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Richard Becker, piano

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THE UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

Presents in Concert

Richard Becker, *piano*

Sunday, February 6, 2011

3:00 p.m.

Booker Hall of Music

Camp Concert Hall



RICHARD BECKER, coordinator of piano studies at the University of Richmond, is a pianist, composer, and chamber musician whose playing has been acclaimed in Europe and America. Playing on college campuses, he has frequently toured the eastern United States. He has performed at New York's Alice Tully Hall, Town Hall, 92nd Street Y, Carnegie Hall, Washington DC's Library of Congress, National Gallery of Art, and at the French Embassy. In Paris, he performed at Salle Cortot as first prize laureate of the French Piano Institute (1996), l'École Normale de Musique and at Salle Edmund Michelet (1997, 2006), a venue of the Cité Internationale des Arts, where he has been a frequent artist-in-residence. As a composer, he has been a MacDowell Conlony Fellow and was a nominee for an American Academy of Arts and Letters award.

His performances and his own music have been broadcast on NPR, Voice of America, WNYC, WETA, WGMS, and WCVE, and have been featured during a Marshall University Artist Residency, at National Conferences of the Music Teachers National Association, at CMS-Mid-Atlantic, at Brattleboro Chamber Festival, at the American Music Festival of the National Gallery, the James Madison University Contemporary Music and the Roxbury (NY) Music Festivals. He has received Meet the Composer Grants, Contemporary Music Studio grants, and critical acclaim in the press. Becker's playing has been described as "powerful" by the *Washington Post*, "admirable in taste and technique" by the *New York Times*, and "brilliant with seamless passagework and elegant phrasing" by the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.

Becker's playing is grounded in the tradition of Arthur Schnabel, acquired during his study with Leonard Shure while at Boston University (M. Mus.). His teaching owes much to the methods of Tobias Matthay, learned from Cecile Staub Genhart during his years at the Eastman School of Music (B.Mus. and Performers Certificate). Becker taught at the University of Texas and Boston University prior to joining the faculty at University of Richmond.

In recent years, his poetry has been published in journals such as *America*, *Columbia*, *Visions-International*, *Cold Mountain* and his poetic sequence, *FATES*, as a chapbook of *The Literary Review*, Summer, 2008 in print and online. His compositions have been recorded on CRS and his piano performances on Albany Records.

Program

Intermezzi, Opus 118

- No. 1 in A minor
- No. 2 in A major

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

Impromptus, Opus 90

- No. 3 in G flat major
- No. 4 in A flat minor

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)

Grande Sonata Pathétique

- I. Grave, Allegro con brio
- II. Adagio cantabile
- III. Rondo: Allegro

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Intermission

Gaspard de la nuit

- I. Ondine
- II. Le Gibet
- III. Scarbo

Maurice Ravel
(1875-1927)

Etudes

- Opus 10, No. 3 in E major
- Opus 10, No. 2 in A minor
- Opus 25, No. 1 in A-flat major
- Opus 25, No. 12 in C minor

Frédéric François Chopin
(1810-1849)

Program Note

Gaspard de la nuit

Maurice Ravel

Unlike such composers as Mozart, Beethoven and Rachmaninoff, Ravel significantly enriched the literature of the piano without being a virtuoso pianist himself. *Gaspard de la nuit*, composed in 1908, is at once the most demanding and the most revolutionary of his keyboard works, and altogether the most remarkable. The title identifies the inspiration for the work: *Gaspard de la nuit* was a book by Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841, actually named Louis Bertrand) which contained verses, prose-poems and drawings relating to fantasies of imps, devils, nymphs, ill-fated lovers, and death and nightmares. In his preface to the book, written about 1830 and published posthumously in 1842, Bernard identified "Gaspard de la nuit" as the pseudonym taken by Satan, who had given him the poems to illustrate various literary principles. Ravel wrote that his own *Gaspard* "has been the very devil to write, which is only reasonable since He is the author of the poems." It is also the very devil to *play*, because Ravel determined that it should be. He stated that in composing it he had as one of his objectives simply creating greater challenges for the pianist than Balakirev had done in his "Oriental fantasy" *Islamey*, he went beyond that example, and beyond the *Mephisto Waltz* of Liszt, to achieve his extraordinary mixture of super-human technical demands and sheer poetic evocativeness.

Ravel selected three of Bertrand's fantasies as patterns for musical treatment, and had the texts printed in the score. He dedicated each of the three pieces to a different pianist, while a fourth, his boyhood friend Ricardo Viñes, gave the first performance, on January 9, 1909.

— Richard Freed
Quoted with permission

I. Ondine

Une vague harmonie enchanter mon
sommeil,
et près de moi s'épandre un murmure pareil
Aux chants entrecoupés d'une voix triste et
tendre.

Charles Brugnot — *Les deux Génies*

— "Écoute!—Écoute!—C'est moi, c'est
Ondine qui frôle de ces gouttes d'eau les
losanges sonores de ta fenêtre illuminée par
les mornes rayons de la lune; et voici, en
robe de moiré, la dame châtelaine qui
contemple à son balcon la belle nuit étoilée
et le beau lac endormi.

Chaque flot est un ondin qui nage dans le
courant, chaque courant est un sentier qui
serpente vers mon Palais, et mon Palais est
bâti fluide, au fond du lac, dans le triangle
du feu, de la terre et de l'air.

