

T H E
G I L M O R E
RISING STARS SERIES

2020-2021 VIRTUAL SEASON

Series Sponsored by The Wattles Family in Memory of Helen Fischer Wattles

Sunday, September 20, 2020 | 4 PM
Live Streamed from Wellspring Theater, Kalamazoo, Michigan

MACKENZIE MELEMED, piano

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| J. SIBELIUS | <i>Valse Triste</i> , Op. 44, No. 1 |
| J. S. BACH | Partita No. 1 in B-flat Major, BWV 825
I. Praeludium
II. Allemande
III. Corrente
IV. Sarabande
V. Menuet I & II
VI. Gigue |
| L. V. BEETHOVEN | Sonata in F Major, Op. 54
I. In tempo d'un menuetto
II. Allegretto - Più allegro |
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| F. PRICE | <i>Meditation</i> |
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I. <i>Pagodes</i> |
| A. SCRIBAN | <i>Préludes</i> , Op. 16
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About the Artist



Mackenzie Melemed

American pianist Mackenzie Melemed was the winner of The Juilliard School's 2019 Leo B. Ruiz Carnegie Hall Recital Prize and 2018 Arthur Rubinstein Piano Prize. In May 2019, he won third prize in the 1st China International Music Competition, performing in the final round with The Philadelphia Orchestra under the baton of Maestro Yannick Nézet-Séguin at the National Center for Performing Arts in Beijing. Most recently, he was named a finalist of the 2021 American Pianists Association Awards, which comes with a \$50,000 cash prize.

Recent performance highlights include guest artist appearances with the San Diego Symphony and Finland's Vaasa City Orchestra and solo recitals at the Salle Cortôt (Paris), Arctic Piano Fest (Finland), South Orange Performing Arts Center (NJ), and Tuckerman Hall (Worcester, MA). As winner of the Ruiz Prize he also made his debut at Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall.

In October 2019, Warner Classics released "Möbius," featuring his performance of contemporary Korean composer Jeajoon Ryu's first piano concerto with 1994 Gilmore Artist Ralf Gothóni conducting the Sinfonia Varsovia (Warsaw). Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Melemed has transformed his New York City apartment into a home studio, performing concerts via livestream and offering virtual lessons to students around the world.

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865-1957)

Valse Triste, Op. 44, No. 1

Jean Sibelius, the voice of Finnish nationalism, is principally known for his large-scale symphonies and concertos. This exquisite little waltz reveals a softer side. It was composed in 1903 as incidental music for Arvid Järnefelt's play *Kuolema* ("Death"), to accompany a scene in which a dying mother, attended by her son, imagines that she is waltzing. The son sleeps. When he awakes, he finds that she has danced away with death.

Sibelius sold the work outright to his publisher, giving up all royalties. It immediately became one of his most popular works ever, a signature piece. A year after its composition he arranged it for piano, brilliantly

capturing the orchestral sonorities on the keyboard. (Since then it has been set for six double basses, cello/piano, a cappella vocal ensemble, synthesizer, and jazz quartet.) With its yearning melodies, harmonies that change beneath your feet, and surprising tempo and mood changes, it is quintessentially Romantic in style. Fragments of waltzes from happier times float in and out, the last one becoming almost manic. Yet it is the plaintive first melody, always returning, that expresses the work's deep sadness, lingering in the ear long after the music is finished. It is the perfect expression of the last dance of the evening. "Triste" indeed.

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

Partita No. 1 in B-Flat Major, BWV 825

In 1731, J. S. Bach published at his own expense the first part of his magisterial *Clavierübung* ("Exercises for the Keyboard"), containing a set of six partitas. He described the work as "Clavier Practice, consisting of Preludes, Allemandes, Courantes, Sarabandes, Giges, Minuets and other Galanteries composed for the pleasurable diversion of music lovers." Like its sister, the suite, the Baroque partita is a collection of venerable dances, all in the same key, cast in two repeated sections, each with its own distinctive character. By now far from the dance floor, they had become stylized, the music exploring the character of a particular dance.

Because Bach's contemporaries knew each type intimately, they would have been intrigued by his reworkings.

