OPUS 3 ARTISTS
presents

**JEREMY DENK**
PIANO

**Sonata, Sz. 80**
Allegro moderato
Sostenuto e pesante
Allegro molto

**Prelude on “Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen”, S. 179**

**I vidi in terra angelici costumi (No. 123) from Sonetti del Petrarca, S. 161**
(Années de pèlerinage, Deuxième Année: Italie)

**Après une lecture du Dante, fantasia quasi sonata**
*from Années de pèlerinage, Deuxième Année: Italie, S. 161*

**Isolden’s Liebestod, S. 447 after Wagner**

**INTERMISSION**

**Prelude and Fugue in B minor, BWV. 869**

**Sonata No. 32 in C minor, Op. 111**
Maestoso; Allegro con brio ed appassionato
Arietta, Adagio molto, semplice e cantabile

Steinway Piano

Exclusive Management:

470 Park Avenue South
9th Floor North
New York NY 10016
Béla Bartók (1881–1945)
Sonata for Piano, Sz. 80

Composed in 1926. Premiered over Hungarian Radio on December 3, 1926, by the composer; public premiere on December 8, 1926, in Budapest.

After the fiendish winds of the First World War finally blew themselves out in 1918, there came into music a new invigoration and an eagerness by composers to stretch the forms and language of the ancient art. Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Webern, Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Copland and other of the most important 20th-century masters challenged listeners and colleagues throughout the 1920s with their daring visions and their brilliant iconoclasms. It was the most exciting decade in the entire history of music. Béla Bartók, whose folksong researches were severely limited geographically by the loss of Hungarian territories through the treaties following the war, was not immune to the spirit of experimentation, and he shifted his professional concentration at that time from ethnomusicology to composition and his career as a pianist. He was particularly interested in the music of Stravinsky, notably the mosaic structures and advanced harmonies of the Diaghilev ballets, and in the recent Viennese developments in atonality and motivic generation posited by Arnold Schoenberg and his friend and disciple Alban Berg. A decided modernism entered Bartók’s music with his searing 1919 ballet, The Miraculous Mandarin, and his works of the following years—the two Violin Sonatas, the Piano Sonata, the piano suite Out of Doors, the First Piano Concerto and the String Quartet No. 3—are the most daring that he ever wrote. He was reluctant to program them for any but the most sophisticated audiences.

Bartók’s Piano Sonata synthesized the formal plans and precise motivic development of High Classicism with some of the most advanced stylistic traits of the 1920s—the clangorous, percussive use of the piano that Bartók himself had tried out as early as his Allegro Barbaro of 1911 and which had become a trademark of Serge Prokofiev’s early piano music and Stravinsky’s Les Noces; the derivation of thematic materials from the essential building blocks of Eastern European folksong; the iconoclastic harmonies of Viennese modernism; the elemental, propulsive rhythms of The Rite of Spring. The exposition of the opening sonata-form movement encompasses some five distinct motives that are varied in contour and intensity, though all are built largely from the pervasive scale steps and small intervals of folk music and are carried along by a powerful current of incessant rhythms. The compact development section, identifiable by its bristling, crushed scale figures, uses fragments of the exposition’s themes. The recapitulation is shortened by the excision of some of the earlier materials. A dynamic coda drives the movement to its abrupt end. The second movement, with its keening chants of repeated notes and cramped intervals, solemn bell tones and trudging, dirge-like pace, is a bleak lament, perhaps a reminiscence of the ghastly war that had scarred Europe a decade before, that is wound from pure, stark contrapuntal lines. The finale is a meticulously refined hybrid of rondo and variations forms using the jagged rhythms and short, repetitive phrases of indigenous Hungarian music, but its essential expressive character is that of a riotous folk festival. [CAL performances, Berkeley]

Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

Franz Liszt was a 19th-century Hungarian composer, pianist, conductor, and teacher who became renowned in Europe during the nineteenth century for his virtuosic skill as a pianist. He was said by his contemporaries to have been the most technically advanced pianist of his age, and in the 1840s he was considered by some to be perhaps the greatest pianist of all time. Liszt was also a well-known and influential composer, piano teacher and
conductor. He was a benefactor to other composers, including Richard Wagner, Hector Berlioz, Camille Saint-Saëns, Edvard Grieg and Alexander Borodin.

As a composer, Liszt was one of the most prominent representatives of the "Neudeutsche Schule" ("New German School"). He left behind an extensive and diverse body of work in which he influenced his forward-looking contemporaries and anticipated some 20th-century ideas and trends. Some of his most notable contributions were the invention of the symphonic poem, developing the concept of thematic transformation as part of his experiments in musical form and making radical departures in harmony. He also played an important role in popularizing a wide array of music by transcribing it for piano.

**Prelude on “Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen”, S. 179 -- Liszt**

*Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* (Weeping, lamenting, worrying, fearing), BWV 12, is a church cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach. Bach composed the cantata in Weimar for Jubilate, the third Sunday after Easter, and first performed it in the Weimar court chapel on 22 April 1714.

