

JOEY GAO

SENIOR RECITAL

24.04 17:00

YST Concert Hall

R. Strauss

R. Planel

N. V. Krufft

Pianist: Liu Jia



YST

Yong Siew Toh
Conservatory
of Music

Programme notes for Senior Recital

Richard Strauss: Horn Concerto No.2 in E-flat major

Richard Strauss (1864-1949) was a German composer, conductor, pianist, and violinist. He was 18 years old when he first composed his first Horn Concerto and was 78 years old by the time he completed the second Horn Concerto, which was dedicated to his father Franz Strauss. In the last decade of his life, Strauss was appointed head of the Reichsmusikkammer (the state music bureau), which involved the cleansing of German music of the "unwholesomeness" of Jewish and modernist elements. He, unfortunately, lost the job in a couple years when the Nazis intercepted his letters to an Austrian-Jewish friend and librettist, Stefan Zweig. It was also those years that he was turned away from trying to intervene and help his Jewish relatives suffering in the Theresienstadt concentration camp. Having to struggle between his obligations and his compassion, Strauss also dealt with influenza – and given these circumstances, it is only understandable that his late works drives on escapism.

Strauss' Horn Concerto No.2 debuted at a festival in Salzburg, played by the Vienna Philharmonic and led by Karl Böhm on August 11, 1943. It is a piece cast in the conventional three movements, fast-slow-fast format. While the music is every bit as technically challenging as its predecessor, it demands much more agility and ability from its soloists due to its complex harmonies and structures.

The opening Allegro features a highly traditional horn call, but quickly follows a pastoral tune that is usually accompanied by the strings. The first movement challenges the duality of the horn, exploring its heroic and hunting characteristics, as well as its lyrical and operatic features. The second movement, Andante con moto, blends the horn into a chamber-like radiance. It stands out due to the seamless intertwining of the soloist and accompaniment as it departs from its previous acrobatics. The third and final movement is a rousing and affirming Rondo. The horn returns with its hunting calls, reflecting a heroic conclusion.

While this is definitely the most challenging piece in my programme, I hope to showcase the vast possibilities and qualities of horn playing through one of Strauss's most magnificent works in solo repertoire.

Robert Planel: Légende for Horn and Piano

Robert Planel (1908-1994) was a French composer and violinist who wrote many different genres. He frequents in more vocal and chamber music. But he has also written works for orchestra, masses and sacred music, music theatre, as well as solo works. He studied at the Conservatoire de Paris and was a recipient of the prestigious Prix de Rome, before studying at the Académie de France. Planel was a devoted music educator after serving as a band leader in World War II, he promoted mainly contemporary music, choral singing, and music education for the underprivileged in France.

Légende for Horn and Piano is a multi-section piece that incorporated many musical styles of the era, including salon music, and the blues. Despite being mainly French influenced, you might also hear a slight hint of the fiery flamenco of the Spanish. The piece is intended to portray a legendary narrative character, but Planel does not overtly represent anything in specific. It begins with a dramatic introduction that alludes a hero declaring his arrival through the horn call. A slower, more lyrical and romantic interlude follows the introduction of the hero – representing romance. Planel showcases his melodic finesse, exhibiting the horn's capabilities with its incredible musicality and thick timbre. Soon after follows the section Animé, the audience will be presented with a mixed and changing meter that creates a sense of unease and anticipation. The piece is led to the end with a restatement of the opening call motif, declaring a sense of accomplishment, and concludes with a celebratory section.

Having played mostly classical repertoires during my time as a performing student, *L'Égènde* will be one of the first 20th century pieces that I will be presenting on stage.

Nikolaus von Krufft: Sonata for Horn and Fortepiano

Nikolaus von Krufft (1779-1818) was an Austrian composer and civil servant. He was born into an affluent family, where his father Andreas Adolph von Krufft was a state minister, and his mother Maria Anne was a famous pianist. Having an obligation to follow in his father's footsteps, Nikolaus studied philosophy and law at the University of Vienna and took employment at the "Secret Court and State Chancellery". Although he did spend majority of his life undertaking civil duties, his love for music was great. He received his earliest piano lessons from his mother and later composition lessons from Albrechtsberger. Krufft composed a vast number of lieder and sonatas, including the 24 Preludes and Fugues for Fortepiano that Bach heavily influenced.

Krufft's Sonata for Horn and Fortepiano was first published in 1812, while it is unknown if it was written for a specific horn player, it was possible that it was written for Friedrich Bode, the principal horn player at Court Chapel in Mecklenburg-Shwerin, as Krufft later composed a set of Variations for horn and piano for him.

The Sonata itself features stunning dialogues between the parts of the horn and piano, exploring a wide range of texture and sounds that transcend classical structures in search of new ways of expression. The piece is also written in the traditional three-movement classical style, each movement featuring stylistic differences in terms of virtuosities and lyricism. The first movement challenges the higher range of the horn itself, with technically challenging embellishments that ironically emphasize the light-heartedness of the classical period. The second movement embodies vocal lyricism, contrasting the first movement with beautiful melodic lines that intertwines with the piano like a romantic duet. The final movement features a dance, just like those that you would imagine in ballroom.

As the finale of my recital, I aim to present what I do best in horn repertoires. I believe that the classical period is one of the most important eras to distinguish the growth of natural horn to valve horns. With the capabilities of our instruments today, I hope to present the dynamics and qualities that Krufft and his predecessors have intended in their time.