



Clayton Stephenson, Piano

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2022

7:30 PM ET

MAHANEY ARTS CENTER, ROBISON HALL



CLAYTON STEPHENSON, PIANO

Program

Sonata in D Major, Hob. XVI:37 **Joseph Haydn**

Allegro con brio (1732–1809)

Largo e sostenuto

Finale. Presto ma non troppo

Sonata No. 4 in F-sharp Major, Op. 30 **Alexander Scriabin**

Andante (1872–1915)

Prestissimo volando

Piano Sonata No. 23, Op. 57 “Appassionata” L. van Beethoven

Allegro assai (1770–1827)

Andante con moto

Allegro ma non troppo – Presto

∞ *Intermission* ∞

Firebird Suite **Igor Stravinsky/Guido Agosti**

Danse Infernal (1882–1971)/(1901–1989)

Berceuse

Finale

Symphonic Metamorphosis on “Die Fledermaus”

Johann Strauss/Leopold Godowsky

(1825–1899)/(1870–1938)

Summertime Variations

George Gershwin/Fazil Say

(1898–1937)/(b. 1970)

Green Tea Farm

Hiromi Uehara

The Tom and Jerry Show

(b. 1979)



The performance will be available on demand until 7:30 PM ET on Monday, October 10, 2022 at <http://go.middlebury.edu/Clayton-Piano/>

This Performing Arts Series event is made possible thanks to the Paul Nelson Performance Endowment.

Program Notes

HAYDN Sonata in D Major, Hob. XVI:37

Note by Richard Wigmore, courtesy Hyperion Records

One of Haydn's few pre-London sonatas to have entered the popular repertoire is the D Major, No. 37, from the set of six published by the Viennese firm of Artaria in 1780. The sonatas were dedicated to the talented sisters Franziska and Maria Katherina von Auenbrugger, whose playing in aristocratic salons drew the admiration of both Leopold Mozart – never one to dish out compliments lightly – and Haydn himself. The D Major's popularity is easy to understand. The first movement, with its irrepressible, chirruping main theme, evokes the spirit of Domenico Scarlatti at his most dashing within the dynamic of the Classical sonata style. At the center of the development Haydn offsets the prevailing mood of jocularly with a powerful sequence of suspensions. The Largo e sostenuto, in D minor, is especially striking: a grave, sonorously scored

sarabande, archaic in flavor, with a suggestion of a Baroque French overture in its dotted rhythms and imitative contrapuntal textures. Like the slow movement of No. 24, it leads without a break into the finale, a guileless rondo marked *innocentement* and built around a fetching tune that could have been whistled on any Viennese street corner.

SCRIABIN Sonata No. 4 in F-sharp Major, Op. 30

Note by John Henken, courtesy of the L. A. Philharmonic

“I am God! I am nothing, I am play, I am freedom, I am life. I am the boundary. I am the peak.” –*Alexander Scriabin*

Scriabin was greatly influenced by Chopin in his early music, composing a set of 24 preludes like Chopin, as well as numerous nocturnes and mazurkas. He was also much under the influence of theosophy, and his ten piano sonatas are all, in some measure, programmatic works expressing mystical ecstasy. The Fourth, composed in 1903 and published the

following year, is no exception. The poem he wrote about the work begins with the distant gleam of a star that calls to him. He takes flight towards the star in a leaping dance of liberation, and by the end, he has engulfed the star. This is reflected in the music, opening in calm, alluring reflection, then diving into a cathartic celebration; the original Andante theme is transfigured at the close, as the composer and the flaming star become one.

BEETHOVEN Piano Sonata No. 23, Op 57 “Appassionata”

Note by John Henken, courtesy of the L. A. Philharmonic

Both the opening movement of the “Appassionata” Sonata in F minor, Op. 57, composed 1804-05, and its finale are in sonata form, and that tonal opposition is the principal dualism of the work. But Beethoven also plays powerfully with severe contrasts of dynamics, range, and articulation, and he is a master of expressive silences.