Écoute!—Écoute!—Mon père bat l'eau coas-
sante d'une branche d'aulne verte, et mes
sœurs caressent de leurs bras d'écume les
fraîches îles d'herbes, de nénuphars et de la
glaiéuls, ou se moquent du saule caduc et
barbu qui pêche à la ligne."

Sa chanson murmurée, elle me supplia de
recevoir son anneau à mon doigt, pour être
l'époux d'une Ondine, et de visiter avec elle
son Palais, pour être le roi des lacs.

Et comme je lui répondais que j'aimais une
mortelle, boudeuse et dépitée, elle pleura
quelques larmes, poussa un éclat de rire, et
s'évanouit en giboulées qui ruisselèrent
blanches le long de mes vitraux bleus.

—Aloysius Bertrand

... I thought I heard a vague harmony casting
a spell over my slumber,
and near me a murmuring break out like the
interrupted song of a sad and tender voice.

—"Listen!—Listen!—It is I, it is Ondine who
brushes with these drops of water the vi-
brant panes of your window, lit by the mel-
ancholy rays of the moon; and here, in a
robe of watered silk, is the lady of the castle
who, from her balcony, gazes at the beauti-
ful, starry night and the beautiful, sleeping
lake.

Each wave is a water-sprite swimming in
the current, each current is a path that
winds towards my palace, and my palace is
built of water, in the depths of the lake, in
the triangle of fire, earth and air.

Listen!—Listen!—My father beats the
croaking water with a green alder branch,
and my sisters caress with their arms of
spray the cool islands of grass, of water-
lilies and gladioli, or mock the weeping,
bearded willow as he dips his fishing-line in
the lake."

She finished her murmured song and
begged me to put her ring on my finger, to
be the husband of a water-nymph, and to
come down with her to her palace as king of
the lakes.

And when I told her that I was in love with a
mortal woman, she began to sulk in annoy-
ance, shed a few tears, gave a burst of laugh-
ter, and vanished in a shower of spray
which ran in pale drops down my blue win-
dow-panes.

—Transl. R. Nichols

II. Le Gibet

Que vois-je remuer autour de ce Gibet?
—Faust

Ah! ce que j'entends, serait-ce la bise nocturne qui glapit, ou le pendu qui pousse un soupir sur la fourche patibulaire?

Serait-ce quelque grillon qui chante tapi dans la mousse et le lierre stérile dont par pitié se chausse le bois?

Serait-ce quelque mouche en chasse sonnant du cor autour de ces oreilles sourdes à la fanfare des hallali?

Serait-ce quelque escarbot qui cueille en son vol inégal un cheveau sanglant à son crâne chauve?

Ou bien serait-ce quelque araignée qui brode une demiaune de mousseline pour cravate à ce col étranglé?

C'est la cloche qui tinte aux murs d'une ville, sous l'horizon, et la carcasse d'un pendu que rougit le soleil couchant.

—Aloysius Bertrand

What is it I see stirring around that
Gibbet?

Ah! What do I hear? Is it the night wind howling, or the hanged man sighing on the gibbet?

Might it be a cricket singing, hidden in the moss and the sterile ivy with which the wood covers itself out of pity?

Might it be a fly hunting and sounding its horn around those ears that are deaf to the slaughterer's triumph?

Might it be a cockchafer plucking, in its halting flight, a bloody hair from its bald pate?

Or might it be a spider, weaving a length of muslin as a scarf for that strangled neck?

It is the bell that sounds from the walls of a town beyond the horizon, and the corpse of a hanged man that glows red in the setting sun.

—Transl. R. Nichols

III. Scarbo

Il regarda sous le lit, dans la cheminée, dans le bahut—; personne.
Il ne put comprendre par où il s'était introduit, par où il s'était évadé.
Hoffmann - *Contes nocturnes*

Oh! que de fois je l'ai entendu et vu, Scarbo, lorsqu'à minuit la lune brille dans le ciel comme un écu d'argent sur une bannière d'azur semée d'abelilles d'or!

Que de fois j'ai entendu bourdonner son rire dans l'ombre de mon alcôve, et grincer son ongle sur la soie des courtines de mon lit!

Que de fois je l'ai vu descendre du plancher, pirouetter sur un pied et rouler par la chambre comme le fuseau tombe de la quenouille d'une sorcière!

Le croyais-je alors évanoui? le nain grandissait entre la lune et moi comme le clocher d'une cathédrale gothique, un grelot d'or en branle à son bonnet pointu!

Mais bientôt son corps bleuissait, diaphane comme la cire d'une bougie, son visage blémissait comme la cire d'un lumignon—, et soudain il s'éteignait.

—Aloysius Bertrand

He looked under the bed, in the fireplace, in the cupboard—; no one. He could not understand where it had got in, or where it had got out.

Oh! How many times have I heard and seen Scarbo, when at midnight the moon shines in the sky like a silver coin on an azure banner dotted with golden bees!

How many times have I heard his laughter buzz in the shadows of my alcove, and his fingernails scratching on the silk curtains round my bed!

How many times have I seen him leap down to the floor, pirouette on one foot and hurtle round the room like the spindle that has fallen from a witch's distaff!

Did I think he had vanished? The dwarf would begin to grow between the moon and me like the steeple of a Gothic cathedral, with a gold bell bobbing on his pointed bonnet!

But soon his body would start to turn blue, as transparent as candle wax, his face would grow pale as the light from a candle-end—and suddenly he would begin to disappear.

—Transl. R. Nichols