rhythm.

Late in his life on a visit to the Court of Frederick the Great in Potsdam, Bach (a virtuoso on harpsichord and organ) was introduced to new fortepiano by his son Carl Phillip Emanuel. He didn't take to it. Yet today we relish Luca Buratto's beautiful Bach on the Steinway. Does it matter? As fortepianist Leslie Tung points out, "The most critical element of our musical experience is not the keyboard instrument, but what is immediately two feet to its left: the particular human musical brain and heart doing the playing."

THOMAS ADÈS

b. 1971

Blanca Variations; Mazurkas, OP. 27

Composed 2015; 2010

Thomas Adès is one of the most accomplished musicians of his generation. His music is decisively new, yet it incorporates the past with warmth and imagination. A virtuoso pianist and brilliant conductor, he is a skilled composer in many genres, including solo piano and chamber music, as well as choral and orchestral works. He is especially known for his opera *The Exterminating Angel* (2016), which premiered in Salzburg and received much acclaim at the Metropolitan Opera last year. Based on a 1962 movie by Luis Buñuel, guests at dinner gradually discover that they cannot leave. In the movie, one of the guests, Blanca Delgado, plays a piano sonata to pass the time in what is becoming an interminable evening. In the opera, that same character performs the piece we hear today, the *Blanca Variations*. They were originally commissioned by the Clara Haskil International Piano Competition in 2015 and premiered there by the contestants.

For the theme, Adès draws on a traditional Sephardic song, "Lavaba la Blanca Nina" ("The Pure Maiden Washes"), which tells of the anguish experienced by a young woman whose husband has not returned from the wars. Melancholy and ethereal, the song gives voice to feelings so deep that only music can express them, a grief that can't be assuaged, Adès says. When the theme first appears, with its melody beautifully ornamented and supported by a single

bass line, we immediately think of Bach. But soon we venture into new worlds. Strategic silences set off hesitations and uncertainties, as if the music can't find a home. There are echoes of Liszt, Chopin, and Ravel, and a sense of continuous improvisation. With music shimmering, delicate and silvery, the piano becomes the singer, especially so in the hands of such virtuosos as Adès and Buratto. Finally, the music, ever slower, drifts off into the distance, and the piece ends.

Adès's Mazurkas, Op. 27, were composed in 2010 to celebrate the 200th anniversary of Chopin's birth and were premiered by Emanuel Ax at Carnegie Hall, which had co-commissioned them. They are clearly based on the mazurkas of Chopin, which Adès brings decisively into the 21st century. Although he lived in Paris, Chopin never forgot his Polish heritage, which we hear most clearly in his polonaises and mazurkas. He was the first to set the mazurka (an old Polish folk dance) as a solo piano piece. Like his waltzes, the mazurkas are most at home in the salon and are not meant for dancing; they are stylized version of the idea.

Adès's mazurkas are classical in the same way Chopin's are: they reveal their secrets gradually, their complex structures hidden under delightful music. The first is the most dance-like of the three, mostly in the triple meter expected of a mazurka, with playful rhythms in the melody. The second features delightfully rippling, sparkling phrases, and profuse

ornamentation. It is tinkling water music, with shades of Debussy and Ravel. Adès blends new with old, indicating the specific ornaments he wants with mordents (short-hand signals to the performer in the score), as did Bach and Couperin. The final mazurka is all new, all Adès. Transparent, calm, ethereal,

it exploits the extreme registers of the piano. Each note matters; each note rings clear as we absorb its sound. The dance slowly expands in deliberate, regular motion, then quietly slips away.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

1770-1827

Sonata No. 23 in F Minor, Op. 57 ("Appassionata")

Composed 1804-1805

In 1798 Beethoven realized that he was growing deaf, and by 1802 he was sure of it. In a letter to his brothers, dubbed the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, he described his despair and his resolution to continue living for and through his art. Today's sonata, the "Appassionata," was composed during the four-year flurry of creativity that followed (1803-1807), in which Beethoven wrote some of his most beloved music: the "Waldstein" piano sonata, the third ("Eroica") and fourth symphonies, the triple concerto, fourth piano concerto and violin concerto, the Rasumovsky quartets, and the opera *Fidelio*. These remarkable works made Beethoven famous all over Europe and have only increased in popularity. (We'll hear the "Waldstein" on Gabriela Montero's November 15 recital.)

