THURSDAY, JUNE 22 :: 7:30 PM

Christina & Michelle Naughton, piano duo

ANDANTE AND ALLEGRO ÂSSAI VIVACE, FOR PIANO, FOUR-HANDS, OP. 92, MWV T4 (1841)
Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47)

SONATINA FOR PIANO (1941)
Conlon Nancarrow (1912–97), transcribed for piano, four-hands by Yvar Mikhashoff
Presto
Moderato
Allegro molto

DOLLY, FOR PIANO, FOUR-HANDS, OP. 56 (1893-6)
Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924)
Berceuse
Messieur Aou! [ Mi-a-ou’]
La jardin du Dolly
Ketty valsa ['Kitty valsa']
Tendresse
Le pas espagnol

:: INTERMISSION ::

SCARAMOUCHE, SUITE FOR TWO PIANOS, OP. 165B (1937)
Darius Milhaud (1892–1974)
Vif
Modéré
Braziléria

VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY HAYDN, FOR TWO PIANOS, OP. 56B (1873)
Johannes Brahms (1833–97)

LA VALSE: POÈME CHORÉGRAPHIQUE, FOR TWO PIANOS (1919-20)
Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

This concert is made possible by contributing sponsor Sandra Jesse.
ANDANTE AND ALLEGRO ASSAI VIVACE, FOR PIANO, FOUR-HANDS, OP. 92, MW T4
Felix Mendelssohn (b. Hamburg, Germany, February 3, 1809; d. Leipzig, November 4, 1847)
Composed 1841; 10 minutes

On March 31, 1841, a landmark concert took place in Leipzig marking the first appearance together of the recently married Robert and Clara Schumann. Historians will also find it significant as the ‘world premiere’ of Schumann’s First Symphony, the Spring symphony, which Felix Mendelssohn conducted with his Gewandhaus Orchestra. Members of the orchestra would remember the event for the generosity of the young Clara Wieck Schumann, who was playing as a benefit for the orchestral pension fund. Leipzigers in the audience will also surely remember this same concert for a newly composed concert piano duet for the four hands of both Clara Wieck and Felix Mendelssohn – the Andante and Allegro assai vivace.

Mendelssohn hastily composed the piece as the concert approached, dating two manuscript copies March 23 and 26, 1841. It says much about the pianistic skill of both musicians to have prepared the digitally demanding score (not to mention its intricate, overlapping arm and shoulder coordination) days before the concert. The piece opens with an elegantly melodic Andante in the spirit of one of Mendelssohn’s Songs Without Words, the two pianists here playing as one. The music then leaps into a delightful Allegro in Mendelssohn’s featherlight scherzo idiom. This virtuoso score was written comparatively late in the composer’s short life, but, nonetheless, recreates the freshness and joie de vivre of his youthful Octet and A Midsummer Night’s Dream music. Its vivacity only slows for a brief echo of the Andante until whisked away into a witty coda. The score to this exuberant concert-opener was published posthumously four years after Mendelssohn’s death as the Allegro brilliant, without its pendant, the Andante. Surprisingly, the two were only reunited in print as recently as 1994, to the benefit of both.

SONATINA FOR PIANO
Conlon Nancarrow (b. Texarkana, AR, October 27, 1912; d. Mexico City, August 10, 1997)
transcribed for piano, four-hands by Yvar Mikhashoff
Composed 1941; 5 minutes

Like Glenn Gould, American expatriate composer Conlon Nancarrow quickly grew frustrated with live concert performance. For four decades, Nancarrow composed exclusively for player piano, bypassing the pianistic skill of both musicians to have prepared the digitally demanding score (not to mention its intricate, overlapping arm and shoulder coordination) days before the concert. The piece opens with an elegantly melodic Andante in the spirit of one of Mendelssohn’s Songs Without Words, the two pianists here playing as one. The music then leaps into a delightful Allegro in Mendelssohn’s featherlight scherzo idiom. This virtuoso score was written comparatively late in the composer’s short life, but, nonetheless, recreates the freshness and joie de vivre of his youthful Octet and A Midsummer Night’s Dream music. Its vivacity only slows for a brief echo of the Andante until whisked away into a witty coda. The score to this exuberant concert-opener was published posthumously four years after Mendelssohn’s death as the Allegro brilliant, without its pendant, the Andante. Surprisingly, the two were only reunited in print as recently as 1994, to the benefit of both.

DOLLY, FOR PIANO, FOUR-HANDS, OP. 56
Gabriel Fauré (b. Parim, Ariège, France, May 12, 1845; d. Paris, November 4, 1924)
Composed 1893-4; 16 minutes

Fauré wrote his Dolly suite over three years, each movement being a gift for a young girl, Dolly Bardac. She was the daughter of singer Emma Bardac, who had recently given the première of Fauré’s song cycle La bonne chanson, and had an intense relationship with the composer. The lyrical, song-like Bercuse was the first piece Fauré wrote for Dolly, in 1893, and was his first piece for piano for almost two decades. Monsieur Raoul, Dolly’s young brother, portrayed here in a whimsical waltz given to Dolly on her birthday in 1894. Another valse-caprice, Ketty valse, was a birthday gift two years later. Its title refers to Raoul’s pet dog Ketty. In between these two delightfully ingenious waltzes comes Fauré’s 1895 gift, Le jardin de Dolly, a delicately drawn picture of an enchanted garden. Both Le Jardin and Tendresse roam harmonically far and wide, in a gentle nocturnal mood. Le pas espagnole reflects the prevailing vogue for the sounds of Spain, here via an equestrian bronze by Fauré’s father-in-law, sculptor Emmanuel Frémiet, which stood in Dolly’s house and was a clear favorite of the young girl.

