

TUESDAY EVENING, MARCH 19, 2024, AT 7:30 > 4,419TH CONCERT Alice Tully Hall, Starr Theater, Adrienne Arsht Stage

Home of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

MICHAEL STEPHEN BROWN, piano

An Evening with Michael Stephen Brown

**JOSEPH HAYDN** (1732–1809)

Fantasia in C major for Keyboard, Hob. XVII:4, "Capriccio" (1789)

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918) Hommage à Haydn for Piano (1909)

**MAURICE RAVEL** (1875–1937)

Menuet sur le nom d'Haydn for Piano (1909)

MICHAEL STEPHEN BROWN (b. 1987) Etude-Fantasy on the Name of Haydn for Piano (2020)

RAVEL

Miroirs for Piano (1904-05)

Noctuelles: Très légerOiseaux tristes: Très lent

▶ Une barque sur l'océan: D'un rythme souple

Alborada del gracioso: Assez vif
 La vallée des cloches: Très lent

INTERMISSION

# DELPHINE VON SCHAUROTH

(1814–1877)

Selections from Songs without Words for

Piano, Op. 18 (c. 1830)

I. Mäßig und gefühlvoll

▶ V. Venezia: Moderato

▶ VI. Am Arno: Wiegend und weich

### FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Fantasie in F-sharp minor for Piano, Op. 28 (1833)

(1809-1847)

▶ Con moto agitato—Andante

▶ Allegro con moto

▶ Presto

**BROWN** 

**Breakup Etude for the Right Hand Alone** (2020)

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF "Scherzo" from A Midsummer Night's Dream, after Mendelssohn (arr. 1933)

(1811–1886)

(1873 - 1943)

"Wedding March and Dance of the Fairies" from A Midsummer Night's Dream, after Mendelssohn (arr. 1850, arr. Brown 2023)

This concert is underwritten, in part, by Martha Hall. Additional support provided by the Francis Goelet Charitable Lead Trusts, Samuel I. Newhouse Foundation, and The Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Inc.

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The Chamber Music Society acknowledges with sincere appreciation **Ms. Tali Mahanor**'s generous long-term loan of the Hamburg Steinway & Sons model "D" concert grand piano.

# ABOUT TONIGHT'S PROGRAM

Dear Listener,

We first heard Michael Stephen Brown in 2010 and have witnessed his steady, astounding artistic growth ever since. Michael is a young musician virtually exploding with talent and ideas; every challenge thrown his way has been met with joy, enthusiasm, and complete mastery on stage. During the fourteen years we have known him he has developed into a consequential composer as well, with performances of his music on multiple continents.

In the summer of 2022, Michael appeared in a full solo recital at our summer festival in California, Music@Menlo. His performance more than surpassed even the highest expectations: it remains one of the most impressive recitals in our festival's twenty-two-year history. The program Michael plays today is reminiscent of his Menlo recital for the simple reason that we quickly decided this concert is too good to be missed.

Michael's mastery of the keyboard is innately connected to his fluid musical brain. As a born composer, he plays any piece as though he wrote it himself, naturally and apparently effortlessly representing the composer whose music is in his fingertips. He is also a performer capable of moving between emotional extremes, from profundity to lightheartedness, as he himself does as a human being.

From the earliest days of CMS, our great founder Charles Wadsworth utilized the talents of his Artist Members as solo artists, affording many of them entire evenings alone on stage. By doing so, he accomplished several things: one, allowing his audience to hear great repertoire beyond the standard chamber music genre; two, displaying in depth the extraordinary capabilities of individual artists; and three, offering his artists the rigorous challenge of a solo recital. We are more than happy to carry on Charles's tradition with this recital by one of the most gifted young artists of our time.

Enjoy the concert,

David Finckel
ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

Wu Han

## ARTIST PERSPECTIVE

For tonight's concert, I've chosen a group of pieces that hold personal significance for me, crafting a program that delves into the roots of creative inspiration. This exploration traverses some of life's diverse encounters and connections, from serendipitous meetings to cherished friendships, loves gained and lost, and the impact of revered figures of the past.

