



YEKWON SUNWOO, PIANO
VAN CLIBURN INTERNATIONAL PIANO COMPETITION GOLD MEDALIST

Wednesday, March 14, 2018, at 7:30pm
Foellinger Great Hall

PROGRAM

YEKWON SUNWOO, PIANO

VAN CLIBURN INTERNATIONAL PIANO COMPETITION GOLD MEDALIST

Franz Schubert
(1797–1828)

Four Impromptus, D. 935, Op. 142

- No. 1 in F Minor
- No. 2 in A-flat Major
- No. 3 in B-flat Major
- No. 4 in F Minor

Percy Grainger (arr.)
(1882–1961)

Ramble on the Last Love-Duet from Richard Strauss' Der Rosenkavalier

Richard Strauss
(1864–1949)

20-minute intermission

Johannes Brahms
(1833–1897)

Sonata No. 2 in F-sharp Minor, Op. 2

- Allegro non troppo, ma energico
- Andante con espressione
- Scherzo: Allegro
- Finale: Sostenuto–Allegro non troppo e rubato

Franz Liszt
(1811–1886)

Hungarian Rhapsody No. 12 in C-sharp Minor

Yekwon Sunwoo appears by arrangement with:

The Cliburn

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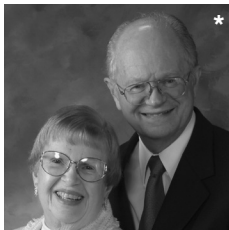
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PROGRAM NOTES

FRANZ SCHUBERT

Born January 31, 1797, in Alsergrund,

Vienna, Austria

Died November 19, 1828, in Vienna, Austria

Four Impromptus, D. 935, Op. 142

Despite illness, depression, and persistent financial troubles, the last five years of Schubert's life were remarkably productive: the song cycles *Die Schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise*, the *Symphony No. 9*, the last three piano sonatas, the great Quintet in C Major, and the two sets of Impromptus, D. 899, Op. 90, and D. 935, Op. 142 that we hear on this program. Both sets were composed in 1827, just a year before his death. Like most of his works, the Op. 142 Impromptus were not published within his lifetime. Heard as a set, the four Op. 142 Impromptus might suggest a grand sonata rather than a collection of disparate pieces. While they have infinite variety, there is also a unity to them that spells a certain wholeness of concept. Governing all is Schubert's glorious sense of song.

The declarative opening of the F Minor Impromptu, marked *Allegro moderato*, draws our attention and paves the way to the multiple themes that glisten throughout the work. Within these themes are quick harmonic shifts that evoke an emotional reaction from listeners. Why shifting from a major mode to a minor mode can cause this is one of the mysteries of music and an important part of Schubert's genius. He does it like no other. Additional Schubertian hallmarks in the F Minor Impromptu are the strong use of left-hand melody, rippling triplet figures offering accompaniment, great dynamic variation, and, as already mentioned, a sense of song. With Schubert, a simple five-note theme becomes

both heart-rending and monumental. Already in the work, too, is a sense of the variations that will dominate the third B-Flat Impromptu. To this complexity, Schubert gives a simple conclusion.

The theme of the second and briefer Impromptu in A-flat Major, marked *Allegretto*, is immediately put forward in a simple chorale-like statement that soon turns complex as it moves from the vertical to the horizontal. Harmonic shifts and dynamic changes lead to a rising tension that Schubert, once again, resolves simply. Despite the emotional impact of his music, Schubert is not given to overstatement.

The third Impromptu, marked *Andante* (Theme and Variations), is comparable in length to the first but structured differently. Here we meet variation form, another Schubert imprint and one that is challenging to the performer. The B-flat Impromptu opens with a simple statement of a theme that Schubert used in his incidental music to the play *Rosamunde* and in his A Minor String Quartet. The five variations then elaborate on that theme with an ever-increasing complexity. Here Schubert does not hold back on virtuosic display with his dramatic scale passages, but, in typical Schubert fashion, he returns to the spirit of the chorale-like opening and offers a sublime ending to the work.

If Schubert could ever be accused of showmanship, surely it is in the fourth Impromptu, appropriately marked *Allegro scherzando* with its element of humor. Here we have rippling chromatic scales, arpeggios, and trills employed in the freshest of ways. Schubert gives us a flashy ending with a sweeping glissando. Our emotions have been pulled to the darkest of points in the set, but, typical of Schubert, he leaves us smiling.

