

THE **THERESE M. GROJEAN**  
CLASSICAL SERIES

# Ilya Yakushev, Piano

Presented in the May Gallery

VILAR PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

Monday, January 10, 2022

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## PROGRAM

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Sonata in D major, Hob.XVI/37

Allegro con brio

Largo e sostenuto

Finale: Presto ma non troppo

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Opus 57 "Appassionata"

Allegro assai

Andante con moto

Allegro ma non troppo; Presto

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)

Nocturne in C-sharp minor, Lento con gran espressione (Op. posth.)

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Prelude in C-sharp minor, Opus 3 no.2

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Vallée d'Obermann

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

Three Preludes

Allegro ben ritmato e deciso

Andante con moto e poco rubato

Agitato

This evening's performance is generously supported by  
Presenting Underwriters: Alexia & Jerry Jurschak



## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Russian pianist Ilya Yakushev, with many awards and honors to his credit, continues to astound and mesmerize audiences at major venues on three continents.

In 2014, the British label Nimbus Records released Yakushev's CD, "Prokofiev Sonatas Vol. 1" CD. The American Record Guide wrote, "Yakushev is one of the very best young pianists before the public today, and it doesn't seem to matter what repertoire he plays - it is all of the highest caliber." Volume 2 was published in 2017, as was an all-Russian CD.

Highlights of his 2021-22 season include appearances as soloists with the Wisconsin Philharmonic, La Crosse Symphony, and Fort Wayne Philharmonic, as well as recitals in PA, CA, CT, TN, AZ, MD, FL and CO. Mr. Yakushev also tours extensively with cellist Thomas Mesa.

In past seasons, he has performed in various prestigious venues worldwide, including Great Philharmonic Hall (St. Petersburg), Victoria Hall (Singapore), Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall (New York), Davies Symphony Hall (San Francisco), and Sejong Performing Arts Center (Seoul, Korea). His performances with orchestra include those with the Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, St. Petersburg Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, BBC Concert Orchestra, Boston Pops, Rochester Philharmonic, Utah Symphony, and many others.

Winner of the 2005 World Piano Competition which took place in Cincinnati, OH, Mr. Yakushev received his first award at age 12 as a prizewinner of the Young Artists Concerto Competition in his native St. Petersburg. In 1997, he received the Mayor of St. Petersburg's Young Talents award, and in both 1997 and 1998, he won First Prize at the Donostia Hiria International Piano Competition in San Sebastian, Spain. In 1998, he received a national honor, The Award for Excellence in Performance, presented to him by the Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation in Moscow. Most recently, Mr. Yakushev became a recipient of the prestigious Gawon International Music Society's Award in Seoul, Korea.

Mr. Yakushev attended the Rimsky-Korsakov College of Music in his native St. Petersburg, Russia, and subsequently came to New York City to attend Mannes College of Music, where he studied with legendary pianist Vladimir Feltsman.

A sampling of critical praise for Mr. Yakushev includes:

"In Familiar Music, a Pianist Shows What He Can Do [HEADLINE]: Mr. Yakushev can do just about anything he wants . . . superb." —New York Times

"Yakushev was little short of heroic." —New York Times

One of the Top 10 Classical Music Events of the Year:

"The young Russian pianist made an astounding triple debut as part of the [San Francisco] Symphony's Prokofiev Festival, playing the First Concerto, the Fourth Concerto and the Seventh Sonata with vigor and virtuosity." —San Francisco Chronicle

He is a Yamaha artist.

## PROGRAM NOTES

### HAYDN:

One of Haydn's few early sonatas to have entered the popular repertoire is the D major, No 37, from the set of six published by the Viennese firm of Artaria in 1780. The sonatas were dedicated to the talented sisters Franziska and Maria Katherina von Auenbrugger, whose playing in aristocratic salons drew the admiration of both Leopold Mozart—never one to dish out compliments lightly—and Haydn himself.

The D major's popularity is easy to understand. The first movement, with its irrepressible, chirruping main theme, evokes the spirit of Domenico Scarlatti at his most dashing within the dynamic of the Classical sonata style. At the center of the development Haydn offsets the prevailing mood of jocularity with a powerful sequence of suspensions. The Largo e sostenuto, in D minor, is especially striking: a grave, sonorously scored sarabande, archaic in flavour, with a suggestion of a Baroque French overture in its dotted rhythms and imitative contrapuntal textures. Like the slow movement of No 24, it leads without a break into the finale, a guileless rondo marked *innocentemente* and built around a fetching tune that could have been whistled on any Viennese street corner.

—From a note by Richard Wigmore

### BEETHOVEN:

The Sonata No.23 in F minor, Op. 57 is so demanding of both performer and instrument, so novel of structure, that it was virtually incomprehensible at first, and, reportedly, went unplayed in public until more than three decades after Beethoven's death, when the name "Appassionata" was appended by a publisher.

What is it about this particular one of the 32 sonatas which seems to give us an insight into the passion at the very heart of the great composer? It's easy to look at this period of his life immediately after the onset of his deafness and find examples of anger and despair, but nothing equates with—or prepares us for—the Sonata No.23, which Beethoven himself considered the greatest of all his sonatas. The man with the inside track on his teacher at this time, his virtuoso pupil Carl Czerny, wrote, "There is no doubt that in many of his most beautiful works Beethoven was inspired by similar visions or pictures from his reading or from his own lively imagination. It is equally certain that if it were always possible to know the idea behind the composition, we would have the key to the music and its performance."

