



presents

CHRISTIAN ZACHARIAS, piano

Friday, December 9, 2011, 8pm

Herbst Theatre

C.P.E. BACH

Sonata in A minor, Wq.57/2

Allegro

Andante

Allegro di molto

Rondo in C minor, Wq. 59/4

BRAHMS

Four Pieces for Piano, Opus 119

Intermezzo in B Minor

Intermezzo in E Minor

Intermezzo in C Major

Rhapsody in E-flat Major

BEETHOVEN

Piano Sonata in A-flat Major, Opus 110

Moderato cantabile molto espressivo

Allegro molto

*Adagio ma non troppo; Fugue: Allegro,
ma non troppo*

INTERMISSION

SCHUBERT

Piano Sonata in D Major, D.850

Allegro vivace

Con moto

Scherzo: Allegro vivace

Rondo: Allegro moderato

The Shenson Piano Series is made possible by Fred M. Levin and Nancy Livingston,
the Shenson Foundation.

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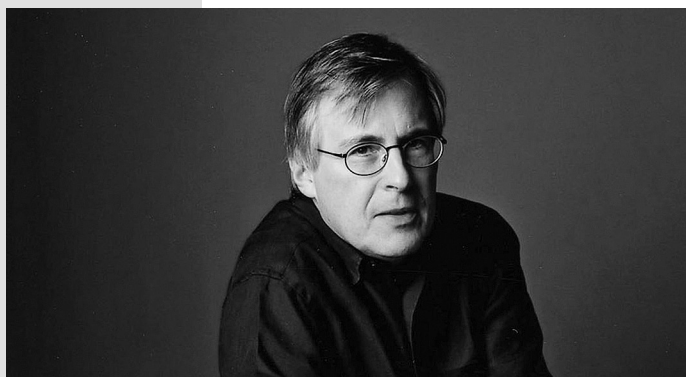


Photo: Nicole Chuard

Artist Profiles

Christian Zacharias makes his San Francisco recital debut with this performance.

Christian Zacharias

The qualities that make **Christian Zacharias** one of the world's most celebrated pianists have enabled him also to make his mark as a conductor, festival director, musical thinker, writer, and broadcaster: integrity married to individualism; deep musical insight matched by a sure poetic instinct; a brilliance in communication; a charismatic and commanding platform manner. He made his name first as a pianist, and continues to appear in concerto and recital worldwide. His career to date has also been distinguished by a small number of important chamber music relationships with esteemed colleagues including the Alban Berg Quartet, the Leipziger String Quartet, Heinrich Schiff, and Frank Peter Zimmermann.

This tendency to embark on long musical journeys with kindred spirits is reflected also in his work as conductor. Since 2000 Zacharias has been Principal Conductor of the Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne and with them he made a number of critically acclaimed recordings, including works by Mozart, Schumann, Chopin, and Michael Haydn. Especially notable is their ongoing complete cycle of Mozart's piano concertos. Volume III won an ECHO Classic 2008, and Volume IV both the Diapason d'Or and Choc du Monde de la Musique. The most recently released Volume V (Piano Concertos K 175, 246, and 488) has also been awarded the ECHO Classic 2010.

Zacharias has also been Principal Guest Conductor of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra since the 2002/03 season, and in 2009 he became an "Artistic Partner" of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. Additionally, he enjoys long-term relationships with many other orchestras such as Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, New York Philharmonic Orchestra, and Scottish Chamber Orchestra

with whom he appears as a regular guest. Most recently he has embarked on an operatic career with productions of two very different works: Mozart's opera seria *La Clemenza di Tito* (Geneva) and Offenbach's Opéra bouffe *La Belle Hélène*.

Zacharias' career has been marked by many awards and prizes, including, recently, the 2007 Midem Classical Award "Artist of the Year" in Cannes. After having been awarded for his services to the culture in Rumania in 2009, Christian Zacharias has recently been bestowed the highly honourable title of a "Officier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres" by the French state. Since 2011 Christian Zacharias has been professor for orchestra playing at the Academy of Music and Drama Gothenburg.

