



Sunday Afternoon Classics

Thomas Dawkins, *piano*



September 28, 2008 at 2:00pm



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Chaconne in d minor, BWV 1004

J.S. Bach
transcribed by Johannes Brahms

Sonata in c minor, op. 13 *Pathétique*

Ludwig van Beethoven

I. Grave – Allegro di molto e con brio
II. Adagio cantabile
III. Rondo. Allegro

— *Intermission* —

Andante favori in F, WoO 56

Ludwig van Beethoven

Variations on *Unser dummer Pöbel meint*
from Glück's *Pilger von Mekka* KV 455

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Isoldes Liebestod from *Tristan und Isolde*

Richard Wagner
transcribed by Franz Liszt

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Program Notes

It is interesting how music draws itself together into a coherent whole when you sit down to make a program. I had some ideas when I started to put this recital together and when it was finished, I noticed how interconnected the whole thing really is. Both the first and last pieces are transcriptions of one great composer's work by another, the last two pieces are music from the opera. The centerpieces of the program are Beethoven, since there is little that any pianist can ask for which Beethoven does not give.

The first work on the program is Bach's exquisite Chaconne from his second partita for solo violin. This piece has been transcribed many times, with the most popular piano transcription by Ferruccio Busoni. However, Busoni takes the intricate architecture and careful planning of the Bach and turns it into an almost gaudy concert showpiece, where Brahms' transcription was actually intended as an etude. The arrangement can be played with just the left hand, but I prefer to play it with both hands in a concert to allow the piano to assume an organ-like sonority in places. Consequently there are a few passages in which I add notes to fill out harmonies that would be unplayable with one hand.

Like nearly all of the movements in Bach's suites and partitas, the Chaconne is a dance, a fairly slow one in 3/4 time, characterized by a repeating chord progression, in this case one that is played sixty-four times. The first thirty-two variations are in d minor, increasing in ornamentation and virtuosity, but at the exact half point of the piece, Bach shifts to D Major and makes the variations much more simple, for twenty variations an oasis of calm in an otherwise highly wrought piece. The fifty-third variation brings back d minor and the piece ends the way it began, thus the one movement forms a kind of cycle of its own.

The *Grande Sonate Pathétique* may be considered an important turning point in Beethoven's piano writing, his first mature composition in c minor, the dark and menacing key he used for the Fifth Symphony. It is the eighth of thirty-two piano sonatas, and adheres to traditional classical form. The first movement begins with a slow introduction reminiscent of the French overtures that begin baroque suites before launching into the Allegro. Before the development section as well as before the very end of the movement, this opening material is reprised. The main themes of the Allegro are sweeping, virtuosic, and full of dynamic contrast.

The second movement is the opposite of the first, slow and lyrical with the melody in a vocal style; it would not be a stretch to call it a kind of aria and Beethoven would give this name to a few slow movements in his late works. The third movement is a rondo of fairly standard proportion in the form A-B-A-C-A-B-A. The four statements of theme A are slightly varied from each other (in one the left hand takes what had been the right hand's material, for instance), the two B sections are in contrasting keys, and the middle C section is a very different episode. After the final statement of theme A, there is a short dramatic coda.

Beethoven's *Andante favori* is thought to have been written to be the slow movement for the C Major piano sonata op. 53, which has come to be called the *Waldstein*. The movement was taken out in favor of a shorter slow movement which serves as an introduction to the lengthy (and highly unusual) Rondo, and now stands as an independent work. It is typical of Beethoven's mid-to-late slow movements, with a kind of yearning quality and a series of variations interspersed with episodes of different thematic material.

Opera has been a popular art form for the public since soon after its creation, but a problem has always been how to get it into the concert hall or the home. To this end, various arrangements of opera arias and scenes in the form of paraphrases, transcriptions, or variations were written by the greatest composers, often to take advantage of the familiarity of an already popular tune. Mozart's variations on an arietta from Glück's *Pilger von Mekka* (The Pilgrim from Mecca) was written in 1784, fourteen years after the opera was brought to Vienna in a German translation (the original title for the Paris production was *Les pèlerins de la Mecque*), and is a series of ten embellishments on a fairly simple theme. There are certain "stock" variations that are expected of a classical composer, such as turning the major theme into a minor key, a slow and highly decorated variation, and a final variation with an extended coda. This particular piece was popular enough to be orchestrated by Tchaikovsky in his fourth suite for orchestra which he called *Mozartiana*, along with two early dances and the late choral motet *Ave Verum Corpus*.

