



Olga Kern

SAT / FEB 9 / 7:30 PM

PROGRAM

Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757)

3 Sonatas

- Piano Sonata In A Major, K. 24, L495
- Piano Sonata In D Minor, K. 9, L413
- Piano Sonata In C Major, K. 159, L104

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 21 in C major, Op. 53 "Waldstein"

- i. Allegro con brio
- ii. Introduzione. Adagio molto
- iii. Rondo. Allegretto moderato

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

Three Preludes

"Fascinating Rhythm" from Seven Virtuoso Etudes
(arr. Earl Wild)

Intermission

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Moments Musicaux, Op. 16, No. 4 in E minor
7 Morceaux de salon, Op. 10 No. 3 "Barcarolle"
Morceaux de fantasia, Op. 3 No. 4 "Polichinelle"

Alexander Scriabin (1871-1915)

2 Etudes

- No. 4, Op. 42
- No. 5, Op. 42

Mily Balakirev (1837-1910)

Islamey, Op. 18

Pre-show Spotlight Talk with Santa Monica College Faculty
Shanon Zusman at 6:45 PM

Classical Music Series at The Broad Stage made possible in part by the generous support of the Colburn Foundation.

Domenico Scarlatti (1685–1787)
Piano Sonata in A Major, K. 24 L495
Piano Sonata in D minor, K. 9 L413
Piano Sonata in C major, K. 159 L104

Scarlatti was the founder of modern keyboard technique and one of the greatest keyboard virtuosos of his time.

Although he composed some operas and sacred music, Scarlatti is remembered mostly for his more than 500 sonatas for the harpsichord. His sonatas were forerunners of the classical sonata, although for him a “sonata” meant little more than music that was to be played rather than sung. All of his sonatas fit into one general shape, binary form: a single movement divided into two sections, each of which is repeated. Many of the sonatas are rich in colorful echoes of the songs and dances of the Spanish people.

This sonata was included in the 30 *Essercizi* of 1738, and was published during Scarlatti’s lifetime. In one movement, it presents many ideas that seem to be unrelated, but a lot of the music has toccata-like lines that incorporate scales as well as repeated notes.

Published in London in 1738 as one of the *Essercizi per gravicembalo*, Sonata in D minor, K.9, often nicknamed “Pastorale,” *Allegro moderato*, may have been written as much as 20 years before it was published. A light and melodic work, it is occasionally playful and projects a bucolic charm as well as a pervasive quality of serenity. It has a fanfare-like beginning, followed by a repeated note figure. In the second half of the work, Scarlatti develops the expository material of the first half. It is known for the variety of its themes and the orchestral nature of the writing.

K. 9 and K. 159 are both *Allegros*. The sense of the natural-length breath and the dance phrase are present in much of Scarlatti’s keyboard writing. Usually, the dance phrase dominates the *Allegros*, but sometimes the “panting” rhythm created by his use of fragmentary repeated phrases is caused by the sense of where the breath would come if the music were sung.

Sonata K. 9 is universally known by the designation *pastorale*, but that subtitle appears to have originated in the 19th century, not with Scarlatti. K. 159 is a

very special little sonata. Its opening imitates a fanfare of hunting horns. Although its general form could be called classical (because the main theme reappears at the end of the second half), we have no indication in other works that Scarlatti was, in any way, aiming at the classical sonata form.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
Piano Sonata No. 21, in C Major, Op. 53
(Waldstein Sonata)

Count Ferdinand Ernst Joseph Gabriel von Waldstein, who was born in Bohemia just eight years before Beethoven, was the composer’s earliest noble benefactor. He helped to make Beethoven’s career. When they met, Beethoven was the 17-year-old son of an indigent choir singer. Waldstein furnished him with a good piano, was instrumental in securing him a sufficient allowance to make it possible for him to continue his studies and also personally provided him with additional financial support.

In 1791, Beethoven and Waldstein collaborated on two compositions: a set of variations for four hands for piano on a theme Waldstein had created as well as a ballet. The Count continued to invest in Beethoven’s career the following year when he sent the young composer to Vienna. Upon Beethoven’s departure, Waldstein wrote that Mozart’s genius “had found a refuge but no occupation with the inexhaustible Haydn,” but that with serious work, he thought it would be possible for Beethoven to “receive the spirit of Mozart from the hands of Haydn.” Beethoven was received, nourished and encouraged in the palaces of aristocratic connoisseurs as a result of Waldstein’s backing.

