

mélancholie

ZHENNI LI, PIANO

Lourié | Bartók | Schumann



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ZHENNI LI's riveting personality and passionate performances have brought audiences to their feet around the world. Hailed as "*a magnetic pianist--with fire and poetry*" by music critic David Dubal and for her "*...big, gorgeous tone and a mesmerizing touch*" by The Philadelphia Inquirer, Ms. Li has performed throughout North America, Europe and Asia in such notable venues as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Merkin Concert Hall and WQXR's Greene Space in New York, the Kimmel Performing Arts Center in Philadelphia, the California Theater in San Jose, the Berlin Philharmonie, the Grieghallen in Norway and the National Concert Hall in Tianjin, China.

Ms. Li has garnered worldwide recognition as a winner of the 2017 New York Concert Artists Worldwide Debut Audition, Astral Artist's 2016 National Auditions, the Grieg International Competition in Norway, and the unanimous 1st Prize at the Concours Musical de France. She is also a top prizewinner of the International Russian Piano Competition, Midwest International Piano Competition, the Kosciusko Chopin Piano Competition and The Heida Hermanns International Piano Competition.

Her performances have been broadcast internationally through numerous sources including WQXR in New York, WRTI in Philadelphia, Canada National CBC Radio, Norwegian National Radio: NPK P2/NPK Klassisk, Texas Public Radio, WFMT Public Radio in Chicago, Iowa Public Radio and WWFM The Classical Network. She has also appeared as a guest artist for the New York Philharmonic Symposium on Stravinsky with conductor Valery Gergiev. She has previously served as a piano faculty and chamber music coach for McGill School of Music for undergraduate students and currently is the co-founder and Artistic Director for "*The Last Soirée*", a multi-genre performing arts series which debuted in New York in spring 2018.

Arthur-Vincent Lourié was a key figure among Russian composers involved in the Futurist movement, along with Mikhail Gnesin, Julian Krein and Alexander Mosolov among others, whose works drew inspiration from or paid homage to machines. Lourié's earliest piano pieces, however, reflect the teenage composer's eager assimilation of late Russian Romanticism, particularly the 5 *Préludes Fragiles* Op. 1.

Note, for instance, how the varied tuplets throughout the *Lento*'s undulating left hand accompaniment have a built in agitation that evokes Scriabin. By contrast, Rachmaninov's virtuoso authority informs the second *Prélude*'s gently whirling right hand figurations. No. 3's decorative high register phrases bear a kinship with those in Ravel's *Oiseaux Tristes* from *Miroirs*. Considering No. 4's animated urgency and fuller textures, its overall brevity surprises, although the final *Prélude* reiterates some of No. 1's gestures to more extensive effect.

Robert Schumann's feverish creativity was a law unto itself, and temperamentally at odds with the classical style's formal precepts. Certainly the F-sharp Minor Sonata counts among his most personal and idiosyncratic compositions, not the least in how he first titled it for publication: "Pianoforte Sonata, Dedicated to Clara, by Florestan and Eusebius, Op. 11"

Clara, of course, was the 16-year-old pianist who would become the composer's wife. Schumann ascribed the names Florestan and Eusebius to his contrasting personalities; the former a vigorous, active man, the latter a dreamer prone to melancholy. Florestan decisively presides over the first movement's declamatory themes and fandango-like rhythms. The brief slow movement's *senza passione, ma espressivo* directive underlines this gorgeous music's sense of yearning and aching lyricism.

The Scherzo embodies some of Schumann's wildest ideas: The Allegro outer sections feature rapid figurations that leap across the keyboard's registers with driving momentum, while a markedly contrasting Trio is an exaggerated polonaise that caricatures the genre's pomp and swagger. Obsession comes home to roost in the finale, which basically repeats the expository material over and over again in different keys, rather than allowing the ideas to unfold and develop. Yet the underlying energy and volatile mood swings manage to add up to a fulfilling entity.

Listeners accustomed to the percussive tautness of Bartók's works with piano from the late 1920s on will find a looser, more voluble keyboard approach in his earlier *Elegies Op. 8b*. The First *Elegy's* opening section is a brooding recitative whose narrative trajectory spills over into virtuosic outbursts culminating in chordal build-ups. Bartók returns to his original slow tempo with imitative writing in octaves that again gives way to petulant flourishes, followed by long legato lines supported by rapid scales and arpeggios that might be described as Liszt transported twenty years into the future.

Lisztian rhetoric rears its head more overtly in the Second *Elegy's* peasant unison figures, hammered-out repeated chords, and palpable kinetic sweep. At the same time, the flickering embellishments and textural mixing and matching opens a window into Debussy's sound world. Small wonder that the late pianist and writer Charles Rosen provocatively described Bartók as both a 20th century composer and a 19th century pianist.

— *Jed Distler*

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Arthur Vincent Lourié (1892-1966)

Préludes fragiles, Op. 1

- 1 I. Lento 2:13
- 2 II. Calme, pas vite 1:57
- 3 III. Tendre, pensif 2:43
- 4 IV. Affabile 1:42
- 5 V. Modéré 2:55

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Sonata No. 1 in F sharp minor, Op. 11

- 6 I. Un poco adagio 13:09
- 7 II. Aria 3:40
- 8 III. Scherzo e intermezzo 5:39
- 9 IV. Allegro con poco maestoso 14:24

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Two Elegies, Op. 8b

- 10 I. Grave 8:01
- 11 II. Molto adagio, sempre rubato 8:21

Playing Time: 64:44



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