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Piano Recital Program Notes

L. van Beethoven – Sonata no. 15 in D major *Pastoral*, op. 28

Ludwig van Beethoven's (1770 – 1827) Piano Sonata No.15 in D major, op.28 was first published in 1801. It is dedicated to Count Joseph von Sonnenfels. The title *Pastoral* – as many other titles of Beethoven's compositions– was added by the publishers and not composer himself. It has been debated whether the title *Pastoral* refers to the sense of countryside and nature (like Beethoven's later 6th symphony, where composer annotated country scenery and nature themes in some of the symphony's movements), or to its sense of calm, simplicity and lightness. In early 1801, right before the sonata, Beethoven composed an orchestral movement entitled *Pastorale* within the ballet music to *The Creatures of Prometheus* op. 43 and may have consciously drawn upon the character of this movement in op. 28. The fourth movement of Sonata – and, less obviously, its first movement – draw on established, nature painting elements of primitive pastoral and Christmas-tide music in their dance-like triple meter, simple key, harmonies that revolve solely around tonic, dominant and subdominant, pedal notes reminiscent of bagpipes, and drone-like intervals of a fifth in the bass. Carl Czerny in his book *Die Kunst des Vortrags der älteren und neueren Klavierkompositionen* was pointing out to the fourth movement in particular as a “cheerful *Pastorale*, playful and good-humored”. The second movement of Sonata has a lot of imitation of string quartet in its articulation, keeping a steady yet balanced non-legato accompaniment for a somber stretched-out melody, with an unexpectedly cheerful middle section. The third, Scherzo movement is not overly complicated, it variates the same simple chord progression in different keys and includes a little bit more dramatic Trio section.

F. Chopin – *Andante Spianato and Grande Polonaise Brillante* op. 22

Frederic Chopin (1810 – 1849) composed the Polonaise in 1830-1831, while the Andante was probably added in 1834. In 1836 the work appeared in print simultaneously in France, Germany and England and was dedicated to Madame d'Este. The Andante Spianato (*it. spianato* – smooth, even) and Grande Polonaise Brillante op. 22 is one of the Chopin's six works for piano and orchestra, the others being his two piano concertos opp. 11 and 21, the Variations on *La ci darem la mano* op. 2, the Fantasy on Polish Themes op. 13, and the *Krakowiak* op. 14. Since the orchestra is known to play only a very minor role in Chopin's music, especially when functioning as an accompaniment, these works can easily be performed on a single piano, with the pianist playing the tutti sections in piano reduction. In the case of op. 22, unlike Chopin's two concertos, this necessity has been turned into a virtue, and concert pianists are fond of playing the work in recital: indeed, even the majority of recordings of this work are for solo piano. The introductory Andante – which in any case was only added at a later date – dispenses entirely with the orchestra, which does not make an appearance until the Polonaise.

M. Ravel – *Alborada del gracioso* from *Miroirs*

Maurice Ravel (1875 – 1937) dedicated the five pieces of his piano cycle *Miroirs* to his five close friends who, like him, were members of the Paris artists' circle "The Apaches". *Alborada del gracioso* ("Morning Song of the Court Jester") is dedicated to the musicologist and music critic Michel Dimitri Calvocoressi. The origin of *Miroirs* is also believed to be closely connected to the "Apaches". The pianist Ricardo Viñes, to whom Ravel dedicated *Oiseaux tristes* ("Sad Birds"), reported that Claude Debussy was dreaming of music so formally free that it would seem improvised, as if torn from a sketchbook. Ravel would then have replied that he had started from a similar idea for the composition on which he was then working and added that in any event he had wanted to liberate himself from the *Jeux d'eau*, written in 1901. If Debussy's concept actually did inspire the composition of *Miroirs*, with its relatively free structure within a multipartite reprise form, it certainly only did so indirectly (Debussy's essay in quasi-improvised music was completed in January of 1904, when Ravel had already begun working on at least one of *Miroirs* pieces by this time).

"*Miroirs* (1905) is a collection of piano pieces that mark a considerable change in my harmonic evolution, one that disconcerted even those musicians who had been most familiar with my compositional style up to then." wrote Ravel himself in his letters. The work's title can be interpreted as a mirror of the composer's imagined and real world of sensory experiences. Immediate models for the music of *Miroirs* might be much the genre scenes of a Spanish court as a nature images of the sea, forest birds, moths and the aural tapestry created by the bells of Paris. In *Alborada del gracioso* this is triggered by the object itself: the court jester parodying the morning ballad of the knight.

Alborada del gracioso was not written until 1918. Though its premiere on May 17th in 1919 initially attracted little attention, the work ultimately made its way into concert halls and was published in 1923.

J. Corigliano – *Winging It*

John Corigliano's (1938) *Winging It* is a set of three improvisations that were composed in 2007-2008 and premiered on May 5th, 2009. The piece is dedicated and was performed for the first time by the pianist Ursula Oppens at Symphony Space, New York. The process of composing this three-piece set was quite unusual and worth mentioning. The composer recorded a few improvisation sessions, in which he improvised very freely – there was no steady beat and no clear measures. He later asked Mark Baechle to try transcribing the music from the recordings and putting it into measures in the way that it would make sense. There are many ways of notating the same music, so this required extraordinary musical experience.

The first improvisation has a clear ABA form, it is fast paced with a slower and more melodic middle section. In his program notes Corigliano mentions, that he thought the first improvisation was too short when he listened back to his recording, so he took the liberty of repeating the opening section again and added a single "composed" measure to conclude the piece.

Second improvisation is the longest by the performance length of all three and has an overall non changing contemplative mood. It portrays a peaceful and steady feeling of status quo, surprising the audience with a few joyous bursts of pastel colors near the end of the piece.

The last improvisation is quite virtuosic, with ascending passages in running 16th notes in several sections. Composer initially intended notating the passages he improvised in recordings as they were, but that would have meant asking a pianist to play a consistently fast piece that never repeated any notes. In the end, he decided to copy some notes and insert them in sections where he planned to play the same notes himself while improvising only could not remember what they were.