

Concerts from the Library of Congress 2011-2012

The Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation

Genova and Dimitrov, *piano duo*

The Franz Liszt Bicentenary Project

Saturday, October 29, 2011

Coolidge Auditorium

Library of Congress, Thomas Jefferson Building

THE ELIZABETH SPRAGUE COOLIDGE FOUNDATION

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The Library of Congress

Coolidge Auditorium

Saturday, October 29, 2011 – 8:00 pm

Founder's Day Concert

GENOVA and DIMITROV, piano duo

AGLIKA GENOVA and LIUBEN DIMITROV, pianos

PROGRAM

Fantaisie in F minor, op. 103, *for piano, four hands*

Franz SCHUBERT
(1797-1828)

Suite no. 1, op. 15, *for two pianos*

Anton ARENSKY
(1861-1906)

Allegretto

Valse

Polonaise. Allegro ma non troppo

Intermission

Concerto pathétique, S. 258, *for two pianos*

Franz LISZT
(1811-1886)

Scaramouche, *for two pianos*

Darius MILHAUD
(1892-1974)

Vif

Modéré

Brazileira. Mouvement de Samba

Réminiscences de Don Juan –

Fantasy on Mozart's Don Giovanni, S. 656, *for two pianos*

Franz LISZT

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The term “piano duo” is admittedly an imprecise one, used to describe two pianists performing at one piano (commonly referred to as “piano, four hands”), and/or two pianists performing at two separate pianos. Although the medium likely arose from the purely practical consideration of allowing pianists to practice the solo parts of piano concertos with another pianist simultaneously playing an arrangement, or “reduction,” of the concerto’s orchestral parts, composers such as Mozart, Schumann, Brahms, Debussy, Stravinsky, Bartók, and Poulenc have composed original and compelling works for the combination of two performers at a single piano or at two pianos.

Franz Liszt probably contributed more works to the repertoire for piano duo than any other composer; his works for this medium comprise some sixty-six (66) works for piano, four hands and twenty-nine (29) works for two pianos. Many of these represent transcriptions of works originally composed in other musical genres (primarily from orchestral works by Liszt himself or by other composers, i.e., symphonies of Beethoven, or organ works of Bach) – which resemble as closely as possible the works from which they are derived – or freely-conceived paraphrases, inspired by themes from contemporary operas. Although such practices would be considered a sacrilege in our time, it was common in an era where opera reigned as the supreme art form – and when access to live performances of operatic and orchestral works was largely limited. Piano performances of that time frequently included extemporaneous elaborations on operatic themes in order to demonstrate the abilities of the pianist. Transcriptions and paraphrases, especially in Liszt’s capable hands, also had the benefit of disseminating unfamiliar – and larger – musical works to a wider audience who might otherwise never hear them in their original formats. While it is understandable that a pianist of Liszt’s formidable skills would naturally embrace these “transformative” genres – which he in fact did, bringing them to their highest state of development in works for piano solo – translating them into the medium of the piano duo was somewhat rarer, and demonstrates the nature of Liszt’s unique creative vision and continual exploration of innovative means of musical expression.

Franz SCHUBERT : *Fantaisie* in F minor, op. 103 (D. 940), for piano, four hands (1828)

Although Franz Schubert’s creative legacy rests primarily upon his many vocal *Lieder* and his symphonic works, the piano remained central to his compositional thought. Sketches for his works, even those for orchestra, indicate that he composed at the piano. It has been suggested that his symphonically conceived works naturally assumed their pianistic equivalent of works for piano duo, simply to allow Schubert to hear his own works performed – and perhaps out of no small frustration at not having such works performed by an orchestra. It is significant that Schubert turned to the genre of the piano duo throughout his life – from his earliest surviving work, a *Fantaisie* in G Major for piano duet, dating from 1810, to the *Fantaisie* in F minor, one of four works in this medium composed in 1828, the last year of their composer’s life. As with the innovations that Schubert bestowed upon the genre of the *Lieder*, Liszt elevated the genre of the piano duo from its utilitarian roots to a body of over forty works diverse in style, ambitious in scope, and rich in content – perhaps constituting Schubert’s most original and enduring contribution to the keyboard repertoire.

