

THE GILMORE 2018.2019 SEASON



RISING STARS SERIES

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Sunday, April 14, 2019 | 4 PM
Wellspring Theater, Kalamazoo, Michigan

ZHANG ZUO, piano

J. S. BACH

Partita No. 5 in G Major, BWV 829

- I. Praeambulum
- II. Allemande
- III. Courante
- IV. Sarabande
- V. Tempo di Minuetto
- VI. Passepied
- VII. Gigue

R. SCHUMANN

Faschingschwank aus Wien, Op. 26 (Carnaval of Vienna)

- I. Allegro. Sehr lebhaft
- II. Romanze. Ziemlich langsam
- III. Scherzino
- IV. Intermezzo. Mit grösster Energie
- V. Finale. Höchst lebhaft

: INTERMISSION :

M. RAVEL

Le Tombeau de Couperin _

- I. Prélude. Vif
- II. Fugue. Allegro moderato
- III. Forlane. Allegretto
- IV. Rigaudon. Assez vif
- V. Menuet. Allegro moderato
- VI. Toccata. Vif

La Valse (The Waltz)

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ABOUT THE ARTIST



Photo: Marco Borggreve

ZHANG ZUO

An imaginative and electrifying performer, Zee Zee began her musical training in Germany at the age of five. Upon returning to her native China, she became one of the most sought after young artists in the nation, collaborating with leading Chinese orchestras with whom she retains a close link – the 16/17 season saw her as the Artist in Residence with the Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra touring Europe. Having completed her piano studies with Dan Zhao Yi at the Shenzhen Arts School, Zee Zee was invited to continue her artistic development under the mentorship of Nelita True at the Eastman School of Music and Yoheved Kaplinsky and Robert McDonald at The Juilliard School, where she won the coveted Petschek Piano Award. Zee Zee was awarded first prizes at China's 1st International Piano Concerto Competition, the Gina Bachauer International Artists Piano Competition in America, and the Krainev International Piano Competition in Ukraine; she was also a prizewinner at the 2013 Queen Elizabeth Competition. She has studied at the Peabody Institute with Leon Fleisher, and continues to receive guidance from Alfred Brendel.

Zee Zee has been described as "full of enthusiasm and glamour, radiating the vigor of youth" (Chinese Gramophone). Her interpretations and communicative abilities have been praised as "taking us to another reality...bright, expressive and moving to the extreme" (Belgischer Rundfunk) while her creative maturity has been hailed as "a powerful, passionate and compelling representation of pure artistry" (Los Angeles Times).

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

1685-1750

Partita No. 5 in G Major, BWV 829

Composed 1725-1730 or 1731

In 1731, Bach published at his own expense the first part of his magisterial *Clavierübung* (Exercise for the Keyboard), Opus 1, containing a set of six partitas. He described the work as "Clavier Practice, consisting of Preludes, Allemandes, Courantes, Sarabandes, Gigue, Minuets and other Galanteries composed for the pleasurable diversion of music lovers." On the title page Bach identified himself as "Acting Chapel Master to the Court of Saxe-Weisenfels" and "Conductor of the Leipzig Musical Choir." Aiming for a broader audience, he omitted any mention of his fulltime job as Cantor (music director) at the two biggest churches in Leipzig, St. Thomas and St. Nicholas, where he served as composer, organist, choirmaster, and Latin teacher.

Over the next decade, the encyclopedic Bach would add three parts to his *Clavierübung*: in 1735, one more partita and the Italian Concerto (played earlier this season by Luca Barrato); in 1739, four duets (for one player); and in 1741, the unparalleled Goldberg Variations, an exhaustive study of the myriad ways a theme can be transformed. As a renowned virtuoso on both harpsichord and organ, Bach knew exactly what he was doing as he led keyboard players through some of the most important styles of the day.

Like its sister the suite, the Baroque partita is a collection of venerable dances, all in the same key, in two-part form, each with its own distinctive character and set of expectations. By now far from the dance floor, they had become stylized, the music exploring the character of a particular dance (think Chopin waltzes). Because Bach's

listeners and performers knew each dance type intimately, they would have been intrigued by his reworkings. A partita is built on four essential dances: the Allemande, the Courante, the Sarabande, and the Gigue. To these were added optional Galanteries, chosen from a range of possible dances, as well as a non-dance movement to begin each set.

