



# Celebrity Series of Boston

Saturday, March 3, 2018 at 8pm  
NEC's Jordan Hall

Daniil Trifonov piano  
Sergei Babayan piano

## Notes on the Program

**Robert Schumann** (1810-1856)

*Andante and variations in B-flat Major, Opus 46* (1843)

Throughout his twenties, Schumann composed piano music and little else. His range expanded during the euphoric year of 1840, when he married Clara Wieck and produced more than 120 songs. Next came the “year of the orchestra” in 1841, in which Schumann issued two symphonies, a Symphonette in three movements, and a one-movement *Phantasie* for piano and orchestra. Schumann’s obsessive focus turned next to chamber music, a fascination that occupied much of 1842. That year he penned the *Andante and variations* for the unlikely combination of two pianos, two cellos, and horn. Following the advice of his friend Felix Mendelssohn, Schumann reworked the score to a more manageable configuration of two pianos, and he published it in that form as Opus 46. (It took another fifty years before Brahms, in the course of editing Schumann’s complete works, released the original version.)

Schumann, writing in his twenties, described two fictional characters who represented the opposing sides of his musical personality: the feisty and extroverted “Florestan,” balanced out by the dreamy and introspective “Eusebius.” The *Andante* theme of this work and the bulk of the variations exemplify the Eusebius side of Schumann; as he wrote to a friend, “Their mood is very elegiac, and I think I must have been very melancholy when I wrote them.” Still, the variations’ structure facilitates abrupt mood shifts, and several variations are fashioned as vigorous, Florestan-style excursions.

**Arvo Pärt** (b. 1935)

*Pari intervallo* (1976)

Before the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt developed his hallmark sound—a style he calls “tintinnabuli,” from the Latin for “little bells”—he wrote strident neo-classical and serial works that bucked Soviet orthodoxy. Then he reached an artistic crisis in 1968, and over the next eight years he barely composed. His new style emerged only after detailed investigations of Gregorian chant and other early music, leading to a series of breakthrough scores from 1976-77, including *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten*, *Tabula Rasa*, and *Fratres*.

*Pari intervallo*, also from 1976, exemplifies Pärt’s newfound austerity and spiritual resonance. The title—Italian for “Equal Interval”—explains the movement of the melodic lines, which maintain an even spacing of thirds (separated by several octaves) as they patiently step up and down an E-flat minor scale. The contrasting voices use only the notes of the E-flat minor triad, creating a bell-like aura around the melody. Pärt notated the work in a way that left the instrumentation flexible, and it has appeared in many forms, from solo organ to saxophone quartet. His publisher released this version for two pianos in 2008.

**W. A. Mozart** (1756-1791)

*Sonata in D Major for two pianos, K.448* (1781)

Mozart, stifled in his hometown of Salzburg and stymied in his broader job search, took the risk in 1781 of moving to Vienna. The 25-year-old former prodigy found himself in the unfamiliar position of having to scrape together a freelance career, starting with a few students and a smattering of concerts set up by supporters, but before long he was able to capitalize on his reputation as the city’s best keyboard player. One of his most devoted early students was Josepha von Auernhammer, who was 23, single, and from a well-off family. Mozart respected her musicianship, even if he did not reciprocate her amorous feelings that developed during his almost daily visits; as he wrote in a letter, “The young lady is a fright, but plays enchantingly.” He wrote his only Sonata for two pianos to play with Josepha, and they debuted it together during a private concert at her father’s house on November 23, 1781.

Mozart had written only a bit of earlier music for two pianos—mostly things he and his sister could use to show off, including a concerto for two piano soloists that he asked his father to send from Salzburg to use on the same concert. In the opening *Allegro con spirito* movement of the Sonata, Mozart navigated the challenge of voicing music for two pianos by incorporating canons, echoes, and other contrapuntal devices. The central *Andante* gives most of the song-like melodies to the first piano part written for Josepha, which is a bit ironic considering Mozart’s complaint that “in cantabile playing she has not got the real delicate singing style. She clips everything.” A very fast and brilliant rondo closes this Sonata on an energetic note, proving that Josepha must have been a very capable recital partner, even if there was no love connection between them.

**Sergei Rachmaninoff** (1873-1943)

***Suite No. 1, Opus 5 “Fantaisie-tableaux”*** (1893)

Rachmaninoff enrolled at the Moscow Conservatory at age 12, in an arrangement where he and several other young students lived in their piano teacher’s apartment and began rigorous practice sessions at six each morning. This teacher, Nikolay Zverev, did not encourage his prize pupil’s budding interest in composition, and when Rachmaninoff asked for more space to compose he was instead kicked out of the apartment. Nevertheless, Rachmaninoff went on to earn the school’s highest honor when he took his composition exams at the age of 19, a year after completing his piano studies. By then he had taken up residence with relatives in Moscow, the Satins, and he also joined them for summers at Ivanovka, the country estate where he went on to do the vast majority of his composing for the next 27 years.

It was there at Ivanovka that the 20-year-old Rachmaninoff composed his Suite No. 1 for two pianos. He wrote it during the summer of 1893, and he debuted it that November in Moscow; the premiere came just weeks after the death of Tchaikovsky, to whom Rachmaninoff dedicated the score when it was published the next year. The first edition gave the title as *Fantasia*, with *Tableaux* added in parentheses, an indication that the four movements engaged in scene painting. Descriptive movement titles and poetic epigraphs in the score reinforce the programmatic references.

The Suite’s opening *Barcarolle* doesn’t quite match the usual cadence that is meant to evoke the gliding strokes of a Venetian gondolier, but the wistful melodies and aqueous textures capture the melancholic essence of the scene. The two middle movements of the Suite are both slow, but they approach ideas of love from opposing sides: The first, *Oh Night...Oh Love*, flutters with anticipation of a nighttime tryst (heralded by the song of a nightingale), while its counterpart, *Tears*, descends into inexhaustible sadness. The brisk finale, *Easter*, resounds with the clangorous ringing of bells.

**Rachmaninoff**

***Suite No. 2, Opus 17*** (1900-01)

Rachmaninoff’s First Symphony, a sprawling work meant to cement his place in the upper echelon of Russian composers, instead came off so poorly at its 1897 premiere that the bruised young musician swore off composing for the next three years. He finally sought help from a psychiatrist, and after months of hypnotherapy he began writing again. The composition most associated with Rachmaninoff’s comeback is the Second Piano Concerto; less attention is paid to the Suite No. 2 for two pianos, which Rachmaninoff completed amid his ongoing work on the concerto in 1901. Two weeks after he appeared as the soloist in the triumphant premiere of his Piano Concerto No. 2, Rachmaninoff returned to the Moscow stage with his cousin (and former teacher) Alexander Ziloti to debut the Suite No. 2.

The Suite begins with an *Introduction* in a marching tempo, its crisp chords and pecking octaves driving the music forward with lively propulsion. Coming off a mellow coda, the second movement strikes up the three-beat tempo of a *Waltz*, weaving a melody in perpetual motion. In the slow movement, rising threads of melody voiced at first in a warm tenor range match the heading of *Romance*, a reference to an older tradition of simple, heartfelt vocal music. The manic finale takes the form of a *Tarantella*, an Italian folk dance that, according to legend, could ward off death after a poisonous tarantula bite.