2006-03-16

Faculty recital series: Anthony DiBonaventura, piano, March 16, 2006

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

College of Fine Arts
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FACULTY RECITAL SERIES

ANTHONY DiBONAVENTURA piano

8pm
Thursday, March 16, 2006

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE of Fine Arts

Thursday, March 16, 2006 at 8pm
Tsai Performance Center

FACULTY RECITAL SERIES

ANTHONY DiBONAVENTURA piano

BEETHOVEN — *12 Variations on a Theme of Wranitzky,* WoO 71

RACHMANINOV — *Variations on a Theme of Corelli,* Op. 42

Andante
Poco piu mosso
L'istesso tempo
Tempo di Minuetto
Andante
Allegro (ma non tanto)
L'istesso tempo
Vivace
Adagio misterioso
Un poco piu mosso
Allegro scherzando
Allegro vivace
L'istesso tempo
Agitato
Intermezzo
Andante (come prima)
L'istesso tempo
Allegro vivace
Meno mosso
Allegro con brio
Piu mosso. Agitato
Piu mosso
Andante

INTERMISSION

RAVEL — *Miroirs*

Noctuelles
Oiseaux tristes
Une barque sur l'ocean
Alborada del gracioso
La vallee des cloches

PROGRAM NOTES

As an artistic vehicle, theme-and-variations form has had a long, twisted, both distinguished and undistinguished, in other words an uneven history. Starting with an extended, most often binary form theme that has a beginning, middle and end, and adding variations to it can be mechanical and result in a fairly uninteresting, predictable and ultimately boring composition. In the middle of the 16th century, when Spanish composers made many of them, called *Diferencias*, most of them tended to fall into this category. Antonio de Cabezon managed to produce quite interesting results with this technique, and many Baroque composers did as well, but the danger remained that a work would often start and stop without making any effort at an aesthetically satisfying whole. It would lack logic, momentum and a sense of a gradually unfolding form that transcended the natural, usual limitations of the procedure.

In the 1770s and onward, societal changes induced bourgeois and laboring class people to join the audience of the music produced by leading composers. This had the effect of lowering aesthetic standards, particularly of pieces in variation form. People enjoyed hearing popular songs, songs they knew and loved, serve as the vehicle for a dozen or more variations in which the performer could show off all his most flashy and brilliant technical capabilities, whether or not any true musical value accompanied the variations. The London piano school of this age led in grinding out these potboilers on *God save the King, Rule Brittania, Woodman spare that tree, Home sweet home, The last rose of summer*, or operatic hit[s] by Paisiello, Gretry, Mozart, or many less famous figures. Sometimes the variations ran on for half an hour ending in a display of musical fireworks that made strong men blush and women faint. By the end of the 19th century, more than two hundred sets of variations on The carnival of Venice could be bought in music shops. These "figural" variations, as we call this type because of the rapid melodic figurations that characterize them, gave the genre a bad name.

Besides the fact that their surnames all begin with B, the most useful thing we can say about the linkage of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms is that they all wrote many sets of variations, and that theirs almost always maintained the highest states of musical worth from beginning to end. Johann Sebastian Bach reached the summit of the Baroque variation in many organ and clavier pieces, most notably the so-called Goldberg Variations. Beethoven wrote an enormous number of these pieces, culminating in his monstrous and overwhelmingly impressive "Diabelli" Variations, Op. 120. In the second half of the century, Johannes Brahms almost single-handedly saved the form with his many magnificent sets, of which it would be difficult to single out one example. These three composers' works stand as the touchstone against which all other sets of variations have been, continue to be, and always will be measured.

Beethoven's "Wranitzky" Variations, WoO 71, come from the earliest period of his compositional life. At this time he established himself more as a piano virtuoso than as a composer, and became famous for spontaneously improvising variations on the very sort of popular theme all the other virtuosos cultivated. He occasionally wrote these out, and even allowed them to be published, but would not honor them with an opus number, which explains the peculiar designation WoO (Werke ohne Opuszahl, work without opus number). Paul Wranitzky (1756–1808), brother of Anton, wrote a ballet in 1797 containing a Russian dance that served as the theme of WoO 71. We can thus expect this to be a cheap, obvious, figural variation set like those of Pinto, Cramer or Dussek.

