



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

presents

MAXIM LANDO, piano

FRI APR 2, 7:30 PM

Hodgson Concert Hall

FRI APR 2, 7:30 PM – THURS APR 8, 10 PM

Studio HH

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PROGRAM

Chick Corea (1941-2021)

Children's Songs

Nikolai Kapustin (1937-2020)

Concert Etudes, Op. 40

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)

Piano Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 36

I. Allegro agitato

II. Non allegro – Lento

III. Allegro molto

Mily Balakirev (1837-1910)

Islamey, Op. 18

Maxim Lando appears by arrangement with Young Concert Artists, Inc. www.yca.org

Program is subject to change.

PROGRAM NOTES

By Luke Howard

Chick Corea (1941-2021)

Children's Songs

The American pianist/composer Chick Corea grew up around jazz. His father, Armando Corea, was a jazz trumpeter in the 1930s and 40s, and introduced “Chick” (whose given name was also Armando) to piano at the age of four. At age eight, Corea started taking percussion lessons and began exploring classical music, both of which would exert deep influences on his later musical directions. Corea studied at Columbia University and the Juilliard School of Music, but quit both to pursue a professional performance career in jazz in the 1960s.

Chick Corea was the consummate collaborator, moving freely and confidently between disparate genres of music—from bebop and fusion to children’s music, chamber, and orchestral works—alongside a “who’s who” of jazz and classical performers. To a person, Corea’s co-collaborators relished their partnerships with such a gifted, astute, and collegial associate. Independent of his jazz works, Corea also ventured into concert-hall composition, producing (for example) a piano concerto and a string quartet. Over a prolific recording career, Corea won 25 Grammy Awards (from 65 nominations) as well as three Latin Grammy Awards.

Corea’s *Children’s Songs* began in 1971 and developed into a series of short, simple melodies—only some of which were first conceived for piano—that that were published in 1980, then recorded and released as a piano album in 1984. In its rhythmic

materials and compositional modes of treatment, the collection was partly inspired by Béla Bartók’s *Mikrokosmos*, a well-known pedagogical series of keyboard exercises arranged according to difficulty. Corea’s goal in writing these *Children’s Songs* was, as he put it, “to convey simplicity as beauty, as represented in the Spirit of a child.”

But while simple, there is nothing simplistic about the *Children’s Songs*. Corea’s palette is a sophisticated interplay of musical discovery, growth, understanding, and wonder. And he opened up these works for further development, both in his own performances (which were typically modified and adapted to the occasion) and for others who played them. Corea invited anyone who performs these songs to “play them, and play with them. Reharmonize, improvise, orchestrate. Take a child’s approach and fool around with them.... Please experiment. There are no rules.”

Nikolai Kapustin (1937-2020)

Concert Études, Op. 40

Ukraine-born composer/pianist Nikolai Kapustin started out with lessons in classical piano, and then discovered jazz just as World War II was ending. Though he continued as a classical pianist, graduating from the Moscow Conservatory in 1961, Kapustin played in jazz groups through the 1950s, and began to earn a reputation as a jazz arranger and composer. But he never accepted the label of “jazz pianist” because of his stated disinterest in improvisation, adding rhetorically, “and what is a jazz musician without improvisation?”

In his desire to fuse classical and jazz idioms, Kapustin cited Oscar Peterson

as his biggest influence, but unlike Peterson, he wrote out his “improvisatory” passages in full, believing it improved them. The jazz piano remained central to his work—almost all of Kapustin’s compositions (like Chopin’s) are for solo piano or include the piano in an ensemble.

Kapustin’s Eight Concert Études, published in 1984 as his Op. 40, are exuberant miniatures that explore technical aspects of keyboard playing—as an étude, by definition, should—but overlaid with a sense of poetry and artistry. They are not merely technical studies, in other words, but are character pieces with evocative titles that, in the tradition of Liszt, explore multiple technical issues in each étude. Individually, the Concert Études have become popular as recital encores, but as a group they form an archetypal representation of Kapustin’s career and his lasting interests in jazz and classical repertoires.

