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JOYCE YANG IN RECITAL
MON 18 MAR 7PM

JONATHAN BISS IN RECITAL
MON 29 JUL 7PM

INGRID FLITER IN RECITAL
MON 23 SEP 7PM

KATIA & MARIELLE LABÈQUE IN RECITAL
MON 21 OCT 7PM

CITY RECITAL HALL
ANGEL PLACE
2013 Season
International Pianists in Recital
Presented by Theme and Variations
City Recital Hall Angel Place

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This program book for International Pianists in Recital contains notes and articles for all four recitals in the series. Copies will be available at every performance, but we invite you to keep your program and bring it with you to each recital. Please share with your companion.
Dear Piano Lovers,

Welcome to the Sydney Symphony’s International Pianists in Recital Series for 2013.

After an exciting and varied 80th anniversary season in 2012, the Sydney Symphony once again delights us with an extraordinary line-up of pianists.

Theme and Variations is the exclusive New South Wales and Queensland agent for Steinway & Sons. As such, we are proud to once again be the presenting partner of this series and to provide the Steinway & Sons piano, which always graces the recital hall stage, waiting to respond to the touch of these master pianists.

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Of course, the piano on the stage would remain silent without the incredible artists we are privileged to hear in this series each year.

I am sure you will thoroughly enjoy the 2013 International Pianists in Recital Series with all that Sydney Symphony has to offer.

ARA VARTOUKIAN
Director and Concert Technician
2013 SEASON
INTERNATIONAL PIANISTS IN RECITAL
PRESENTED BY THEME AND VARIATIONS
Monday 18 March, 7pm
City Recital Hall Angel Place

Joyce Yang in Recital

Béla Bartók (1881–1945)
Out of Doors – Suite, Sz.81
With Drums and Pipes (Pesante)
Barcarolla (Andante)
Musettes (Moderato)
The Night’s Music (Lento – Un poco più andante)
The Chase (Presto)

Robert Schumann (1810–1856)
Fantasiestücke (Fantasy Pieces), Op.12
Des Abends (Evening)
Aufschwung (Soaring)
Warum? (Why?)
Grillen (Whims)
In der Nacht (In the Night)
Fabel (Fable)
Traumes-Wirren (Dream’s Confusion)
Ende vom Lied (End of the Song)

INTERVAL

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)
Arranged by Earl Wild (1915–2010)
Dreams, Op.38 No.5
The Little Island, Op.14 No.5
Vocalise, Op.34 No.14

Rachmaninoff
Sonata No.2 in B flat minor, Op.36 (1931 revision)
Allegro agitato
Non allegro – Lento
Listesso tempo – Allegro molto

This recital will be recorded for broadcast on ABC Classic FM.

Pre-concert talk by Robert Curry at 6.15pm in the First Floor Reception Room.
Visit sydneysymphony.com/talk-bios for speaker biographies.

Estimated durations:
14 minutes, 28 minutes, 20-minute interval, 12 minutes, 20 minutes
The concert will conclude at approximately 8.50pm

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Since her first visit to Australia in 2010, Joyce Yang has ‘gone Russian’. There was a hint of that when she returned the following year to perform Rachmaninoff’s Third Piano Concerto with Edo de Waart. This was no one-off event: she has been performing all the Rachmaninoff concertos, not to mention Tchaikovsky, with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, where De Waart is music director. She has begun including Russian music in her recital programs, and last year she made her Moscow debut playing Rachmaninoff’s Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini. This is repertoire the Moscow audience had grown up with, she says, ‘and you know, as a Korean to go in there and play something that’s really in the heart of their culture – it was an extraordinary experience’.

Yang describes the shifting of her focus to Russian music as an organic process. ‘It’s a good mirroring of what I can do in my art form,’ she says. ‘I think Russian repertoire fits me somehow... It is immensely extroverted, full of passion, and something about the way I make music – people say it tends to jump off the page and it just pours out of me to the audience.’ Despite the ‘million notes’ and myriad technical and emotional difficulties of this music, she finds it more natural and ‘easier’ to play. ‘Ultimately it’s about really “going there”, this is as passionate as something can get and for me it’s very liberating.’

That said, if she were to choose her first love among composers, it would be Robert Schumann, who frequently turns up in her recital programs. Schumann requires a more restrained style of music-making than the Russians: ‘Schumann is not just about
Making a collage

Shortly after her most recent visit to Sydney, Joyce Yang released a recital disc, Collage. It’s a diverse and personal selection that lives up to its name. The music is by Debussy, Scarlatti, Lowell Liebermann (Gargoyles) and newer pieces by Sebastian Currier. Schumann’s Carnival has pride of place in the program. According to Yang, these are all pieces that ‘you’d never think would go together, but – interwoven back to back like that – each piece is illuminated’ and together they make a greater whole. She adds: ‘a recital disc should be a journey on its own.’

YVONNE FRINDLE
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ABOUT THE MUSIC

Bartók, Schumann and Rachmaninoff

With a range that encompasses the gamut of pitches produced by an orchestra, the piano has long been an ideal vehicle for self-expression. Despite its ubiquity, however, it has represented different things to different people. By the early 20th century, its suitability for music both melodic and powerfully virtuosic had been established by composers and great concert artists alike, yet one of its most innate aspects was still to be explored: its percussiveness. The Hungarian pianist, Belá Bartók, was instantly inspired by this potential following a performance of Stravinsky’s Concerto for Piano and Winds, given by its composer in Budapest in 1926. The chance encounter simultaneously rejuvenated Bartók’s creativity and led to an outpouring of new works for the instrument, including his first piano concerto, a piano sonata, Nine Little Pieces for piano, and Out of Doors.

As Bartók showed a strong preference for generic titles in his works (such as ‘concerto’ or ‘sonata’), the choice of programmatic titles for both the overall collection and the five pieces within Out of Doors makes it almost unique in his output. With an indication as to the intent of the music, the pianist perhaps expectedly imitates the percussive character of untuned drums in With Drums and Pipes, here by repeatedly hitting notes in the lowest register of the keyboard. Far from being twee marching music, the offbeat clusters propel the music with restless energy. Short glimpses of quasi-modal melody represent the pipes, before a final strike of the drum signals the end. The Barcarolla, like similarly titled pieces by earlier composers, deploys a 6/8 time signature to depict the gentle rocking of a boat. Here, however, it lasts only sufficient time to establish the effect, and is afterwards altered to 3, 4, 5 and even 7 pulses to the bar. At places the boat seems becalmed, the stasis intensified by parallel pitch patterns that stifle harmonic resolution.

Bartók again turns to an older musical form in Musettes, possibly indicating the influence of Couperin, whose music he had recently studied. Despite numerous modifications to the tempo, the drone effect of bagpipes is consistent, while the composer’s lifelong interest in folk music, as evidenced by his pioneering work in the field, is reflected in short melodies which conjure rural scenes. The fourth piece, The Night’s Music, is regarded as the most important in the set: Bartók often performed it as a solo concert item, and it established the ‘night music’ genre to which he
would return in many of his late, great works. Perhaps also
revealing a reason behind his choice of programmatic titles,
the music creates the sounds of nature at night, including
croaking frogs and buzzing insects, depicting them over
a backdrop of eerie dissonance. By contrast, The Chase
establishes within its opening bars a frenetic moto perpetuo
of bass pitches, against which a syncopated melody of
ever-greater dexterity dances. The breathlessness indicated
by the title can be palpable, and it forms a virtuosic
conclusion to the set.

The decision to highlight the piano’s percussiveness
was viewed as modern in the early 20th-century, with
Stravinsky and Prokofiev sharing similar approaches.
The use of characteristic titles, however, can be seen to
hark back to the early Romantic period, when composers
were similarly seeking to establish a form of modernism.
Then, art-music had been perceived as abstract and
absolute, and Classical composers typically attached
generic titles to their works. The instrument inherited
by Romantic composers is the piano we recognise today,
which through advances in construction and engineering
was capable of both power and a warm sonority.
Accordingly, the poetic nature inherent in the instrument
was highlighted by 19th-century performers, and
composers responded by writing dramatic music to
themes conveyed through titles. Aptly, the term ‘recital’
to describe piano concerts came into use.

