Where Tradition Meets the Unexpected
2016-2017 Season

Gabriela Montero, piano

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PROGRAM

Gabriela Montero
Saturday, February 11th, 2017

Four Impromptus, Op. 90, D. 899...........................................................Schubert
Impromptu in C Minor
Impromptu in E-Flat Major
Impromptu in G-Flat Major
Impromptu in A-Flat Major
PROGRAM CONT.

*Carnaval, Op. 9* ............................................................................................................................ Schumann

*Préambule*
*Pierrot*
*Arlequin*
*Valse noble*
*Eusebius*
*Florestan*
*Coquette*
*Réplique*
*Sphinx*
*Papillons*
*Chiarina*
*Chopin*
*Estrella*
*Reconnaissance*
*Pantalons et Colombine*
*Valse allemande*
*Paganini*
*Aveu*
*Promenade*
*Pause*
*Marche des Davidsbundler contre les Philistins*

Interval

*Improvisations* ................................................................................................................................... Montero

ABOUT THE MUSIC | NOTES BY ROSE GEAR

**Franz Schubert: Four Impromptus, Op. 90, D. 899**

*Born: January 31, 1797 in Vienna, Austria*
*Died: November 19, 1828 in Vienna, Austria*

Franz Schubert (1797–1828) was born in Vienna, Austria. His father was a schoolmaster. In 1808 he won a scholarship to attend a boarding school where his instructors included the composer Antonio Salieri, and he sang in the Imperial court chapel choir. He later returned to work in his father’s schoolhouse. In a career that lasted fewer than two decades, Schubert produced an immense quantity of work spanning numerous genres; he wrote operas, symphonies, chamber music, 20 piano sonatas, choral works, and 600 songs. Schubert was famous for showcasing his latest compositions in chamber music parties known as “Schubertiads.” The composer died of syphilis at the age of 31. At his request, he was buried next to Beethoven, whom he adored, in the village cemetery of Währing, Vienna.

In the year 1827 Schubert wrote eight impromptus; he did so while suffering increasingly from symptoms of the illness that would eventually claim his life the following year.
The composer sold his eight impromptus to the publisher Haslinger in Vienna, who published the first two (in C minor and E-Flat major) in 1828. These were not especially commercially successful and the remainder of the set were not published until after the young composer’s death.

The term “impromptu” was coined by Czech composer Jan Voříšek, and assigned to Schubert’s works by the publisher. The term came to signify an entire genre of small-scale instrumental pieces meant to sound spontaneous and improvised; however, these pieces by Schubert are anything but lacking in substance and gravitas. Impromptus usually follow a three-part (ABA) form where the outer sections contrast in mood with the inner section. These works are lyrical and poetic in character, and unmistakably Romantic.

The C minor impromptu begins with a somber march-like theme. A contrasting section sees the opening theme transformed into a lyrical variant before the inexorable darkness returns. The work resolves with a hopeful C major chord. The second impromptu in E-Flat major moves freely with a flying triplet figure reminiscent of a string of jewels, contrasted with a fiery waltz-like passage. Subtle and nocturnal, the G-Flat major impromptu offers gently arpeggiated chords and long, drawn-out melodies. The tuneful final Op. 90 impromptu in A-Flat major alludes to Schubert’s penchant for song. Pianist Artur Schnabel described this impromptu as “a dance in the moonlight—with the feet scarcely touching the ground.”

Robert Schumann: Carnaval, Op. 9
Born: June 8, 1810 in Zwickau, Germany
Died: July 29, 1856 in Endenich, Germany

The life of Robert Schumann (1810–1856) was marked by both brilliance and mental illness. Schumann was a heavy drinker, womanizer, and is believed to have suffered from bipolar disorder. His father was a bookseller, from whom the young Schumann developed an early interest in literature and music. When Schumann was 16, his father died and his sister committed suicide in the same month. Since his father’s will stipulated that to collect his inheritance he must attend university for at least three years, Schumann enrolled in law school in Leipzig. He also began piano lessons with Friedrich Wieck, eventually dropping out of law school to pursue becoming a concert pianist. But Schumann suffered from numbness in the right hand, likely the result of mercury poisoning, which precluded such a career choice. He instead settled for a life as a composer and writer. Schumann co-founded Neue Zeitschrift für Musik, a progressive musical magazine.

