

**Summary of Dissertation Recitals
Three Programs of Solo Piano Music**

by

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my parents and brother, Hou-Chen Lee, Yen-Ju Lin, and Chen-Han Lee.

To my husband, Yuan-Ting Hsieh.

To the teachers who inspired me throughout my musical journey.

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ABSTRACT

Three piano recitals were given in lieu of a written dissertation.

Each recital explored a specific theme, period, or style of piano music. The first recital explored the theme of the “late work” by selecting works by four great composers that were written in their final years: Fryderyk Chopin, Johannes Brahms, Franz Schubert, and Ludwig van Beethoven. The recital took place on Friday, December 10, 2021, 8:00 p.m. in the Stamps Auditorium of the Walgreen Drama Center at the University of Michigan. Works performed were Fryderyk Chopin, Nocturnes, op. 62; Johannes Brahms, *Drei Intermezzi*, op. 117; Franz Schubert, *Drei Klavierstücke*, D. 946, no. 2; and Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Sonata in A-flat Major, op. 110.

The second recital combined a lecture-presentation with a performance of the major piano works by the Czech composer Leoš Janáček. The recital took place on Friday, February 4, 2022, 5:30 p.m. in the Stamps Auditorium of the Walgreen Drama Center at the University of Michigan. Works performed were Leoš Janáček, Sonata for Piano in E-flat Minor, “1 October 1905, From the Street,” JW 8/19; and “In the Mists,” JW 8/22.

The third recital was a study of the “prelude” genre of piano music. The recital included numerous preludes with dates of composition spanning the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. One goal of this recital was to demonstrate through performance the central influence of the Polish composer Fryderyk Chopin on the development of the prelude genre across time and cultures. The recital took place on Friday, April 15, 2022, 5:30 p.m. in the Britton Recital Hall of the Moore Building at the University of Michigan. Works performed were Maria Szymanowska, *Vingt Exercices et Préludes*, No. 1; Fryderyk Chopin, *24 Preludes*, op. 28, nos. 1, 3, 4, 7, 16, 21, 24; Aleksandr Scriabin, *5 Preludes*, op. 16; Karol Szymanowski, *9 Preludes*, op. 1, nos. 1, 2, 5, 9; Claude Debussy, *Preludes*, Book 1, nos. 5, 6, 8, and Book 2, nos. 1, 5, 12; and George Gershwin, *Three Preludes*.

Recital I

Reflection, monologue, and transcend – Late pieces by four great composers

Program

Nocturne, op. 62 (1846)

Fryderyk Chopin
(1810-1849)

No. 1 in B Major: Andante

No. 2 in E Major: Lento

Drei Intermezzi, op. 117 (1892)

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

No. 1 in E-flat Major: Andante moderato

No. 2 in B-flat Minor: Andante non troppo e con molta espressione

No. 3 in C-sharp Minor: Andante con moto

Intermission

Drei Klavierstücke, D. 946 (1828)

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)

No. 2 in E-flat Major: Allegretto

Sonata in A-flat Major, op. 110 (1821)

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Moderato cantabile molto espressivo

Allegro molto

Adagio ma non troppo–Allegro ma non troppo

Recital I

Reflection, monologue, and transcend – Late pieces by four great composers

Program Notes

In this recital, we are going to hear pieces by four genius composers composed in the last years of their life. At this stage of their life, they've accumulated great compositional techniques and had established their careers, the music they composed is no longer showy pieces to display their abilities, but true music they wanted to convey deeply from their hearts. We will hear fluid, beautiful music, reflective meditations, conflicting emotions of pureness and storms, and some philosophical reflections on their life experiences.

F. Chopin - Nocturnes, Op. 62 (1846)

Chopin's music has long been regarded as the most poetic and romantic piano music of all time, his nocturnes especially reflecting this "lyrical, romantic" characteristic. As the person who brought nocturne to a new level and makes it a unique piano genre, Chopin wrote 21 nocturnes throughout his life, the nocturnes op. 62 are the last ones he wrote and published during his lifetime - three more nocturnes were published later after his death. These two nocturnes not only reflect the poetic, lyrical characteristic, but also show Chopin's "late style" - the incredible textural complexity, usage of counterpoint, and flawless fluidity.

