

# UMC Concert Series

presents

ANTHONY & JOSEPH PARATORE, Duo Pianists

8 Waltzes for Piano, Four Hands, Op. 39 Johannes Brahms

Fantasia in F Minor for Piano, Four Hands, Op. 103, D. 940 Franz Schubert

Allegro molto moderato  
Largo  
Allegro vivace  
(Allegro molto moderato)

Aria and Toccata for Two Pianos Norman Dello Joio

Intermission

Pictures at an Exhibition Modest Mussorgsky, arr. Reginald Haché

Promenade  
"The Gnome"  
Promenade  
"The Old Castle ("The Troubadour")  
Promenade  
"Children Playing in the Garden of the Tuileries"  
"The Oxcart"  
Promenade  
"Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks in Their Shells"  
"Samuel Goldenberg and Schmuyle"  
Promenade  
"The Market Place at Limoges"  
"Catacombs: Con mortuis in lingua mortua"  
"Baba-Yaga: The Hut on Chicken-Legs"  
"The Great Gate of Kiev"

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With continuous radio broadcasts, personal record libraries, and the increasingly promising music programming on television, few music lovers of today appreciate the limited opportunities of their ancestors to hear music. Twentieth-century technology has, of course, diminished in no way the unique quality of the musical experience, but it has allowed us to take performances of all kinds somewhat for granted and, many would argue correctly, has made us lazy. For example, how many out-of-practice pianists would choose to "do battle" with a Beethoven sonata or a Chopin nocturne when an inspired recording of a Rubinstein or a Horowitz is at the fingertips? In earlier times, this possibility for immediate gratification did not exist except for professional musicians or the wealthy who could afford to hire them. Lesser men and women who wanted music were expected to make it for themselves.

The nineteenth century is of particular interest in this respect because of the unprecedented relationship between music and the new middle class that emerged in Europe and America. The appearance of a large number of musical amateurs held important implications for many aspects of music sociology. Certainly among them were the universal popularity of the piano, its acceptance into middle-class homes on a grand scale, and the overwhelming body of literature supplied by composers for parlor soloists and partners. Just as important as original compositions for this instrument were transcriptions of current orchestral and vocal works, music that served at the same time as vehicles of entertainment, education, and advertisement. Thus, not unlike many, many other less well-remembered amateurs, Queen Victoria and her Consort spent many happy hours together at the keyboard reading the symphonies of Beethoven, the string quartets of Mozart, and the vocal music of Rossini transcribed for one piano, four hands.

Today, because of the general accessibility of recordings and the peculiarly twentieth-century preference for music in its original form, the vast body of transcriptions, with few exceptions, has been pushed aside and left to historians. The smaller number of original compositions for two pianists at one keyboard, especially those works intended by their creators to be more than parlor diversion, have survived as concert fare and are sometimes performed on two instruments. Works expressly written for two pianos were typically conceived as concert music; in this category are found substantial contributions by master composers. Tonight's concert by Anthony and Joseph Paratore presents a faithful sampling of this music: two works for one piano, four hand, and two works for two pianos; three original compositions and one transcription; three pieces from the nineteenth century and one from the twentieth century. It will likewise exhibit the pleasures of this special category of piano music in both its chamber and concert forms.

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Because of his predilection for dense and redundant scoring, Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) was especially attracted to the possibilities created by the use of two pianists. Many of his compositions, at one time or another, existed in two-piano or four-handed versions. His Waltzes for Piano, Four Hands, Op. 39, of 1865 are prime examples of fine-art music based on popular dance music of the day as well as of the then contemporary custom of constructing a lengthy work by juxtaposing short, self-contained musical thoughts--the so-called Romantic miniatures--in a series. The waltz itself had evolved from Austro-German dances in the second half of the eighteenth century. So tame by our standards, it had shocked the sensibilities of respectable society in the early nineteenth century because of the placement of the gentleman's hand on his partner's torso and the resulting "tight" embrace. In spite of this, and probably because of it, the waltz became a staple of the ballroom and was in fact the most popular dance of the century. As always, fine-art composers were quick to show interest and proceeded to create stylized treatments of its lilting melodies in 3/4 time and its "om-pah-pah" accompaniments. In these eight excerpts from his Opus 39, Brahms has provided a surprising degree of variety within these guidelines, and the listener will note with pleasure the composer's donning several guises, including "folkish Brahms," "gypsy Brahms," and "lullaby Brahms."

