

Opus 3 Artists presents

LEONIDAS KAVAKOS, violin
& YUJA WANG, piano

November 6, 2021

Cobb Great Hall

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Sonata No. 3 for Violin and Keyboard in E major, BWV 1016
JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685 – 1750)

Adagio

Allegro

Adagio ma non tanto

Allegro

Sonata No. 2 for Violin and Piano in E minor, Op. 36a
FERRUCCIO BUSONI (1866 - 1924)

Langsam

Presto

Andante piuttosto grave

Sonata for Violin and Piano in G major, Op. 134
DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH (1906 – 1975)

Andante

Allegretto

Largo – Andante

Tonight's program will run approximately 80 minutes
with no intermission.

Mr. Kavakos records exclusively for Sony Classical.

Ms. Wang records exclusively for Deutsche Grammophon.

BIOS

LEONIDAS KAVAKOS

Violinist and Conductor

Leonidas Kavakos is recognized as a violinist and artist of rare quality, known for his virtuosity, musicianship and the integrity of his playing. He works with the world's greatest orchestras and conductors and plays as recitalist in the world's premier recital halls and festivals. By age 21, Kavakos had won three major competitions: the Sibelius (1985), Paganini, and Naumburg competitions (1988). This success led to his recording the original Sibelius Violin Concerto (1903/4), the first recording of this work in history, which won Gramophone Concerto of the Year Award in 1991.

Kavakos is a Carnegie Hall "Perspectives" Artist in 21/22, performing in a variety of concerts over the season, which includes a recital with pianist Yuja Wang; the North American premiere of a violin concerto by composer Unsuk Chin, written for Mr. Kavakos and co-commissioned by the Boston Symphony, London Symphony, and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France; and a chamber music trio concert with Emanuel Ax and Yo-Yo Ma. The recital program with Ms. Wang will be toured across the U.S. in November 2021 with performances in Georgia (Atlanta and Athens); Chicago, East Lansing, Lincoln (NE), San Diego, Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, and Berkeley. The Ax-Kavakos-Ma trio will also give concerts at the Kennedy Center in Washington DC, Boston's Symphony Hall, Chicago's Orchestra Hall, and

Stony Brook NY, in addition to their Carnegie Hall performance in March 2022.

In recent years, Kavakos has succeeded in building a strong profile as a conductor, and this season will return to the Dallas Symphony to lead a program of Mozart Sinfonia Concertante and Prokofiev's Sixth Symphony. As conductor, he has collaborated with the New York Philharmonic, Houston Symphony, Gürzenich Orchester, Vienna Symphony, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Maggio Musicale Fiorentino, Filarmonica Teatro La Fenice, and the Danish National Symphony Orchestra.

Leonidas Kavakos is an exclusive recording artist with Sony Classics. Recent releases from the Beethoven 250th Anniversary year include the Beethoven Violin Concerto which he conducted and played with the Bavarian Radio Symphony, and the re-release of his 2007 recording of the complete Beethoven Sonatas with Enrico Pace, for which he was named Echo Klassik Instrumentalist of the year. Kavakos was awarded Gramophone Artist of the Year 2014 and the 2017 Léonie Sonning Music Prize, Denmark's highest musical honor.

Born and brought up in a musical family in Athens, Greece, Kavakos curates an annual violin and chamber music masterclass in his native city, which attracts violinists and ensembles from all over the world. He plays the 'Willemotte' Stradivarius violin of 1734.

YUJA WANG

Piano

Pianist Yuja Wang is celebrated for her charismatic artistry, emotional honesty and captivating stage presence. She has performed with the world's most venerated conductors, musicians and ensembles, and is renowned not only for her virtuosity, but for her spontaneous and lively performances, famously telling *The New York Times* "I firmly believe every program should have its own life and be a representation of how I feel at the moment." Her skill and charisma were recently demonstrated in her performance of the Shostakovich Piano Concerto No. 2 at Carnegie Hall's Opening Night Gala in October 2021, following its historic 572 days of closure.

