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3-23-2024

Emma Ross, Senior Piano Recital

Emma Ross

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THE CEDARVILLE UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF
MUSIC AND WORSHIP

PRESENTS THE

SENIOR PIANO RECITAL

OF

EMMA ROSS

SATURDAY, MARCH 23, 2024
7 P.M.

RECITAL HALL
BOLTHOUSE CENTER FOR MUSIC
DIXON MINISTRY CENTER

PROGRAM

Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesus Christ, BWV 639 J. S. Bach (1685–1750)
tr. Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924)

8 Fantasiestücke, Op. 12 Robert Schumann (1810–1856)
II. Aufschwung

Vocalise, Op. 34, No. 14 Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)
tr. Alan Richardson (1904–1978)

Ballade No. 1 in g minor, Op. 23 Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)

Student:

Sonatina in a minor Jiří Antonín Benda (1722–1795)
Elisabeth Weaver

Squaring Off Eugénie Rocherolle (b. 1939)
Elisabeth Weaver and Emma Ross

Oblivion Astor Piazzolla (1921–1992)
tr. John Mortensen (b. 1965)

Libertango Astor Piazzolla
arr. Emma Ross (b. 2002)

The Garden of Eden William Bolcom (b. 1938)
III. The Serpent's Kiss

Organ Sonata No. 4 in e minor, BWV 528 J. S. Bach
tr. August Stradal (1860–1930)

II. Andante

Emma is a student of John Mortensen.

This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the
Bachelor of Music in keyboard pedagogy degree.

Program Notes

Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesus Christ

Ich ruf zu dir is part of a church cantata composed by Bach and first performed in 1732. Originally written for organ and transcribed for piano by Ferruccio Busoni, the text of the cantata is taken from a 16th-century hymn by Johann Agricola. The first time I heard *Ich ruf zu dir*, I appreciated the simplicity of the soprano line and the calm but steady chord progression. While working on it, I have grown to see that “still waters run deep”—there is much more beneath the surface of the soprano than I first heard. The alto line constantly weaves a doubtful image of fear and inadequacy as the soprano slowly escalates in unshakable confidence described as “the indecisiveness of mankind cloaked in deceptive simplicity.” (Netherlands Bach Society) This juxtaposition beautifully depicts the hymn text—the prayer of a despairing man crying out for God to sustain his faith and give him strength to endure the various trials of the Christian life. I have been encouraged by the text of this hymn while preparing this recital, especially the first verse.

*I call to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
I pray, hear my lamentation,
bestow your grace on me at this time,
do not let me despair;
I think that I have the right faith, Lord,
which you wanted to give me,
to live for you,
to be useful to my neighbour,
to keep your word properly.*
(tr. Francis Browne)

Aufschwung

Schumann's *Fantasiestücke* is a collection of eight piano pieces written in 1837. The pieces represent Schumann's dual personality—the dreamy Eusebius alternating with the fiery Florestan. *Aufschwung* translates to “soaring,” and this piece explores the exciting uplift of flight. You could think of this piece as a plane ride: an explosive takeoff is contrasted by a gentle secondary theme as one thermal in the clouds. This is followed by a playful middle section in which Schumann performs various acrobatic maneuvers before firing up the afterburners to coast through the original and secondary theme once again. The piece culminates in a less than ideally controlled landing from which the pilot triumphantly struts away. I have enjoyed playing with the contrasting characters in this piece, as well as solving various technical challenges through lots of redistribution.

Vocalise

Rachmaninoff composed his *Vocalise* for voice with piano accompaniment in 1915, later arranging it for voice and orchestra. Many other transcriptions for a myriad of instruments and ensembles have been created, including this one for solo piano by Alan Richardson. When performed with voice, the vocal line is sung without words on a single vowel of the singer's choice. The melody of this piece is devastatingly beautiful, and I immediately fell in love with the heart-wrenching tune. It has been immensely rewarding to dissect this piece and work through showing the counterpoint within the inner lines, as well as learning how to guard the melody from falling and breaking the carefully woven spell.

