



VANCOUVER
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SOCIETY

VIVA VRS!

FALL CONCERTS 2021

Behzod Abduraimov piano
Tuesday November 9 2021

From the Artistic Director

Dear Friends,

We are most grateful to Behzod Abduraimov for squeezing us in to his busy schedule to replace the young Russian pianist Alexander Malofeev, who was unable to travel to Canada.

Last month, we presented the Canadian recital debut of young pianist Tony Siqi Yun at the Playhouse. It reminded me very much of Behzod's Playhouse debut in 2012, Yuja Wang's debut at the Kay Meek Centre in 2008, and Leif Ove Andsnes' Playhouse debut in 1997. This is what those performances had in common: most of the audience had purchased their tickets on trust, not knowing much or anything about the artists. And each and every one of those performances really stunned the people lucky enough to be in the hall. I'll admit that I was one of them! I remember standing and screaming when Behzod finished playing. This is the very essence of the VRS: stunning surprises.



We are most grateful to the VSO for allowing us the use of their new Hamburg Steinway concert grand for Behzod's performance tonight.

Having heard Behzod's performance of *Pictures* in London a while back, I can assure you that the piano will have quite a workout!

I would also like to thank our Season Sponsor, the Peak Group of Companies and the City of Vancouver for their support of all our performances this season.

And thank *you* for being here with us this evening.

Sincerely,

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，感谢您的合作。

Program

Behzod Abduraimov, piano

Tuesday, November 9, 2021
Orpheum Theatre 7:00pm

DOMENICO SCARLATTI (1685-1757)
Sonata in B minor K 27
Sonata in D major K 96

(approx. 8 minutes)

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)
Kreisleriana Op. 16

Äußerst bewegt
Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch
Sehr aufgeregt
Sehr langsam
Sehr lebhaft
Sehr langsam
Sehr rasch
Schnell und spielend

(approx. 35 minutes)

INTERMISSION

MODEST MUSSORGSKY (1839-1881)
Pictures at an Exhibition

Promenade
The Gnome
Promenade
The Old Castle
Promenade
Les Tuileries
Bydło
Promenade
Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks
Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle
Promenade
Limoges: The Market Square
Catacombs
Cum Mortuis in Lingua Mortua
Baba-Yaga: The Hut on Chicken Legs
The Great Gate of Kiev

(approx. 33 minutes)

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Additional Support



Behzod Abduraimov piano

Early Life & Education: Born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in 1990, Behzod began to play the piano at the age of five as a pupil of Tamara Popovich at Uspensky State Central Lyceum. He is an alumnus of Park University's International Center for Music where he studied with Stanislav Ioudenitch, and now serves as the ICM's artist-in-residence.

This Season: Forthcoming engagements include St Petersburg Philharmonic, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Danish National Symphony, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Oslo Philharmonic, Israel Philharmonic, and Pittsburgh Symphony. Behzod will also appear in recital at the Alte Oper, in Frankfurt, the Gulbenkian Foundation Lisbon, Amare Hall at Hague, and The Conrad Center, La Jolla.



Photo credit: Evgeny Eutykhov

Recordings: 2021 saw the release of his recital album for Alpha Classics based on a programme of Miniatures including Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. In 2020 his recordings included Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* with Lucerne Symphony Orchestra under James Gaffigan, recorded on Rachmaninov's own piano from Villa Senar for Sony Classical and Rachmaninov's *Piano Concerto No. 3* with Concertgebouworkest under Valery Gergiev for the RCO live label. Both recordings were nominated for the 2020 Opus Klassik awards in multiple categories. A DVD of his BBC Proms debut in 2016, with the Münchner Philharmoniker under Valery Gergiev, was released in 2018. His 2012 debut CD of Liszt, Saint-Saëns, and Prokofiev for Decca won the *Choc de Classica* and *Diapason Découverte*, and his first concerto disc for the label featured Prokofiev's *Piano Concerto No.3* and Tchaikovsky's *Piano Concerto No. 1*.

Behzod Abduraimov is represented by Harrison Parrott, London, UK.

Program Notes

Domenico Scarlatti **Sonata in B minor K 27** **Sonata in D major K 96**

The 550-odd sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti are perhaps the most successful works to migrate from the harpsichord to the modern grand piano. Their transparent texture of simple two- and three-part keyboard writing has one foot in the imitative counterpoint of the Baroque while anticipating the Classical era of Haydn and Mozart in their clarity of phrase structure and harmonic simplicity. Especially appealing to modern performers is their pungently flavourful evocations of the popular folk music of Spain, not to mention the flurries of repeated notes, octaves and register-spanning arpeggios that make them such effective vehicles for pianistic display.