Through the advocacy of his literary work, Robert
Schumann was a leader of these newly Romantic
composers, and his early piano works show him at the
height of his powers, his imagination – or fantasy –
seemingly knowing no limit. Written at the age of 27, the
eight pieces that comprise Fantasiestücke, Op.12 contain
numerous references. The title is thought to refer to a
collection of short stories – Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier –
by a favourite author, E.T.A. Hoffmann. Similarly, the
individual pieces have programmatic connections through
their suggestive names. Yet there is a deeper subtext here,
represented by the two characters who permeate much of
the composer’s early music: Eusebius and Florestan. Their
contrasting personality types – one introspective and
contemplative, the other extrovert, passionate – were, to
him, equally compelling, their conflicts providing the
background rhetoric in many of his works. (More sadly,
their contradictions have been related to psychological
issues which later may have led to the composer’s
breakdown.)

SCHUMANN
Fantasiestücke, Op.12
Des Abends (Evening)
Aufschwung (Soaring)
Warum? (Why?)
Grillen (Whims)
In der Nacht (In the Night)
Fabel (Fable)
Traumes-Wirren (Dream’s
Confusion)
Ende vom Lied (End of the
Song)
Writers have noted how in Des Abends the gentle melody embroidered over a simple accompaniment is representative of the dreamy Eusebius, while in Aufschwung the powerfully soaring outbursts evoke Florestan. In the enigmatically-titled Warum?, Eusebius makes a questioning return, yet is vanquished again in the jocular Grillen (marked ‘with humour’). In the final four pieces, originally published as a separate set, the polarising aspect of the characters occurs within the structure of each piece, the darkly tormented outer sections of In der Nacht giving way to gentler dreams in the central section. Fabel similarly juxtaposes inward and outward looking aspects, while perhaps the most difficult piece in the set, Traumes-Wirren, literally presents confused dreams. In a letter to his future wife, Clara, the composer explains that the optimistic opening bars of Ende vom Lied ‘resolve into a jolly wedding’, yet the work ends quietly, perhaps marking a return of his ‘painful anxiety’.

Liszt, from the same generation as Schumann, made transcriptions that are considered by some to represent the epitome of the art. Beyond being a simple arrangement, the term indicates that the original has been somehow transformed, allowing the ‘re-composer’ to elevate it through their own personality or their choice of instrumentation.
From a later generation, Sergei Rachmaninoff left many fine transcriptions of both his own music and the works of others, so it is fitting that Earl Wild – an American pianist regarded as one of the greats of the following era – made transcriptions of over a dozen of his songs. In Dreams, one of the last that Rachmaninoff composed, Wild chooses to alter little of the original, the pianist carefully adding the vocal melody to the already dense score. In the final page – given to piano alone – Wild adds delicate touches with great restraint. The Little Island is approached differently, the simple chordal textures of the original abandoned for shimmering cascades of demisemiquavers throughout. The transformation is also dramatic in Vocalise, perhaps Rachmaninoff’s most famous vocal work. The potent harmony is enriched without violating the intricate counterpoint, and the full scope of the instrument’s range is explored.

As it is perhaps unusual, it is worth noting that all of the works presented so far have descriptive titles, a function that arguably heightens the notion of meaning in music. It is equally interesting, therefore, to note that for a composer whose music was disparaged as anachronistic, Rachmaninoff generally avoided them. (I imagine he winced when the otherwise abstract ‘Prelude in C sharp minor’ was published as ‘The Bells of Moscow’.) Yet perhaps there is something inevitable in finding extra-musical associations, especially when a work such as his Second Piano Sonata can seem so evocative, and where a recurrence of tolling bells might also seem to dominate. Written in 1913, the sonata represents an approach to the piano that is instantly different to both Bartók and Schumann. At that time, late-Romantic sensibilities were approaching a dead-end, the futility of extreme maximalist pursuits indicating to some that the path forward might necessitate a ‘less is more’ approach. This may partly explain why the composer later published a revised version (1931, as performed tonight), where textures are pared back and sections are cut or recast. Common to both versions, however, is the composer’s utilisation of the piano’s complete range, and with massive double-octave strikes to the lowest notes its power can be tested to the limit.

The sonata opens with the simultaneous presentation of two musical ideas: an heraldic motto of a falling third, and a sinuously descending melody. Again reflecting the composer’s classical upbringing, the music follows strictly in sonata-form, contrast occurring in the warmer relative
major tonality for the second subject. The pages of the central development section witness some of Rachmaninoff’s most tumultuous music, yet perhaps surprisingly the movement tapers to a quiet close. Like bookends harmonised with a prescient nod to jazz, two elliptical phrases frame the slow movement, an initially peaceful *Lento* in the unrelated key of E minor. The music is violently upended in the central section, which features unexpected references to the opening of the sonata. A climax leads not, as might be anticipated, to a return of the movement’s opening material, but in this later version to a brief recollection of the first movement’s warm second subject. The final movement is a study in exuberance, the music shifting to the more optimistic major tonality. Repeated chords suggest riotousness, while the heraldic motto from the opening of the sonata is ever present. A languorous second subject shows Rachmaninoff in typically lyrical vein, and to great effect he returns to this theme in the final pages, the music lifted to the zenith of the capacity of both pianist and piano. Despite the composer’s Romantic reputation, the sonata ultimately reflects both modern and classical sensibilities, and occupies a position in the repertoire as one of the most demanding ever written for the instrument.

SCOTT DAVIE © 2013
John Adams’ music keeps turning up in Sydney: we’ve given the Australian premieres of nine of his creations, and two of those were Sydney Symphony commissions. But 2013 will mark his first appearance with us as conductor, and Sydney audiences will be the first in the world to hear a brand new commission: a saxophone concerto for American virtuoso Timothy McAllister.

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2013 SEASON
INTERNATIONAL PIANISTS IN RECITAL
PRESENTED BY THEME AND VARIATIONS
Monday 29 July | 7pm
City Recital Hall Angel Place

Jonathan Biss in Recital

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Sonata No.15 in D, Op.28
Allegro
Andante
Scherzo (Allegro vivace)
Rondo (Allegro ma non troppo)

Sonata No.16 in G, Op.31 No.1
Allegro vivace
Adagio grazioso
Rondo (Allegretto – Presto)

INTERVAL

Sonata No.24 in F sharp, Op.78
Adagio cantabile – Allegro ma non troppo
Allegro vivace

Sonata No.21 in C, Op.53 (Waldstein)
Allegro con brio
Introduzione (Adagio molto) –
Rondo (Allegretto moderato – Prestissimo)

This recital will be recorded for broadcast on ABC Classic FM.

Pre-concert talk by David Larkin at 6.15pm in the First Floor Reception Room.
Visit sydneysymphony.com/talk-bios for speaker biographies.

Estimated durations:
24 minutes, 25 minutes,
20-minute interval, 10 minutes,
26 minutes
The concert will conclude at approximately 9pm
Few composers can sustain a complete program, but Beethoven is one of them. In an all-composer program, says Jonathan Biss, achieving maximum contrast is his prime responsibility. Fortunately, he adds, this is easy in the case of Beethoven ‘because he doesn’t tread on the same territory more than once – very often.’

As a result, even though the sonatas Biss has chosen for this recital were all composed within the space of a decade, they show Beethoven in many different moods. ‘I’m interested,’ says Biss, ‘in how this one composer with one very, very strong personality can cover so much emotional ground.’

We talk a little about Biss’s sonata choices, but not too much, because he is also writing the program notes for the recital. (Biss is not only a gifted and intelligent musician but a gifted and intelligent writer.) The theme of contrast seems to be central to the program. In the second half there’s the intimacy of the Op.78 sonata, with its ‘feeling of a private conversation’, alongside the public character and grand scope of the Waldstein. There are contrasts of key character: the ‘gnarled quality’ of F sharp major in Op.78 versus the openness of C major in the Waldstein. Beginning the recital with the Op.28 sonata brings the pleasure of a hushed opening that then unfolds so generously, and Op.31 No.1 comes to the edge of ‘humour of the practical joke variety’.

