

HOROWITZ PIANO SERIES

Boris Berman, *artistic director*

Boris Berman

Wednesday, September 21, 2022 | 7:30 pm
Morse Recital Hall in Sprague Memorial Hall

Yale SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Robert Blocker, Dean

Program

Valentin (Valentyn)
Silvestrov
b. 1937

Triade (1961–1966)

- I. Signs
- II. Serenade
- III. Music of silvery tones

Silvestrov

Sonata No. 2 (1975)

Silvestrov

Kitsch Music (1977)

INTERMISSION

Johannes Brahms
1756–1791

Theme with Variations in D major, Op. 18b

Brahms

Variations on an Original Theme in D major, Op. 21, No. 1

Brahms

Variations on a Hungarian Song in D major, Op. 21, No. 2

Artist Profile

Boris Berman, *piano*

A performer well known to audiences in fifty countries on six continents, Boris Berman regularly appears with orchestras, on recital series, and at festivals around the world. He studied at the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory with distinguished pianist Lev Oberin.

An active recording artist and Grammy Award nominee, Berman was the first pianist to record Prokofiev's complete solo piano works. Some of Berman's other acclaimed recordings include all of Scriabin's piano sonatas and a performance of piano works by Shostakovich that received the Edison Classic Award (the Dutch equivalent of the Grammy). His double CD of Debussy Preludes and other works on Palais des Degustateurs label has received the Choc mark from the French Classica. The same label has also released his recordings of Brahms, Haydn, and Schubert.

At the Yale School of Music, Berman teaches a studio of graduate students, coaches chamber groups, and heads the Piano Department. He is the Artistic Director of the School's Horowitz Piano Series and frequently gives solo and collaborative performances as part of that series and others. Berman regularly performs and coaches at the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival/Yale Summer School of Music, teaches master classes throughout the world, and adjudicates national and international competitions.

Berman has authored two books published by the Yale University Press: *Prokofiev's Piano Sonatas: A Guide for the Listener and the Performer* (2008) and *Notes from the Pianist's Bench* (2000; the new, electronically enhanced edition 2017). These books were translated into several languages. He is also the editor of the critical edition of Prokofiev's piano sonatas (Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2011).

» borisberman.com

Program Notes

Triade

SILVESTROV

Patrick Campbell Jankowski

Valentin Silvestrov's *Triad* dates from his years at the conservatory in Kyiv. Its serialist construction is in keeping with the style of that time and place, but there is also a defiant quality to the music: boisterous, ironic, and occasionally forceful. As with Prokofiev, Penderecki, or Schnittke, that *enfant terrible* quality exhibited by Silverstrov in his youth settled into a more restrained, quietly rebellious style over time. Each of the three pieces of the triad are themselves divided into multiple sections, which are played together without pause. The seven signs in the opening piece are connected by their pitch construction, but each is in an entirely different character. Each settles onto a quiet, prolonged chord: a unifying feature across all of the signs. The middle piece of the three is itself divided into three sections, again played without pause. The "fast-slow-faster" form almost resembles a Classical-era construction (perhaps explaining the title "Serenade"). The final of the three pieces, "Music of silvery tones," certainly resembles its title. Bright, metallic tones predominate throughout most of the piece, except when a series of blocky chords interrupts before dissolving once again into delicate "silvery" strands.

Sonata No. 2

SILVESTROV

Patrick Campbell Jankowski

Like Franz Liszt's B minor sonata, Silvestrov's second piano sonata is constructed in one movement, broken up into smaller sections which resemble the components of a multi-movement work. An opening section in a moderate tempo is followed by a "slow" chordal section, a quicker scherzo, and a finale that reflects the music that came earlier. The sonata is further unified by the recurrence of patterns and melodic ideas throughout. Some remarkable features of the work include the hymn-like melody of the slower section decorated by rumbling pedals in the bass and twinkling high-register tones, and the motif of cascading triplets that lead us between sections, including to the close of the sonata. Silvestrov's inventive use of pedals to create otherworldly sounds is another of his characteristic features. He frequently makes use of the *una corda* pedal to create sparse tones, and asks the performer to "vibrate" the pedal, alternating between $\frac{1}{3}$, $\frac{1}{2}$, or fully pressed, in order to shape tones further. The occasional, percussive "Thud" of a plucked piano string can be heard as well.

