



Dear friends and colleagues,

Thank you for coming to my recital. It means so much for us aspiring musicians to have a supportive audience. I am very grateful to have had access to such wonderful facilities and met such wonderful people and teachers over the course of my undergraduate studies.

This evening's concert is titled "***Lyrical Expressions – Journey's Point***", and it parallels my journey over the past four years. All the music presented is inherently lyrical in nature, because as a pianist and a singer, one of my goals of music-making is to 'sing' through the keyboard. Nothing gives me more joy than expressing my innermost feelings through song. Tonight's program sees me combining my three passions – piano, voice and literature.

The works presented tonight are all thematically linked. All tell or comment on the journey of life. All are late works by the composers and written during their twilight years, except the *Romeo and Juliet* piano pieces. As a result, their mood and character tend to be more reflective, mellow and lyrical. Beethoven's Op. 110 piano sonata and Brahms's Op. 117 intermezzi are hauntingly beautiful. Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* piano pieces tell the story of Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers (or at least give us a glimpse of the major characters in the play). Chopin's *Barcarolle* is like a breath of sunshine with its optimistic, hopeful character, bringing the program to a bright final close. It is probably also the work that best summarizes my own personal journey. It passes through different places, different scenes; the ups and downs that often send me floating on 'cloud nine' or crashing to the bottom. But always, I hold on to hope and optimism, because I believe that the only direction one can go after hitting the absolute bottom, is come back up. And then we emerge victorious and triumphant.

Tonight's recital marks a major milestone in my musical journey. It is however not an end in itself. In fact, it is a new beginning as I embark on the next phase of studies. Hence I have chosen the subtitle of "Journey's Point" instead of "Journey's End". Like the composers presented tonight, I have reached a major point in my musical *and* physical life – I turned 21 last month.

I hope that you will enjoy the concert as much as I have enjoyed preparing it. Please join me as I take you on this (condensed) hour-long journey!

Blessings,
Anastasia

PROGRAMME

Chin Ying Han Anastasia, piano

Three Intermezzi, Op. 117

J. Brahms

- I. Andante moderato
- II. Andante non troppo e con molta espressione
- III. Andante con moto

Piano Sonata in A-flat major, Op. 110

L. v. Beethoven

- I. Moderato cantabile molto espressivo
- II. Allegro molto
- III. Adagio, ma non troppo – Fuga (Allegro ma non troppo)

Intermission (10 minutes)

10 Pieces from Romeo and Juliet, Op.75 (1937)

S. Prokofiev

- IV. The Young Juliet
- VII. Friar Laurence
- VI. The Montagues and Capulets

Barcarolle in F-sharp major, Op. 60

F. Chopin

Three Intermezzi, Op. 117

Johannes Brahms

The Three Intermezzi Op. 117 is a typical example of Brahms's late piano compositions. All three intermezzi have slow markings and reflect the growing tendency in the composer's late compositions toward more serene, meditative and mellow moods. All three are lullabies in one way or another. Brahms had just lost his sister Elise and his longtime friend Elizabeth von Herzogenberg in 1892, the year he composed this set, so the prevailing darkness of the music is easy to understand.

The first intermezzo in E-flat major is cast in simple ABA' form. Brahms prefaced this intermezzo with lines from a favourite Scottish cradle song:

*Schlaf sanft, mein Kind, schlaf sanft und schön!
Mich dauert's sehr, dich weinen sehn.*

(Balou, my boy, lye still and sleep! It grieves me sore to hear thee weep.)

The consoling and gentle outer sections are contrasted with a darker, more ponderous middle section in E-flat minor. The character of the music is reminiscent of Brahms's famous lullaby, Op. 49 No. 4 ("Guten Abend, gute Nacht"), although having less of the pure, angelic character of the earlier composition.

The second intermezzo in B-flat minor is undeniably melancholic, almost resigned in its character. It is a miniature sonata form in triple meter. Soft arpeggios in the middle voice fall from the main theme traced by the uppermost notes in the right hand, supported by single bass notes in the left hand. This intermezzo is an excellent example of thematic transformation – the main theme ('first theme') is transformed into the second theme in D-flat major thirty measures later. The movement is flowing and fluid, and its ending provides one of the most moving closing passages of all time: The warmer second theme sings out above a dominant pedal that alternates between the tonic major and minor. Slowly and gently, the music folds in on itself before a final outburst, like a dying person's final struggle for life, before closing with soft ascending arpeggios that almost feel like the soul rising towards heaven.

