

Sunday, October 23, 2016, 3pm
 Hertz Hall

Denis Matsuev, *piano*

PROGRAM

- Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770–1827) Sonata No. 31 in A-flat Major, Op. 110
 Moderato cantabile molto espressivo
 Allegro molto
 Adagio ma non troppo
- Robert SCHUMANN (1810–1856) *Symphonic Études*, Op. 13
 Theme: Andante
 Étude I: Un poco più vivo
 Étude II: Marcato il canto
 Étude III: Vivace
 Étude IV: Allegro marcato
 Étude V: Vivacissimo
 Posthumous Variation No. 4
 Posthumous Variation No. 5
 Étude VI: Agitato
 Étude VII: Allegro molto
 Étude VIII: Andante
 Étude IX : Presto possibile
 Étude X: Allegro
 Étude XI: Andante
 Étude XII: Allegro brillante

INTERMISSION

- Franz LISZT (1811–1886) *Mephisto Waltz* No. 1, S. 514
- Piotr Ilyich TCHAIKOVSKY (1840–1893) “Méditation,” Op. 72, No. 5
- Sergei PROKOFIEV (1891–1953) Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major, Op. 83, *Stalingrad*
 Allegro inquieto
 Andante caloroso
 Precipitato

*Funded, in part, by the Koret Foundation, this performance is part of Cal Performances’
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Additional support made possible, in part, by Patron Sponsor Dan Johnson.

Sonata No. 31 in A-flat Major, Op. 110
Ludwig van Beethoven

This work, one of the most lyrical of his 32 piano sonatas, was written in 1822, when Beethoven had already begun his Ninth Symphony and was working on the enormous *Missa Solemnis*. It is one of the three sonatas written between 1820 and 1822, a set of works highly diverse in content but similar in their precision and economy of development, the distillation of a lifetime's musical experience. Aided by developments that within the span of his career had considerably expanded the range of the fortepiano, Beethoven took the inherited structure of the sonata form crystallized by Haydn and transformed it into a spacious framework for the expression of grand ideas. He did this by employing important innovations, such as frequent key changes, and by reintroducing into it fugal elements.

The first movement of this sonata, which is lyrical, friendly, and informal in construction, begins *con amabilità*—amiably and graciously. Like a foreboding of Romanticism, an ecstatic beauty of melody dominates the movement, which seems to have grown out of the tone colors that are peculiar to the pianoforte, partaking neither of the quartet nor the orchestral style. The music glides along, now disporting itself in graceful curves, arabesques, or trills, now speaking in eloquent declamation.

The second movement, scherzo-like, mixes the soft dialogue sounds with harder accents. It is a kind of fantastic march, with suspended rhythms and mobile basses, at once light and heavy, delicate and opulent, high and low, loud and soft. A trio-intermezzo in D-flat flutters along, following a capriciously drawn line.

A subdued recitative at the beginning of the next movement leads to the deeply moving arioso, filled with prayerful expression. Deep, melancholy shadows descend. But it would not be worthy of Beethoven to remain in this mood long. Building a rampart against it, piling stone upon stone, the fugue follows, liberating and elevating. Once again in the middle portion the beautiful arioso raises its plaintive voice. The fugue hesitates but resumes its progress with an inner unrest, from which only the final sections

bring release. With robust strength the theme pursues its course in confidence, rising ever higher, while the tempo and the mobility of the music grow, to reach a climax in an exclamation of *joie de vivre*.

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Symphonic Études, Op. 13
Robert Schumann

Robert Schumann is a central figure in musical Romanticism; his music is infused with much self-expression, potent lyricism, and extra-musical associations—both personal and literary—thus making him one of the quintessential Romantic composers. Though Schumann was above all a composer of piano music and art songs, the concert literature of the 19th century would be greatly impoverished without his orchestral works.

Son of a bookseller, publisher, and author, Schumann demonstrated such talent in both musical and literary spheres while still a schoolboy that his father thought to send him to study composition with Carl Maria von Weber in 1826. Unfortunately, both Weber and Schumann-père died before this plan could be realized; in 1828, Robert's mother sent him to the University of Leipzig to matriculate as a law student. After a rather dilatory pursuit of legal studies in both Leipzig and Heidelberg, he finally won his parent's permission to devote himself solely to music in 1830.

