

The program is based on the two quintessential ways of human expression which are manifested in music; the dance- expression through choreography and movement, and the song or melody- expression through voice and sound.

The pieces and the composers demonstrate the dynamic relationship and the integration between these two profound elements in an ingenious way.

I will open the program with a French Dance Suite by J.S.Bach.

Bach writes here long melodies using complex counterpoint, and underneath these, establishes the distinct rhythmic identity of each dance, some associated with the country from which they originated. The harmony remains rather consistent from one dance to the next, which binds the movements of the suite.

Among the many attributes of Bach's genius, his French Dance Suites capture with utmost vibrancy elements from choreography in the form of instrumental writing.

I chose the C minor because its poignancy and poeticism speaks to me.

The more music by Chopin I study, I discover the magnitude of Bach's presence in Chopin's life. The influence was prevalent in Chopin's teaching, playing, writings, and in his compositions. I chose to play two of Chopin's last major compositions, which he composed 3 years before his death. Both of the pieces are single movement pieces, and encompass Chopin's revolutionary innovativeness, and unprecedented freedom of form. In both pieces I feel a sense of a journey which is complete, with a breadth of emotions one would experience in a span of a lifetime, from the most intimate and desolate moments to the most exuberant and passionate ones.

The "barcarolle"- a boatman's song, moves with a constant rhythmic lilt like the rocking of a boat on the water.

The "Polonaise-fantaisie"- juxtaposes two compositional ideas (as the title suggests), which interweave a sense of freedom and suspense with a sense of untamed motion. To me, the two ideas represent the notion of life and after-life, of fantasy and reality, encapsulating both Chopin's composition and improvisation. Like in Bach, the linear melodic writing is entangled with the dance rhythm. Other times, the Polonaise interrupts the 'fantasy' moments, and brings the piece to a stoic end, as if to conclude that life prevails.

My personal feeling is that the composition is autobiographic; throughout most of the piece there is a strong sense of transition, motion, abundance of new musical ideas and modulations, until a turning-point during which we experience moments of repose, and peace, and from which emerges the first nostalgic sentiment, starting to look back to the past.

Debussy wrote that "Chopin was the greatest of all composers, for through the piano alone he discovered everything....". Chopin set a new path especially for composers who wrote new literature for piano like Debussy and Faure.

I chose to play two very contrasting pieces by Debussy. In the first one, "Pagodes", Debussy invented a new soundscape, that emulates Javanese Gamelan instruments, rhythm, and modes. That entails a very specific approach to sound projection and to expressivity on the pianist's part.

The second piece is the morbid waltz- I envision it as Debussy's mocking of a certain display of sentimentality (initially), but actually becoming a charming tonal piece, saturated with the harmonies of Debussy.

I inserted the additional Debussy pieces from Images because of the connection with both Schumann and Chopin. Those sonic connections were purely instinctive at first, but the more I became familiar with the Images, I heard more proximities between the pieces, which I hope will be obvious to the audience.

The 'Homage a Rameau', clearly a Sarabande, is not only circling back to the Baroque dance, but also shares melodic notes and tonality with Chopin's Polonaise-fantaisie.

Faure was a master of art-song composition. While Chopin wrote melodies that imitated the vocal qualities of Bel Canto, Faure took after Chopin in his setting of a beautiful long vocal line and accompaniment texture. There are obvious features that are shared between the Nocturnes of Faure and Chopin.

What Faure contributed to the Nocturne as a genre is the complex dialogues between the different voices, the original harmonic exploration, and the adventurous structure.

This Nocturne to me starts as a reminiscent of Chopin 3rd piano sonata (3rd movement). It swings as a dreamy lullaby, but is interrupted by a the contrasting urgent and dramatic middle section, which transitions magically into an unexpected playful ending.

Erwin Schulhoff was an established pianist and composer. A Czech-German Jew, he was captured and taken to a concentration camp in Germany during World War II, where he found his death.

Schulhoff was a brilliant pianist, of both classical and Jazz music. He took several lessons with Debussy, who was one of the composers that influenced his music. He was also taken by American ragtime and Jazz.

Schulhoff composed the suite of "Five Jazz Etudes" in the 1926.

The last etude, the "Toccata" is based on a ragtime by Zez Confrey called "Kitten on the Keys". Schulhoff had a very wide range of compositional styles and influences, including composers from the second Viennese school, Arnold Schoenberg, and Alban Berg- whose piano sonata he performed.

I would hope that his exquisite and invigorating writing for the piano will inspire young generation pianists to perform his music, and introduce it to listeners around the world.

-Renana Gutman