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WINTER CONCERTS 2023

Mao Fujita piano

Sunday March 5 2023

From the Artistic Director

Those who read our weekly e-newsletters already know how excited we are to present the remarkable young Japanese pianist Mao Fujita in his Canadian debut. Since first hearing him at the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow in 2019 when he won the Silver Medal, we have been following and trying to keep up with his career trajectory.

Having spent over 40 years watching and listening to young pianists, I've noticed that Mozart is seldom included on repertoire lists. That's because it is so incredibly difficult to play Mozart *well*.

Then along comes a talent like Mao, who, it seems, was born to play Mozart.

Not that he can't play the big romantic music as well, but I thought I'd seize the opportunity and request an all-Mozart program, and we can look forward to the big romantic pieces on his return visit to Vancouver!

There are many to thank for Mao's appearance at the Playhouse, starting with our Season Sponsor, The Peak Group of Companies. Support for our Next Generation performances comes from the estate of Edwina and Paul Heller and RBC's Emerging Artists Program. We'd also like to thank the Concert Sponsors, Joyce and Tony.

Finally, we're most grateful to the City of Vancouver and to the Government of British Columbia for their support.

We're delighted that you've chosen to join us for this afternoon's performance. Stay tuned... we have more exciting debuts to come!

Sincerely,



Leila



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Program

Mao Fujita piano

Sunday March 5 2023 3:00 pm
Vancouver Playhouse

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)

Sonata No. 7 in C major K. 309

Allegro con spirito

Andante un poco adagio

Rondeau. Allegretto grazioso

(approx. 17 minutes)

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)

Sonata No. 8 in A minor K. 310/300d

Allegro maestoso

Andante cantabile con espressione

Presto

(approx. 22 minutes)

INTERMISSION

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)

Sonata No. 13 in B-flat major K. 333

Allegro

Andante cantabile

Allegretto grazioso

(approx. 21 minutes)

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)

Sonata No. 9 in D major K. 311

Allegro con spirito

Andante con espressione

Rondeau. Allegro

(approx. 16 minutes)

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Mao Fujita piano

Early Life & Education: Born in Tokyo, Mao started piano lessons at the age of three. In 2017, he took First Prize at the prestigious Concours International de Piano Clara Haskil in Switzerland while he was still studying at the Tokyo College of Music. In 2022, Mao moved to Berlin for further studies with Kirill Gerstein.

Performances: Mao has been invited to appear in recitals at major international festivals including the Klavier-Festival Ruhr, Tsinandali and Riga-Jurmala festivals, among others, and he made his highly-anticipated US recital debut at Carnegie Hall in January 2023.

This Season: Recent and upcoming orchestral highlights include performances with the Gewandhausorchester, Munich Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw, Philharmonique de Radio France, Konzerthaus Berlin, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony, Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony, Israel Philharmonic, RAI, Filarmonica della Scala, and Lucerne Festival orchestras.

Recordings: In November 2021, Mao signed an exclusive multi-album deal with Sony Classical International. The new partnership started with an eagerly-anticipated studio recording of Mozart's complete piano sonatas, which was released in October 2022.

Awards & Prizes: Mao won his first international prize in 2010 at the World Classic in Taiwan, and became a laureate of numerous national and international competitions such as the Rosario Marciano International Piano Competition in Vienna (2013), Zhuhai International Mozart Competition for Young Musicians (2015), and the Gina Bachauer International Young Artists Piano Competition (2016). Mao was also the Silver Medalist at the 2019 International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, where his special musical qualities received exceptional attention from a jury of leading musicians.



Photo credit: Eiichi Ikeda

Mao Fujita is represented by Intermusica Artists' Management Ltd. London, UK.

Program Notes

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Sonata No. 7 in C major K. 309

Mozart's Sonata in C major K. 309 was composed in late 1777 when the 21-year-old composer was sojourning in the musically important city of Mannheim. The court orchestra of Mannheim, led by Johann Christian Cannabich (1731-1789), was famous throughout Europe for stylistic innovations that significantly increased the expressive range and dramatic effect of orchestral music.

The "Mannheim sound" featured sudden exhilarating crescendos, imitations of bird calls, and a swiftly rising melodic figure known as the "Mannheim rocket". Many of these effects found their way into the keyboard textures of Mozart's C major sonata, written for his young piano student Rose Cannabich (1764-1839), daughter of the orchestra's leading musician.

The first movement opens with just the kind of sharp dynamic contrasts and picturesque touches that the Mannheim orchestra was known for. Right off the bat we hear a bold fanfare that jump-cuts to the soft chirping sounds of a musical aviary:



And the dainty 2nd theme, replete with Lombardic (short-long) rhythms, seems to have been sprinkled with a goodish handful of birdseed as well.



