

Vicente Della Tonia, Piano

Program, March 2024

Variations in F minor, Hob. XVII:6 (1793).....Joseph Haydn
(1732-1809)

Ballade No. 4 in F minor, Op.52 (1843).....Fryderyk Chopin
(1810-1849)

The Baby's Family No.1 (1918).....Heitor Villa-Lobos
(1886-1959)

Little Light-Skinned Girl- The Porcelain Doll
Little Dark-Skinned Girl- The Papier-Mâché Doll
Little Mestizo Girl- The Clay Doll
Little Mulatto Girl- The Rubber Doll
Little Black Girl- The Wooden Doll
The Little Poor Girl- The Rag Doll
The Punch (*Polichinelo*)
Witch- The Cloth Doll

Rhapsodie espagnole, S. 254 (1858).....Franz Liszt
(1811-1886)

F.J. Haydn - *Variations in F Minor*

Written in 1793, Haydn's *Variations in F Minor* has maintained a status of being one of his best known, and most challenging, works for piano. It is likely that this work was originally intended to be the opening movement of a longer sonata for piano, but the piece was able to stand on its own with Haydn creating an incredible emotional journey from melancholy to hope in a single musical landscape. He does this by presenting two distinct themes, one in F minor, resembling a dirge, then one in F major, as though the darkness of grief is given respite by a ray of sunshine. Haydn then proceeds to present two variations of each theme, alternating minor, then major. Not to be outdone by his onetime pupil, Beethoven, Haydn brings back the brooding opening theme which leads directly to an extended coda that is somewhat harmonically adventuresome, making the return to the tonic F minor more satisfying. And, to keep the sense of hope alive, Haydn ends with one final cadence in F major.

The *Variations in F Minor* was likely inspired by the death of Haydn's friend Maria Anna von Genzinger. Even though the piece presents as an effort to work through his grief, Haydn still presents hints of his well-known sense of humor. The work demonstrates a considerable demands for the pianist who must negotiate both bold, intense dotted rhythms, but also delicate flourishes of notes while maintaining a sense of calm. It is little wonder that this has remained one of Haydn's most popular works.

F. Chopin - *Ballade No. 4 in F minor, Op.52*

Frederic Chopin, known as the *poet of the piano*, clearly demonstrates his Romantic genius in the *Ballade No. 4 in F Minor*, composed in 1842. It has been speculated that the inspiration for the piece was a poem, *The Three Budrys*, written by Adam Mickiewicz, a Polish poet and playwright. Though Chopin was born with a French surname, he maintained a strong allegiance to his Polish roots and is often considered a prime example of the type of musical *nationalism* that spread throughout Europe during the 19th century. He dedicated this work to the Baroness Charlotte de Rothschild, a French socialite who introduced Chopin to the aristocrats of Paris, thus providing an opening to a world that would help establish him as one of the foremost pianists and composers of the time.

The *Ballade No. 4* is the final ballade that Chopin composed and established him as the clear master of this genre that he helped to create. The piece opens with seven measures in the dominant key leading to the opening theme in F minor that evolves into an unusual take on the well codified "sonata" form. Chopin's gift of moving quickly, yet lyrically, in and out of related and unrelated keys, is quite evident here. In addition, he presents "varied" versions of the theme, adding contrapuntal texture before transitioning to theme number two. Chopin chose Bb major, for the second theme, an unusual choice compared to the more typical relative major or minor dominant. After a brief development

section, a hint of the introductory material returns in the remote key of A major, yet still signals the expected recapitulation. An overtly embellished version of the first theme leads into a transition to Db major for a return to theme two. After a bold statement of this secondary idea, the action stops with a brief pause, then eight bars of long notes emphasizing the dominant harmony. The coda bursts into a typically Chopinesque flurry of ornamental triplets that breathlessly end with a declamatory cadence to finish the piece. With the combination of lyrical delicacy and flamboyant technique, it is no wonder this piece is considered one of Chopin's greatest masterpieces.

H. Villa-Lobos - *The Baby's Family (A Próle do Bebe)*, No. 1

Brazilian composer, Heitor Villa-Lobos wrote a set of twenty-six character pieces for solo piano,

in three sets: "As Bonecas" (The Dolls), "Os Bichinhos" (The Little Animals) and "Esportes" (Sports). The work is similar in some ways to Robert Schumann's famous set of piano miniatures, *Carnaval*. Villa-Lobos dedicated the first set to his wife, Lucília Guimarães, a well-known Brazilian pianist. Set No.1, *As Bonecas* (The Dolls), composed in 1918, features eight sections, each representing a different doll. The dolls were intended to be representative of the racial diversity found in Brazil. Musically, there is a true sense of nostalgia, conjuring imagery of a young child playing with these "friends." Though intended to portray child-like thoughts, these pieces are technically very challenging and require masterful technique as well as finesse.

Branquinha (A boneca de louça, Little Light-skinned Girl): The Porcelain Doll-this piece implies the delicacy of porcelain, at times alluding to a Debussy-like impressionism. The well-known Brazilian children's melody, "Dorme nenê" (Sleep Baby) is featured here as well.

Moreninha (A boneca de massa, Little Dark-skinned Girl: The Papier-mâché Doll-in this section a sixteenth-note background continues throughout with a playful melody floating on top.

Caboclinha (A boneca de barro, Little Brazilian Girl): The Clay Doll-this section is introduced by a two-note ostinato figure in sixteenth notes that simmers throughout, occasionally changing to fit a new harmony. A short middle section presents some syncopated ideas reminiscent of traditional Brazilian music, but gives way once again to the ostinato which fades out to end the piece.

Mulatinha (A boneca de borracha, Little Mulatto Girl): The Rubber Doll-this piece begins with

another famous Brazilian melody, "Vem Cá, Bidú" (Come Here, Bidu), also known as "Cai cai balão," a tune traditionally sung at St. John's Day festivals, normally celebrated on June 24. After a second iteration of this melody the piece bounces through different ideas, perhaps expressing the joy of playing with a rubber doll. Hints of a pentatonic melody appear on a couple of occasions with short bursts that alternately resemble George Gershwin and

Claude Debussy. The piece ends with a sustained tone in the left hand. *Negrinha (A boneca de pau, Little Black Girl): The Wooden Doll*-one of the shorter sections, this piece launches into streams of sixteenth notes that undulate throughout. A melody emerges from the flurry. After a brief sustained tone at the end of a rapid whole-tone scale, the piece ends with an unexpected short note.

A Pobrezinha (A boneca de trapo, Little Poor Girl): The Rag Doll-perhaps the most subdued piece in the set, this section begins with a peaceful accompaniment in triple meter, at times flirting with interesting cross-rhythms, two against three in particular. The delicate melody transitions back to the opening idea and ends peacefully with a sustained tone in the high register. *O Polichinelo/Punch*-this is the one section that is not given a specific name. Some music historians believe the name "Punch" is a reference to the traditional puppet clown, "Pulcinella," a character that originated in traditional Italian street theater known as *commedia dell'arte*.

Reminiscent of Stravinsky's work, the piece begins with a satirically happy tune, immersed in a stream of rapid notes. Occasional low notes interrupt the spritely melody, but the action continues until the very end when there is a brief *ritardando* followed by glissando punctuated by a short note in octaves to end the piece.

A Bruxa (A boneca de pano, Witch): The Cloth Doll-after a somewhat mysterious beginning, this section settles into a whimsical tune, accompanied by rapid notes undulating beneath. The action is interrupted by brief moments of calm, particularly at the end where we hear a version of the tune played slowly and quietly. After a brief pause, a flurry of alternating chords is cut off by two loud bass notes in octaves that end the work.

F. Liszt - *Rhapsodie Espagnole*, S. 254

Franz Liszt, who was well known for his incredible mastery of the piano, became an equally gifted composer, known not only for his piano works but also for his orchestral pieces. The *Rhapsodie espagnole* was likely inspired by Liszt's tour to Spain and Portugal in 1845. The piece was composed in 1858, but not published until 1867. It was likely based on his earlier work *Grosse Konzertfantasie über spanische Weisen*. This challenging piece includes many physiologically difficult techniques for the pianist including rapid chords and octaves. There are two traditional Spanish pieces embedded in the work, *La Folia* and *Jota Aragonesa*. In fact, the published subtitle for the *Rhapsodie* is "Follies d'Espagne et Jota Aragonesa."

La Folia, which is likely based on a Portuguese dance, is one of the oldest known melodic ideas in Western music. The term, "la folia," literally means folly or empty headedness and may have referred to the way dancers would spin or twirl to original versions of this tune. Over two hundred composers are known to have featured this tune in their works, including Jean-Baptiste Lully, Arcangelo

Correli, G.F. Handel, J.S. Bach, Henry Purcell, Beethoven and of course, Liszt. This well-known melody, typically in a minor key, has been the basis of many musical forms featuring a repeated idea, such as the *passacaglia* or *chaconne*. These formats lend themselves to multiple variations on a repeated melody or harmonic progression, which is what Liszt does here. The “jota” is also a dance originating most likely in the Aragon region of Spain. The dance is accompanied by castanets, the traditional handheld percussion instrument. In the *Rhapsodie*, Liszt begins with a very freeform ornamental introduction which leads into the “la folia” theme, stated in a majestic triple meter. After multiple variations the piece transitions into the “jota” which is a lively tune, also in triple meter. After several variations, the jota ends majestically in quadruple meter with five sturdy quarter note chords announcing the final cadence in D major.