



White Rock Concerts *Presents*

Marcus Groh



Friday, January 27, 2006

Markus Groh

Winner of the 1995 Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels (the first German in the competition's history), **Markus Groh** has confirmed his position in the top echelon of the new generation of pianists. He is frequently cited for the depth of his power and the richness of his "sound imagination." The New York Times said of his recent debut at the Frick Collection, "[**Mr. Groh**] gave a superb recital...among the more remarkable qualities of his playing was the degree to which he gave each composer a distinctive voice."

Among **Mr. Groh's** recent performances are the London Symphony, The Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, National Symphony, Detroit Symphony, New Jersey Symphony, Colorado Symphony, and recitals in Toronto, Washington, D.C., New York and London (Wigmore Hall). He has also appeared with the St. Petersburg Philharmonic, The Hague Residentie Orkest, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, MDR Radio Orchestra at the Leipzig Gewandhaus, SWR Orchestra/Stuttgart, German Symphony Orchestra/Berlin, Bamberg Symphony, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Beijing Symphony, Osaka Philharmonic and the New Japan Philharmonic, among others.

Markus Groh opened the 2004-05 season of the Fort Worth Symphony playing his own transcription of Brahms's Double Concerto for Violin and Cello. A frequent guest at international festivals such as Ruhr, Ludwigsburg, Bad Kissingen and Schubertiade (Austria), **Markus Groh** is the founder and artistic director of the Bebersee Festival near Berlin. He has appeared frequently on radio and television in Germany, Spain, Belgium, Holland, France, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Japan (NHK), Mexico and the United States (NPR). His recordings for René Gailly Productions, Espace2 and Harmonia Mundi feature works of Brahms and Liszt.

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Programme

Johannes Brahms
(1833 – 1897)

4 Ballades, Op. 10
D Minor
D Major
B Minor
B Major

Gyorgy Ligeti
(1923 -)

2 Etudes from Book 1
No. 4 Fanfares
No. 5 Arc-en-ciel

Sergey Prokofiev
(1891 – 1953)

Sonata No. 7 in B-flat, Op. 83
Allegro inquieto - Andantino
Andante caloroso
Precipitato

Intermission

Franz Liszt
(1811 – 1886)

Sonata in B Minor
1. Lento assai - Allegro energico
2. Grandioso - Recitativo
3. Andante sostenuto - Quasi adagio
4. Allegro energico - Stretta quasi presto
- Presto - Prestissimo – Andante sostenuto
- Allegro moderato - Lento assai

Programme Notes

Brahms 4 Ballades, Op. 10

These four works operate as a set and should be played that way. Even though the first Ballade has an inscription that it is based on Herder's translation of the Scottish ballad Edward, no one has found proof that the other three are linked to this story in any way. Whether there was an underlying literary connection in Brahms' mind hardly matters though, as the four Ballades are linked into a dramatic narrative in so compelling a manner that some commentators consider this an unlabeled sonata. Stylistically it is rather more advanced than the earlier sonatas, and anticipates the First Piano Concerto. The first Ballade, Andante, in D minor, opens with a slow and grim march, which is followed by a bold and dramatic central Allegro and concludes with a variation of the opening. The second Ballade, Andante, in D major, is structured much the same way. The opening though, is lyrical while the central episode is substantially longer and more varied than in the first Ballade. Brahms labeled the third Ballade in B minor *Intermezzo*. The three-part plan is reversed, with the faster music surrounding a slower central section. The tone of this scherzo-like piece is fantastic and lugubrious, but in spite of this, it seems to bridge the gap emotionally between the heroic and epic tone of the first two Ballades to the lyrical and wistful final Ballade. This concluding piece in B major is more complex structurally than its predecessors, although the principal tone is lyrical rather than dramatic. The entire set is an early masterpiece, entirely original and effective

Ligeti 2 Etudes from Book 1

György Ligeti is one of the most important avant-garde composers in the latter half of the twentieth century. He stands with Boulez, Berio, Stockhausen, and Cage as one of the most innovative and influential among progressive figures of his time. His early works show the influence of Bartók and Kodály, and like them, he studied folk music and made transcriptions from folk material. Ligeti is almost alone among progressive composers from the latter twentieth century who have written popular and widely performed music.

The first six, or Book I (of three), of Ligeti's ongoing cycle of piano études were premiered in 1986, though not all at once. Ligeti had gone through some relatively arid years after the completion of the opera *Le Grand Macabre* in 1977, but he had spent time studying sub-Saharan African

music and music of the Caribbean, along with the music of Conlon Nancarrow, which he had encountered in 1980. He also studied fractal mathematics and algorithmic processes, a notion he had intuitively applied in some of his earlier works. Ligeti also began looking to the Romantic era, a period that previously had only a glancing influence on his music. Finally, for “pianistic” sensibility he looked to the quintessential keyboard works of Debussy and Scarlatti.

