

INON BARNATAN



FEATURES

JANET & JOHN NINE STEINWAY

NOVEMBER 17, 2016 | 7:30 PM | LOEB PLAYHOUSE

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INON BARNATAN, PIANO

G.F. HANDEL
(1685-1759)

Chaconne in G Major, HWV 435

J. BRAHMS
(1833-1897)

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

INTERMISSION

F. SCHUBERT
(1797-1828)

Sonata No. 21 in B flat Major, D. 960

I. Molto moderato

II. Andante sostenuto

III. (Scherzo) Allegro vivace con delicatezza

IV. Allegro ma non troppo

Program subject to change

With respect to the musicians and your fellow patrons, we request your participation in the tradition of withholding applause between movements of a selection. To the same end, we also ask that you silence and discontinue use of all electronic devices.

ABOUT

Celebrated for his poetic sensibility, probing intellect, and consummate artistry, Israeli pianist Inon Barnatan is embarking on his third and final season as the inaugural Artist-in-Association of the New York Philharmonic, appearing as soloist in subscription concerts, taking part in regular chamber performances, and acting as ambassador for the orchestra.

This summer Barnatan makes a host of high-profile festival appearances, including the Seattle, Santa Fe, Delft and Aspen Festivals, all capped by a solo recital marking his Mostly Mozart debut. In the 2016-17 season he debuts with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra under the baton of New York Philharmonic Music Director Alan Gilbert, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Jesús López-Cobos, the Baltimore Symphony under Vasily Petrenko, and the Seattle Symphony under Ludovic Morlot. He returns to the New York Philharmonic under Manfred Honeck, and embarks on three tours: of the U.S. with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, of Europe with his frequent recital partner Alisa Weilerstein, and of the U.S. again performing a trio program with Weilerstein and clarinetist Anthony McGill, including a concert at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Other highlights include concerto performances in Japan, Hong Kong and Australia, the complete Beethoven concerto cycle in Marseille, and several concerts at London's Wigmore Hall.

A recipient of both the Avery Fisher Career Grant and Lincoln Center's Martin E. Segal Award, Barnatan has performed extensively with many of the world's foremost orchestras, including those of Cleveland, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and San Francisco; Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin; the Royal Stockholm Symphony Orchestra; and the Gulbenkian Orchestra of Lisbon. He has worked with such distinguished conductors as Gustavo Dudamel, Michael Tilson Thomas, James Gaffigan, Susanna Mälkki, Matthias Pintscher, Thomas Søndergård, David Robertson, Edo de Waart, Pinchas Zukerman, and Jaap van Zweden. Passionate about contemporary music, in recent seasons the pianist has premiered new pieces composed for him by Matthias Pintscher, Sebastian Currier and Avner Dorman.

"A born Schubertian" (*Gramophone*), Barnatan's critically acclaimed discography includes Avie and Bridge recordings of the Austrian composer's solo piano works, as well as *Darkness Visible*, which scored a coveted place on the *New York Times*' "Best of 2012" list. Last October the pianist released *Rachmaninov & Chopin: Cello Sonatas* on Decca Classics with Weilerstein, which earned rave reviews on both sides of the Atlantic.

PROGRAM

Chaconne in G major, HWV 435 (1733)

by George Frideric Handel (Halle, Saxony, 1685 – London, 1759)

Among the forms of Baroque instrumental music, the chaconne occupies a very special place. Treating a characteristic dance rhythm with spectacular instrumental virtuosity, chaconnes are sets of variations over a bass line or chord progression (as opposed to variations on a theme or melody). The most popular of these bass lines is a stepwise descent from the tonic (the main pitch in a key) to the dominant (four notes lower); it is a pattern that may be embellished endlessly, and composers never tired of this simple yet extremely flexible and versatile genre. (Another form, closely related to the chaconne, is the passacaglia; there is no consensus among the experts about the exact difference between the two terms.) J. S. Bach's Chaconne for solo violin and Passacaglia for organ are two of the best-known examples from the 18th century, but many others, including George Frideric Handel, cultivated the form and wrote exquisite variations on the descending bass.