In 1834 Schumann became romantically involved with a young pianist named Ernestine von Fricken, a piano student of Friedrich Wieck (the father of the composer’s future wife, Clara). The two became secretly engaged; a short time later Schumann began writing Carnaval. When Schumann discovered Ernestine was born out of wedlock, he broke off the engagement. Later that same year, he began to pursue his affections with Clara Wieck, whom he would eventually marry, over the prolonged and emphatic objections of her father.
Carneval consists of a series of 21 short musical vignettes depicting a masked ball. Schumann subtitled this work *Scènes mignonnes sur quatre notes* (Little Scenes on Four Notes). These vignettes are bound together musically through Schumann’s pervasive use of four-note motives based on the letters “A.S.C.H.” or A, E-Flat (Es), C, and B in German notation. In their various permutations, these letters represent Ernestine’s hometown of Asch, Schumann’s name, the German word “Fasching” (carnival), and Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent.

Schumann’s imaginary masked ball welcomes guests both fictional and real. Traditional Italian *commedia dell’arte* characters Harlequin, Pierrot, Pantalone and Colombine make their appearance alongside the musical figures of Chopin and Paganini. “Eusebius” and “Floristan” represent two alter-egos from Schumann’s diary, as well as the two sides of the composer’s personality: “Eusebius” the ruminative and philosophical, and “Floristan” the impulsive and passionate. Clara Wieck (“Chiarina”) and Ernestine von Fricken (“Estrella”) appear in the milieu; *Reconnaissance* depicts the moment when Schumann and Ernestine recognize each other from behind their masks. The suite ends with *Marche des Davidsbundler contre les Philistins* depicting the triumph of the “Davidsbündler,” a forward-thinking musical society created by Schumann in his writings, over the “Philistines,” or uncultured masses.

**Gabriela Montero: Improvisations**

Yehudi Menuhin wrote that “improvisation is not the expression of accident but rather of the accumulated yearnings, dreams and wisdom of our very soul.” Historically speaking, improvisation was a highly valued skill in classical music. Schubert, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt all famously improvised at the keyboard. Twentieth-century pianists such as Vladimir Horowitz and Arthur Rubinstein incorporated improvisation into their performances. Regrettably, the practice of improvisation in classical music performance has largely fallen by the wayside in recent decades.

Pianist Gabriela Montero breathes new life into the classical improvisatory tradition with her brilliant performances. She improvises fluently in the style of composers such as Bach and Chopin, as well as across multiple genres as widely ranging as tango and ragtime. Montero frequently bases her improvisations on melodies supplied by audience members (this author recalls a particularly memorable performance in which Montero improvised a piece based on the tune “On Wisconsin”); as impeccably executed and wonderfully expressive as these improvisations are, one wonders why this important practice fell out of fashion.

**Rose Gear** served as WUD Performing Arts Committee Director for the Wisconsin Union Theater during its 2009–2010 season. She lives in Seattle, WA where she is personal assistant to the Seattle Symphony’s Music Director, Ludovic Morlot, and performs regularly as a classical bassist.
ABOUT THE ARTIST

Gabriela Montero's visionary interpretations and unique improvisational gifts have won her a devoted following around the world. Anthony Tommasini remarked in The New York Times, “Montero's playing has everything: crackling rhythmic brio, subtle shadings, steely power in climactic moments, soulful lyricism in the ruminative passages and, best of all, unsentimental expressivity.”


Gabriela has also been invited to perform with many of the world’s most respected orchestras, including the Los Angeles, New York, Liverpool, Rotterdam, and Dresden philharmonic orchestras; Chicago, San Francisco, Houston, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Atlanta, and Toronto symphony orchestras; the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Academy of St Martin in the Fields, WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln, and Zürcher Kammerorchester; the Cleveland, City of Birmingham Symphony, Philharmonia, and Komische Oper Berlin orchestras; and the Vienna Symphony, NDR Radiophilharmonie Hannover, Residentie, and Sydney Symphony orchestras.

Recent collaborators include conductors Claudio Abbado, Lorin Maazel, Leonard Slatkin, Sir Roger Norrington, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Vassily Petrenko, Marin Alsop, Eivind Gullberg Jensen, James Gaffigan, Andrés Orozco-Estrada, Mario Venzago, Peter Oundjian, Mikko Franck, Carlos Miguel Prieto, Jaime Martin, Kristjan Järvi, Pietari Inkinen, and Patrick Lange.