According to pianist Carl Czerny, Beethoven considered the "Appassionata" to be one of the greatest among his thirty-two piano sonatas, which span his career, from Op. 2 (1782) to Op. 111 (1822). It presents formidable challenges to the pianist (and Beethoven was a good one). One contemporary called it a "volcanic explosion." The first movement begins with

a falling pianissimo arpeggio, outlining an F minor triad. The same motive repeats, a half-step above, now questioning and searching. In a contrast of extremes (think *piano* and *forte*), massive chords destroy the mystery, and we're off into a torrent of notes. He "first fills the soul with sweet melancholy," a Parisian critic wrote in 1810, "and then shatters it by a mass of barbarous chords. He seems to harbor together doves and crocodiles." As the movement goes on, Beethoven explores the full range of the piano, contrasting dynamics, texture and timbre. He was pushing the boundaries of the Viennese fortepiano, whose delicate wooden construction was world's away from the cast-iron-framed Steinway we hear today.

The slow movement, in the richly comfortable key of D-flat major, refreshes the ear. An introspective chordal theme is followed by three variations: in the first, the theme is gently syncopated; in the second, it moves to the bass; in the third, both ideas are combined and extended. A tumbling scale leads directly to the finale. As passionate as the opening movement, it begins with loud, unstable, chords, which

hesitate and then give way to virtually nonstop motion. Dramatic pauses seem to signal that the end is near, but Beethoven is not done. In a new section, marked “Presto,”

scales and arpeggios race up and down the keyboard until, finally, three emphatic chords bring our journey to a close. It's been quite a ride.

ROBERT SCHUMANN

1810-1856

Sonata No. 3 in F Minor, Op. 14

Published 1836

In a recent interview, Luca Buratto observed that Schumann has something to teach us all about being human. Music, he believes, should be the vehicle of a message the composer leaves us: “It is the depth of this message that can touch the audience. My goal is to respect and bring back to life the composer’s will.”

If any piece has a specific message, it is this Grand Sonata, published in June 1836. The 26-year-old composer had been separated for nearly a year from his beloved Clara Wieck, a rising piano star, by her father Frederick, who served as her teacher, promoter, and manager. In May Schumann had sent Clara his second sonata, Op. 11, dedicated to her by his two alter egos, Florestan (the turbulent wild child) and Eusebius (the thoughtful older brother). Clara’s father had ordered her to return it, along with Schumann’s letters, and to ask for her own letters back.

Op. 14 gives full voice to Schumann’s predicament. It speaks of love and longing, bereavement and loss, confusion and wandering. The quintessence of Romanticism, the work features surging rhythms, rich harmonies, soaring melodies, and deep emotions. To carry the full depth of its message, a pianist must play with both clarity and abandon. The voices of both Florestan and Eusebius are heard. In

the first two movements Florestan is by far the stronger. The first is built around the exploration of three essential ideas, with sweeping arpeggios, a galloping dotted rhythm, and a lovely off-beat melody. Breathless phrases trip over one another in an urgent effort to tell the story. The second, equally fervent, is a boisterous, unpredictable Scherzo.

The third movement stands in complete contrast to these. Now it is Eusebius’s turn, and he speaks through Clara, whose profoundly moving theme is stated most simply. (Schumann had prefigured her melody in the opening notes of the Sonata.) Four increasingly complex variations follow, in which the theme shines through, even when surrounded by a multitude of notes. The virtuosic finale (frequently played by Horowitz as an encore) is a tour-de-force of perpetual motion. Schumann marked it “Prestissimo possibile” (as fast as possible).

Schumann’s publisher Tobias Haslinger tagged the sonata “Concerto without Orchestra,” believing that this would “whet the appetite of a more curious public” and perhaps also to communicate a level of virtuosity equal to that of a concerto soloist, so that potential buyers would know that this music was not for amateurs.

In 1840, after five years of waiting and a court case against her father, Robert

and Clara were married. He continued his composing, and she her international career, all the while raising eight children. A renowned pianist and tireless advocate for her husband's music, Clara's surviving concert programs do not mention a performance of Op. 14. Instead, the work was premiered six years after Robert's death by Johannes Brahms, the Schumanns' most intimate friend.

What a treat to hear Schumann's sonata on the same program as Beethoven's "Appassionata." Indeed, this season is a feast of sonatas: one by Haydn, two by Mozart, two more by Beethoven, no less than three Schuberts, a Chopin and a Brahms, wrapping up with Prokofiev.

Program notes by Zaide Pixley, PhD, Professor Emerita, Kalamazoo College

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