Today's work starts with a Praeludium, a persistent mordent ("turn") passing in imitation between the hands. Then comes an Allemande (from the French word for Germany). Rather than complex and serious, as befitted the supposed character of the German people, this one is downright cheerful, the music unfolding in Vivaldian sequences. In the buoyant *Corrente* ("current"), a sparkling melody dances over a rippling bass. In the Sarabande (a French court dance), a stately bass supports an expressive melody, full of graceful

decorations. Next come two added Galanteries, both minuets. The first, one of Bach's most famous, is almost danceable, with the left hand, a walking bass, keeping the beat secure,

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Sonata in F Major, Op. 54

As Jonathan Biss has pointed out, one of the most extraordinary things about Beethoven's thirty-two piano sonatas is their great variety, each individually profiled. This one is a surprise. Composed in 1804, Op. 54 is sandwiched between two giants: Op. 53 ("Waldstein") and Op. 57 ("Appassionata"). Beethoven would sometimes juxtapose weightier works with lighter ones--the Eighth Symphony between the monumental Seventh and Ninth, for example. But is this extraordinary sonata a "lighter" work, or does it reveal aspects of his evolving view of the sonata? As Beethoven plays with his audience's clearly understood expectations of just what a sonata might be, his robust sense of humor is clearly on display.

Rather than beginning with a dramatic, even argumentative, sonata-form first movement, Beethoven starts with a Tempo di Menuetto, giving it a clearly structured, old-fashioned theme, its balanced phrases repeated. Suddenly there comes a sempre forte e staccato

FRANZ LISZT (1811-1886)

Funérailles from *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*

Liszt not only invented the solo piano recital, he turned it into an art form. Fabulist Hans Christian Andersen,

while the right sings an irresistible tune. The second, abbreviated and chordal, is the perfect foil. A cheerful Gigue ("jig"), brings the partita to a close.

explosion of octaves, and the minuet has become a rondo. The theme comes back around, increasingly decorated each time. "Improvisations on paper," Joseph Kerman called them. The theme returns, the octaves interrupt. With a cadenza, then a charming coda, Beethoven bids an affectionate farewell to the gracious theme, which by now has become an old friend.

The second movement grows seamlessly out of the first, joyfully rising upward, dominated by a central theme. It is Beethoven at work, "the master atomizer, pulverizer, and transmogrifier of motivic ideas," as Thomas May puts it. Although marked Allegretto ("a little fast"), the music's irrepressible high spirits drive it forward. A daunting challenge to a pianist, it is a study of perpetual motion coupled with a series of quickly changing, far ranging harmonies. Then Beethoven, who could take his time in coming to an ending, provides a bravura conclusion to this remarkable work. No wonder he has cast such a long shadow.

who attended one of his monologues pianistiques, reported: "When Liszt entered the salon it was as if an

electric shock passed through it." Contemporary British pianist Charles Hallé sat speechless, "in a stupor of amazement." His playing had a "crystal-like clearness which never failed him for a moment, even in the most complicated and, for anybody else, impossible passages," Hallé wrote. When Clara Schuman heard Liszt play, she reported, "I sobbed aloud, it overcame me so." Between 1839 and 1847 Liszt gave at least 1,000 public performances, creating what Heinrich Heine dubbed "Lisztomania."

Funérailles, subtitled "October 1849," gives full voice to Liszt's outrage about the bloody uprising in his native

FLORENCE PRICE (1887-1953)

Meditation

A native of Little Rock, Florence Price graduated from the New England Conservatory of Music, where she studied organ and composition. In 1927 she moved to Chicago, and in 1933 her Symphony in E was premiered by the Chicago Symphony, making her the first African American woman to have her music played by a major American orchestra. The next year the Women's Symphony Orchestra of Chicago premiered her piano concerto, with fellow composer Margaret Bonds as soloist. In November 1943 Price wrote to Serge Koussevitzky, conductor of the Boston Symphony, urging him to

Hungary and his grief about Chopin's death. Daniel Barenboim calls it one of the most wonderful of his piano works. It is certainly among the most challenging. It begins somberly with a tolling bell, leading into a fanfare announcing a funeral march, whose ponderous steady rhythm has become a universal symbol of mourning. The heart-breakingly beautiful melody of the next section is quintessentially Liszt. Ostinato bass octaves pile up in repeated scales in both hands, gradually building in intensity. Finally, Liszt sums up all that has gone before in a dazzling ending.

consider her music, even though, she wrote, "I have two handicaps--those of sex and race. I am a woman, and I have some Negro blood in my veins." There is no record that he replied.

Meditation exists in a single undated autograph copy, most likely written about 1929. A meticulously crafted miniature, simple on the surface, it exhibits what Alex Ross calls Price's "pervasively elegant and subtle handling of familiar idioms." With its graceful melody and rich harmonies, it is perfect in its own way, like a Chopin waltz, a tantalizing sample of her remarkable body of work.