Kitsch Music

SILVESTROV

Patrick Campbell Jankowski

Kitsch is not something we often associate with “high art,” and that isn’t necessarily a bad thing. In his use of the term, Valentin Silvestrov refers more to that which is vaguely familiar, comforting, yet difficult to place. A kitschy film might replace a cityscape with a scale-model replica: almost the same but not quite. This work — the second of five pieces of musical Kitsch that the composer wrote — produces a similar effect. Is it Chopin that we are hearing? Certainly with its songful melody atop the pulsating strum of chords, there is something inherently Nocturne-like about it. Yet it stops short of overt homage. Silvestrov shared a bit about the motivation behind writing this “easy” music, not often taken as seriously as his “high art” pieces but very powerful in his view, saying:

Think of the somnambulists who are walking on the edge of a roof of a high house. We are watching them at a distance and we are apprehensive that they can fall off the roof, but they continue on with a steady walk, with tender steps.

This tenderness to walk on the edge of an abyss is more tragic than the explicit direct representation of a tragic scene. My kitsch music is all about this tragic tenderness.

Theme with Variations in D minor

BRAHMS

Patrick Campbell Jankowski

We can thank Clara Schumann for a great deal of music, both her own and that of others. Among them is Brahms’ Theme and Variations for piano, derived from his first string sextet. Schumann loved the chamber work upon hearing it and requested an adaptation of this second movement, which Brahms delivered for her birthday.

The distinctive theme, with its upward reach and surprising harmonic turns, yields a rich set of six variations in both minor and major. Although the theme is noble and unhurried, the variations “open up” into more emotive and animated characters. In the original sextet, the opening melody is played at first by the viola, with the two “soprano” violins absent, joining later in repetition at a higher register. The resonant sonorities of the middle and low voices are among the sextet’s greatest features, with its doubled violas and celli playing against the higher violins. Brahms carries this over into his version for piano, crafting variations in which smaller groups of high and low voices exchange in contrapuntal dialogue.

Program Notes, *cont.*

Variations on an Original Theme in D major
BRAHMS

Patrick Campbell Jankowski

The original theme from which Brahms derives his variations begins in a state of calm. An unwavering pedal point keeps the melody grounded, making its subtle motion away from its starting point all the more significant. In its latter half, the theme does expand a bit, harmonically, dynamically, and rhythmically. A series of eleven variations meander through contrapuntal styles for multiple voices, degrees of rhythmic complexity, and shifting characters. Midway through the set occurs perhaps the most impactful shift. Out of a variation composed of delicate, shimmery arpeggios, Brahms plunges into a response in a tempestuous character, exploiting the robust lower register of the piano. This is the first of three sequential minor mode variations, the last of which features a trembling effect in the bass which then wanders through other voices, imbuing the music with an unsettled quality. It ultimately eases, and the final variations and coda lead us back to the calm resolve that marked the opening of the piece.

Variations on a Hungarian Song in D major
BRAHMS

Patrick Campbell Jankowski

This rich yet compact set of thirteen variations takes as its theme a Hungarian song given to the composer by his friend, the violinist Eduard Reményi, with whom he had been close since they were teenagers. The composer's sketches contain several melodies copied from his friend, the melody of this song among them. It is a short theme of only eight measures, but Brahms derives much from it, venturing into his melodramatic and comedically playful sides. The composer seems especially intrigued by the rhythmic possibilities within this simple theme, using the characteristic short-long figure, martial dotted configurations, and flowing triplet divisions at various times. He moves the melody around between voices, sometimes placing it in a middle voice with decoration above and below. For a work of such brevity, it leaves quite an impact, building towards a dramatic final variation marked by thick chords that grind to a halt as though slowed by their own heaviness.

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List as of September 21, 2022

Upcoming Events at YSM

- SEP 23 **Carolyn Kuan, *guest conductor***
Yale Philharmonia
7:30 p.m. | Woolsey Hall
Tickets start at \$12, Yale faculty/staff start at \$8, Students free
\$3 surcharge at the door
- SEP 27 **Miró Quartet with David Shifrin, *clarinet***
Oneppo Chamber Music Series
7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
Tickets start at \$28, Students start at \$13
- SEP 29 **David Simon, *organ***
Doctor of Musical Arts Degree Recital
7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
Free admission
- OCT 6 **Katherine Balch, *faculty composer***
New Music New Haven
7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
Free admission
- OCT 9 **Arthur Haas & Friends**
Faculty Artist Series
3:00 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
Free admission

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