

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

English Suite No.3 in G minor, BWV808

Duration: 12 minutes

Bach's earliest collection of the clavier suite - six English Suites BWV806-811 were compiled during his Weimar years and were presumably influenced by his study of Charles Dieupart's *Six Suittes de clavessin*. Keeping the standard North Germany four-movements structure with an additional movement by option, Bach's English suites are categorized as the type of "avec prélude"- opening with a prelude or overture in a dance suite, which was modeled after the form of French lute suites. The extensive prelude presents a respective profile for each suite. In English Suite No.3, the Prelude resembles a 17th-century concerto grosso in a ritornello form in which the recurring materials are passed between the soloist and tutti. Being referred to the term "agréments," the embellishments were written out in the poignant Sarabande, which intensified the expressiveness of the work. The well-known two contrasting Gavottes present two instrumental characterizations- the drum-like rhythm and repetition in the G-minor Gavotte I, and the pastoral Musette with the pedal bass in the G-major Gavotte II.

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Piano Sonata in E-flat major Hob.XVI/52

Duration: 17 minutes

Haydn's 62 piano sonatas unfold the evolution of his compositions from the 1750s to 1795, notably the ones written during and after the *Sturm und Drang* movement, which featured deep emotional sentiments and dramatic contrasts in the artistic expression. Haydn's last three piano sonatas Hob.XVI/50-52 exemplified this aesthetic development through the growth of audacious elements utilized. They were written during his second visit to London in 1794 and were dedicated to the virtuosic female pianist Therese Jansen. Some of Haydn's full-fledged and finest works were composed at about the same time, such as London symphonies and "Gypsy Rondo" Piano Trio Hob.XV/25.

Haydn took full advantage of the English fortepiano's properties, which is evident in the symphonic sonority, abruptly changing of dynamics, and extensive usage of the range in his Sonata in E-flat major, Hob. XVI/52. The first movement *Allegro Moderato* opens with a dainty French overture theme framed by a series of uplifting arpeggiated-chords in a military dotted rhythm. An affectionately tender melody is chromatically expanded, which paved the way for the usual harmonic exploration throughout the piece. Contrastingly, the second theme is a witty tick-tock clock figure prancing in the upper register. Haydn juggles with unpredictable keys and comically harmonic turns in the development to create surprises and the sense of humor.

The second movement *Adagio* is set in a Neapolitan key of E major. The double-dotted rhythm in the theme intensified a trend to emphasize the second beat. Subsequently, the dotted motive extends toward a fantasy and pensive phrase with the arpeggio figuration as if imitating the Austrian Zither instrument. C.P.E. Bach's theoretical influence on Haydn is enumerated dynamically in this sonata- the upward arpeggios and rhapsodic cadenza, the rich ornamental additions written-out in the second half, as well as the sudden pause in the finale.

Similar to the structure in the first movement, the ebullient *Presto* finale opens with a repeating group of Gs - misleads a G-minor tendency from the previous E major movement, until the E-flat pedal note in the bass settles it in the returning key of E-flat major. After two tentative attempts of the theme, it finally bursts into a brilliant and frantic running passage, releasing the whimsical ideas. Haydn's unusual way to impose musical signs such as fermatas on suspensions, *fz* accents dislocated on the upbeats and interrupted rests between phrases manifest his masterful manipulation of teasing elements.

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Transcendental Etude No.10 in F minor, *Allegro Agitato Molto*

Duration: 5 minutes

Being called “true storm and terror etudes” by Robert Schumann, Liszt’s technically demanding collection *Études d’exécution transcendante* S.139 published in 1852 is an outstanding contribution to the genre. The collection is the third and final revised version from Liszt’s original twelve-etudes collection *Étude in douze exercices* finished in 1826. In the final set, he simplified the technique, removed the overstretched chords, titled most of etudes, and dedicated it to his piano teacher Carl Czerny. Nonetheless, after Liszt fades out his dazzling virtuosic elements, what remains is his most expressive lyricism and the pictorial, meaningful musical content.

Liszt incorporated extra-musical ideas in the etudes, drawing upon the poetry, legends, folklore, landscapes, and heroic dramas. The etude No.10 in F minor has no descriptive title. The agitate torrent triplets and breathless halftone motive replete with inexhaustible passion and impulsivity, yet the leading intervals of minor sevenths and augmented fourths in the accompaniment along with the bittersweet climax where the D-flat octave being reiterated 22 times pervade the heartrending beauty. The impetuous staccato octaves and the furious tempo setting in the coda bear a resemblance to Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No.23 in F minor, Op.57. Italian composer and editor Ferruccio Busoni named this etude “*Appassionata*.”