Regardless of the emotion at play, Beethoven’s music demands your attention, says Biss, Beethoven is ‘powerful,
belligerent, large-spirited, limitless—’ – this is a musical spirit so large it ‘takes up all the space in the room’.

You could also say that, in the Biss household in the 1980s, music took up all the rooms in the house. His mother, Miriam Fried, is a concert violinist, his father Paul is a gifted teacher, and his older brother began studying piano when Jonathan was three. ‘I have this memory of at least two people practising in the house at most times. When music wasn’t happening it was being talked about.’ All this contributed to a perception of music as a spoken language, a beautiful lingua franca. ‘It shaped the way I view music,’ he says, ‘which is, above all, as a form of communication.’

It was later on that Biss developed what he calls ‘a reverence for music’; meanwhile, music and being a musician just seemed to be the most natural, ordinary thing in the world. He was immersed in music, obsessed with it, riveted by it. ‘I couldn’t really imagine that there would be something else which would have the same effect on me, and so therefore I knew that whatever form it took, music would be my life.’

Biss’s musical life has taken the form of a career as a concert pianist – giving recitals, playing chamber music, appearing as a concerto soloist. But even an established musician is always learning, so I asked Biss how he goes about studying new repertoire. The most important thing, ‘which does not vary’, is that he learns in phases. He’ll begin looking at a new piece more than a year before the first scheduled performance, and he builds in pauses. ‘The time I spend away from a piece of music,’ he explains, ‘is almost more important than the initial practising – there’s a strange osmosis that happens. I’ll spend months really getting something into my fingers and trying to deal with the essential problems, then I’ll come back to it three months later, and some of the problems will have magically resolved themselves.’ But, he laughs, ‘it usually then reveals a whole new set of problems!’

Biss is also applying the principle of phases to his Beethoven sonata recording project, which began in 2012 and will take nine years. With any of the sonatas, he will always have performed the work multiple times before going into the ‘artificial’ environment of the studio to record. ‘I have this goal of trying to replicate the experience of a concert as much as possible,’ he says, ‘and I think about what it felt like playing the piece when I was communicating it directly to an audience.’

The other reason for spacing the Beethoven recordings is that powerful, limitless musical spirit of the composer. Recording all the sonatas over a couple of years would have meant playing almost no other music, says Biss, ‘and I think I really would have forgotten who I was because he is so dominating.’

YVONNE FRINDLE
SYDNEY SYMPHONY © 2013
Beethoven Sonatas

Note by Jonathan Biss

Beethoven wrote his 32 piano sonatas over the course of 27 years; only nine of those years, from the turbulent centre of Beethoven’s altogether turbulent life, are represented on this program. And yet, despite that narrow span of time, the range of expression in these four sonatas is anything but narrow. It is, in fact, infinite, moving in turn from subtle to sly, to warm-hearted, to, finally, cosmic. These works show – as more or less any selection of Beethoven sonatas would – that the form of the sonata, the very idea of the sonata, is large and mutable enough to accommodate history’s most restless musical imagination, no matter his mood or priorities of the moment.

The two sonatas on this program’s first half were written in 1801 (though Op.31 No.1 was completed the following year), a year during which Beethoven was especially pugnacious in pushing the boundaries of the form. It was in that year that Beethoven announced to Carl Czerny that he would be taking a ‘new path’. And it is true that while from opus 1 onwards Beethoven is never anything other than an original, 1801 finds him relentlessly testing the sonata’s limits, terrible twos style.

Ludwig van Beethoven, 1802
A slow set of variations in lieu of a proper sonata allegro (Op.26); a multi-movement work played without pause (Op.27 No.1); a ghostly, suspended rumination which is somehow, improbably, also a fully realised sonata form (Op.27 No.2, the ‘Moonlight’); a set of halting, increasingly operatic recitatives fully incorporated into an otherwise tersely argued sonata (Op.31 No.2, the ‘Tempest’) – all of these are among Beethoven’s 1801 experiments, and most are without precedent.

The innovations in Op.28 and Op.31 No.1 are no less significant but decidedly less arresting. In fact, the defining features of Op.28 – sometimes saddled with the rather silly nickname ‘Pastorale’ – are its soft-spokenness and, particularly, its subtlety: it is subtle in its innovation, in its humour, and even in the way it announces itself. Unlike so many of Beethoven’s sonatas, whose first notes are declamatory or combative (or both), Op.28 murmurs its way into being; the gentle pulsation in the bass gives the impression of having existed silently for all eternity, becoming audible just at the moment the sonata begins. (It warms my heart no end to know that Artur Schnabel chose this work, rather than any number of more assertive ones, to launch his cycle of the sonatas each time he performed them complete.)

While there is nothing dull or self-serious about this work – it is full of wit and play and, in its second movement, a quiet pathos – its serenity is rarely disturbed. The effect of this is to make its few real outbursts all the more powerful: the sonata’s free-wheeling, exultant conclusion, and above all, the remarkable passage in the first movement’s development in which Beethoven bloody-mindedly repeats an F sharp major chord for 28 consecutive measures. This eventually involves the elimination of all other musical elements: there is no melody, no rhythm, just this chord, a harmonic visitor from a foreign country in the midst of a sonata in D major. The insane length and all-round improbability of this passage force us to rehear everything that has preceded it. When Beethoven is finally finished with this chord, and effortlessly modulates us back home in three little phrases – what F sharp major? – the work’s peace, now knowing what it is to be disturbed, takes on a more fragile, tender quality. That is the essence of Beethoven: that even what on the surface seems merely lovely, upon closer examination is revealed to be complex and suffused with meaning.

Sonata No.15 in D, Op.28 (1801)
Allegro
Andante
Scherzo (Allegro vivace)
Rondo (Allegro ma non troppo)
No less layered and finely wrought is Op.31 No.1, but here the brilliant detail is placed at the service of high comedy – if Op.31 No.2, its companion, is The Tempest, No.1 is Much Ado About Nothing. It is a work that both begins and ends with a joke, and while what comes in between is on occasion truly moving, it never abandons its central mission: to explore every variety of musical humour, rough or refined. The first movement revolves around one ingenious premise: the inability of the two hands to play together – the right hand keeps anticipating the beats, making the left, which is the one actually doing what it is supposed to, sound slothful. It’s already funny in its first appearance, but gets better as the hands’ inability to get it together leads first to (mock?) rage, and then to a zany and fruitless race up and down the keyboard – an early 19th-century Wile E. Coyote and Roadrunner routine.

In the second movement, the humour takes the form of parody: it is a devastating imitation of an aria from an Italian opera, complete with an oom-pah-pah accompaniment and ornamentation that is at times absurdly florid. (When I hear it, I am reminded of my teacher Leon Fleisher’s admonishment that one should not play a melody in the style of ‘a bad Italian tenor’.) At the same time, though, Beethoven loved Italian opera and he admired Cherubini more than practically any other composer – and whatever else it might be, this movement is uncommonly beautiful. It is a send-up, to be sure, but it is simultaneously a tribute. And filtered through Beethoven, perhaps the most powerful musical personality who ever lived, it becomes something its source material never could be: transcendental.

The wit of the final movement is of a gentler variety, and it would not, on the surface, seem likely to make as indelible an impression as the first two. But it was a crucial source of inspiration to no less a genius than Schubert, who used it as a very literal model for the finale of one of his last masterpieces – the A major piano sonata, D959. [Ingrid Fliter will perform this Schubert sonata in September.] Phrase by phrase, he follows Beethoven’s shifts of register, character, note values – everything. Both the Beethoven and the Schubert end with a quick-as-a-flash presto, in each case immediately preceded by the movement’s most striking moment: a silence-filled iteration of the finale’s main theme, the theme itself seeming to break down. In the Schubert, this gives the material a new and heartbreaking vulnerability. In the Beethoven, once again, the innovation is played for laughs: the silences have knocked a rather suave theme charmingly

Sonata No.16 in G, Op.31 No.1 (1801–02)
Allegro vivace
Adagio grazioso
Rondo (Allegretto – Presto)

It is a send-up, to be sure, but it is simultaneously a tribute.
off-kilter. It’s as if Beethoven is mocking himself for any hint of earnestness he displayed earlier; however dazzlingly and lovingly crafted it might be, earnestness has no place in this work.

