

Susanna Braun: RNCM International Artist Diploma Recital

FIRST HALF

Heinz Holliger (born 1939): Partita for Piano "Praeludium" (1999)

Swiss composer Heinz Holliger's profound love for Bach and the Baroque style offers an intriguing perspective on Baroque music, reimagined through the lens of a contemporary artist. In performances of Baroque repertoire, harpsichordists often precede a work with an improvised prelude in the same key. Inspired by this tradition, and by Holliger's own description of the first movement of his *Partita*, as *quasi-improvised*, I chose to use it as an **introduction to Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in E-flat minor* from The *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book I. As the final cluster chord of Holliger's *Praeludium* fades into the unknown, a lingering E-flat remains audible, an important detail (and one of the reasons I paired the two works), as Bach's prelude begins on the very same note.**

Beyond his deep connection to 18th-century music, Holliger also had a profound admiration for Schumann. Like Schumann, he used *soggetti cavati*, musical themes derived from the letters of words (we will see this later in Schumann's *Abegg Variations*). His concept of the *innere stimme*, also inspired by Schumann, refers to an inner voice, an imagined choir singing music from 400 years ago. Though not explicitly played, you will hear it resonating inbetween the fast notes.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750): Prelude and Fugue in E-flat minor, BWV 853

A piece of great passion, one that deeply moves me. **This work is highly reminiscent of the 16th-century Flemish style and has strong similarities with Froberger's *Tombeau Blancrocher*.** The *Prelude* feels almost like a funeral march, filled with a sense of solemnity and meditation. However, as the *Fugue* unfolds, it breathes life back into the piece. The subject of the fugue appears in various forms: mirrored, augmented, and developed in stretto. **The stretti in the fugue are positioned by Bach with remarkable precision, aligning the climax of the work with the golden ratio.**

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827): Piano Sonata No. 13 in E-flat major, Op. 27 No. 1, "Quasi una fantasia"

Beethoven's *Quasi una fantasia* challenges the sonata conventions of its time with its breakless structure creating a fantasia-like feeling. Beethoven begins with a slow movement (which is not even in sonata form) instead of the typical fast one, and incorporates thematic material across movements, which furthermore creates a fantasia-like experience. The thematic material of the 3rd movement this Sonata reminds me of the 2nd movement of Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No. 3* - both works were written in the same year!

Robert Schumann (1810 – 1856): Abegg Variations, Op. 1

Robert Schumann's *Abegg Variations*, written in 1829/30, showcase the young composer's playful creativity and good humour - Schumann at the time was still a law student in Heidelberg. The variations are based on the musical notes A-B-E-G-G, derived from the name "Abegg" and dedicated to the fictional Mademoiselle Pauline, Comtesse d'Abegg. Schumann invented both the name and the dedication, a light-hearted gesture that reflects his joking character. Despite being an early work, the *Abegg Variations* already reveal Schumann's compositional traits, including his artistic personas - Eusebius, the introspective dreamer, and Florestan, the fiery extrovert. Both characters are already subtly present, hinting at the deeper psychological layers that would characterize his later music.



SECOND HALF

The second half of this recital will be dedicated to Franz Liszt and Carl Maria von Weber. As a composer, pianist, and pedagogue, Liszt reshaped 19th century music. Known for his thematic transformations and programmatic music, Liszt also brought orchestral and operatic transcriptions to his audiences. Deeply influenced by his Hungarian roots, Liszt's compositions reflect both his national identity and spiritual struggles.

Liszt's multifaceted character has led me to make a connection with a work of art: ***The Old Fisherman*, by Hungarian painter Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka (1853 – 1919), which contrasts divine and diabolical elements.** Like the divided face of the fisherman in the painting, Liszt embodied a balance of contrasting forces: spiritual devotion and worldly ambition.

Although there are no records of a meeting between painter Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka and composer Franz Liszt - and most probably none occurred - I find this painting rather associated to Liszt in spirit due to its striking dualism. The painting initially depicts an old fisherman, a seemingly humble and solitary figure. However, when a mirror is placed vertically down the middle of the canvas, the painting reveals two distinct identities, a man praying at sea, and the Devil. For me, this duality strongly resonates in Liszt's music. Below you can see the painting with the two reflections.



https://arthive.com/artists/84186~Tivadar_Csontvary_Kosztka/works/586745~Old_fisherman

Franz Liszt (1811-1886): Les Cloches de Genève (Nocturne)

Les cloches de Genève (The Bells of Geneva), composed in December 1835, is a work from the first year of Liszt's *Années de pèlerinage: La Suisse*. Dedicated to his first daughter Blandine (1835–1862), this piece is accompanied by a quote from Lord Byron, taken from the narrative poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*: 'I do not live in myself, but become part of what surrounds me.'

Franz Liszt (1811-1886): Étude No. 10 in F minor "Allegro agitato molto" (from Transcendental Études, S.139)

Étude No. 10 from its *Transcendental Études* "Allegro agitato molto" is one of Liszt's most dramatic studies, combining virtuosic technical demands with deep emotional expression. The piece explores a wide range of pianistic techniques, from cascading arpeggios to lyrical, melancholic melodies, culminating in an explosive finale.

Franz Liszt (1811-1886): Sterbeglöcklein (based on Schubert's Zügenglöcklein)

One of my favourite works by Liszt also happens to be one of the rarely played and little known. Liszt's arrangement of Schubert's Lied transforms its melancholic theme of death into a meditation on funeral bells. In my interpretation, this work speaks more about eternity than death itself. **The extended 6/4 chords, bell-like motifs, and harmonic ambiguity evoke transcendence, reflecting Liszt's belief in sweet Christian hope beyond mortality.** Prolonged 6/4 chords are Liszt's symbol for eternal life and salvation given to those redeemed. Similiar examples can be found in Liszt's *B-minor Sonata*, *Dante Symphony*, and *Requiem Messe des morts*.

Carl Maria von Weber (1786 – 1826): Invitation to the Dance, Op. 65

Invitation to the Dance is one of the earliest programmatic waltzes, structured as a musical dialogue. Beginning with a gentle, courtly introduction, Weber's waltz depicts a ballroom scene where a suitor invites a lady to dance. The main waltz is graceful and full of elegance, while virtuosic flourishes reflect the dance itself. The piece concludes with a return to the opening motif.

Franz Liszt (1811-1886): Hungarian Rhapsody No. 19 in D minor, d'après les 'Csárdás nobles' de K. Ábrányi

The last Rhapsody No. 19 was composed in 1884 and is based on the *Csárdás nobles* by Komel Ábrányi. It is one of the more unknown works and reflects Liszt's late style, combining virtuosic Hungarian flavours and brighter moods with introspective melancholy. The dramatic contrasts reflect the development of Liszt's artistic identity, juxtaposing his early works with the existential depth of his later years.