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VIVA VRS!

FALL CONCERTS 2021

Juho Pohjonen piano

Sunday October 31 2021

From the Artistic Director

Dear Friends:

If you ask me why it's taken me 10 years to invite Juho Pohjonen to return to the VRS, I can't give you the answer! I've always been a huge fan of his intelligence and musicianship.

Before I got around to booking Juho for the first time, I was listening to a tape (yes, I said *tape* — my car at the time had a cassette player!) of him playing Mozart. It was 2007, and Alfred Brendel was in town to perform for the VRS. I was about to drive him somewhere, and when I started up the car, Juho's playing automatically came through the speakers because I'd forgotten to switch off the tape. As I reached over to turn it off, Mr. Brendel said, "Oh don't do that! This is very interesting playing!" Right after I dropped Mr. Brendel at his destination, I went back to the office and booked Juho for his first appearance in Vancouver in 2008! That performance marked his Canadian debut, and it was quite wonderful. He returned to our stage in 2011.



I'm thrilled with the program Juho has chosen for this performance: Mozart Fantasy and Sonata in C minor followed after intermission by Prokofiev 6th Sonata.

I would like to thank our Season Sponsor, the Peak Group of Companies, the City of Vancouver, and our generous donors and patrons.

Enjoy the performance!

Leila



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The use of cellphones and recording devices is prohibited in the concert hall. Please take this opportunity to turn off all electronic devices.

音乐厅内禁止使用手机，禁止拍照，录音，录像。请观众关闭所有电子器材，谢谢您的合作。

Program

CLASSIC AFTERNOONS AT THE PLAYHOUSE SERIES

Juho Pohjonen, piano

Sunday, October 31, 2021 2:00pm
Vancouver Playhouse

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)
Fantasy in C minor K 475

Adagio - Allegro - Andantino - Più allegro
- Tempo primo

(approx. 12 minutes)

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)
Sonata in C minor K 457

Molto allegro
Adagio
Allegro assai

(approx. 18 minutes)

INTERMISSION

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891-1953)
Sonata No. 6 in A major Op. 82

Allegro moderato
Allegretto
Tempo di valzer lentissimo
Vivace

(approx. 26 minutes)

Season Sponsor



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Juho Pohjonen piano

Early Life & Education: Juho began his piano studies in 1989 at the Junior Academy of the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, and subsequently earned a Master's Degree from Meri Louhos and Hui-Ying Liu-Tawaststjerna at the Sibelius Academy in 2008.

This Season: In 2021-2022 Pohjonen performs Daniel Bjarnason's concerto for piano *Processions* with the Helsinki Philharmonic with the composer at the podium. Continuing his long-standing relationship with Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Pohjonen performs at Alice Tully Hall on two separate occasions this season in programs featuring works by Stravinsky, Debussy, Shostakovich and Mendelssohn. Additional chamber projects include a performance at Parlance Chamber Concerts with Danbi Um and Paul Huang and Cliburn Concerts with Danbi and Karim Sulayman.

Recordings: Juho's most recent recording with cellist Inbal Segev features cello sonatas by Chopin and Grieg, and Schumann's *Fantasiestücke*, hallmarks of the Romantic repertoire. *Plateaux*, his debut recording on Dacapo Records, featured works by late Scandinavian composer Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, including the solo piano suite *For Piano*, and piano concerto *Plateaux pour Piano et Orchestre*, with the Danish National Symphony Orchestra and conductor Ed Spanjaard.

Awards & Prizes: Juho was selected by Sir András Schiff as the winner of the 2009 Klavier Festival Ruhr Scholarship, and has won prizes at international and Finnish competitions.

Did you know: Juho Pohjonen launched *MyPianist* in 2019, an AI-based iOS app that provides interactive piano accompaniment to musicians everywhere. Designed and programmed by Juho himself and infused with his keen musical sensibility, *MyPianist* acts as a "virtual pianist" for musicians looking to hone their skills or learn new material.



Photo credit: J. Henry Fair

Juho Pohjonen is represented by Kirshbaum Associates Inc., New York.

