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Stormy Waters and Une Derniere Fois

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Stormy Waters
and
Une Dernière Fois

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Arts
of Bard College

by
Kate Blaine

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2019

Artist's Statement

Music has been an integral part of my life for as long as I can remember, and my senior project has not only been a culmination of four years of work during my time at Bard, but also a chance to use skills I have spent my life developing and to challenge myself to improve them. For the past four years, I have studied classical piano performance in the studio of Blair McMillen. My first senior concert, on December 7th, 2018, focused on music evoking images of moving water and was titled *Stormy Waters*. My second senior concert, on April 18th, 2019, explored French music and styles and was titled *Une Dernière Fois*.

When choosing the program for my first senior concert, I wanted to include music which evoked the images and sounds of moving water and storms because I have always been fascinated by the vastness, power, and volatility of the sea. I began by choosing Sergei Rachmaninoff's 2nd Piano Sonata as the main piece on the program because of its evocative and expressive nature. Particularly, the opening of the first movement is essentially a musical thunderclap. Next, I found a piece I had never encountered before: Ernest Bloch's *Poems of the Sea*, a unique set of movements inspired by the chilly coastal waters of Percé, Québec. Finally, I chose to include a song cycle because of my interest and experience in working with singers over the past couple years. Although all the pieces on the program were composed during the early twentieth century, I greatly enjoyed working with and highlighting the wide range of moods and colors that they express.

My spring senior concert took place during the same semester that I participated in an art song performance class specifically focused on French art songs. Because of

this, I wanted to explore some solo piano repertoire in a similar vein, so I chose a French theme for my second and final senior concert. Additionally, since this concert was to be one of my last performances, I intentionally chose pieces that I find especially meaningful and beautiful. First, I chose my favorite preludes from some of the most prominent French composers – Frédéric Chopin, Claude Debussy, and Olivier Messiaen. J.S. Bach's 3rd French Suite, while not written by a French composer, was written partially in the French style, and is a suite I find particularly moving. I chose Franz Liszt's *Benediction de Dieu dans la solitude* because of my strong affinity for the piece. Even after working on it for an entire year, I do not love it any less than the first time I heard a recording of it. Finally, I chose Maurice Ravel's Piano Concerto for similar reasons, and because it is a great example of the jazzy and soulful aspect of the French style.

Stormy Waters: A Senior Concert

Kate Blaine, pianist

December 7th, 2018

3:30 PM

Bito CPS

Program

Poems of the Sea

Ernest Bloch (1880-1959)

- I. Waves
- II. Chanty
- III. At Sea

Three Moods of the Sea

Ethel Smyth (1858-1944)

- I. Requies
- II. Before the Squall
- III. After Sunset

Rachael Gunning, soprano

10 Minute Pause

Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 36

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Allegro agitato
Non allegro--Lento
Allegro molto

Program Notes

When choosing the program for this concert, I wanted to include music which evoked the images and sounds of moving water and storms because I have always been fascinated by the vastness, power, and volatility of the sea. Although all the pieces were composed during the early twentieth century, I have greatly enjoyed working with and highlighting the wide range of moods and colors that they express. The succession of music in this program is certainly a journey of some sort, and it is up to you to interpret how it progresses--and whether you make it out of the storm alive.

Ernest Bloch, *Poems of the Sea*

Ernest Bloch was a Swiss composer who is known for his unique compositional style. Born in Switzerland, he emigrated to the United States in 1916. Many of his compositions draw on his Jewish heritage. Bloch composed music in a wide range of genres: orchestral, instrumental, vocal, and operatic. His use of Dorian mode and tone clusters, among other harmonic devices, makes his music distinct. *Poems of the Sea*, composed in 1922, was inspired by the chilly coastal waters of Percé, Québec. Bloch prefaced this piece with the following Walt Whitman excerpt:

In cabin'd ships, at sea,
The boundless blue on every side expanding,
With whistling winds and music of the waves, the large imperious waves,
Or some lone bark buoy'd on the dense marine,
Where joyous full of faith, spreading white sails,
She cleaves the ether mid the sparkle and the foam of day, or under many a star at night,
By sailors young and old haply will I, a reminiscence of the land, be read,
In full rapport at last.

Ethel Smyth, *Three Moods of the Sea*

Ethel Smyth was an English composer known not only for her musical works, but also for her contributions to the women's suffrage movement. In fact, Smyth's "The March of the Women," composed in 1911, became the anthem of the movement. Her works include orchestral, instrumental, and chamber music, as well as some religious works. During her lifetime, she was criticized for writing music which was thought to be too masculine for her. Smyth wrote *Three Moods of the Sea* in 1913, during the period of her life when she had begun to lose her hearing. Originally written for voice and orchestra and later transcribed for piano, the music is set to text by poet Arthur Symons.

Sergei Rachmaninoff, Piano Sonata No. 2

Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff is well-known for his deeply Romantic compositional style, using rich melodies and a wide spectrum of musical colors to bring his works to a new level of emotional depth. Before achieving global recognition, Rachmaninoff's works received inconsistent

reviews. In fact, after the negative reaction to his first symphony, his depression stopped him from composing further for four years. He wrote two versions of Piano Sonata No. 2, the original edition composed in 1913, and the revised edition composed in 1931. In both versions, the three movements are highly interrelated thematically. Rachmaninoff was unsatisfied with the original edition and thought much of the material was repetitive and unnecessary. As a result, the revised edition is considerably shorter, the biggest changes being in the first movement.

Note: In this performance, you will hear the revised first movement and the original second and third movements.

