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## Guest Artist Recital Series, September 6, 2019

Tzu-Yi Chen Piano

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Illinois State University  
College of Fine Arts  
School of Music

Guest Artist Recital Series

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**Tzu-Yi Chen, *Piano***

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Center for the Performing Arts  
September 6, 2019  
Friday Evening  
7:00 p.m.

This is the third program of the 2019-2020 season.

## Program

Please silence all electronic devices for the duration of the concert. Thank you.

English Suite No.3 in G Minor, BWV 808

Prelude  
Allemande  
Courante  
Sarabande  
Gavotte I  
Gavotte II  
Gigue

Johann Sebastian Bach  
(1685-1750)

Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel in B-flat Major, Op. 24

Johannes Brahms  
(1833-1897)

### ~ Intermission ~

3 Valses Oubliées (Forgotten Waltzes)

No.1 in F-sharp Major  
No.4 in E Major  
No.2 in A-flat Major

Franz Liszt:  
(1811-1886)

Après une Lecture de Dante, Fantasia quasi Sonata

Franz Liszt

## Program Notes

The Prelude of the **English suite No.3 in G Minor, BWV808** is a perfect example of how Bach could conduct a solo keyboard piece using a Vivaldi concerto grosso as a model. Ritornello passages imitating the full orchestra alternate with solo episodes that are light and more transparent. The first and third of these passages using similar material giving the movement a symmetrical construction. The crescendo of the first six bars is a built-in one with Bach piling up the parts of strings or wind instruments. The return of the repeat of the opening section is ingenious. There is no pause or clear re-commencement, but rather a bridge passage where the opening three-notes motif begins to appear low down, moving upwards until the ensemble finally comes to the right spot and we find ourselves in familiar thematical materials. The swinging rhythm of the movement should be brought out, especially since one of the earliest copies it was written in double measures, with the stress only on every second bar, as though it were in 6/8 meter rather than 3/8 as we see now in the published edition.

The theme of the Allemande appears for the first time, rather unusually, in the bass. Taken up by the right hand, it is then swapped back and forth between the hands. After the double bar it is inverted, but then returns to its original form before the end. Bach flaunted his disregard for the rules and wrote a pair of consecutive octaves going into bar 11 that must have shocked his students! The Courante is rhythmically complex, with one passage in the first section sounding as though we are suddenly in 4/4 time rather than 3/2. The Sarabande is truly magical and must be one of his most inspired examples of this dance. The pedal point at the beginning lasts a full seven bars and requires some repetition of the low G if it is to continue sounding. There are swift changes of key, and enharmonic progressions over a second pedal point that add to its beauty. As in the second suite, Bach gives us fully written-out ‘agréments’ which this time I like to play after a full, repeated version of the original dance. That way it somehow seems like a distant ‘echo’ of what has come before, yet even more wondrous and expressive.

The two Gavottes are well known—probably the best-known movements in all the English suites. The first makes you think of Rameau’s famous Tambourin with the insistent, drum-like repeated Gs in the bass. The second is a musette in the major key which has a tender, almost lullaby-ish character. It is always preferable, I think, to play the pair of galanteries at the same speed, so this second gavotte prevents you from taking the first one too fast. The Gigue is in fact a three-part fugue of great difficulty which needs clarity, precision, and a sense of line to be effective. This is definitely one movement in which the constant ‘hammering and rattling’ that Forkel talks about can be most distressing!

**Brahms’ Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel in B-flat Major Op. 24** is based on a theme from Handel’s Harpsichord Suite No.1 in B-flat major, HWV 434, and has been considered the “climax of the young Brahms.” Op. 24 consists of a theme, 25 variations, and a fugue. These variations, dedicated to Clara Schumann, were composed in 1861. In the words of Brahms’ biographer Jan Swafford, “...the Handel Variations are “perhaps the finest set of piano variations since Beethoven...” Besides a masterful unfolding of ideas concluding with an exuberant fugue with a finish designed to bring down the house, the work is quintessentially Brahms in other ways: the filler of traditional forms with fresh energy and imagination; the historical eclectic able to start off with a gallant little tune of Handel’s, Baroque ornaments and all, and integrate it seamlessly into his own voice, in a work of massive scope and dazzling variety.” The 28-year old Brahms was still perfecting his mastery of the piano when he wrote Op. 24. He played these variations in public on occasion, and Op. 24 was the first piece that he played in the presence of Richard Wagner. Wagner—known for his modern tonal functionality—was impressed enough to tell Brahms that Op. 24 was a good example of the innovation that could still be gleaned from traditional forms. Brahms cast the Variations in unusual guises: Variation No. 6 is a Baroque canon; No. 13 has the Hungarian flavor that appears frequently in Brahms’ music; Program Notes and No. 19 has the lilt of an Italian siciliano. The subject of the concluding fugue derives from the main theme and brings the work to a brilliant close.

