Master’s Recital
Zheni Atanasova, piano

PROGRAM

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685–1750)
tr. by Franz Liszt
Organ Fantasia and Fugue in G Minor, BWV 542

Claude Debussy
(1862–1918)
tr. by Maurice Ravel
Prelude a l’Apres-midi d’un Faune

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
(1756–1791)
tr. by Ferrucio Busoni
Fantasia for Musical Clock Work, K. 608

Spencer Baker, piano

Frederick Chopin
(1810–1849)
Grande Sonate in F Minor, Op.77 ("l’Invocation")
Allegro moderato ma energico
Tempo di minuetto con moto, canone alla seconda, trio.
Adagio non troppo ma solenne, minore, maggiore
Rondo, allegro moderato

Jae Ahn-Benton, piano

This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Music in Performance.

Zheni Atanasova is a student of Mykola Suk.

Thursday, May 16, 2013  5:00 p.m.  Dr. Arturo Rando-Grillot Recital Hall
Lee and Thomas Beam Music Center
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Johann Sebastian Bach was one of the most eminent composers of the Baroque period. He completed the Fantasia and Fugue in G Minor for organ, BWV 542 (the "Great"), as an audition for an organist position in Hamburg in 1720. Generations of organists since then have considered it one of their repertoire's crown jewels. The two parts of BWV 542 are thought to have been composed separately: the fugue is assigned to Bach's Weimar years (1708–1717) and the fantasia to his time in Cöthen (1717–1723). The fantasia opens spaciously and in recitative-like style, but as it unfolds Bach finds room for dense passages in upper-voice imitation. The wide tonal scope of the fantasia has been a subject of fascination for two centuries of musicians: just when some kind of harmonic stability seems to arrive, Bach shoots off on a mock-improvised cadenza that jolts the music into a whole new pitch realm. Thus the fantasia both lives up to its name and contains quite a bit of contrapuntal rigor. More than one worthy mind has deemed the fugue to be Bach's ultimate accomplishment in the field of organ counterpoint. Though it provides the sense of a stable answer to the fantasia in its predominantly even sixteenth note rhythms, it is similarly ambitious harmonically: Bach makes two revolutions through the entire circle of fifths. The fugue makes a fine contrast with the later music of the fantasia while nevertheless seeming of a piece with it. The Hungarian piano virtuoso of the 19th century, Franz Liszt, has turned this remarkable organ work into a virtuosic masterpiece for the piano.

Ravel met Debussy in the 1890s. Debussy was older than Ravel by twelve years and his pioneering Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune was influential among the younger musicians including Ravel, who were impressed by the new language of Impressionism. About his composition Debussy wrote:

"The music of this prelude is a very free illustration of Mallarme's beautiful poem. By no means does it claim to be a synthesis of it. Rather there is a succession of scenes through which pass the desires and dreams of the faun in the heat of the afternoon. Then, tired of pursuing the timorous flight of nymphs and naiads, he succumbs to intoxicating sleep, in which he can finally realize his dreams of possession in universal Nature."

Ravel's fascinating transcription of Debussy's masterpiece articulates the evanescent orchestral substance of the original with analytical precision while retaining a magical limpidity and flow. This languid music is not at first sight suited to a piano arrangement, but Ravel knew his craft and loved the work, to the extent that he described it as 'the only music I know which is absolutely perfect'. To perform this version of the score is a great challenge, to which the artists must respond with taste and sensitivity.

J. V. Dussek was one of a number of foreign-born composers, who contributed significantly to the development of a distinct "London" school of pianoforte composition. In some of his piano writing the Classical Czech composer and organist anticipated features of musical Romanticism. Dussek's last-known work - the Grande Sonate in F Minor, subtitled "L'Invocation" is an extremely virtuosic and engrossing piece with a wide variety of emotional twists and turns and a secure yet exploratory approach to pianistic technique. Imagine this: Brahms' wistful, long-lined lyricism years before Brahms was born; Schubert's effortless melodies and off-the-wall modulations long before Schubert matured; Chopin-like roulades and decorations popping up all over the place, written by a composer who died when Chopin was only two; fast movements whose virtuosic flair evokes Mozart or Clementi, yet maintains its own, pungent identity; Beethovenian thrust fortified by plusher, more Schumannesque keyboard deployment. His op.77 is charming, sophisticated, imaginatively crafted and intensely expressive.

W.A. Mozart was a prodigious, prolific and influential German composer of the Classical era. His masterpiece, Fantasia for Musical Clock Work, composed initially for mechanical organ, was transcribed for two pianos by the brilliant and inspired Italian pianist and composer, F. Busoni. Faithful to Mozart's classical style, the Busoni transcriptions demand clarity of the lines and structures, dexterity of the fingers and richness and depth of the musical interpretation.

Fr. Chopin was a Polish composer, virtuoso pianist, and music teacher of French–Polish parentage. He was one of the great masters of Romantic music and has been called "the poet of the piano". His first Ballade is one of the most notoriously difficult pieces in the piano repertoire. This masterpiece requires tremendous virtuosity evident not only in the agility of the fingers running through the keys, but also expressed in the beauty of the various dynamics touching even the most pretentious listener.