The Scarlatti sonatas are typically in binary form, with a first half that ends in the dominant and a second half that works its way back from the dominant to the home tonality. They are now referenced by means of the Kirkpatrick (K.) numbers assigned to them by Ralph Kirkpatrick in 1953, replacing the less chronologically precise Longo (L.) numbers of Alessandro Longo's first complete edition of 1906.

The *Sonata in B minor K 27* exemplifies many features of Spanish guitar music. Right from the opening (mm.3-6) you hear the flamenco Phrygian mode in the four-note descending bass line known as the "Andalusian cadence". Even more guitar-like are the extended passages of rippling broken-chord figuration – but just *how* extended is one of the intriguing interpretive challenges of this sonata. There is in fact passages in both the first and second halves of this sonata in which the same measure is repeated – verbatim (!) – seven times in a row.

The *Sonata in D major K 96* is sound theatre of a high order. While guitar figuration is in evidence here as well, especially in the many passages of repeated notes, more imposing on the ear is the military flavour of the opening trumpet fanfare, the trilled flourishes of snare-drums, and the stomping cadence patterns with big cadential trills. Add in copious passages of hand-crossings and you have a performance show-piece worthy of opening a piano recital.

Robert Schumann **Kreisleriana Op. 16**

Violinist Johannes Kreisler represented for Robert Schumann the very essence of the new Romantic spirit in art. This eccentric, hypersensitive character from the fictional writings of E. T. A. Hoffmann was a cross between Nicolò Paganini and Dr. Who, an enigmatic, emotionally volatile figure committed to plumbing the depths of his creative soul.

Schumann's tribute to this symbol of creativity in art, his *Kreisleriana* of 1838, is as wildly inventive and emotionally unstable as the artistic personality it describes. Each of the eight pieces that make up the work is comprised of contrasting sections that reflect the split in Schumann's own creative personality, a bipolar duo of mood identities to which he self-consciously gave the names Florestan and Eusebius.

Florestan, Schumann's passionate, action-oriented side, opens the work *Äußerst bewegt* (extremely agitated) with a torrential outpouring of emotion that only halts when the introspective daydreamer Eusebius takes over with more tranquil lyrical musings. The pairing is reversed in the following movement, *Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch* (very intimate and not too fast), which begins thoughtfully but is twice interrupted by sections of a much more rambunctious character.

Schumann's inventiveness in creating this series of mood-swing pieces is astonishing. Each is a psychologically compelling portrait of a distinct temperamental state, enriched and made whole by embracing its opposite.

Projecting these portraits is no easy task for the pianist as Schumann's writing, especially in slower sections, often features a choir of four fully active voices with melodies as likely to rise up from the bass, or to emerge out of the middle of the keyboard, as to sing out from on top. Indeed, the smooth part-writing and polyphonic texture of many sections points to another prominent feature of Schumann's writing: his great admiration for the music of Johann Sebastian Bach.

Schumann's desire to give a Bachian solidity of structure to his writing is most evident not only in his four-voice harmonization textures, but also

in his use of close three-voice stretto in the *Sehr lebhaft* (very slow) fifth movement and fugato in the *Sehr rasch* (very quick) seventh, not to mention the many extended passages based on a single rhythmic pattern in the manner of a Bach prelude.

But most remarkable in this work is the sense of mystery and unease that it radiates as a result of the pervasive use of rhythmic displacement in the bass, where strong notes often fail to coincide with the strong beats of the bar, in imitation of the unregulated movement of tectonic plates of thought and feeling in the mind of the creative artist.

Modest Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition

In 1874 Mussorgsky attended a memorial exhibition in St. Petersburg featuring the paintings, drawings and sketches of the Russian artist, architect and designer Victor Hartmann (1834-1873), who had died the previous year at the age of 39. Aggrieved at the loss of his friend and fellow artist, Mussorgsky set about to create his own unique memorial to Hartmann in a piano suite comprising 10 musical depictions of the works he had seen in St. Petersburg, with a recurring intermezzo melody, the *Promenade*, to represent the composer as he strolls along between the works displayed.

Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* is an overtly nationalist work, as is evident from many of the scenes he chose to set to music: fairy-tale creatures from Russian folklore, everyday life in the Russian countryside, and landscapes symbolic of the nation's glorious past. This nationalism extends to his musical vocabulary as well, which at times evokes the melodic style of Russian folk tunes, at other times the austere choral hymns of the Orthodox Church and the clangorous resonance of cathedral bells.

Very Russian as well is Mussorgsky's expressive vocabulary, which is raw, bluntly chiselled and often brutally direct, with a pictorial vividness that anticipates modern film scores. Sometimes he is Warner Bros. cartoonish, as in his depiction of the animated scurrying of gaggles of small chicks in their shells, or the chatty bickering of women in the market square. But more often it is the dark side of this alcohol-addicted composer that comes to the fore. His ghoulish evocations of the spirits of the dead put one in mind of *The Blair Witch Project* while his terrifying portrait of the lumbering, child-eating witch Baba Yaga recalls

the most panicky chase scenes from *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*.