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Gaspard de la nuit

I. Ondine

III. Scarbo

Duration: 16 minutes

Ravel’s somber, morbid subtext in some of his music is inseparable from the modern literary influence in his time. His reading of Edgar Allan Poe, especially “The Philosophy of Composition” and the poem “The Raven,” has a significant impact on his aesthetic of art, which is revealed tangibly in his compositions. French Romantic poet Aloysius Bertrand’s prose poem collection *Gaspard de la nuit, fantasies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot*, which encloses with prints of Rembrandt and Jacques Callot, stylistically echoing Poe, was defined as dark, grotesque, and macabre gothic imagery. Ravel appealed to this collection and chose “Ondine,” “Le gibet,” and “Scarbo” as his tone poem triptych- *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908). As he wrote, “my ambition is to say with notes what a poet expresses with words.” Ravel indeed transformed Bertrand’s poetic narrative into his unique musical language, as befitted and portrayed the varied aquatic effect, the sound of tolling bells, and the hallucinatory, nightmarish demon.

“Ondine” opens with the C-sharp major chord adhered with a doleful minor sixth embedded, repeating alternately as the “shimmering water” accompaniment. The conjured, mysterious melodic theme lingering throughout the entire piece symbolizes the water nymph’s cunning and pleading singing to seduce a mortal man to her palace and to be the king of the lake. The changing liquid accompaniment figuration depicts the varied water fluctuation, such as the water falling, splashes, ripples, waves, and cascades. The rapid repetitions and light touch require the dexterity of finger movement. In terms of the technique, Ravel proficiently applied the virtuosity adopted from Liszt. The floating descending double note passage gradually arouses a sense of danger, building up a turbulent waterfall-like climax. After being rejected by the mortal man, with her laughter and tears reflected by the violently swept arpeggios, Ondine vanishes being “sullen and spiteful,” which brings the piece back to placidity.

“Scarbo” portrays the nasty, devilish dwarf that appears at night, flitting around the observer’s bed, scratching on things, and transforming its color and shadow randomly in the darkness. Ravel’s use of advanced piano technique thoroughly links up with the programmatic content. The hectic tremolo, scintillating dynamic effect, and fierce dissonances characterize the frightening and elusive atmosphere. The Phrygian mode with the flamenco dance rhythm that mimics Scarbo’s impish pirouette embodies Ravel’s predilection of Spanish dance music, which came from his Basque’s influence. *Gaspard de la nuit* demonstrates Ravel’s mathematical use of harmonic progressions and motivic patterns. His rational and precisely constructed composition also contains the fatal beauty.

Lowell Liebermann (b.1961)

Nocturne Op.55 No.5

Duration: 7 minutes

Lowell Liebermann, an American pianist and postmodern composer, composed approximately 140 works in all genres, including his most frequently performed and recorded works *Gargoyles* (1989) piano suite and *Sonata for Flute and Piano* (1987). Liebermann talked about his composing, "my interest is in the 12 notes, and in melodic and motivic development... whether tonal or not." His eleven nocturnes for the piano repertoire refract his neo-romantic writing style- maintaining the tonality, lyricism, and stunning counterpoint, which show inspirations from Chopin, Fauré, and initially, as Liebermann mentioned in his interview, from John Field. Moreover, he diversely combines this traditional way with his harmonic modernity.

Liebermann composed his eleven nocturnes from 1987 to 2011. His original idea was to write twelve nocturnes in each key, but ultimately he wasn't restricted to the tonality. Nocturne OP.55 No.5 was premiered by pianist Norman Krieger at Carnegie Hall in 1997. This ethereal, poetic work comprises two melodic ideas that return with new materials each time. The simple D major melody with the triple accompaniment returns with the "wind chime" decorated texture, and the last time appears in a distinguished four-part canonic layer. The octave melody with the two-notes ostinato second theme varies to the eerie chromatic double thirds; later it is gathered with the D major melody in a three-part counterpoint. He considers Liszt as his model for the virtuosity aspect, who "get a brilliant effect using the least amount of means." The polyrhythm, intricate texture, imaginative crystallize timbre, intervals larger than 10th and double thirds in this work demand performers' coloristic nuances and technical facility.