40th ANNUAL
ROCKPORT CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

Friday, September 3 :: 5 & 8 PM

JAN LISIECKI, piano

RONDO A CAPRICCIO, OP. 129
(‘THE RAGE OVER A LOST PENNY’) (C1795)
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

RONDO CAPRICCIOSO, OP. 14 (1828-30)
Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

LIEDER OHNE WORTE
(SONGS WITHOUT WORDS),
BOOK 6, OP. 67 (PUBL. 1845)
Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

No. 31, in E-flat major, Op. 67, No. 1
No. 32, in F-sharp minor, Op. 67, No. 2
No. 33, in B-flat major, Op. 67, No. 3
No. 34, in C major, Op. 67, No. 4,
   Spinnerlied (Spinning Song)
No. 35, in B minor, Op. 67, No. 5
No. 36, in E major, Op. 62, No. 6

NOCTURNE IN B MAJOR, OP. 62 NO. 1 (1846)
NOCTURNE IN E MAJOR, OP. 62 NO. 2 (1846)
Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)

BALLADE NO. 1, IN G MINOR, OP. 23 (c1825)
Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)

VARIATIONS SÉRIEUSES, OP. 54,
MWV U156 (1841)
Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

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It would be hard to conceive of anything more amusing than this little escapade. How I laughed when I played it for the first time! And how astonished I was when, a second time through, I read a footnote telling me that this capriccio, discovered among Beethoven's manuscripts after his death, bore the title: "Fury over the Lost Penny, Vented in a Caprice" . . . Oh! It's the most adorable, futile fury, like that which seizes you when you can't get a boot off, and you sweat and swear and the boot looks up at you, phlegmatically-and unmoved! . .

"'I'm really unbuttoned today,' was Beethoven's favorite expression when his spirits were high. And then he would laugh like a lion and let loose about him - for he was unruly in all circumstances . . .

"Should there one day be a resurrection of the arts, and Genius hold the scales with the capriccio about the penny balanced against ten of the newest dramatic overtures, well, I tell you, the overtures would flip skyward! . . ."

**RONDO A CAPRICCIO, OP. 129 ('THE RAGE OVER A LOST PENNY') (c1795)**

Ludwig van Beethoven (b. Bonn, Germany, December 15 or 16, 1770; d. Vienna, Austria, March 26, 1827)

*Composed c1795; 6 minutes*

Franz Grillparzer, the renowned dramatic poet, who delivered Beethoven's funeral oration, once told Beethoven's biographer Thayer that he thought the composer "half crazy." Yet Grillparzer could also write of Beethoven: "For all his odd ways, which often bordered on being offensive, there was something so inexpressibly touching and noble in him that one could not but esteem him and feel drawn to him." These seemingly contradictory descriptions appear loud and clear here in this fiery, witty Rondo a capriccio. This truly is Beethoven unbuttoned! In this virtuoso, spirited rondo, with its recurring whimsical theme and explosive episodes, it is almost as though Beethoven is looking in a mirror and portraying what he
sees. Beethoven with his infamous temper and chaotic living conditions. Beethoven the scowling, paranoid man, always looking over his shoulder suspecting that he was about to be cheated. Beethoven who was once observed keeping an unemptied chamber pot under his piano with the remains of last night’s supper on a chair, in one or other of the 87 dwellings he lived in during his three decades in Vienna.

Filling out the picture of the *Rondo alla ingharese quasi un capriccio* [Hungarian rondo in the style of a capriccio], in G, Op. 129 is an inscription clearly written across the top of the manuscript giving an alternate title “The Rage over a Lost Penny” (*Die Wut über den verlorenen Groschen*). The title has stuck, although the hand that inscribed it appears not to be that of the composer. There again, Beethoven’s original manuscript was only discovered in 1946 and it is incomplete. So the editor – who may well have been the Vienna-based composer and publisher Anton Diabelli, whose company first published the piece in 1828 – may well have been responsible for this vivid, affectionate subtitle. Scholars are divided as to when the piece was composed. 1795 appears to be the consensus, though earlier and later dates have been suggested. As to the late opus number, Op. 129, sandwiched numerically between the Ninth Symphony and a cluster of Beethoven’s late string quartets, this was assigned by the wily Diabelli to increase sales when he published the piece, less than a year after the composer’s death.