* * *

The *Promenade* opens the work, proceeding at a walking pace of even quarter notes structured in an alternating pattern of 5/4 and 6/4 measures. As it recurs throughout the work its forthright melody is delivered at times sparsely, in a single line, at other times richly harmonized, grand and imposing, to reflect the imposing size and stature of the composer himself as he travels from picture to picture.

We are first presented with the arresting portrait of *The Gnome*, whose darting movements are immediately suggested by restless keyboard gestures and sudden contrasts of dynamics. You can almost see him, scrambling into a corner, crouching down, then springing up with a toothy grin. Set in the rather 'evil' key of E-flat minor, this portrayal is chock full of ugly chromatic intervals. And the disquieting left-hand trills in the final section only add to the sense that this menacing mischievous creature is up to no good.

After a soft and almost heavenly rendition of the *Promenade*, we come upon *The Old Castle*, which represents a troubadour singing his mournful song before a mighty stone fortress. The melody is modal, suggesting the Middle Ages. A dull throbbing pedal point, droning throughout, creates a blurry tonal mist that casts the scene far back into the legendary past.

The *Promenade* that follows is strongly assertive, projected in bold octaves and full chords, leading to the first whimsical scene in the collection, *Les Tuileries*. Here we witness the animated scene of children at play in the Jardin des Tuileries, a public park in Paris where nannies would often take the young ones in their charge for a bit of fresh air. An ostinato of coy rocking chords opens the scene and continues throughout, regularly relieved by short scampering scale passages, communicating the wide-eyed innocence and youthful exuberance of the frolicking tykes.

Next comes *Bydło*, a scene emblematic of the daily struggles of rural life. A Polish oxcart heaves into view from afar, the plodding of hooves getting gradually louder as it draws near, and diminishing as it passes off into the distance.

A deeply reflective version of the *Promenade* then cleanses the aural palette to prepare us for a welcome contrast, a scene as feather-light and treble-centred as the previous portrait was

ponderous and bass-heavy: the *Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks*. Keen to be released from their shells, these spry young fry spring, hop and flutter about in their shells so as to get out and explore their new barnyard home.

We are then introduced to the two Polish Jews *Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle*, the first rich, arrogant and overbearing, the second poor, craven and whimpering. The frequent use of augmented 2nds in scale patterns is meant to suggest the character of traditional Jewish music. Such caricatures testify to the casual antisemitism that blighted Russian culture in the late 19th century, and that continued to stain the nation well into the Soviet period of the 20th century.

A repeat of the opening *Promenade* suggests a new beginning for our art tour as we enter *The Market at Limoges*, where the local women are engaged in a raucous, finger-pointing, shoulder-poking dispute over some trivial matter, their hysterical exchanges indicated by a constant chatter of 16th notes.

Then as the fracas is reaching its height of hysteria, we are stopped 'dead', as it were, by the arresting sight of *Catacombs*, where the implacable finality of the grave is symbolized in a series of starkly dissonant chords alternating in dynamics between loud and soft. Soon we are ushered even nearer into the presence of the dead in a section entitled *Con mortuis in lingua mortua* (With the dead, in a dead language) in which spooky octave tremolos in the treble accompany

intimations of the eerie peacefulness of *post mortem* subterranean existence.

We are then jolted out of this bittersweet reverie by the sudden arrival of the witch Baba Yaga who lives in *The Hut on Chicken Legs* – an unusual kind of home construction, to be sure. In Mussorgsky's depiction we catch her out on the hunt, stomping her way around the forest in search of prey, her terrifying gait easily a match for the glass-jiggling foot-fall of the Tyrannosaurus Rex in *Jurassic Park*. A quieter, but no less unsettling middle section with some bitonal writing brings us little relief from the sheer nightmarish terror of this scene.

Then just as the monster is closing in on us, ready to grab us by the heel, we are saved by the appearance of *The Great Gate of Kiev*, imagined from a sketch by Hartmann for a gigantic entrance gate to be constructed in Kiev, ancient capital of the state of Kievan Rus whence the Russian nation traces its origins. The awe-inspiring majesty of the scene is evident from the proud chords that underpin a transfiguration of the *Promenade* theme as the scene opens out before us. A solemn hymn steeped in the tonal colours of Eastern Orthodox choral singing twice interrupts this stern processional to sprinkle holy water on the proceedings. Eventually the piercing metallic peel of cathedral bells is heard, interspersed with reminiscences of the original *Promenade* theme chiming in the high treble, as Mussorgsky strains to make the piano proclaim the same ecstatic utterance that crowned the coronation scene of his opera *Boris Godunov*: Слава! Glory!

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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 20 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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