Partita No. 5 starts with a *Praeambulum* (a pre-walk), appropriately full of introductory frills and flourishes. The first dance, an Allemande (from the French word for Germany) is serious and stately (as befitted the supposed character of the German people) and features a profusion of notes in a complex pattern of triplet rhythms. In the Courante (in Italian, "current") a sparkling melody dances over a regular, rippling bass. Bach's version of a Sarabande (a French court dance) breaks the norm completely. Instead of writing a chordal, stately dance in triple meter, he presents a highly decorated melody, explicitly indicating what kind of ornaments to play, combined with a persistent dotted rhythm (long-short-long).

Now comes the first of the added Galanteries, this one called *Tempo di Minuetto*. Pianist Phyllis Rappeport points out that when Bach says "Tempo di" anything, what follows will be a surprise. In this one, instead of the expected elegant, balanced phrases, we hear lively eighth-notes set in scampering cross rhythms. The second Galanterie is a *Passepiéd* ("pass-foot"). Traditionally, in this dance the focus is not on the elegance of steps, but on the formation of geometric patterns on the floor. Perhaps to honor this practice, Bach

employs a hemiola pattern, alternating pairs of measures in the scheme 1-2-3/1-2-3/1-2/1-2/1-2. (Bernstein uses the same device in *West Side Story*.)

A highly contrapuntal version of the Cigue (jig), a fast dance in 6/8, brings the partita to a close. Structured almost like a fugue, this one begins with a six-note subject,

stated first in the middle voice, then the top, then the bass, and continuing in three independent lines. When the second half of the two-part form begins, the same theme passes back through the voices, becoming even more elaborate, and a musical conglomeration brings this delightful work to an end.

ROBERT SCHUMANN

1810 – 1856

Faschingsschwank aus Wien, Op. 26 (Carnival of Vienna)

Composed 1839

In April 1839, Schumann's fiancée Clara Wieck wrote to him from Paris with a request: "Listen, Robert, couldn't you just once compose something brilliant, easily understandable...not too long and not too short? I'd so much like to have something of yours to play that's specifically intended for the public. Obviously, a genius will find this degrading, but politics demand it every now and again." As an internationally known concert pianist and ardent promoter of his music, she knew what she was talking about. Separated, anxious, and lonely, the two lovers were in the throes of a court case, petitioning the court to let them marry without her father Friedrich Wieck's consent. Violently opposed to their marriage, Wieck, who also served as Clara's teacher and manager, had blocked them at every turn. That spring he had sent Clara alone to Paris to present a series of concerts without his guidance, hoping to teach her a lesson in dependency.

When Schumann received Clara's letter, he had just left Vienna, which he found completely captivating, and had already begun to ponder exactly how he would support a wife and perhaps a family.

Fortunately, *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* was already germinating, with the five movements sketched out. Fasching (Shrove Tuesday) refers to the last day to celebrate before the strictures of Lent begin. Perhaps better known as Mardi Gras or Carnival, it is a revel indeed, full of Schwanks (jests or pranks). Schumann had observed the Viennese version first-hand only a few months earlier, in mid-February. He subtitled the work *Fantasiebilder* ("Fantasy Pictures").

In the true spirit of Fasching, the piece can be read as a sonata turned on its head. Schumann sets the first movement as a rondo (traditionally a jubilant finale), and the last in sonata form (usually the first, a thoughtful exposition of ideas). Instead of two middle movements, Schumann gives us three. Calling the work *Faschingsschwank* was undoubtedly intended not just to indicate its nature, but also to entice potential buyers; labeling it a sonata would have implied a more serious work. Consistent with the era's growing nationalism, the markings are in German rather than Italian, a preference sometimes shared by Beethoven.

The opening B-flat major rondo is marked *Sehr lebhaft* (very lively). Through a series of increasingly extended episodes, Schumann makes the regular returns to the emphatic, chordal main theme unmistakable. Each of these is individually profiled—one songful and melodic, another in minor mode, yet another march-like—and set it off to perfection. Midway we hear a brief snatch of the Marseilles, the French national anthem, banned in Austria at the time. A G minor Romanze follows, marked *Ziemlich langsam* (rather slow). Only twenty-four measures long, it serves as an interlude rather than an independent movement. With its poignant melody, gentle accompaniment, spare texture, and yearning, introspective mood, it couldn't be more appealing. Perhaps it paints a "fantasy picture" of a reveler taking time away from the rowdy celebration.