No. 1 in B Major

This beautiful nocturne begins with an arpeggiated chord like an opening curtain on a stage, the B major sonority only arrives in the fourth measure and stuns us with incredibly beautiful yet complicated texture. After a time-pausing digression in the relative minor key, the main theme comes back and leads into the middle section. The middle section changes the texture with syncopated rhythms on the left hand, bringing a more agitated feeling to the music. Similar to the opening section, there is also a time-pausing passage before the return of the B major theme. The returning of the initial theme magically grows out with trills mimicking the vibrato from opera singers, and later leads into a cadenza-like passage enriched by chromatic harmonies. The dreamy coda reminds us of the previous time-pausing passages and ends the nocturne in a rich but peaceful sonority.

No. 2 in E Major

As a close relative key of the preceding nocturne, the E Major nocturne perfectly continues the musical journey with a rich, yearning sonority. The jumping accompaniments on the left hand and the single melody on the right hand remind us of the middle section from the previous nocturne, but in a more stable and noble character. The distinguishing feature of this nocturne is

the tonal digression that happens frequently throughout the whole piece, bringing lots of surprises to the listeners. The agitated middle section is seamlessly followed by the flowing transition, characterized by lots of syncopated rhythm and melody imitations on different voices. The first theme comes back after a wandering short transition and melts with a sequence of tonal digressions. This nocturne quietly ends with a similar texture as the first nocturne in the sweet E major home key.

J. Brahms - 3 Intermezzi, Op. 117 (1892)

After a long break, Brahms returned to compose piano solo works in the last decade of his life. The three intermezzi, op. 117 was composed in 1892 and is the third-to-last piano solo piece Brahms had composed. These three intermezzi do not serve as interludes between pieces but are character pieces with meditative, introverted, and melancholic characters. Charles Burr had a beautiful interpretation of the title that these are “a kind of emotional time-out for the composer and listener from the exterior world of getting and spending.” Brahms himself referred to this set of intermezzi as “the cradle songs of my sadness.” During these sixteen minutes, we could embrace the sorrow in our minds and slowly let the sorrows flow out along with the music.

No. 1 in E-flat Major

‘Schlaf sanft, mein Kind, schlaf sanft und schön! Mich dauert es sehr, dich weinen sehn’
‘Sleep softly, my child, sleep softly and beautifully! It troubles me to see you cry’

Preceding the quotation from an ancient Scottish poem, this first intermezzo is a lullaby for adults. As the only piece in this set that is in a major key, the outer sections here are a lullaby for us to comfort our sadness, whereas the middle section is the moment when we embrace our sorrow and totally sink into the melancholic emotion.

No. 2 in B-flat Minor

This beautiful intermezzo in B-flat Minor is distinguished by the flowing thirty-second notes and the floating chromatic mediant chords in the outer sections. This intermezzo perfectly illustrates the falling leaves in the fall with again, a melancholic mood, with a distinguished falling seconds motive. The middle sections also extended the melancholy feeling with a sigh gesture despite its major key but enriched with inverted sigh gestures. The retransition combines the original and inverted sigh gesture, in the texture of the initial section and leads into the return of the initial section. The coda is an expansion of the middle section yet in a more depressing emotion.

No. 3 in C-sharp Minor

The moving octaves opening of this intermezzo sets up an ominous mood, illustrating an image of a person walking alone on a dark, bleak night. The bleak motive was reharmonized several

times with rich harmonies, bringing us different kinds of loneliness and sadness each time. The middle section of this intermezzo reminds us of the falling leaves in the previous intermezzo by its flowing thirty-seconds notes, but this time with different coloring by jumping to different registers. The sadness is enhanced by diminished seventh sonority in the return of the initial motive and finally reaches a satisfying climax. However, the satisfaction doesn't last long, and the deepest sadness crushed into our hearts in the coda with tragically diminished harmonies and the widespread displacement of registers, ends this set of intermezzi with great grief and emptiness.

F. Schubert - Drei Klavierstücke, D. 946, No. 2 (1828)

Composed in the last year of Schubert's thirty-one years of life, these three piano pieces were left un-titled and not published until 1868 when Brahms anonymously edited and published them. This middle piece of this set is opened by a warm, beautiful E-flat major recurring theme, contrasted by two stormy and agitated sections in minor keys. Although the music of the recurring E-flat major theme is exactly the same each time when it comes back, the emotions are different because of the journey we went through in the minor key sections. An interesting side note of this piece would be the similarity between the recurring section in this piece and the beginning of the E-flat major intermezzo by Brahms we just heard before the intermission. Both in E-flat major, 6/8 meter, and starts with a single B-flat on the right hand, the coincidences make us wonder if Schubert's beautiful melody stayed in Brahms' mind when he edited it and became his inspiration decades later when he was composing the intermezzo.