Much of this was due to the support of the renowned piano pedagogue Friedrich Wieck, he who later, after much resistance and a court battle, would become Schumann's father-in-law. Wieck told Frau Schumann that three years of solid study could see her son one of the foremost pianists of the day. His share of Robert's tutelage however, dropped to naught when his daughter Clara showed promise as a concert pianist herself and required his presence on concert tours.

The *Symphonic Études*, Op. 13 is not only one of Schumann's greatest works, but a landmark in the history of piano literature. The title of the work underwent several metamorphoses: Schumann had originally intended to call it "12 Davidsbündleretüden" in reference to

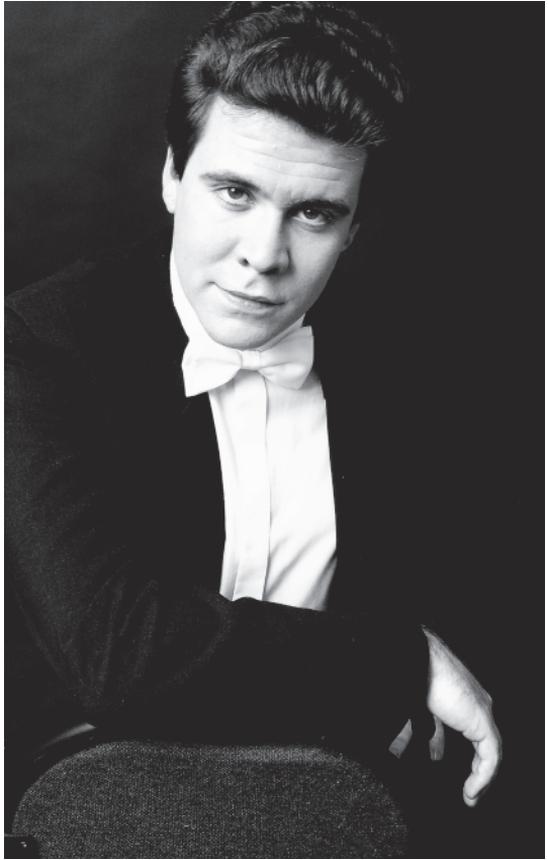
the League of David that he had invented as a symbol of his battle with musical philistines. Later he thought of the more portentous title of “Études in Orchestral Character,” finally settling for the double title of “Études en forme de Variations, or XII Études symphoniques.”

The theme is, in fact, not by Schumann, but Baron von Fricken, an amateur composer and the father of Ernestine von Fricken (Schumann’s fiancée at the time). In 1834 the Baron asked Schumann to look at a set of variations he composed. Schumann, impressed with the theme, used it for his own *Symphonic Études*. But he felt that the somber character of the theme was too prevalent in the Baron’s work (a problem Schumann eventually solved by giving his work a triumphant conclusion). As he explained in a letter to the Baron:

No doubt the subject ought to keep in view but it ought to be shown through different colored glasses, just as there are windows of various colors which make the country look rosy like the setting sun, or as golden as a summer morning . . . I am now really arguing against myself, as I have actually been writing variations on your theme, and am going to call them “pathetic.” Still if there is anything pathetic about them I have endeavored to portray it in different colors.

Strangely enough, Schumann struggled all his life to find the perfect version of this work. He was not only interested in composing variations with the utmost variety, but variations that united structurally to form a work of symphonic proportions.

The first version contained 18 variations, but when it was published in 1837, it had just 12. In 1852, Schumann published a second edition in which Nos. 3 and 9 were deleted and



Ernst Ertl

the finale revised. After Schumann’s death, Clara Schumann and Brahms published five variations of the six that had been left out of the first edition. Today’s program presents the first edition, as well as the last two of the so-called posthumous variations.