This does not turn out to be the case. The thirteen minutes of this composition already demonstrate the restraint and reflective character that mark the subsequent "Eroica" Variations, Op. 35, and the B–major variations that conclude the Fantasie, op. 77. You w[ill] notice yourself as you listen, that as every variation ends, the one that follows does not seem to be what you might expect, but as it continues, the logic and flow of it make it seem inevitable. When the piece ends, you find yourself not noticing the starts and stops, but experiencing the whole. No greater compliment can be paid to a work in this form. Though Beethoven may not have been pleased enough with the Wranitzky Variations to give them an opus number, we can hear the inner genius in them to award it a palm.

The Russian post-romantic Sergei Rachmaninoff carried the best of the 19th-century sensibility into the 20th. He employed the theme-and-variations form rarely, and reverently in the shadow of Brahms, whose works he studied and played in public. He only composed three pianistic sets in his career, the Chopin Variations, Op. 22, the Corelli Variations, Op. 42, and the most famous set of all, the strangely-named Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini, Op. 43. One might be surprised that he used a theme by Arcangelo Corelli, whose Baroque musical language seemed distant from that in Rachmaninoff's environment. He had come upon the theme not in its original form, but as Liszt had employed it in his *Rapsodie espagnole*, a work Sergei had played in public for several years. Finding that he liked its shape and possibilities for variation, he looked up the original and began work on the piece in 1931, which vacationing in France. What the composer discovered after he had decided on the title of Op. 42, was that Corelli did not compose the theme but adapted a 16th-century anonymous dance song from Portugal. The actual composer of this theme may be discovered soon, as researchers have now begun to explore that repertory intensely.

When Sergei's piece appeared in print, Corelli's named did not appear on the title page, but remained on page 2, just above the actual music. After Rachmaninoff left Russia for good because of the Revolution, he only wrote one work for solo piano, and that piece is this Op. 42! The D-minor theme unfolds slowly as four phrase units, but the first two form a question ending on the dominant, the second two the answer finishing on the tonic. The [illegible]ty variations so named follow this pattern, if not exactly, about as close as one can w[illegible]n one constantly adjusts the harmony to conform to romantic experimentation. An intermission amounting to a wild *cadenza* occurs between variations 13 and 14, and the *coda* after variation 20 tease the listener by straying from the basic pattern, but only just enough to pull off some surprises. Like the three B's, Rachmaninoff groups the variations into chapters that seem to follow each other logically until a sudden change of mood ushers in a new chapter. The ultimate form seems more like a *rondo* than simple variations, eliminating the mechanical disaster attendant to the genre. At the same time, the composer revels in stopping at almost a dozen final cadences, as though he had actually reached the end, only to demonstrate that he had a lot more to say than anyone in the audience could imagine. This I call composer arrogance, and Rachmaninoff possessed a great deal of it (in the nicest possible way, of course)!

Now that we have progressed into the 21st century, we can look backwards at the 20th century with (at least the beginning of) a sense of perspective about it. When we do, the figure of Maurice Ravel looms larger than it had seemed to when he lived. In 1960, the consensus about the great musical visionaries of the century included Debussy, Schonberg, Bartok, Stravinsky, and Prokofiev, but not Ravel. Critics saw Ravel as a pale imitator of Debussy, but lacking the divine Claude's sensitivity and exploratory nature. One important writer dismissed him as the creator of "light music beneath contempt."

