

Daniil Trifonov

Thursday, February 1, 2018 at 8:00pm

This is the 798th concert in Koerner Hall

PROGRAM

Federico Mompou: Variations on a Theme of Chopin

Robert Schumann: "Chopin" from *Carnaval: Scènes mignonnes sur quatre notes*, op. 9

Edvard Grieg: "Hommage à Chopin" from *Moods*, op. 73

Samuel Barber: Nocturne (Homage to John Field), op. 33

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky: "Un poco di Chopin," op. 72, no. 15

Sergei Rachmaninov: Variations on a Theme of Chopin, op. 22

Tema: Largo

Variation 1: Moderato

Variation 2: Allegro

Variation 3: L'istesso tempo

Variation 4: L'istesso tempo

Variation 5: Meno mosso

Variation 6: Meno mosso

Variation 7: Allegro

Variation 8: L'istesso tempo

Variation 9: L'istesso tempo

Variation 10: Più vivo

Variation 12: Moderato

Variation 13: Largo

Variation 14: Moderato

Variation 15: Allegro scherzando

Variation 16: Lento

Variation 17: Grave

Variation 20: Presto

Variation 21: Andante

Variation 22: Maestoso – Tempo 1

Tema

INTERMISSION

Fryderyk Chopin: Variations on "Là ci darem la mano" from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, op. 2

Introduction. Largo—Poco più mosso

Thema. Allegretto

Variation 1. Brillante

Variation 2. Veloce, ma accuratamente

Variation 3. Sempre sostenuto

Variation 4. Con bravura

Variation 5. Adagio and Alla Polacca

Fryderyk Chopin: Piano Sonata No. 2 in B flat Minor, op. 35

- I. Grave - Doppio movimento
- II. Scherzo
- III. Marche funèbre: Lento
- IV. Finale: Presto

Federico Mompou

Born in Barcelona, Spain, April 16, 1893; died there, June 30, 1987

Variations on a Theme of Chopin (1938-57)

Catalan composer Federico Mompou composed the earliest sketches for his Variations on a Theme of Chopin in 1938 in Paris, almost a century after the Polish composer died in his adopted city. The idea initially began with Spanish cellist Gaspar Cassadó, a friend and fellow countryman, as a set of variations on Chopin's A Major Prelude, op. 28, no. 7. With just four sketches complete, the two musicians abandoned the project. Mompou resumed work on the variations 19 years later when England's Royal Ballet suggested developing the variations as a ballet, with the existing sketches providing the first four variations. He published the complete work in 1957 for solo piano and never saw it through to completion as a ballet.

Chopin's well-known A Major Prelude is one of his shortest and Mompou incorporates all 16 measures in his set of 12 variations with concluding epilogue. His first variation gently suggests the harmonic change to come, while the second whimsically nudges it a stage further. The nocturnal third shifts to D major and is for the left hand alone. A canonic texture is introduced in the nostalgic fourth variation, as the structure evolves into three sections. After another nod to Chopin in the crisp *Tempo di mazurka*, the sixth turns introspective and harmonically more distant. The étude-like no. 7 presents the greatest technical challenges and contrasts with the song-like no. 8, which is written in the spirit of Chopin's D flat and E Minor Preludes.

The ninth now pays tribute to the Chopin waltz and the tenth, headed *Évocation*, both quotes Mompou himself and transforms a melody from Chopin's *Fantaisie-Improvisation*, op. posth. into a quiet chorale. The last two variations become increasingly brilliant while always allowing Chopin's melody to keep its presence and the set concludes with Mompou's reflective harmonic musings on Chopin's A Major Prelude.

Robert Schumann

Born in Zwickau, Saxony, June 8, 1810; died in Endenich, nr. Bonn, July 29, 1856

"Chopin" from *Carnaval: Scènes mignonnes sur quatre notes*, op. 9 (1834-5)

"Chopin's works are guns buried in flowers," Schumann once prophetically wrote. He was speaking specifically of the mazurkas, an art form that Chopin established, but applying his revolutionary imagery to all of Chopin's music. In his piano cycle *Carnaval*, Schumann elects Chopin to his imaginary league of *Davidsbündler*, united in their vision of a 'new poetic age' in their fight against the Philistines. Chopin makes a brief, agitated, yet poetic appearance in the 12th piece in the cycle, which the 25-year-old Schumann composed in 1835.