Between these two themes, of course, is a transition section featuring a whole Cape Canaveral of Mannheim rocket launches:



The exposition's major-mode cheerfulness is balanced by an emphasis in the development section on minor-mode drama, and this tonal colouring even makes a cameo appearance in the recapitulation, as well. Throughout the movement we hear keyboard textures filtered through an orchestral lens, with changes in keyboard register standing in for changes in orchestration. A particularly obvious example is found in the recapitulation, in which the 2nd theme is first placed in the left-hand 'cellos' before returning to its original place in the right-hand 'violins.'

* * *

Mozart described the 2nd movement *Andante un poco adagio* as a kind of musical “portrait” of his 13-year-old piano student Rose Cannabich. Taking him at his word, we immediately sense her blushing coyness in the way that the opening melody moves by fits and starts, in small one-bar mini-phrases, each separated from the next by a pause.



Within this demure demeanour, however, lurks a bright-eyed perkiness communicated by pervasive dotted rhythms, and reinforced by sudden contrasts of *forte* and *piano* that bespeak her Mannheim upbringing. Throughout the movement, in the luxuriantly frilly ornamentation of the movement’s two simple themes – repeated over and over again in different guises – we hear portrayed the character of a loquacious young girl with few thoughts to express but an impressively large vocabulary with which to express them.

* * *

The rondeau (i.e., rondo) finale puts all eccentricity aside and attempts to win the listener’s ear through charm alone. Its opening refrain is a tune tailor-made for rondo treatment: a jewel-box tune so motivically repetitive and pleased with itself that it simply begs to be departed from and returned to:



The intervening episodes are where all the keyboard sparkle and heartbeat-quickenning excitement comes, with this orchestral tremolo figure as a recurring element throughout the movement:



But true to form, it is the delicate refrain theme that has the last word, like a jewel box softly closing, in the final bars.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Sonata No. 8 in A minor K. 310/300d

Mozart’s Sonata in A minor K. 310, composed in Paris in the summer of 1778, is remarkable not only for being in a minor key – a rarity in the works of this “major-mode” composer – but also for the expressive intensity that characterizes large swathes of its three movements.

Many see the work as autobiographical, responding to adverse events in the young Mozart’s personal life: the recent death of his mother, the scolding reproaches of his father, or the professional setbacks he was encountering in the European musical world. Whatever the case, the manner in which the work opens – with an eruption of throbbing cluster-dissonances supporting a stern, almost angry march tune – is unparalleled in his output.



The movement's 2nd theme could not be more contrasting, consisting as it does of a chipper-chatter of 16th notes noodling their way down the degrees of the C major scale in the right hand while the left hand performs a light-hearted parody of the anxious throbbing dissonances from the 1st theme.



These two radically different motivic ideas duke it out in the development section as the 1st theme's dotted rhythms struggle to assert themselves against the backdrop of a constantly surging carpet of 16th-note activity. Indeed, manic 16th-note chatter dominates in every section, giving a *moto perpetuo* feel to the movement as a whole, propelled forward by a current of tragic resignation that converts even the bubbling 2nd theme to the minor mode in the recapitulation.

* * *

The *Andante* slow movement, marked *cantabile con espressione*, offers relief from high drama only in its stately and serenely songful opening section:



In the development section of this sonata-form movement dark clouds gather over the proceedings as the left-hand accompaniment rumbles with trills in the bass register while the right hand pulses with an ostinato of utterly heart-breaking suspensions.



It is an unusual feature of this sonata that the slow movement is the most technically challenging, mainly because of the number of trills written into the score, indicating that the work was likely not written for performance by amateurs at home. Most amateur performers, for example, would need a triple snort of snuff before confronting the three-voice texture found in the following passage:



* * *

The *Presto* finale is a rondo, but not a merry one. The carefree spirit of the rondo genre is here replaced by a mood of restless searching, tinged with a strangely indefinable sadness.