Jan offers some thoughts about Mendelssohn:

“I think Mendelssohn has one foot in the classical world and one foot in the romantic. Finding that middle, where to balance those two, is the challenge in playing the music.”

“Mendelssohn wrote very elaborate music. It’s music that has a lot of notes to say a very simple thing. And I love that because once you’ve overcome all the notes, everything comes to light — it becomes so simple, as if it was always in front of you.”
RONDO CAPRICCIOSO, OP. 14

Felix Mendelssohn (b. Hamburg, Germany, February 3, 1809; d. Leipzig, November 4, 1847)

Composed 1828-30; 7 minutes

Mendelssohn initially wrote the two-part Rondo capriccioso in 1828, as a sparkling E-minor Étude. Taking a cue, perhaps, from Carl Maria von Weber’s Konzertstück, he added a short introductory Andante two years later as a gift for the 17-year-old prodigy Delphine von Schauoth. She's “slim, blond, blue-eyed, with white hands and somewhat aristocratic,” he confided to one of his sisters, describing a musician he visited frequently at the time and with whom he would subsequently develop an even closer friendship. Adding what he referred to as ‘sauce and mushrooms’ to the Étude, Mendelssohn took care to make the Andante more than a mere atmospheric prelude to the fireworks that follow. Its main theme is thematically related and the lyrical, emotionally wide-ranging music generates a feeling of anticipation as its leads without break into the quicker rondo. This mercurial, elegantly crafted movement then recreates the feather-light atmosphere of the overture to A Midsummer Night’s Dream which Mendelssohn had written the previous summer. Marked Presto leggiero, it calls for nimble fingers, swiftly oscillating thirds, fluent arpeggios, rapid-fire double octaves and a sustained pianissimo touch. Mendelssohn himself kept it as a favorite showpiece. The late 19th century pianist and conductor Hans von Bülow felt that a successful performance must tread a fine line between ‘thrilling haste’ and a ‘sentimental interpretation’ of its more lyrical sections.

LIEDER OHNE WORTE (SONGS WITHOUT WORDS), BOOK 6, OP. 67

Felix Mendelssohn (b. Hamburg, Germany, February 3, 1809; d. Leipzig, November 4, 1847)

Published 1845; 15 minutes

“As for the Songs Without Words, I wish you would send them to many millions of amateurs and let them play them,” Mendelssohn wrote of this Op. 67 collection, in fun and in English, to his British publisher. Later, aware of the dangers of success, he wrote to his German publisher: “If there were too many of these creatures on the face of the earth, nobody would like them anymore.” At first, his wordless songs were slowly accepted by the public. But then Mendelssohn’s 48 Songs Without Words became so popular later in the 19th century that they were widely imitated, and his prediction of their near extinction did, indeed, come to pass. While the Songs Without Words may have found a treasured place in 19th century drawing rooms, they became a rare commodity in the concert halls of the 20th.

Mendelssohn started to use the term ‘Song without words’ around 1828. He issued volumes of six at a time throughout his life (with two additional volumes published posthumously). By 1840, pirated editions were beginning to appear and, the following year, Mendelssohn took legal action against a Hamburg composer for
adding texts to the piano pieces. But there was nothing he could do
to prevent people adding titles and nicknames to his music as the
century progressed. These include such gems as “Sweet
Remembrance,” “Sighing Wind,” “Homeless,” “Delirium,” and, a
staple of my own childhood, “The Bee’s Wedding” – a title bestowed
in preference to Mendelssohn’s own title Spinnerlied (Spinning Song)
for the fourth of the Op. 67 collection. This piece, with its allusion to
Schubert’s Gretchen at the Spinning Wheel, is the only one in the
collection to be titled by the composer.

