

Presents



Valentina Lisitsa The Queen of Rachmaninoff

Sunday, April 18, 2021 Amelia Plantation Chapel | 36 Bowman Road | Fernandina Beach, FL

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PROGRAM

VALENTINA LISITSA- Piano

April 18, 2021

Variations on A Theme Of Corelli, Op. 42

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

(1873 - 1943)

Four Scherzi

Scherzo No. 1 in B minor, Op. 20 Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 31 Scherzo No. 3 in C-sharp minor, Op. 39 Scherzo No. 4 in E major, Op. 54

FREDERIC CHOPIN

(1810 - 1849)

Polonaise-Fantasy No. 7 in A-flat major, Op. 61

FREDERIC CHOPIN

(1810 - 1849)

Program Subject to Change

YAMAHA Grand piano generously provided by Keyboard Connection Pianos & Organs

VALENTINA LISITSA Piano

Valentina Lisitsa is not only the first «YouTube star» of classical music; more importantly, she is the first classical artist to have converted her Internet success into a global concert career in the principal venues of Europe, the USA, South America and Asia.



Washington Post Online wrote: "It's striking that her playing is relatively straightforward. 'Straightforward' is an inadequate term for virtuosity. She does not tart the music up. She does not seek to create a persona, much less impose one on what she is playing. She offers readings that are, when you penetrate through the satin curtains of the soft playing and the thunder of the loud playing, fundamentally honest and direct. You feel you're getting a strong performer but also a sense of what the piece is like rather than of how Lisitsa plays it. I was impressed, sometimes dazzled and sometimes even taken aback by the ferocity of her fortissimos. And she is also a delicate, sensitive, fluid player who can ripple gently over the keys with the unctuous smoothness of oil."

Valentina posted her first video on the internet platform YouTube in 2007, a recording of the Etude op. 39/6 by Sergei Rachmaninoff. The views increased staggeringly; more videos followed. The foundation stone of a socialnetwork career unparalleled in the history of classical music was laid. Thanks to an unwavering dedication towards her audience and personal approach to videos, her YouTube channel now records over 550.000 subscribers and 147 million views with an average 75.000 views per day.

VALENTINA LISITSA Piano continued

This singular success has led Valentina to perform at some of the world's most prestigious stages which included a spectacular recital in London's Royal Albert Hall before an audience of 8000 in June 2012 that sealed her international breakthrough. Listeners had the chance to vote online in advance for their preferred programme - a form of audience participation that has become one of Valentina's trademarks. DECCA gave Lisitsa an exclusive artist contract, releasing the live recording of the Royal Albert Hall concert only one week later on CD and DVD. Since then, Valentina has released a further 9 albums for Decca, including every piano concerto by Sergei Rachmaninoff, works by Chopin, Philipp Glass, Liszt and Scriabin as well as CD «Love Story - Piano Themes from the Cinema's Golden Age» with major film music from the 1920s. In February 2019, for the 125th anniversary of Tchaikovsky's death, Decca released a special CD-Box Set: the most complete collection of works for solo piano by Tchaikovsky with some of the works having never been recorded before.

The 2019/2020 season sees Valentina perform recitals in Istanbul, Vienna, Zurich, Rome Geneva, Essen and Brussels and a return to Madison and Amelia Island Chamber Music Festivals in the USA. She also makes her debut with Philharmonia Orchestra under Alpesh Chauhan performing Shostakovich Piano Concerto No 2 and returns Fort Wayne Philharmonic with a programme including Piano Themes from Cinema's Golden Age and tours New Zealand with New Zealand Symphony Orchestra performing Prokofiev Piano Concerto No. 3.

Highlights of the past seasons include amongst others a sold-out concert at Auditorio Nacional with the Spanish National Orchestra, where Valentina played all piano concertos and the Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini by Sergej Rachmaninoff in one evening. She has also performed at Berlin Philharmonie, Théâtre des Champs Elysées in Paris, the Great Hall of Moscow Conservatory, Wigmore Hall in London, Prinzregententheater in Munich, Carnegie Hall in New York, NCPA in Beijing, Teatro Major in Bogota and at festivals including the BBC Proms, Dvorak Prague Festival and Musica Mundi Chamber Festival in Brussels. In recent seasons, Valentina performed as a soloist with London Symphony Orchestra, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, Orchestre Philharmonique de Liège, Staatskapelle Dresden, Orquesta Sinfónica de Castilla y León, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, and Seoul Philharmonic.