All of this is immediately apparent in the opening bars of the “Appassionata.” (The nickname is not the composer’s, but it accurately suggests the defining character of the piece.) It begins in ominous mystery, with a hushed traversal of the notes of the F-minor triad, full of latent energy and developmental potential while defining the tonic key as starkly as possible. There are suggestive silences, unexpected harmonic bumps, great sonic holes between the widely spread right and left hands, and a kinetic explosion at the end. You will recognize the recapitulation when all of this returns, but now over a throbbing bass line that fills in the expectant silences with audible urgency.

The central movement is a contemplative theme in D-flat major – a key much alluded to in the first movement – and increasingly agitated variations. It ends with an enriched reprise of the theme, leading directly into the whirlwind finale, a physically grueling dramatic challenge that raises the violence ante to bank-breaking levels in a furiously accelerated coda.

“If Beethoven, who was so fond of portraying scenes from nature, was perhaps thinking of ocean waves on a stormy night when from the distance a cry for help is heard, then such a picture will give the pianist a guide to the correct playing of this great tonal painting,” wrote Beethoven’s virtuoso pupil Carl Czerny about the finale of Op. 57. “There is no doubt that in many of his most beautiful works Beethoven was inspired by similar visions or pictures from his reading or from his own lively imagination. It is equally certain that if it were always possible to know the idea behind the composition, we would have the key to the music and its performance.”

STRAVINSKY/AGOSTI *Firebird Suite*

Note Courtesy of Hyperion Records

Stravinsky’s score for *The Firebird* was written for Sergei Diaghilev’s *Ballets Russes* dance company, which premiered

the work in Paris in 1910. Based on ancient Russian folk tales, it tells the story of the young Prince Ivan's quest to find a legendary magic bird with fiery multi-colored plumage. During his adventures, he falls in love with a beautiful princess but has to fight off the evil sorcerer Katschei to eventually marry her. The suite presents the culminating scenes of the ballet in a piano transcription by the Italian pianist and pedagogue Guido Agosti (1901-1989), who studied with Ferruccio Busoni and taught Maria Tipo.

The Danse infernale depicts the brutal swarming and capture of Prince Ivan by Katschei's monstrous underlings until Prince Ivan uses the magic feather given to him by the Firebird to cast a spell on his captors, making them dance until they drop from exhaustion. The Berceuse is a lullaby depicting the eerie scene of the slumbering assailants, leading to the Finale, a wedding celebration for Prince Ivan and his princess bride.

Agosti's piano transcription, completed in 1928, is a daunting technical challenge for the pianist. But then again, transcribing Stravinsky's orchestral writing was always going to be a challenge, something like herding cats, because his signature melodic fragments emerge from every corner of the sound range, with tone-colours and timbral qualities outrageously difficult to capture on a single instrument. Many of his trademark sonorities result from widely spaced chord structures difficult to put within the grasp of the pianist's mere ten fingers.

**STRAUSS/GODOWSKY *Symphonic Metamorphosis on
"Die Fledermaus"***

Note courtesy of Hyperion Records

The paraphrase on Die Fledermaus ('The Bat') has, necessarily, a different structure, its themes being taken from two acts of Strauss's comic operetta premiered in Vienna in 1874 (the only one of his operas set in Vienna itself).

Godowsky obligingly indicates which numbers he is using by placing the appropriate lyrics above or within the stave. Thus, the opening bars have 'Oh je, oh je, wie rührt mich dies' (the Act I Trio), followed by 'Brüderlein, Brüderlein und Schwesterlein' (the ensemble from Act II) and, at varying intervals, snatches of 'Mein Herr Marquis' (Adele's Laughing Song, Act II). In other words, there is no narrative logic to the themes: Godowsky uses them instead to weave his ingenious web at will: 'Johann Strauss waltzing with Johann Bach', according to Albert Lockwood (Notes on the Literature of the Piano, 1940).

Godowsky's *Die Fledermaus* metamorphosis (not 'pot-pourri', as one leading record catalogue persists in titling the piece) was completed in November 1907. Godowsky was evidently pleased with himself, judging from the letter he wrote to Maurice Aronson the day he finished work on it: 'Aside from what you know of the Valse, I have added several original features. Between the second theme of the first valse and the first theme of the second valse, I introduce

a very short parody on Richard Strauss (something like Till Eulenspiegel and a bit of Salomé cacophony). It is rather amusing, not unmusical but queer, stranger than the beginning. The transition between the second theme of the second valse and the first theme of the third valse is perhaps the most delicately impassioned passage I have ever written – it has genuine vitality! I think the end is a complete success. You know how long I worry to bring a work like this to a proper climax ... This part is almost unplayable but will sound well when I can play it. A sudden modulation from E flat to E major, from ff to p, from bravura playing to poetry, and after several measures the real climax comes on gradually until it bursts into a triumph with a “Steigerung” quite Wagnerian. I think it very successful. I may be mistaken.’

