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Junior Recital: Ben Brown, piano

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UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC



JUNIOR RECITAL

Ben Brown, *piano*

assisted by

Charles Staples, *piano*



APRIL 17, 1999, 3 PM
PERKINSON RECITAL HALL

PROGRAM

Intermezzo, op. 116, no. 6

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

Brahms wrote seven sets of character pieces for solo piano including Capriccios, Intermezzos, Rhapsodies, Ballades and Romanzes. This particular Intermezzo, a somewhat somber and quiet piece, comes from *Opus 166, Fantasiën*, one of Brahms' last works for piano. Characterized by two dominant themes, one sounding stately and processional, and the other lyrical and intimate, its driving force is the mild antagonism between the accentuation due to the meter in which the piece is cast, 3/4 time, and that of the phrase, which hints at 4/4 time. Between rich harmonies in the quarter note chords of the first section and lyrical, soothing triplets in the second section, the offset rhythm gives the piece a unifying tender character. The piece ends with a short Coda, which combines elements of both the earlier sections.

L'isle joyeuse

Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)

There is some debate as to when Debussy actually wrote *L'isle Joyeuse*. The diary of Catalan pianist Ricardo Viñes records that Debussy performed a work of that title at his home on June 13, 1903, at which time Debussy may have intended it as part of the *Suite bergamasque*. The autograph of the piece, however, is dated July-August 1904. For this reason, most of Debussy's biographers and analysts of the work associate its composition with Debussy's 1904 journey to the Isle of Jersey with Emma Bardac. The lightness and grace of the piece of the piece certainly could reflect the joy Debussy had found in his new love affair.

Many biographers and analysts also associate the origins of *L'isle Joyeuse* with the French painter Jean-Antoine Watteau, and with one painting in particular: *L'embarquement pour Cythère*. Debussy once remarked, concerning Watteau, of "That enchanting echo that emanates from the depths of a Watteau landscape, filled with plaintive figures." Indeed, Watteau's painting, a beautiful landscape picturing the journey of several couples, led by cherubs to the Isle of Cythère, the birthplace of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, does seem to reflect the mood of Debussy's music. And the line of characters starting in the foreground and spiraling off into the distance, with the last few cherubs rising up triumphantly into the sky and disappearing into the light, reflects the form and shape of the entire piece. Listen specifically for the contrast between the light dance sections and the smooth, lyrical sections of the work.

Rhapsody in Blue

George Gershwin
(1898-1937)

Rhapsody in Blue was an accident waiting to happen. Paul Whiteman came to Gershwin, asking him for a composition in a jazz idiom for his concert in Aeolian Hall on February 12, 1942. Gershwin, who was already extremely busy with the upcoming premiere of his new musical, *Sweet Little Devil*, did not have any intention of actually writing anything for the concert but told Whiteman that he would think about it. He did, in fact, come up with several ideas for the composition -- most importantly, what would become the famous slow section of the *Rhapsody*. Other ideas started to come into focus as well, some supposedly inspired by the rhythms of the train Gershwin took on his way to the premiere of *Sweet Little Devil*. Gershwin continued to put the project from his mind, however, until his brother Ira happened upon a small article in the New York *Herald Tribune*, announcing that Gershwin was working on a "jazz concerto" for the Whiteman concert. Gershwin sprang to the challenge.

The *Rhapsody* was completed, all told, in just under 3 weeks. Gershwin wrote page by page of a 2-piano score, and, as each page was completed, it was handed to Ferde Grofé, Whiteman's arranger, for arrangement of the second piano part for Whiteman's jazz orchestra. The arrangement was completed on February 4 and immediately went into rehearsals for the concert on the 12th. Of the 23 pieces on Whiteman's program that day, the *Rhapsody* was the overwhelming favorite. Two years later, Grofé went back and arranged the work for piano and symphony orchestra, which is the form in which the *Rhapsody* is primarily performed today.