We now have studied all this music closely, and come to understand and appreciate Ravel as never before. Among the most vital and historically important of Ravel's works, *Miroirs* occupies an elevated position. Its five movements explore a region of musical expression never before essayed by anyone anywhere. *Noctuelles* depicts the twisting, desperate motions of moths trying to avoid the flame that will kill them but to which they cannot help being drawn by the forces of phototropism. *Oiseaux tristes* I will not attempt to describe – but have you ever heard sad bird calls? *Un barque sur l'ocean* represents humanity, thinking it stands on solid ground while our planet gropes along its orbit like a boat on a stormy sea, perhaps about to capsize at any moment. *Alborado del gracioso* (the aubade of a fool) tells the story of two illicit lovers trysting while the fool waits outside to warn them if her husband returns – a warning he fails to give properly. *La vallee des cloches* reveals a [illegible]e, town or city in a valley where church bells ring, but an eerie emptiness pervades t[illegible]environment, as though God were calling but no one heard – or if anyone heard, he or she did not listen. The overall depressing nature of these five movements contrasts greatly with the natural impressionist romanticism for which Debussy stood.

Ravel depicts moths, Debussy would have chosen butterflies. Debussy's *La mer* expresses love and respect for the real ocean, not its use as a symbol for the fragility of life.

Even though Ravel's five movements differ from each other in every musical parameter, they may be seen as variations on the 20th-century theme that this bittersweet life seems to be turning far more bitter than sweet. The first loud rumblings of World War I sounded in 1908, the year Ravel finished *Miroirs*. Beethoven's heroic stance, Rachmaninoff's romantic passion here gives way to a deep pessimism, not so much for Ravel himself but for the culture and civilization in which he grew up. The individual would be chewed up by forces greater than him, and he would not ever recover his dignity – that is what Ravel predicts. He lived and suffered through the Great War and his work after that carried through the realization of what he had predicted. The violence of La valse and the Concerto for the left hand seem to say "I told you so" but in that ever subtle, sophisticated Ravellian manner. The first whiffs of that violence can be inhaled in Mimoirs.

Thus, dear friends and gentle hearts, all three works on this evening's program may be thought of as variations on a theme. Run that up the flagpole and see if it waves.

Joel Sheveloff
January 2006

ANTHONY DIBONAVENTURA piano

Anthony di Bonaventura is Professor of Piano at Boston University's School of Music. Known around the world for his championship of new music and his dedication to the classics, he has performed in 27 countries in recitals and with such major orchestras as the Boston Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Chicago Symphony, Royal Philharmonic, and Vienna Symphony. He has appeared in the Great Performances Series at Lincoln Center and the festivals of Ann Arbor, Saratoga, Bergen (Norway), Graz (Austria), and Almeida (England). During his second tour of Australia and New Zealand, he was the soloist for the concerts which opened the famed Sydney Opera House.

Many of the most distinguished composers of our time — György Ligeti, Luciano Berio, Alberto Ginastera, Milko Kelemen, and Vincent Persichetti — have written works especially for Professor di Bonaventura, and he has performed the world premieres of Ligeti's Concerto for Piano, Austria, 1986, (American premiere with the Saint Louis Symphony with Leonard Slatkin); Ginastera's Piano Sonata No. 2, Ann Arbor, 1992; Berio's *Points on the Curve to Find*, Germany, 1975; and Persichetti's Piano Concerto, Dartmouth Festival, 1968.

In 1968, Professor di Bonaventura was invited to go to Hungary by the world-renowned composer and educator, Zoltan Kodaly, to perform his music and that of his fellow countryman Béla Bartók. In 1991, Professor di Bonaventura performed the Netherlands premiere of Witold Lutoslawski's Piano Concerto with the composer conducting, followed by performances also conducted by Lutoslawski with the Boston Symphony, Polish National Radio Symphony, and San Francisco Symphony in 1993, on the occasion of the composer's 80th birthday.

Professor di Bonaventura has recorded for the Colombia (Sony Classical), RCA, Connoisseur Society (IN-SYNC), Sine Qua Non, and Titanic record labels. His recording of the Debussy *Etudes* has been described by *The Boston Globe* as "one of the wonders of th world." His latest releases include fourteen Scarlatti Sonatas the complete Rachmaninoff Preludes, and an all-Chopin disc for Titanic.