Étude No. 1 is a rhythmically tense march confined almost exclusively to the middle and lower half of the keyboard. No. 2 pits an assertive and massive triplet accompaniment against a canto in duple time. The wide-spaced “violin” arpeggios in the right hand of No. 3 provide a background for the left hand’s elegant melody. No. 4 is another march, with full chords in both hands separated from one another by eighth-note rests; it leads directly into No. 5, a scherzo handled in pseudo-canonic fashion. The fourth of the so-called posthumous varia-

tions is a waltz setting with a prominent accent on the second beat of the measure. The final posthumous variation combines brilliant finger work with the melody hidden in the offbeats. Returning to the first edition, No. 6, marked *agitato*, gets its tumbling, fluttering quality by a complicated figuration divided between the two hands. No. 7 starts with both hands moving close together, in parallel motion, but the right hand gradually gains a separate identity. No. 8, with its persistent dotted rhythm and ascending-descending “slides,” resembles the opening of a Baroque overture. No. 9 is another puckish scherzo, to be played *presto possibile*. There is never a pause in the massive, sixteenth-note progression of No. 10. The left hand is equally persistent in the following étude, but above it the right hand spins out an expressive nocturne.

The finale is more than three times the length of any of the preceding études and tends to overshadow them with its brilliance and melodic appeal. As a tribute to the young Englishman William Sterndale Bennet, a close friend of Schumann’s to whom the work is dedicated, Schumann used the theme “Du stolzes England, Freue dich” (“Proud England, rejoice”) from a Marschner opera, *Der Templer und die Jüdin*, as the theme for the finale.

Though one of Schumann’s most brilliant works, these works were received with so much hostility when first performed, by Clara, that Schumann advised her not to play them in public again. He said they were written not to please the public but for their own sake.

—*Columbia Artists Management Inc.*
(edited by Mark Williams)

Mephisto Waltz No. 1, S. 514

Franz Liszt

The *Mephisto Waltz* is the first of four such-titled works by Liszt, this one composed in 1860. One of his favorite pieces of literature, Goethe’s *Faust*, inspired these and many of Liszt’s compositions, but this music is based on a scene from Nicolaus Lenau’s poetic setting of the legend. Subtitled “The Dance in the Village Tavern,” the story, inscribed at length in Liszt’s score, follows in brief:

Faust and Mephistopheles enter a village tavern where a wedding celebration is in progress. Faust becomes enamored of a dark-eyed beauty, while Mephistopheles takes over the fiddle-playing. The dancers become intoxicated by his demonically inspired music-making and the party becomes a bacchanalia. The dancers slip out into the night, with Mephistopheles’ laughter echoing from time to time as a double-note trill. Finally, the nightingale’s song is heard. The heavy desire pulls them down. And they are swallowed in the boiling sea of ecstasy.

Liszt scored this work first for full orchestra, then later transcribed it for piano solo and for two pianos. The *Mephisto Waltz* is a grand showpiece; it presents the performer with technical problems that are truly diabolical. There are few compositions that offer such a wealth of dazzling pyrotechnics in so few minutes.

—*Columbia Artists Management Inc.*

“Méditation,” Op. 72, No. 5

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Tchaikovsky’s works do not exhibit the raw national and folk-song idiom to the extent of Mussorgsky’s music, for instance, and his colors are not quite as brilliant as Rimsky-Korsakov’s; yet, more than those by either of these two composers, Tchaikovsky’s works are considered by musicians all over the world as the epitome of Russian music. While he adhered to Western European forms of technical skill and lyric style, in his essentials Tchaikovsky remains a Russian of the most classic tendencies—his language is emotionally Slavic. His music glows with the peculiar fire that burned in his soul; rapture and agony, gloom and joy seem in perpetual struggle for expression.

Tchaikovsky’s piano works often take a back-seat compared to his orchestral and vocal music. This is curious when one realizes the praise they were given by both Bülow and Rubinstein. Nevertheless, his works are infrequently played, and little gems like his “Méditation” are quite deserving of inclusion in the

recital repertoire. Its grand tune, interesting figurations, and strong sense of direction, paired with its strong Russian roots and contemplative nature, make this piece a well-deserved respite in a virtuosic recital.

—*Columbia Artists Management Inc.*
(Elizabeth E. Torres)

Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major, Op. 83, *Stalingrad*
Sergei Prokofiev

Not many composers write music that has such an unmistakable identity as that of Prokofiev. What is particularly interesting is that Prokofiev's music, stylistically changed little over the decades; the same qualities and mannerisms by which his later works are recognized can be found in many of his earlier compositions. In his autobiography, Prokofiev stated that five principal factors dominated his art; these are: 1) the influence of Baroque and Classical forms, 2) the desire to introduce new harmonies into his expressive music, 3) strong rhythms, 4) elements of lyricism, and 5) the jesting and mocking characteristics so typical of his symphonies, concertos, and stage works.