L. van Beethoven - Piano Sonata in A-flat Major, Op. 110 (1821)

As the second-to-last piano sonata Beethoven had composed, this sonata is tightly tied together with the dualistic idea of ascending and descending motives, and the whole sonata was meant to be performed continuously.

The first movement of this sonata is the most uplifting one, conveying everything in a heavenly way. However, the downward movement is implied here in the running arpeggio passages, although disguised in a delicate sonority. The short development section is a concentrated section that tightly ties the exposition and recapitulation sections together. The recapitulation surprised us with a tonality digression to E major and corrected itself back to A-flat major. The same notes on the right hand at the ending of the first movement and the beginning of the second movement implied a continuous effect between these two movements. The folksy second movement illustrates the descending idea in a humorous, playful way. However, the cheerful emotion doesn't last for long and is totally vanished when the first chord in the last movement magically emerges from the smoke-like sonority at the end of the second movement.

The multi-section last movement of this sonata is the most emotional and dramatic one which speaks to the deepest corner of our minds. It starts with an operatic recitative full of pain and suffering, which is enhanced even more in the following arioso. The tragedy of the arioso hits us in the deepest corner of our hearts and eventually stops as if the liveness is gone. However, a Fugue emerges from the dying soul and brings it back to life, though this liveness doesn't last long that another arioso comes back right away. This time, it's even more sobbing and despairing than the first arioso. After the choking arioso, a series of bell-like chords hits us and turns into the second Fugue, which descends from heaven in an inverted shape. This fugue soon combines different shapes of the Fugue motive and rushed into a triumphant coda, where the dying soul finally defeated the tragic fate and transcends it back to life.

Recital II

Two major piano works by Czech composer Leoš Janáček

Program

Lecture-recital: Leoš Janáček “1. X. 1905” and “In the Mists”

1. X. 1905 “Sonata” (1905)

Leoš Janáček
(1854-1928)

I. Předtucha / The Presentiment

II. Smrt / The Death

V mlhách “In the Mists” (1912)

Leoš Janáček
(1854-1928)

Andante

Molto adagio

Andantino

Presto

Recital II

Two major piano works by Czech composer Leoš Janáček

Program Notes

In this lecture recital, we're going to get a glimpse of Czech composer, Leoš Janáček's life, aesthetics, and two of his major piano works – "1. X. 1905" and "In the Mists."

Biography

Leoš Janáček was a Czech composer born in 1854 in Hukvaldy, Moravia. He was born into a family of cantors – a kind of village teacher who also served as organist and choirmaster for the local church. Janáček's father and grandfather are both cantors and are leading figures in the local village. He was to follow the family tradition and had received musical training such as conducting and keyboard skills throughout his younger ages.

He continued his musical training in the Brno's Czech Teacher's Institute when he was 15 years old, with the intent of becoming a professional teacher. Not long after he arrived at Brno, Janacek started to conduct several local choirs. He took those local choirs from taverns to formal concert settings, performed serious music and his early choral works.

Eager to become a concert pianist, he went to Leipzig Conservatory to study piano and composition in 1879. However, his studying in Leipzig wasn't quite fruitful, and had started to doubt his ability to become a concert pianist. Also because of cultural differences, he felt uncomfortable living in Leipzig that he decided to go to study in Vienna in the next year, 1880. However, his study in Vienna didn't go well, either. After being rejected by a Conservatory competition, he left Vienna with frustration and disappointment and returned to Brno.

When he returned to Brno in 1881, Janacek got married and started his busy life with plenty of responsibilities. As a teacher, conductor, composer, father, and editor of a critical music journal. He also started to study and collect Moravian folk music, publishing collections of thousands of Moravian songs and dances. These years of immersing in folk music nourished his composition and eventually led him to develop his unique musical language.

Later in the first decade of the twentieth century, Janáček was facing difficulties in both his personal life and professional career. His daughter, Olga, suffered from illness for years and died in 1903, his marriage also facing difficulties after losing their daughter; and the lack of substantial success in his professional career when he was already in his 50s. All these facts resulted in serious self-doubt, and he destroyed several of his own works. However, those tragic

incidents became the inspiration for many great works. Such as the opera *Jenůfa* and the piano cycle *In the Mists*.