Liszt's very literal transcription of the final scene from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* was written and published only two years after the opera's premiere and reached many parts of Europe long before the opera itself did. It is for this reason that Liszt's title for this scene — *Isoldes Liebestod* (Isolde's Love-Death) — is still used instead of Wagner's *Verklärung*

Transfiguration). To introduce the scene, Liszt extracts the orchestral accompaniment from four bars in the climax of the title characters' love duet in Act II (on the words *sehrend verlanges Liebestod*, meaning "longed-for love-death.") Unlike most of Liszt's operatic transcriptions for piano, this piece adheres closely to the orchestral score and if anything makes even more out of the passionate emotions and colors of Wagner's orchestration. — TBD

About the Artist

A versatile musician who plays numerous instruments including piano, harpsichord, organ, oboe, English horn, bassoon, contrabassoon, and timpani, Thomas Dawkins is also a classically trained bass-baritone soloist. He graduated *magna cum laude* in music with Highest Honors from Brandeis University where he was the first recipient of the Ira Gershwin Prize for excellence in musical performance.

As a winner of three concerto competitions, he has performed as a solo pianist with the New England Philharmonic, the Longy School of Music, and the Brandeis University Orchestra, as well as soloist with the Salem Philharmonic Orchestra. He has done much work as a collaborative pianist with many local artists, both singers and instrumentalists, including recitals and masterclasses at the Longy School of Music, the New England Conservatory, MIT, Brandeis University, and Wellesley College.

He has sung as a bass-baritone soloist with several local choirs including the Masterworks Chorale, Paul Madore Chorale, and the Master Singers of Lexington, and is a member of Boston's Handel & Haydn Society chorus, as well as being an alum of the Tanglewood Festival Chorus.

He is the organist and choir director for the Congregational Church of Harvard, UCC, and works as an accompanist and vocal coach privately and at the Longy School of Music in Cambridge. In addition, he is attempting to be the first person to sit in every section of the Concord Orchestra, having already checked off keyboard (piano, celesta), percussion, woodwinds (bassoon, contrabassoon, saxophone), and strings (viola).

Dedication

In 1907, Tom's grandfather, Norbert Eisenstein, was born in Vienna, Austria, and Tom's grandmother, Dorothy Brian Dawkins, had a double cousin named Donna Brian who was born in Massachusetts. We thought that grandpa Norbert did pretty well when he died in 1997 at the age of 90, but Donna lived until a few months ago to the remarkable age of 101. Both grandpa Norbert and cousin Donna were champions of Tom's musical career, attending his recitals while they were able, then collecting audio tapes, then video tapes, then CDs of Tom's performances.

The last time grandpa Norbert ever sat up from his recumbent wheelchair was to take a closer look at his pianist grandson playing timpani for Beethoven's 5th Symphony, and cousin Donna spent much of her last year of life listening to Tom's tapes and CDs, in order from Kindergarten to the present-day; likely the last performance she heard from him was his singing in the chorus of Handel's *Messiah* with the Handel & Haydn Society at Symphony Hall last December.

In her 60s, Donna Brian married Paul Gropp, a German retired from teaching at Phillips Exeter Academy. On the wall right next to Donna's chair, for the last many years, was a photo of Tom playing in a 1989 piano recital at Phillips Exeter Academy, he was nine years old.

This program of German composers is a tribute to all of Tom's ancestors, from his grandfather Norbert's mother Frieda who is buried in the same Viennese cemetery as Beethoven, to his artist grandmother Dorothy and his poet grandfather Forrest, and ultimately to Donna Brian Gropp, who one holiday brought Tom her favorite piece to play for her, the Wagner that closes the program today. — DED

Mr. Dawkins is very grateful for the knowledge imparted to him by his two piano teachers: the late Mary R. Johnson and Shaylor Lindsay.