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Sergei Babayan in Recital

Sergei Babayan
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Visiting Artist: Sergei Babayan, piano Feb 10

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CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

Conservatory of Music

presents

Sergei Babayan
in recital

Visiting Artist in Piano

February 10, 2009 • 8:00 P.M.
Salmon Recital Hall

Program

Fantasia in c minor in memory of Maria Yudina, op. 21

Introduzione

Sonata 1

Marcia funebre

Sonata 2

Capriccio

Vladimir Ryabov
(b. 1950)

Der Müller und der Bach

Gretchen am Spinnrade

Auf dem Wasser zu singen

Franz Schubert
arr. Franz Liszt
(1811-1886)

Intermission

Suite No. 2 in a minor

from *Nouvelles suites de pieces de clavecin*

Allemande

Courante

Sarabande

Les trois mains

Fanfarinette

La triomphante

Gavotte et 5 doubles

Jean-Philippe Rameau
(1683-1764)

*Proceeds from this concert to benefit the
Piano Scholarship Fund at Chapman University.*

Sergei Babayan is the Mr. and Mrs. John D. Gilliam Artist-in-Residence at The Cleveland Institute of Music. One of the most charismatic personalities on today's concert stage, Mr. Babayan's vibrantly expressive performances has inspired audience acclaim worldwide. Ever since his arrival here in the United States, on his first trip outside of the Soviet Union in 1989, his gifts of breathtaking virtuosity and a wide-ranging tonal palette have brought him critical praise and accolades. He is the winner of four first prizes in international piano competitions, including the 1989 Robert Casadesus International Piano Competition in Cleveland (marking the first time a Soviet artist had competed without government sponsorship), the Palm Beach Competition (1990), the Hamamatsu Competition in Japan (1991), and the Scottish Competition (1992). He is also a Queen Elizabeth Competition (Brussels) Laureate, and a winner of the Busoni (Italy), and the Esther Honens Competitions (Calgary, Alberta).

Sergei Babayan was born in Armenia to a musical family and started to play the piano at the age of three. He began his musical studies at the age of six under Luisa Markaryan and later with George Saradjev. He continued his studies at nineteen with Mikhail Pletnev at the Moscow Conservatory and completed post-graduate work there in 1989 as a student of Professor Vera Gornostaeva. He also studied privately with Lev Naumov in Moscow.

After making his New York recital debut in 1990 at Alice Tully Hall to great critical acclaim, Mr. Babayan embarked on a busy schedule that has included solo appearances with The Cleveland Orchestra, the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, the Osaka Symphony, the National Orchestra of Belgium, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Warsaw Philharmonic, the Slovenska Filharmonia of Bratislava, the Brno Philharmonic, the Bergamo Symphony of Italy, the Florida Orchestra, West Virginia Symphony, New World Symphony, and Orchestre National de Lille. His recital appearances have included the cities of New York, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Seattle, Washington, D.C., Indianapolis, Sarasota, Toledo, Santa Fe, Fresno, Birmingham, San Juan, Calgary and Toronto. In Japan he has performed in the cities of Tokyo, Osaka, Sapporo and Nagoya; in Europe, he has appeared in recital in Glasgow, Lisbon, Freiburg, Grenoble, Hannover and Paris.

Festival appearances have included the Mayfest in Glasgow, the Duszniki Chopin Festival in Poland, and the White Nights Festival in St. Petersburg. Mr. Babayan has also been heard in concert on WQXR in New York, WCLV in Cleveland, and on Radio France, Polish Radio and TV, and BBC-TV.