In 1916, the opera *Jenůfa* finally made its first performance in the Prague National Theatre after many years of rejection. It was a great success and brought Janáček finally his first acclaim. He was already 62 years old when he finally gained acclaim outside of Moravia. Janáček kept teaching in the Brno Conservatory until 1925 and kept composing operas and orchestral works in his late years. His works gained more and more acclaim during this time and were performed in different cities, such as Berlin, Vienna, London, and New York.

Moravian folk music, Aesthetic & Theory

Janáček's music is deeply influenced by Moravian folk music, as well as his musical aesthetics and theories. To understand Moravian folk music, we'll need to straighten out an important concept of the differences between Bohemian folk music and Moravian folk music. Czech was roughly divided into two parts, Bohemia on the west and Moravia on the east. As geographically attached to the west, Bohemian music is more connected to Western Europe, and because of the constant contact in the 17th and 18th centuries, the old national tunes were assimilated to the contemporary musical idiom - diatonic harmonies and symmetrical forms. This Bohemian music greatly influenced two other great Czech composers, Smetana and Dvorak.

The Moravian folk music preserved its' unique character with irregular phrasing, changing meters, and improvisational spirit. All these features could be found in Janáček's music, showing his deep connection with his Moravian identity.

After knowing about the style of Moravian folk music, I then want to introduce some of Janacek's own unique theories towards music.

Speech melody

Janacek believes that Moravian folk song grows from people's speech. The music comes from the words, and he commented "(music) cannot always be fettered with regular time". He also emphasizes that each note has a fragment of an idea, "When anyone speaks to me, I listen more to the tonal modulations in his voice than to what he is actually saying. From this, I know at once what he is like, what he feels, whether he is lying, whether he is agitated or whether he is merely making conventional conversation. I can feel, or rather hear, any hidden sorrow."

His notebooks and published essays contain thousands of speech melodies, which he wrote down while hearing people uttering particular words or phrases, noting down what he believed was the precise pitch, rhythm, stress, and length. Although he never consciously cited those speech

melodies in his works, the idea of the speech melody has deeply influenced his musical aesthetics, which emphasized the “speak” rather than the “notes.” This aesthetic removed him from the traditional compositional techniques and eventually developed a musical language of his own when he was in his fifties.

Pocit (sensation) and pacit (false sensation)

The next concept I’d like to introduce is *pocit* (sensation) and *pacit* (false sensation). *Pocit* is the true, physically happening sound, whereas *pacit* is the residue in our ears of a previous happened sound. This was described in his harmony textbook *On the Composition of Chords and their Connections* in 1896, that he believes the sounds will linger in our ears for a fraction of second after it’s already disappeared. “A tone sounds from an instrument, but also floats in our mind when it has really faded out.” This idea of the phantom sound in our ears emphasizes the connection between chords and the ability to hear the most subtle nuance, which is a necessary ability to listen to or interpret Janáček’s music.

Spojovací formy (connecting forms): spletna (twine) and rozuzlení (disentanglement)

The idea of *pocit* and *pacit* is further applied in connecting forms, which consists of two stages: *spletna* [twine] and *rozuzlení* [disentanglement]. In the *spletna* stage, musical ideas are mixed, then the *rozuzlení* stage disentangled and clear out the musical ideas.

Sčasovka (rhythmic unit)

The idea of *sčasovka* was formulated as early as 1901 in Janacek’s published articles, although he didn’t provide a clear definition of *sčasovka*, he addressed the importance of rhythm as an organic entity, a vehicle for the melodic and harmonic content of the music to move. Rather than an objective phenomenon, rhythm should be full of meaning and is crucial to the expression of the music. In my understanding, *sčasovka* is associated closely with his idea of speech melody, in which the rhythm comes from the expression of people’s speech, containing emotions and meanings. *Sčasovka* plays a very important function in his music, often as an important motif that pushes the charge of the music and as a base for further developments.

Solo Piano Music

Besides several earlier works, such as *Tema con variazioni* (known as Zdenka’s Variation), a set of variations composed when he was studying in Leipzig and dedicated to his future wife, Zdenka. Most of his piano solo works were composed between 1900 and 1912, this is the point when he achieved his mature compositional style. The important solo piano works composed during this time are “*On an Overgrown Path*”, “*I. X. 1905*” and “*In the Mists*”. Although it’s not a huge oeuvre, these piano works show his unique compositional style, and deeply reflect his personal feelings like autobiographies.

1.X.1905 “Sonata” (1905)

Background

As indicated in the title, this sonata was composed in 1905, after a tragic political event happened in Brno on October 1st.

