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# CONSERVATION



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# Athena Grasso, piano

## Senior Honors Recital

From the studio of Elena Cholakova

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Saturday, March 23, 2024, 2:00 p.m.

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Emerson Concert Hall  
Schwartz Center for Performing Arts



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Program Design: Lisa Baron | Cover Photo: Mark Teague

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## Program

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<i>L'Egyptienne</i> , Suite in G Major, RCT 6	Jean-Philippe Rameau
<i>Les tendres plaintes</i> , Suite in D Major, RCT 3	(1683–1764)
<i>Le rappel des oiseaux</i> , Suite in E Minor, RCT 2	
Rhapsody No. 1 in B Minor, op. 79	Johannes Brahms
Rhapsody No. 2 in G Minor, op. 79	(1833–1897)
Impromptu No. 1 in A-flat Major, op. 29	Frédéric Chopin
	(1810–1849)

## —Intermission—

<i>Carnaval</i> , op. 9	Robert Schumann
1. <i>Préambule</i>	(1810–1856)
2. <i>Pierrot</i>	
3. <i>Arlequin</i>	
4. <i>Valse noble</i>	
5. <i>Eusebius</i>	
6. <i>Florestan</i>	
7. <i>Coquette</i>	
8. <i>Réplique</i>	
9. <i>Sphinxes</i>	
10. <i>Papillons</i>	
11. <i>A.S.C.H—S.C.H.A: Lettres Dansantes</i>	
12. <i>Chiarina</i>	
13. <i>Chopin</i>	
14. <i>Estrella</i>	
15. <i>Reconnaissance</i>	
16. <i>Pantalon et Colombine</i>	
17. <i>Valse allemande—Intermezzo: Paganini</i>	
18. <i>Aveu</i>	
19. <i>Promenade</i>	
20. <i>Pause</i>	
21. <i>Marche des Davisbündler contre les Philistins</i>	

This recital is presented by the Department of Music at Emory University  
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## Program Notes

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### ***L’Egyptienne, Les tendres plaintes, and Le rappel des oiseaux***

Known as a theorist of the musical arts, Baroque composer Jean-Philippe Rameau’s keyboard works are exceptional in the way that they imitate life and nature. While the details of Rameau’s personal life are hard to come by, there are reliable accounts of his musical career. Strongly influenced by his father, a professional organist, Rameau was trained as a keyboardist early in his life. He held several different posts as an organist in his adulthood, but only began earning a stable and comfortable income once appointed by the royal court to write operas, cementing his influence in the French artistic scene. Not only was Rameau a prolific composer, he also produced a multitude of theoretical writings about music theory that were held in very high regard in his time. In alignment with common themes of the current Age of Enlightenment, Rameau believed that music could be used as empirical evidence to discover rational truths. Despite having a quasi-scientific approach to composition, his works are still evocative of deep emotions, and it was said by dramatist Alexis Piron that Rameau’s “heart and soul were in his harpsichord.”

*L’Egyptienne* (“The Egyptian”) is considered a character study and is likely inspired by a myth Rameau had encountered regarding Egypt. This work is highly energetic, and the staccato arpeggio motif maintains consistency and momentum throughout. Skillful harmonic progressions and transitions between major and minor keys create a sense of intrigue and adds to the mysterious quality of the piece. Programmed next is *Les tendres plaintes* (“The Tender Complaints”). This slow, sensitive piece reflects its title with a sweet yet mournful quality. Rather than embody a character like in *L’Egyptienne*, this work is more representative of a certain mood. It is impressive to witness the depth of emotion Rameau conjures in this sonically simple piece. The final programmed piece by Rameau is *Le rappel des oiseaux* (“The Call of the Birds”) and it demonstrates his ability as a master of impersonation. Inspired by his friend and philosopher Louis-Bertrand Castel to take musical inspiration from nature, *Le rappel des oiseaux* was one of several pieces Rameau wrote that imitates scenes from the natural world.