PERCY GRAINGER, ARRANGER

Born July 8, 1882, in Melbourne, Australia
Died February 20, 1961, in White Plains, New York
Ramble on the Last Love-Duet from
Der Rosenkavalier by

RICHARD STRAUSS

Born June 11, 1864, in Munich, Germany
Died September 8, 1949, in Garmisch-
Partenkirchen, Germany

Australian-born composer, arranger, and pianist Percy Grainger is well-known for his arrangements of other composers' works as noted here in his setting of the final love duet between Sophie and Octavian from Richard Strauss' famous comic opera, *Der Rosenkavalier*, first performed in Dresden on January 26, 1911. To undertake an arrangement of the brief but ecstatic duet for piano solo was quite a challenge, but Grainger accomplished it in a grand way. The beautiful sweeping arpeggios that Grainger lends to his adaptation are indeed pianistic yet do not lose the sense of Strauss' song. The piece does indeed ramble its way through an ecstatic keyboard expression of love quite comparable to Strauss' famous duet. It is considered to be one of Grainger's finest and most elaborate piano paraphrases. Since Grainger and Strauss admired each other's work, one can only assume that Strauss approved of Grainger's brilliant treatment of his duet. Grainger began his transcription in 1920 and completed it in 1922.

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born May 7, 1833, in Hamburg, Germany
Died April 3, 1897, in Vienna, Austria
Sonata No. 2 in F-sharp Minor, Op. 2

The *F-sharp Minor, Op. 2* Sonata is Brahms' first piano sonata, composed in November of 1853 and published the following year. Despite its numbering as Op. 2, it did precede the C Major Sonata listed as No. 1, Op. 1. Evidence states that it may have been performed for the first time on February 2, 1882 in Vienna.

The highly passionate nature of the Sonata might very well be inspired by Brahms' well-known admiration of Clara Schumann to whom the work is dedicated. To Romantic style, however, Brahms brought his honoring of Classical form. This combination is further revealed in the contrasts between many highly passionate statements and slower expressions that suggest Brahms' fascination with folk song. Heard in its entirety, the Sonata is a continuous contrast between these two effects even though each movement also has its individual stamp. The work is also marked by many virtuosic challenges which may account for its not being heard as often as we might expect.

The first movement offers a dramatic opening with demanding octave playing before a contrasting slower passage with beautiful arpeggios. The energico direction in the movement marking is especially evident. The second movement *Andante con espressione* is of a gentler nature but not lacking in deep expressiveness and growing passion. The third movement *Scherzo* reveals the happier third of Brahms, but the following Trio section returns us to the Brahms we expect. The final movement

begins in a sustained manner but does not conclude before numerous elaborations on its theme and dramatic effects such as widely extended trills. It is a combination of both the solemn and the ecstatic. In this impressive sonata, there seems to be nowhere that Brahms does not take us.

FRANZ LISZT

Born October 22, 1811, in Raiding, Austria
Died July 31, 1886, in Bayreuth, Germany
Hungarian Rhapsody No. 12 in C-sharp Minor

Liszt's two visits to Hungary in 1839 and 1840 inspired his 19 Hungarian Rhapsodies composed in two periods of his life, 1846 to 1853 and 1882 to 1885. In addition to five others, the No. 12 Rhapsody was arranged for orchestra by Franz Doppler with revisions by Liszt who also scored them for piano duet. Although he claimed inspiration from the Hungarian Gypsy bands, the

truth is that Liszt also used tunes from Hungarian composers such as Komel Ábrányi. Central to the scheme of the Rhapsodies is the concept of the Verbunkos, a Hungarian dance form used to recruit military troops. It would later be used by Bartók in his famous *Contrasts for Clarinet, Violin, and Piano*.

The Rhapsodies caught the contempt of Schumann and Chopin. Later on, Charles Rosen would speak of them as "the least respectable side of Liszt." This writer suggests that we abandon such controversial discussions and enjoy the *Rhapsody No. 12* for what it is: an unapologetic ten minutes of glorious and serious virtuosic display from its dramatic opening to its thrilling conclusion. Within those moments, the pianist is invited to exercise pianistic expressions that dazzle the listener. Be dazzled!

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PROFILE

Yekwon Sunwoo (piano), is the Gold Medalist of the Fifteenth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. 28-year-old Sunwoo has been hailed for “his total command over the instrument and its expressiveness” (*San Francisco Examiner*). A powerful and virtuosic performer, he also, in his own words, “strives to reach for the truth and pure beauty in music,” and hopes to convey those fundamental emotions to audiences.