On the occasion of his 60th birthday, 2010, the Alte Oper Frankfurt arranged an "Artist's Portrait" of Christian Zacharias, which presented him as pianist, conductor, chamber musician, and as Lied accompanist with five concerts and three films. Renowned ensembles and colleagues appeared alongside him: he conducted the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra and the Opern- und Museumsorchester Frankfurt. In autumn 2011 he conducts a new production of *La Nozze di Figaro* at the Opéra Liège. Further conduct/play engagements lead him to the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, The Hague Philharmonic, the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of St. Luke's, Los Angeles Philharmonic and Gürzenich Orchester Köln as well as to the Konzerthausorchester Berlin. In Avery Fisher Hall he performs Beethoven's piano concerto No. 4 and Brahms' piano concerto No. 2 together with the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Jonathan Nott. Additionally he plays a few recitals in season 2011/12. Moreover, he is reinvited to conduct the Orchestre National de Lyon. Throughout the season, he also continues his close artistic cooperation with the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne, and with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra.

Program Notes

Sonata in A minor, Wq. 57/2 Rondo in C minor, Wq. 59/4

CARL PHILIPP EMANUEL BACH

Born March 8, 1714, Weimar
Died December 14, 1788, Vienna

Like many parents who never went to college, Johann Sebastian Bach was anxious

that his sons have university training and many opportunities he never had. While he gave his second son Carl Philipp Emanuel a thorough musical training, he sent the young man off to the University of Leipzig and the University of Frankfurt an der Oder to study law. But the lure of music proved too strong. Despite spending seven years in university study, Emanuel walked away from that training to devote himself to the keyboard and to composition, and in 1740 he was named court harpsichordist to Frederick the Great. He spent the next twenty-seven years in Berlin and Potsdam in service to Frederick, an accomplished amateur flute-player. In 1767 Emanuel succeeded Telemann as music director for the city of Hamburg, and he would remain in that city for the final two decades of his life.

Central to Emanuel's career were his many works for keyboard, which for him meant the clavichord (though he did play and compose for the fortepiano). He was concerned with the technique and theory of writing for the keyboard, and his *Essay on the True Art of Keyboard Playing*, written between 1753 and 1762, remains one of the most important eighteenth-century theories of keyboard music. Emanuel composed nearly two hundred keyboard sonatas, as well as a number of shorter works, including fantasias, rondos and others. These were published in Hamburg in six volumes and intended, in Emanuel's words, "für Kenner und Liebhaber" ("for connoisseurs and amateurs"). His sonatas show an evolution away from the binary form of earlier sonatas and toward an early incarnation of sonata form, in which contrasting material is developed and recapitulated. This music is often characterized by short phrases and the most rapid changes of mood, alternations that can pose particular expressive problems for a performer.

This recital opens with Emanuel's *Sonata in A minor*, one of a group of five keyboard sonatas that was probably composed in 1781. The work is in the three-movement fast-slow-fast sequence that Emanuel preferred in his sonatas. The opening *Allegro* proceeds along a sequence of brilliant exchanges between the hands. The *Andante* opens simply, but grows more complex as it develops, and eventually the music is full of syncopations, turns, grace-notes and long runs. It proceeds directly into the *Allegro di molto*, which races along its triplet rhythms to a firm close on a great rolled A minor chord.

The *Rondo in C minor* dates from 1785. Short, pithy and varied, it is full of those unexpected pauses and instant changes of mood that characterize so much of Emanuel's music for the keyboard.

Four Pieces for Piano, Opus 119

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born May 7, 1833, Hamburg
Died April 3, 1897, Vienna

As he approached his sixtieth birthday, Brahms returned to the instrument of his youth, the piano. The young Brahms—the "heaven-storming Johannes," as one of his friends described him—had established his early reputation as the composer of dramatic piano works: Of his first five published works, three were big-boned piano sonatas and he next produced a series of extraordinarily difficult sets of virtuoso variations. And then suddenly, at age thirty-two, Brahms walked away from solo piano music and, except for some brief pieces in the late 1870s, that separation would last nearly three decades.

