



Advance Program Notes

Awadagin Pratt, piano

Thursday, November 30, 2017, 7:30 PM

These Advance Program Notes are provided online for our patrons who like to read about performances ahead of time. Printed programs will be provided to patrons at the performances. Programs are subject to change.

Awadagin Pratt, piano

Four Ballades, op. 10
Sonata in D Major, op. 10, no. 3

Johannes Brahms
Ludwig van Beethoven

INTERMISSION

Wachet auf, ruft unst die Stimme
Nun komm der Heiden Heiland
Chorale, Fugue, and Postlude
Prélude, Choral, et Fugue

Johann Sebastian Bach-Ferruccio Busoni
Johann Sebastian Bach-Ferruccio Busoni
Lera Auerbach
Cesar Franck

This performance is supported in part by a gift from Intimate Voices.

Program Notes

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Four Ballades, op. 10 (1856)

Although Johannes Brahms is remembered today as a conservative proponent of “absolute” music (music lacking a story or program), he did write a handful of works which at least gesture towards the idea of program music, the four Ballades being his best-known efforts in that realm. The musical *ballade* is based on the English poetic ballad, a long narrative song or poem orally passed from generation to generation. Ballads usually feature a grisly or fantastic storyline, a famous example being Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. The first Brahms ballade lives up to our gruesome expectations, being based on a traditional Scottish murder ballad, *Edward*. A mother asks her son, Edward, why his sword drips with blood; he gives a number of explanations, saying that he has killed his hawk, and when challenged, then claims that he has killed his horse. Finally, he admits that he has slain his father, that he will flee and leave nothing but despair and poverty to his wife and children, and that he leaves his mother only “the curse of hell,” the implication being that she was the one who put him up to the crime. The other three ballades lack a known program, but are by turns consoling and dramatic, acting as a fine counterbalance to the bloody first ballade.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Sonata in D Major, op. 10 no. 3 (1798)

The Beethoven Sonata we will hear today lacks a program, but is just as dramatic as the four Brahms Ballades, with all the violent contrasts we expect from the composer of the Fifth Symphony. Uncharacteristically for Beethoven, three of the four movements are sunny almost to the point of zaniness, while the slow movement (*Largo e mesto*) is, in the words of the pianist Ernest Hutcheson, “surcharged with passionate grief.” The entire piece is built on four notes, the first four notes of the descending D Major scale we hear at the beginning of the sonata. Over and over again, we hear these four notes (D, C#, B, A) in various combinations, spinning out in different directions and rhythms. This is a perfect example of the compositional style, which Beethoven would go on to refine over the course of his life, his traditional *modus operandi* being take a simple and short melodic germ, then tinker with it until all of its melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic possibilities have been exhausted.

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Transcribed by Ferruccio Busoni

Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme (composed ca. 1748, transcribed ca. 1908)

Nun komm der Heiden Heiland (composed ca. 1712, transcribed ca. 1908)

At the turn of the last century, very few pianists played “un-hyphenated Bach,” meaning that concertgoers were more likely to hear transcriptions of organ, violin, cello, and orchestral works than original keyboard works like the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, *Goldberg Variations*, *Partitas*, etc. Most piano recitals of the late 19th and early 20th centuries began with “Bach-Liszt,” “Bach-Tausig,” “Bach-Saint-Saëns,” and other various hyphenations. The undisputed king of the Bach transcribers was the Italian pianist Ferruccio Busoni, whose association with the Leipzig master was so great that he was once introduced at a party by a society matron as “Mr. Bach-Busoni.”

“Chorale preludes” are short organ improvisations, which function as a sort of introduction to a hymn and are intended to familiarize the Lutheran congregation with the tune they are about to sing. Busoni’s transcriptions of *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* (*Wake up, we are called by the voice*) and *Nun omm der Heiden Heiland* (*Now come, savior of the heathens*) have long-featured in the concert repertoires of great pianists of the past, serving as excellent openers for a concert or after intermission due to their simple beauty and potent emotional message.