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) **Piano Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 36**

So many of Sergei Rachmaninoff’s Russian contemporaries came to music only after abandoning plans to study law, medicine, or some other profession. But Rachmaninoff was always going to be a musician—his background and connections virtually demanded it. Rachmaninoff’s parents were both musicians, and his grandfather had studied with the legendary Irish pianist John Field. His cousin, Alexander Siloti, was a former pupil of Liszt and one of the most important musical figures in Russia at the time. And while Rachmaninoff was still a teenager he became a protégé

of Tchaikovsky, who didn’t hesitate to proclaim him an equal.

Rachmaninoff left Russia after the October 1917 Revolution and never returned, shuttling for the next two decades between New York and Switzerland. In 1935 he settled in Beverly Hills, and became a United States citizen just before he died in 1943. It was during this period that he cemented his reputation as a piano performer, and composed very little. But Rachmaninoff always considered himself primarily as a composer, not a pianist.

As a composer, Rachmaninoff was completely unmoved by the modernist musical experiments of the early 20th century, clinging steadfastly to the opulent and lyrical Romanticism of the 19th century. This mostly pleased his audiences, but failed to impress the music historians and modernist critics who at first regarded his works as stale, uninteresting remnants from a past era. It was only after his death that Rachmaninoff’s reputation as a composer rose to match his standing as one of the pre-eminent pianists of his day.

While visiting Rome in 1913, taking a break from his rigorous concert schedule, Rachmaninoff started to compose his Piano Sonata No. 2. It was a busy year for him—he was simultaneously working on his choral symphony *The Bells*—and there was still much work to be done on the sonata after he returned to Russia in the summer. He continued revising the work later in 1913, and again (more extensively) in 1931 when he was concerned that his finger technique was not as supple and agile as it had once been. He wrote at the time,

“I look at my early works and see how much there is that is superfluous. Even in this sonata, so many voices are moving simultaneously, and it is too long.” Another final revision, on the advice of his friend Vladimir Horowitz, came in 1942.

Similar in structure and technique to his famous Piano Concerto No. 3 (1909), Rachmaninoff’s Second Piano Sonata was likewise not an immediate success, but eventually endeared itself to its public. The technical demands at least equaled anything else in the literature to that point, and while there are numerous pianists who are able to handle the technique, conquering the musical and aesthetic demands is another issue still. Rachmaninoff did not care for the piece himself—he found the sonata frustrating, while admitting that Horowitz played it better than he did.

Formally this work follows the classical pattern of piano sonata composition, with a sonata-allegro first movement, a lyrical and expressive slow movement, and a dynamic, dramatic finale. The first movement (*Allegro agitato*) in B-flat minor opens with a cascading first subject that is soon transformed when the harmonies shift to the relative major, D-flat. A gentle second subject seems drawn from the same thematic well that produced the composer’s Op. 32 preludes—lyrical, elegant, and pianistic. The development section, simplified and radically truncated in the 1931 revision, includes evocations of chiming bells (something of a Rachmaninoff thumbprint) that leads into a final recapitulation.

After a transitional introduction, the meditative and improvisatory second movement (*Lento*) settles into the

distant key of E minor for a lilting theme. In a parallel to the opening movement, the theme is then reimagined in the relative major (G major) and undergoes further variation. More allusions to the first movement’s materials appear, then another modulatory passage that leads back to B-flat for the finale.

The transitional passage heard between the first two movements is repeated again before the finale (*Allergo molto*), which presents a sizzling juxtaposition between furious virtuoso passagework and staccato cheerfulness before concluding optimistically.