Ballade No. 1 in g minor

Chopin composed this ballade in 1835, and it remains one of his most popular and greatest works. The famous opening phrase outlines the Neapolitan chord in a dramatic arpeggio without resolution. Two main themes are introduced, then developed in other keys throughout the piece. The themes are repeated in reverse order in their original key before the introduction of the coda. The fiery and passionate coda outlines the original Neapolitan harmony before ending in fragmented scales and snippets of previous material. Although an absolute work, the title, “Ballade,” conjures images of an epic poem told by minstrels. The music is appropriately picturesque, ranging from growing storms, a romantic love theme, pastoral fields, raucous carnivals, delicate waltzes, and sweeping plains, followed by the tumultuous coda—the scenery of a future epic. This has been the most technically demanding piece I have ever worked on due to the stamina needed to move between the various difficulties. I have been challenged to think through preparing the transitions between each section, as well as how to display various characters while navigating technical obstacles. This piece has been immensely rewarding to tackle and performing it on my senior recital has been a longstanding dream of mine.

Oblivion

One of Piazzolla's most popular tangos, *Oblivion* was written in 1982 for bandoneón (similar to an accordion), piano, and bass. It was commissioned for the film *Enrico IV* (Henry IV) which tells the story of a man who delusionally thinks he is King Henry IV after a fall from his horse. While addled, he kills a rival in love. After recovering his mental faculties, he continues to pretend to be mad to avoid the consequences of his murder. Less jazzy than some of Piazzolla's other tangos, this piece features a passionate melody full of sorrowful desire. *Oblivion* straddles the line between serious concert hall music and accompaniment to the tango dancers of Buenos Aires. I love over-the-top gooey romanticism with many nuanced layers to sort through and this piece is full of both—a melancholic melody over a broken accompaniment trying to free itself from oblivion.

Libertango

Combining "Libertad" (Spanish for liberty), and tango, *Libertango* is symbolic of Piazzolla's break from classical tango to the new world of tango nuevo. *Libertango* deconstructs many of the traditional tango elements such as rhythm, uses counterpoint in new ways, and even adds in instruments such as the electric guitar. Perhaps in a similarly liberating spirit to Piazzolla, Dr. Mortensen suggested that I incorporate elements of improvisation in a prelude as I began learning this piece. That morphed into improvising a middle section, then ending, and the final product is an almost entirely improvised piece. While improvisation is out of my comfort zone, I have appreciated learning the rules that govern it and enjoyed the freedom to try out some of my own musical ideas. I have chosen to keep Piazzolla's original riff and thematic material, while interspersing ideas of my own on top of the harmonic progression and rhythmic pulse. The result is a schmaltsy and syncopated dance.

The Serpent's Kiss

The Garden of Eden is a set of four piano rags loosely based on the Genesis narrative and completed in 1960 by William Bolcom. *Old Adam* is described by the composer as a "chicken scratch," *The Eternal Feminine* "evokes the mystery of women," and *Through Eden's Gates* "has Adam and Eve calmly cakewalking out of paradise." The third rag, *The Serpent's Kiss*, although not exactly reverent, displays the devious cunning of the serpent in the garden. This piece uses a traditional rag template and rhythms, along with chromaticism juxtaposed with contemporary compositional techniques. Called a rag fantasy, this piece features vignettes with dramatically shifting tempos, textures, tonality, and expression with a manic and virtuosic ending. Pulling off the performativity of this piece—along with its extramusical surprises and good 'ole toe-tapping—has once again challenged the boundaries of my musicianship.

Organ Sonata No. 4 (Andante)

Bach's fourth organ sonata is described as a "trio sonata"—written as three-part music for two manuals and a pedal. It showcases the deep emotion of Bach's music, conveying "a unique sorrow intertwined with its melodic graces." (Vikinger Ólafsson) Stradal's transcription for piano masterfully keeps the complexity of changed voicing, insistent repetition, and grief of the original. The music starts delicately and then adds voices while beginning to build up excruciating tension that is only released in the thunderbolt of a powerful climax. Learning this piece has exercised my patience, attention to detail, and absolute precision while listening. I adore the music of Bach, and crafting the sound and pacing of this piece from the serene opening to the shattering awe of the finale has seemed a humble offering and culmination to my time here at Cedarville. Soli Deo gloria!