

HONENS PROGRAM NOTES

2019 HONENS FESTIVAL

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ABOUT THIS PROGRAM

I am very attracted to programs that combine older and newer music and observe their interaction. Do we notice similarities or contrasts? Does one style influence the impact of the other? It's like placing a Modigliani sculpture into a 16th century Loire castle. As it happens, I have neither a Modigliani nor a Loire castle. So, for the moment, I am having a great time putting together programs like *Bach Dialogues*.

The concept is simple—three works by Johann Sebastian Bach from the 18th century interspersed with works by David Fulmer and James Joslin from the 21st century. I don't have any specific theme or message. The match-making process is entirely visceral and intuitive. After all, it's a piano recital and I am not in a business of facts. My business is letting our imaginations roam (with no roaming charges, naturally) in every possible direction.

The three works by Bach are quite varied. The **Second Partita**, from the set of keyboard exercises, one very small percentage of music that was published in Bach's lifetime (in 1731) is a grand suite consisting of six movements, half of them rooted in instrumental forms (*Sinfonia, Rondeaux, and Capriccio*) and the other half from the dance world (*Allemande, Courante, and Sarabande*). The second work, with a rather melodramatic title (originally in Italian), **Capriccio on the Departure of a Beloved Brother** is a rare example of Bach's program music. What do I mean by that? Instrumental music is an abstract art. It is wordless and most of it has generic titles (sonata, quartet, prelude). Occasionally composers decide to be more specific about the narrative they are expressing through sounds; this capriccio is an example of that. Written when Bach was a teenager (most likely in 1704), its sections have rather elaborate titles such as *Friends Gather, Try to Dissuade Him from Departing, and They Picture the Dangers Which May Befall Him*. But fear not, the bright and happy *Fugue in Imitation of the Postillion's Horn* that ends the work tells us quite clearly that the journey was a success.

Now comes the part of intrigue that you've been waiting for! There is some dispute whether **Sarabanda con partite** was indeed written by J.S. Bach or not. We don't know much about it. It appeared by the end of 18th century from a handwritten manuscript. Since most of Bach's works come to us in other people's handwriting, that is not so unusual. The work is a set of virtuosic variations on a noble sarabande, both in compositional twists and turns that Bach puts it through and in its technical demands on the player.

Contemporary works in this program come from two gifted millennials—American David Fulmer and British James Joslin. Fulmer's abstract and whimsical essay with its suggestive title and Joslin's juxtaposition of the primal beat of two metronomes, pensive piano chords, and distant sounds of a music box are two distinctive and creative voices of our rich music scene today. Does Bach's music make us hear something different in the music of our time? Or vice versa? I am not sure, but let's find out together.

– Pedja Mužijević