Born in Kiev, Ukraine, Valentina started learning the piano at age three and gave her first public recital a year later. She graduated from Kiev Conservatory subsequently moving to the United States and giving her debut performance in New York in 1995. Now Valentina shares her time between Moscow and Rome.



SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873-1943) Variations on A Theme of Corelli, Op. 42

"The great Russian artists were immersed in gloom, but they had the strength to accept it and rest themselves through this gloom, for they believed in the light."

~ Alexander Blok, Russian poet and writer

The enigmatic composer Sergei Rachmaninoff was extremely introverted and private. In over one thousand letters of personal correspondence very little is revealed about the inner workings of this man. He dreaded interviews and his daughter Irina Wolkonsky overheard him to say: "all I feel and experience is told far better, more clearly and thoughtfully in my compositions." Composer Igor Stravinsky described Rachmaninoff as a "six-and-a-half-foot-tall scowl."

He was born in north-west Russia to an aristocratic family on April 1, 1873. His earliest piano lessons were given to him by his Mother, a trained pianist. He studied at the Conservatory in St. Petersburg and graduated from the piano class of the Moscow Conservatory in 1891. He sight-read brilliantly and transposed pieces effortlessly. His hands could span 12 piano keys from the tip of his little finger to the tip of his thumb. Possessing a colossal and all-encompassing memory, he is said to have been able to hear a symphony once and be able to play it back the next day, the next year or the next decade. Quoting Harold Schonberg: "He had the kind of musical mind that automatically absorbs sound impressions or sight impressions. From ear and eye to brain and fingers was an instantaneous process."

To explain his compositional creative process he said: "I hear the music in my head. When the music stops, I write it down." In 1897 his ability to compose ceased. His First Symphony in D minor was performed at a Russian Symphony Concert with a said-to-be inebriated conductor, Alexander Glazunov. It received scathing reviews resulting in a nervous breakdown for Rachmaninoff. Unable to compose for three years, his breakthrough came when he underwent successful hypnotic treatments with Dr. Nikolay Dahl.

His Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op. 42 was his only original work for solo piano after leaving Russia in 1917. He began composing it on May 27, 1931 at his villa, Le Pavillion, in Clairefontaine, France. The inspiration for his Variations is said to have originated from hearing friend, colleague and violinist Fritz Kreisler perform Arcangelo Corelli's *Violin Sonata in D minor, Op. 5 No. 12.* The theme, used by other composers as well, is based on an old Portuguese melody known as *La Foila*.

Rachmaninoff performed its premiere on October 12, 1931 in Montreal. His timidity and insecurity are evident in a letter to Nikolai Medtner dated December 21, 1931. It reads: "I have played [my variations] about 15 times but only one of those performances was good... Not even once have I played them in their entirety I was guided by the audience's coughing: When the coughing increased, I would skip the next variation. When there was no coughing, I would play them in order. At one concert, in a small town, I don't remember where, the coughing was so bad that I only played 10 variations (out of 20) My own record was 18 variations (in New York)." His ambivalence can be seen on the score's markings: Variations 11, 12, and 19 are accompanied by the note "this variation may be omitted."

Rachmaninoff presents the theme in D minor. The tempo marking is Andante and the dynamic marking is p (softly) to be played cantabile, in a singing manner. Both hands play in the treble clef in the medium high register of the keyboard to state the four voice austere, pure and desolate theme. With each unique variation *La Folia* becomes creatively and uniquely Rachmaninoff's.

His *Variations, Op.42* is dedicated to friend violinist Fritz Kreisler.

Once while accompanying the famous violinist, the music "stopped" in Kreisler's head as the two performed. Lost and panic stricken in the music Kreisler whispered to his accompanist, Rachmaninoff: "Where are we?" The reply: "Carnegie Hall."

FREDERIC CHOPIN (1810-1849) Four Scherzi Polonaise-Fantasy No. 7 in A-flat major, Op. 61

"He confided....those inexpressible sorrows to which the pious give vent in the communication with their Maker. What they never say except upon their knees, he said in his palpitating compositions."

