



74TH SEASON OF CONCERTS

JANUARY 10, 2016 • NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART



PROGRAM



3:30 • West Building, West Garden Court

Yael Weiss

Lera Auerbach (b. 1973)
Ludwig's Alptraum (2007)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Sonata in C Minor, op. 111
Maestoso — Allegro con brio ed appassionato
Arietta; Adagio molto semplice e cantabile

Intermission

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
Sonata in B-flat Major, D. 960
Molto moderato
Andante sostenuto
Scherzo; Allegro vivace con delicatezza — Trio
Allegro ma non troppo — Presto

The Musician

Award-winning pianist Yael Weiss has been hailed by many of today's greatest musicians and critics for visionary interpretations of surpassing depth, immediacy, and communicative power. Weiss has performed across the United States, Europe, Japan, Korea, and South America at such venues as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, Seattle's Benaroya Hall, Moscow's Bolshoi Hall, and London's Wigmore Hall. Her New York recital debut was presented by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Weiss has appeared as soloist with many international orchestras, including the Prague Chamber Orchestra, Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, Israel Chamber Orchestra, Israel Camerata Orchestra, the Brazil National Symphony, the Seattle Symphony, Santa Fe Symphony, Jacksonville Symphony, New Bedford Symphony, Sioux City Symphony, and the Chautauqua Festival Orchestra, among others. She is also in demand at international music festivals, such as Marlboro, Ravinia, City of London, Banff, Parry Sound, Caramoor, and the Seattle Chamber Music Festival.

Yael Weiss's discography encompasses piano works by more than a dozen composers, with two releases, *Robert Schumann: Piano Works* and *88 Keys to Joy*, on the Koch International Classics label. Weiss is also devoted to chamber music and tours worldwide with violinist Mark Kaplan and cellist Peter Stumpf as the Weiss-Kaplan-Stumpf Trio. The group's discography includes CDs of Brahms, Smetana, Chihara, and Lerdaahl trios, as well as a 2014 release, *An American Tour*, featuring world premiere recordings of compositions by American composers, all on the Bridge Records label.

Weiss's current touring schedule includes concerto and recital appearances in the United States, Canada, Germany, and Israel. She is presenting performances of the complete cycle of Beethoven's thirty-two *Piano Sonatas*, as well as lectures and workshops devoted to those masterpieces. Among her other special projects are performances of Beethoven's complete Piano Trios, world premiere performances with the Israel Camerata Orchestra of Grieg's piano concerto in a new re-orchestration, and premieres of works by Lera Auerbach, Joel Feigin, and Michael Gilbertson.

Having been a frequent guest on NPR's *Performance Today*, American Public Media's *St. Paul Sunday*, the BBC in London, and multiple shows on New York's WQXR and WNYC, Yael Weiss is known to radio and television audiences worldwide. She has appeared numerous times on Israeli television and presented a recital filmed live for NHK television in Japan.

Program Notes

Opening today's program is a short composition by Russian-American composer Lera Auerbach: *Ludwig's Alptraum* (Ludwig's Nightmare). I've enjoyed working with Lera while commissioning and recording her piano trio *Triptych*, and this solo piano work has a similarly arresting power and expressivity. Written for the Second International Beethoven Competition for Piano in Bonn in 2007, it uses as a departure point the opening measures of Beethoven's *Sonata in E-flat Major*, opus 27, no. 1.

Lera said about the piece: "When I finished the work it didn't yet have a title. 'Prelude, Toccata, and Postlude' was my first thought, which I immediately discarded as conservative and boring. But what should I call the piece? As often happens in dreams, the most random elements suddenly reveal common characteristics in 'Ludwig's Alptraum.' They seem to belong together in a strange, distorted reality that has its own proportions, its own feeling of time and its own timelessness. All art arises from dreams and it is perhaps only in dreams that fate can reveal its hidden threads to us, the threads that connect each day with the next. Dreams are full of symbols, even if they can only be found again in memories."