Acknowledged as a master teacher of international stature, Professor di Bonaventura is also the founder-director of the Brandywine Piano Institute at Westchester University of Pennsylvania. He has given masterclasses at many institutions including UCLA, University of Michigan, Eastman School of Music, Brigham Young University, North Carolina School for the Arts, University of Toronto, University of Texas, Tulane University, and the Yamaha School in Singapore. In 1992, Professor di Bonaventura was given the Metcalf Cup and Prize, Boston University's highest award for excellence in teaching. In 2002, he was given an honorary doctorate by Husson College.

Professor di Bonaventura began his piano studies at the age of three, gave his first professional concert at the age of four, won a scholarship to New York's Music School Settlement at six, and appeared as a soloist with the New York Philharmonic at thirteen. At sixteen, he became the pupil of the celebrated Russian teacher Madame Isabelle Vengerova, and later entered the Curtis Institute, from which he graduated with the highest honors. Enthusiastic acclaim by critics and audiences alike came early in his career. After his Washington debut, Paul Hime of *The Washington Post* wrote, "He can stand with the great players of Mozart's keyboard music." His brilliant performances in an early European tour led to his selection by Otto Klemperer to perform the complete Beethoven Concerti at the London Beethoven Festival.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MUSIC
UPCOMING EVENTS AND PERFORMANCES

Tuesday, March 21, 8pm

Faculty Recital Series
PETER ZAZOFSKY violin
Complete Bach Sonatas and Partitas
Tsai Performance Center

Wednesday, March 22, 5:30pm

Music Education Research Seminar
ANN GALLIGAN
Culture, Creativity, Education and the Workplace: A musical perspective
CFA Room 156

Wednesday, March 22, 6:30pm

Faculty Recital Series
BARBARA POESCHL-EDRICH harp
MICHELLE LACOURSE, viola
WHITNEY PENCINA guest flu
YOUNG The Song of the Lark (19
AMLIN Encomium (2004) - world premiere
DEBUSSY Sonate for flute, viola and harp
MOZART Concerto for flute and harp, KV. 299
ROUSSEL Serenade, Op. 30
Marsh Chapel

Tuesday, March 28, 8pm

Soloists Winners Concert
Boston University Symphony Orchestra
DAVID HOOSE conductor
and student conductors
PEI-YEH TSAI piano
RYAN YURE clarinet
INA ZDOROVETCHI harp
Tsai Performance Center

Thursday, March 30, 8pm

Richmond Competition Winners Concert
PEI-YEH TSAI piano
Works by Schumann, Brahms, Cornell and Beethoven
Tsai Performance Center

Saturday, April 1, 8pm

Boston University Chamber Chorus, Women's Chorale, and Concert Choir
ANN HOWARD JONES conductor
and student conductors
Music by Boston University composers
including Cornell, Amlin, and Ne
CFA Concert H

Tuesday, April 4, 8pm

Faculty Recital Series
"Il Furioso"
VICTOR COELHO theorbo
GIAN PAOLO FAGOTTO tenor
DAVID DOLATA tiorbino and theorbo
Marsh Chapel

Friday and Saturday, April 7 and 8, 9am

Music Education Research Seminar
EDWIN GORDON
Music Learning Theory and Audiation
Please check our website for more information on this event

Sunday, April 9, 7pm

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distinguished international artists and speakers
Tsai Performance Center
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Tuesday, April 11, 8pm

Boston University Baroque Orchestra
MARTIN PEARLMAN conductor
An evening of Baroque opera scenes
CFA Concert Hall

Wednesday, April 12, 8pm

Times Arrow
Student New Music Ensemble
playing works by Boston University faculty and students
CFA Concert Hall

Thursday, April 13, 5:30pm

Music Education Research Seminar
THOMAS MANUEL
The Influence of Social Dance on Popular Music
CFA Room 154

Sunday, April 16, 7pm

Faculty Recital Series
SARAH ARNESON soprano
GEORGE KERN piano
Arias by Mozart
CFA Concert Hall

Tuesday, April 18, 8pm

Boston University Symphony Orchestra
and Symphonic Chorus
ANN HOWARD JONES and DAVID HOOSE conductors
MICHELLE JOHNSON soprano
SIMON ESTES bass-baritone
An all Vaughan Williams Program
Symphony No. 4 in F minor
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Carnegie Hall, New York