When the aging Brahms returned to the instrument of his youth, he was a very different man and a very different composer from the "heaven-storming Johannes" of years before. During the summers of 1892–93, Brahms wrote twenty brief piano pieces and published them in four sets as his Opp. 116–119. While perhaps technically not as demanding as his early piano works, these twenty pieces nevertheless distill a lifetime of experience and technical refinement into very brief spans, and in their focused, inward, and sometimes bleak way, they offer some of Brahms' most personal and moving music. Someone once astutely noted that a cold wind blows through these late piano pieces; Brahms himself described them as "lullabies of my pain."

Brahms' Opus 119, published in 1893, consists of three intermezzos and a concluding rhapsody. Most of these brief pieces are in ABA form: a first theme, a countermelody usually in a contrasting tempo and tonality and a return to the opening material, usually varied on its reappearance. One of the shortest of Brahms' late piano pieces, the *Intermezzo in B minor* is also one of the most subtle, particularly in matters of rhythm. It opens with chains of falling thirds that seem to ripple like flashes of iridescence, and before we know it, Brahms has seamlessly transported us into the firmer center section. The return is just as subtle, and the music trails off into silence. In the *Intermezzo in E minor*, which Brahms marks *Andantino un poco agitato*, the pianist's two hands seem to be chasing each other through the murmuring, rhythmically-fluid opening section. The central episode dances gently (Brahms' marking is *teneramente*: "tenderly"); the music gradually makes its way back to the open-

ing material, now varied, and Brahms concludes with a faint whiff of the waltz-melody. The *Intermezzo in C Major*, marked *Grazioso e giocoso* (“Graceful and happy”), dances easily on its 6/8 meter. This piece has no true contrasting theme in its center—Brahms simply slows down his opening idea and uses that as the central episode before the return of the theme at its original tempo.

Brahms’ late piano music concludes with the powerful *Rhapsody in E-flat Major*. Brahms marks this music *Allegro risoluto*, and resolute it certainly is: The pounding chords from the beginning seem to echo throughout—they intrude even into the *grazioso* middle section. Instead of having that thunderous opening reappear in its original form, Brahms takes it through a subtle evolution on its return and, rather than returning to the home key of E-flat Major, he drives the music to its (resolute) close in E-flat minor.

Piano Sonata in A-flat Major, Opus 110

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born December 16, 1770, Bonn
Died March 26, 1827, Vienna

The years 1813 through 1820 were exceptionally difficult for Beethoven. Not only was he having financial difficulties, but this was also the period of his bitter legal struggle for custody of his nephew Karl. Under these stresses, and with the added burden of ill health, Beethoven almost stopped composing. Where the previous two decades had seen a great outpouring of music, his creative powers flickered and were nearly extinguished. Not until 1820 was he able to put his troubles, both personal and creative, behind him and marshal his energy as a composer. At the end of May 1820 he committed himself to writing three piano sonatas for the Berlin publisher Adolph Martin Schlesinger. These were Beethoven’s final sonatas. Although he claimed he wrote them “in one breath,” their composition was actually spread out over a longer period than he expected when he agreed to write them.

The *Sonata in A-flat Major*, completed in December 1821, shows some of the most original touches in a group of sonatas that are all distinguished for their originality. The first movement, *Moderato cantabile molto espressivo*, is remarkable for its lovely and continuous lyricism. Beethoven notes that the opening is to be played *con amabilità*, and that spirit hovers over the entire movement. The essentially lyric quality of this movement is

underlined by the fact that the second theme grows immediately out of the first: The opening idea has barely been stated when the second seems to rise directly out of it. By contrast, the bluff *Allegro molto* is rough and ready—it is a scherzo with a brief trio section full of energy and rhythmic surprises.