On 2 March 1714 Bach was appointed concertmaster of the Weimar court capelle of the co-reigning dukes Wilhelm Ernst and Ernst August of Saxe-Weimar. As concertmaster, he assumed the principal responsibility for composing new works, specifically cantatas for the Schloßkirche (palace church), on a monthly schedule. *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* is the second cantata in this series, composed for the third Sunday after Easter, called Jubilate. The prescribed readings for the Sunday were from the First Epistle of Peter, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man" (1 Peter 2:11–20), and from the Gospel of John, Jesus announcing his second coming in the so-called Farewell Discourse, saying "your sorrow shall be turned into joy" (John 16:16–23). The text, depicting the affliction of the Christians, is assumed to have been written by Salomon Franck, the Weimar court poet. The poet follows details of the Gospel. The text of the opening chorus corresponds to John 16:20, the text of the first recitative is taken from Acts 14:22, "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God". The poet expands that this is true not only for the disciples who were addressed then, but also for every Christian. Movement 4 sees the suffering of Jesus as a consolation for the afflicted Christian, movement 5 voices the decision to follow Jesus even in suffering, movement 6 offers the consolation that it will be only a short while until all sadness is overcome, alluding as already in movement 4 to Revelation 2:10. The cantata is closed by the first stanza of the chorale *Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan* (1674) by Samuel Rodigast.

Franz Liszt based works for keyboard (organ or piano) on the first section of movement 2, S.179, *Prelude after a theme from Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* by J. S. Bach (1854) and S.180, *Variations on a theme from Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* by J. S. Bach (1862).

**Années de Pèlerinage (Years of Pilgrimage)**
*From Second Year: Italy, S. 161*

**Tre sonetti di Petrarca (Three Sonnets of Petrarch)**
*Après une lecture de Dante: Fantasia Quasi Sonata (After reading Dante: Fantasia in the form of a sonata)*

Liszt could not have been more different from his younger contemporary, Brahms. Where Brahms was cerebral, conservative, and somewhat reclusive, Liszt was the toast of the
continent, a superstar of colossal talent and wild genius. The *Tre sonetti di Petrarca* were born during Liszt’s stay in Italy during 1838-1839, when he and the Comtesse d’Agoult read Petrarch and Dante together. Originally set as arias for tenor, Liszt later transcribed them for solo piano.

The genesis of the poetry is the stuff of legend. Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) is known as the first Renaissance humanist, that is, a scholar dedicated to reviving classical learning and to virtuous and prudent action. Petrarch was the first “tourist,” the first to climb Mont Ventoux, the famously windy hill in the south of France, simply for the pleasure of seeing the view. He was the first to use the concept of “Dark Ages” to refer to the centuries after the fall of Rome. In 1327, Petrarch fell in love with a woman named Laura, and channeled his unrequited affection into 366 canzone, or sonnets. Liszt set three of them, initially as arias for tenor, then later as works for solo piano. They are intense love-songs, full of passion, harmonic richness, and flights of scantent melody.

**Sonetto No. 47: Benedetto sia lgiono**—“Blessed be the day, and the month, and the year, and the season, and the time, and the hour, and the moment, and the beautiful country, and the place where I was joined to the two beautiful eyes that have bound me.”—Liszt’s setting of this is quietly rapturous, marked sempre mosso, con intimo sentimento (always moving, but with intimate feeling).

**Sonetto No. 104: Pace non trovo**—“I find no peace, yet I am unsuited for war. I fear, yet hope; I burn, yet am turned to ice; I soar in the heavens, but lie upon the ground; I hold nothing, though I embrace the whole world.” These oxymorons and antitheses bespeak the paradoxes of love, which Liszt evokes in agitated succession of avant-garde harmonies followed by ecstatic lyricism.

**Sonetto No. 123: I vidi in terra angelici costumi**—“I beheld on earth angelic grace and heavenly beauty unmatched in all the world.” Angels come to earth, and Laura’s beauty takes the breath away as the air is filled with sweetness. The music, with its restless harmonies, achieves a lightheaded stasis.

**Après une lecture de Dante** (*After a reading of Dante)*: *Fantasia quasi Sonata* is the final piece in the second volume of the *Years of Pilgrimage*, although Liszt later added three movements based on his travels to Venice and Naples. It is a piano sonata in one movement that takes its inspiration from *The Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri’s epic excursion through Hell to Paradise. It is not a literal representation of the poet’s journey so much as a rendering of the composer’s reaction to it. The structure of the work is a fairly taut sonata form, more highly organized than the title Fantasia suggests. The opening motif is a simple and dramatic statement of the tritone—called *diabolus in musica* (the Devil in music), and a “dangerous interval” since the Middle Ages—which recurs and is developed throughout the piece. The tonic key is D minor, in the 19th century commonly encountered in music relating to death. Alfred Brendel says this downward motif is “a call for the spirits of the damned to rise.” An agitated chromatic section is followed, after a restatement of the diabolus theme, by an expressive and extended slower section that portrays the torments of the unfortunate adulteress Francesca da Rimini. A beautiful chorale toward the end is in F-sharp major, a key Liszt associated with salvation and redemption. The piece ends in D major, with a grand coda that suggests deliverance into Paradiso and a restatement of the opening motive, the tritone transmuted into the stable and grounded perfect fifth. [By Mary Fairchild]
Isolden's Liebestod, S. 447 after Wagner

