

Except for nine orchestral works and a few vocal and chamber pieces, Alexander Scriabin's compositional output was confined to works for solo piano. His early works, such as the *Nocturne in A-flat, Op. 1*, the *Valse in F Minor*, and the *Sonata-fantaisie*, were obviously influenced by Chopin. Scriabin began expressing himself in an original manner in his later compositions through a new harmonic approach that he labeled "mystic chords." This "new sound" allowed him to drift further and further into a state of spiritualism and became a vehicle for asserting his theosophical theorem. His nine sonatas can be grouped into periods that elucidate his musical and spiritual ascendancy, and the *Sonata No. 5, Op. 53*, is the first to dissolve several movements into a single one. According to writer Leonard Altman, "Scriabin's original harmonic plan begins to make itself felt [in this sonata], and a new 'diabolic' element, derived from Liszt but made more esoteric and personal, quickly gives one the feeling of existing on the edge of some half-seen and awe-inspiring realm. [The] sonata discards the usual formal division into movements, [and] its excitement and its ecstasy make it a welcome addition to the catalogue of [piano music]."

A noteworthy Spanish composer from the Catalan region, Federico Mompou went to Paris in 1911 to continue his studies. He spent twenty years there, taking piano lessons from Ferdinand Motte-Lacroix and studying composition and harmony under Marcel Samuel-Rousseau. Mompou employed some unusual compositional techniques, such as the dropping of key signatures and bar lines, profuse use of the pedal, and the insertion of accidentals (flats, sharps, and natural signs). His *Cançons i dansas (Songs and Dances)* comprise twelve works written over a period of more than forty years (1921–1962). Their direct relation to the sumptuous folklore of Catalonia is evidenced in their full intensity and sonority. The seventh *Cançion i danza*, said to have been a favorite of Francis Poulenc (1899–1963), consists of a quiet atmospheric song that is followed by a dance of similar reflection and an unusual contrapuntal finale.

The loveliness of Chopin's *Nocturne, Op. 27, No. 2*, appears to be consistent with the presumption that he wrote it as he was planning to marry his beloved Maria Wodzinska (the marriage never materialized). The work spurts forth a seamless lyrical melody, born of a single theme. It incorporates the use of thirds and sixths in an expression that is reminiscent of a love scene from the operatic world of Bellini, whose music Chopin adored. As described by James Huneker (1857–1921), an American writer on music: "It is a song of the sweet summer of two souls, for there is obvious meaning in the duality of voices."

The *Scherzo No. 3 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 39*, written in Majorca, Spain, is the most inspiring and poignant of Chopin's four works in this genre. Marked *presto con fuoco*, it is shadowy and reflective and reveals Chopin, the artisan. Bold, adventurous harmonies make the work at once virile and personal. It is enhanced at the outset with prolonged unbridled octaves, after which the first of two contrasting sections simmers in a fitful play of agitation. The second contrasting section, marked *meno mosso*, is in D-flat major. It contains chorale figures that are cleverly contrived and judiciously placed, followed immediately by a cascade of jewel-like arpeggios. After alternating the first section with two trios in the format ABABA, Chopin provides a demonic coda to close the work in the bright key of C-sharp major.

Program notes by Elmer Booze

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed.

For the convenience of concertgoers the Garden Café remains open until 6:30 p.m.

Selections from concerts at the Gallery can be heard on the second Sunday of each month at 9:00 p.m. on WGMS, 103.5 FM.

The Fifty-ninth Season of

THE WILLIAM NELSON CROMWELL and
F. LAMMOT BELIN CONCERTS

National Gallery of Art



2388th Concert

THOMAS SCHUMACHER, *pianist*

Sunday Evening, 10 June 2001
Seven O'clock
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

PROGRAM

Johannes Brahms
(1833–1897)

Four Ballades
Op. 10 (1854)

No. 1 in D Minor
No. 2 in D Major
No. 3 in B Minor
No. 4 in B Major

Muzio Clementi
(1752–1832)

Sonata No. 2 in F-sharp Minor
Op. 26 (1791)

Allegro con espressivo
Adagio patetico
Presto

Alexander Scriabin
(1872–1915)

Sonata No. 5
Op. 53 (1907)

