

J.S. Bach (1685-1750): French Suite No. 5 in G Major

1. Allemande
2. Courante
3. Sarabande
4. Gavotte
5. Bourée
6. Loure
7. Gigue

Johann Sebastian Bach's six French Suites are marvels of imaginative writing, structural beauty, vitality and gracefulness. Written between 1717 and 1723, they were originally for clavier, as the piano was still a very infantile instrument and not yet widely accessible. The suite in G Major follows a fairly traditional structure, with seven dances of varying character, the main ones being the Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue. In between these movements, Bach has inserted three delightful additional dances: Gavotte, Bourée and Loure. The dances are all written in the key of G and in two-part (binary) form with repeats at the end of each section. The Allemande is of German origin, beginning with a traditional upbeat note joining with continuously flowing semi-quavers, giving a very gracious feel. The title 'Courante' stems from the French verb 'courir', meaning 'to run' and is full of rapidly descending scales and a spritely staccato counter-melody. Following the perpetual motion of the Courante comes the elegant and stately Sarabande, of Spanish origin and full of ornamentation. The Gavotte and Bourée, although shorter in length, are full of cheerfulness and energy, and the lyrical, more pensive Loure gives welcome respite from quick tempi before the grand finale that is the Gigue. Full of technical bravura, the English/Irish dance in 12/8 time is the epitome of exuberance, brilliance and Bach's melodic and motivic inventiveness.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827): Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Op. 27, no. 2 'Quasi una fantasia'

1. Adagio sostenuto
2. Allegretto
3. Presto agitato

After receiving many requests from NZ audiences to play the famous 'Moonlight' Sonata, I have finally had the opportunity to study it and have found the piece (when taken as a whole, rather than just the extracted first movement from which its popular name is derived) to be full of emotional depth, drama, and alluring pianistic challenges—a combination that promises to keep both performer and audience waiting for the next inspired musical turn. In both Opus 27 sonatas, Beethoven unconventionally begins with a slow introductory movement, giving more room for

improvisatory freedom and a sense of magical unfoldment (as in a fantasia), not as easily achieved with a traditional sonata-allegro movement, which here Beethoven saves for the final movement. The middle Allegretto movement is in D-flat Major, which is actually the same key as C-sharp Major, making it the 'major sister' of its C-sharp minor outer movements. Franz Liszt was said to have described the movement as 'a flower between two chasms' and I feel this is appropriate, given the innocent, dance-like joy of this little piece. The finale, marked Presto agitato--is on fire from the very first bar and once in a while stops to gather its energies, only to press on with even greater vigor and rhythmic drive. The pianist and writer Charles Rosen alludes to this movement as 'the most unbridled in its representation of emotion. Even today, two hundred years later, its ferocity is astonishing'.

Claude Debussy (1862-1918): Clair de lune

I thought to follow Beethoven's stirring sonata with a more peaceful depiction of moonlight and one that is a favourite throughout the world. As part of the Suite Bergamasque (which takes its title from the poem on which Clair de lune is based, by French poet Paul Verlaine), Debussy's homage to the light of the night sky sits beautifully underneath and fingers and in the ears, again in the key of D-flat Major, directly related to the key of the Moonlight Sonata. Verlaine's poem speaks of 'charming masqueraders and bergamaskers...their song mingles with moonlight...the still moonlight, sad and beautiful, that sets the birds dreaming in the trees'. Debussy uses his finest colour palette to make these images come to life.

Bela Bartok (1881-1945): Romanian Folk Dances

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953): Sonata No. 2 in D minor, Op. 14

IV: Vivace-Moderato-Vivace

After the relatively romantic tones of the Beethoven and Debussy, we move to the more brusque sounds of Eastern Europe and Russia. The dances and the sonata movement share the qualities of rhythmic vitality, raw energy, and haunting melodic lines; each is wonderfully invigorating to play, and, as I hope you will agree, to listen to.

Bartok is famous for his work as an ethnomusicologist and it is the tireless hours he spent collecting and arranging the songs and dances of peasant peoples throughout Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria that brought him the wealth of dance rhythms and exotic melodies that characterize his music, immortalizing that folk music in Western concert halls. These six dances were originally written for piano in 1915 and subsequently orchestrated. Bartok would have first heard their melodies played on a fiddle or shepherd's flute. This afternoon, I shall explain the background for each individual dance from the stage.

In addition to being one of the most prolific and admired composers of the 20th century, Prokofiev was also a revered concert pianist. His piano sonatas are beloved works of the piano repertoire and in the fourth movement of the 2nd Sonata, Prokofiev utilizes a rhythm often found in the tarantella—perpetual quaver motion in 6/8 time. This drives the momentum forward until a gorgeous, slower middle section emerges, in which a waltz-theme is revisited from the first movement. The movement then returns to 'vivace' and hurtles towards its fantastic finish.

INTERVAL

George Gershwin (1898-1937):

Three Preludes for Piano

The Man I Love

I Got Rhythm

Having American heritage, I feel delighted to bring the best of American music to New Zealand audiences, and no composer gives me greater joy to present than George Gershwin. His Preludes are perfect, classy miniatures of jazz and blues styles. In 6 minutes, the dashing George takes us from the streets and jazz clubs of Manhattan, to a hot summer's day in the soulful South, then back to the noise and bustle of the city. Moving onto the two very famous songs that he co-wrote with his brother Ira, we find rare examples of Gershwin's own song arrangements for solo piano, which, while short in length, capture the very essence of these timeless tunes, and allow pianists to momentarily share the spotlight with the likes of Ella Fitzgerald and Judy Garland.