SCARAMOUCHE, SUITE FOR TWO PIANOS, OP. 165B
Darius Milhaud (b. Marseilles, September 4, 1892; d. Geneva, June 22, 1974)
Composed 1937; 10 minutes

As a young French composer, Darius Milhaud first came across jazz in a Hammersmith dance hall in London. Then, in New York, he heard the Leo Reisman band and the Paul Whiteman orchestra and was struck by their timbre and subtlety. In Harlem, he loved the stinging New Orleans-type jazz. In Brazil, he explored the country’s folklore and the rhythmic energy of Rio at Carnival time. Milhaud drew on these experiences 20 years later, in 1937, when he put together the Suite Scaramouche for a performance at the Paris Exposition of that year. The outer movements are a reworking of instrumental music he had recently written for children’s play adapted from Molière, while the middle movement is drawn from incidental music to another play, by Jules Supervielle. The music exudes the rhythmic energy he found in the streets of Rio and has become one of the most popular pieces of music for two pianos. Although Scaramouche is the stock clown character of the 16th century comedie dell’arte, Milhaud’s title comes from the Théâtre Scaramouche, where his incidental music was first performed.

VARIATIONS ON A THEME BY HAYDN, FOR TWO PIANOS, OP. 56B
Johannes Brahms (b. Hamburg, Germany, May 7, 1833; d. Vienna, Austria, April 3, 1897)
Composed 1873; 18 minutes

In 1870, Ferdinand Pohl, librarian to the Vienna Philharmonic Society, showed his friend Brahms a set of six Feld-Partitas for eight wind instruments, believing them to be by Haydn. The second movement of the B-Flat Partita particularly caught Brahms’s eye. Called Charante St. Antoni in the manuscript, Brahms immediately saw potential in its irregular, yet musically logical structure. The theme was believed to be a traditional Austrian pilgrim song, which added a romantic touch to the discovery. (It remains without attribution today.) In his mind, Brahms began to formulate a set of variations on the chorale that could be viewed as a tribute to Haydn, and to the classical era in general. In August 1873, he played over the completed two-piano score with Clara Schumann and sent the manuscript off to his publisher. It appeared in print almost simultaneously with the première of its orchestral version, November 1, 1873. Brahms wanted the two-piano version to be recognized as an independent work, allowing us to appreciate the symphonic scale of the undertaking, while bringing clarity to its structural foundation. Energetic and forward driving, the first three variations function like an
opening movement. Then comes a more reflective Andante, in the minor key. Variations 5 to 8 function as a scherzo, with hunting calls and galloping rhythms in No. 6, and a graceful, trio-like Siciliano in No. 7. Brahms concludes his virtuoso transformation of the original 'Haydn' theme in a passacaglia, with 17 repetitions of its solemn, five-bar theme.

LA VALSE: POÈME CHORÉGRAPHIQUE, FOR TWO PIANOS
Maurice Ravel (b. Ciboure, France, March 7, 1875; d. Paris, December 28, 1937)
Composed 1919-20; 11 minutes

La valse is a disturbing work, a product of the disturbing times in which Ravel worked on it. He began the score before the First World War as a symphonic poem to be called Wien (Vienna). “It is a grand waltz,” he wrote at the time, “a kind of homage to the memory of the great Strauss – not Richard – the other, Johann!” La valse only took its final form in 1920, when both Vienna and the world around Ravel himself were very different places.

By 1920, Imperial Vienna had forever changed and Ravel’s attitude towards its ideals had been shaped by events in Europe. He dropped the original title of the piece and reworked its music as a ‘choreographic poem.’ He no longer referred to his score as an apotheosis of the Viennese waltz. Still, all the surface charm of the Straussian waltz appears to be present in La valse. But there are unsettling undertones and snatches of uneasy tension that couldn’t have been written before the war. The fantastic and fatal whirling seems to speak of narcissism and the end of an era. The typical Viennese ‘lift’ to the music seems ironic. The very bones of the waltz are laid out in front of us, picked over and fall apart, even as we listen. Diaghilev commissioned La valse from Ravel for his Ballets Russes. But he rejected the music with a perceptive comment: “It’s a masterpiece,” he said. “But it isn’t so much a ballet as the portrait of a ballet, a painting of a ballet.” One side of the canvas is an impressionist representation of the waltz; the other is expressionist. Ravel himself completed the two-piano version while still working on the orchestration of the piece.

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