Yuja was born into a musical family in Beijing. After childhood piano studies in China, she received advanced training in Canada and at the Curtis Institute of Music under Gary Graffman. Her international breakthrough came in 2007, when she replaced Martha Argerich as soloist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Two years later she signed an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon, and has since established her place among the world's leading artists, with a succession of critically acclaimed performances and recordings. She was named *Musical America's* Artist of the Year in 2017, and in 2021 received an Opus Klassik Award for her world-premiere recording of John Adams' *Must the Devil Have all the Good Tunes?* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic under the baton of Gustavo Dudamel.

As a chamber musician, Yuja has developed long-lasting partnerships with several leading artists, notably violinist Leonidas Kavakos, with whom she has recorded the complete Brahms violin sonatas and will be performing duo recitals in America, of which this performance is one. In 2022, Yuja embarks on a highly anticipated international recital tour, which sees her perform in world-class venues across North America, Europe and Asia, astounding audiences once more with her flair, technical ability and exceptional artistry in a wide-ranging program to include Bach, Beethoven and Schoenberg.

PROGRAM NOTES

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) accepted the position of Kapellmeister in the court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen in 1717. Leopold was a Calvinist, whose religious beliefs limited sacred music to settings of the Psalms. Bach was thus freed of the responsibility to create liturgical compositions, although he was already renowned as a composer of organ and choral music for the church. His new position required him to write secular works for the court's various functions and ensembles. From 1717 to 1723, Bach composed many of his most famous instrumental works, including the Brandenburg Concertos, the solo violin and solo cello works, and the six violin/harpsichord sonatas now known as BWV 1014-1019. These intricate works are among the most influential chamber music of the Baroque era.

The sonatas for violin and keyboard instrument broke new ground in several ways. They were published as "Sonatas for Obligato Harpsichord and Solo Violin with Bass for Viola da

Gamba ad libitum." In contrast to previous works, these sonatas were composed with independent parts for the solo violin and the keyboard. Previously, the solo instrument and the right-hand keyboard part had been almost identical. The independence of these two parts was an innovation. Further, it had been standard practice to use "continuo" – i.e., a string or low woodwind instrument doubling the left hand of the harpsichord part – to reinforce the bass line, which was in the weakest register of the instrument and usually was rather sketchily notated. However, in these works, Bach wrote out the bass line in full, giving it an important melodic and harmonic role. Although doubling the bass part with another instrument was still used in many works of the time, these sonatas did not require it because of the strong independence of each part. (The modern piano was developed almost 100 years after the sonatas were written and is generally used in Baroque music performance today. With the piano's full volume throughout its range, there is no longer a need to double the bass line in order to balance with the upper voices.)

BWV 1016 begins with an "Adagio" first movement, opening lyrically in E major, with a highly ornamented melody and extensive chromaticism. The C major second movement, "Allegro," begins with a four-measure melody which seems almost folk-like, but it is misleadingly simple – the motif is subjected to amazing variations in the violin and both the treble and bass of the keyboard. The third movement, "Andante ma non tanto," is in C minor. It features a chaconne in the bass, a repeated rhythmic and melodic pattern which dictates the melodic and harmonic development of the upper voices. The movement ends on a chord that leads harmonically into the "Allegro" of the

finale. This movement is in E major, and begins in three-quarter time, moving in quarter and eighth notes before suddenly switching to triplets for most of the next 50 measures. The straightforward rhythm then returns and propels the virtuosic passages to a thrilling conclusion.

Ferruccio Busoni was born in Florence, Italy, in 1866 and died in Berlin in 1924. His father was a professional clarinetist and his mother, a professional pianist. Busoni was a child prodigy and conducted his first major composition at the age of 12. He moved to Leipzig in 1886 and later to Helsinki and Berlin. He became good friends with many of the major musicians of the day, including Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Sibelius, and Delius. As a composer, pianist, philosopher, professor, and theorist, he made his mark on the early 20th century with his blend of reverence for the traditions of the Baroque and Classical eras as well as his disdain for the clichés and entrenched practices of the latter 19th century. He ultimately broke with the major/minor harmonic structure but did so in a less radical way than contemporaries such as Schoenberg and Shostakovich. He was said to “always keep the audience in mind” when composing, a trait which is evident in this work’s genial atmosphere.