Program Notes

LERA AUERBACH

Chorale, Fugue, and Postlude (1994, revised in 2003)

The Russian-American Lera Auerbach carries on the tradition of her illustrious Russian forebears, Sergei Rachmaninoff and Nicolai Medtner, in carving out a career for herself as a professional composer-pianist. She regularly appears in concert playing works of her own while also programming works by standard-issue composers like Schumann or Prokofiev. Her compositions run the gamut from violin sonatas to operas and ballets, with everything possible in between. The Chorale, Fugue, and Postlude is one of her most significant works for piano, but as yet is not a common presence on the concert programs of other pianists. Her compositional style could be described as serious but volatile, similar to Shostakovich or Schnittke: never atonal, but also never shying away from crunchy, satisfying dissonance.

CÉSAR FRANCK

Prélude, Choral, et Fugue (1884)

The Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) was a major catastrophe for the French, who suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the newly-formed North German Confederation, presided over by Otto von Bismarck. A year after the end of the war, Belgian composer César Franck was appointed to the faculty of the Paris Conservatoire as a professor of organ, being forced to first take French citizenship as a condition of his appointment. Camille Saint-Saëns derisively referred to the Belgian as the “eternal modulator,” sneering at Franck’s near-obsessive use of modulation (another word for changing keys). The animosity between the two was primarily due to Franck’s admiration for Liszt and Wagner, as well as Franck’s willingness to borrow the German’s intense, heavily-Romantic tonal language, which was anathema to the more classically-inclined, chauvinistically French Saint-Saëns.

The Prélude, Choral, et Fugue is a perfect example of Franck’s late-Romantic style; you will hear many of those slithering modulations paired with an almost hysterical emotional intensity that never abates, as well as Franck’s trademark “cyclic” compositional technique in which themes present themselves, then return in different guises throughout the three movements. Because Franck’s principal instrument was the pipe organ, you will hear him attempt to imitate that “King of Instruments” on the piano in this work, writing low notes on the keyboard which are sustained with the pedal while the two hands play complicated patterns above in higher registers. The opening, for example, features a melody in whole notes that occur once per bar, while other notes flurry about it, creating the illusion of two hands accompanied by pedal.

—Richard Masters, 2017

Biography

AWADAGIN PRATT

Born in Pittsburgh, Awadagin Pratt began studying piano at the age of six. Three years later, having moved to Normal, Illinois, with his family, he also began studying violin. At the age of 16 he entered the University of Illinois, where he studied piano, violin, and conducting. He subsequently enrolled at the Peabody Conservatory of Music, where he became the first student in the school's history to receive diplomas in three performance areas—piano, violin, and conducting. In recognition of this achievement and for his work in the field of classical music, Pratt recently received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Johns Hopkins.

In 1992 Pratt won the Naumburg International Piano Competition and two years later was awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Since then, he has played numerous recitals throughout the U.S., including performances at Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles, and Chicago's Orchestra Hall. His many orchestral performances include appearances with the New York Philharmonic, Minnesota Orchestra, and the Pittsburgh, Atlanta, Baltimore, St. Louis, National, Detroit, and New Jersey symphonies, among many others. Summer festival engagements include Ravinia, Blossom, Wolftrap, Caramoor, and Aspen, as well as the Hollywood Bowl and the Mostly Mozart Festival in Tokyo.

As a conductor, Pratt participated in the American Symphony Orchestra League and Conductor's Guild workshops and the National Conducting Institute, where he worked closely with Leonard Slatkin and conducted the National Symphony at the Kennedy Center. He has also conducted the Toledo, New Mexico, Vancouver (Washington), Winston-Salem, Santa Fe, and Prince George County symphonies; the Northwest Sinfonietta; the Concertante di Chicago; and several orchestras in Japan.

A great favorite of college and university performing arts series and a strong advocate of music education, Pratt participates in numerous residency and outreach activities wherever he appears; these activities may include master classes, children's recitals, play/talk demonstrations, and question/answer sessions for students of all ages.