The present Chaconne in G major, with 21 variations, was printed in 1733 in London, as part of a publication entitled *Suites de pièces*. The volume contained nine suites, most of which consist of multiple movements; our Chaconne makes up Suite No. 2 all by itself. Handel originally composed the piece about thirty years earlier, between 1703 and 1706 while living in Hamburg; over the years, he revised the work multiple times. (A second Chaconne in G major, this one with 61 variations, appears in the ninth suite of the same 1733 publication.)

The twenty-one variations (each variation is rather short, only eight measures long) are organized in three large groups: the first (Variations 1-8) presents figurations in gradually increasing speed (eighth-notes in the right hand, eighth-notes in the left hand; eighth-note triplets in the right hand, eighth-note triplets in the left hand; two pairs of variations in sixteenth-notes, alternating between the two hands). The central portion of the piece (Variations 9-16) are in the minor mode. Once again, after a slow and lyrical beginning, the sixteenth-notes appear, alternating between the two hands, culminating in a chromatic variation with many bold leaps in the upper voice. The last five variations form the climax of the piece: Variation 17 is almost identical to Variation 7, producing the effect of a recapitulation; Variations 18-21, with their fast broken chords, bring the piece to its exciting conclusion.

Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op. 24 (1862) by Johannes Brahms (Hamburg, 1833 – Vienna, 1897)

Composers in the 18th and 19th centuries usually took the themes of their variation sets from their contemporaries or from popular sources, if they did not write them themselves. Brahms, whose knowledge of music history was encyclopedic, was the first composer in his time to choose a theme whose composer had been dead for more than a hundred years. Handel's Suite for harpsichord in B-flat major (HWV 434), from which the theme of the present work was taken, was first published in 1733, in the same volume as the Chaconne we have just heard. The pioneering Brahms biographer Max Kalbeck (who was a personal friend of the composer's) asserted that Brahms knew the piece from the original edition. By the time Brahms finished his variations, Handel's suite had been republished in the newly started complete edition of the Baroque composer's works, edited by another of Brahms's many musicologist friends, Friedrich Chrysander.

The melody was used even by Handel as a theme for a set of variations, which were, however, rather modest in scope. Brahms built from this simple raw material a gigantic composition comparable only to Bach's "Goldberg" and Beethoven's "Diabelli" variations. Both those works are from their composers' last years; Brahms, by contrast, was only 28 when he set out to follow their example. He completed the work shortly before moving from Hamburg to Vienna in 1862, and played it later that year at his Viennese debut concert with great success.

The simplicity of Handel's original concealed an enormous potential for development in various directions; the straightforward harmonies could be expanded, rhythmic intricacies and quite novel pianistic difficulties could be introduced. The variations explore different historical periods from Handel's Baroque era through Mozartean classicism to Brahms's own time.

There are 25 variations in all, not counting the fugue. The variations are arranged in such a way as to maximize contrast in tempo and character, while at the same time establishing meaningful links between successive numbers. Three variations (Nos. 5, 6 and 13) are in B-flat minor, one (No. 21) in G minor. Variation 19, in siciliano rhythm, directly evokes the Baroque, while No. 22 ("Alla Musette") sounds like an 18th-century music box.

The work ends with a fugue that follows Baroque models through the intermediary of Beethoven. The latter's French subtitle for his *Great Fugue* (Op. 133) would apply to Brahms's fugue as well: *tantôt libre, tantôt recherchée* ("now free, now strict in style"). The initial contrapuntal imitation is followed by a powerful development without any counterpoint at all, reaching a grand climax at the end.

Sonata in B-flat major, D. 960 (1828)
by Franz Schubert (Himmelfortgrund [now part of Vienna],
1797 – Vienna, 1828)

This work is the last of three monumental piano sonatas Schubert wrote during the last months of his short life. It covers an enormous emotional ground from the contemplative opening to the exuberant close, and is without a doubt one of the peaks of the entire piano literature.