At the time, Czech was ruled by the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Influenced by the bloom of nationalism in the 19th century, most ethnic groups wanted their independence and their own countries. The incident that happened on October 1st, 1905 was one of many events caused by this situation.

The Czechs were requesting an establishment of a Czech University in Moravia at the time. The Prime Minister from the Austrian parliament promised that he would consider the request, but the Czechs and the Austrians who live in Czech will need to have an agreement on where to build the new university. Naturally, the Czechs favored Brno since it's the capital of Moravia; however, the Austrians refused because they were fearing the growing Czech and Moravian nationalism in Brno. They are afraid that Brno will be out of their control. In order to get support, the Austrians organized a protest in Brno on October 1, 1905. And of course, to respond to this, the Czechs also rallied on the street in opposition to the Austrian protesters. Soon the two crowds clashed violently on the street, the police and soldiers were sent to maintain order. In the middle of the chaos, a young joiner's apprentice, František Pavlík, was killed by a soldier.

As a Czech patriot and disgusted by the Austrian authorities, this event resonated deeply with Janáček. He attended František Pavlík's funeral and started to compose this piece soon after the event.

The original title of this piece was “*Z ulice dne 1. října 1905*” (From the Street on 1. October 1905), later, Janáček simplified the title as “*I. X. 1905*”, which is the title we have now. The title “Sonata” wasn't given by Janáček, it was given by the publisher because of the usage of the sonata form in the first movement.

Originally in three movements, this was supposed to be premiered by one of Janáček's students, pianist Ludmila Tučková in January, 1906. However, just one night before the performance, after hearing Ms. Tučková play through the whole piece, Janáček was not satisfied with the last movement and took the score from her and burned it. Based on letters and documents, the third movement was a funeral march. However, Janáček's dissatisfaction with this work not only happened once, later in the same year, he became dissatisfied again, this time, he cast the remained two movements score into the Vltava River. The score we have today was the copy from Ms. Tučková. She performed this to Janáček again during his seventieth birthday, this time, Janáček decided not to discard this work, and published it in 1924.

The score is prefaced with a motto by Janáček:

The white marble staircases of the House of Artists in Brno.

The ordinary labourer František Pavlík falls, stained with blood.

He came merely to champion higher learning and has been slain by cruel murderers.

Předtucha / The Presentiment

The first movement, titled “the presentiment” is in a classical sonata form with the exposition section repeated, the motives in this movement are tightly connected. Beginning with a melancholy melody on the RH, it’s interestingly similar to Johannes Brahms’ six piano pieces, op. 118, no. 6. Probably because of the association with death here – both melodies come from the Mass for the Dead “Dies irae.”

In the fourth measure, a drastic *sčasovka* (rhythmic unit) interrupts, this will be a very important motif of this movement, and it’s actually derived from the melody. Another distinct feature here will be the drastic shifting of dynamics and emotions, this will show up a lot in his later work - “In the Mists” as well.

After the opening statement, the transition is in a very interesting texture. It combines the opening melody on the soprano, with the *sčasovka* in the middle, and the e-flat pedal point on the bass. The *sčasovka* here is more than an accompaniment, it brings tension to the music, eventually leading into the climax of the exposition section. This passage is also a challenge for pianists not only because of the huge leaps on the LH, but also the necessity to deliver the different layers in the music clearly.

The second theme then comes after the dramatic climax, in a remote key – G Major. The juxtaposition of triple and duple rhythms here showing the influence of Moravian folk music.

The development section uses all the materials we’ve already heard in the exposition section. After some ominous building of the tension, it reaches the climax of this whole movement, which I believe echoes with the tragic moment when the young joiner František Pavlík got killed by a soldier.

The recapitulation follows right after this climax, but not starting from the initial phrase, rather starting from the layered transitional phrase, to illustrate the unsettled feeling after witnessing the tragic event. The whole recapitulation section follows the structure we have in the exposition section, ending with a short Coda revisiting the important keys that happened in this movement.

Smrt / The Death

Titled “the Death”, this second movement is in a rounded binary form, with the first part repeated. The whole movement is dominated by a *sčasovka* throughout. Also in e-flat minor, this

movement illustrates the grief and emptiness after the tragic event. The *sčasovka* motif is derived from the opening motif of the first movement, brings a unity of the whole piece.

There's an important key in the B section worth mentioning. After a beautiful, sad melody in the *sčasovka* and some modulations, we reached d-flat minor in the middle of the B section.