The same cannot be said of the Sonata Op.78, which dates from one of the loneliest periods of Beethoven’s life and was a particular favourite of his. Nothing in this gem of a work is business as usual. Not the number of movements – two, placing it in the company of only a handful of the sonatas. Not its proportions – save for the heart-stopping four-bar phrase which opens the work, it contains no slow music. Certainly not the key – F sharp major, the porcupine of tonalities. And yet, the predominant impression it leaves is not of awkwardness, or even strangeness, but of how very beautiful it is. Its warmth and generosity are all the more moving in light of how effortful composition was for him at the time. Beset with personal difficulties and reaching for a new style, Beethoven wrote only four piano sonatas in the decade this work comes in the middle of. But as he took baby steps to the future, certain jewels emerged, and this sonata is one of them. In its first movement, all of F sharp major’s edges – all the porcupine’s quills – have been smoothed, and what emerges is one of his most mellifluous, song-like creations. The edges come back with a vengeance in the second movement, which is rowdy and happily absurd. Here is Beethoven’s sense of humour at its earthiest, tongue not in cheek but sticking belligerently out.
Op.78, rarely played nowadays, needs to be rescued from obscurity; the Waldstein needs rescuing from its own success. It is so often played, it is difficult to hear with open ears, and it is done no favours by the hordes of piano students who tear into it with mostly misdirected enthusiasm. I often wish that, like its similarly abused companion, the Appassionata, it had been given a nickname derived not from its dedicatee, but its primary affect: ‘Sonata Misterioso’. For while it is undeniably a piece of tremendous energy, that energy is often more potential than kinetic: a great deal of the sonata unfolds in the piano-pianissimo range, and nearly all of it, in a good performance, should convey a sense of wonder. Even the brilliant first movement is not without its shadows; all of its motives feature moments that hover between major and minor. The movement ends in triumph, but afterward, the uncertainty it hinted at comes right to the fore: the introduction to the finale is a masterpiece of indistinctness. Most of its phrases pose unanswered questions, its tonality is perpetually in flux, and even its metre is not always clear – it is a portrait of instability in sound. When it finally resolves itself into the finale proper, C major has never sounded so open, so life-affirming. The Waldstein is known primarily for a certain athletic quality, but what makes it a masterpiece is the way in which, with ever-increasing power and rapture, it conjures the infinite. Among the many great gifts Beethoven gives us, this vision of the beyond may be the greatest and most unfathomable of them all.

JONATHAN BISS © 2013
2012 SEASON
INTERNATIONAL PIANISTS IN RECITAL
PRESENTED BY THEME & VARIATIONS

Monday 23 September | 7pm
City Recital Hall Angel Place

Ingrid Fliter in Recital

Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)
Sonata in E minor, Hob.XVI:34
Presto
Adagio
Finale (Molto vivace)

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)
Sonata in A, D959
Allegro
Andantino
Scherzo (Allegro vivace) – Trio (Un poco più lento)
Rondo (Allegretto – Presto)

INTERVAL

Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)
24 Préludes, Op.28
(The individual preludes are listed on page 29.)

This recital will be recorded for broadcast on ABC Classic FM.

Pre-concert talk by David Garrett at 6.15pm in the First Floor Reception Room.
Visit sydneysymphony.com/talk-bios for speaker biographies.

Estimated durations:
15 minutes, 38 minutes, 20-minute interval, 40 minutes
The concert will conclude at approximately 9.05pm
Ingrid Fliter

In 2011 Ingrid Fliter made her Australian debut, performing the Schumann concerto with the Sydney Symphony and presenting a recital of Beethoven and Chopin in this series. Summing up the season at the end of the year, critic Peter McCallum described how ‘an embarrassment of world-beating pianists adorned [the orchestra’s] programs – Bavouzet, Osborne, Hough, Lang Lang…, a dour but demonically accomplished Evgeny Kissin and the talented Ingrid Fliter…’ It was a good year, and some very fine company.

Since then she has released a third recording – Beethoven sonatas – and, as one European journalist has put it, she is no longer just a hot tip among classical piano insiders. She has acquired a mainstream reputation as a pre-eminent interpreter of Chopin, and has proven her worth in the music of other composers as well – Haydn, Schubert and Schumann, among others. In Sydney 2011 she played the Schumann concerto, a performance that was praised for its ‘engaging vitality, committed passion and inner thoughtfulness’. For a time, her plan was to perform Schumann in this recital. But it is to Chopin she keeps returning and so we are able to enjoy the treasures offered by his Opus 28 Préludes.

On Chopin

‘My very first memories are related to Chopin. I remember the Arthur Rubinstein recordings everywhere: in the living room, in the kitchen, in the car, and my father playing waltzes. So I grew up loving Chopin’s music and taking it as part of my

born
1973, in Buenos Aires

piano studies
with Elizabeth Westerkamp in Argentina before moving to Europe in 1992 to study

made her debut
as a recitalist at the age of 11 and as a concerto soloist in Buenos Aires at 16

her big break
receiving the 2006 Gilmore Artist Award, followed by important concerto and recital debuts throughout North America

beyond the piano
she loves lieder, especially Schubert and Schumann, Bach passions, Beethoven and Mahler symphonies, Mozart operas, and playing chamber music

recordings
so far she has chosen to focus her energy on Beethoven and Chopin, with her most recent release a Beethoven sonata disc, Passion

in Australia
made her Australian debut in 2011; this year returns to Sydney and appears with the West Australian Symphony Orchestra

read more
www.ingridfliter.com
everyday life. When I began my studies in Argentina I was lucky to be introduced to his music early on and thanks to him I discovered the beauty of piano playing as well as the importance of developing a singing tone.

‘Chopin in many aspects is essential and natural. This has led erroneously to the view of him as a “light” composer. Nothing could be further from the truth! Through the years of my studies, I was very touched to discover his darker side, his sense of the tragic, which plays as much a fundamental role in his music as the joie de vivre. His romanticism is not obvious and requires a strong sense of proportion. One of the most difficult things to achieve when playing his music is a good balance between his romantic soul and his classical expression. But most of all, Chopin speaks directly to the heart; the story he tells us is deeply personal.

‘He doesn’t really tell stories or paint a landscape – you cannot “see” the picture, but you can feel as if he is a friend telling you a very deep secret about life that he wants to share it with you, and with his eyes half open, he’s telling you some treasure. He never shouts these truths.’

On Haydn
The thing that strikes Ingrid Fliter about Haydn as a composer is his sense of humour. ‘That’s a very important component in music, as it is in life. Haydn was a person limited by his own environment – he had to compose for the court – and so he had to somehow include a ridiculous component to vary his creation, to make fun of himself in a very subtle way. His sense of humour is really something very inspirational, and it’s something I like to put an accent on when I play his music. The sonata in E minor definitely is an example of that.’

On interpretation
Composers like Haydn and Chopin may represent centuries past, but for Ingrid Fliter they hold a very ‘contemporary’ relevance.

‘I think these composers are very contemporary – they all talk about human feelings, human experiences, as a journey. Every piece that I face I try to put it in a level of expression of a human life. And in Chopin’s case, I think his music will always bring people to the concert hall, because there is a breath of recognition of your own self – actually of your own self made in a better way, you become a better person when you play this composer.