**CLAUDE DEBUSSY
(1862-1918)**

Estampes

In his Dictionnaire de musique, Rousseau wrote, “Music portrays everything, even those objects that are purely visible. By means of almost inconceivable powers it seems to give the ear eyes.” Debussy shared this view completely. A friend of Monet, he was keenly interested in the painting revolution going on around him, giving this work (composed in 1903) a title meaning “prints” or “engravings.” Although he disliked being labeled an Impressionist, Debussy’s music was just as ground breaking. At the 1889 Paris Exposition he first heard the Javanese gamelan (an ensemble of gongs, xylophones, and similar instruments). He began to think about the piano in new ways.

Pagodes comes as close to imitating gamelan music as possible, Stephen Walsh observes, marked by suspended animation, unchanging harmonies fragmented melodies, horizontal and vertical layers. Since pagodas are

layered towers, perhaps Debussy had that structural principal in mind, he suggests.

Once heard, who can forget Carmen’s sensuous Habanera aria from Bizet’s 1875 opera? Clearly Debussy couldn’t, subtitled *La soirée dans Grenade* (“An Evening in Grenada”) *Mouvement de Habanera*. His version is an impression, almost a meditation, on the nature of the dance. Its characteristic rhythm--DUM-da-dum-dum--is present in nearly every measure; lovely melodies pass from voice to voice.

Jardins sous la pluie (“Gardens in the Rain”) is a brilliant depiction of water play, in the same vein as Ravel’s *Jeux d’eau* of 1901. The music sparks the imagination immediately, its sparkling sonorities like sunshine on water droplets, its gusts as unpredictable as the weather. The wind blows, the rain patters down, and this spectacular trio of pieces comes to an end.

**ALEXANDER Scriabin
(1872-1915)**

Préludes, Op. 16

When the sixteen-year old Scriabin entered Moscow Conservatory in 1888, he quickly became one of its foremost pianists, second only to Rachmaninoff. Feeling the competition, he set out to learn all thirty-two of Beethoven’s sonatas in order, but lost interest at the tenth (Op. 14, No. 2), twelve sonatas shy of Op. 54. In 1894 he met music publisher Mitrofan Balyaye, whose catalogue was restricted to Russian

composers. Enthusiastic about his new contributor, Balyaye planned to take Scriabin to Paris. He challenged the young composer to write forty-eight preludes before their departure, basing the tally on Bach’s forty-eight. Scriabin took him on, but finished just under thirty, among them the lovely miniatures of Op. 16. It was a genre Scriabin would cling to throughout his career, writing over one hundred

preludes, from the first in 1894 to the last in 1914.

In Op. 16 Scriabin adopted the key plan Chopin had used in his set of twenty-four--following a major key by its relative minor--setting his preludes in B major, G-sharp minor, G-flat major, and E-flat minor. He breaks the pattern for the last, set in F-sharp major (the enharmonic equivalent of G-flat). The first prelude suggests a Chopin nocturne, its tender melody meandering over a gently sprawling accompaniment, a pervasive two-

**IGOR STRAVINSKY
(1882-1971)**

Étude No. 4 from 4 Études, Op. 7

Stravinsky wrote his only set of piano etudes in the summer of 1908 while he and his family were on vacation in the Ukrainian countryside. He was taking time off from private study in Moscow with the renowned composer Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, who had been meticulously guiding his development as a composer. It was at Rimsky’s Wednesday house-concerts that many of Stravinsky’s compositions were first heard. Their fruitful relationship was cut short when Rimsky died in June 1909, the very time of this composition. Devastated and grieving, Stravinsky traveled by train for two-and-a-half days, from the Ukraine to St. Petersburg, to attend his funeral.

against-three cross rhythm creating a tranquil murmuring. Time is suspended in the second, which is dominated by a recurring gesture: two sustained chords followed by a gentle shake. Marked *cantabile* (“song-like”), the third prelude tells an intimate story, its phrases rising and falling like gentle breaths. The fourth is the briefest: just twelve measures based on a single idea. Beginning *sotto voce*, it fades to a *pianissimo* close. The fifth darts quickly away to end this captivating set.

Stravinsky dedicated the last etude of Op. 7 to his beloved teacher. It is a brilliant study of rapid-fire perpetual motion, spiced with syncopation. The action never stops: the left-hand scampers about the keyboard in four-note patterns; the right provides double-time commentary. Each pattern begins on a weak rather than a strong beat, making everything sound a bit off kilter. Percussive chords add to the clamor; the left hand rushes up the scale, and the right maintains its ceaseless activity. Marked “Vivo,” the etude is a pianistic workout indeed.

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February 7, 2021 | Isaiah J. Thompson Quartet
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