Allegro; impetuoso con stravaganza

INTERMISSION

Federico Mompou
(1893–1987)

Cançon i dansa VII
from Cançons i dansas
(1921–1962)

Frédéric Chopin
(1810–1849)

Nocturne in D-flat Major
Op. 27, No. 2 (1835)
Scherzo in C-sharp Minor
Op. 39 (1839)

Thomas Schumacher's career as a performer and teacher has spanned four decades. He has appeared extensively throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and the Far East in recitals and with major orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, the National Symphony, the Los Angeles Symphony, the Toronto Symphony, the Warsaw Philharmonic, and the Tokyo Philharmonic. Venues in which he has played include Town Hall, Avery Fischer Hall, and Carnegie Hall in New York City, Orchestra Hall in Chicago, and Constitution Hall and the National Gallery in Washington. Born in Montana, where he received his early training, Schumacher continued his studies in New York at the Manhattan School of Music with Robert Goldsand and at the Juilliard School of Music, where his teachers were Beveridge Webster and Adele Marcus. He graduated with the highest honors from both schools, winning the Harold Bauer Award, the Frank Damrosch Scholarship, the Morris Loeb Memorial Prize, the Alan Wardwell Scholarship, the Carol Roeder Memorial Award in Piano, and the Juilliard Alumni Scholarship. Schumacher made his New York City recital debut in 1963 as the winner of the JUGG Award.

Schumacher was a prizewinner in the 1962 Busoni International Competition and was subsequently approached by composer David Diamond to be the soloist in the world premiere of his *Piano Concerto*. He performed the work in 1967 with Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic at Lincoln Center. In 1968 Schumacher joined the roster of Columbia Artists Management, Inc., and toured for ten years under its aegis throughout the United States. He was a teaching assistant to Adele Marcus at the Aspen Music Festival and served from 1969 to 1995 on the piano faculty of the University of Maryland. During that time he received the Maryland Creative and Performing Arts Award as well as the Maryland Distinguished Faculty Award. Schumacher was also an associate artist faculty member of the Levine School of Music in Washington. He is currently a member of the piano faculty of the Eastman School of Music.

Between the years 1854 and 1863, Brahms wrote primarily in larger forms, such as the *First Piano Concerto*, *Sonata No. 3*, and several variations for piano. Three exceptions were works in smaller forms for the piano: two *Gavottes* (without opus numbers) and four *Ballades*, *Op. 10*. The ballades use the song form with trio [ABA] and were purportedly inspired by the Scotch folk ballad, *Edward*, a tale of an unfortunate patricide initiated by the protagonist's own mother, who persuaded him to carry out the assault. When performed as a unit, the four pieces are intended to unfold the gruesome episode. Though full of pessimism and gloomy in outlook, they are potent and thespian. In the first ballade, in the key of D minor and marked *Andante*, Edward's crime is illustrated in the B section (*Allegro ma non troppo*). The second ballade, in D major, is less distressed at the outset (*Andante*) and provides a reprieve with one of Brahms' loveliest melodies. The B section, however, ushers in a return to violence that is interpolated with a bizarre scherzo (*Molto staccato e leggero*). In the key of B minor, the third ballade carries the subtitle *Intermezzo*, but is a bonafide scherzo with a songlike trio at its center, resembling Brahms' *Scherzo*, *Op. 4*, in miniaturized form. The fourth ballade (*Andante con moto*) is in the key of B major and exhibits a reflective mood that presages the later *Intermezzi*. Brahms uses a type of syncopation in this ballade (two against three) that is one of his conspicuous trademarks.

In 1773, at a time when the newly invented pianoforte was struggling to compete with the popularity of the harpsichord, Clementi became enamored with the sonority and quality of this exciting new instrument and published the first volume of his sonatas with it in mind. The pianoforte suited well the composer's demand for brilliant scale and double note passages, hefty chords, and colorful dynamics, which are not generic to the harpsichord. The *Sonata No. 2 in F-sharp Minor*, *Op. 26*, is among some forty sonatas Clementi published before 1796, the year Beethoven's earliest sonatas appeared in print. It was reported that Beethoven knew of these sonatas and that this particular one was his favorite.