Gabriela has recently given debut performances at the BBC Proms, and with the NDR Sinfonieorchester Hamburg, Bilbao Orkestra Sinfonikoa, Orquesta Sinfónica del Principado de Asturias, and the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as debut recitals at the Sydney Opera House, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Antwerp deSingel, Manchester Bridgewater Hall, Rheingau Musik Festival, and Cheltenham Music Festival.

In addition to her brilliant interpretations of the core piano repertoire, Gabriela is also celebrated for her ability to improvise, composing and playing new works in real time. She says, “I connect to my audience in a completely unique way – and they connect with me. Because improvisation is such a huge part of who I am, it is the most natural and spontaneous way I can express myself.” Whether in recital or following a concerto performance, Gabriela regularly invites her audiences to choose themes and ideas on which she improvises.

Gabriela has long held a desire to apply her abilities in improvisation and composition to larger ensembles and contexts. In 2011, she embarked on this new phase of her career by composing a tone poem for piano and orchestra, entitled Ex Patria. Her piece had its world premiere tour in October of that year with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields in London and in several German cities. In 2016, Gabriela performed the world premiere of her Piano Concerto No.1, the “Latin” Concerto, at the Gewandhaus Leipzig with the MDR Symphony Orchestra and Kristjan Järvi, to great critical acclaim.
Gabriela is also an award-winning and best-selling recording artist. Bronze medalist at the Chopin Competition, her debut disc, Bach and Beyond, featured her own improvisations on themes by Bach and held the top spot on the Billboard Classical Charts for several months. She has won two Echo Klassik Awards: the 2006 Keyboard Instrumentalist of the Year and 2007 Award for Classical Music without Borders. She received a Grammy® nomination for her Bach and Beyond follow-up, Baroque, in 2008. Solatino, inspired by her Venezuelan homeland, is devoted to works by Latin American composers and features her own interpretations on Latin themes. Gabriela’s most recent album - an emphatic demonstration of the “total” artist as pianist, composer and improviser - features Rachmaninov’s Piano Concerto No.2, Montero’s own “Ex Patria”, and 3 freeform improvisations. It earned Gabriela her first Grammy® Award for “Best Classical Album” at the 2015 Latin Grammy Awards®.

Gabriela’s innovative perspectives have also been sought outside the sphere of classical music. In May 2015, she was appointed as the first “Honorary Consul” of Amnesty International, in recognition of her sustained efforts to advocate for human rights in Venezuela, both through music and public discourse. That commitment also garnered a nomination for Outstanding Work in the Field of Human Rights by the Human Rights Foundation. Gabriela was invited to participate in the 2013 Women of the World Festival at London’s Southbank Centre, and has spoken and performed twice at the World Economic Forum in Davos-Klosters (Switzerland). She was awarded the 2012 Rockefeller Award for her contributions to the arts and played at Barack Obama’s 2008 Presidential Inauguration.

Born in Venezuela, Gabriela gave her first public performance at the age of five. At age eight, she made her concerto debut in her hometown of Caracas, which led to a scholarship from the government to study privately in the USA. She continued her studies under Hamish Milne at the Royal Academy of Music in London, graduating with the highest honors. She currently resides in Barcelona, with her husband and two daughters.

Up Next This Season
Pilobolus: Shadowland
Thursday, February 23, 2017
8pm
Shannon Hall
Ultimate Tchaikovsky: The Last Symphony

FEB. 17, 18, 19  |  Overture Hall

Tchaikovsky’s emotionally charged melodic masterpiece is perfectly complemented by the exotic beauty of Saint-Saëns’ magnificent concerto.

SAMUEL BARBER
Second Essay

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS
Piano Concerto No. 5
(The Egyptian)

PETER ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY
Symphony No. 6 (Pathétique)

John DeMain, Conductor
Stephen Hough, Piano

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THE ORGAN IN ORATORIO & OPERA
Organist Samuel Hutchison with Tenor Andrew Bidlack and Bass Kyle Ketelsen
Feb. 21  |  7:30 p.m.  |  Overture Hall
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