The Second Sonata for Violin and Piano, opus 36a, was written in 1898, when Busoni was 32 years old. Although there are brief breaks between and within movements, it is essentially one connected work. The development of melodic fragments, as well as frequent changes of key, harmony, harmonic rhythm, dynamics, and varying techniques for each instrument, are prominent throughout the sonata.

The first movement, "Langsam" (Slowly), is melodic, with wide pitch ranges, including some very low passages for the violin. The piano part begins with somber chords which are the condensation of a chorale melody that appears in the third movement. Rippling arpeggios and solid chords lead to a soft ending. The brief "Presto" begins immediately with staccato piano passages and a generally excited violin theme, although momentum slows for a second, calmer theme before the fireworks return. After the briefest of pauses, the third movement begins with several short chords in both instruments. The violin offers a variation on the chorale melody before the full chorale appears in the piano in the "Andante con moto" section. The chorale is "Wie wohl ist mir, O Freund der Seelen, wenn ich in deiner Liebe ruh!" (How happy am I, O Friend of Souls, when I rest in thy love!), which was a well-known hymn melody, first published in 1704 and used by J. S. Bach in his cantata of the same name, BWV 517. Six variations follow, ranging from lyrical and recognizable to march-like transformations that seem to have little relationship to the chorale. After a very busy variation with elaborate piano and soaring violin, the work ends with a tranquil restatement of the chorale and the four chords of the opening phrase.

Dmitri Shostakovich was born in St. Petersburg in 1906 and died in Moscow in 1975. Unlike many of his contemporaries who fled to Europe or the United States over the decades, Shostakovich remained in Russia (i.e., the Soviet Union) and sought to work within the strictures placed upon musicians by the government. He was prolific, with fifteen massive symphonies as well as several operas, film scores, string quartets, and other chamber music. His fascination with traditional forms led him to explore new ways to use them,

in contrast to many of his peers, who were searching for other means of expression.

Shostakovich began the Sonata for Violin and Piano, Op. 134, to commemorate the 60th birthday of violinist David Oistrakh in 1966. Shostakovich and Oistrakh were close friends and often concertized together. As he was working on this and other works, Shostakovich suffered a massive heart attack that hospitalized him for three months and required further recovery. The sonata is often felt to be a reflection on suffering and mortality, hardly a joyous birthday gift but one which Oistrakh played fervently at its premiere in 1969.

The sonata contains several unusual features. It was the first work by Shostakovich to explore twelve-tone techniques. The tone row begins in octaves in the piano and has two complete repetitions before being used in rhythmic augmentation. The violin opens with an unrelated melody featuring slight variations on Shostakovich's musical symbol for his name, the pitches D, E-flat, C, B (using the German pitch names; these spell out DSCH.) Throughout the sonata, a markedly noticeable feature is the recurrent interval of a downward fourth (for example, G-D), which Oistrakh explained as the "shriek" of the ambulance arriving when Shostakovich fell ill. The interval is frequently used in Russian music to indicate death, and it is also the interval used by emergency vehicles throughout Europe, as opposed to the wail of an American emergency vehicle.

In the first movement, after the establishment of the tone row, Shostakovich frequently puts the piano part in octaves, or in two independent lines rather than full chords. When

chords do appear, they are dramatic and serve to emphasize the movement of the violin part, which explores the entire range of the instrument. The interval of a fourth is especially prominent toward the end of the movement. The second movement is a scherzo of incredible energy and aggression in both parts. The final and longest movement begins with fortissimo piano chords, followed by a violin melody that becomes the subject of 24 variations. The interval of the fourth is used almost obsessively. A long solo cadenza for each instrument is followed by slower repetitions of material from the first movement. The work ends with a soft "Largo" section, in which the final chords quietly repeat the interval of a fourth as they die away.

- Mary Black Junttonen, Michigan State University Music Librarian Emeritus

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