Brahms once referred to the third intermezzo in C-sharp minor as "the lullaby of all my grief". Cast in ternary form, the mysterious and dark outer sections frame a more relaxed central section in A major, characterized by a leaping theme with right-hand octaves. It is the only intermezzo in the set with a simple duple meter, but even with a 2/4 time signature, the music has a lilting feel that becomes especially apparent in the middle section as Brahms makes use of hemiola and across-barline beaming. The work closes gently, leaving the performer and listener suspended for a few moments as the last chord quietly rings and fades off.

Piano Sonata in A-flat major, Op.110

Ludwig van Beethoven

The late piano sonatas of Ludwig van Beethoven have often been described as "far-reaching", "inward-looking", "uncharted territory", "transcendent", and "profoundly spiritual". The *Piano Sonata in A-flat major, Opus 110*, is no exception.

Beethoven's late works are characterized by a "deepening concern for lyricism", "growing interest in folk-like melodies" and a "more direct and intimate mode of communication". His late piano sonatas embrace rich harmonic structures, intricate counterpoint and adherence to Classical and Baroque forms. Musical and psychological weight is in the last movement instead of the first. In the *Hammerklavier* (Op. 106), the final movement is a double fugue. In Op. 111, it is a set of variations on a sixteen-bar theme, complete with a coda and stretched out to almost twice the length of the first movement. In the Op. 110 sonata in A-flat major, it is an Arioso with fugue and fugal inversion.

The Op. 110 sonata is the most translucent, and some will say the most accessible, of the last three sonatas. It is part of a set of three (Op. 109, 110 and 111) written for the Berlin publisher Adolf Martin Schlesinger. Beethoven was completely deaf by the time he wrote it, but he had also recently recovered from a long illness. "My health appears to give me new life, so that I can, anew, live for my art..." he wrote in September 1821. This probably contributed to the luminous character of its opening movement, as well as its final triumphant ending. This sonata exemplifies Beethoven's ability to masterfully condense and reduce material down to its distilled essence. The whole work is built on the fugue subject of the last movement.

The first movement, marked *con amabilità*, outlines the Classical sonata form. A quiet but heartfelt melody opens the movement in chorale style. The opening material is built on a succession of intervals – alternating falling thirds and rising fourths, followed by a four-note descending scale fragment. This is important, as it is these very intervals that form the skeleton of the whole work. A soaring lyrical theme, based on the opening material, follows shortly. One can almost feel the heavens slowly opening up to allow beacons of light to shine through, as the melody climbs higher and higher, supported by a cushion of sonic vibration in the left hand harmonies. The 'development' section is almost non-existent - it is a mere sixteen measures long, sounding more like a passing episode of harmonic sequences that lead right back to the 'recapitulation'.

The main theme of the fast Scherzo is based on the descending diatonic scale figure that was seen at the beginning of the first movement. It also resembles two different folksongs, *Unsa kätz häd kaz'In g'habt* ('Our cat has had kittens') and *Ich bin lüderlich, du bist lüderlich* (politely translated as 'I'm a slob, you're a slob'). But even with its predominantly scalic melodic contour, the opening intervals from the first movement are embedded. In the middle section, a series of falling fourths and rising thirds linked by passing tones outline the D-flat major scale, while the left hand outlines the tonic triad in arpeggios that leap up the keyboard and cross over the right hand. An unexpected *Tierce de Picardie* ends the short but dramatic movement.

The last movement is best described as an "unprecedented keyboard Passion", complete with Recitative, Solo Arioso accompanied by winds with repeated chords, and a choral fugue. It is a stark contrast to the first two movements. It begins in B-flat minor, a "gloomy and terrible" key (in the words of Marc-Antoine Charpentier) used for "mournful songs" (Jean-Philippe Rameau). The music slides into A-flat minor in the Arioso dolente, with seven flats. Soft, evenly spaced, repeated plodding chords in the left hand give the impression of endless space and time, and reinforce the muted darkness of the tonality. A mournful lament floats above in the right hand, its opening notes outlining the descending scalic motif in previous movements, but also strangely sounding like "a fairly direct quotation from an alto aria in J.S. Bach's *St. John Passion* that describes the moment of Christ's death", *Es ist vollbracht* ('It is finished'). It is significant to note that A-flat minor is also the key of the 'Funeral March on the Death of a Hero' in Beethoven's Piano Sonata in A-flat major, Op. 26.

One could easily score the following fugue for full chorus and pipe organ. The fugal subject is the final, or one might say original, form of the compositional material from which the whole sonata was derived. Simple yet aristocratic in its beauty, the more optimistic character of the fugue is interrupted by a return of the Arioso, this time in G minor. However, the depressed mood soon gives way to a return of the fugue, this time in inversion and marked *Poi a poi di nuovo vivente* ('little by little new life'). It perhaps alludes to the idea of Christ's death and resurrection.