Haydn's unparalleled wit shines in his Fantasia, featuring cross-handed figurations, long silences, and a folk song about a farmer's wife who lost her cat. Over a century later, we find ourselves in the evocative world of Debussy and Ravel, who tip their hats to Haydn with miniatures spelling out his name in musical notes. Inspired by their tributes, I wrote my own etude, incorporating the same (HAYDN) pitches and his innovative pianistic techniques. The centerpiece of the first half is Ravel's *Miroirs*, inspired by Shakespeare's line "the eye sees not itself, / But by reflection, by some other things."

The theme of love permeates the second half. A portrait of Felix Mendelssohn adorns my apartment walls, his gaze meeting mine daily, inviting me into his creative realm. Feeling connected to him, I've delved deeply into his music. As a teenager, Mendelssohn encountered Delphine von Schauroth, whose pianistic talent and beauty captivated him. Their shared musical exchanges, reflected in compositions written in each other's notebooks, evoke a tender intimacy that transcends time. Yet, the bittersweet reality of unrequited love, as Delphine chose another, left Mendelssohn heartbroken. Out of that spirit of lost love comes my *Breakup Etude for the Right Hand Alone*, born from my own pain and dedicated to myself. In art, one has the luxury of scripting the ending—and with a *Scherzo* and a triumphant *Wedding March*, I believe everything will be just fine.

- Michael Stephen Brown

# NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

By Jack Slavin

Fantasia in C major for Keyboard, Hob. XVII:4, "Capriccio" (1789)

### JOSEPH HAYDN

When submitting this piece to his publisher, Haydn wrote, "In a moment of splendid good humor, I wrote for the pianoforte a very new Capriccio whose tastefulness, singularity, and special

elaboration cannot fail to win the favor of connoisseurs and amateurs alike. It is only a single movement, somewhat long, but not too difficult." While he may have misjudged the difficulty level of the work, which is in reality quite virtuosic, he did predict the broad appeal of this comical, spirited piece.

As its title suggests, the Capriccio does not fit neatly into any particular form. Rather, Haydn exploits the freedom of tonal organization to his own comedic benefit; thwarted expectations and humorous transitions are abundant. As are other

devices the composer was known to use, including sudden contrasts, playful imitative passages, recurring horn calls, and unsettled rhythmic divisions (the § measure can be broken into three groups of two sixteenths or two groups of three sixteenths), all of which combine to create a delightfully cheerful, if not technically simple, solo work. ◆

### Hommage à Haydn for Piano (1909)

### **CLAUDE DEBUSSY**

### Menuet sur le nom d'Haydn for Piano (1909)

### MAURICE RAVEL

# Etude-Fantasy on the name of Haydn for Piano (2020)

### MICHAEL STEPHEN BROWN

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of Haydn's death in 1809, Debussy and Ravel, along with four other Frenchmen, were each asked to compose a piece in his honor by the Revue musicale mensuelle de la Société Internationale de Musique, the monthly publication of the International Society of Music (ISM). The concept of tombeau (tomb), a piece or collection of pieces honoring the death of an individual, was well established in the French musical tradition, with examples dating back to the Baroque era. Musical tombeaux often combine elements of the style of the departed with the composer's own expression of sorrow over the loss.

The six composers were tasked with using the notes B-A-D-D-G to represent Haydn in their pieces. Though not immediately clear, this combination was derived from his last name: H in German corresponds to B-natural, and to determine the equivalents of Y and N a cyclical approach was used wherein every letter after H would be mapped, in order, to a letter between A and G.