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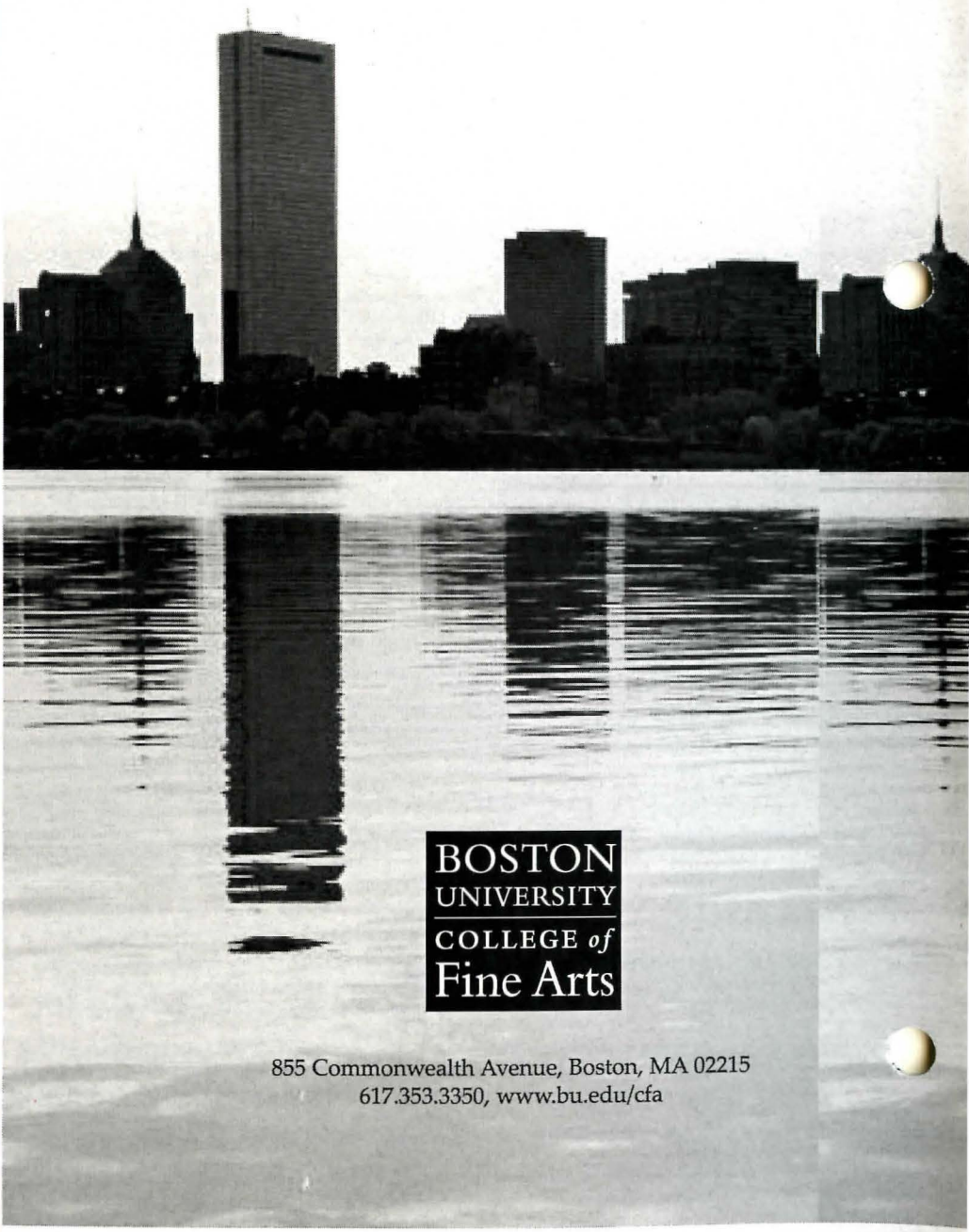

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