Frederic Chopin (1810-1849):

Nocturne in C minor, Op. 48, no. 1

Waltz in E Major, Op. Posth.

Waltz in A-flat Major, Op. 42

Nocturne in E-flat Major, Op. 9, no. 2

Scherzo No. 3 in C-sharp minor, Op. 39

Chopin is known to many as the 'poet of the piano'. His writing enables pianists to attempt the art of singing with our fingers, by which we may express some of the most intimate emotions of the human heart. The Nocturnes, or 'night songs', are some of Chopin's most sublimely beautiful works. The C minor Nocturne is deeply and dramatically plaintive, but not altogether hopeless, as spoken by the prayer-like middle section in C Major. When the initial C minor theme returns in the final section, Chopin has marked it to be played 'twice as fast and in an agitated manner'. This swirl of emotion finally exhausts itself and only a single melody line remains, winding its way up to a high C and concluding in the bass with three poignant C minor chords.

The Waltzes of Chopin (15 in total) are the epitome of elegance and grace and are composed in such a perfectly pianistic manner as to make it unimaginable that they should be played on any other instrument to such fine effect. The E Major Posthumous Waltz brings a sense of wistful nostalgia to its lines and plenty of room for rhythmic freedom and spontaneity. It is simple in construction, but its humble repetitions would win it the 'tune of the day' or 'most likely to be whistled while leaving the concert hall' prize. The Waltz in A-flat Major is known as a 'Grand Waltz', having additional sections and a virtuosic flair that turns it at some points into a sparkling show piece while still maintaining a charming waltz character. (continued below)

In contrast to the C minor Nocturne, the E-flat Nocturne is of a sunnier disposition, although Chopin's use of the note C-flat in various chords throughout the piece lends a melancholic, bittersweet tint to the harmony, which we feel all the way through the high, fluttering cadenza at the very end of the piece, which also centers around C-flat. Chopin uses the opening melody of the Nocturne no fewer than four times throughout the piece, each time revealing new embellishments and gorgeous twists and turns, reminiscent of the bel canto singing style on which the nocturnes are modeled.

The C-sharp minor Scherzo is a larger-scale work and one of four Scherzi that Chopin composed. In these works, Chopin employs the title 'scherzo' not in reference to its Italian meaning of a 'musical joke', but rather in its capacity as a middle movement in symphonies and sonatas of the time, usually written in rapid $\frac{3}{4}$ time as is the case with this scherzo. It is a piece of high musical quality and content, blending imposing virtuoso elements (rapid parallel octaves in the theme) with moments of great tenderness. A chorale-like section comes twice in two different keys and it is notable for its 'call and response' type of composition, with wide chords in each hand presenting a rich choral melody, followed by quickly descending arpeggios, which seem to fall from the top of the piano and have been likened to angels singing from heaven. The Scherzo concludes with an impressive coda and we are left with the utmost grandeur and triumph in its final bars.

Melanie Lina © 2015

Pianist Melanie (Hadley) Lina immigrated to New Zealand from the United States in late 2010 to marry her husband, a New Zealander. Praised for her 'lyrical sound, refined nuances, and poetic depth of performance', she regularly appears as a recitalist on concert series around the North Island and gave her NZ concerto debut in May of 2012, performing Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto. She has since delighted more audiences in New Zealand with her performances of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, the Schumann Piano Concerto, and a triumphant performance last November of the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto at the Gala Concert celebrating the 150th Anniversary of the city of Hamilton, NZ. Former orchestral soloist appearances include the National Orchestra of Porto, Portugal, the Samara Philharmonic and St. Petersburg Kapella Orchestra of Russia, as well as numerous orchestras in the United States, including the Saint Louis Symphony. She has performed solo and chamber music recitals in Russia, Germany, Portugal, Lithuania and the US on recital series such as the Dame Myra Hess Memorial Concerts of Chicago.

At the age of eighteen, Ms. Lina performed in Washington, D.C. at the Kennedy Center, having received the Presidential Scholars Medallion from President Clinton for Achievement in the Arts. Other awards include prizes in the American National Chopin Competition, the Missouri Southern International Piano Competition, the National Society of Arts and Letters Piano Competition, and the Kosciuszko and Naftzger competitions. For the 2008 film adaptation of Leo Tolstoy's 'The Kreutzer Sonata', she was invited to record several works with violinist Pip Clarke, including Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata.

A native of Ozark, Missouri, Ms. Lina received her primary training as a pupil of Jane Allen for ten years at the Saint Louis Symphony Conservatory and Schools for the Arts. After receiving her undergraduate degree from the University of Kansas as a student of Jack Winerock, she continued her study there for two years with Distinguished Professor Sequeira Costa. A dedicated teacher

herself, Ms. Lina has maintained private studios of 30-40 students in St. Louis and Los Angeles, and currently teaches privately in Cambridge, NZ, where she resides. She is also a sought-after collaborative pianist, performing regularly with both instrumentalists and singers, and 2015 marks the formation of the Kulios piano trio with cellist Sarah Spence and violinist Joe Harrop.