The long final movement is of complex structure. It performs the function of both adagio and finale, yet even these elements are intermixed with great originality. The main theme of the *Adagio*, marked *Arioso dolente*, arches painfully over a steady chordal accompaniment before Beethoven introduces a fugue marked *Allegro, ma non troppo*. After a brief working-out, the fugue comes to a halt and the *Arioso* theme returns. This time, however, Beethoven has marked it *Ermattet, klagend* (exhausted, grieving), and here the music seems almost choked and struggling to move. Yet gradually the music gathers strength and the fugue returns, but this time Beethoven has inverted the theme and builds the fugue on this inversion. The sonata ends with a great rush upward across five octaves to the triumphant final chord.

Piano Sonata in D Major, D.850

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Born January 31, 1797, Vienna
Died November 19, 1828, Vienna

In the spring of 1825, Franz Schubert—his health and his strength recovered after a devastating illness—set out on an extended visit to northern Austria. Schubert loved it there: he wrote to his parents in Vienna that the “surroundings here are truly heavenly and have deeply moved and benefitted me,” and he traveled a great deal, visiting Steyr, Linz, Gmunden, Gastein and other places. He was also writing music. That summer he drafted the symphony that he would complete three years later as the “Great” *C-Major Symphony*, and he wrote for the piano as well; his major work was the *Piano Sonata in D Major*, completed in August at Gastein and published the following spring in Vienna.

This music is today one of Schubert’s most-admired sonatas, but that was not always the case, and it is astonishing how one piece of music can have had such radically different things said about it. A generation ago, one critic spoke of this sonata as “uneven,” and Alfred Einstein called the first movement “a little empty”; even Robert Schumann, one of Schubert’s most fervent admirers, could not understand the relation between the finale and the rest of the sonata. Yet all of these opinions have been stood on their head by

more recent criticism, which now considers this sonata among Schubert’s finest creations. What had seemed failings to previous generations—the generous proportions and the refusal to develop according to the model of the Beethoven sonata—have come to seem virtues, and this sonata has been particularly praised as an alternative vision of what a sonata might be.

This is a big sonata: It is in four movements that stretch out to nearly forty minutes. All commentators praise the harmonic freedom in Schubert’s handling of sonata form, but even more remarkable here is his use of rhythm as a structural element. Some of the movements are shaped by certain cell-like rhythmic patterns that repeat constantly. The powerful opening of the *Allegro vivace* seems consciously to evoke the world of Beethoven, yet these grand gestures are almost athematic, the product more of a repetitive rhythm than a melodic theme. The plunging second subject, marked *un poco più lento*, combines dotted rhythms and triplets, and across its long span this movement treats the impulses bound up in these quite different rhythms.

The second movement should be a slow movement, but it is not. Instead, Schubert marks it *Con moto*, and while it is never fast, this movement stays in constant motion. The rhythm that opens it—three eighths and a downbeat—will recur almost obsessively throughout this movement: one critic has counted one hundred sixty appearances of this figure. That sounds monotonous, but it is not; these rhythms grow more ornate, and suddenly this simple figure turns into something varied and expressive. Einstein calls this “one of the richest and most intimate” movements ever written.

The *Scherzo* depends heavily on dotted rhythms, while its trio section proceeds on steady chordal melodies. The rondo-finale has attracted the most attention, for it takes us miles away from the Beethoven-like stresses of the very beginning. It is built on a main theme of such innocence that it sounds like a music-box tune: it is universally described as “child-like.” Yet it is child-like in the same sense that the finale of Brahms’ *Second Piano Concerto* seems innocent after the fury that has preceded it: both works strike a consciously non-heroic pose in their finales. Schubert provides the requisite episodes along the way, but the main theme, in all its innocence, always returns, and finally this huge sonata is rounded off by one last fleeting brush of this delicate little tune.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger