



SENIOR RECITAL SERIES | SPRING 2025

Sunday, April 13, 2025, 3:00 PM

Taplin Auditorium

Kasey Shao '25

Piano

Senior Recital

About the Department of Music:

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PROGRAM

M. Ravel

1875 - 1937

Miroirs

I. Noctuelles

II. Oiseaux Tristes

IV. Alborada del gracioso

L.v. Beethoven

1770 - 1827

Eroica Variations, Op. 35

- Intermission -

J.s. Bach/E. Petri

1685 - 1750

1881 - 1962

Sheep May Safely Graze

G. Gershwin

1898 - 1937

Rhapsody in Blue

The use of photographic, video, or audio equipment is strictly prohibited. Please turn off or mute electronic devices for the duration of the performance.

PROGRAM NOTES

By Kasey Shao

M. Ravel -- Miroirs (1904-5)

Joseph Maurice Ravel, French pianist, composer, and orchestrator, was born in a small town in France, about 11 miles from Spain. In 1889, he was accepted to the Conservatoire de Paris as a piano student but made no remarkable progress and was expelled from the Conservatoire in 1895. Ravel then began focusing on composition and was readmitted to the Conservatoire as a composition student studying with Gabriel Fauré in 1897. He grew quickly as a composer, publishing notable pieces such as *Scheherezade*. Ravel was quite indifferent to audience and critic reception of his compositions and seemed to focus significantly more on the quality of his own works. He was heavily influenced by the French Symbolist movements and Impressionist painters, striving to create music that would represent the mundane objectiveness of his world. Interestingly, he also noted Mozart as a strong influence on his works, especially in his later Neoclassical era with pieces like the Piano Concerto in G Major.

In the early 1900s, Ravel and his fellow artistic outcasts formed an artistic society named “Les Apaches”, where they shared musical, literary, and philosophical ideas. It was at these meetings where Ravel and Debussy were documented to be talking about creating a work that would seem like pages torn out of a sketchbook, collections of ideas and representations of objects. Ravel completed *Miroirs* in 1905, and pianist Ricardo Viñes, who was a close friend of Ravel, gave the premiere performance in 1906. Each of the 5 movements of *Miroirs* is dedicated to a fellow member of Les Apaches.

“*Noctuelles*” (Night Moths) was dedicated to Leon-Paul Fargue, a French poet and essayist and one of Ravel’s closest friends. He was known for his stream-of-consciousness writing filled with detail, wit, and enlivening charisma. Ravel pays homage to his lifelong friend by turning his words into music. “*Noctuelles*” is based on a poem by Fargue of the same name, detailing the awkward, groping nature of the night creatures. Ravel creates a fluttering, atmospheric representation of the night critters, full of glistening details and charm, just present enough for one to catch a glimpse of the soft beauty.

“*Oiseaux Tristes*” (Sad Birds) was dedicated to Ricardo Viñes, who was known for his vast repertoire of both traditional and contemporary music. In addition to Ravel, he premiered works by Debussy, Satie, Falla, Albéniz, and Granados. Ravel described this movement as “birds lost in the torpor of a very dark forest during the hottest hours of the summer.” He portrays that exact image in his music, with static, longing coos of the birds, never ending, but never developing, creating an anxious, disjointed world.

“*Alborada del gracioso*” (The jester’s dawn-song) was dedicated to Michel-Dimitri Calvovoressi, a prominent music critic and musicologist. The Alborada is a morning song often sung to wake lovers and warn them of the approaching day. Ravel takes this theme to the extreme, finding playful, spicy ways to wake the lovers from their slumber with flourishes and an explosive finale.

L.v. Beethoven -- Eroica Variations (1802)

By 1802, Beethoven’s deafness was progressing quickly. In an attempt to come to terms with his condition, he moved to the small town of Heiligenstadt, outside of Vienna. Here, he wrote his now infamous letter, the Heiligenstadt Testament, in which he talked about both his suicidal ideations due to his growing deafness and his defiance to continue composing. Although this letter was never sent to his brothers and was only discovered after his death, the letter marks a turning point in Beethoven’s compositional journey. Historians often call this period the “heroic” period, marked by pieces like the Third Symphony, the *Waldstein* and *Appassionata* piano sonatas, and the Violin Concerto, all much grander and bolder in scale and prowess than his earlier works. The Eroica theme was a staple of Beethoven’s works during this period, featured in the *Contredanses* (1801), the Third Symphony (1803), his ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus* (1801), and, of course, this set of variations and fugue (1802). This variation set is quite inventive; whereas typically the theme is presented first before embarking on a set of variations, Beethoven introduces the bass line first (something Rachmaninoff would also do in his *Paganini Variations*) and presents three variations of the bass line, marked A due, A tre, and A quattro, before the theme comes in. From this, he embarks on an incredible journey through each variation, utilizing the full artistic power of the piano. From intricate minor iterations to blazingly bold passages, Beethoven is truly pushing the theme to its pianistic limits. The second to last variation is a

massive fantasia-like movement. His extremely rare marking of Largo is used here, and he creates an expansive space, letting imagination fuel dramatic runs and cadenzas. He then ends with a complex and lively fugue, followed by yet another variation before reaching a boisterous conclusion.