‘For me the most natural way of facing a piece of music is to feel it as telling a story. And for this I need to try to start feeling and thinking as the composer did. It doesn’t mean that I know for sure what the composer wanted to express; I can only wish that educational background and a certain intuition will lead me to respect characteristics of style and expression and to be as credible as possible.’
Sonatas and Preludes
Haydn, Schubert and Chopin

The composers in this program wrote many large-scale works, some of which they called sonatas, but they wrote many miniatures as well. Their compositions in sonata form might sound very different, but they have much in common. Whereas the 24 Préludes of Chopin, particularly when played together, do not seem like miniatures.

The word ‘sonata’ can be confusing, as it has two different meanings. As a title, it usually describes a work in several movements. Haydn wrote sonatas with two or three movements, while Schubert, Chopin and Brahms went to four or even five; Beethoven composed sonatas in two, three and four movements. Alban Berg produced a highly emotional piano sonata in one movement, and Leos Janáček wrote a masterpiece called 1.X.1905 in two movements. Franz Liszt wrote his great piano sonata in one movement, but in fact there are four separate movements hidden in this greater whole!

The ‘sonata’ title has of course been used for several centuries and it includes the glittering displays of Scarlatti, at his peak in the years around 1730, writing exercises for

Haydn, portrait by Thomas Hardy
his talented student, the Queen of Spain, as well as the densely packed argument of the sonatas of Boulez, written in the 1940s on his way to total serialism.

In addition to its use as a title, the word ‘sonata’ also describes a musical form, a way of organising musical material, and this form is most often used in the first movement of such a work. To avoid confusion, many writers on music prefer to describe this form as ‘first movement form’. First movement form starts by giving us a group of themes in the principal key (in the Haydn Sonata Hob.XVI:34, this is the key of E minor, and in the Schubert Sonata D959, A major). The musical form then leads us to another set of themes in a different key, and after developing, commenting and experimenting with some (or all) of these themes, the composer brings us back to the restatement of the first themes (and often the second ones too) in the ‘home’ key. It is a form that highlights relationships and contrasts between different keys. Classical music-lovers have all become accustomed to hearing this form very often, and it is not difficult to follow the stages of the argument.

In this program, both Haydn and Schubert use the ‘sonata’ title, and also the first movement ‘sonata form’. Although Schubert travels much further in his journey, taking in some unusual detours, he underlines the key relationships of the main themes and their return in a similar way to Haydn. It seems to me quite useful to listen to both sonatas with this plan in mind!

The Haydn Sonata in this program, though in a minor key, is very brilliant and sprightly in mood, particularly the first movement. The second movement speaks directly to us at first, and then surrounds its rhetoric in veils of arpeggios and scales. In the third, the composer dashes in and out of minor and major sections with great gusto.

Schubert’s last three Sonatas (of which Ingrid Fliter plays the second) were written in the last year of his life (1828), although they remained completely unknown and unpublished until ten years later. Schubert, composer of more than 600 songs, gives us more than the usual number of themes. Some of the themes in the development section are in fact new ones, but the journey back comes just as inexorably as it does in the Haydn sonata. It is well known that Schubert had a great admiration for Beethoven, and in the Schubert Sonata in A, D959, he pays homage to that composer’s use of the sonata form, although in Schubert’s hands it becomes rather stretched and elongated, seeming to slow time to a standstill.

HAYDN
Sonata in E minor, Hob.XVI:34
Presto
Adagio
Finale (Molto vivace)

SCHUBERT
Sonata in A major, D959
Allegro
Andantino
Scherzo (Allegro vivace) – Trio
Rondo (Allegretto – Presto)
The second movement has an opening melody with the rhythm of a barcarolle, but it gives way to conflicted wanderings that confuse our ears with strange keys. There are extraordinary outbursts that reach a climax of operatic proportions, before we are brought safely back home. It’s worth noting the little change in the accompaniment figure at this return of the first melody: a favourite device of Schubert, only a tiny change, but it deeply affects the way we hear this repeated theme.

Schubert the dance composer appears in the Scherzo movement – with a late night waltz in the Trio section. The long last movement has a principal theme that he has used in other works. Like the first movement, this one also spends a lot of time travelling to distant keys. The end comes with several bars of triumphant reference to the opening theme of the whole sonata, first heard some forty minutes ago!

It is tempting to see a composer’s last works as more personal and autobiographical than earlier works. This is particularly common in the case of Schubert. It is certainly true that Schubert’s last year was filled with a string of masterpieces – the last three sonatas, the song cycle Winterreise, the String Quintet. And we know that Schubert...
was aware that he was dying – his friends also knew. The Sonata D959 is so amazingly graphic in its changes of mood that it is possible to hear a whole lifetime of experiences contained in this one work.

Chopin’s pianism and brilliant writing have always placed him at the forefront of the great pianist-composers. But it is probably his ability to turn the piano into a great poetic instrument that is his greatest gift to musicians and audiences. His musical language was so inextricably linked to his instrument that he hardly wrote for other instruments at all. Many of Chopin’s miniatures have become very popular with amateur players, as they are very grateful pieces to play. This includes some of the preludes, and those waltzes that are in the ‘salon’ style. Though many of the preludes are short, most of them are too difficult for amateurs, and may have even surprised some of Chopin’s aristocratic students with their pianistic complexity, as well as their moods of vehemence and passion.

**Chopin’s 24 Preludes Op.28** were written between 1835 and 1838 and published in 1839. There is one for each key just as Bach had done in his *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Bach planned his voyage through all the keys by going up the keyboard one step at a time; Chopin ordered the keys in a different sequence, starting in C major, proceeding to the relative key of A minor (No.2), then G major (a full fifth above C) followed by its relative E minor, and so on. Many of the preludes were completed in Mallorca, where Chopin spent an uncomfortable holiday with his lover, George Sand, hoping that the warm weather would set his health to rights. The rain and cold and the spartan monastic lodgings had the opposite effect. Perhaps it is not too fanciful to hear some of his distress expressed in the preludes with their violent storms and dramatic outbursts.

As a title ‘prelude’ had many uses in the 18th and 19th centuries. Many pianists played one to introduce a larger piece in the same key; others used it as a way of settling the audience in their seats, 19th-century audiences being somewhat less formally attentive than we have become to-day. Sometimes it was a linking element between two larger works, a means of arriving at the key of the second one.

Many preludes of this sort would have been improvised and they are usually in a style that suggests a ‘prelude to something else’. But the title has also come to mean an independent concert piece complete in itself, like a tone poem, or a rhapsody. Many composers used the title in

**CHOPIN**  
24 Préludes, Op.28

1. C major (Agitato)  
2. A minor (Lento)  
3. G major (Vivace)  
4. E minor (Largo)  
5. D major (Molto allegro)  
6. B minor (Lento)  
7. A major (Andantino)  
8. F sharp minor (Molto agitato)  
9. E major (Largo)  
10. C sharp minor (Molto allegro)  
11. B major (Vivace)  
12. G sharp minor (Presto)  
13. F sharp major (Lento)  
14. E flat minor (Allegro)  
15. D flat major (Sostenuto)  
16. B flat minor (Presto con fuoco)  
17. A flat major (Allegretto)  
18. F minor (Molto allegro)  
19. E flat major (Vivace)  
20. C minor (Largo)  
21. B flat major (Cantabile)  
22. G minor (Molto agitato)  
23. F major (Moderato)  
24. D minor (Allegro appassionato)
Pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet brings impeccable flair to his performances and you’ll want to hear him in George Gershwin’s jazz-inflected piano concerto.

Thu 5 Dec 1.30pm · Fri 6 Dec 8pm
Sat 7 Dec 2pm · Mon 9 Dec 7pm

SHOSTAKOVICH Jazz Suite No.1
GERSHWIN Piano Concerto in F
PROKOFIEV Symphony No.5

James Gaffigan conductor
Jean-Yves Thibaudet piano

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this sense – Rachmaninoff, Scriabin and Debussy being some of the most famous examples. This meaning was often employed by poets such as Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot as well as musicians.

Nowadays the Op.28 Preludes are nearly always played as a cycle, although it seems unlikely that this would have been the case in the 19th century. Chopin is known to have played some of the preludes within a group of other pieces, and sometimes as a short group in themselves.

