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Colin Song, piano

Senior Honors Recital

From the studio of Elena Cholakova

Saturday, March 23, 2024, 5:00 p.m.

Emerson Concert Hall
Schwartz Center for Performing Arts



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Program Design: Lisa Baron | Cover Photo: Mark Teague

Program

Estampes

Pagodes
La soirée dans Grenade
Jardins sous la pluie

Claude Debussy
(1862–1918)

Gaspard de la Nuit

Ondine
Le Gibet
Scarbo

Maurice Ravel
(1875–1937)

—Intermission—

Fantaisie in F Minor, op. 49

Frédéric Chopin
(1810–1849)

Ballade No. 1 in G Minor, op. 23

Chopin

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

Estampes

In his suite *Estampes* (“Prints”) completed in 1903, Claude Debussy takes the listener on a trip around the world to three culturally distinct destinations with each providing a unique soundscape. As Debussy remarks, “If one cannot afford to travel, one substitutes the imagination.” Debussy’s work can be described as impressionistic, alluding to the 19th-century art movement of Impressionism. Debussy sought to mirror some of the basic tenets of impressionistic art into his compositions, including fluidity, atmosphere, and color. Debussy achieved the integration of these characteristics into his music by exploring the versatile capabilities of the piano as an instrument; he championed novel ways of using pedaling, pentatonic scales, and the mechanical approach of the finger to the key in his works.

Pagodes (“Pagodas”) is the first movement of the suite and brings the listener to the Far East, evoking Indonesian gamelan music. The movement is built on the pentatonic scale, a scale commonly used in Asian music. Pagodas are a type of tiered tower common to Asia with eaves that often curve upwards. The main melodic motif throughout the piece consisting of ascending notes G#, C#, D# seems to be a musical representation of the structural components found in pagodas. Overall, the piece provides a sense of serenity with light, airy colors accompanied by a dream-like haze.

La soirée dans Grenade (“The Evening in Granada”) brings the listener west to the city of Granada, Spain. The opening immediately conveys a mysterious mood, slowly introducing the listener to sultry sounds of a muted strumming guitar. Throughout the piece exists a droning habañera dance rhythm, a dance form originating from Cuba during the Spanish colonial period of the 18th century. At the end, the movement trails off almost to a sense of nothingness, preparing the listener for the rapidity of notes shortly to come.

Jardins sous la pluie (“Gardens in the Rain”) captures the image of a garden in the Normandy region of France during a heavy rainstorm. The opening consists of quick 16th notes in E minor, establishing the onset of a storm. Sudden crescendos and decrescendos mimic gusts of wind assertively moving through the garden. As the thunderstorm reaches its peak and recedes to light raindrops, the piece turns to a major key providing some hope of sunshine. The piece ends on a playful note culminating in a grandiose E Major chord to close out the suite.

Gaspard de la Nuit

Gaspard de la Nuit is a suite of pieces written by Maurice Ravel in 1908, and it is considered to be one of the most difficult pieces in the solo piano repertoire. Ravel was inspired by the virtuosity of Franz Liszt's compositions and sought to compose a piece more technically challenging than Mily Balakirev's *Islamey*. Not only does *Gaspard de la Nuit* demand a high level of technique but also a mature and nuanced understanding of the underlying moods and emotions throughout the three movements. The suite is based on three poems written by poet Aloysius Bertrand, and the pianist is tasked with internalizing the text in order to faithfully translate them into music. Like Debussy, Ravel masterfully uses all resources of the piano to reveal a wide palette of colors; *Gaspard de la Nuit* requires the pianist to focus on subtleties to create a wide range of textures in the sound.

Ondine is the opening movement and is arguably the most lyrical movement of the suite. It is the story of the water nymph, Ondine, who lives in her underwater palace and attempts to seduce an innocent mortal. The movement opens with the singing and sensual melody of Ondine supported by a light tremolo that conjures up images of shimmering water. As the piece evolves, Ravel uses rapid arpeggios to reflect swirling water as Ondine develops her plan for seduction. The climax of the movement is a full, passionate outburst of sound as Ondine bursts into laughter and stirs up the sea. A tender and hushed ending to the movement brings back calm waters until Ondine can meet her next victim.

Contrary to the constant flow and movement in *Ondine*, *Le Gibet* is chillingly still and suspenseful. The image from Bertrand's poem is macabre: a corpse hangs from a gallows in the light of a setting sun while a bell tolls from the walls of a city. Throughout the entirety of the piece, a B-flat pedal point is repeated to represent the bell and thus establishes an uncanny atmosphere. While there is a necessary strictness to the movement's tempo, Ravel uses a variety of layered sonorities to paint haunting colors.