## Rhapsody No. 1 in B Minor, op. 79

“Seated at the piano, he began to reveal wondrous regions to us. We were drawn into ever more magical spheres. In addition, the playing was absolutely inspired, transforming the piano into an orchestra of lamenting and loudly jubilant voices.”

In 1853, Robert Schumann wrote about a young Johannes Brahms in the music publication *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* after inviting him to his house to play, which began a long-standing relationship between both Robert and his wife, Clara, with Brahms. Though never truly confirmed, it is widely speculated that Clara and Brahms became romantically involved during the more than 40-year period of knowing each other. However, it is well-documented that Brahms would frequently consult Clara for feedback on his compositions, which included the rhapsodies.

Brahms was known for being such a perfectionist to the point where he would destroy his works that were not up to his standards. Knowing this, his surviving music must be treasured, including his two rhapsodies for piano. Interestingly, Brahms did not originally intend to call these pieces rhapsodies, but instead simply *klavierstücke*, or “piano pieces.” However, the dedicatee of the pieces, Brahms’s pupil Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, suggested the name change, and he reluctantly agreed. These pieces are in modified sonata-form, so they are not rhapsodies in the truest sense, which are known as single-movement, episodic works that encompass a wide range of colors. Regardless, these pieces are a complete departure from sonatas of the Classical era and even from sonatas of Schumann, his friend and mentor.

The opening of the Rhapsody in B Minor immediately draws in the listener with a swirling melody, burning with a passion that remains for much of the work. Incorporation of extensive arpeggiated chords as well as unpredictable chord progressions develops a sense of anxiety and momentum throughout the work. The powerful opening sequence is followed by a wistful lyrical section, followed by a return to the opening theme that grows more intense and desperate before a somewhat unexpected gentle and lyrical middle section.

After a repeat of the first section of the piece, there is a brief coda that includes a reprisal of the melody from the first lyrical section, but in the lower register instead of the higher.

## Rhapsody No. 2 in G Minor, op. 79

Brahms claimed to not write his music with extra-musical associations, so it is up to the performer to find inspiration in how to make his music come to life. Although the op. 79 rhapsodies were not necessarily

designed to be played consecutively, their stark contrast provides for an invigorating listening experience. In today's program, the ending of the first rhapsody resolves in B major, the parallel major of the written key, B minor. This ending is then followed by the bold entrance of the second rhapsody, diving straight into a cadence resolving in E-flat major, which is the major VI of G minor, and a key very distantly related to B minor.

The Rhapsody in G Minor adheres more closely to traditional sonata form than the Rhapsody in B Minor, but this in no way suggests that this piece is anything like sonatas of the Classical era. Gone are the rigid chordal structures set in place from the likes of Mozart and Haydn—this piece sits at the heart of late-Romantic repertoire. Compared to the calm ending of the first rhapsody, the opening of the second immediately enters an entirely new, intense landscape. The complex harmonies and thick textures make this piece almost orchestral in quality. This work contains an oscillating triplet motif that persists throughout almost the entire piece, constantly stimulating movement and flow. Brahms's frequent use of octaves in this work contributes to its grandeur and heroic nature. Copious usage of the lower register creates a bold, yet at times haunting sound that contributes to the powerful presence of the piece. In addition, unexpected changes between major and minor modes keep listeners guessing, ultimately creating extremely unique and satisfying harmonic language. Similar to the first rhapsody, the unexpected harmonic progressions make it so that the actual key of the piece, G minor, does not become apparent until further into the piece.

## **Impromptu No. 1 in A-flat Major, op. 29**

Frédéric Chopin was known for being a highly emotional and sensitive pianist whose compositions pushed the envelope in the Romantic era. Though he was only 27 when he wrote this piece, he was already more than halfway through his life. Many of his works contain a darkness that reflects his sorrow from missing his homeland of Poland as well as his deteriorating health. However, this impromptu is very bright and airy, with a bubbling melody that flows effortlessly.