In subsequent years, Waldstein became Chancellor to the Emperor of Austria and followed Beethoven to Vienna, but they only rarely met there because, by then, they had developed critical political differences; nevertheless, Beethoven immortalized Count Waldstein when he dedicated this sonata to him in an act of friendship and gratitude. Beethoven began the sonata in 1803 and completed it in the summer of 1804 while also working on the *Eroica* Symphony Op. 55.

This sonata is often treated as a

three-movement work, although the central slow movement is only 28 measures long and runs directly into the finale without any pause. As originally composed, the sonata did have a long and lyrical *Andante* slow movement but, in a stormy argument, a friend persuaded Beethoven that it made the work much too long, so he replaced it with the Introduction. The sonata was published in its present form in the spring of 1805. That autumn he issued the discarded *Andante* as a separate work. Beethoven’s pupil, Carl Czerny, wrote that the composer often played it for his circle of friends and called it his “favorite *Andante*,” and from 1807 on, it appeared in many editions as Beethoven’s *Andante favori*.

The Waldstein Sonata is Beethoven’s first great, mature work for piano. By the time he composed it, he was in complete control of his materials. His unique technical skills on the piano helped him master large forms and gave him the facility for an intense power of expression. In France this sonata used to be known as *L’Aurore* (“*The Dawn*”) perhaps because some pianists imagined the opening pages to be a depiction of daybreak. In the energetic and exciting first movement, tense melodic fragments and entire themes seem to grow out of one another. It, the longest movement Beethoven had written in a piano sonata until then, has a theme that begins with a rapidly repeated chord that becomes broken up. Charles Rosen, in his book *The Classical Style*, has said that this movement reflects an “energetic hardness, dissonant and yet curiously plain, expressive without richness.” He says that effect is caused by the harmonic treatment of all the themes growing from an initial “kernel,” each theme moving in a stepwise fashion based on scale progressions. The second theme, more chordal, makes a contrast, and the closing theme consists of arpeggios. The last movement, after its brief and slow Introduction, takes the shape of a brilliantly formed Rondo, whose principal theme resembles a German folksong from the Rhineland.

The movement ends with a great rushing *Prestissimo*, which doubles the speed of the principal tempo. As in the first movement, Beethoven utilizes the

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combination of a slow harmonic rhythm and quick figuration.

George Gershwin (1898–1937) **Three Preludes**

George Gershwin's Three Preludes are his only known surviving works originally conceived as solo piano pieces. He wrote at least six preludes and there is speculation that there may be more as yet unpublished extant in the Gershwin family archives. At a recital he gave in New York in 1926, Gershwin played five Preludes, which were probably these three plus two pieces that he sometimes billed as *Novelettes*. The music that begins the finale of his Piano Concerto was originally sketched in 1925 as a Prelude.

Gershwin worked over these pieces for a long period of time, and he at last fixed them in final form for publication in 1927. He dedicated them to his friend, Bill Daly, a Harvard-trained musician who was a great help to him in acquiring the craft and the technique he needed to apply his extraordinary natural talent to work in larger musical forms than the popular song.

Each of the three preludes is generally based on a single persistent rhythmic figure, melodically varied and extended. The first and third preludes are quick and jazzy, *Allegro ben ritmato e deciso*. Prelude No. 2, *Andante con moto e poco rubato*, is blues-derived.

George Gershwin, arr. Earl Wild (1915–2010) ***Fascinating Rhythm* from Seven Virtuoso Etudes**

Earl Wild created a large number of transcriptions and arrangements for the piano including a set of *Seven Virtuoso Études on Gershwin Songs* (1989), based on favorite songs from the Broadway musicals of George and Ira Gershwin. The seven Gershwin songs for piano solo are "Fascinating Rhythm," "Oh, Lady, Be Good!" "Somebody Loves Me," "The Man I Love," "Liza," "I Got Rhythm" and "Embraceable You."

Wild's arrangements of Gershwin's songs are not just transcriptions, but elaborate, virtuosic re-compositions of the original, fairly conventional song forms of George Gershwin. They are full of spontaneity and flamboyant bravura and reflect the jazz idiom with the

powerful technique and style Gershwin had captured. Wild's *Fascinating Rhythm* etude, in particular, demands technical prowess from the pianist. Gershwin wrote *Fascinating Rhythm* in 1924; Wild created his arrangement in 1973.