Pratt has been the subject of numerous articles in the national press, including *Newsweek*, *People Magazine*, and *New York Newsday*. He was named one of the 50 Leaders of Tomorrow in *Ebony Magazine's* special 50th anniversary issue and has been featured on National Public Radio's *Performance Today*, *St. Paul Sunday Morning*, and *Weekend Edition*. On television, Pratt has performed on the *Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, and *Sesame Street*; has been profiled on *CBS Sunday Morning*; and was one of the featured soloists on PBS's *Live from the Kennedy Center: A Salute to Slava*. In November 2009 Pratt was one of four artists selected to perform at a White House classical music event that included student workshops hosted by First Lady Michelle Obama and performed in concert for guests, including President Obama. He has performed two other times at the White House, both at the invitation of President and Mrs. Clinton.

Pratt's recordings for Angel/EMI include *A Long Way From Normal*, an all Beethoven Sonata CD, *Live From South Africa*, *Transformations*, and an all Bach disc with the St. Lawrence String Quartet. His most recent recordings are the Brahms Sonatas for Cello and Piano with Zuill Bailey for Telarc and a recording of the music of Judith Lang Zaimont with the Harlem Quartet for Navona Records.

Pratt is currently professor of piano and artist in residence at College-Conservatory of Music (CCM) at the University of Cincinnati. He was recently named the artistic director of the Cincinnati World Piano Competition and is also the artistic director of the Art of the Piano Festival at CCM.

Pratt received a performance certificate and graduate performance diploma from the Peabody Institute.

Engagement Events

Wednesday, November 29, 2017

MASTER CLASS: AWADAGIN PRATT

During his visit, Awadagin Pratt led a master class with Virginia Tech piano students.

Thursday, November 30, 2017

TALK: AWADAGIN PRATT

Before the performance, participants engaged with Pratt during this informal talk. Presented in partnership with the Lifelong Learning Institute at Virginia Tech

Special thanks to Tracy Cowden, Pat Hyer, and Menah Pratt-Clarke

For Virginia Tech Students

The Division of Student Affairs invites you to engage in the Aspirations for Student Learning to do more, be more, and aspire to be your best self.

Aspirations for Student Learning

Commit to unwavering **CURIOSITY**

Pursue **SELF-UNDERSTANDING** and **INTEGRITY**

Practice **CIVILITY**

Prepare for a life of **COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP**

Embrace **UT PROSIM** (That I May Serve) as a way of life

One way to work toward these aspirational goals is to engage in Keystone Happenings. Keystone Happenings highlight the Aspirations for Student Learning, provide opportunities for learning, and challenge students to reflect. Search "keystone" on GobblerConnect at gobblerconnect.vt.edu/events to discover these opportunities.

Keystone Happening Reflections for Awadagin Pratt, piano

In a 2015 television interview with Matt Peiken of WCPO Channel 9 News Awadagin Pratt expressed that, "playing the piano is an infinite art [...] there's not a dimension of our physical and intellectual and emotional capabilities that it doesn't touch upon." In what ways is this perspective evident to you in Pratt's performance?

For more resources for educators, students, and lifelong learners to help you dig deeper and engage with this performance and our other season performances, view our Learning Guide at artscenter.vt.edu/experiences.

In the Galleries



PIA FRIES

September 14-December 9, 2017

Ruth C. Horton Gallery and Francis T. Eck Exhibition Corridor

Internationally acclaimed artist Pia Fries (Swiss, based in Dusseldorf, Germany) integrates silkscreened fragments of 16th- and 17th-century Baroque and Mannerist prints into a hybrid fusion of figuration and abstraction, art historical tradition and adventurous innovation. Intense color and lush paint careen, halt, retreat, then advance across expanses of empty white surfaces in a statement about the intersection of movement and stasis, past and present, and art and life. This exhibition presents a selection of paintings and prints from renowned private collections and prominent galleries in New York and California.

For more information on this artist, please visit piafries.com.

piafries.com.

GALLERY HOURS

Monday-Friday, 10 AM-5:30 PM

Saturday, 10 AM-4 PM

To arrange a group tour or class visit, please contact Meggin Hicklin, exhibitions program manager, at megh79@vt.edu or 540-231-0840.