Edvard Grieg

Born in Bergen, Norway, June 15, 1843; died there, September 4, 1907

"Hommage à Chopin" from *Moods*, op. 73 (1898-1905)

Edvard Grieg, dubbed “the Chopin of the North” by German pianist, conductor, and composer Hans von Bülow, held on to sketches for an F minor study, paying tribute to two Chopin Études, for more than three decades. They were polished into the stormy “Hommage à Chopin” and published in his final piano collection, titled *Moods*.

Samuel Barber

Born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, March 09, 1910; died in New York, New York, January 23, 1981

Nocturne (Homage to John Field), op. 33 (1959)

This short, dreamy Nocturne by American composer Samuel Barber marries some modified serial techniques with the traditional romantic characteristics of the nocturne. Its premiere was given by John Browning who said: “I doubt that Sam loved Field’s music the way he loved Chopin’s. So, in essence, Sam honours Chopin in this small but powerful work.”

Pyotr Il’yich Tchaikovsky

Born in Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia, April 25/May 7, 1840; died in St. Petersburg, Russia, October 25/November 6, 1893

“Un poco di Chopin,” op. 72, no. 15 (1893)

Just six months before his death, Tchaikovsky set himself a goal of composing one piece per day for a month. After a (relatively) slow start, things went well. “I cannot stop my ideas, which appear to me one after another, at all hours of the day,” he wrote. The result was a collection of 18 pieces, composed over 15 days. “Un poco di Chopin” is the second mazurka of the collection, with a waltz-like central section.

Sergei Rachmaninov

Born in Semyonovo, Russia, March 20/April 1, 1873; died in Beverly Hills, California, March 28, 1943

Variations on a Theme of Chopin, op. 22 (1902-3)

Eclipsed by the later Corelli Variations and the Paganini Rhapsody, the Chopin Variations nevertheless radiate the distinctive, virtuoso keyboard writing that made Rachmaninov renowned as a pianist. He wrote them in 1902-3, during a productive period following his wedding to his cousin and their honeymoon in Vienna and Bayreuth. The 30-minute score is the longest of the three sets of variations in Rachmaninov’s catalogue. It is based on the well-known C Minor Prelude, op. 28 by Chopin, itself assertive and soulful, tinged with introspective questioning – the second half of which Rachmaninov does not repeat. While continuous, Rachmaninov’s 22 variations are structured to create a feeling of forward momentum and growth within a loosely sonata-like framework of three or four movements (much like the Liszt Sonata).

Fryderyk Chopin

Born in Żelazowa Wola, nr. Warsaw, Poland, March 1, 1810; died in Paris, France, October 17, 1849

Variations on “Là ci darem la mano” from Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, op. 2

“Hat’s off, gentlemen – a genius!” wrote the 21-year-old Robert Schumann in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*. He was hailing the op. 2 of a fellow pianist and composer, the equally young Fryderyk Chopin from Poland. Chopin had published his brilliant variations primarily as a vehicle to display his own virtuosity at the keyboard. Schumann was bowled over by the music, but struggled unsuccessfully with the notes. So, he set himself a challenge of recreating Chopin’s notes in his own literary prose: “It seemed as though nothing but strange eyes were looking up at me – the eyes of flowers, basilisk eyes, peacock’s eyes, maiden’s eyes. Some passages seemed less strange. I

thought I saw Mozart's 'Là ci darem la mano' wind through a hundred chords, Leporello definitely seemed to wink at me, and Don Juan flew by in his white mantle ..."

The Variations are among the earliest of a number of large-scale works, including the two concertos, which Chopin wrote in Warsaw. They date from 1827 and the pianist-composer, not yet 20, had great success when he gave the premiere in Vienna with orchestra the following year. "After each variation, the applause was so loud that I could not hear the orchestra's *tutti*," he wrote to his family, confirming that he had mastered the conventions of the concert display piece for the piano, then the virtuoso instrument *par excellence*. An introduction, in which Chopin provides some of his most attractive and original writing, is followed by the theme (taken from the Act I duet from *Don Giovanni*, between Zerlina and the Don) and six variations of great beauty, brilliance, and seemingly spontaneous pyrotechnics. A rousing polonaise transforms Mozart's simple yet caressing theme to pure Chopin and, with it, provides a musical metaphor for the Don's power of seduction.