The *Fantaisie* in F minor, like Schubert’s masterful “*Wanderer*” *Fantasy* (1822) for piano solo, exhibits a continuous structure across its four movements. The work’s haunting opening

theme reappears several times during the course of the work, as well as in its coda, endowing the work with a tautly cohesive unity of structure. The second movement's Baroque stylizations (i.e., its dotted rhythms and trills) are contrasted with a central episode of poetic lyricism. The third movement's quicksilver *Scherzo*, like the second movement, is in the remote key of F-sharp minor – indicating a subtle structural relationship between the work's two inner movements. The final movement's return to the musical material of the opening (and to the original key of F minor), here developed anew (including an extended fugal treatment), both reaffirms the work's formal structure and displays, as biographer Brian Newbould terms it, "a touching nostalgia for the pristine form of the poignant, songful tune-and-accompaniment thought from which the whole fantasy sprang."

Franz LISZT : *Concerto pathétique*, S. 258, for two pianos (1856) ;
Réminiscences de Don Juan, S. 656, for two pianos (1877)

The two works by Franz Liszt presented on this evening's concert were both originally conceived for piano solo, and both subsequently arranged for two pianos: the *Concerto pathétique* (1856), itself an arrangement by Liszt of his *Grosses Konzertsolo* (S. 176), of 1850; and the *Réminiscences de Don Juan* (1877), a free paraphrase on themes from Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, which was arranged from a work of the same name for piano solo (S. 418), composed in 1841.

The *Grosses Konzertsolo*, which served as the basis for the *Concerto pathétique*, was composed according to similar stylistic and structural principles as those used just a few years later in his large scale *Sonata* for piano solo (1852-53); the *Konzertsolo* therefore served as a means for Liszt to test out original musical ideas that would be developed further in the *Sonata*. Musicologist Ben Arnold speculates that the *Konzertsolo*, originally composed for the 1850 piano competition at the Paris Conservatoire, might well be regarded as Liszt's most famous large scale solo piano work had it not been for the composition of the *Sonata* three years later. The *Konzertsolo* was subsequently recast as a work for piano, four hands, and renamed the *Concerto pathétique*, in which form it has proven more successful a work than in its original version.

Liszt's *Réminiscences de Don Juan* is much more than yet another elaboration of operatic themes commonly encountered at that time; ever the restless innovator, Liszt introduces musical gestures intended to enrich our appreciation of the scenario of Mozart's opera, rendering the *Réminiscences* as a recasting of the opera in miniature (without its vocal element, of course). The aria "Là ci darem la mano," for example, which serves as the basis for an extended lyric episode at the core of Liszt's paraphrase, portrays, in Mozart's opera, Don Giovanni's attempts to seduce Zerlina; Liszt's version, in the words of scholar Charles Suttoni, "contrasts the Don's suave baritone blandishments with Zerlina's increasingly flustered treble responses," serving to provide a greater insight into the characters' psychological states of mind. Although the work's brilliant finale, based on the Don's aria "Fin ch'han dal vino," has occasionally met with disapproval from prudish critics for the hedonistic entreaties of its subject matter, the work's virtuosity and energy has nevertheless made the *Réminiscences* a favorite with listeners.

Anton ARENSKY : *Suite no. 1*, op. 15, for two pianos (1888)

Composer of a modest but distinguished body of works, Russian composer Anton Arensky (1861-1906) worked within a musical idiom that was most notable for its lyricism and elegance, manifested primarily in brief works – songs for voice and piano, as well as in piano miniatures. His natural fluency at the piano resulted in the production of a relatively large corpus of works for that instrument, including several works for piano duo, of which the most notable are five *Suites* for two pianos. Of these *Suites*, the three-movement *Suite no. 1*, op. 15 (1888), has achieved the greatest popularity in the West, owing largely to its charming second movement “Waltz.”

Arensky attended the St. Petersburg Conservatory as a composition student of Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Upon his graduation from that institution (which awarded him a gold medal), Arensky accepted an offer to join the staff of the Moscow Conservatory, where he developed friendships with his colleagues Tchaikovsky and Taneyev. Among his students were Rachmaninoff, Medtner, Scriabin, Glière, and Grechaninov. He subsequently returned to St. Petersburg in 1895 to conduct the choir of the Imperial Chapel, a position which he left after six years in order to devote his activities to composition, writing, and to appearances as pianist and conductor in Russia and abroad. A lifelong struggle with alcohol addiction, however, contributed to the onset of tuberculosis, to which he succumbed at the age of forty-four.

Arensky adopted an eclectic musical language derived from the works of Chopin, Mendelssohn, and most notably, Tchaikovsky. Despite Rimsky-Korsakov’s prediction that Arensky’s works would be forgotten, their elegance, craftsmanship, and nostalgic lyricism have assured them a secure place in the concert repertoire.