A slow, nostalgic waltz opens Debussy's *Hommage à Haydn* and sets the B-A-D-D-G motif in various ways throughout its three sections: slowly, in the floating upper voice of the right hand over a chorale-like texture; embedded in fast filigree passages; and in punchy, accented chords. Having chosen a looser structure than some of the other commissioned composers, Debussy's tombeau has an almost improvisatory air. His warm sentiments toward "Papa Haydn" are clear in the opening and closing material.

Ravel opted to recreate a dance form with which Haydn was very well acquainted—the minuet, a fixture in his sonata-form works. The *Menuet sur le nom d'Haydn* is a departure from Debussy's free-form musings. Rather, true to its name, it follows the rules of ternary form and Classical phrase structure. The B-A-D-D-G motif appears at the start of the first phrase in the right hand, where it is quite recognizable. In other instances, such

as when used as a bassline or when inverted, the sequence of notes is less easily heard. The minuet structure and the texture of the piano writing are unusual for Ravel, but the blending of his own harmonic language with the forms, rhythms, ornamentation, and style of Haydn makes for a true tombeau.

More than a century later, Michael Stephen Brown adds his own Etude-Fantasy on the name of Haydn to the tributes commissioned by the ISM. Utilizing the same musical spelling of Haydn's name, Brown's piece pays further homage with its sprightly, jubilant character, reminiscent of many of Haydn's light-hearted (though not trivial) compositions.

### Miroirs for Piano (1904-05)

### MAURICE RAVEL

Shortly after the turn of the 20th century, Ravel became a core member of Les Apaches, an informal group of avantgarde musicians, writers, and artists. The group's name, borrowed ironically from a term that was pejoratively applied to Parisian street gangs of the day, remains an unfortunate lesson in cultural insensitivity; it is unlikely that the artists gave much thought to the problem of associating an indigenous people group with savagery and hooliganism. In any case, at their weekly meetings these self-styled "ruffians" of the art world had the opportunity to perform for each other, share their work, and discuss contemporary trends. Ravel dedicated each of the five movements. of his Miroirs, a suite for piano

composed in 1904–05, to a different member of the group.

Noctuelles (Night Moths) is dedicated to the poet Léon-Paul Fargue. Ravel masterfully depicts the moths' flight with fast-paced chromatic motion in the upper register of the piano. The onus is on the performer to heed the Très léger (very lightly) performance indication; otherwise, the magic of the fluttering insects is lost. The middle section is relaxed and melodic, to be played très expressif (very expressively). The occasional moth does flit through even this tranquil section with a flurry of sixteenth-notes.

The first movement Ravel wrote was *Oiseaux tristes* (*Sad Birds*), for pianist

Ricardo Viñes, who would go on to give the premiere of *Miroirs*. *Oiseaux tristes* unfolds along two planes; as Ravel himself explained, the piece "evokes birds lost in the oppressiveness of a very dark forest during the hottest hours of summer." Indeed, the spatial distinction between the piercing bird calls and brooding forest below is clear from the outset. The birds' expressions vary from moments of anxiety to bouts of dejection and melancholy.

Une barque sur l'océan (A Boat on the Ocean) was dedicated to Paul Sordes, who hosted the weekly meetings of Les Apaches in his Montmartre apartment. The illusion of gentle ocean waves is clear in the shimmering left-hand arpeggios. The right hand supports this with an equally regular rhythmic pattern, creating a mesmerizing sense of calm. Oddly placed accented notes interrupt the water's tranquil surface, presumably representing the boat floating above it. Over the course of the movement, the character of the ocean changes through the arpeggio patterns: from utter calm; to imminent, brewing

trouble; to a wave in the form of an overwhelming wall of sound.

The penultimate movement, written for the critic Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi, is perhaps the most technically challenging of the suite. Ravel would come to be known for his effective use of Spanish musical influence in many of his works, of which Alborada del gracioso (Morning Song of the Jester) is an early example. The outer sections are fiery, with rhythmic patterns reminiscent of the sound of castanets and repeated notes imitating the strumming of a quitar. Resonant chords introduce the brooding middle section, whose melody bears clear Andalusian influence.