Chopin only published four impromptus, and just three were published during his lifetime. Published posthumously is the very famous *Fantaisie-Impromptu in C-sharp Minor*. However, the *Impromptu in A-flat Major* was the first to be published during his lifetime, composed in 1837 and dedicated to his student, Lady Caroline de Lobau.

This impromptu contains a nocturne-like middle section in the relative minor, creating tension before relieving it in the return to the major key. Though this piece sounds light and carefree, careful examination of the score reveals immense complexity of writing and structure, which is where the true genius of Chopin's music lies. However, as the name

would suggest, the piece is meant to be performed in an improvisatory manner, requiring a certain level of spontaneity from the performer to maintain the intended character.

Chopin was a trailblazer in his time because of his use of arpeggios that spanned larger than the hand's reach, a practice not expanded upon before him. What additionally sets apart Chopin from other composers is his *bel canto* style, or beautiful singing, which can clearly be heard in the melody of the middle section of this impromptu. Intentional placement of slurs mimic the breath that a singer would take if they were singing the melody.

## ***Carnaval*, op. 9**

Robert Schumann, celebrated as one of the greatest composers of the Romantic era, made incredible contributions to piano repertoire during his lifetime. His *Carnaval* is a monumental work consisting of 21 short movements that represent different people and moods at Carnival, a festival that occurs before Lent. The subtitle of *Carnaval* is *Scènes mignonnes sur quatre notes*, which translates to “Little Scenes on Four Notes.” The explanation behind this subtitle lies in the fact that the entirety of *Carnaval* is connected by reoccurring motifs consisting of musical cryptograms—series of notes that encode different meanings. One of these cryptograms represents Asch, the German name of the town Schumann's previous fiancée was born in, and another represents portions of Schumann's full name. This musical puzzle adds an additional layer of complexity to the already complex musical content of *Carnaval*.

The many movements of *Carnaval* are not only inspired by Schumann himself, but also by friends, colleagues, and fictional characters. Musical scholars have long paid particular attention to the contrast between *Florestan* and *Eusebius*, who are imaginary characters of Schumann's psyche. *Carnaval* contains consecutive movements named “Eusebius” and “Florestan” that illustrate this contrast musically. *Eusebius* represents Schumann's thoughtful, calm side, which he expresses through tender melodies and gentle articulation. *Florestan*, on the other hand, represents Schumann's impulsive side, demonstrated through a fiery temperament and a sense of desperate urgency. Additional character studies within *Carnaval* include *Pierrot* and *Arlequin*, which add elements of sneakiness and playfulness to the work. Schumann even pays homage to Chopin in a movement named after him, imitating his characteristic arpeggiation and *bel canto* melodies. Schumann additionally incorporates snippets from his earlier work, *Papillons*. He briefly references the main theme of *Papillons* in *Florestan*, and references a melody in the last movement of *Papillons* in the final



movement of *Carnaval* as well. This last reference happens to be taken from the *Grossvatertanz* (“Grandfather Dance”), a traditional German dance tune that is also quoted in Tchaikovsky’s beloved *Nutcracker* ballet.

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## Athena Grasso, piano

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Athena Grasso is a fourth-year student at Emory University double majoring in biology and music performance on the pre-med track. She began studying piano at age five at the Cleveland Institute of Music under Judson Billings and she continued her studies with Sean Schulze. At Emory, she studies with Elena Cholakova. In the music department, Grasso has played in several chamber ensembles and also serves as president of the Music Advisory Board. In summer 2023, she received an Emory Pathways award to attend the Prague Piano Festival in Prague, Czech Republic. She received the William B. Dickinson Scholarship in her third year of studies for her performance in each of her respective majors. She has a passion for mentorship and serves as a learning assistant for introductory-level biology courses at the college as well as teaches piano lessons. Outside of academics, Grasso additionally works in Dr. Anna Woodbury’s lab at the Atlanta Veterans Affairs Medical Center and volunteers at the Winship Cancer Institute.