The final movement of the suite, *Scarbo*, is technically the most difficult. It is quick-paced and tells the story of a wicked dwarf running through the night. The music carries a constant sense of frenzy, mirroring the high degree of virtuosity required by the pianist. There is a driving energy, almost nervous in nature, that keeps the piece pushing forward as the dwarf engages in mischievous activity. By writing sudden and dramatic changes in dynamics, Ravel further develops the nightmarish scene of the dwarf unexpectedly disappearing and reappearing. The last moments of the piece suggest that the dwarf's mischief has reached its end, but the final string of notes are the dwarf's tease to say "I'll be back..."

Fantaisie in F Minor, op. 49

Frédéric Chopin composed his Fantaisie in F Minor, op. 49 in 1841. The musical form of the fantaisie (known as the fantasia in Italian or fantasy in English) is a piece of free-form music unbound to strict rules and rooted in improvisation. The form breaks free from the standard and well-accepted forms of the Classical era including the sonata, rondo, and theme and variations.

The piece starts with a solemn funeral march in the dark key of F minor; this brings about a feeling of mourning. While quite rhythmic so as to stick to the style of the march, the melody in the right hand projects in a beautifully sorrowful manner. A bridging section full of agitation leads into a bright theme in A-flat major characterized by an expressive melody evoking elation. Chopin shortly thereafter includes another march, but this time not of a funeral setting. Instead, this march has a military-like character with a sharp, driving rhythmic force. One of the most tender and special moments of the piece is when all the powerful sonorities and soaring melodies are brought down to a much slower and muted chorale in B major. The key change brings about warmth and tranquility and has often been characterized as a hymn with its subtly sung melody. The final moments of delicacy and grace are suddenly interrupted by tumult and passion leading to the sweeping climax of the piece. As the piece approaches its end, the climax disintegrates into a quiet whisper. However, a triumphant plagal cadence resolving in A-flat major brings the fantaisie to its final close. Chopin's Fantaisie is truly a masterpiece and is a profound reflection of his imagination. Through this composition, he takes the listener on a journey starting in a setting of unsettling darkness and ending in glorious victory.

Ballade No. 1 in G Minor, op. 23

Frédéric Chopin's Ballade No. 1 in G Minor, op. 23 is arguably one of his most famous works. Completed in 1835, it perfectly captures the essence of the ballade genre. Ballades are often solo piano pieces that are written in a balletic narrative style. One of the hallmark components of a ballade is its ability to convey a story through lyrical melodies and expressive techniques. In general, ballades seek to evoke deep emotions in the audience to bring them along a journey of storytelling. Chopin wrote four ballades, and his first is chock full of drama and musicality. The Ballade in G Minor is also imbued with a strong sense of nostalgia for Chopin's homeland of Poland, as Poland was part of the uprising against Russia during the earlier years of the Ballade's composition.

The piece begins with an arpeggiated Neapolitan sixth chord—something unique to the time. The opening tempo is marked Largo,

meaning very slow; this special opening line carries a magical yet ominous aura, expanding the audience's imagination and preparing them for what is to come. The main theme of the Ballade that follows the opening line is a subdued yet lyrical waltz-like passage that returns throughout the piece. This gives way to a stormy, tumultuous passage and immediately leads into a beautifully dreamy and flowing melody. Just as a good story often has a dramatic turn or twist, the Ballade then moves into a substantial development section where keys distant from the home key of G minor are explored. Most notably, there is a momentous passage in A major that radiates grandeur and splendor. The piece moves through quick-paced passages filled with light-hearted curiosity before coming back to the main theme. This final iteration of the main theme is subtle and muted before the onset of an explosive coda racing to a thunderous finale.

—Program notes by Colin Song

Colin Song, piano

Colin Song is a senior and a Robert W. Woodruff Music Scholar at Emory University. He comes from Glenview, Illinois, where he attended Glenbrook South High School. He was a scholarship fellow at the Music Institute of Chicago's Academy, a training center for advanced pre-college musicians, where he studied piano with Ralph Neiweem. Song is pursuing a double major in chemistry and music, and he currently studies with Elena Cholakova.

In his solo career, Song has received awards in the DePaul Concerto Competition, Emilio Del Rosario Concerto Competition, Sejong Music Competition, and MTNA Competition. As an accomplished chamber musician and previous member of Duo Appassionato, he is a first-prize winner of the 2017 Chicago National Youth Competition for Piano Duos and has had the opportunity to be featured on WFMT's *Introductions*. In 2018, Song was invited to play at the Smith Center in Las Vegas, as well as perform on NPR's *From the Top*. Song was a finalist in the 2018 MTNA Senior Piano Duet Competition, held in Orlando, Florida, a quarter-finalist at the 2019 and 2020 Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition, and first-place winner in the 2020 Rembrandt Chamber Musician Competition.

Additionally, Song is the winner of the Emory University 2022 Concerto and Aria Competition and was invited to perform Sergei Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No. 1 with the Emory University Symphony Orchestra. Most recently, Song won first place in the Atlanta Music Club Scholarship Competition and participated in the 2023 Prague Piano Festival.

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