

PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

a life more beautiful

PREVIEW
NOTES

EMANUEL AX, piano
Tuesday, March 19 – 7:30 PM
Perelman Theater, Kimmel Center

PROGRAM (*Selection of Program Notes*)

Partita in B-flat Major, BWV 825

Johann Sebastian Bach

Born: March 31, 1685, in Eisenach, Germany

Died: July 28, 1750, Leipzig, Germany

Composed: 1726

Duration: 17 minutes

Bach's partitas are much grander and more technically challenging than his English Suites and French Suites, with larger individual movements. The Partita in B-flat Major, published in 1726, is quite an upbeat affair, ranging in mood from cheerful and celebratory in the opening movements to ecstatic, almost manic, in its closing gigue. Even when the pace is slow, as in the Sarabande, the tone remains distinctly bright and chipper.

Six Little Piano Pieces, Op. 19

Arnold Schoenberg

Born: September 13, 1874, in Vienna, Austria

Died: July 13, 1951, in Los Angeles, California

Composed: 1911

Duration: 6 minutes

With their miniature format and extreme aphoristic brevity, these pieces might appear to be a strange and confusing departure from Schoenberg's normal concise formulation, but they are wholly symptomatic of the free-tonal form of his works (and of those of his pupils and successors, who were innovators in their own right) at this time. The natural melodic flow and expansive breadth that would make themselves apparent again in the later dodecaphonic works here yield to an epigrammatic form of expression. This might be described as the antithesis of the symphonies of his contemporary Gustav Mahler and also of Schoenberg's own "Gurrelieder," a monumental work for orchestra, choir, and solo voices that was finished at roughly the same time.

Fantasiestücke, Op. 12

Robert Schumann

Born: June 8, 1810, in Zwickau, Germany

Died: July 29, 1856, in Bonn, Germany

Composed: 1837

Duration: 24 minutes

Fantasiestücke, Op. 12 ("Fantasy Pieces"), was written in 1837 around the same time as another well-known work for solo piano *Davidsbündlertänze*. These pieces are surely closely associated with Clara Wieck, whom he married three years hence. Characteristically, extreme contrasts abound from movement to movement. There is some evidence of programmatic afterthought on Schumann's part, alluding to the Greek myth of the doomed lovers Hero and Leander. The key scheme is interesting: the first four pieces are in D-flat Major (or related keys) while the last four are centered around F Major. The *Fantasiestücke* were much loved by Clara who performed them often throughout her career.

Valses nobles et sentimentales

Maurice Ravel

Born: March 7, 1875, in Ciboure, France

Died: December 28, 1937, in Paris, France

Composed: 1911

Duration: 15 minutes

Ravel could be slightly obsessive in the way he allowed certain musical interests to reappear throughout his compositions. Two such interests were dance and the past, and in *Valses nobles et sentimentales*; one can hear how Ravel was able to effectively fuse these two curiosities together. *Valses* was oriented toward the nineteenth century and written out of homage to Schubert's piano piece of the same name. Ravel declared that the work's title, "indicates clearly enough my intention of composing a chain of waltzes following the example of Schubert. The virtuoso element that was the basis of *Gaspard de la nuit* is here replaced by a writing of greater clarity, which has the effect of sharpening the harmony as well as the outline of the music." Ravel achieved his goal of clarity, as the waltzes were written using intense precision, sophistication, and technical flawlessness.