Program Notes

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart **Fantasy in C minor K 475**

The year 1785 was a good one for Mozart. In the words of musicologist John Irving, he had become something of a 'hot property' in Vienna, enjoying considerable success both as a published composer and as a performing musician. But Mozart had also acquired a reputation as a gifted improviser, if we are to believe the swooning testimony of Johann Friedrich Schink in his *Literarische Fragmente* of 1785:

And his improvisations, what a wealth of ideas! What variety! What contrasts in passionate sounds! One swims away with him unresistingly on the stream of his emotions.

One notable occasion at which the ecstatic Schink might have needed his swim trunks and inner tube was a benefit concert which took place on 15 December 1785 at one of Vienna's Masonic lodges. Mozart had become a Mason the previous year and for this concert contributed a cantata as well as a piano concerto, and for the grand finale of the evening held forth with his own 'fantasias', i.e., improvisations.

Was it by coincidence that, just the week before, an advertisement had appeared in the *Wiener Zeitung* announcing the publication by Viennese publishing house Artaria of Mozart's *Fantasy in C minor* (K. 475) paired with a keyboard sonata in the same key (K. 457), or was it merely clever marketing?

This original pairing of fantasy and sonata in the same publication has led many pianists to perform the two works together as a single unit, the fantasy serving as an elaborate 'slow introduction' to the sonata. The young Beethoven may have thought the pairing aesthetically effective when he composed his *Sonata in C minor* Op. 13 in 1798. Apart from the shared key, the *Pathétique* shares many characteristics with the fantasy-sonata publication, its *fp* opening followed by a sigh motive being only the most obvious.

Then again, the original joint publication might simply have been for commercial convenience, since the two works were composed a good half-year apart, and Mozart is known to have performed the fantasy as an independent work. Indeed, the Fantasy seems to have had an unusually high profile in the decade after its publication, spawning pirate editions in Mannheim and Berlin, and even making a cameo appearance in contemporary literature when performed by a

character in Wilhelm Heinse's experimental novel *Hildegard von Hohenthal* (1795).

* * *

Mozart's Fantasy is comprised of six sections of contrasting character, alternating between deeply expressive, modulating passages and more harmonically stable sections of melody and accompaniment that would be perfectly at home in any sonata movement. Remarkable in this work is the unusual vehemence of expression in the two central modulating sections. The first of these, with its jangling tremolos of alarm in the treble, would not be out of place accompanying a silent movie in which a young girl is being tied to the railroad tracks. The emotional intensity of the 'escape operas' of the 1790s was evidently already on the horizon. Remarkable as well is how Mozart exploits the full range of the keyboard in the cadenza-like sections, especially the deep bass register. Indeed, passages occur in which both hands play below middle C.

Despite its harmonic wanderings to remote key centres, the final section of this work is in a solid C minor, providing a degree of symmetry to balance the wild turbulence that characterizes its emotional trajectory.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart **Sonata in C minor K 457**

In 1785 Mozart's Sonata in C minor was published together with the composer's Fantasia in C minor as a single opus, with the Fantasia forming a kind of introductory 'prelude' to the sonata. Scholars are divided as to whether or not this was Mozart's intention. Certainly, the common key of C minor and a shared fondness for heightened musical drama link the two works. Not to mention how the practice of combining an improvisatory movement with a more formally rigorous one has traditional roots in the Baroque pairing of fantasy and fugue.

And yet this three-movement sonata is entirely capable of standing on its own. It is a small sonata with big ideas: operatic in its wide range of emotions, orchestral in many of its effects (especially its imitation of alternating orchestral 'choirs' of instruments), and pianistic in its unabashed display of quasi-virtuosic keyboard techniques, all of which have been cited as possible influences on – and perhaps even models for – some of the early sonatas of Beethoven in a minor key.

* * *

The work opens with an imperious fanfare: an arpeggio rising dramatically over more than an octave. This abrupt gesture looks back to a similar instrumental effect, associated with mid-18th-century orchestras in south-west Germany, called the “Mannheim rocket” while at the same time looking forward to a similar opening in Beethoven’s first piano sonata, the Sonata in F minor Op. 2 No. 1.