Czerny also has a convenient image for those struggling with the crashing chords, unexpected pauses and shockingly violent outbursts. "If Beethoven, who was so fond of portraying scenes from nature, was perhaps thinking of ocean waves on a stormy night when from the distance a cry for help is heard, then such a picture will give the pianist a guide to the correct playing of this great tonal painting," he wrote.

This is a piano work of tremendous contrasts, like its composer. Sometimes charming and often passionately in love, Beethoven was equally well known for his outbursts of temper and the arrogant, even cruel, way he would treat people. This character of contradictions, facing the worst possible diagnosis for a musician, is never



going to be easy to understand, but listening to the "Appassionata" it's possible to reconcile the expressive silences with the furious urgency of the finale, without necessarily discerning "cry for help" that Czerny described. But Beethoven does reveal himself in the piano pieces he wrote with the sole purpose of performing them himself. It means that centuries later, through these intensely personal works, and the "Appassionata" in particular, we get a glimpse of that troubled heart.

—Adapted from a note by Jane Jones

### CHOPIN:

Frédéric Chopin wrote his Nocturne in C sharp minor in 1830, though it was never published during his life. He dedicated this work to his older sister as an exercise to prepare for the study of his second concerto.

The piece was famously played by Holocaust survivor Natalia Karp for a Nazi concentration camp commandant, leaving him so impressed with the rendition that he spared her life. Marked *lento con gran espressione*, it features a soft introduction and a dramatic melody played over a bassline in eighth notes. The piece was featured in many films, the most popular being *The Pianist*.

### RACHMANINOFF:

Rachmaninoff composed the Prelude in C-sharp minor in the late summer of 1892, at the age of 18, and first performed it at the Moscow Electric Exhibition in September of 1892. This was the beginning of the career of one of the world's most popular piano pieces—it shortly became known simply as "The Prelude." Audiences would clamor for it by shouting "C-sharp minor!" while applauding other pieces, and even towards the end of Rachmaninoff's career it was reported that no recital of his ever ended without this prelude as a final encore.

The atmosphere of the first section may be likened to a solemn procession or ritual; in contrast, the chromatic sequential phrases in the second section (measures 14-42) are almost frantic. When the first theme returns, it is in "a mood of grandeur and power, as if illustrating the inevitable survival of some great and mighty truth" (Godowsky), but the Coda returns to the mysterious and reflective atmosphere, as if the question posed at the beginning is left unanswered after all.

The juxtaposed fortissimo and pianissimo passages suggest the tolling of bells and their echoes, and the piece picked up its nickname, "The Bells of Moscow," quite early in its life. As for its inspiration, Rachmaninoff once told an interviewer: "One day the prelude simply came and I put it down. It came with such force that I could not shake it off even though I tried to do so. It had to be, so there it was."

## LISZT:

Whenever Liszt, as a boy, was asked what he wanted to be when he grew up, he would point to a portrait of Beethoven and say: "Like him." It was Liszt who gave the first public performance of Beethoven's imposing Hammerklavier sonata. Without Liszt's generosity, a Beethoven monument might never have been unveiled in Bonn. Liszt even possessed the great composer's death mask.

*Vallée d'Obermann* (Obermann's Valley) is from the first of the three suites that make up Liszt's *Années de pèlerinage* (Years of Pilgrimage), a collection that is widely considered a masterwork and summation of Liszt's musical style.

It was inspired by Senancour's novel of the same title, set in Switzerland, with a hero overwhelmed and confused by nature, suffering from ennui and longing, finally concluding that only our feelings are true. The captions include one from Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* ("Could I embody and unbosom now / That which is most within me,--could I wreak / My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw / Soul--heart--mind--passions--feelings--strong or weak-- / All that I would have sought, and all I seek, / Bear, know, feel--and yet breathe--into one word, / And that one word were Lightning, I would speak; / But as it is, I live and die unheard, / With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword.") and two from Senancour's *Obermann*, which include the crucial questions, "What do I want? Who am I? What do I ask of nature?"

## GERSHWIN:

Born Jacob Gershowitz to Russian Jewish immigrants in Brooklyn, George Gershwin is one of America's most revered composers. He showed prodigious musical talent at a young age, and at fifteen dropped out of school for his first job as a "song plugger," playing Tin Pan Alley songs for prospective customers at a music store. During the 1920s Gershwin wrote for several of George White's *Scandals*, an annual variety show which introduced songs such as "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise" and "Somebody Loves Me." Before long, Gershwin and his lyricist brother Ira were producing hit musicals on their own: *Lady Be Good* (1924), which introduced the song "Fascinating Rhythm"; *Funny Face* (1927) with its hit "S'Wonderful"; *Strike Up the Band* (1930) with "I've Got a Crush on You"; and *Girl Crazy* (1930), which introduced "But Not for Me," "Embraceable You," and "I Got Rhythm."

Concurrent with this feverish and highly successful composition for the theater, Gershwin also studied classical music. His *Three Preludes for Piano* date from 1926 and are deemed by some to be his best works in the non-jazz idiom. Gershwin originally planned 24 preludes for this set of works. The number was reduced to seven in manuscript form, then to five in public performance, and finally decreased to three when published in 1926. His desire to develop the skills demonstrated in these pieces led him to move to Paris in 1927, where he hoped to study with Nadia Boulanger and Maurice Ravel. These composers were so intrigued by Gershwin's jazz-influenced compositional style that they refused to teach him, afraid that he would lose that aspect of his writing with too much rigorous classical training.