The carefully contained emotion of Mendelssohn’s Lieder ohne Worte
reflects both the best and the worst of Biedermeier charm. The
music often treads a fine line between sentiment and
sentimentality. Mendelssohn had ambiguous feelings about the
pieces, but he still spent a good deal of time revising and organizing
them into balanced sets of six. Each Song Without Words is a
textless piano miniature that mirrors aspects of art song, notably as
a solo song, duet or part-song. As to what they express, we have
Mendelssohn’s own words: “People often claim that music is too
ambiguous; that what they should be thinking as they hear it is
unclear, whereas everyone understands words,” he once wrote to a
family friend. “With me it is exactly the opposite, and not only with
regard to an entire speech, but also with individual words. These,
too, seem to me so ambiguous, so vague, so easily misunderstood in
comparison with genuine music, which fills the soul with a thousand
things better than words.”

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NOCTURNE IN B MAJOR, OP. 62, NO. 1
NOCTURNE IN E MAJOR, OP. 62, NO. 2

Fryderyk Chopin (b. Żelazowa Wola, nr Warsaw, Poland, March 1,
1810; d. Paris, October 17, 1849)

Composed 1846; 13 minutes

Chopin explores the lyrical,
more subjective side of his
nature in his 20 or so
nocturnes. He wrote them
throughout his short life, with
the earliest dating from his
student years at the
Conservatory in Warsaw. His
latest, the two we are to hear
today, were composed in 1846,
three years before his death.
Isolated from Poland from the
age of 20, the hypersensitive
young man soon developed an
intense nostalgia for his
homeland. It found expression
in the sense of longing that
often permeates his melodies. In the yearning, reflective melodic
lines of the first of the Op. 62 Nocturnes, Chopin exposes a
vulnerable side, while at the same time, wholly avoiding
sentimentality. The full beauty of the nocturne’s restrained melody
only gradually flowers, through discreet variation, until coming into full bloom in a luminous display of trills and ornamentation, just before the concluding coda. In the opera house this would be referred to as *fioritura*, the florid embellishment of a melodic line. It is a skill that many attempt and few succeed at with the subtlety, grace and composure that Chopin reveals in this nocturne.

Though Chopin never wrote an opera, his immediately recognizable dreamy, introspective melodies clearly have their origins in the opera house - which he loved to frequent. The harmonically sinuous, ever-expanding, always surprising melodic lines which frame the second of the Op. 62 nocturnes, in E-major, offer a prime illustration. These serene, vocally inspired phrases turn in on themselves in an unhurried, effortlessly floating manner, as Chopin elaborately decorates his writing for the right-hand. Sterner stuff is found in the middle section, where the left-hand drives the music urgently forward to remote harmonic regions. Both Op. 62 Nocturnes are supreme examples of Chopin’s art and a fitting conclusion to the collection.

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**BALLADE NO. 1, IN G MINOR, OP. 23**

Fryderyk Chopin (b. Żelazowa Wola, nr Warsaw, Poland, March 1, 1810; d. Paris, October 17, 1849)

*Composed c1825; 10 minutes*

Chopin started composition of the first of his four Ballades after he left Poland, in Paris, the city he was to make his home. The origins of the title are to be found in narrative poetry and folk song, where the reader would find a descriptive, often dramatic story. By the early 19th century, the term had come to be used for the narrative songs of German composers, with Schubert’s *Erl-King* marking the very peak of the form. Then, in 1831, Chopin began to use the title Ballade for single movement, extended piano compositions with an implied storyline. The structure of his Ballades is at one level free - a kind of individual take on the sonata form principle, working towards an apotheosis of the main themes. But, at another level, the music is disciplined by the utmost rigor and control. After a dramatic opening statement, the First Ballade, in G minor, Op. 23 alternates two richly lyrical themes separated by more fiery material. It concludes with one of Chopin’s most ferocious, knuckle-crunching codas. Schumann told Chopin that he liked this Ballade better than any other work Chopin had so far composed. After thinking a long time, Chopin replied with great feeling, “I’m glad of that because it’s the one I prefer, too.”
By 1839, more than a decade after Beethoven’s death, the idea for a Beethoven monument in his native town had been brewing for several years. Civic leaders in Bonn, musicians and other artists throughout Europe all lent their support. There was a less than effective official association to promote the cause. But it was only with Franz Liszt’s energetic involvement from October 1839, that the project began to gain momentum along what was to prove to be a very bumpy road.