Darius MILHAUD : *Scaramouche*, op. 165b, for two pianos (1937)

Born in Aix-en-Provence, France in 1892, Darius Milhaud’s fame was initially established through his association with an iconoclastic group of six French composers who burst upon the Parisian music scene in December 1917. Soon dubbed simply *Les Six* by the press, these composers – Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, Arthur Honegger, Germaine Tailleferre, Georges Auric and Louis Durey – were united not by an aesthetic philosophy, but rather by a common goal of creating a distinctively French musical language free from the pervasive influences of Debussyan impressionism and Wagnerian Romanticism – a goal which they pursued according to very different individual approaches.

One of the most prolific composers of the twentieth century, Milhaud produced 443 works in nearly every imaginable genre, all of which demonstrate his rich imagination, mastery of compositional technique, and endless curiosity for exploring new means of musical expression. The jaunty and elegant nonchalance of *Scaramouche* belies the “more than usual trouble” that its composer admitted to have encountered in creating the work. Based on incidental music originally composed for a 1937 children’s play titled *Le Médecin volant* (“The Flying Doctor”; itself adapted by Henriette Pascar from a play by Molière; listed as Milhaud’s “op. 165”), the composer created an arrangement of the work for two pianos (op. 165b) that same year. At the suggestion of his publisher, Raymond Deiss of the Salabert firm, that the work be published, Milhaud was hesitant; he even advised Deiss against it, saying that “no one would play it.” Deiss published it anyway, and within a short time, it became, and remains, one of Milhaud’s most popular works. The work is also well known in its 1938

arrangement for saxophone or clarinet and orchestra (or piano; op. 165c), prepared for and performed by clarinetist Benny Goodman.

Kevin LaVine
Senior Music Specialist
Library of Congress, Music Division

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Born in Bulgaria of Greek origin, the piano duo of **Aglika Genova** and **Liuben Dimitrov** was formed in Hanover in 1995. Within a year, they had won all the major piano duo competitions (including the Tokyo Piano Duo Competition, 1996; the ARD Music Competition, Munich, 1996; the Murray Dranoff Piano Duo Competition, Miami, 1997), launching an international career performing as piano duo recitalists as well as soloists with the major orchestras of the world in repertoire for two pianos and orchestra. The stunning accuracy of their ensemble has prompted critic Attila Csampai to describe the duo in *Stereoplay Magazine* (Germany) as “a symbiotic mythical creature with four hands.”

Both artists began playing the piano at the age of five, and continued their musical training at the Music Academy in Sofia, Bulgaria; each garnered awards in international solo piano competitions before turning their attention and prodigious talents to the relatively neglected piano duo repertoire.

In addition to their international performing schedule, the duo serve as Artistic Directors of the Dranoff Piano Duo Competition in Miami, participate on juries for international piano duo competitions, and present master classes and workshops worldwide. They have made several recordings of the piano duo works of composers as diverse as J. C. Bach, Clementi, Ravel, Poulenc, Milhaud, Shostakovich and Vladigerov. Their recent recording of Mendelssohn’s two early concertos for two pianos and orchestra with the Münchner Rundfunkorchester under the direction of Ulf Schirmer, released on the CPO label, has met with exceedingly favorable reviews. Both of the duo’s members presently serve as associate professors in piano performance at the Hanover State Academy of Music and Theatre, where they also present special classes for piano duo performance.

CONCERTS FROM THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The Coolidge Auditorium, constructed in 1925 through a generous bequest by **Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge**, has been the venue for countless world-class performers and performances. Another Washingtonian *grande dame*, **Gertrude Clarke Whittall**, presented to the Library a gift of five Stradivari instruments which were first heard here during a concert on January 10, 1936. These parallel but separate donations serve as the pillars that now support a full season of concerts made possible by gift trusts and foundations that followed those established by Mrs. Coolidge and Mrs. Whittall.

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PROGRAM NOTES

Kevin LaVine

UPCOMING CONCERTS AT THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS :

Friday, November 4, 2011 - 8 p.m.

MOZART PIANO QUARTET

Performing works of Mozart, Mahler and Saint-Saëns

Saturday, November 5, 2011 - 2 p.m.

ROBERTO DÍAZ, *viola* and KWAN YI, *piano*

Performing works of Liszt, Brahms and Bach

Saturday, December 17, 2011 - 8 p.m.

BORROMEO STRING QUARTET
with SEYMOUR LIPKIN, piano

Performing works of Schuller, Beethoven and Schubert

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