



The Music Department Presents

Senior Piano Recital
Seth Spital

Saturday, March 30th, 1:00 PM
Arthur Zankel Music Center
Helen Filene Ladd Concert Hall

Prelude and Fugue in E-flat Major,
BWV 852 from Well-Tempered
Clavier 1

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

Sonata in E-flat Major, Hob. XVI: 52
I. *Allegro*
II. *Adagio*
III. *Presto*

Franz Joseph Haydn
(1732-1809)

Variations on a Theme by Paganini for
Two Pianos

Witold Lutosławski
(1913-1994)

Michael Lowry, Piano 1
Seth Spital, Piano 2

INTERMISSION

Troubled Water

Margaret Bonds
(1913-1972)

Variations Brillantes, Op. 12

Frederic Chopin
(1810-1849)

Tarantella from Venezia e Napoli

Franz Liszt
(1811-1886)

Program Notes

Prelude and Fugue in E-flat Major, BWV 852: J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

J.S. Bach was a German composer of the late Baroque period. He was a master of counterpoint, a compositional technique that involves the interweaving of two or more melodically independent voices ¹. His compositions feature counterpoint heavily, which contrasts his music with his successors in the Classical period who favored simpler musical textures. During his lifetime until the middle of the 19th century, he was not popular as a composer and was more renowned as an organist, but when Mendelssohn began promoting his music Bach's compositions gained much more recognition ².

The Prelude and Fugue in E-flat major, BWV 852, is published in the first edition of the Well-Tempered Clavier, a collection of 24 preludes and fugues, with one in each major and minor key. The prelude is a short piece with variable musical material and form, and a fugue is a genre of music where a melodic idea is first introduced in one voice and is then imitated throughout the piece in multiple voices while simultaneously being developed using counterpoint. BWV 852 is one of the few examples where the prelude is more substantial than the fugue. The prelude begins with a short, improvisation-like section that features a musical idea being iterated in all voices, followed by a slow chorale-like section that then gives way to a fugue-like section that develops the material found in the beginning sections. The fugue is much more upbeat and livelier than the prelude, featuring three voices that work in tandem to develop a cheerful theme.

¹ Kennedy, J., Kennedy, M., & Rutherford-Johnson, T. (2012). counterpoint. In *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*.: Oxford University Press.

² Kennedy, M., & Bourne Kennedy, J. (2007). Bach, Johann Sebastian. In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Music*.: Oxford University Press.

Sonata in E-flat Major Hob XVI 52: Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Alongside Mozart and Beethoven, Haydn was a highly regarded composer of the Classical period. Haydn's output was extremely prolific, resulting in many works across all genres present during his time. From 1761 onwards, his output was in the service of his patrons, the Esterhazys, who would provide both a salary and living space in exchange for his services as a composer. Although he was secluded with his patrons, his music was published and distributed across Europe. Haydn's music grew popular, and he became one of the most well-known composers in Europe despite living in seclusion with his patrons. From 1790 onwards, he was finally granted permission to travel, enabling him to go to places like London and Vienna to further grow his popularity and compose more for the public instead of only his patrons ³.

The Sonata in E-flat major, no. 62, is the last piano sonata Haydn composed. It follows a typical three movement structure. The Allegro first movement is grand and expressive. Dynamic shifts are frequent, and Haydn often alternates between virtuosic passagework and more lyrical sections. The Adagio second movement begins with a very moving and slow section in E major before shifting to a darker section in E minor, before again reintroducing nearly the same material as the opening section in E major. The Presto third movement is humorous and rhythmically vigorous.

Variations on a Theme by Paganini for Two Pianos: Witold Lutosławski (1913-1994)

Witold Lutosławski was a Polish composer, who, like many composers at the time, openly embraced atonality and serialism in his music. He was also known as one of the foremost advocates of aleatoricism~ a system where the composer leaves aspects of their

³ Clark, C (2011). Haydn, Joseph. In *The Oxford Companion to Music*.: Oxford University Press.

music to chance ⁴. Early in his career, his music existed in relative obscurity, which can be attributed to the oppressive climate of the Soviet Union. However, his compositions grew in recognition following the 1956 Warsaw autumn festival, and he grew to become internationally recognized ⁵.