This d-flat minor moment lasts for quite a while, with the overwhelming dotted rhythm on the left hand. Janáček's choice of this key is not a coincidence, because this d-flat minor key resembles a very personal memory for him. In his essay *Creative Mind*, Janáček describes a fire he witnessed when he was only four years old, remembering his own anguished cry when he was carried away from the burning house. This childhood memory created a unique, powerful, and lasting emotional footprint on his mind. He concludes: "and the key of C# minor is its echo in my *On an Overgrown Path*." Although he only specified *On an Overgrown Path* here, it wasn't a coincidence that this c-sharp minor (or its enharmonic equivalent, d-flat minor) usually serves as a platform for him to project a highly unsettled, charged emotion. Not only being used here in this second movement, this d-flat minor key is also being used a lot in "*In the Mists*."

***V mlhách* "In the Mists" (1912)**

Background

In the Mists is a cycle of four short pieces for solo piano, written in 1912. 1912 wasn't a good year for Janáček; his Opera *Jenůfa* was still waiting to perform in the Prague National Theatre; it was rejected by the director for many years; moreover, several of his stage works were also waiting to be performed outside of Brno. He was already fifty-eight years old, but was still largely unknown outside of Moravia; not only despair in his professional career, his marriage was also facing difficulties after losing their daughter, Olga. Living in the garden of the Brno Organ School, Janáček composed this piano cycle with a broken self-confidence and melancholy state of mind. Just like indicated in the title, *In the Mists*, the emotions in this cycle are disoriented and lost, almost like a dream, illustrating his depressed mind at that time.

Key scheme

As we can see here from the slide, three of the pieces are in D-flat. Although the first and second pieces end in D-flat major, the music is in d-flat minor most of the time. As we mentioned earlier, c-sharp or d-flat minor is a special key for Janáček, connected with his agonic childhood memory. The d-flat minor here in this cycle illustrates different kinds of struggling emotions - from sad whispers to aggressive exclamations.

Motivic Unity

In the first piece, the motif of the opening phrase and the middle section is connected. The ascending contour is clearly related. It's also clear in the d-flat minor phrase from the first section.

In the second piece, the motivic unity is even more obvious. The figuration in the Presto section uses the same motif, just transposed to a different key and in a much faster tempo. This piece is dominated by this single motif throughout.

In the third one, the innocent, beautiful opening melody and the agitated middle section shares the same *sčasovka*, also the second half of the melody.

In the last piece, melodies in both opening phrase and the B section shares the same descending contour.

This kind of motive unity and the repetitions of a single motif, brings a kind of obsessed feeling to the listeners. This phenomenon is especially obvious in nos. 2 and 4, that the recurring phrase keeps coming back throughout the whole piece. The motivic unity not only exists in each of the pieces, but also exists between the pieces.

In the Mists is Janáček's last major solo piano work, and the summit of his piano oeuvre. With ingenious usage of motives, texture, and harmonious nuances, every single note in this cycle is conveying some kind of emotions and meanings with overwhelming oppressed feeling. As Thomas Adès puts it, 'The greatness of *In the mists* lies in its very claustrophobia, and austerity of means affecting every aspect of the music. The solo piano becomes a narrow space with four solid walls'.

Conclusion

Janáček's music is great not only because of his ingenious compositional technique, but also the incredible sincerity in his music. Every single note is conveying something, expressing some kind of emotion deeply and genuinely from his heart. It is our privilege to be able to play, listen to, and appreciate his music, to get a glimpse of the suffering he had during his life, and connect to the most personal, intimate corner of his heart.

Recital III

Preludes – From nineteenth century and beyond, the Chopin legacy

Program

Vingt Exercices et Préludes (1819)

Maria Szymanowska
(1789-1831)

No. 1 in F Major: Vivace

24 Préludes, op. 28 (1839)

Fryderyk Chopin
(1810-1849)

No. 1 in C Major: Agitato

No. 3 in G Major: Vivace

No. 4 in E Minor: Largo

No. 7 in A Major: Andantino

No. 16 in B-flat Minor: Presto con fuoco

No. 21 in B-flat Major: Cantabile

No. 24 in D Minor: Allegro appassionato

5 Preludes, op. 16 (1894-1895)

Aleksandr Scriabin
(1872-1915)

No. 1 in B Major: Andante

No. 2 in G-sharp Minor: Allegro

No. 3 in G-flat Major: Andante cantabile

No. 4 in E-flat Minor: Lento

No. 5 in F-sharp Major: Allegretto

9 Preludes, op. 1 (1899-1900)

Karol Szymanowski

No. 1 in B Minor: Andante ma non troppo

(1882-1937)

