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2021–2022
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Acknowledgment
The Schwartz Center gratefully acknowledges the generous ongoing support of Donna and Marvin Schwartz.

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Jisu Yang, piano
Senior Honors Recital

Sunday, March 20, 2022, 5:00 p.m.
Emerson Concert Hall | Schwartz Center for Performing Arts

Program

Nocturne in B Major, op. 62, No. 1 — Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)

Le Tombeau de Couperin — Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

I. *Prélude*
II. *Fugue*
III. *Forlane*
IV. *Rigaudon*
V. *Menuet*
VI. *Toccata*

—Intermission—

Piano Sonata No. 3 in B Minor, op. 58 — Chopin

I. *Allegro maestoso*
II. *Scherzo: Molto vivace*
III. *Largo*
IV. *Finale: Presto non tanto*

Program Notes

Nocturne in B Major, op. 62, No. 1 (1846)

During Frédéric Chopin's lifetime, the nocturne was often performed at salon gatherings, as most nocturnes, or night songs, possess a calm and poignant character. It was at these gatherings that members of the aristocracy would assemble to hear music written and played specifically for them. The nocturnes of Chopin reflect this association with the salon; they are soft and intimate in character, reminiscent of words spoken softly, not meant for many to hear.

Chopin was never a pianist who impressed his audience with huge sounds. He used loud dynamics only at culminating points and then returned to soft playing quickly after. During the last years of his life, he was physically unable to produce a forte on the piano, and the serene Nocturne in B Major, op. 62, No. 1, is reflective of this. As compared to his earlier nocturnes, which included a contrasting middle section that escalated in volume, intensity, passion, and technical difficulty, the middle section of the Nocturne in B Major, op. 62, No. 1, is slower and sparser in texture compared to the initial theme.

Chopin's last years could very well be described as turbulent. His father and sister both died. He ended his relationship with his lover, George Sand, and he himself was ill and struggling with the financial consequences of his ailment. Lastly, his compositions began to be heavily criticized by the music community. Perhaps due to the difficulties that he was experiencing in those latter years, his music reflects a harmonic complexity and maturity that is not found in his earlier music.

The Nocturne in B Major, op. 62, No. 1 begins with a harmonically ambiguous chord—rather than an introduction of the thematic material—and such exploration of new sonorities continues until it culminates in the coda. Harmonic ambiguity that appears throughout the piece may be thought of as brief moments of delirium before the final drifting off to sleep—the melodic movement from the highest to the lowest registers of the piano in the coda. Such a dreamlike state can be achieved through ample usage of *rubato* and the *una corda*.

***Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1917)**

Maurice Ravel's early forties were marked by heartache and darkness; his mother passed away and a number of his friends died in World War I, in which Ravel fought as well. He fell into somewhat of a creative chasm and wrote *Le Tombeau de Couperin* in the midst of it. Despite this, the suite still

reflects the best of Ravel's stylistic priorities: charm and sensitivity.

As the name—tombeau or tomb—suggests, the suite is a memorial piece; Ravel dedicated each movement to a different acquaintance who had died in the war. The individual movements themselves, however, cannot necessarily be classified as funeral compositions. Instead, they are written in genres that were once popular 200 years before the time of composition, during the Baroque period. Considering all this, the complete title of the suite—*Le Tombeau de Couperin*—becomes more meaningful. As Couperin was a Baroque composer and clavecinist, the work was written in memory of not only the friends of Ravel, but also as a reminiscence of the music of the past.

The *Prélude* serves as a lighthearted introduction to the suite and to the introspective *Fugue*, cast as a three-voiced canon. Each appearance of the subject can be enunciated by emphasizing its slurred articulation. The *Forlane*, *Rigaudon*, and *Menuet* are all Baroque dances of different character. The *Forlane* can be interpreted as a stately introductory dance to the rambunctious *Rigaudon*. The *Menuet*, slow and mysterious, is a final dance of farewell. Various colors of the movement can be explored through usage of *una corda* and a light touch. The last movement—*Toccata*—is reminiscent of virtuosic 18th-century keyboard music, complete with ample technical challenges. It is a victorious celebration of life.

As one half of the suite consists of dance movements, it is perhaps inevitable that the work does not sound as sorrowful as one might expect for a memorial piece. The suite as a whole is melancholy but not gloomy; it is even playful and triumphant at times. From a performer's point of view, it seems safe to assume that *Le Tombeau de Couperin* was written not as a mourning, but as a remembrance—a celebration even—of the past.

Piano Sonata No. 3 in B Minor, op. 58 (1844)

Frédéric Chopin's compositions are very often associated with two things: *rubato* and emotional expression. Chopin utilized *rubato* extensively both in his playing and in the performance directions of his compositions. Perhaps partially because of this, Chopin's music is often rightfully described as "emotional." Although this leaves much room in performance for freedom and individual interpretation, the *rubato* also has a history of overindulgent misuse, or stretching time so much as to distract the listener from the structure or message of the piece itself. Instead, the *rubato* in Chopin's works, as described by Liszt, is meant to be like "wind [playing] in the leaves . . . [while] the tree remains the same."

Chopin was a fan of the musical order and structure characteristic of music from the Classical period, close to a hundred years before his time. His Piano Sonata No. 3 reflects his respect for the music of the past, as in terms of structure, the piece closely follows the conventions of the sonata genre established in the Classical period.

The uniqueness of this piano sonata is best understood in the context of his other works. Chopin championed certain specific genres in his compositions, sometimes by establishing a new genre, other times by significantly contributing to the development of preexisting genres. These include ballades, scherzos, nocturnes, polonaises, and mazurkas. Upon a closer look, each movement of the sonata is reminiscent of such a genre.

The first movement, marked *Allegro maestoso*, is a ballade. The sonata starts with a defiant introduction with large, supported chords, reminiscent of a declaration of war. Slower lyrical sections intersperse the movement, which ends with an optimistic coda. The second movement, *Molto vivace*, is a scherzo. It is lighthearted and playful. Usage of *leggiero* perhaps portrays a life of privilege, far removed from the tragedy of the first movement. The third movement, *Largo*, takes the form of a nocturne. With *rubato*, this movement is introspective, intimate, and reminiscent of a final goodbye between lovers. Lastly, the fourth movement, *Finale: Presto non tanto*, is a rondo that tells the story of a heroic struggle. With each repetition of the main theme, the left-hand accompaniment escalates in volume, speed, and complexity. The work comes full circle as the war heroes from the first movement return victorious in the B major coda.

Jisu Yang, piano

Pianist Jisu Yang made her orchestral debut with the Oistrakh Symphony of Chicago as a winner of the DePaul Concerto Competition. She is a prize-winner in numerous competitions such as the Emilio del Rosario Piano Concerto Competition, Confucius Music Competition, and Georgia Music Teachers Association Piano Competition. She has performed in venues including the Chicago Symphony Center and PianoForte Studios. Yang is an active chamber musician, having placed in the Discover National Chamber Music Competition and Chicago National Youth Competition for Piano Duos. She performed in WFMT radio's Bach Keyboard Festival and was featured in its *Introductions* program. At Emory, Yang is a recipient of the Dickinson Scholarship as well as the Emory Friends of Music Scholarship. She currently studies under Elena Cholakova; as a first-year student, she studied under Keiko Ransom. Prior to Emory, she studied on a merit scholarship at the Music Institute of Chicago.

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