

CHANG YUN-HUA

Senior Recital

A. Copland

Piano Variations (1930)

L. v. Beethoven

**Piano Sonata No. 26
in E-flat Major, Op. 81a**

J. Brahms

**Variations and Fugue
on a Theme by Handel, Op. 24**

29 April 2021

Thursday 5:15PM

YST Concert Hall



Senior Recital Programme Notes

Chang, Yun-Hua

AARON COPLAND (1900-1990)

Piano Variations (1930)

After years of pursuing jazz idioms in the 1920s, this piano variation was a product of Copland's second-style period when he started to work on abstract music. Copland premiered the piece himself, and wrote that the Piano Variations "was the first work where [he] felt very sure of [himself]." Unlike many other variations, the variations in this piece are not episodic i.e. these variations are played continuously without a break in between. He experimented with different ways of playing the piano to create different kinds of effects that successfully intensify the piece, such as striking the keys sharply, producing overtones, and using sostenuto pedal. Moreover, the dissonant intervals and the irregular rhythm also help to make the piece sound more powerful and impressive. In addition to the piano solo version, Copland also transcribed this piece for the orchestra in 1957.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 26 in E-flat Major, Op. 81a ("Les Adieux")

- I. Das Lebewohl: Adagio - Allegro**
- II. Abwesenheit: Andante espressivo**
- III. Das Wiedersehen: Vivacissimamente**

This sonata was composed in 1809-10 and was dedicated to Archduke Rudolph, one of Beethoven's closest friends and patrons. When Napoleon's army approached Vienna in May 1809, the Archduke was forced to flee with the imperial family. Hence, Beethoven composed this piece to express the deep emotion and to bid farewell to his friend. Furthermore, this sonata is one of the few pieces that Beethoven gave titles. The three movements were entitled respectively as "Das Lebewohl" (The Farewell), "Abwesenheit" (The Absence), and "Das Wiedersehen" (The Return). The title "Les Adieux" was not given by Beethoven himself, but instead added on by the publisher as the French translation for "farewell".

The three-note motive at the beginning of the first movement imitates the sound of horns. Beethoven even wrote "Le-be-wohl" over the notes to help people experience the feeling of saying goodbye to one's dearest friend. This motive also transforms into the turbulent first subject and the expressive second subject. It is very special that the length of the coda is even longer than the development in the first movement. The "Le-be-wohl" motive constantly appears in the coda, which depicts his reluctance to be separated from his friend. The second movement captures one's mood of waiting for someone to return through the use of sighing diminished seventh chords, lonely wandering, and angry stabbing sforzandos. In between these materials, a major comforting melody comes up, reminiscing all the happy memories in

the past. The second movement leads directly into the joyful “reunion” of the third movement. The running sixteenth notes and the light-hearted melody in the last movement portray Beethoven’s excitement when he finally met his friend again.

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op. 24

This piece was written in September 1861 and was dedicated to Clara Schumann on her 42nd birthday. Brahms wrote many variations throughout his life. He also showed lots of interest in Baroque music. Therefore, he composed this piece based on the theme from the Aria of Handel’s Harpsichord Suite No. 1 in B-flat Major. This piece consists of a theme, 25 variations, and a fugue. The theme is very simple in terms of the structure and the harmony, which allows Brahms to have more freedom to vary the theme with different approaches. In addition to the Aria and Fugue, Brahms also applied forms from the Baroque era on different variations, such as Siciliana (Var. 19), Musette (Var. 22), and Canon (Var. 6 & 16). The organization of 25 variations can be grouped by how one is related to the next one in terms of the similar rhythm, character, etc. These variations were smartly planned so that they help the listeners to prepare for the epic fugue. Despite how complex it already is as a four-voice fugue, Brahms made it even more challenging by using techniques such as third and sixth - which displays virtuoso pianism. The motive keeps appearing in different ways, which finally builds up to the triumphant ringing of “bells” at the end of the piece.