By playing them all together, we are made more aware of the great contrasts of mood – there are hardly two of the same type and tempo next to each other. Some preludes seem to lead on to the next; some end on the note that is to become the first note of the next one; some of them seem to form a group; while others come to an end with a full stop. As they unfold, we start to hear our own groupings of them. The opportunity of hearing them as a cycle leads to an emotional experience which, by the time we get to No.24, finds us (and sometimes the performer!) very stimulated, if not exhausted.
Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Sydney Symphony has evolved into one of the world’s finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world’s great cities.

Resident at the iconic Sydney Opera House, where it gives more than 100 performances each year, the Sydney Symphony also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales. International tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence, most recently in the 2012 tour to China.

The Sydney Symphony’s first Chief Conductor was Sir Eugene Goossens, appointed in 1947; he was followed by Nicolai Malko, Dean Dixon, Moshe Atzmon, Willem van Otterloo, Louis Frémaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Zdeněk Mácal, Stuart Challender, Edo de Waart and Gianluigi Gelmetti. David Robertson will take up the post of Chief Conductor in 2014. The orchestra’s history also boasts collaborations with legendary figures such as George Szell, Sir Thomas Beecham, Otto Klemperer and Igor Stravinsky.

The Sydney Symphony’s award-winning education program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, developing audiences and engaging the participation of young people. The orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and its commissioning program. Recent premieres have included major works by Ross Edwards, Liza Lim, Lee Bracegirdle, Gordon Kerry and Georges Lentz, and the orchestra’s recording of works by Brett Dean was released on both the BIS and Sydney Symphony Live labels.

Other releases on the Sydney Symphony Live label, established in 2006, include performances with Alexander Lazarev, Gianluigi Gelmetti, Sir Charles Mackerras and Vladimir Ashkenaz. In 2010–11 the orchestra made concert recordings of the complete Mahler symphonies with Ashkenazy, and has also released recordings of Rachmaninoff and Elgar orchestral works on the Exton/Triton labels, as well as numerous recordings on the ABC Classics label.

This is the fifth year of Ashkenazy’s tenure as Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor.
Katia & Marielle Labèque in Recital

Katia and Marielle Labèque PIANOS
Gonzalo Grau PERCUSSION | Raphaël Séguinier DRUMS

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)
En Blanc et noir (In Black and White)
Avec emportement (With passion)
Lent. Sombre
Scherzando

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)
Rapsodie espagnole
Transcribed for piano duo by the composer
Prélude à la nuit (Prelude to the Night) –
Malagueña
Habanera
Feria

INTERVAL

Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990)
West Side Story
Arranged for two pianos and percussion
by Irwin Kostal (1911–1994)
Prologue – Jet Song – Something’s Coming –
Rock Blues – Mambo – Cha Cha – Maria – America –
Cool – I Feel Pretty – One Hand, One Heart –
Tonight – Somewhere – A Boy Like That –
I Have a Love – The Rumble – Finale

This recital will be recorded for broadcast on ABC Classic FM.

Pre-concert talk by Stephanie McCallum at 6:15pm in the First Floor Reception Room.
Visit sydneysymphony.com/talk-bios for speaker biographies.

Estimated durations:
15 minutes, 16 minutes,
20-minute interval, 44 minutes
The concert will conclude at approximately 9:55pm

2013 SEASON
INTERNATIONAL PIANISTS IN RECITAL
PRESENTED BY THEME AND VARIATIONS
Monday 21 October | 7pm
City Recital Hall Angel Place

Katia & Marielle Labèque in Recital

Katia and Marielle Labèque PIANOS
Gonzalo Grau PERCUSSION | Raphaël Séguinier DRUMS

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)
En Blanc et noir (In Black and White)
Avec emportement (With passion)
Lent. Sombre
Scherzando

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)
Rapsodie espagnole
Transcribed for piano duo by the composer
Prélude à la nuit (Prelude to the Night) –
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INTERVAL

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Before our phone call, Katia Labèque has been trying to work out exactly when she and her sister Marielle were last in Australia. It’s been a long time – nearly 20 years – but she thinks it must have been for the Melbourne Festival. That visit followed concerto and recital appearances with the Sydney Symphony in 1990, and their Australian debut in a recital tour for Musica Viva in 1988.

‘The big change for us since then,’ says Katia, ‘was the decision in 1997 to stop our relationship with Philips. It took us ten years to decide how to build our own record company and what to do. That was a very important decision for us, because CDs keep you in the eyes of the public – it’s a way to stay in contact.’

‘We had no idea what it is to create a record company,’ Katia admits, ‘it was a little bit like jumping into the sea when you don’t know how to swim!’ But the experience has clearly been worthwhile. Running their own label, KML, has given Katia and Marielle artistic freedoms while forcing them to grow as musicians. Recording provides a workshop for experimenting with programs and trying new repertoire – ‘to see what’s working, what’s not working, what’s beautiful’. Furthermore: ‘The microphone does not lie. You hear differently when you record yourself. It’s the best school.’

KML also gives them ownership and control of their material. Among the recent releases is a pairing of Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* – the work that first brought them international attention and commercial success – and their current version of Bernstein’s *West Side Story*. ‘We love this combination,’ says Katia, ‘but we could not do it before because Philips had *Rhapsody in Blue* and Sony had *West Side Story* and they never agreed together.’
I ask whether it’s frustrating to have recordings tied up by other labels, but Katia is unsentimental about their earlier work. ‘We don’t give a damn, really, because it’s the past,’ she says, following with a food analogy: ‘It’s like yoghurt: you have a date and after this date you throw it away.’ I don’t have any attachment to the way we were playing at the start. It was very impressive, very fast, very loud, but we’ve changed a lot.

But there’s one recording to which Katia does feel an attachment: their very first recording, of Olivier Messiaen’s *Visions de l’Amen*, made in 1969. The sisters had only just decided to form a duo and were still discovering the repertoire when a friend suggested they play the *Visions*. One day, when they were practising at the Paris Conservatoire, Messiaen himself knocked on the door and asked if he could stay and listen. ‘And you know,’ recalls Katia, ‘at this age you fear nothing. We were so young – 15 and 17 – and we said, “Of course, stay!”’

Their fearlessness paid off when Messiaen invited them to record the music under his guidance. This made them known to the ‘high intelligentsia’ of the Paris music scene. Pierre Boulez introduced them to London. They toured the world with Luciano Berio, playing his concerto for two pianos. ‘That was how we started: through contemporary music, really intellectual music, and difficult music.’

But when Berio took Katia and Marielle to America in 1979, they were given another life-changing repertoire suggestion: Gershwin. ‘We had no idea about Gershwin, so we went a record shop and ended up in the jazz section.’

Gershwin’s original two-piano version of *Rhapsody in Blue* became their first recording for Philips, in 1980. ‘They did not want us to record Gershwin,’ recalls Katia. But eventually, the nervous label agreed to a royalties-only deal (no fee, no advance), and within six months it became a gold record in France. ‘That was the first time, I think, that Philips had a gold record on a classical label – they could not believe it!’

The *Rhapsody* recording represented the beginning of the Labèque’s international career. Previously they’d played a lot of classical contemporary music, Katia explains, but Gershwin gave them a wider audience. There was a price to be paid, though. In the 1980s Gershwin wasn’t taken seriously by French orchestras or concert presenters. ‘The audience loved us, but the people in the French music world really hated us.’ That’s when they decided to leave France and they’ve toured and lived abroad ever since. For the past eight years they’ve been based in Rome.

‘When we decided to form a duo, we did not know it would be for life!’ says Katia. The two sisters simply got on very well and wanted to find a way ‘to stay a little bit more together’. Forty-five years on, the partnership is going strong as their musical and entrepreneurial horizons continue to expand.

