

THE ARTIST

Byron Schenkman

19TH-CENTURY BROADWOOD PIANO,
FROM THE INSTRUMENT COLLECTION
OF EARLY MUSIC VANCOUVER

A COLLABORATION WITH



The Vancouver
CHOPIN
SOCIETY

Generously supported by

Agnes Hohn

Pre-concert chat with
host Matthew White at 12:15:

Byron Schenkman



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VANCOUVER BACH FESTIVAL 2019

THURSDAY AUGUST 1 AT 1:00 PM | CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL

CHOPIN PRELUDES

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849):

Waltz in E Minor (Op. post.)

Prelude in C# Minor, Op. 45

Nocturne in A^b Major, Op. 32, no. 2

Maria Szymanowska (1789-1831):

Nocturne in B^b Major

Robert Schumann (1810-1856):

Kinderszenen, Op. 15

Of foreign lands and people

Curious story

Blind man's buff

Pleading child

Perfect happiness

Important event

Dreams

By the fireside

Knight of the rocking horse

Almost too serious

Frightening

Child falling asleep

The poet speaks



Clara Schumann (1819-1896):

Nocturne in F, Op. 6, no. 2

Fryderyk Chopin:

Prelude in D^b Major, Op. 28, no. 15

Robert Schumann:

Arabesque, Op. 18

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897):

Rhapsody in E^b, Op. 119, no. 4

PROGRAMME NOTES

BY BYRON SCHENKMAN

One of the most famous quotes in the history of music criticism comes from Robert Schumann, writing about Frederic Chopin in 1831: "Hats off, gentlemen, a genius!" At that time, the idea of a composer being a genius was still quite new. Whereas earlier composers had been servants of the courts, churches, and/or theatres where they worked, 19th-century composers had new freedoms and new responsibilities. On one hand, they could express their innermost thoughts and feelings in whatever ways suited them; on the other hand they were expected to create works of genius worthy of posterity. As a result, 19th-century composers created works on a much a larger scale - from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony to Wagner's Ring Cycle, but also on a much smaller scale - intimate musical poetry such as the piano pieces which make up today's programme.

Frederic Chopin's output consists primarily of works for solo piano, mostly in miniature forms. Some are based on dances, such as the waltz which begins our programme; some are preludes inspired by the music of J. S. Bach; and many are vocally-conceived character pieces which Chopin often calls "Nocturnes". As with Felix Mendelssohn's "Songs without words" or Fanny Mendelssohn's "Songs" for solo piano, these pieces are based on the premise that music can communicate that which cannot be expressed through mere words.

One of the early influences on Chopin's work was that of his Polish compatriot Maria Szymanowska (née Wołowska). By the time Chopin was starting his career, Szymanowska was one of the most celebrated pianists in Europe. She was among the first to tour internationally, performing solo recitals from memory. In 1828 she accepted a position as court pianist to the Empress of Russia and she spent the rest of her career in Moscow and St. Petersburg. Her compositional output includes waltzes, preludes, nocturnes, and many of the other forms we associate with the work of Frederic Chopin.

Robert Schumann was known first as a music critic and later as a composer. He struggled with mental illness throughout his life and one of his obsessions seems to have been a longing for innocence. Although he wrote many beautiful pieces for children to play, his *Scenes from Childhood*, op. 15, is a series of nostalgic reminiscences intended for adults. It is interesting to note that Schumann claimed to have added the evocative titles to these pieces after the fact "as mere hints for interpretation", once again suggesting that music can express what words cannot.

Robert Schumann's fame as a composer is largely due to his music having been championed by his wife Clara (née Wieck) who was the more famous musician of the two in their time.



"The Death of Chopin" - Photo-gravure by Félix-Joseph Barrias

Clara Wieck began her career as a child prodigy and ended up supporting her husband and their large family through her international concert tours, teaching, and also arranging Robert's music for publication. She herself published 23 volumes of music including solo piano works, songs, chamber music, and a concerto. Her first ten volumes of music were published while she was still in her teens. Unfortunately, in a society in which composers were expected to be superheroes and superheroes were not supposed to be women, Clara struggled with self-doubt. She wrote in her diary that she should not delude herself into believing she could be a composer, that no woman ever had, and that it would be arrogant to think that she could be the first. If only she had known about the many women who composed, published, and in some cases were greatly celebrated for their music in prior centuries!

When Johannes Brahms was just about twenty years old, Robert Schumann declared him a genius "who would achieve mastery, not step by step, but like Minerva fully armed from the head of Jove... a young fellow at whose cradle graces and heroes stood watch." Brahms was being presented not just as a genius but as a sort of deity or at least prophet. The pressure was on and it's no wonder it took Brahms 21 years to complete his first symphony. In the first few decades of his career Brahms focused on large-scale works, including sonatas which Schumann described as "disguised symphonies". Later in life Brahms turned to smaller forms, at times showing the influence of François Couperin whose compete keyboard works he helped to edit. His final work for solo piano, the Rhapsody in E-flat, combines the orchestral grandeur of his early sonatas with the intimacy of his late keyboard miniatures. ■

BYRON SCHENKMAN

19TH-CENTURY PIANOFORTE BY JOHN BROADWOOD & SONS, LONDON



Byron Schenkman performing on the 1870 London Broadwood pianoforte at last year's Festival. Photo credit Jan Gates

Byron Schenkman believes in the power of music to bring people together for healing and joy. By the time Byron went to their first music camp at the age of eleven, they knew that playing chamber music would be an important part of their life's work. They have since been a founding member of several ensembles, including the Seattle Baroque Orchestra which they codirected until 2013. In addition to performing live on harpsichord, fortepiano, and piano, Byron can be heard on more than forty CDs, including recordings on historical instruments from the National Music Museum, Vermillion, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. A recipient of the Erwin Bodky Award from the Cambridge Society for Early Music "for outstanding achieve-

ment in the field of early music", Byron was voted "Best Classical Instrumentalist" by the readers of *Seattle Weekly*, and their piano playing has been described in *The New York Times* as "sparkling", "elegant", and "insightful". Highlights of the 2019/2020 season include historical piano recitals for the Boston Early Music Festival and Vancouver Bach Festival, Bach's fifth "Brandenburg" Concerto with Portland Baroque Orchestra, and a production of Francesca Caccini's opera "Alcina" with the Orpheus Project in Juneau, Alaska. Byron is a graduate of the New England Conservatory and received the Master of Music degree with honors in performance from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. www.byronschenkman.com

EARLY MUSIC VANCOUVER'S 19TH-CENTURY PIANOFORTE BY BROADWOOD

This pianoforte in EMV's important collection of historical instruments was a generous gift by Dr. Patricia M. Lee and Dr. Nicholas H. Lee.

This is an original 19th-century instrument by Broadwood, one of the oldest and most renowned piano makers in the world. Established in the mid-1700s, Broadwood has built pianos in England for over two centuries and continues to make some of Europe's finest pianos today.

This small grand piano of 1870, built in a beautiful walnut burl, was typical for the time; these instruments in the Empire Revival style were quite popular in late 19th-century parlors and country house boudoirs.

A decal inside the casing reads "Consigned to Balmoral" which suggests that it may have been made for Queen Victoria's residence at the Scottish castle she loved so much.



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Schubert, Chopin



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Shakespeare in Love
Charlie Gallant & Ghazal Azarbad
Photo: Emily Cooper

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