A bronze statue by Dresden sculptor Ernst Julius Hähnel was eventually unveiled August 12, 1845, 75 years after the composer’s birth, as the highlight of a three-day Beethoven festival. It was the first Beethoven monument in Germany. Vienna then commissioned its own in 1880. Today, there are well over 100 Beethoven monuments throughout the world.

VARIATIONS SÉRIEUSES, OP. 54, MWV U156

Felix Mendelssohn (b. Hamburg, Germany, February 3, 1809; d. Leipzig, November 4, 1847)

Composed 1841; 11 minutes

This was Mendelssohn’s contribution to the published album whose proceeds helped build the monument to Beethoven in Bonn. The collection was published in 1842 and titled Dix morceaux brillants. It included Chopin’s poetically reflective C-sharp minor Prelude, Op. 45, together with contributions by leading pianists of the day: Czerny, Döhler, Henselt, Kalkbrenner, Moscheles, Taubert, Thalberg and Liszt, who became the chief protagonist in getting the statue funded and built. By giving his variations the title ‘serious,’ Mendelssohn distinguished them from the brilliant, if vacuous operatic variations that were in vogue at the time.

His theme is in D minor. Beethoven’s 32 Variations in C minor were an obvious precedent for a work in the minor key. Mendelssohn alludes to it in his variations, together with Beethoven’s String Quartet, Op. 95, which Beethoven himself subtitled Serioso. Subsequent variations by Brahms, Franck, Reger, and Busoni were clearly inspired by Mendelssohn’s success in the medium. The character of the theme is somewhat melancholy and it progresses from one chromatic, suspended harmony to another. The 18 variations then divide into small clusters that progress with
increasing momentum. The dramatic tension increases throughout the first four as they build towards the theme in two-part canon (No. 4). The next five follow a similar crescendo and lead towards the fugato of No. 10. The dreamy No. 11 has the character of an homage to Schumann. The rapid-fire No. 12 and No. 13 again work together cumulatively – the latter incorporating the three-hand effect in a striking manner. A sentimental, hymn-like variation leads to increasingly brilliant, even flamboyant variations that work towards a restatement of the theme over a rumbling, low pedal-point. Then follows a powerful coda (No. 18) and a quiet ending.

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Comments welcomed: khnotes@sympatico.ca
Jan Lisiecki has quickly made a name for himself among the upper echelon of artists working today. The Canadian pianist performs over a hundred yearly concerts worldwide, and has worked closely with conductors such as Antonio Pappano, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Daniel Harding, and Claudio Abbado.

Mr. Lisiecki has appeared with many of the world’s finest orchestras including the New York Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony, the San Francisco Symphony, and the London Symphony Orchestra among several others. Lisiecki rocketed to the world stage at an early age, when at 13 the Fryderyk Chopin Institute issued a recording of Jan performing Chopin’s piano concertos. At age 15 he signed an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon, a relationship that has seen the pianist release seven acclaimed recordings, winning several JUNO and ECHO Klassik awards in the process. His most recent, a duo recording of Beethoven lieder with baritone Matthias Goerne, won both the Diapason d’Or and Edison Klassiek awards. At eighteen, Lisiecki became both the youngest ever recipient of Gramophone’s Young Artist Award and received the Leonard Bernstein Award. He was named UNICEF Ambassador to Canada in 2012.