No. 2 in D Minor: Andante con moto

No. 5 in D Minor: Allegro molto–impetuoso

No. 9 in B-flat Minor: Lento–mesto

Intermission

Préludes (1909-1913)

Claude Debussy

Book I: V. Les collines d'Anacapri [The Hills of Anacapri]

(1862-1918)

Book I: VI. Des pas sur la neige [Footprints in the Snow]

Book I: VIII. La fille aux cheveux de lin [The Girl with the Flaxen Hair]

Book II: I. Brouillards [Mists]

Book II: V. Bruyères [Town in Eastern France]

Book II: XII. Feux d'artifice [Fireworks]

Three Preludes (1926)

George Gershwin

Allegro ben ritmato e deciso

(1898-1937)

Andante con moto

Agitato

Recital III

Preludes – From nineteenth century and beyond, the Chopin legacy

Program Notes

Starting from the mid-fifteenth century, preludes have existed and have been written by composers in abundance over time. With an improvisational nature, preludes were normally paired with other substantial pieces in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century. Among them, J. S. Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier Preludes & Fugues might be one of the most famous works in the Baroque period. In the nineteenth-century, preludes started to appear in a few different contexts. They could be used as the introduction to a concert, a transition to other music, or a preface of the following substantial work. Following Bach's tradition, Chopin wrote 24 preludes in every major and minor key, which influenced many composers after him. The meanings of preludes also changed over time, for composers, performers, and listeners alike. In this recital, we hope to get a glimpse of the different concepts of preludes and see how Chopin, as a Polish-Parisian, influenced the composers after him in Russia, Poland, France, and America.

Maria Szymanowska - 20 Exercices et Préludes, No. 1 in F Major (1819)

Composed by Polish piano virtuoso Maria Agata Szymanowska, this refreshing prelude serves as the introduction to the recital – serving one of the genre's signature functions in the early nineteenth-century. Again typical of the nineteenth-century, it has a simple rounded binary form with simple harmonies. The constant running notes provide the opportunity for the pianist to warm-up and get used to the instrument; and the simplicity provides some time for the audience to mentally settle down and be prepared for the following music.

Fryderyk Chopin – Préludes, Op. 28 (1838-39)

With his fondness of Bach's music, Chopin wrote a set of preludes on every major and minor key knowing the concept of Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier. The organization here is different from Bach's one, for Chopin organized them into pairs of relative-keys, ascending by fifths. Chopin's preludes were completely novel from the preludes that existed at his time, his preludes are more like character pieces with a high aesthetic. Each of the preludes consists of a simple motive, and most of them are in a very short length – around twenty to forty measures. The longest one has ninety measures, whereas the shortest one has only thirteen measures. Modern pianists normally perform this work as a set, partly because of the continuity in the way it's been

organized. However, Chopin himself never performed this whole work as a complete set – he performed them as separate pieces, often grouped with other preludes. In this recital, we listen to seven preludes as a set to take us back to the nineteenth-century drawing rooms.

The C major prelude, no. 1, alludes to Bach's first prelude from the Well-Tempered Clavier Book I, both in terms of texture and key. As the dominant key of the preceding one, prelude no. 3 in G major perfectly emerges. This refreshing prelude features stream-like running notes on the left hand with a simple motive on the right hand. Finishing with a charming G major chord, the next one, prelude no. 4 in E minor starting on the same pitch "B" on the right hand. This melancholy, yearning prelude evokes the deepest sadness in Chopin's mind – it is incredible how Chopin uses such simple musical elements to create this magical experience. After the sighs of desperate, prelude in A major, no. 7, illustrates the ultimate brevity, simplicity yet poetic of a prelude could possibly be. This thirteen-measure prelude serves as a transition in this set, taking us to the hair-raising prelude in B-flat minor, no. 16. After this etude-like, furious prelude, we can sit back and enjoy the beautiful melody of the B-flat major prelude, no. 21. Finally, the prelude in D minor evokes Chopin's deep, heroic emotions toward his beloved homeland.