Mily Balakirev (1837-1910) **Islamey (“An Oriental Fantasy”), Op. 18**

Mily Balakirev was a pivotal figure in Russian 19th-century music at a time when two opposing cultural forces were in play—one of them stubbornly Western in its outlook, and the other doggedly nationalistic. Balakirev was firmly camped on the nationalist side, putting him at odds occasionally with more “cosmopolitan” composers like Glazunov, Rachmaninoff, and Tchaikovsky (who, ironically, was Balakirev’s student), but alongside Rimsky-Korsakov, Borodin, Musorgsky, and Cui, forming with them the group known as the “Mighty Handful” of Russian nationalist composers.

Balakirev was notoriously slow to complete some of his larger compositions, and his colleagues occasionally worked his own ideas into their own pieces before Balakirev had a chance to develop them himself. But his *Islamey*, an “Oriental Fantasy” for piano solo, and one of the 19th century’s most celebrated virtuoso

showpieces, came to him quickly in the fall of 1869 after a trip to the Caucasus. Balakirev recalled meeting a prince there “who frequently came to me and played folk tunes on his instrument, that was something like a violin. One of them, called *Islamey*, a dance-tune, pleased me extraordinarily and... I began to arrange it for the piano.” It took Balakirev only one month to complete the work. He revised it in 1902.

Though Balakirev was renowned as one of the leading virtuoso pianists of his day, there were passages in *Islamey* that

even he couldn't manage. Nikolai Rubinstein premiered it later in 1869, and Liszt championed the piece that was already gaining a reputation as “unplayable.” Alexander Scriabin famously injured his right hand in the early 1890s from over-practicing *Islamey*. And two of Balakirev's colleagues, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov, included quotations from it in their own compositions. It remains an audience favorite today—a brilliant, fiendishly difficult folk-influenced masterpiece of 19th-century Russian pianism.

Mr. Lando was also invited to play at the grand opening of Steinway and Sons in Beijing, and has performed at the National Center for Performing Arts in Beijing, Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris, Samos Young Artist Festival in Greece, Rising Stars Munich, Jupiter Symphony Chamber Players in New York City, Ravinia and Aspen Music Festivals, and Jay Pritzker Pavilion at Chicago's Millennium Park.

Dedicated to making classical music accessible to his own generation, Maxim Lando has been featured on CNN's Best of Quest, NPR's “From The Top,” BBC Radio 4, and WQXR. A proponent of Sing For Hope's mission, he served as a last-minute replacement for Lea Salonga at its 2017 Gala.

Winner of the Gold Medal at the 2017 Berlin International Music Competition, Maxim Lando has participated in the Artemisia Akademie at Yale University, is an alumnus of the Lang Lang International Music Foundation, and is a student of Hung-Kuan Chen (YCA Alumnus) and Tema Blackstone at Juilliard Pre-College.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

MAXIM LANDO, piano

Maxim Lando began playing the piano at age three and made his Carnegie Hall debut at the age of six. He first received national attention at the age of fourteen, appearing on the piano bench alongside Lang Lang to perform the parts intended for Mr. Lang's injured left hand, on tour and at Carnegie Hall's Gala Opening Night with the Philadelphia Orchestra led by Yannick Nézet-Séguin. In 2020, Mr. Lando was awarded the prestigious Gilmore Young Artist Award, and in January was named Musical America's “New Artist of the Month.”

In the 2020-2021 season, Mr. Lando was invited to appear as a soloist with the Westmoreland Symphony Orchestra, Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, Memphis Symphony Orchestra, and the Massapequa Philharmonic Orchestra. He has previously performed with the symphonies of Pittsburgh, Toronto, Vancouver, and Hawaii, Russia's Mariinsky Theater Orchestra, St. Petersburg Symphony, Russian National Orchestra, Bolshoi Symphony, Moscow Philharmonic, Kazakh State Philharmonic, Israel Philharmonic, and China's NCPA Orchestra.

Mr. Lando won First Prize at the 2018 Young Concert Artists International Auditions. He opened the 2019-20 Young Concert Artists Series with recital debuts in Washington, DC, at the Kennedy Center's Terrace Theater, and in New York in the Peter Marino Concert at Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall, which made the *New York Times*'s “10 Months of Classical Concerts You Won't Want to Miss.”





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