### Three Valses oubliées

Liszt wrote some delightful waltzes when he was in his twenties and early thirties—*Valse de bravoure*, *Valse mélancolique*, *Valse-Improvisu*—and then more or less abandoned dance forms for forty years. Though it has long been assumed that the four *Valses oubliées* which he produced in his seventies were inspired by some kind of nostalgia for his carefree youth. Although the title (‘Forgotten

Waltzes’) seems to confirm that assumption and although there is the occasional sentimental episode, the *Valses oubliées* are actually not so much nostalgic as ironic. Obviously, they do not display the demonic attitude of the Mephisto Waltzes but they all have something sardonic about them, the impish rhythms, the charming main themes, the unsettled and innovative harmony, the feverishly glittering octaves, and the inconclusive ending.

### **Après une Lecture de Dante (Fantasia quasi Sonata)**

One of the greatest epic poems in Western literature, Dante Alighieri’s *The Divine Comedy* inspired two compositions from the pen of Franz Liszt. The composer was introduced to the works of Dante in the 1830s and soon after composed a two-movement piece titled *Fragment after Dante*, which he premiered in Vienna in 1839. Liszt later returned to the work in 1849, concurrent with the composition of the much grander *Dante Symphony*, and revised it into a lengthy, single-movement composition. Giving the work a new title, *Après une Lecture de Dante*, borrowed from Victor Hugo, Liszt made it the last installment in the second volume of his *Années de Pèlerinage*.

Liszt termed the work a Fantasia quasi Sonata. Though it is often referred to as the “Dante Sonata,” it is strictly speaking certainly more the former than the latter. Structured quite freely, it is based on two distinct themes, with the second being a transformation of the first. After a menacing introduction of tritones and dissonant harmonies, Liszt arrives at the key of D minor and the chromatic first theme depicting the tortured souls Dante witnessed in Hell. Liszt also used D minor in the *Dante Symphony* and the key has a rather infamous reputation throughout classical music of being associated with death. This theme is developed to great extent before the arrival of the second theme. Shifting to F-sharp major, Liszt now portrays the joy of those in Heaven. The chromatic first theme also reappears, though greatly transformed, and now appropriate for the heavenly vision. Ultimately arriving at the key of D major, the ending comes not in gentle tones that one might expect of a depiction of Paradise but instead with grandiloquent chords in D major. The final cadence, plagal in nature, concludes with resonant open fifths, hearkening back to the religious works of centuries past.

## **About the Artist**



“Magnificent,” wrote Frank Daykin of the New York Concert Review about Taiwanese pianist Tzu-yi Chen’s 2014 solo debut concert at Carnegie Hall. “She displayed...technical command...beautiful tone, total artistic involvement, deep feeling, stylistic understanding, and in an era of cookie-cutter musicians, the feeling of spontaneity, even risk, that makes an evening truly memorable, often electrifying.” Of her 2019 piano-duo recital with Lan-In Winnie Yang at the hall, Daykin wrote “delightful.” “Their unanimity of ensemble, scrupulous attention to phrasing, generous flexibility...and their budgeting of dynamics all contributed to the fine impression they made.”

Since the age of three, music has been Tzu-yi’s passion. A performer and competition winner throughout the world, she holds degrees from the Paris Conservatory and the National Karlsruhe Music University in Germany. She earned an Artist Diploma from Columbus State University in Georgia, where, after graduation, she co-founded the International Friendship Ministries’ Arts Academy to teach children.

Recent performances include a concerto with the Novgorod Orchestra in Russia as well as solo and chamber music recitals in Taipei, Puerto Rico, and for the 60th anniversary celebration concert of the Taiwan-Paraguay Diplomatic Relations in Asunción. Her recent US appearances have been in New York, Illinois, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Alabama, and Georgia as well as her home base of Washington, DC where she teaches at the Levine School of Music.

Tzu-yi is currently working toward a doctorate at the University of Maryland. She is on the Artist Roster with the New Asia Chamber Music Society in New York, whose first CD, “Unforgettable Memories,” was released in 2018.