

Le Gibet

Ah! What is that sound I hear? Is it the night wind howling, or the sighing of the corpse that hangs from yonder gibbet? / Is it a cricket singing in the moss and barren ivy in which the gallows stand? / Is it a fly sounding its hunting horn in those deaf ears? / Is it perchance some blundering cockchafer trailing a hair plucked from that bald head? / Or would it be some spider weaving a length of muslin as a cravat for that strangled neck? / It is the sound of a bell tolling from the walls of a town far away on the horizon, and a corpse hanging from a gibbet reddened by the rays of the setting sun.

Scarbo

How many times have I seen and heard Scarbo when, at midnight the moon is shining in the sky like a piece of silver on an azure banner sprinkled with golden bees! / How many times I have heard him laughing in the shadow of my alcove or scratching at the silk curtains round my bed! / How often I have seen him descend from the ceiling, pirouette on one foot, and roll across the floor like a bobbin from a witch's distaff. / And if I expected him to dissappear. the little dwarf would grow taller and taller and stand towering between me and the moon like a cathedral spire, with a golden bell jingling at the tip of his pointed cap. / But soon his body would turn blue and translucent like the wax in a candle, and his face grow pale - then suddenly he would vanish.

Ondine

Listen! It is I, Ondine, sprinkling with drops of water your windowpane lit by the pale moon's rays while over there the Lady of the Manor is gazing from her balcony at the beauty of the starry night and the slumbering lake. / Every little water is a water-sprite swimming with the current, and every current is a path that leads to my palace, and my palace is built of water at the bottom of the lake in the triangle formed of fire, earth and air. / Listen! My father is dipping a branch of green alder into the bubbling water while my sisters are caressing with their foam transparent arms the islands of herbs, waterlilies, and glaiolus, or laughing at the weeping willow fishing in the stream. / Having finished her murmured song, she begged me to put her ring on my finger to show that I was wed to an ondine, and to go with her to her palace to be king of the lakes. / And when I told her that I loved a mortal woman, chagrined and discomfitted, she wept a little, then laughed and disappeared, dissolving into a shower of drops that glistened on my blue windowpane.

presents

Faculty Artist Recital

Ralph Votapek, Piano

7:30 pm, Monday, April 7, 2014
Fairchild Theatre, Auditorium Building

Program

Sonata in F Major, Op. 10, No. 2
Allegro
Allegretto
Presto

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770 – 1827)

Davidsbundlertanze, Op. 6
18 Characteristic Pieces

Robert Schumann
(1810-1856)

Intermission

Three Intermezzos, Op. 117

Johannes Brahms
(1833 – 1897)

Gaspard de la Nuit
Ondine
Le Gibet
Scarbo

Maurice Ravel
(1875 – 1937)

Ralph Votapek is professor emeritus of piano at the Michigan State University College of Music. He is the Gold Medalist of the first Van Cliburn International Piano Competition and winner of the prestigious Naumburg Award. Votapek has been featured 16 times as the Chicago Symphony's guest soloist, has played with the Philadelphia Orchestra, the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics, the Boston Pops, the Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Houston, Dallas, St. Louis, National Symphonies, and other top ensembles.

With eastern hemisphere concerto engagements stretching from London to Taiwan, he has also toured in Russia, Japan, and Korea. He has made a special commitment to Latin America, where he has toured for more than 42 years, performing repeatedly in Buenos Aires, Rio, Santiago, and other cities. He is equally celebrated as a solo recitalist throughout the United States and has performed repeatedly in Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Chicago's Orchestra Hall, and the National Gallery in Washington. Guest appearances with the Juilliard, Fine Arts, New World, and Chester String quartets highlight his extensive chamber music experience.

Votapek was the soloist on Arthur Fiedler's last Boston Pops recording, a Gershwin program released on CD by London Records and most recently available as a part of the Deutsche Grammophone CD titled "The Arthur Fiedler Legacy." In recent years he has recorded prolifically for the Ivory

Classics and Blue Griffin labels. On the former he recorded the complete Debussy Preludes, the complete Goyescas of Granados, and a collection of important 20th century works. On the latter there are "Votapek Plays Gershwin," "The Votapeks from Mozart to Piazzolla," and the complete works for piano and cello of Beethoven with cellist Suren Bagratuni. They have been critically acclaimed by "Grammophone," "American Record Guide," "International Piano," and "Fanfare" magazines.

His wife, Albertine, frequently joins him in two-piano and four-hand recitals. They have appeared in Buenos Aires under the auspices of the Mozarteum Argentino, on the Van Cliburn Series in Fort Worth, the Pabst Theatre Series in Milwaukee, and on many college campuses. Votapek is now retired from Michigan State University, where he served as artist-in-residence for 36 years.

Ravel's greatest work for the piano, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, was written in 1908. It was inspired by three poems of the Frenchman Aloysius Bertrand in a collection entitled Gaspard de la Nuit published in 1842. While Ravel was less the impressionist than many realize, he deliberately intended to set the poems in an atmospheric manner, succeeding to a degree that we find him here at his most impressionistic. Yet Ravel's sense of the theatrical surfaces, even in a shimmering piece like Ondine (a water sprite), and by the end we are exhausted by a deluge of water rather than just a fine spray.

Much of Ravel's music was conceived as a solution to artificially defined challenges. For example his music emulating the old masters or the orchestration lesson of the Bolero. In Le Gibet (the scaffold) the problem is to find a way to make interesting a six minute piece in which the same note is constantly sounding. Considering such a severe limitation, Ravel's success in the realm of harmony is all the more astounding.

In Scarbo Ravel set out to write a piece of piano music "of transcendent difficulty...to be more difficult than Balakiev's Islamey". In great vogue at the turn of the century the latter was certainly a spectacular showpiece, but Scarbo leaves it far behind in its variety of techniques and in its musical content, though as in Islamey quick repeated notes predominate.

Like any great piece of program music Gaspard de la Nuit can easily stand on its own feet without reference to the poetry which inspired it. However the listener's enjoyment can be enhanced by the reading of the poems in the original French or in one of the several translations that exist as Ravel has graphically composed certain passages to corresponding lines of the poems.