Variations on a Theme by Paganini is one of his earliest published compositions, written in 1941. The specific theme it is based on is Paganini's 24th Caprice for Violin. The melodic elements of the piece closely mirror Paganini's original composition, making it more akin to an arrangement than an original composition. It doesn't feature any aleatoricism, but it is highly atonal, showcasing the unique palette of harmonies that Lutosławski often used. In addition, it features many tempo changes that correspond to each new variation on the theme, making it a challenging task for the two pianists to coordinate.

Troubled Water: Margaret Bonds (1913-1972)

Margaret Bonds was one of the most accomplished Black female composers in American history. She was born into a musical background, with her mother Estella Bonds being a professional musician and belonging to the National Association of Negro Musicians. Estella's membership within this group enabled her and Margaret to connect with many of the leading Black musicians of the time, which served to catalyze Margaret's musical growth from an early age ⁶. At age 16, she began attending Northwestern University, where she won awards in piano and composition, and at age 22, she became the first Black musician to perform with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. This rapid growth enabled her to

⁴Kennedy, J., Kennedy, M., & Rutherford-Johnson, T. (2012). Lutosławski, Witold. In *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*: Oxford University Press.

⁵ Thomas, A.. Lutosławski, Witold. In *The Oxford Companion to Music*: Oxford University Press.

⁶ *Margaret Bonds: Composer and Activist* (n.d.). Library.georgetown.edu.

quickly establish herself as both a performer and composer, which she maintained throughout her career ⁷.

As a working musician, Margaret Bonds primarily composed orchestral works, theatrical arrangements, vocal works, and performed often ⁸. She also often extended her influence to the popular music scene by performing in nightclubs and hotels and writing music that connected the events of her time, especially the civil rights movement. Notably, she collaborated with the prominent poet-activist Langston Hughes, resulting in much of his poetry being set to music like *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, and *I, Too* ⁷.

Troubled Water is one of the only examples of solo piano work that Bonds composed. Its main theme is based on “Wade in the Water,” a spiritual sung by enslaved Black Americans to aid in gaining freedom. * Despite being a rather short work, it undergoes many variations in key, texture, meter, and rhythm, all while maintaining the primary theme, making it akin to a theme and variations or a fantasia.

Op. 12 Variations Brillantes: Frederic Chopin (1810-1849)

Frederic Chopin is one of the most renowned composers of the Romantic era. His output consists exclusively of works involving piano. His compositions are known for their high expressive range and technical rigor. Although only composing for the piano, he covered a wide range of genres present at the time through his piano music including etudes, sonatas, concertos, waltzes, mazurkas and more ⁹.

The Op. 12 Variations Brillantes is one of Chopin’s earlier and lesser-known works. It is a theme and variations that is based on the aria “Je vends des scapulaires” from Louis Joseph Ferdinand

⁷ Lauritzen, B. (2024). *Open Ears: The Endlessly Unfolding Story of Margaret Bonds*. Classical KDFC.

⁸ Gaspaire, B. (2013). *Margaret Bonds (1913-1972)*.

⁹ Samson, J (2011). Chopin, Fryderyk [Frédéric] (Franciszek). In *The Oxford Companion to Music*.: Oxford University Press.

Herold's opera *Ludovic*. Typically, theme and variations form begin with the main theme, and then progresses through a number of variations on that theme. However, Chopin first includes a brief introduction that introduces the key of B-flat major seen in the main theme but does not share any thematic resemblance to the main theme. Following the introduction, Chopin introduces the complete theme, followed by the first variation, which closely follows the main theme in the left hand, while the right hand plays more intricate figurations. The following variations are based on different musical genres present at the time, including first a scherzo, which is a humorous dance, a nocturne, a slow and melodious genre that translates in French to "nocturnal"—implying a connection to nighttime, followed by a final scherzo, which has elements of a mazurka, a kind of Polish dance. All these variations are based loosely on fragments found in the main theme, and this liberal approach to theme and variations form allows each variation to take on a life of its own. The first scherzo features a detached texture, irregular rhythm and humorous mood that contrasts with the smooth lyricism shown in the primary theme. The nocturne that follows introduces the key of D-flat major, a distant key from B-flat major, and features a much slower tempo than earlier variations, giving a more relaxed feeling. The last scherzo is generally lively and virtuosic and ends with a coda that prominently features the primary theme in the upper voice.

Tarantella from Venezia e Napoli: Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Like Chopin, Liszt was one of the most renowned composers of the Romantic era. In addition to being a composer, he was also the most well-regarded pianist of his time. His ability as a pianist made him a celebrity performer, often touring across Europe as a younger man to great success. His style as a pianist was known for its dramatism and showmanship, which is also directly reflected in the piano music he wrote. His output for piano is a fraction of his overall output, which spanned across all genres of the time except opera. His forward-looking style is credited with influencing

famous composers such as Wagner, Bartok, Schoenberg and Debussy ¹⁰.