La vallée des cloches (The Valley of the Bells) is an almost mystical, otherworldly exploration of harmony dedicated to composer Maurice Delage. Ravel achieves an incredible variety of tone colors given the textural limitations; it seems as though each bell toll has its own character, though not to the detriment of the movement's cohesiveness.

# Selections from *Songs without Words* for Piano, Op. 18 (1830)

### **DELPHINE VON SCHAUROTH**

Delphine von Schauroth was a German pianist and composer who, despite being quite talented in both pursuits, has been all but forgotten since her death in the late 19th century. Von Schauroth and a young Felix Mendelssohn crossed paths in Munich and found themselves drawn to one another. They played duets and even dedicated compositions to each

other, indicating a strong connection. Ultimately, however, both musicians went on to marry other people.

Perhaps inspired by Mendelssohn's Lieder ohne Worte (Songs without Words), von Schauroth composed a set of six piano miniatures, published together as Opus 18. The pieces are lyrical and Romantic, with intricate accompaniment textures. The first of the set, heard on today's program, is heartfelt, with lovely melodic lines and lush accompaniment. The final two installments, subtitled *Venezia* and Am Arno, hint at one of Mendelssohn's most famous Songs without Words, the "Venetian Gondola Song," which he dedicated to von Schauroth. ◆

### Fantasie in F-sharp minor for Piano, Op. 28 (1830)

### **FELIX MENDELSSOHN**

Mendelssohn wrote prolifically for the piano throughout his career: dozens of *Lieder ohne Worte*, two concertos, preludes and fugues, and several larger works of which the Fantasie in F-sharp minor is an earlier example. The structure of a slow first movement and fast, passionate third movement is said to have been inspired by Beethoven's "Moonlight" Sonata, notably marked *Quasi una fantasia* (like a fantasy).

The first movement's introduction, marked *Con moto agitato* (with movement, agitated), opens with swift arpeggios blurred together by the pedal over a sustained F-sharp in the bass. The ominous introduction is short-lived before the simple, wistful *Andante* begins. This calm proves deceptive when the *con moto agitato* arpeggios return in the middle section. A storm rages, with thunderous, tremolo bass

lines and passages marked con fuoco (fiery). This material briefly reappears towards the end of the movement, which is drawn to a close by a single, pensive statement of the *Andante* melody.

The Allegro con moto is a bright. lively movement set in the relative key of A major. The charming opening theme ushers in an extended and rather spirited middle section in D major, propelled forward by a driving eighth-note pulse in the accompaniment and bouncy octaves in the right hand. The intense Presto is written in true sonata form. A blustering cascade of sixteenth-notes launches the first theme, which is complemented by a cantabile (singing) second theme. A nervous undercurrent persists throughout the movement and spurs the nearly perpetual sixteenth-notes on to a rousing conclusion.

# Breakup Etude for Right Hand Alone for Piano (2020)

### MICHAEL STEPHEN BROWN

The Breakup Etude for Right Hand Alone came out of an injury that put Michael Stephen Brown's left hand out of commission—the titular breakup refers to this split between right and left hand.

While the solo left-hand repertoire is substantial (think Scriabin's Prelude and Nocturne or Ravel's *Concerto for the Left Hand*), Brown noticed a lack of pieces written for the right hand and

was motivated to compose his own. Fiendishly difficult, the etude is also introspective; the composer writes that it "reflects [his] inner feelings, from loss and nostalgia to personal growth and discovery." Brown utilizes the full range

of the instrument and incorporates a variety of tones, colors, and textures, from dry, percussive attacks to rounded, melancholy gestures. Verbal interjections throughout the etude allude to the personal struggle at its core.