Then comes a graceful, Mendelssohnian Scherzino, the "ino" indicating that the expected middle section (the Trio) is missing and further communicating the lightness Clara requested. Its periodic structure, repeated sections, clear cadences, and leaps between high and low registers provide a delightful focal point between the movements that frame it. The E-flat major Intermezzo, marked *Mit grösster Energie* (with the greatest energy), is quintessential Schumann. Its surging, urgent melody sings out over an active bass

accompaniment and intricate inner parts, the thicker texture contrasting dramatically with the crisp Scherzino and transparent Romanze. Although Brahms was only six when Schumann wrote *Faschingsschwank*, he must have been deeply influenced by it, particularly the Intermezzo, for it is so Brahmsian in its mood and style. Back in the home key of B-flat major, the sonata-form last movement, marked *Höchst lebhaft* (extremely lively), provides a robust, satisfying ending to this sometimes sprawling work.

And what of Robert and Clara? The court ruled in their favor, and they were married on September 12, 1840, the day before she turned twenty-one. The joyous composer entered into what has been called his "year of song," turning out one brilliant vocal work after the other, including his beloved *Frau und Lieben und Leben* ("A Woman's Life and Love") and *Dichterliebe* ("A Poet's Songs," sung at last spring's Festival by Lawrence Brownlee), in which the piano is a partner equal to the singer. Schumann turned almost entirely away from solo piano music, which had been his preoccupation. Op. 26 is the eighteenth of his solo piano works with opus numbers; only seven would follow. From now on, it would be mainly in his songs, chamber music, and piano concerto that the piano would play a central role.

MAURICE RAVEL

1875-1937

Le Tombeau de Couperin (Couperin's Tomb) Composed 1914-1917

When the Great War broke out in 1914, the thirty-nine-year-old Ravel was determined to serve his country. Turned down as a

pilot, he volunteered for the motor corps and as a truck driver worked just behind enemy lines. After eight months at the front,

life-threatening illness ended his service. Upon discharge from a military hospital, Ravel began work on *Le Tombeau*, an idea sparked just before the war had begun. Each movement was dedicated to a friend killed in battle. The work was completed in 1917 and premiered in April 1919 by Marguerite Long; the last movement honored her husband.

The Tombeau, literally, "tomb," had been used by French musicians in the Baroque era to commemorate the death of a notable person. Ravel consciously revived this distinctively French practice. Although its title honors François Couperin (1668-1733), Ravel wrote, "The tribute is directed not so much toward the individual figure of Couperin as to the whole of French music of the eighteenth century." It is a double accolade, Roger Nichols notes: "To the civilization Ravel most admired, and to the friends who had tried to preserve its standards."

When the work was published, Ravel's contemporaries took him to task, asking why he would compose such a spritely piece on such a deeply tragic subject. To this Ravel replied, "The dead are sad enough, in their eternal silence." Yet, as Alex Ross puts it, emotion "smolders under the exquisite surface," along with "hints of muscle, glints of steel." Ravel expressed his mourning with characteristic subtlety, elegance, and restraint. However, the work has its edge. Nichols writes that Ravel "courts danger by putting new wine into old skins," the dance types favored by Couperin in his brilliant harpsichord suites.

Like Bach's fifth partita, Ravel's Tombeau begins with a Prélude. Sparkling and effervescent, it is reminiscent of Ravel's 1901 piano piece *Jeu d'eau* ("Water Play"). Triplet sixteenth-notes flow so quickly that the composer indicated breaths

(respirations) between the phrases. The prevailing G major/E minor tonality is spiced with chromatic harmonies. The next movement, a fugue in three voices, pays clear homage to Baroque style. The subject begins in the top voice, travels to the alto, and then to the bass, seamlessly woven into Ravel's transparent texture. The whimsical rhythms, insouciant dissonance, and lilting melodies of the Forlane, originally a Venetian dance, suggest a gently rocking gondola. Its regular phrases and symmetrical structure are paired with some of Ravel's most audacious harmonies, at times bitonal. Ravel insisted that the many repeats be honored, and, in true Baroque style, he decorates the main theme whenever it reappears.