Tarantella is the final piece in a suite of three pieces titled “Venezia e Napoli,” a supplement to the Years of Pilgrimage, 2nd Year. This suite is inspired by themes that Liszt heard in his travels to Italy. Particularly, *Tarantella* is inspired by the themes of French composer Guillaume-Louis Cottrau, who spent his life working in Naples ¹¹In addition, *Tarantella* as a genre is an Italian folk dance, which further strengthens the suite’s connection to Italy. Compared to the two other pieces in the suite, titled *Gondoliera* and *Canzone*, *Tarantella* is much longer and technically complex, featuring three overarching sections. The opening section contains elements of a traditional tarantella, with its lively rhythmic energy and triple meter. Following the opening section, the music drastically changes by introducing a slow, lyrical canzone in E-flat major which contrasts greatly with the energy present in the opening section. The piece closes with a flashy coda that recalls the themes found in the opening section, while also sharing the opening section’s rhythmic vitality and triple meter.

¹⁰ Hamilton, K (2011). Liszt, Franz. In *The Oxford Companion to Music*.: Oxford University Press.

¹¹ *Franz Liszt, Venezia e Napoli*. (n.d.). Classical Connect, LLC.

Bio

Seth Spital (born 2002 in New York City) is a classically trained pianist. He is a Filene Scholar at Skidmore College, where he is currently completing his BA in Music. A graduate of LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts, Seth began playing chamber music in high school, playing in numerous venues including a performance of Martinu's Sonata for Flute, Violin and Piano at Carnegie Hall. Since arriving at Skidmore College, Seth has been an active chamber musician, performing varied repertoire from JS Bach to Lutosławski. He is currently a piano student of Young Kim and has performed two piano pieces with her, including Scaramouche by Milhaud and Suite for Two Pianos by Amy Beach. He was a winner of the Skidmore Concerto Competition in both 2021 and 2023 and has played Mozart and Beethoven with the Skidmore Orchestra. Seth has also been an active participant in Master Classes, including classes taught by Awadagin Pratt, Wei-Yi Yang, Jiayan Sun and Lara Downes. He has been fortunate to be taught and coached by Pola Baytelman, Michael Emery and Glen Cortese. Seth works as a class accompanist for Skidmore's musical theater workshop, the "MOp-Shop," and has performed for the Young Musicians Forum in Schenectady. In 2023, Seth was awarded the Louis Edgar Johns award for an outstanding student pianist. After completing his BA, Seth hopes to pursue further studies in piano performance.

Upcoming Events

Senior Voice Recital:
Lucrezia Zichichi
Friday, April 5, 4:00pm

Skidmore String Festival
with the Miró Quartet
Saturday, April 20, 7:30pm

Skidmore in Concert: Brass &
Woodwind Ensembles
Saturday, April 6, 1:00pm

Senior Piano Recital:
Raisa Ihnat & Dylan Salinger
Sunday, April 21, 12:00pm

Young Kim & Skidmore Pianists
Saturday, April 6, 3:00pm

Skidmore in Concert:
Small Jazz Ensembles
Tuesday, April 23, 7:00pm

Sr Voice Recital: Maggie Besthoff
Saturday, April 6, 7:00pm

Skidmore in Concert: Chorus
Thursday, April 26, 4:00pm

Senior Cello Recital: Anna Cates
Sunday, April 7, 1:00pm

Skidmore in Concert:
String Ensembles
Friday, April 26, 4:00pm

Senior Flute Recital: Lydia Watkins
Sunday, April 7, 4:00pm

Sr Voice Recital: Johnny Mulcahy
Sunday, April 7, 7:00pm

Skidmore in Concert:
Global Music Showcase
Saturday, April 27, 4:00pm

Sr Jazz Recital: Elan Stadelmann
Friday, April 12, 4:00pm

Skidmore in Concert: Concert Band
Sunday, April 28, 1:00pm

Skidmore in Concert: Big Band &
Vocal Soul Collective
Saturday, April 13, 7:00pm

Skidmore in Concert:
Guitar Ensemble
Sunday, April 28, 4:00pm

Skidmore in Concert: Orchestra
Monday, April 29, 7:00pm