# "Scherzo" from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, after Mendelssohn (arr. 1933)

### SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

"Wedding March and Dance of the Fairies" from A Midsummer Night's Dream, after Mendelssohn (arr. 1850, arr. Brown 2023)

### FRANZ LISZT

Mendelssohn likely became acquainted with William Shakespeare following the 1825 publication of a new German translation of his plays. By the summer of 1826, he had completed his highly acclaimed concert overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream, which he incorporated into the incidental music he wrote much later, in 1842, for a Berlin production of the play. This, like the overture, was very well-received, and selections from it remain popular today.

The Scherzo from A Midsummer Night's Dream is as beloved by audiences as it is feared by orchestral musicians. Light, breathless, whimsical, and enchanting scherzos were Mendelssohn's strong suit, and this one is unrivaled; the fairies can be heard fluttering through the forest outside Athens in the brisk and highly articulated passagework. Nearly a century after its original composition, Rachmaninoff transcribed this magical scherzo for solo piano. The result is as

captivating as the orchestral version, both in terms of virtuosic flair and the unique Mendelssohnian character that Rachmaninoff was able to capture.

Mendelssohn's most recognized composition is likely the Wedding March that appears later in this same opus. Maiestic and ceremonious. the main melody is often played as a recessional to conclude wedding ceremonies. Franz Liszt, an expert in transcribing and arranging works for the piano, incorporated the Wedding March into a concert paraphrase in 1849-50. This, in turn, inspired Vladimir Horowitz, a renowned pianist of the 20th century, to create his own virtuoso transcription of the Wedding March with variations on its theme. Tonight, Michael Stephen Brown puts his own spin on this classic.

> Jack Slavin is a pianist, music educator, and arts professional based in New York City.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST



### MICHAEL STEPHEN BROWN

▶ Michael Stephen Brown has been described as "one of the leading figures in the current renaissance of performer-composers" (New York Times). Winner of a 2018 Emerging Artist Award from Lincoln Center and a 2015 Avery Fisher Career Grant, he is an artist of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and an alum of CMS's Bowers Program. He makes regular appearances with orchestras such as the National Philharmonic and the Seattle, Phoenix, North Carolina, and

Albany symphonies, and recently has made European recital debuts at the Beethoven-Haus Bonn and the Chopin Museum in Mallorca. He has received commissions from many organizations and some of today's leading artists, and recently toured his own Piano Concerto around the US and Poland with several orchestras. He performs regularly with his longtime duo partner, cellist Nicholas Canellakis, and has appeared at festivals worldwide. A prolific recording artist, he has multiple albums in the works this spring, including Connection, featuring his own Piano Concerto with the East Coast Chamber Orchestra; (b)romance with Canellakis; and Mendelssohn+, music by Mendelssohn and Delphine von Schauroth. He was the composer- and artist-in-residence at the New Haven Symphony, and winner of the Concert Artists Guild and Copland House Awards. He holds degrees in piano and composition from the Juilliard School, where he studied with Jerome Lowenthal, Robert McDonald, and Samuel Adler. Additional mentors include András Schiff and Richard Goode. An Artist Ambassador for Creatives Care, Brown lives in New York City with his two 19th-century Steinway D pianos, Octavia and Daria. He will not reveal which is his favorite, so as not to incite jealousy.

# ABOUT THE CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (CMS) was founded in 1969 under the leadership and patronage of Alice Tully and the artistic direction of Charles Wadsworth, beginning a new era for chamber music in the United States. Through its many performance, education, and digital activities, CMS brings the experience of great chamber music to more people than any other organization of its kind. The performing artists constitute a multi-generational and international roster of the world's finest chamber musicians, enabling CMS to present chamber music of every instrumentation, style, and historical period. The Bowers Program, our competitive three-season residency, is dedicated to developing the chamber music leaders of the future and integrates this selection of extraordinary early-career musicians into every facet of CMS activities. CMS reaches a growing global audience through a range of free digital media, including livestreams, an online archive of more than 1,300 video recordings, and broadcasts that are distributed to millions of listeners around the world.

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