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943) **Moments Musicaux, Op. 16, No. 4 in E minor**

As a composer, Rachmaninoff represents late Russian Romanticism. In his early works, the influences of Rimsky-Korsakov, Tchaikovsky and other Russian composers of the day are somewhat evident, but his writing soon acquired its individual lyrical character.

In 1897, the young Rachmaninoff suffered a great disappointment in the failure of the premiere of his Symphony No. 1, an event that for a time shattered his ambitions for a career as a composer. After a period of depression, he took a post as assistant conductor of a minor opera company while trying to restore his spirit and regain his hopes, and in the summer of 1898, he began to write again. His *Moments Musicaux* ("Musical Moments"), Op. 16, written in 1896, a year after he completed his Symphony No. 1, revealed his piano style in a formative period, when he was beginning to write his characteristic yearning themes, on the way to that of the popular Preludes, Op. 23.

Rachmaninoff's set consists of six musical moments: No. 4 in E minor, is very fast, *Presto*; it is improvisatory in nature and requires the playing of a skilled virtuoso. It is turbulent, in three-part form, and displays great contrasts, from very soft to very loud.

Sergei Rachmaninoff **7 Morceaux de salon, Op. 10, No. 3 "Barcarolle" in G minor**

Rachmaninoff composed the seven Salon pieces in the winter of 1893–94. As it was early in his career, the style of the pieces varied, some sounding immature or derivative in certain passages. The "Barcarolle" is probably the best known piece of the set. In ABA form with a coda, it features an attractive and melancholy Russian melody in the beginning in the left hand, accompanied by right hand sounds imitating a boat rocking on the

water. The middle section has fast figurations and extreme dynamics from very, very soft to loud, characteristic of the sound often produced by the youthful Rachmaninoff, as well as a chromatic descending figure.

Sergei Rachmaninoff **Morceaux de Fantaisie, Op. 3, No. 4, "Polichinelle"**

In the autumn of 1892, Rachmaninoff wrote his set of five pieces entitled *Morceaux de Fantaisie* (Fantasy Pieces), his first publication for solo piano. He had graduated from the Moscow Conservatory, and at that time he was poor, depressed and generally in ill health.

The style of *Morceaux de Fantaisie*, although it is an early work is very characteristic of Rachmaninoff. Just after completing the work, the composer gave a copy of the set to Tchaikovsky, who told Rachmaninoff's harmony teacher, Anton Arensky, that he was very impressed, especially with the "Prelude" and the "Mélodie." Before his 20th birthday, Rachmaninoff premiered the pieces in Kharkov on December 27, 1892. He dedicated the whole set to Arensky. (He later revised all the pieces in the set.)

The complete de Fantaisie is rarely performed as a whole today. The penultimate piece, "Polichinelle" in F-sharp minor, takes its name from the suggestion of Rachmaninoff's fellow student Mikail Slonov, who came up with the descriptive title. "Polichinelle" translates into Punch, and comes from the character in the popular Punch and Judy marionette shows. Punch, an arrogant wife-beater, was a hump back with a big hooked nose. This small-scale virtuosic scherzo is said to depict his enraged appearances, his boasts and his sly threats. The piece is in ternary form, and the critic Baylor has commented that to achieve his effect, Rachmaninoff uses "brilliant chordal fanfares, deep bell-like pedal tones and lightening fast figurations."

Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915) **Two Etudes, Op. 42, Nos. 4 and 5**

Although the music Scriabin composed had a very different character than that of his countryman, Rachmaninoff, the two became friends in childhood and studied piano with the same teacher.

Scriabin's works for the piano, generally considered avant-garde or decadent when he wrote them, include 10 piano sonatas and many collections of short piano pieces that display his extraordinary creative imagination.

In his early piano works, Scriabin emulated Chopin and Liszt as composers for the piano, combining elements of expressivity and virtuosity that he found in their music with hints of the advanced musical language that he would later develop. Like them, he wrote many etudes, or studies, works in which the composer concentrates on one or more technical problems of performance, but with such intrinsic musical interest that they become concert pieces rather than just practice exercises.

In addition to two freestanding etudes, Scriabin composed 24 Etudes in three sets: Op. 8, published in 1894; Op. 42, in 1903, and Op. 65, in 1912. The earliest grouping, Op. 8, illustrates the young Scriabin as he was developing, still influenced by Chopin and Liszt, but also making his own voice ring through these short works as he begins journeys on the new paths that he would later regularly tread.