Cowering in the upper register of the keyboard where this fanfare left off is a timid little answer full of plaintive sighs. A subsequent repeat of this Punch & Judy show establishes from the outset the wide emotional range that this sonata will claim for itself. Indeed, off-beat accents and abrupt juxtapositions of loud and soft are recurring features of the movement, features that may have given Beethoven ideas to follow up on.

The movement’s second theme, singing out in the major mode atop a burbling Alberti bass is more sociable, with hand-crossing replies echoing up from the bass. But even this theme is not immune to unexpected interruptions. One of the most dramatic is a passage of broken-chord figuration that extends from the bottom to the very top of the fortepiano keyboard of Mozart’s time, an indication that this movement may have been written for the composer’s personal use, with his own hand in mind. He was known to be a bit of a show-off at times, we hear.

The second-movement *Adagio* is no less spectacular in its own way. It is a study in melodic ornamentation and remarkable for the myriad possibilities that Mozart finds to decorate its simple melodic structures, structured around chord tones that sit on top of an audaciously rudimentary harmonic undergirding. Slow movements are not normally the place for virtuoso fireworks, but included in the decorative detail of *this* slow movement are breathtaking ecstatic runs spanning more than three octaves that astonish the ear.

The *Allegro assai* finale is a rondo that returns to the restlessness mood of the first movement, typified by the confrontational manner in which its opening refrain melody is structured. It begins *piano* with a series of suspensions that evoke a feeling of whimpering pathos, but then turns on a dime to become aggressive and insistent, with shoulder-poking repeated notes ringing out *forte* in a foretaste of the rondo refrain from Beethoven’s *Pathétique* Sonata. Even the coquettish quality of this rondo’s interludes cannot mask the troubled atmosphere evoked by its many sudden changes in dynamics and the searching

quality of its numerous dramatic pauses. This is Mozart at his most ‘Beethovenian’.

Sergei Prokofiev Sonata No. 6 in A major Op. 82

Prokofiev’s Piano Sonata No. 6 is the first of the three “War Sonatas” (Nos. 6, 7, and 8) written between 1939 and 1944 while the Soviet Union was at war with Nazi Germany. The Sixth Sonata was completed in 1940 and demonstrates well the obsessive rhythmic drive, percussive attack, and dissonance-encrusted harmonies that characterize Prokofiev’s style of piano-writing. The work comprises four movements which, given the extreme modernity of their musical language, are laid out in a surprisingly traditional pattern: sonata-form first movement, second movement scherzo, slow third movement, and rondo finale.

The sonata opens with an arresting ‘motto’ that descends three scale steps, first as a major 3rd and then a minor 3rd, changing C natural to C #. This creates a brilliantly colourful bitonal effect that, even if it weren’t stutteringly repeated almost 40 times in the course of the exposition, would be memorable. A more tranquil second subject offers a contrasting vision of where things are going, but both are put through the wringer in a development section peppered with repeated notes before the opening motto returns in a recapitulation of brutal directness enacted over a keyboard range of more than six octaves.

The Allegretto second movement has been called a “quick march” and with a dependable four staccato beats to the bar its metrical regularity comes as a welcome relief after the chaotic events of the first movement. Its *espressivo* middle section adds a more expansive note of mystery and wonder to the proceedings. This movement ends almost humorously as its colourful harmonic pulses veer into port just at the last moment, in the very last bar.

The slow waltz *Tempo di valzer lentissimo*, while lacking any real Viennese sense of lilt, has a wonderful vulnerability about it that is quite touching despite, or perhaps because of, the searching quality of its constantly shifting inner voices, even in the more turbulent middle section.

The work closes, like the other two War Sonatas, with a toccata of breathless drive that scampers playfully between tonal centres like it owned them all. It becomes increasingly haunted, however, by the thematic ghosts of the first movement and ends firmly in the grip of the opening motto.

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COVID-19 has changed a great many things about the way in which we move through the world and interact with one another. Over the last 19 months, our supporters have sustained us in ways that we couldn't have imagined, and never have we been more grateful or more appreciative.

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