Liszt chose to transcribe one of the most dramatic and often-excerpted moments, Isolde's Liebestod (Isolde's Love-death), from Wagner's masterpiece. It comes at the very close of the opera as Isolde grieves over the body of her love, Tristan. She sings, "How softly and gently he smiles, how sweetly his eyes open..." Liszt's effort here is reasonably faithful to the score, although he had to eliminate much of the vocal music. This is most noticeable at the powerful climax when the love theme resounds passionately. Of course, when orchestras play this excerpt in concert they typically follow this procedure as well, since the instrumental side of the music can stand apart here.

The music starts off gloomy and sounding quite native to the piano, almost like a passage from one of Liszt's darker late compositions. But shortly it begins to yearn and fill with regret as notes shimmer and search, the sound of Wagner's orchestration coming to mind. As the emotions build the music struggles to explode with the impassioned love theme. Finally the climactic moment comes: It is sad, it is ecstatic, it is tragic, but it is beautiful. Then the music fades, and at this point in the opera Isolde falls gently onto the body of Tristan.

It was not just vocal parts that Liszt eliminated, but some of the instrumental music and orchestration as well. In the Wagner opera, this scene will last around eight or nine minutes. The transcription here typically takes a minute or two less. This is one of Liszt's most effective efforts in this genre, though, ironically, by incarnating the music so well on the piano, the listener gets more Wagner than Liszt, more of the opera's momentary impact than a singular keyboard-oriented account of the scene. That, however, is probably what Liszt wanted. This opera may have had a greater hold on the elderly composer than even he realized: On his deathbed, in 1886, Liszt reportedly uttered "Tristan," then died.

Prelude and Fugue in B minor, BWV. 869
J.S. BACH

J. S. Bach was known in his day primarily as one of Germany’s great organists—as a keyboard composer and a powerful improviser. In 1722, while employed at the court of Cöthen, he wrote a collection of 24 preludes and fugues “for the profit and use of musical youth desirous of learning,” that came to be known as The Well-Tempered Clavier, Book I. Another set of 24 came in 1742, now known as Book II. These works, affectionately known as the WTC, or simply as “the 48,” became standard teaching pieces in the 18th century—both Mozart and Beethoven later studied and learned them. At least part of Bach’s intent was to demonstrate the value of a new “tempered” tuning that allowed a harpsichord to be played with equal effectiveness in any key. In each of the two collections, he provided a prelude and fugue in all possible major and minor keys. Stokowski’s transcription of the Prelude in B minor from Book I (he did not include the rather gnarly fugue that follows) is effectively simple, for strings only: a pizzicato accompaniment in the low strings, with the upper strings making the most of Bach’s expressive dissonances until a dramatic closing passage. [Written by Michael Allsen]

Sonata No. 32 in C minor, Op. 111
Ludwig van Beethoven

One thing to be expected of Beethoven, particularly in his last creative period, is the unexpected. In 1822, in crowning his body of piano sonatas with the great Op. 111 work in
C minor, the composer at first alludes strongly to the taut, muscular imagery with which he had imbued so many of his earlier piano scores, and only then does he return to the transcendentalism which had become his mature form of expression. Juxtaposing the appassionato extroversion of his middle period with the visionary profundities of his last, he makes a supremely personal statement about himself as a consummately versatile and spiritual creative artist.

The first movement’s defiance and steely-eyed anger begin with the urgent dramatics of a brief introduction that rumbles its way into the movement proper. Here, the performing directive Allegro con brio ed appassionato tells everything about the kind of bravura Beethoven has in mind. (The composer had by now abandoned the German musical directives and reverted to the prevailing Italian.) And he doesn’t make accomplishing the bravura an easy matter, for the textures are very lean, often constructed in polyphonic, two- or three-part invention style, and in general looking back to the manner of the last movement of the Appassionata Sonata of 1805. Unlike that movement, this one breathes an air of calm in its final measures, a benign C-major calm that prepares for the serene nobility of the opening of the Sonata’s finale.

Having wrestled with tempests, Beethoven turns to an otherworldly sphere for his very last sonata movement. Titling it Arietta, he presents an adagio theme of exalted (though not, as the name implies, diminutive) simplicity, on which he constructs – no, divines – four variations and a fantasy-like coda. A description can be given of the un-folding of the variations as a progressive doubling of the number of notes in each beat. And of the chains of double trills that seem to emerge, not from the keyboard but from some mysterious and enchanted source. But no commentary is sufficient to describe the effect of music that goes far beyond aural perception, that reaches to rarefied heights of sublimity.

[Written by Orrin Howard]