The way the accompaniment persistently begins on the off-beat is vaguely unsettling, as is the pervasive use of minor-mode tonal colouring, relieved only once, in the musette-like second episode:



And just as the 1st movement was dominated by 16th-note motion, this finale is driven on to its final cadence, *moto-perpetuo*-like, by a non-stop stream of 8th notes.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Sonata No. 13 in in B-flat major K. 333

Mozart's Sonata in B flat K 333 is something of a 'showpiece' meant to display not only the performer's ability to create ear-tickling keyboard effects, but also his sense of taste and refinement. In this regard, the influence of Mozart's mentor, Johann Christian Bach, is evident in the composer's borrowing from J. C. Bach's Sonata in G major Op. 17 No. 4 to create the gracious and carefree 6-note descending scale figure used in the first movement's opening theme:



and in its equally poised and elegant second theme as well:



Johann Christian, the so-called "London" Bach, was a leading exponent of the *style galant* and elements of this style are apparent in the short balanced phrases of the first movement's themes, and in its pervasive use of coy little two-note sigh motives throughout. Even the light overlay of minor-mode tonal colouring in the development section seems to be something that can be effortlessly waved away, as if by the leisurely command of a frilly-cuffed hand politely calling in the recapitulation. This movement is an elegant amalgam of textbook sonata-form construction, Italianate vocal melodies and scintillating keyboard figuration.

* * *

The sonata's emotional centre of gravity is the second movement *Andante cantabile*, an operatic aria transferred to the keyboard idiom.



Its mood of dignified lyrical reflection is enlivened by frequent decorations of the melodic line and unified by the recurrence of the rhythmic motif of three repeated notes leading into the first beat of the following bar. This motif occurs both in the treble's melody line and echoed in the bass, as well.



This 3-note motive becomes especially important as the central focus of the probing chromatic deliberations of the development section.

* * *

An aristocratic tone of playfulness returns in the rondo finale marked *Allegretto grazioso*, with its breezy opening refrain tune featuring a whimsical downward hop of a 7th.



The influence of the showy, display-oriented concerto style is evident in the contrasts between 'solo' and 'tutti' textures, and more strikingly still in the way the movement stops dead in its tracks on a cadential 6-4 chord to set the stage for a full-on 'soloist' cadenza:



After which, with a few coquettish flutters of the fan, the movement ends in the same eye-twinkling good humour with which it began.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Sonata No. 9 in D major K. 311

Like the Sonata in C major K. 309, Mozart's Sonata in D major K. 311 was written in late 1777 while the composer was sojourning in Mannheim. And like the C major sonata it displays many of the vivid "sound theatre" features of that city's famous orchestra, especially their fondness for sharp dynamic contrasts.

The work opens with an orchestral 'tutti' followed by a lively conversation in question-and-answer format among individual sections of the keyboard 'orchestra'.



The back-and-forth chit-chat continues between 'sections' until the arrival of the 2nd theme, comprised of a string of dainty little two-note sigh motives:



The forward drive in this opening section is considerable, with hustle and bustle being the order of the day -- until, that is, the very last bars of the exposition. Because that is when the section's final concluding *masculine* cadence (ending on a strong beat) is upstaged, out of the blue, by the gratuitous insertion of a soft *feminine* cadence (ending on a weak beat) – a cadence thematically unrelated to anything that has come before.



Moreover, this thematic interloper, having just walked into the room, then goes on to dominate the development section as if it owns the place, and takes pleasure in ending the movement the final bars, as well. One can well imagine the young Mozart casting a sly sideward glance of delight at the old periwigs in the audience coughing out their dentures at this outrageous violation of the rules.

* * *

The slow-ish second movement has a few quirks of its own. Its opening theme is halfway between a lyrical aria and a processional hymn. (Haydn's *Gott Erhalte Franz den Kaiser* springs readily to mind.)



Note the Mannheim-style *forte* chords interrupting this softly flowing melody. Such enlivening jolts to the attention of listeners are not infrequent in this movement. They serve as a counterbalance to the sweetness and predictability of its heavily ornamented melodic lines.

As a side note, Classical-era scholar Robert Levin points out that the score of this movement provides strong evidence of Mozart's use of the pedal, as the following passage from the closing section would be impossible to play without it



* * *

The concluding rondo of this sonata is simply bursting with personality and inventive keyboard textures. Its opening refrain tune is a skippy affair in a toe-tapping triple meter, encrusted with a healthy sprinkling of grace notes make it swing and sway.



In this movement sharp dynamic contrasts are not the result of Mannheim eccentricity but rather reflect the alternations of 'soloist' and 'orchestra' in a concerto texture. And as in the B flat Sonata K.333, there is even a kind of cadenza section in which the pianist feigns being a concerto soloist who has been given a 'lead break' to stand out from the band.



Infectious as the opening refrain tune is, many of the most exhilarating passages are in the episodes, with their breathless scale figures tickling the ear for bars on end.



Strangely enough, this D major sonata is one of Mozart's less frequently performed keyboard works ... and more is the pity.

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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 couple of years, our supporters have sustained us in ways that we couldn't have imagined, and never have we been more grateful.

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