Acknowledgements

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My musical compatriots, Rachael Gunning and Lindsey Williams

My infinitely caring and wonderful parents

My canine support, Carmen and Pippa

Maya Schwartz, Nick Bader, friends and family

Une Dernière Fois

Kate Blaine, pianist

April 18th, 2019

8:00 PM

Bito CPS

Program

Preludes Op. 28, No. 11 in B major	Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)
No. 6 in B minor	
Prelude No. 5, Book II -- "Bruyères"	Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
Prelude -- Un reflet dans le vent	Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)

French Suite No. 3 in B minor, BWV 814	J. S. Bach (1685-1750)
Allemande	
Courante	
Sarabande	
Anglaise	
Menuet	
Trio	
Gigue	

10 Minute Pause

Bénédiction de Dieu dans le solitude	Franz Liszt (1811-1886)
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Piano Concerto in G major	Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)
Allegramente	

David Sytkowski, pianist

Program Notes

Frédéric Chopin, Preludes No. 6 and 11

Frédéric Chopin was a Polish composer who lived and worked in France. His fame during his lifetime as a child prodigy, his high-profile relationship with writer George Sand, and his early death at age 39 makes Chopin a symbol of the Romantic era. Chopin composed his set of 24 preludes between 1835 and 1839. Similar to Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, there is one prelude in each of the major and minor keys. Each

of the preludes evokes a different mood and atmosphere, for example, Prelude No. 6 in B minor is somber, and in fact, this prelude was played on the organ at Chopin's funeral.

Claude Debussy, Prelude No. 5 Book II -- "Bruyères"

Claude Debussy, one of the most famous French composers, is often referred to as an Impressionist composer despite his opposition to the term. Similar to Chopin, Debussy composed 24 preludes for piano, but he did not use all the major and minor keys. His preludes are divided into two books: he composed Book I in 1909-1910 and Book II in 1912-1913. Unlike Chopin's preludes, each of Debussy's preludes has a title. In particular, Debussy chose to put the title of each prelude at the end of the score so that the performer can experience the sound without being influenced by the title. The title of Prelude No. 5 Book II, "Bruyères", is a town in northeastern France.

Olivier Messiaen, Prelude -- *Un Reflet dans le vent*

Olivier Messiaen was a French composer and ornithologist. He composed his *Préludes pour piano* in 1928-1929, when he was only twenty years old. Unlike Chopin's and Debussy's sets of preludes, Messiaen's preludes are more unified in that they are movements in a single work. He considered one of the most important aspects of his composition process to be his synesthesia--association of sounds with colors. Messiaen provides a preface to each prelude describing the associated colors. Below is the preface to the last movement, *Un Reflet dans le vent* (A Reflection in the Wind):

"The small storm which opens and concludes the piece alternates veins of orange, and green with black stains. The central development section is more luminous. The second theme, very melodious, and wrapped in sinuous arpeggios, is blue-orange in its first occurrence, and green-orange in its second one. Violet, orange, and purple dominate the entire piece."

J. S. Bach, French Suite No. 3

Bach wrote a total of six suites for keyboard between 1722 and 1725, each comprised of different dance movements. The title of French Suites was given after Bach's death (similar to the English Suites). In fact, most of the French Suites are, for the most part, written in the Italian style. For example, the "Courante" movement present in all six suites is written in Italian convention with the exception of the first (D minor) and third (B minor) suites, which are written in the French convention. Originally, suites were made up of four dances: allemande, courante, sarabande, and gigue. Later, other movements began to be added in between the sarabande and the gigue, such as the minuet, gavotte, passepied, and bourrée. The fourth movement of French Suite No. 3, "Anglaise", was originally titled "Gavotte". In addition, it was common to write a two-part minuet, and perform both parts followed by a repeat of the first part. In this suite, the two-part minuet is the two movements "Menuet" and "Trio".

Franz Liszt, *Benediction de Dieu dans la solitude*

Franz Liszt was a Hungarian composer and virtuosic pianist in the Romantic era. In 1847, he composed a collection of ten piano pieces entitled *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* (Poetic and Religious Harmonies). Although Liszt was not French, the collection and each movement within it have French titles, *Benediction de Dieu dans la solitude* (The Blessing of God in Solitude) being the third movement of the piece. In 1834, Liszt composed a piece inspired by a French poet, Alphonse de Lamartine, specifically his collection of poems called *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*. This original piece became what is now the fourth movement, *Pensée de morts* (In Memory of the Dead). Liszt prefaces the collection with a quote from Lamartine describing meditative souls elevated towards religion. In addition, Liszt prefaces some of the movements with other quotes from Lamartine. Below is a translation of the preface to *Benediction*:

“Whence comes to me, O my God, this peace that overwhelms me?
Whence comes this faith in which my heart abounds?
To me who just now, uncertain, agitated,
And on the waves of doubt buffeted by every wind,
Sought goodness, truth, in the dreams of the wise,
And peace in hearts resounding with fury?
When barely on my brow a few days have slipped by,
It seems that a century and a world have passed,
And that, separated from them by a great abyss,
A new man is born again within me and starts anew.”

Maurice Ravel, Piano Concerto

Maurice Ravel was a French composer often associated with the impressionist style. He composed his Piano Concerto in G major between 1929 and 1931. A year prior to composing the concerto, Ravel traveled to the United States for a concert tour and was inspired by the jazz style. The result is a strong jazz influence heard throughout the concerto. Although he wrote fewer works than many of his contemporaries, Ravel wrote for a variety of instruments, often writing piano works and then transcribing them for a full orchestra. In addition, he transcribed other composers' work for full orchestra as well, as in the case of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

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