~ composer Franz Liszt summarizing Chopin's writing

Robert Schumann, composer and critic, wrote: "It was an unforgettable picture to see Chopin sitting at the piano like a clairvoyant, lost in his dreams; to see how his vision communicated itself through his playing, and how at the end of each piece, he had the sad habit of running one finger over the length of the plaintive keyboard, as though to tear himself forcibly away from his dream."

Frederic Chopin was the second child born to Justina and Nicholas Chopin. Their home in Warsaw was one of harmony and culture which provided "a felicitous setting." Quoting historians Milton Cross and David Ewen: "He was a sensitive, imaginative, and happy child, with an infectious sense of humor, who indulged as eagerly in childish pranks and mimicry as in music, in which he demonstrated exceptional interest and talent from earliest childhood. He was continually found at the piano, trying to produce pleasing melodies and harmonies. When a melody was particularly pleasing he would suddenly burst into tears."

At age fifteen he entered his father's school for academic studies and also studied piano with Josef Elsner, director of the Warsaw Conservatory. Elsner, understanding the delicate, sensitive nature of his pupil, allowed the young Chopin great latitude in expressing his artistic nature. "It was largely due to Elsner's sympathy and understanding that Chopin was able to evolve a personal style of writing almost from the very beginnings of his creative career -a style already thoroughly recognizable in the mazurkas, nocturnes, sonatas, and variations he was writing."

Leaving Poland in 1830 and traveling through Austria and Germany, Chopin eventually settled in France. Forever devoted to his homeland, he never lost his Polish accent nor mastered the French language. While in Paris he flourished as a teacher and preferred performing before private audiences rather than in a crowded concert hall. It was in the fall of 1836 at the salon of Franz Liszt's mistress, Countess d'Agoult that Chopin was introduced to the French novelist Amandine Aurora Dupin also known as George Sand. She wrote using a man's name, dressed in men's clothing and smoked cigars. The love affair between composer and writer was intense and stormy.

Chopin composed mainly with only the piano in mind and within his lifetime he composed 21 nocturnes, 58 mazurkas, 19 waltzes, 27 etudes, 17 polonaises, 2 piano concertos, and 26 preludes.

Chopin's Four *Scherzi* were composed as individual works at four different times. Translated from both the German and the Italian, the word scherzo means "joke." Beethoven's Scherzi, good humored and jesting, along with Mendelssohn's mischievous and lighthearted examples are in sharp contrast with Chopin's compositions bearing the name. Quoting author Donald G. Gislason, Ph.D, the Scherzi of Chopin are "big-boned works, projecting pianistic power and lyrical intensity with a directness and confidence very much at odds with the popular image of Chopin as the delicate performer of perfumed salon pieces."

The first of these four, the Scherzo No. 1 in B minor, Op. 20 was composed in 1835. Chopin was in Austria during an unsettling time of political unrest in Hapsburg. Keeping his Polish political views to himself in conservative Austria, he was most worried about his family and Warsaw. He considered returning to Poland to join the cause but ultimately retreated to Vienna. George Sand said of his longing for home: "Chopin is always leaving -tomorrow." But in Vienna, he became more homesick, grew more depressed and was earning very

little money due to his unpopularity with the Viennese. He wrote to his good friend Jan Matuszynski in December 1830: "but on coming home I vent my rage on the piano...I have a good cry, read, look at things, have a laugh, get into bed, blow out my candle and dream always about all of you." Vacillating on whether to move to London or Munich or Milan, he ultimately landed in Paris in 1831. Here his popularity soared. It is difficult to know the exact date of the *Scherzo No. 1 in B minor*, but it was published in 1835. It reveals his frustrations. It also incorporates a lyrical theme quoting the Polish carol-lullaby "Lulaże Juzuniu" ("Sleep Baby Sleep")...something rarely done by Chopin. In a review of the Scherzo in B minor, composer Robert Schumann said: "How will gravity array itself, if wit is already cloaked so darkly?"

The Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 31 was composed in 1837. Early in that year, Chopin contracted influenza. The epidemic swept Paris and this proved to be a most unsettled time for the composer. His hopes of marrying Countess Teresa Wodzińska's daughter, Maria, had been dashed and he was being pursued and pressured by George Sand to accept an invitation to her country home at Nohant. Rather than being drawn into a relationship with Sand at that time and accepting her requests, he traveled with pianist and publisher Camille Pleyel to London. Chopin found London "gloomy" and returned to Paris in July. From October to December he found comfort in composing. During this period he produced the second set of etudes, the Impromptu in A-flat Major, Op. 29, the four Opus 30 mazurkas, the Opus 32 two Nocturnes and the Scherzo No. 2 in B flat minor. This A-B-A large scale work is dedicated to his student Countess Adèle de Fürstenstein.

The Scherzo No. 3 in C-sharp minor, Op. 39 was composed in 1839. Chopin's health had been declining and George Sand thought it best for the couple and her two children to forego the damp winter in France. Chopin sold the rights to his Twenty-four Preludes to publisher Camille Pleyel to help finance their trip to Majorca. Upon his arrival to the sunny Mediterranean stocked with his manuscript paper, he wrote to friend Julius Fontana: "I am at Palma, among palms, cedars, cactuses, olive trees, oranges, figs, pomegranates, etc. The sky is turquoise, the sea like emeralds, the air as fresh as heaven. A superb life! I am close to what is beautiful. I feel better." But, ultimately, this trip was "a complete disaster" as his health was much poorer when they finally returned to Nohant. He and George Sand were not warmly welcomed in Majorca, he contracted a severe case of bronchitis which worsened into consumption and he suffered a serious hemorrhage on the cargo ship as they returned to France. And yet, despite his worsening health, he composed the third and most dramatic of the four scherzi. Using two vastly contrasting musical elements, he combines a passionate and stormy theme with one that is most graceful and radiant.

The Scherzo No.4 in E Major, Op.54 is the happiest of the four and the only one written in a major key. It is hearing an untroubled Chopin even though it was composed between 1842-43 after the death of his good friend Jan Matuszynski. A healthier Chopin was enjoying the summer at Nohant in 1842 and produced the Impromptu in G-flat Major, Op. 51, the F minor Ballade, the Polonaise in A-flat Major as well as the Scherzo No. 4 in E Major, Op. 54. Quoting music historian Hebert Weinstock the Scherzo No. 4 is "happiness made manifest. There is a sense in which the sunny notion of the E Major Scherzo is aimless-by which I do not mean that it is formless, but that it seems spontaneous and lacks portentousness....It is rich in invention and pleasant to play, and generous with intensely interesting structural and harmonic ideas."

The Polonaise-Fantasy in A flat major, Op. 61 was completed in August 1846. It carries characteristics of a nocturne which are blended with the rhythms of a polonaise. Before its completion Chopin confessed: "I'd like to finish something that I don't yet know what to call." Franz Liszt summarized it as a composition describing "somebody caught in an ambush and surrounded on all sides" while another critic said "the piano speaks here in a language not previously known." It took almost a century before it gained popularity and was embraced. Seen as "a wonderful poetical vision expressed in the language of a grand pianistic poem" Arthur Hedley, British musicologist said: "the spirit that breathes" [in Chopin's polonaises is] pride in the past, lamentation for the present, hope for the future." Today this piece is revered as one of the more complex, mystifying yet rewarding pieces of romantic literature for keyboard.



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The Amelia Island Chamber Music Festival's threefold mission is to:

- 1. Present the world's greatest musical artists in chamber music concerts of classical and alternative genres for diverse audiences;
- 2. Offer music education to concert attendees, students, and aspiring young musicians; and
- 3. Promote local businesses and tourism by attracting music lovers from Nassau County, Northeast Florida and beyond.



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Sunday, April 25, 2021	Scherzando 20th Season Celebration 3 pm and 7 pm Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island
Saturday, May 8, 2021	JB Scott's Swingin' Allstars featuring vocalist Lisa Kelly 1 pm Main Beach
Saturday, May 22, 2021	Peter and the Wolf 11 am and 2 pm Amelia Community Theatre
Sunday, May 23, 2021	Balsam Range 3 pm and 7 pm Sadler Ranch
Thursday, June 3, 2021	The Dover Quartet with Bassist Edgar Meyer 3 pm and 7 pm Amelia Baptist Church
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