Aleksandr Scriabin – 5 Preludes, Op. 16 (1894-95)

Being called the "Russian Chopin" when he toured in the United States, Scriabin adored Chopin so much that he slept with Chopin's score beneath his pillow. The composition of the preludes accelerated because of a wager between him and publisher Mitrofan Belaiev in November 1895, who thought that Scriabin could not deliver forty-eight preludes by the following April. Eventually, Scriabin delivered forty-seven and kept composing preludes throughout his whole life – he completed ninety of them by the end of his life. Different from his previous collection of preludes – 24 Preludes op. 11, in which Scriabin follows Chopin's tradition to compose in each of the major and minor keys – Scriabin's five preludes, op. 16 is a collection of five short pieces which could be performed perfectly as a set.

No. 1 in B major is a beautiful one illustrating a stary night, reminds us of Chopin's nocturnes. Contrasting to the first prelude, no. 2 in G-sharp minor is an interesting one with the drastic shifting of characters and dynamics. In the third prelude, we're back to Scriabin's signature beautiful lyrical style, with a series of parallel sixths throughout the whole piece, as the accompaniment and melody. The last two preludes in this set are two miniature pieces with short lengths and simple ideas. No. 4 in E-flat minor consists of only twelve measures, expressing a kind of tragic and serious emotion. However, the last one in F-sharp major lifts all the tragedy and drama, and concludes the set with a light weighted, refreshing waltz.

Karol Szymanowski – Nine Preludes, Op. 1 (1899-1900)

Karol Szymanowski is one of the most important Polish composers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Deeply influenced by the tradition of Chopin and Scriabin, his music in his young age is very much in the late-Romantic style. This set of preludes is the earliest of Szymanowski's compositions known to us today – other early compositions have been lost. Composed when he was only seventeen years old, Szymanowski was already showing his extraordinary talent as a composer. In 1904, Artur Rubinstein – a prominent Polish pianist and a very good friend of Scriabin – said upon looking through the manuscripts of this set of preludes: “It is impossible to describe our amazement after playing the first few bars of the *Prelude*. This music was composed by a master! Feverishly we read through all the manuscripts, and our enthusiasm and excitement rose as we realized that we were discovering a great Polish composer!”

This set of preludes consists of nine pieces, in this recital, we've chosen four out of them. The other pieces are on the slower side, with very romantic harmonic language. The lyricism and polyphonic texture are reminiscent of Chopin's music aesthetic, whereas the tangled melody shapes and the reflective nature reminds us of Scriabin's preludes. However, Szymanowski took whose languages he inherited from Chopin and Scriabin to a much more complex level. With lots of counterpoint and voices tangled together, plus the virtuosity in some of the pieces, these preludes are not easy to learn and play. Besides, a strong melancholy emotion exists in every moment in this set.

Claude Debussy – Préludes, Livre I & II (1909-13)

Working with Chopin's pupil at the Paris Conservatoire, Debussy succeeded Chopin's legacy in France in his own way. As we enter the musical world of the twentieth century, Debussy's tonal language is now in a totally different world compared to Chopin's time. He inherited Chopin's tradition in different ways – the genres, the elegant touch, and the “exotic” sounds. Also composed of twenty-four preludes but divided into two books, Debussy did not follow the key organization as Chopin and Scriabin. There are no clear “keys” in Debussy's preludes, because his harmonic language is already departed from the traditional tonal language. This collection of preludes is more like a collection of character pieces, with a clear “image”, or topic, in each of them. We've chosen six of them to get a sight of Debussy's different characteristics and the varieties in this collection.

The bright image of the southern Italian island, Anacapri, takes us into Debussy's unique sound world with vivid scenery that we could almost see the sunshine on the hills of Anacapri. However, in the next piece, *Des par sur la neige*, we are already in a bleak scenario, painfully walking in the snow. Coming out from the snow, Debussy illustrates the beauty of *The Girl with the Flaxen Hair* with simple melodies and beautiful harmonies. However, the beauty doesn't last

for long, we're already surrounded by scary, mystery mists. The sun comes out again in the beautiful town in eastern France – *Bruyères*, with the blossom of harmonies. The last piece in this set, *Fireworks*, illustrates vivid scenery with brilliant virtuosic writing.

George Gershwin – Three Preludes (1925-26)

We wrap up this recital with three charming preludes by American composer George Gershwin. Following Chopin's tradition, Gershwin originally planned to write 24 preludes when he started this project around 1924. The number was reduced to three when it was published in 1926. In a very popular American style, Gershwin's harmonic language is deeply influenced by the popular American style of jazz. The similarity between his preludes and Chopin's are their simple forms and brevity. Additionally, the improvisational quality in Gershwin's music is paralleled to Chopin's aesthetic. Premiered by the composer himself, the three preludes were played as a set and function as a collection of character pieces.

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