The first movement, significantly, is not marked *Allegro* but rather *Molto moderato*. The difference is an important one. Nothing must be rushed, so that one has sufficient time to savor the two things that make Schubert's mature works so special: his unique melodic writing, and the ingenuity with which he transforms his melodies and builds bridges between them. Schubert had learned from Beethoven the idea of a "three-key" exposition where the music proceeds from the home key to its goal, the dominant, by way of a detour, with the secondary theme appearing in a remote third key (as in Beethoven's *Waldstein* sonata for example). But Schubert's route—B-flat major to F-sharp minor to F major—is more adventurous than Beethoven's. The words "route" and "adventurous" are used with good reason here: the initial melody is one of Schubert's great "wandering" themes, and it is indeed as if we were embarking on a journey that takes us to many wonderful landscapes before returning home for a rest. (In this, our journey differs from the one in *Winterreise*, where there is no home and no return.) At the crucial points of the journey—at the beginning, before the recapitulation, and at the end—an ominous trill on the low G-flat provides an atmosphere of suspense.

The key of the second-movement *Andante sostenuto*, C-sharp minor, is extremely remote from the sonata's main key of B-flat major. Its wistful melody, played in sweet parallel thirds, is surrounded by an accompaniment figure in the left hand that keeps crossing over above the right hand. A second melody, in A major, serves as middle section. It gradually grows in intensity and reaches *forte* dynamics after a series of striking modulations. The first theme then returns: the movement is crowned by one of those magical Schubertian minor-major shifts where the sudden tonal change carries a particularly strong emotional charge.

The third-movement Scherzo (*Allegro vivace con delicatezza*) has a simple melody but a very intricate harmonic scheme. Aside from a few strongly accented notes, the volume never rises above *mezzoforte*, and the scherzo retains its somewhat hushed quality throughout. The soft and understated Trio section (in B-flat minor) has the same *delicatezza* as the scherzo itself.

The Finale combines sonata form with certain features of the rondo. Its main theme is reminiscent of that of Beethoven's last composition, the finale

replacing the *Great Fugue* in the String Quartet Op. 130 (in the same key of B-flat major). Both movements start with the same harmony, outside the key of B-flat, and both reach the home key gradually by the end of the first phrase. Schubert follows this theme with a lyrical secondary melody, suddenly interrupted by a rest and swept away by a sudden dramatic *fortissimo* that soon gives way in its turn to a lively tarantella dance. In the middle section, the playful first theme itself is subjected to some dramatic development; a literal recapitulation and a brief *Presto* coda concludes this great sonata.

Schubert had intended to dedicate his three sonatas from the year 1828 to the composer and piano virtuoso Johann Nepomuk Hummel, but the works were not published until 1838, ten years after Schubert's death. At that point, the publisher Diabelli dedicated them to Robert Schumann, whose enthusiastic review opened the door to the posthumous recognition of Schubert's music outside Vienna.

—Program notes by Peter Laki





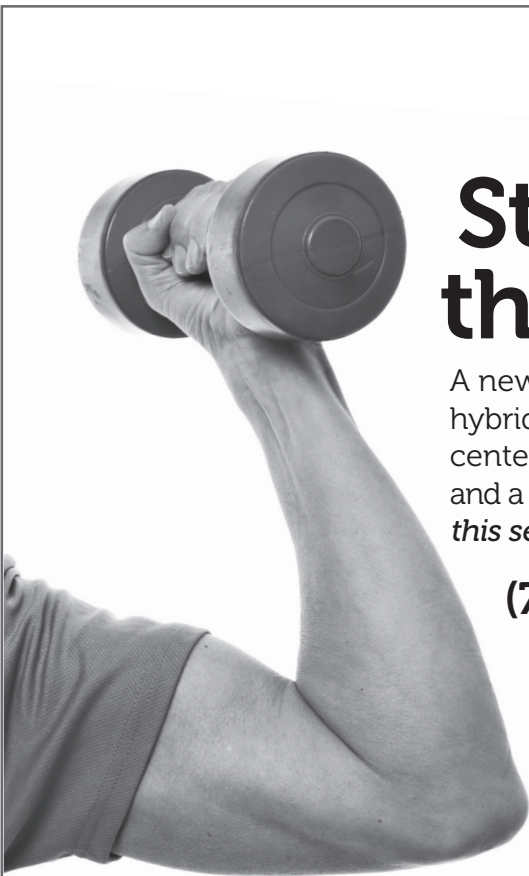
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