Beethoven launches the inverted fugue into diminution and stretto as the music races joyfully and triumphantly to the end. A tonic pedal in the left hand supports the melody as it climbs higher and higher, until grand cascades of arpeggios in A-flat major bring the work to an exhilarating close.

10 Pieces from Romeo and Juliet, Op. 75

Sergei Prokofiev

IV. The Young Juliet

VII. Friar Laurence

V. The Montagues and Capulets

*Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
Whole misadventured piteous overthrows
Do with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.*

The story of Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers is familiar to many. It has been the subject of many musical compositions, including Berlioz's choral symphony *Roméo et Juliette*, Gounod's opera of the same title, Tchaikovsky's fantasy-overture for orchestra, and of course, Prokofiev's ballet, from which this suite is taken.

Prokofiev uses the orchestra as an artist's colour palette, and little is lost in its keyboard form. These piano pieces are neoclassical in style and simple in form. The three movements presented tonight are all in Ternary form with two similar sections framing a contrasting middle section.

In *The Young Juliet*, scurrying strings depict Juliet's youthful energy, while exquisite woodwinds paired with warm lower strings depict falling in love and discovering that she is growing into a young woman. Single notes played on a harp, with lower strings melody against a backdrop of muted upper strings tremolo, are marked '*dolente*' ('with pain'). The melody is then passed to the dark timbre of the bass clarinet, reflecting the tragic end of the story. The lovers finally find peace (marked '*tranquillo*') and happiness in death.

Friar Laurence is characterized by a warm, tranquil melody played by winds with pizzicato strings. Marked *Andante espressivo*, the music is lyrical and dignified. The more passionate middle section makes use of some very lush and expressive harmonies, almost bordering on crunchy. It perhaps reflects the good intentions gone wrong, which ultimately led to the loss of two young lives. The movement ends again with solo bass clarinet melody, extremely poignant in its utterance.

The Montagues and Capulets paints a vivid picture of the feuding families. Heavy brasses punch out the harmonic progression while full strings draw out an arpeggiated melody based on the chords. The dotted rhythm is unrelenting and the music angular. A more tranquil, dance-like middle section characterizes Juliet's *pas de deux* with Romeo and then Paris, the man she is supposed to marry. Regular triangle strokes, tambourine, pizzicato strings, celesta, harp chords and solo woodwind melody carry with them a tinge of melancholy and sorrow amidst the lighter choreography and orchestration. The movement concludes with three hammered chords in strings and brass.

Barcarolle in F-sharp major, Op. 60

Frédéric Chopin

A barcarolle is a 'boat-song', and the term brings to mind pictures of Venetian gondolas. The *Barcarolle in F-sharp major, Op. 60* is one of Chopin's most radiant works. While it has been commonly described as a long movement in the nocturne style, to me it resembles more a journey taken by two lovers. The whole piece is based on melodic thirds and sixths, their sweet consonance singing out above a lightly rocking bass line. The dualism of two notes – persons – is maintained throughout: all is two-voiced, two-souled.

According to Charles Rosen, "the *Barcarolle* shares the scope and textural fullness of the four *Ballades* and the *Polonaise-Fantasy*, representing along with them Chopin's original contribution to the development of large forms." It is Italianate in colour at times, with the composer's *bel canto* influenced filigrees creating shimmering twirls of sound.

The piece opens with an extroverted introduction built on the dominant seventh chord. One can picture the unveiling of a large Venetian painting as 'the curtain rises'. As the characteristic rocking accompaniment emerges in the bass line, Chopin gently ushers us into the painting – the journey – itself. He manages to pack a whole palette of colours into the next ten minutes or so. We experience the gentle waves carrying the gondola over the canals, the tender dialogue of the lovers, apprehension and uncertainty as the boat sails into new waters, the rushing waves of the open sea, passionate embraces, moments of dreamlike fantasy (marked *dolce sfogato* and almost resembling tender kisses), a return to the present, followed by a final triumphant declaration before slowly winding down. There is a last remembrance of the journey before four triumphant octaves end the piece with bright sunshine.

This is the piece that I feel most accurately describes my musical journey over the past few years, and that is the reason behind choosing it to end my recital with. I have been through the smooth waters as well as the rougher ones, enjoyed familiar landscapes as well as explored unfamiliar territory. But always, I hold on to hope and optimism because I believe that the only direction one can go after hitting the absolute bottom is come back up – and emerge triumphant.

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You, the audience, without whom there will be no concert

And above all, to my Heavenly Father for the gift of music, and for seeing and guiding me through the whole process.