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## Upcoming Emory Music Concerts

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Many concerts at Emory are free to attend. Visit **music.emory.edu** or **schwartz.emory.edu** to view complete event information. If a ticket is required for attendance, prices are indicated in the listings below in the following order: Full price/Emory student price (unless otherwise noted as the price for all students).

Sunday, March 24, 3:30 p.m., Jordan Averett, soprano/Greta Franke, soprano, student recitals, Performing Arts Studio, free

Sunday, March 24, 7:00 p.m., Collaborative Piano, Performing Arts Studio, free

Tuesday, March 26, 8:00 p.m., Emory Jazz Combos, Schwartz Center, Emerson Concert Hall, free

Saturday, March 30, noon, Lucy Bright, soprano/Ellie S. Paek, soprano, student recitals, Performing Arts Studio, free

Saturday, March 30, 2:00 p.m., Vivian Zhao, piano, student honors recital, Schwartz Center, Emerson Concert Hall, free

Saturday, March 30, 3:30 p.m., Griffin Trejo Noble, composition/Nat Trejo Noble, composition, student recitals, Performing Arts Studio, free

Saturday, March 30, 8:00 p.m., Vega Quartet, ECMSA: Emerson Series, Schwartz Center, Emerson Concert Hall, free

Friday, April 5, 8:00 p.m., Randall Goosby, violin, Candler Concert Series, Schwartz Center, Emerson Concert Hall, \$35/\$10, tickets required

Saturday, April 6, 2:00 p.m., Carol Xu, violin, student recital, Schwartz Center, Emerson Concert Hall, free

Saturday, April 6, 5:00 p.m., Lucienne “LuLu” Scully, soprano, student recital, Schwartz Center, Emerson Concert Hall, free

Sunday, April 7, 7:00 p.m., Emory Chamber Ensembles, Schwartz Center, Emerson Concert Hall, free

Thursday, April 11, 6:00 p.m., Jazz on the Quad, Emory Quadrangle, free

Friday, April 12, noon, Juilliard String Quartet with Vega Quartet and William Ransom, piano, ECMSA: Cooke Noontime Series, Schwartz Center, Emerson Concert Hall, free

Saturday, April 13, 8:00 p.m., Emory Gamelan Ensemble, Performing Arts Studio, free

Saturday, April 13, 8:00 p.m., Juilliard String Quartet, ECMSA: Emerson Series: Fentress Waits Concert, Cannon Chapel, free, registration required

Sunday, April 14, 2:00 p.m., Rebecca Goodwin, violin/Rachel Seong, cello, student recitals, Schwartz Center, Emerson Concert Hall, free

Sunday, April 14, 3:30 p.m., Sanjay Aiyar, piano/Jonathan Luo, piano, student recitals, Performing Arts Studio, free

Sunday, April 14, 7:00 p.m., Emory Concert Choir, Schwartz Center, Emerson Concert Hall, free

Tuesday, April 16, 8:00 p.m., Emory Big Band, Schwartz Center, Emerson Concert Hall, free

Friday, April 19, 8:00 p.m., Emory Wind Ensemble, Schwartz Center, Emerson Concert Hall, free

Saturday, April 20, 5:00 p.m., Doowon Kim, violin, student recital, Schwartz Center, Emerson Concert Hall, free

Saturday, April 20, 8:00 p.m., *StageWorks 2024*, Performing Arts Studio, free

Sunday, April 21, 4:00 p.m., Meet Mr. Goffriller, the 320-Year-Old Cello!, ECMSA: Family Series, Carlos Museum, free

Sunday, April 21, 4:00 p.m., Emory Concerto and Aria Competition, Schwartz Center, Emerson Concert Hall, free

Tuesday, April 23, 8:00 p.m., Spring Composition Showcase, Performing Arts Studio, free

Thursday, April 25, 6:00 p.m., Jazz on the Quad, Emory Quadrangle, free

Friday, April 26, and Saturday, April 27, 8:00 p.m., Emory University Symphony Orchestra and University Chorus, featuring the 2024 Guest Composer Commission Winner, Schwartz Center, Emerson Concert Hall, free

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