

27 November | Friday

Zheng Mingen

Piano Recital

PROGRAMME

DOMENICO SCARLATTI

Keyboard Sonata in G Major, K. 427

Keyboard Sonata in G Minor, K. 30

JOHANNES BRAHMS

6 Klavierstücke, Op. 118

I. Intermezzo. Allegro non assai, ma molto appassionato (A minor)

II. Intermezzo. Andante teneramente (A major)

III. Ballade. Allegro energico (G minor)

IV. Intermezzo. Allegretto un poco agitato (F minor)

V. Romance. Andante—Allegretto grazioso (F major)

VI. Intermezzo. Andante, largo e mesto (E-flat minor)

- INTERMISSION (10 MINS) -

IGOR STRAVINSKY

Trois Mouvements de Petrouchka

I. Danse Russe

II. Chez Pétrouchka

III. La semaine grasse

About The Performer

Zheng Mingen was born in China and got to know the piano when she was six. When she was eleven, she enrolled in the Central Conservatory Gu Lang Yu piano school. She then studied under Dr Yu Yang and Dr Huang Xiang who were her mentors. The Principal of the school Yang Ming also took her under his wing and learned much from him. She was a favored pupil of Vladimir Krainev's and during his master class he invited her to take part in his competition. Mingen has also attended numerous master classes under renowned pianists such as Anton Kuerti, Yin Cheng Zong and Lars Vogt. Currently, she is doing her master's degree in the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music. She has studied under both Dr Thomas Hecht and Mr Albert Tiu. Mingen has also been asked to take part in some competitions such as;

Hong Kong- Asia Piano Competition Open Class 1st Prize

HaiNan China Piano Competition Professional Young Adult Category 1st Prize

Bradshaw& Buona Piano Competition 2nd Prize

San Jose International Piano Competition 3rd Prize

(Singapore) National Piano & Violin Competition 2019 Piano Artist Category
2nd Prize

Programme Notes

Domenico Scarlatti - Sonata K.427 in G Major & Sonata K. 30 in G Minor "Cat Fugue"

Domenico Scarlatti was a Baroque harpsichordist and organist and is most famous for his 555 keyboard sonatas. Having spent most of his life in the Spanish court, his music is heavily influenced by the elements of Spanish guitar and dance music.

The Sonata in G Major has a sparkly and lively opening with busy and virtuosic passages, which are interrupted by majestic and stately sounding trumpet passages, which might show Scarlatti's influence from his father's trumpet music.

The next piece, in contrast with the light and playful character of the G Major sonata, is a piece with a mysterious quality. Also nicknamed as the "Cat Fugue", the nickname was not given by Scarlatti himself, but by scholars that have linked the unusually crawling subject to the mischievous movements of Scarlatti's pet cat, Pulcinella, who frequently liked to walk across the keyboard. Towards the end of the piece the texture becomes more organ-like, which might also come from Scarlatti's experience at the instrument.

Johannes Brahms – 6 Klavierstucke, Op.118

Johannes Brahms, along with his conservative German contemporaries, most notably Robert and Clara Schumann, were masters of writing collections of miniature pieces and character pieces. This is reflected heavily in his late works, including Op.118, where his introspective character and passionate sensitivity is delivered in a very compact but rich manner, as opposed to the open and virtuosic character of his early works. Brahms has been famous for titling some of his small piano pieces “Intermezzo”, however they do not truly play the role of being a musical interlude, but as standalone pieces.

The first Intermezzo is dramatic and powerful, but this immense passion by waves of arpeggios and broken chords is brief and fleeting. It ends in A major, which sets up an immediate link to the next piece.

The second Intermezzo is the most famous and beloved piece in this set, it has a nocturne-like tenderness, intimacy and melodic quality, but filled with rich and harmonious texture. The change of key in the stormy middle section suggests an agitated outpouring of emotion, as a passionate duet between feminine and masculine voices seem to express Brahms’ inner emotional difficulties.

The title “Ballade” is ironic, as it has none of the emotional scope of an actual Ballade, but is more in the style of a vigorous folk dance not unlike the Hungarian Dances that he wrote in his early life. The energetic rhythms of the opening melt away in the middle section into a more relaxed state while still maintaining the constant rhythmic drive, but now underneath a charming melody.

The fourth of the set is built almost entirely on the principle of canon, which is an old-dated compositional technique that involves strict imitation between parts. Despite the reprise of the first section being more greatly varied, there continues to be a very strict two-voice canon. Brahms, with his masterful use of counterpoint, buries the imitating voice in the middle of a very thick texture.

The unsettling canon is followed by a soothing but bold-sounding chorale. Brahms named it Romanze, which is appropriate as it alludes to an old man recalling his younger life, filled with sweetness and dreams. The middle section is slightly dreamy, but with some playful and delicate elements.

The final piece is a farewell to the bright times of his life; Brahms use the first four notes of the Dies irae plainchant as a basis for his motives, which has been used by many composers such as Rachmaninov and Liszt to show a sense of dread and foreboding. The quiet and mysterious opening slowly but painfully latches on, and gradually it unfolds into a brief tragic-heroic section which is high spirited, full of courage and forcible vigor, comparable to a tragic hero facing death with determination and strong spirit. This heroism does not last

long before Brahms sinks back into the gloomy motif of death, whose final arpeggiated chord, in pianissimo, ends the work's journey to death for eternal living.

Igor Stravinsky – Three Pieces from Petrushka

10 years after the initial inception of the ballet in 1911, Russian composer Igor Stravinsky returned once again to the music of Petrushka to create a showpiece that has high technical brilliance and musical satisfaction to attract the famous pianist Arthur Rubinstein to play his music. Stravinsky's use of modes and tonal harmony in a new harmonic codex already shows foresight to his transition to his later neoclassical style.

The first movement, the Russian Dance, comes from the end of the ballet's first tableau, a scene at the fair in which Petrushka and his fellow puppets spring to life and make a performance for the gathered audience.

In the second movement, Petrushka's Room, the piece takes us inside the puppet theater to showcase the love triangle where the Ballerina is caught between Petrushka and his rival the Moor. Stravinsky quotes a French folk song, "Une jambe de bois", which means a wooden leg, probably referring to the nature of the puppets, and transforms it into a Russian folk dance! The discordant, rising triad figures near the beginning spell out the distinctive polychord, known as the "Petrushka" chord that rings throughout the ballet.

In the final movement, the merriment from the final act is brought in with the accompaniment of gypsies and a troop of masqueraders. Stravinsky's heavy use of large leaps show the character of a bear dance.

Programme notes by Zheng Mingen.