Bach/arr. Petri -- Sheep may safely graze (1713/1944)

Sheep may safely graze (Schafe können sicher weiden) was originally composed as a solo soprano aria for Cantata 208, better known as the Hunt Cantata. As one of the more prominent court composers, Bach was often called upon to write secular music to celebrate birthdays, name and accession days, or academic ceremonies. Cantata 208 was composed for the birthday of Duke Christian Weissenfels in 1713 based on a text by poet Salomo Franck in the Weimar court. Since then, several arrangements have been published, including a big band version by Grainger and a synthesized version by Wendy Carlos as a part of her groundbreaking “Switched-On Bach II” album. The Petri transcription is perhaps the most well-known piano transcription. As a student of Busoni, Egon Petri learned Busoni’s arrangement techniques and actually wrote several of the Bach arrangements for Busoni. The pastoral quality of the piece lulls us with its rocking thirds, creating an air of absolute calm, security, and reassurance that we, like the sheep, can safely graze.

G. Gershwin -- Rhapsody in Blue (1924)

The *Rhapsody in Blue* is perhaps one of the most well-known pieces in the piano repertoire, beloved by musicians and non-musicians alike. Gershwin was just 26 when he wrote this piece. In late 1923, Gershwin was in conversation with Paul Whiteman, the leader of one of the most popular bands in America in the 1920s and 30s, about preparations for Whiteman’s show, “An Experiment in Modern Music”. In addition to marking the anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s birthday, the concert would showcase jazz as a sophisticated art form in the likes of classical music. Surprisingly, Gershwin only discovered that he was officially composing a “jazz concerto” for the concert through a newspaper article his brother happened to read a couple of weeks before the concert was set to take place. Gershwin went to Whiteman to tell him he couldn’t possibly complete the work while he was working on his musical, but Whiteman convinced Gershwin with the promise that he wouldn’t have to orchestrate the

piece, just present the piano solo. While on the train to Boston, Gershwin came up with the idea of the Rhapsody, saying:

“It was on the train, with its steely rhythms, its rattle-ty bang ... I suddenly heard - and even saw on paper - the complete construction of the rhapsody, from beginning to end. I heard it as a sort of musical kaleidoscope of America, of our vast melting pot, of our unduplicated national pep, of our metropolitan madness.”

Within 10 days, a two-piano score of the Rhapsody in Blue, a piece that would cement Gershwin's place in the history of American classical music, was completed. While working, Gershwin had wanted to title the piece American Rhapsody. After visiting a gallery of James McNeil Whistler paintings, his brother, Ira, suggested the new title Rhapsody in Blue. The piece premiered on February 12, 1924, with Gershwin at the piano. It received roaring applause and ultimately became so popular that Gershwin later published a solo piano version.

ABOUT

Kasey Shao, 2024 Gilmore Young Artist and Steinway Young Artist, began piano at the age of 6. She made her orchestral debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Yannick Nezet Seguin as the first place winner of the 2015 Albert M. Greenfield Concerto Competition at the age of 12. Kasey has since won the top prizes in the New York International Piano Competition, Gina Bachauer International Piano Competition, Hilton Head International Piano Competition, Young Concert Artists International Auditions, and the Princeton University Concerto Competition. She was the Gold Medal Winner in the Classical Music Division of the 2020 National YoungArts Week. Kasey has been recognized as a Chopin Scholar for four consecutive years. She was a Cincinnati MacDowell Artist Grant recipient, Feltsman Scholarship winner, and a two-time Matinee Musicale Nancy F. Walker Memorial Scholarship winner.

Notable performances include at the Richardson Hall at Princeton University, Verizon Hall of the Kimmel Center, the Weill Recital Hall of Carnegie Hall, Whitney Hall of the Kentucky Center, the New World Center, the Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center, Merkin Hall of the Kaufman Performing Arts Center. As a Gilmore Young Artist, Kasey recently completed a solo tour in the western Michigan area, featuring 6 solo concerts and a concerto appearance with the Jackson Symphony. She has also performed with PUO, Sinfonia, the Louisville Orchestra, the Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra, and the Blue Ash Montgomery Symphony Orchestra.

Kasey has always been an avid community server and strives to find ways in which classical music can be used as a medium through which education can be made more accessible. She is currently the Interim Director and Fellow of Trenton Youth Orchestra as a part of Trenton Arts at Princeton. In addition, she is a Learning Consultant with the McGraw Center, a Peer Academic Advisor with Rocky College, and an Application Peer Advisor for HPA.

Kasey is a Music Major focusing on composition with minors in Piano Performance and Engineering Biology. She studies with Prof. Margeret Kampmeier. Her former teachers are Drs. Ran Dank, Qing Jiang, Yuxi Wang, Amy Yang, and Mrs. Chui-Tze Lin.