Piano Sonata No. 2 in B flat Minor, op. 35 (1837)

Chopin was in his late twenties when he put the finishing touches to his second piano sonata. He was in the middle of a passionate love affair with the notorious, cigar-smoking author George Sand, living in her house at Nohant in France. A funeral march he had written earlier was the starting point. But something profound seems to have happened in the two years since he first conceived its solemn pages. The funeral march was to become the emotional and structural focal point of the sonata; the other movements complement its emotional intensity and frame its structural position. The opening movement immediately establishes a turbulent sound world. Its two poles, where melancholy and tragedy alternate with consoling lyricism, are hallmarks of both the Scherzo which follows and the famous *Marche funèbre*. So established has this slow movement become as a requiem for the dead that, when we listen to the solemn tread of its dotted rhythms, associations beyond the music itself inevitably come to mind. After its broad expanse what can possibly follow? The whirlwind one-and-a-half-minute finale is at one level an enigma. Chopin provides few performing indications to help the interpreter make sense of its turbulent course in which the hands play rapid triplets an octave apart. At a deeper level, however, there is a logic and power to the music, which make the final fortissimo chord conclusive and inevitable.

- Program notes © 2018 Keith Horner

Daniil Trifonov

Piano

Russian pianist Daniil Trifonov has made a spectacular ascent in the world of classical music as a solo artist, a champion of the concerto repertoire, a collaborator at the keyboard in chamber music and song, and a composer. Combining consummate technique with rare sensitivity and depth, his performances are a perpetual source of awe.

Focusing on Chopin in the 2017-18 season, he released *Chopin: Evocation*, his fourth album as an exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist, which includes both works by Chopin himself and, marking Trifonov's first foray into a new repertoire, works of 20th-century composers who were greatly influenced by the Polish master, including Samuel Barber, Federico Mompou, and others. He gives over 20 recitals on the same theme across the US, Europe, and Asia this season.

Trifonov's other season highlights include a tour of Asia with a combination of recitals and orchestral performances, a European tour with violinist Gidon Kremer and Kremerata Baltica, the London Philharmonic, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the Teatro alla Scala Orchestra. Other orchestral appearances include Strauss's *Burleske* with the Spanish National Orchestra and Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra; the Schumann Concerto with Lisbon's Gulbenkian Orchestra and the Berlin Philharmonic; Prokofiev with the Mariinsky Orchestra led by Gergiev, and the Cleveland Orchestra led by Michael Tilson Thomas; Scriabin's Piano Concerto with the Seattle Symphony and Ludovic Morlot; a performance of his own piano concerto with the Detroit Symphony; and further Rachmaninov performances with Gergiev and the Munich Philharmonic, the Toronto Symphony led by Peter Oundjian, and the Philadelphia Orchestra under the baton of Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

His Deutsche Grammophon recordings include the Grammy Award nominated *Trifonov: The Carnegie Recital*, the pianist's first recording for the label and captured live at his sold-out 2013 Carnegie Hall recital debut; the Grammy Award nominated *Rachmaninov Variations*, recorded with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Yannick Nézet-Séguin; and *Transcendental*, a double album that represented Trifonov's third title as an exclusive artist and the first time Liszt's complete concert etudes had been recorded for the label in full.

His numerous awards include *Gramophone's* 2016 Artist of the Year, Third Prize in Warsaw's Chopin Competition, First Prize in Tel Aviv's Rubinstein Competition, and both First Prize and Grand Prix – an additional honour bestowed on the best overall competitor in any category – in Moscow's Tchaikovsky Competition during the 2011-12 season. In 2013 he was also awarded the prestigious Franco Abbiati Prize for Best Instrumental Soloist by Italy's foremost music critics.

Born in Nizhny Novgorod in 1991, Trifonov began his musical training at the age of five, and went on to attend Moscow's Gnessin School of Music as a student of Tatiana Zelikman, before pursuing his piano studies with Sergei Babayan at the Cleveland Institute of Music. He has also studied composition, and continues to write for piano, chamber ensemble, and orchestra.

Daniil Trifonov made his Royal Conservatory debut on April 14, 2013, and tonight marks his third appearance in Koerner Hall.