GERSHWIN/SAY *Summertime Variations*

Note by the composer

"Summertime Variations is the third arrangement I have made of Gershwin's Summertime - and the first for solo

piano. It begins and ends very quietly and cantabile with a meditation on the well-known opening motif. The complete melody then forms the basis for the swinging and extremely virtuosic Presto Variations of the central section.

The work was composed as a concert piece for my classical solo recitals, but I also play Summertime Variations as an encore in my regular performances in jazz festivals such as in Montreux." -*Fazil Say*

UEHARA *Green Tea Farm* and *The Tom and Jerry Show*

Notes from liner notes

Born March 26, 1979 in Hamamatsu, Japan, Hiromi Uehara is known for her virtuosic technique, energetic live performances and blend of musical genres such as jazz, progressive rock, classical, and fusion in her compositions.

Green Tea Farm

“I have been living in America for four years, and sometimes I think about my home. Where I come from is the most famous place for green tea in Japan. After I came to the States, I realized how always supportive and warm my family were. I want to dedicate this to my parents.” -*Hiromi Uehara*,
January 2004

The Tom and Jerry Show

Written as an assignment while in school, *The Tom and Jerry Show* wound up being recorded for her debut album “Another Mind” in 2003, the year she graduated from Berklee.



Biography

Clayton Stephenson, Piano

Growing up in New York City, Clayton Stephenson found musical inspiration in community programs.



As he describes it, the “3rd Street Music School jump-started my music education; the Young People’s Choir taught me phrasing and voicing; the Juilliard Outreach Music Advancement Program introduced me to formal and rigorous piano training, which enabled me to get into Juilliard Pre-College; the Morningside Music Bridge validated my talent and elevated my self-confidence; and the Boy’s Club of New York exposed me to jazz; and the Lang Lang Foundation brought me to stages worldwide and transformed me from a piano student to a young artist.”

Fresh from the finals of the 2022 Cliburn International Piano Competition, Stephenson now studies in the Harvard-NEC Dual Degree Program, pursuing a bachelor’s degree in economics at Harvard and a master’s degree in piano performance at the New England Conservatory under Wha Kyung Byun. And his accolades along the way have been bountiful: 2022 Gilmore Young Artist; 2017 U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts; Jack Kent Cooke Young Artist Award; Gheens Young Artist; Young Scholar of the Lang Lang

International Music Foundation; and a jury discretionary award at the 2015 Cliburn International Junior Piano Competition and Festival.

Highlights of Stephenson's burgeoning career include recitals at Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris, Kissinger Sommer Festival in Bad Kissingen, BeethovenFest in Bonn, Stars and Rising Stars in Munich, Swiss Alps Classics at Switzerland, and Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. He has been featured on NPR, WUOL, and WQXR, and appeared in the "GRAMMY® Salute to Classical Music" Concert at Carnegie's Stern Auditorium.

He has performed as a guest artist with orchestras including the Calgary Philharmonic, Chicago Sinfonietta, Louisville Symphony, Augusta Symphony, Colour of Music Festival, and Tuscaloosa Symphony Orchestras. On the 69th U.N. Day, Stephenson played with the International Youth Orchestra at the United Nations General Assembly Hall.

Clayton Stephenson appears by arrangement with Encore Artists Management.

www.youtube.com/Claytonplayspiano



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Land Acknowledgement

Middlebury College sits on land which has served as a site of meeting and exchange among indigenous peoples since time immemorial. The Western Abenaki are the traditional caretakers of these Vermont lands and waters, which they call Ndakinna, or "homeland." We remember their connection to this region and the hardships they continue to endure.

We give thanks for the opportunity to share in the bounty of this place and to protect it.