In his keyboard works, Prokofiev sought freedom from typical 19th-century techniques. He used the piano's full sonority, at the same time treating it as a basically percussive instrument. This music, which has become extremely popular, often suggests strange, psychological elements.

Prokofiev wrote more than 100 piano pieces, of varying lengths and in many styles; however, his finest keyboard writing is exhibited in the nine piano sonatas. Their composition covers a span of over 40 years. The Sonata No. 7 was begun in 1939 and completed three years later in Tbilisi, where and when he also completed the opera *War and Peace*. The composer entitled this sonata, along with the sixth and eighth, the *War* sonatas, as they were written during the period when the impact of the Nazi invasion was most strongly felt by the Russian people, and especially by Prokofiev.

The first performance of this work was given by Sviatoslav Richter in Moscow, January 18, 1943; the pianist described the sonata in these terms:

The sonata throws us immediately into the anxious atmosphere of a world off-balance. Disorder and uncertainty reign. Man watches the play of death-bearing forces. That which made up his life has ceased to be. He feels, he loves. The fullness of this feeling is now directed toward all men. He, together with all men, protests and keenly experiences the general grief. The impetuous offensive rush, full of the will of victory, sweeps all in its path. He gains strength in the battle, acquiring gigantic power, and this becomes an affirmation of life.

In his biography of the composer, Israel Nestyev writes:

They were correct who sense in the tempestuous, precipitate rhythms of the first movement, in its "percussive" harmonies, in the Cyclopean might of its finale—music of gigantic, thundering tension, as if overturning everything in its path—a reflection of the shattering events endured by the Soviet Union in these years. The sonata has no program, but the storms of the war years are surely reflected in its general emotional tonality. For a brief moment at the beginning of the second movement the nervous dynamics give way to the charm of a live-lyrical minuet theme. But soon this oasis of pure lyricism is engulfed by the steely pressure of the B-flat Major finale, courageously uniting in itself the Russian monumentalism of Borodin with sharp modern "machine" rhythms.

One of the landmarks of 20th-century piano literature, the Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major, Op. 83 earned the composer the Stalin Prize.

—*Columbia Artists Management Inc.*

Denis Matsuev (*piano*) has enjoyed a stellar career since his triumphant victory at the 11th International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow; he is now one of the most sought-after musicians of his generation. Matsuev appears regularly with renowned orchestras such as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony, London Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Amsterdam's Concertgebouw, Berliner Philharmoniker, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, and the Orchestra of the Mariinsky Theatre. He also enjoys successful creative partnerships with the world's most prominent conductors, including Valery Gergiev, Mariss Jansons, Myung-Whun Chung, Zubin Mehta, and Yuri Temirkanov.

Matsuev continues his involvement with the Serge Rachmaninoff Foundation, established by Alexander Rachmaninoff, the grandson of the composer, and it was Matsuev who was chosen to present Rachmaninoff's unpublished works, recorded at the composer's grand piano.

For many years Matsuev has led numerous music festivals and educational projects, including the Stars on the Baikal Festival, the Crescendo Festival, the Annecy Music Festival (artistic director), and the International Astana Piano Passion Festival and Competition. In 2016 Matsuev also serves as the artistic direc-

tor and chairman of the organizing committee for the Moscow Grand Piano Competition for young pianists.

Matsuev is the president of New Names, the Russian interregional charitable foundation; artistic director of the Serge Rachmaninoff Foundation; and laureate of the prestigious Shostakovich Prize. He was voted People's Artist of Russia and is a member of the Presidential Council for Culture and Art. He recently became the head of the Public Council under the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation.

In 2014 Matsuev was seen by millions of spectators around the globe performing excerpts from Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 at the closing ceremony of the Olympic Games in Sochi. Also that year, he was designated a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador.

Denis Matsuev was recently announced as the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia ambassador.

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Denis Matsuev gratefully acknowledges the AVC Charity Foundation, Andrey Cheglakov, founder, as a Strategic Partner of today's performance.