The program continues with two of the greatest masterpieces in the piano repertoire: the very last piano sonatas of Beethoven and Schubert. Beethoven's *Sonata in C Minor*, opus 111, and Schubert's *Sonata in B-flat Major*, D. 960. These two masterpieces share several similarities, the most important being the uncanny ability of both to transport us into a spiritual realm; they are works that succeed in expressing through music the truth and depth of human experience. These works have other things in common as well: both were written in Vienna only six years apart (Beethoven's in 1822 and Schubert's in 1828), and each is the final work in a trilogy of its composer's late-period sonatas.

It is possible to say that these two monumental works are both studies in silences, and that silence is indeed one of the crucial elements that lead us to the otherworldly, to the sublime. The second and final movement of Beethoven's sonata, titled "Arietta," surrenders itself to silence. It is, as pianist Alfred Brendel has put it "a prelude to silence." Hans von Bülow, one of the first nineteenth-century pianists to perform Beethoven's works extensively, referred to it as "Nirvana," thereby emphasizing the essential contrast with its counterpart, the "Samsara" first movement. The two movements of Beethoven's final sonata paint a picture of earth and heaven, of struggle followed by complete and eternal serenity.

In Schubert's sonata silences abound — there are long fermatas that suspend time, and on many occasions the music simply stops, the dramatic silences allowing us to reflect on where we are. Schubert also makes generous use of the unusual dynamic marking *pianississimo* (*ppp*), creating an unreal world that is neither quite here nor there, hovering above earth and stopping the movement of time. In the same way that silence, or emptiness, can be so meaningful and powerful, another element — the trill, normally a secondary and merely decorative device — is brought to the foreground of the musical experience in both sonatas.

Schubert's trill, first appearing immediately following the opening melody of the first movement, is a low murmur — trembling, dark, mysterious, and unsettling. The pianist Andras Schiff calls it "the most extraordinary trill in the history of music!" All appearances of this trill are to be played very softly, *pp* or even *ppp* — with one startling exception: the trill makes an unexpected appearance during the measures leading to a repeat of the opening section of the movement, and this time we hear it in full force, *fortissimo* (*ff*). In a recent *New Yorker* magazine article Alex Ross refers to this as "the trill of doom." Many musicians debate whether or not this repeat should be performed. Without the repeat, we do not play the *ff* statement of the trill, and some musicians eliminate the repeat precisely to maintain the otherwise serene quality of the whole; however, others play the repeat, feeling that, despite the movement's unusual length, the trill in its loud version is essential to conveying Schubert's complete emotional range. In the second movement of Beethoven's sonata, the long continuous trills that gradually take over are a key element in giving the work its sense of stillness. In exact opposition to Schubert's use of the trill, Beethoven's trills are in high register, shining, shimmering, and weightless. They are a symbol of infinity.

Beethoven and Schubert had quite different approaches to their final sonatas when it comes to the organization of the musical material. Beethoven's is a motivically concise, two-movement work whereas Schubert's is a large, four-movement structure of symphonic scope. While Beethoven's sonata emphasizes the tonal center of C throughout (C minor for the first movement, C major in the second), Schubert's sonata traverses a wide range of keys, enjoying a wealth of modulations and colors without any hurry to let the gravity of harmony pull the music in any one decisive direction. Here we have a great example of what Schumann referred to as Schubert's "Heavenly Length." Strikingly, while Beethoven challenges life in the first movement and transcends it in the second, Schubert on the other hand, after two otherworldly movements, decides to return to the joys of the real world in the third and fourth movements, offering an affirmation of life here and now.

Program notes by Yael Weiss

Upcoming events of the Seventy-Fourth Season of The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lamot Belin Concerts

Fisk Jubilee Singers
Spirituals
January 17, Sunday, 3:30
West Building, West Garden Court

Aspen String Trio
J. S. Bach's *Goldberg Variations*
January 24, Sunday, 3:30
West Building, West Garden Court

National Gallery of Art Vocal Ensemble
Songs inspired by mythology. Presented in honor of *Power and Pathos: Bronze Sculptures of the Hellenistic World*
January 31, Sunday, 3:30
West Building, West Garden Court

Cantus
The Four Loves
February 7, Sunday, 3:30
West Building, West Garden Court

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