Born in Anyang, South Korea, Sunwoo began learning piano at age eight. He gave both his recital and orchestra debuts in 2004 in Seoul before moving to the United States in 2005 to study with Seymour Lipkin at the Curtis Institute of Music. He earned his bachelor’s degree there, his master’s at The Juilliard School with Robert McDonald, and his artist diploma at the Mannes School of Music with Richard Goode. He currently studies under Bernd Goetzke in Hannover. Sunwoo credits each for their guidance in his artistic development and approach, and honored the late Mr. Lipkin by performing his cadenza during his Semifinal Round performance of the Mozart *Piano Concerto in C Major, K. 467*.

The first Korean to win Cliburn Gold, Sunwoo launched his debut season in 2017-18 with invitations to the Aspen, Grand Teton, and Duszynski International Music Festivals. Recitals will take him to Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, and Vancouver, and he undertakes a nine-city tour of the United States with the National Orchestra of Cuba in the spring. In Europe Sunwoo makes his United Kingdom concerto debut with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra under Cristian Macelaru, appears in the first full season at the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, and performs in Brussels, Copenhagen, Istanbul,

Madrid, Helsingborg, and across Germany. His appearances in Asia include those in Beirut, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and across South Korea.

Record label Decca Gold released *Cliburn Gold 2017* two weeks after his Cliburn win, which includes his award-winning performances of Ravel’s *La valse* and Rachmaninoff’s *Second Piano Sonata*.

In previous seasons, Sunwoo has performed as soloist with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra under Marin Alsop, The Juilliard Orchestra with Itzhak Perlman at Avery Fisher Hall, Houston Symphony Orchestra with James Feddeck, Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra with Leonard Slatkin and Nicholas McGegan, National Orchestra of Belgium, Sendai Philharmonic Orchestra, and others. He has appeared in recital in Hamarikyu Asahi Hall in Tokyo, Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall in London, Radio France and Salle Cortot in Paris, Kumho Art Hall in Seoul, and throughout South Korea, Germany, Switzerland, Prague, and Morocco.

An avid chamber musician, his partners have included the Jerusalem and Brentano String Quartets, violinists Benjamin Beilman and Ida Kafavian, cellists Edgar Moreau, Gary Hoffman, and Peter Wiley, and pianist Anne-Marie McDermott. He has toured Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Panama with the Kumho Asiana Cultural Foundation, performed for the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center’s Inside Chamber Music Lectures, and been invited to the Summit Music, Bowdoin International, and Toronto Summer Music Festivals.

In addition to the Cliburn Gold Medal, Sunwoo has won First Prizes at the 2015 International German Piano Award in Frankfurt, the 2014 Vendome Prize held at the Verbier Festival, the 2013 Sendai International Music Competition, and the 2012 William Kapell International Piano Competition.

A self-proclaimed foodie, Sunwoo enjoys finding pho in each city he visits and takes pride in his own homemade Korean soups.

VAN CLIBURN INTERNATIONAL PIANO COMPETITION

Winning the first Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow at the height of the Cold War in 1958 brought Van Cliburn unprecedented celebrity for an American concert pianist. Cliburn's international victory instilled a fresh sense of artistic pride in many Americans, while opening the door to a new era of cultural relations between East and West. The Van Cliburn International Piano Competition was established shortly thereafter to perpetuate Van Cliburn's unique legacy of demonstrating how classical music, in the hands of a master, has the appeal to reach across all borders.

At a dinner banquet in November 1958, Dr. Irl Allison, founder of the National Guild of Piano Teachers, passed a note to Grace Ward Lankford, co-founder of the Fort Worth Piano Teachers Forum. The note read, "Hold onto your seat, I have a startling announcement!" Standing before a crowd of 500, including Van Cliburn and his mother, Rildia Bee O'Bryan Cliburn, Dr. Allison announced his intention to offer a \$10,000 First Prize to be awarded by an international piano competition named in Cliburn's honor. The idea caught everyone (especially Van Cliburn) by

surprise, and immediately ignited the imagination and enthusiasm of music lovers and civic leaders throughout Fort Worth.

A small corps of volunteers began to raise funds, type labels, and lick envelopes as Lankford enlisted the support of an astonishing range of politicians, internationally-renowned composers, conductors, musicians, business leaders, and professional educators, in pursuit of what must have seemed an impossible goal: to create a world-class international piano competition in a city still affectionately known as "Cowtown." By 1961, the pieces were falling into place, and the Van Cliburn Foundation was officially chartered.

First held in 1962, the quadrennial Van Cliburn International Piano Competition quickly established itself as an event that inspires and engages the local community, while gracing the international stage. The Cliburn Competition is one of the few musical events in the world to arrange for competitors to stay with host families, often resulting in close, long-term relationships: this has resulted in southern hospitality becoming a singular trademark of the Cliburn Competition.