

Frederic Chiu

Sunday, July 20, 2008 4:00 pm


Portland International Piano Festival
Miller Hall, World Forestry Center

Program

- CHOPIN** Five Etudes from Op. 10 and Op. 25
Op. 25, No. 1, in A-flat Major
Op. 10, No. 10, in A-flat Major
Op. 10, No. 4, in C-sharp minor
Op. 10, No. 3, in E Major
Op. 10, No. 12, in C minor
- DEBUSSY** *Cloches à travers les feuilles* from *Images II*, No. 1
- RAVEL** *Une barque sur l'océan*, from *Miroirs*

Intermission

- PROKOFIEV/CHIU** Excerpts from *Lieutenant Kijé Suite*
Romance
Kijé's Wedding
Troika
- PROKOFIEV** Toccata, Op. 11
- BEETHOVEN/LISZT** Symphony No. 5 in C minor, Op. 67
Allegro con brio
Andante con moto
Scherzo. Allegro
Allegro



Mr. Chiu appears by arrangement with
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Recordings: Harmonia Mundi

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Program subject to change

Program Notes

As unusual as it may seem, the piano ranks among the most influential inventions in human history, on a level with the printing press and the Internet. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the rise of the middle class, the expansion of culture, and music in particular, was enabled by the access to this versatile, easy-to-play instrument. Easy-to-play? The piano is just a series of buttons with preset notes. You can play it with a finger, a nose (as Mozart did in one of his pieces!) or the tip of an umbrella — not to mention the varied ways of playing the piano on the inside — strumming the strings themselves.

There is no special hand position to learn, or blowing technique to perfect in order to even play a single note well.

Versatile, because the piano can do something almost no other instrument can do — play many notes at the same time. The organ can, the harpsichord can, but only the piano can play those notes with varying degrees of color and volume at the same time! This is why the piano became the staple in every home, ubiquitous in the same way as the stereo in the twentieth century, and the computer today.

Tonight's program is an example of that versatile, if not of the easy-to-play, character of the piano. Techniques for the piano have evolved over its three-hundred-year history, with major proponents of those techniques appearing all along its timeline.

Chopin was one of the major figures in that timeline. He developed a new approach to playing the piano that freed it from more than a hundred years of technical bondage. Developments in technology allowed the piano to be more powerful, more colorful, and more durable. Chopin wrote his Etudes for that instrument, even as it was being developed, forcing the piano to sing and emote in ways that had not been heard or imaged before him.

Debussy and Ravel developed their approach to the piano at the same time, in a kind of rivalry

that brings to mind a Picasso–Monet rivalry, or the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. Essentially, their approach to the piano broke from the Chopin tradition — sprouted from that tradition — and pushed the piano into new areas of color and nuance. One can hear the rustling leaves in Debussy's *Cloches à travers les feuilles*, and certainly the crashing waves in Ravel's *Une barque sur l'océan*.

Prokofiev took the piano back, in some ways, to its origins as a percussion instrument. He was a great pianist himself, and understood the potential of the instrument as a singing instrument (*Romance from Lieutenant Kijé Suite*), and a coloring tool (the bells in *Troika*), but he added the harsh rhythmic approach to the piano that he is known for today (*Toccata*).

All of these techniques were understood and used by Franz Liszt, whom many consider to be the greatest pianist in history. It was the piano's ability to sing, to change color, and to create decisive attacks that allowed Liszt to use it as an orchestra, and even attempt to evoke the multiple colors and textures of the symphonic orchestra. The Fifth Symphony was the first symphony that Liszt attempted to transcribe, and it became one of his most popular concert pieces. Often, he would have another piano or two waiting in the wings, to be brought out to replace an ailing instrument sprouting broken strings and hammers, injuries sustained in battle!

— Program notes by Frederic Chiu



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