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The Fantasy in F Minor, Op. 103, D. 940, of Franz Schubert (1797-1828), one of the glories of four-handed piano literature, was written in the last months of the composer's life and is viewed by some, because of its dark and sober mood, to be an evocation of impending death. In many respects, this piece, like Schubert's more famous fantasia Wanderer-Fantasie (1822) for solo piano, exhibits several prototypical qualities by which we recognize much of the music of the nineteenth century. The most obvious, perhaps, is the preference for an extremely lyrical--singable--melody. (Schubert, whose immortality is closely associated with his production of over 600 art songs, excelled as a composer of this kind of melody.) Another is his treatment of the movements of the classical sonata cycle. Schubert's solution here, which was later much imitated, was to connect the four separate movements together into one lengthy piece and to return thematic material from the beginning of the work (the actual first movement) near the end of the piece (the actual fourth movement finale). Thus, the contrasting song movement and dance movement are framed by similar music, satisfying the expectation for some kind of musical symmetry in a "single" composition. Finally there is the emotionalism, created by a specific vocabulary of musical gestures and devices. Schubert's placement at the beginning of the Romantic Era enables us to hear in his works some of the freshest results of its new ideas without some of the excesses--shocking contrasts, cloying sweetness, or decadent harmonic baggage--that often characterize later examples from this style period.

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"What I strive for most of all is the complete confidence, the lyric quality, the feeling for line that we find in Verdi." This declaration of purpose with its unashamed concern for the attributes of Italian opera of the last century as exemplified by its greatest representative surely helps explain the success of contemporary American composer Norman Dello Joio (born 1913). Nor is his veneration of Verdi difficult to explain. Although a native New Yorker, Dello Joio is a first-generation American and a descendant of a respected family of Italian musicians. His artistic philosophy and compositional style have been shaped by experiences related to his Italian background, including Gregorian chant and other music of the Catholic Church as well as opera, by the popular music and jazz of his New York City adolescence, and by the neo-classicism of his composition teacher Paul Hindemith.

Considering the wide spectrum of styles to appear after World War II, Dello Joio's music is undeniably old-fashioned in its communicative powers. However, because of his care for Italian melody, dance and jazz rhythms, and transparent formal procedures and his reliance on twentieth-century tonal harmony--that is, harmony that confirms a key center while incorporating many of the innovations of modern music, he has tended to minimize the obstacles that many contemporary composers have unconsciously or willfully placed between their music and their listeners. His Aria and Toccata for Two Pianos of 1952 recalls the paired instrumental movements of the Baroque Era. The first is, of course, a reference to the solo portion of opera, traditionally a high point for both melody and emotion. The second is a contribution to the long history of keyboard "touch" pieces--sectional works designed to illustrate the keyboard's capability for rapid repetition of single pitches and idiomatic figuration and to display the technical prowess of performers.

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Better known through the orchestral arrangement of Maurice Ravel, Pictures at an Exhibition by Modest Mussorgsky (1839-1881) was composed initially as a suite of character pieces for solo piano in 1874, shortly after he had attended a memorial exhibition of art works by his late friend the painter and architect Victor Alexandrovich Hartmann (died 1873). Each of the ten "pictures" in this counterpart to Mussorgsky's visit is a description of or a reaction to a specific item on display. The diversity of subject matter in the sketches and paintings--French street scenes, creatures from Russian folklore, character studies, ballet scenography, and architectural designs--is faithfully recorded in the music. A unifying feature of the suite is the recurring "Promenade," a passage to be identified with the viewer's walking from one exhibit to another. This theme is ingeniously transformed in the finale to become the basis for the majestic depiction of "The Great Gate of Kiev," thereby giving the impression that the entire work was conceived as a large-scale Romantic rondo.

The idiosyncratic Mussorgsky spent most of his relatively brief career as a composer living the bohemian life in St. Petersburg, where he was associated with a loosely-bound group intent on creating a Russian national music much less dependent on Western European (especially German) influences. Although he is more highly regarded for his songs and operas, this piano work has become a perennial favorite, and this 1980 transcription for two pianos by Reginald Haché will reveal his highly individualistic and often realistic solutions to the challenges of musical expression.

Notes by Michael J. Budds