**On style and pianos…**

Since 1995, Katia and Marielle Labèque have begun performing on period instruments and working with specialists in historically informed performance, musicians such as Reinhard Goebel. This has changed their perspective in classical music. ‘For me,’ says Katia, ‘playing Bach on the modern piano is like driving a Ferrari on the freeway at 20 kilometres an hour, because as soon as you’re going to go faster it becomes Rachmaninoff – it is not anymore the style! The instrument dictates to you what is wrong and what is right!’

‘But we cannot be onstage and have a Walter for Mozart, a Graf for Schubert and a Steinway for Gershwin – so we need to have a piano that can be clear enough for Mozart, soft enough for Schubert and very brilliant for Gershwin!’

YVONNE FRINDLE
SYDNEY SYMPHONY © 2013
ABOUT THE MUSIC

Four Hands, One Heart

In a piano recital series like this one, a duo recital is an occasional treat. It exchanges the singular vision of one musician alone on stage for the experience of an intimate partnership – four hands and two musical minds performing as one.

The piano duo is chamber music, but it can also be orchestral in effect, and one part of the repertoire derives from transcriptions or arrangements of orchestral music. Before the advent of recordings, these were pragmatic in intention – allowing the dissemination of orchestral works. Ravel’s *Rapsodie espagnole*, in its complicated way, represents the orchestral connection.

Other works in the duet and duo repertoire were conceived for the medium from the outset. These range from music composed with a lucrative domestic market in mind – think of Mozart’s duets, four intertwining hands at one instrument – to virtuoso music for two pianos, intended for the concert hall. Debussy’s *En Blanc et noir* is music conceived in every respect for two pianos.

There is a third kind of work in the duo repertoire: the transcription and arrangement of music from the theatre, represented tonight by Bernstein’s *West Side Story*. This is music in the tradition of 19th-century operatic paraphrases.

This recital begins with *En Blanc et noir* – ‘Three pieces for two pianos four hands’, each one dedicated to a friend. It is late Debussy, begun after the outbreak of World War I and completed in 1915.

The title – originally ‘Caprices en blanc et noir’ – naturally evokes the black and white keys of the piano keyboard. According to Debussy, ‘these pieces derive their colour and their feeling merely from the sonority of the piano…they are like the “greys” of Velázquez.’ The reference from the visual arts is complemented by literary quotations.

The first piece, dedicated to Koussevitsky, is prefaced by lines from Gounod’s opera *Roméo et Juliette*, which Katia Labèque summarises as ‘people who do not dance are disgraced’. The allusion is to those men who ‘stood aside from the macabre dance of the battlefields’. The music doesn’t dance but it’s lively and often joyous.

The second piece is dark – very slow and sombre. The dedication is to a friend killed in battle; the quotation comes from a ‘Ballad against the enemies of France’ by François Villon. This was Debussy’s favourite of the three – at once a memorial and an epic ‘painting’ depicting the

Claude Debussy

**DEBUSSY**

*En Blanc et noir*

*Avec emportement*  
(With passion)  
*Lent. Sombre*  
*Scherzando*
carnage of war. ‘It’s about desolation and death,’ says Katia. The hymn tune ‘Ein’ feste Burg’ emerges from the tense and busy texture in a discomforting harmonisation.

The third piece, *Scherzando*, is dedicated to Stravinsky and quotes a line from Charles d’Orléans: ‘Winter, you are nothing but a rogue.’ The music is full of edgy repeated patterns and motoric rhythms. The correspondence between the two composers, writes Peter Avis, reveals their preoccupation with the war, and ‘their fear that it would lead not only to the destruction of their nations but also of their art’. The music itself seems more impish and light-hearted, with fleeting references to Stravinsky’s *Firebird*.

Katia and Marielle Labèque have performed *En Blanc et noir* in Sydney before (in 1990), and Katia expresses mild surprise that it has been chosen again. ‘It’s very beautiful, probably one of Debussy’s masterworks,’ she says, ‘but it is certainly one of the most difficult of his pieces to understand,’ she says. One of the challenges is the strange, abrupt ending of the third movement: ‘the audience never realises that it’s finished!’

But in this program it makes for an inspired transition to Ravel’s *Rapsodie espagnole*. Admittedly, the transition is less apparent in the concert hall, with its applause and comings and goings from the stage, so this is something to

‘What impressed me at the time...was Debussy’s brilliant piano playing. Recently, while listening to his *En Blanc et noir*, I was struck by the way in which the extraordinary quality of this pianism had directed the thought of Debussy the composer.’

IGOR STRAVINSKY
try at home: listen to the wispy ending of *En Blanc et noir* and allow it to segue into the mysterious nocturnal bell tones of the *Prelude to the Night*.

Maurice Ravel was born in Basque country, on the French side of the Spanish border. And when he composed *Rapsodie espagnole* – one of the most brilliant orchestral portraits of Spain ever written – he had yet to visit Spain. ‘Everyone knows Ravel didn’t really know Spain,’ says Katia Labèque. ‘Spain was in his imagination, it was not something he really lived.’

On the other hand, when the great Spanish composer, Manuel de Falla, heard Debussy and Ricardo Viñes play the piano version of the *Rapsodie* (in 1907, shortly before it was to be premiered in a concert of the Société nationale de musique) he was greatly surprised by its Spanish character. He puzzled over what he called the music’s ‘subtly genuine Spanishness’ until he met Ravel’s mother, a Basque woman who’d sung Spanish folksongs to Ravel when he was in his cradle. Aha!

Among those folksongs was the habanera, which had been in vogue when Ravel’s mother had lived in Madrid, and the third movement of the *Rapsodie*, the *Habanera*, was the first to have been composed, in 1895, beginning life as a work for two pianos.

The habanera was a popular dance form that had inspired other composers before Ravel; Emmanuel Chabrier composed a very famous example. Ravel’s *Habanera* is more dissonant and shadowy – its ‘weary’ rhythms suggesting a ghost of a habanera. And if it sounds strangely familiar in a recital setting, that might be because Debussy borrowed Ravel’s score and transferred some of its effects to his *Soirée dans Grenade* (Evening in Granada) in 1903. No wonder Ravel pointedly added the original date ‘1895’ to the top of his *Habanera* when he reused it for the *Rapsodie* in 1907. He did not, however, repeat the quotation from Baudelaire that had graced the original: ‘Au pays parfumé que le soleil caresse…’ (In the perfumed land that the sun caresses…).

The descending four-note motif that begins the haunting first movement – an effect like the mournful pealing of bells – plays an important role in the *Rapsodie* as a whole. Ravel alludes to it in the *Malagueña* – the tiny, flourishing second movement with its pianistic ‘castanets’ – and again in the finale, the *Feria*.

The finale is where Ravel shows his wild streak. A ‘feria’ is a fiesta, a festival, but it also suggests the fairground and
this is tumultuous music with a tremendous kinetic energy, even when, halfway through, a flamenco singer shows up and the movement takes on an improvisatory feel.

The *Rapsodie espagnole* is often cited as one of the works that Ravel composed specifically for orchestra (as opposed to orchestrating existing piano music, as he did with his *Mother Goose* ballet, for example, or the *Alborada del gracioso*). But the scenario is more complicated than that, and as with the *Alborada*, there is a sense that both versions are perfect ‘transcriptions’ of an unrealised ‘original’. The *Rapsodie* did begin life as a piano duo work, although this isn’t surprising in itself, since even Ravel’s exclusively orchestral works were composed in what’s called ‘short piano score’ and subsequently orchestrated. Early on, however, Viñes suggested that it might work better in orchestra form, given the ‘awkwardness’ of some of the piano writing. (Roger Nichols suggests this assessment may have come about from Ravel and Viñes attempting to play it on one piano, with a tangle of hand-crossing as a result.) Ravel took the advice, but didn’t abandon the piano duo version, which – if Falla’s report is correct – was performed in public at least six months before the orchestral premiere.

* * * * * *

‘*West Side Story* – no explanation needed!’ That’s how Katia Labèque summed up the Bernstein when we spoke earlier this year. If she were right, this note could end here. You could simply do as Katia does and have the movie in front of your eyes, ‘from the beginning to the end’.