The Rigaudon is dedicated to the brothers Pierre and Pascal Gaudin, killed by a single shell on the very day that they arrived at the front. Its contrasting ideas may sketch their different characters; the outer part is lighthearted, even boisterous, the briefer inner one introspective. A persistent rhythm reminds us that Ravel would go on to write *Bolero* a decade later. Next comes the Menuet, one of Ravel's favorite genres, with luxuriant ornamentation that nods back to the Baroque. Its middle section, a Musette, depicts the bagpipe, a favorite faux-folk instrument at the court of Louis XIV, where Couperin was composer and organist. The Menuet ends with a treble flourish and jazzy ninth chord.

Perhaps the sharpest reference to the Great War occurs with the rapid-fire rhythm and menacing repeated notes in the last piece, a Toccata. Glenn Watkins argues that its metallic stream of tone suggests the twisting motion of a fighter plane (the plane Ravel never got to fly). The Toccata is a true tour de force, a challenge to even a virtuoso.

It ends *Le Tombeau*, Ravel's last work for solo piano, with a fiery burst of E major

La Valse (The Waltz) Composed 1919-1920

La Valse was commissioned by Russian émigré and impresario Serge Diaghilev, who had worked with Stravinsky on the scandalous *Le Sacre du Printemps* and was looking for a new ballet to produce. Ravel complied, composing a large orchestral work he called *La Valse* in 1920; a year later he transcribed it for two pianos, and finally for one, the piece we hear today. When he played the work, subtitled poème chorégraphique, for Stravinsky and Diaghilev, the latter responded, "Ravel, it's a masterpiece, but it's not a ballet. It's a portrait of a ballet." Ravel gathered up his music and departed. He would have the satisfaction of seeing two performances of the work as a ballet before Diaghilev's death in 1929.

The waltz had been on Ravel's mind since 1906, when in a letter to "waltz king" Johann Strauss, Jr. he expressed his "deep sympathy for these wonderful rhythms," so full of joie de vivre. He described *La Valse* as "a sort of apotheosis of the Viennese waltz," intended to give "the impression of a fantastic and fatal whirling." He pictured the setting as "an immense hall [in] an imperial court, about 1855." To publish such a work in post-war Paris was daring, given the keen anti-German sentiment of the time. Three years earlier the National League for the Defense of French Music had been formed, seeking to ban "fatal infiltrations" of those thought to be enemy composers. Ravel had refused to join, believing it dangerous for the French to so isolate themselves.

As a solo work, *La Valse* might appear to be yet another finger-crushing test of a pianist's endurance and virtuosity, but, as

arpeggios.

in *Le Tombeau*, deep waters flow beneath the surface. Ravel's contemporaries felt that rather than joie de vivre., the work evoked the death and destruction of the Great War. In response, Ravel wrote: "Tragic, yes, it can be that, like any expression...which is pushed to extremes." He cautioned, "You should see in it only what comes from the music." Yet this apocalyptic reading lingers today: composer George Perle calls it a "Valse macabre;" Alex Ross considers it to portray "a society spinning out of control, reeling from the horrors of the recent past;" Thomas Adès points out that the opening bars suggest rumbling guns.

Pianist Sophie van der Westhuizen finds that in *La Valse* Ravel has perfectly married the different types of piano waltzes into one, truly celebrating the genre. The first half represents the dance's heyday in nineteenth-century Vienna, the second expresses the devastation brought on by the Great War (which marked the end of the waltz era.) First comes a set of short waltzes (like the miniatures of Schubert and Brahms), strung together to form a dazzling concert piece (like those of Chopin and Liszt). In the second half, these waltzes grow bigger, darker, more dissonant, accelerating to their limits and whirling almost out of control.

The biggest challenge for the soloist, van der Westhuizen notes, is to "create the full orchestral sound to make this exciting, dark ending as effective as possible. In the hands of a true virtuoso it will leave you breathless!"

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Professor Emerita, Kalamazoo College

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