Prokofiev Sonata No. 7 in B-flat, Op. 83

This is the middle panel in Prokofiev’s grand trilogy of works called War Sonatas. It is the most popular of the three and, at about 16 or 17 minutes, the shortest as well. The first movement, marked *Allegro inquieto*, opens with a dark, menacing theme whose militaristic vehemence seizes the expressive reins at times with insistent bass chords that hammer out a crushing rhythm. The listener immediately senses a connection to war and struggle in this lively but conflicted opening. A lyrical second theme introduces gentler music, but does not break the dark mood. In the development section, a tense buildup constructed mainly on the first theme leads to a powerful climax, after which the music gradually becomes more tranquil, the second theme being reprised in a gloomy ethereality. A brief, rhythmic coda follows, its lively springiness seeming to sputter and stagger as it reaches the finish line.

The second movement is marked *Andante caloroso* and features a consoling main theme whose gently rocking lilt and overripe textures convey an almost decadent sense, as if its beauty is beginning to decay. Some listeners hear it as a kind of dark salon-like creation in its perfume-drenched melancholy and quasi-pop catchiness. The middle section turns intense and climaxes in a tolling-bell passage that eventually gives way to a reprise of the main theme.

The *Precipitato* finale is the most famous and dramatic movement of the three. Cast in an ABCBA structure, it opens with a driving main theme whose rhythmic jazzy elements convey a frenetic, fight-for-dear-life sense. The second theme maintains the perpetual-motion drive, but now the feeling of desperation takes on an insistent, if less harried manner, before yielding to the ensuing idea, which rises from the bass regions to turn almost subdued in the upper ranges. After the second theme reappears the main theme returns for a crashing, dissonant but ultimately triumphant conclusion in a blaze of dazzling virtuosic writing.

In all of Liszt's vast musical output this is the only work he wrote in an absolute sonata form.

However, he made the sonata form his own in this innovative and unique work in one movement. Wagner described the work as beautiful "beyond all conception" and "sublime." In it, Liszt presents what is considered by most commentators as his finest example of the musical technique of continuous "thematic transformation," which was to have a profound effect on the future of music — especially as taken up by Wagner and used as the basic musical means by which he constructed all his later operas, especially the great Ring of the Nibelung tetralogy.

This one-movement sonata makes the impression of a free, unbridled fantasia, virtually an improvisation. But in reality the whole work is tightly constructed from the music of the sonata's introduction. From that introduction he develops, first, three striking and powerful themes, then a passage sounding like a religious chorale. The final main section not only demands the utmost in piano technique to deal with its prestissimo tempo, but also employs elements of all the themes which have been spun out of the opening. Ultimately, in an eloquent concluding Andante, Liszt returns to the earliest versions of the main musical material and recedes into silence. Thus this work remains an enduring masterpiece even in the estimation of those listeners who tend to find Liszt's music overblown. In the Sonata in B minor, Liszt, the great radical, connected himself convincingly with the sonata tradition.

The sonata dates from 1854, shortly after the Princess Carolyn Sayn-Wittgenstein, with whom the composer lived, had convinced Liszt to quit touring as a pianist and concentrate on composition. The pianist and musicologist Alfred Brendel, among others, has claimed for years that the sonata is related to the Faust legend. While such an interpretation may actually fit the structure and emotional spirit of the work, it must be regarded with a measure of skepticism. Some musicologists have also argued that the piece is autobiographical, and point out that such a view would not exclude a Faustian interpretation.

A Message From the Artistic Director

Unfortunately, I am not able to attend tonight's concert by Marcus Groh. I am presently in Yellowknife, where I am playing a concert tomorrow night. However, tonight, is not only an important concert in our ongoing series for White Rock Concerts, but, as you may know, it is also the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth. Jan. 27, 1756 - a date to commemorate! Certainly no musical event can occur anywhere in the world tonight without recognizing this occasion. So, Happy Birthday, Wolfgang!

Now, even though I am out of town, I wanted to take this opportunity to tell you about the forthcoming season. In connection with this announcement, there are two important things you might want to know. First of all, by next year, we will be celebrating another significant birthday occasion - it will be the 50th anniversary of the founding of the White Rock Overture Concert Society in 1956. Secondly, if you are reading this before the concert begins, in a few minutes time you are in for a wonderful musical surprise. If you are reading it after the concert, then you have already heard the grand news!

For now let me tell you about the remainder of the programme that we have planned for next year.

In October, we are opening with a violin recital by Jasper Wood, the brilliant young Canadian who is heading the string department at UBC.

In November, we are bringing for the first time to the Vancouver area the New Zealand String Quartet - and they will be joined by guest soloist James Campbell for a performance of the sublimely beautiful Mozart Clarinet Quintet.

Our January concert - well, that announcement comes a little later tonight!

Then in February, it's our Winter Winds, with the brilliant Canadian trumpet virtuoso, Guy Few. An ensemble of ten will present an unusual repertoire of music involving the trumpet, including a rare performance of Revueltas' "Ocho for Radio" [Eight Musicians broadcasting].

In March, we are pleased to be bringing back the LITTLE EAGLES OF SIBERIA - that remarkable youth choir, which some may remember from our 1993-94 season. In Europe today, they say that the Eagles are Russia's answer to the Vienna Choir Boys.

And finally in April we are presenting the distinguished Italian pianist, Roberto Plano.

These, plus our mystery January attraction will constitute one of the most exciting series we have ever presented in White Rock Concerts' fifty years of musical service to this community.

Now, please sit back and enjoy Mr. Groh's performance tonight.

Sincerely,

George Zukerman



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