But there are some observations worth making, especially if you’ve heard the Labèques play this music before or own their earlier recording of the Symphonic Dances and songs in Irwin Kostal’s arrangement. ‘We’re bringing a new version,’ explains Katia, in which ‘the two sides of the story are really exposed – in the percussion parts, not only the piano parts.’

Irwin Kostal tells the story of the original version. He’d heard the Labèques’ recording of *Rhapsody in Blue* and had become ‘obsessed by the sound of two-piano music’. Then they called him out of the blue with an invitation to make them a two-piano version of the Symphonic Dances from *West Side Story*, plus all the songs. ‘When I called Lenny to ask for his endorsement of this project, he immediately responded, “What about the percussion?”’ The two men agreed to include percussion and a jazz drummer.
As it turned out, percussion and drums are at the crux of the more recent revisions. ‘We’ve not changed a note of the piano parts,’ Katia points out.

What the Labèques find so inspiring about Bernstein’s music, and West Side Story in particular, is the way it inhabits two worlds, classical and Broadway. ‘I’m always very attracted to these combinations of classical and popular,’ says Katia, ‘like Brahms’s Hungarian Dances, even in Mahler’s symphonies, or in Schubert’s Fantasie in F minor, where the melody comes from a popular song.’

In West Side Story there are two worlds of another kind: the ‘local’ Jets and the Puerto Rican Sharks. But in the original arrangements, these two worlds – these two sides of the story – weren’t properly represented. The percussion was dominated by ‘classical’ instruments (timpani, xylophone, vibraphone) and by the drum kit of jazz and pop. What it needed, thought the Labèques, was the Latino voice.

Enter Gonzalo Grau, not only a pianist but also a percussionist, composer, arranger and producer. ‘A fantastic musician,’ says Katia, and their representative of the popular world. Under his direction, out went the timpani and its ‘orchestral’ companions, in came the colours and effects of Latin percussion. ‘Now we really feel we have two Jets and two Sharks on stage.’

In this new suite of highlights, the numbers from the Symphonic Dances and the remaining songs (which Kostal had originally arranged without percussion) are woven together in a more or less narrative sequence, from the sinister gang whistles that begin the Prologue to the subdued and elusive reprise of Somewhere in the Finale.

In between there are delightful surprises from the hand of Irwin Kostal. One is I Feel Pretty, which the Labèques hadn’t initially wanted to include until Kostal presented them with his irresistible ‘music box’ version. Nowadays, there’s a discreet percussion accompaniment – Maria’s slippers pattering on the floor perhaps?

Another stroke of genius is the Jet Song, which was turned into a boogie-woogie extravaganza. ‘I hope [Lenny] doesn’t mind,’ wrote Kostal at the time. ‘But how can he help loving the fun with which Katia takes off on the high keys while Marielle pounds out the rhythm, never deserting Lenny’s basic harmonies?’ Four hands, one vision, one heart!

YVONNE FRINDLE
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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Gonzalo Grau PERCUSSION

Gonzalo Grau began his musical studies at the age of three in Caracas. Along his musical journey he has developed skills in many instruments, from viola da gamba and cello to the flamenco cajón and his principal instrument, piano. A Berklee College summa cum laude, he has established himself as a multi-instrumentalist and his credits range from performances with Venezuelan music projects such as Maroa, Schola Cantorum de Venezuela, Camerata de Caracas and the Simón Bolívar National Youth Orchestra, to work with jazz icon Maria Schneider and the Latin jazz giant Timbalaye.

As a music director he leads Plural (Latin jazz-Flamenco-Venezuelan fusion) and La Clave Secreta (salsa fusion). He has participated in more than 80 recordings bridging the classical and popular music worlds, with recent productions including the studio recording of Osvaldo Golijov’s La Pasión Según San Marcos (ECHO award 2010). With Katia and Marielle Labèque he has recorded Nazareno and West Side Story (winner of the Choc de Classica).

As a composer and arranger, he has collaborated with Golijov on the opera Aïnadamar and La Pasión. And his original works include the overture Pregunta y Respuesta (Atlanta Symphony Orchestra), Café con Pan (Chicago Symphony Orchestra), Nazareno, and the oratorio Aqua (Bach Academy International).

Raphaël Séguinier DRUMS

Born in 1979, Raphaël Séguinier began playing drums at the age of 15, teaching himself after learning classical piano. Influenced by the indie/noise/post-rock scene (Fugazi, Mogwai, Sonic Youth...), he plays in many bands, creating and producing his own musical projects and touring Europe.

In 2003, as he became more and more interested in improvising and experimental music, he joined the French collective Zazen, performing and recording with musicians from diverse musical territories: jazz, hardcore, electronic and traditional.

In 2005 he moved to Paris, where he began his professional career as a studio drummer. At the same time, he began touring internationally with such acts as Nouvelle Vague, Phoebe Killdeer & The Short Straws, Nadéah, Émilie Simon, Chocolate Genius, Cocoon and Saul Williams.

In 2010 he began working with Katia and Marielle Labèque, first in the project ‘B for Bang’ and later to record West Side Story and work on the project Minimalist Dream House. More recently he has started a new band with David Chalmin (Red Velvet, Dimension X, Nadéah, B for Bang) and an improvisational drums/electronic project with French producer Villeneuve.
JOYCE YANG
In 2011 Joyce Yang released a solo recital disc, *Collage*, which (as the name suggests) features an intriguingly diverse program from Scarlatti to Sebastian Currier. Included is Lowell Lieberman’s *Gargoyles*, which Yang performed in Sydney in 2010.

AVIE 2229
Hear and see Joyce Yang in performance at pianistjoyceyang.com

JONATHAN BISS

ONYX 4094

ONYX 4082
Also amongst his recent releases is a chamber music disc with the Elias String Quartet, pairing Schumann’s Piano Quintet in E flat, Op.44 and Dvořák’s Piano Quintet No.2 in A, B155.

ONYX 4092
On YouTube Jonathan Biss talks about practising Beethoven and the virtues of a separate studio: bit.ly/BissOnBeethoven

If you own a Kindle or use the Kindle app, head over to Amazon.com for two ‘Kindle Singles’ (or long-form essays) by Jonathan Biss: *Beethoven’s Shadow* and *A Pianist Under the Influence*. Two great reads for less than the price of a coffee!

INGRID FLITER
Ingrid Fliter’s third disc for EMI, released in 2011 brings together three of the best-known Beethoven piano sonatas under the album title *Passion*: the *Pathétique* sonata (No.8 in C minor, Op.13), the *Appassionata* (No.23 in F minor, Op.57) and the *Tempest* (No.18 in D minor, Op.31 No.2). The fine recording is complimented by excellent booklet notes from William Kinderman.

EMI CLASSICS 94573
The earlier recordings both feature the music of Chopin: the complete waltzes and a more varied all- Chopin selection, including the Fourth Ballade.

EMI CLASSICS 98351 (WALTZES)
EMI CLASSICS 14899 (BALLADE)
For more information, visit her website: www.ingridfliter.com

KATIA & MARIELLE LABÈQUE
In recent years Katia and Marielle Labèque have established their own record label, enabling them to take full artistic control of their projects. The catalogue is extensive, ranging from the classical repertoire for piano duo to collaborative cross-genre projects. A visit to their website is highly recommended: www.labeque.com

If it’s the latest version of *West Side Story* for two pianos and percussion you’re after, you can find it paired with Gershwin’s two-piano version of *Rhapsody in Blue*.

KML RECORDINGS 1121
Also worth seeking out is the 5-CD set *Labèque*. The wealth of music inside the box includes Ravel’s *Mother Goose* suite, *Boléro* and *Rapsodie espagnole* (in versions with percussion), Stravinsky’s Concerto for Two Pianos and other Stravinsky pieces, *En Blanc et noir* by Debussy, Schubert’s Fantasy in F minor (D940) and Mozart’s Sonata in D (K448), together with music by Rodrigo, Falla, Satie and others.

KML RECORDINGS 1126

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