Scriabin's third period is represented by the Eight Études of Op. 42, which were composed almost 10 years after

Op. 8. These compositions reach diverse nuances of depth and intricacy. Étude No. 4 in F sharp major is placid and serene, and Scriabin gives it a delicate air. Étude No. 5 in C sharp minor is the most famous of the Op. 42 etudes. This work, by contrast, has a colossal feel. There are undulating sounds and ones that create the sense of large booms. Overall, the feel is rebellious and daring, and the etude has a rousing effect.

Mily Balakirev (1837-1910) *Islamey*

Mily Balakirev organized a musical group that became known as the Balakirev Circle, whose aim was to make a cause of Russian music of a national character in order to combat the profusion of imitations of classical German compositions, which at that time seemed dominant in Russia. Simultaneously, he founded the Free Music School in St. Petersburg and gave concerts there of works primarily by Russian musicians. The dream of uniting all Slavic nations under Russian influence animated Balakirev and other musicians of his time.

Balakirev became fascinated with the quasi-oriental melodies and rhythms of the Caucasus in the eastern area of Russia during several trips he made

there. In 1869, he wrote an "oriental" fantasy for piano, entitled *Islamey* that he based on themes he collected there during his travels. It is mostly a Kabardian dance from the north of the Caucasus. It also includes a Tartar melody from the Crimea in its slow middle section that Balakirev presumably heard an American actor sing when he visited Tchaikovsky's house in Moscow. Although the subtitle of the piece is "*Oriental Fantasy*," Balakirev used that term in the sense of eastern Russia, not the Far East or the Orient, as it was then known.

Rubinstein, who was the first to perform the technically demanding work at one of the Free Music School Concerts, remarked, "I am working, poor wretched fellow that I am, at your piece, which fills me with terrible delight, and for which I thank you; I shall certainly play it at my concert in Moscow; but it is so difficult that few will cope with it; I want to be one of those few." Through it, Balakirev's name became known throughout Europe in the 19th century; both Rubinstein and Liszt played it frequently in many cities.

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Russian-American pianist **OLGA KERN** is now recognized as one of her generation's great pianists. She jumpstarted her U.S. career with an historic Gold Medal win at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in Fort Worth, Texas, as the first woman to do so in more than 30 years.

First-prize winner of the Rachmaninoff International Piano Competition at 17, Ms. Kern is a laureate of many international competitions. In 2016, she served as Jury Chairman of both the Seventh Cliburn International Amateur Piano Competition and the first Olga Kern International Piano Competition, where she also holds the title of Artistic Director.

Kern served as Artist-in-Residence for the San Antonio Symphony's 2017/18 season, appearing in two subscription weeks as well as a solo recital. She will also perform with the Madison Symphony, Rochester Philharmonic, Copenhagen Philharmonic, Austin Symphony, New Mexico Philharmonic, Arizona Musicfest Orchestra, Colorado Symphony and Hawaii Symphony Orchestra. Olga will premiere her first American concerto, Barber's Piano Concerto, with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Leonard Slatkin. She will give recitals at the University of Arizona; the Lied Center in Lincoln, NE; the Sanibel Music Festival in Sanibel, FL; and abroad in Mainz and Turin. Additionally, Ms. Kern will perform in the Huntington Estate Music Festival with Musica Viva in Australia.

In addition to opening the Baltimore Symphony's 2015/16 centennial season with Marin Alsop, Ms. Kern has appeared with the Royal Philharmonic, Orchestre Philharmonique de Nice, Rochester Philharmonic, Orchestre National De Lyon and the San Antonio, Detroit, Nashville, Madison, New Mexico, Austin and NHK Symphonies. She has toured South Africa with the Cape and KwaZulu Natal Philharmonics and Israel with the Israel Symphony. As an avid recitalist, she has appeared in solo and collaborative recitals at Carnegie Hall, the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, Symphony Hall in Osaka, Salzburger Festspielhaus, La Scala in Milan, Tonhalle in Zurich, Chatelet in Paris, Van Wezel Hall in Sarasota, 92nd Street Y, Meany Hall in Seattle and the University of Kansas' Lied Center.

Ms. Kern's discography includes her GRAMMY®-nominated recording of Rachmaninoff's Corelli Variations and other transcriptions (2004), Brahms Variations (2007) and Chopin Piano Sonatas No. 2 and 3 (2010). She was featured in the award-winning documentary about the 2001 Cliburn Competition, *Playing on the Edge*.