Mr. Babayan commenced the 1997-98 season with a pianistic milestone: his performances of the complete Beethoven Sonatas, beginning with two concerts in Cleveland encompassing the first ten sonatas. 1997-98 also included chamber music appearances in Toronto and Chicago, and a return to the Krannert Center. He gave highly praised master classes and a recital at the Van Cliburn Institute in Ft. Worth, performed in Spain at the Lucena Festival, and performed the Rachmaninoff First Concerto at the Orford Festival in Canada, where he also taught. A return recital invitation to open the Chopin Duszniki Festival in Poland was broadcast for radio and television, and was warmly received. In addition, Mr. Babayan made his debut with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra at the Meadow Brook Festival in a performance of the Grieg Concerto, conducted by Neeme Järvi. The 1998-99 season began in Germany with cellist Suren Bagratuni in a duo concert, followed by a solo recital tour in England, and the inaugural season of Mr. Babayan's own chamber music festival in Mexico. Last winter, two solo recitals at The Institute of Music and a duo concert with Mr. Bagratuni were followed by a highly praised all-Bach concert which included the "Goldberg Variations" on the Music from Saint Gall series. In March, the duo appeared in concert at Weill Recital Hall in New York. Their performance was later filmed at Steinway Hall for NHK satellite television in Japan, and was aired there this summer on "The Classical Hour" series. Mr. Babayan also taped a solo recital for the series. This past summer, he performed chamber music at the Orford and Music at Gretna festivals. Upcoming concerto appearances include Prokofiev's Third in New Mexico, Rachmaninoff's Second in Santo Domingo, and three performances of the Rachmaninoff at the New Hampshire Music Festival. Next season will include solo recitals in Detroit and at the Warsaw Philharmonic in Poland.

His CD recording of 20th century works by Vine, Messiaen, Ligeti, and Respighi was released recently on the ProPiano label and has already garnered acclaim in the press, including a "critic's choice" review in The New York Times. A recording of Scarlatti Sonatas (ProPiano) has also been widely acclaimed. These CDs join Mr. Babayan's two other releases: works of Mendelssohn and Schubert-Liszt on Discover International, and a Ravel, Prokofiev and Liszt recital on the Connoisseur Society label.

In 1997, four of his students were admitted, in an unprecedented decision, to participate in the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. Mr. Babayan is the founder and director of the Sergei Babayan International Piano Academy, which was established at The Cleveland Institute of Music in 1995.

Program Notes

Vladimir Ryabov's Fantasia in c minor (1983) was written in memory of Maria Yudina (1899-1970), a legendary artist in Russia who is becoming increasingly better known internationally thanks to a recent release of her extensive recorded legacy on CD, spanning almost the entire piano literature from Bach to Stravinsky (although she was also the first to perform Boulez and Stockhausen in Russia).

In her own lifetime, Yudina was not allowed to travel to the West, and was fired from both the Moscow Conservatory and the Gnessin School because of her deep religiosity. A true intellectual institution in Russia, she was close friends with some of the greatest literary luminaries of her time; Pasternak first read his novel *Dr. Zhivago* at her house. Never afraid to speak up against the Communists and to openly affirm her faith, she was a black sheep under the regime; yet she miraculously escaped harm, in one of those strange—and in this case, fortunate—quirks which were not rare in the history of Stalinism. When she received the Stalin Prize, she donated the money to the Orthodox Church for "perpetual prayers for Stalin's sins." Yet this devout Christian woman happened to be the former seminary student's favorite pianist. According to an oft-repeated story, Stalin was so taken with her performance of Mozart's Piano Concerto in A major that he demanded a copy of the recording. No one dared tell him that it had been a live broadcast and there was no recording; so they had to summon Yudina to the studio in the middle of the night where, with a hastily assembled orchestra, they recorded the concerto. The next morning, the Great Leader and Teacher was presented with a unique copy. After Stalin's death, this record was found next to his bed—it was apparently the last thing he had ever listened to.

In his twenty-five-minute Fantasy, Ryabov managed to say something new and personal, even though his idiom is one which is strongly indebted to 19th-century Romanticism. Ryabov accomplished this by devising an approach to harmony in which he added upper and lower neighbors to the tones of traditional chords, creating rich, cluster-like sonorities in which the original harmonies are, nevertheless, still recognizable. The formal outline of the piece is also unusual: the five sections of the fantasy are marked *Introduction—Sonata I—Marcia funebre—Sonata II—Capriccio*. Allusions to the classics abound, from Bach to Mozart to Beethoven to Schumann to Mussorgsky and beyond. The rather extraordinary fugue theme that appears in the second sonata was composed by Yudina herself, at age 18 in 1917; Ryabov used this theme to create the most shattering climax in the entire work.

The tempos and textures of the fantasy are extremely diverse; powerful chordal moments alternate with episodes filled with rapid passagework. The central funeral march is based on a stark rhythmic figure, to be played "like timpani," against silently depressed chords in the right hand that release a set of otherworldly overtones. In the words of Italian critic Ettore Bruck, who didn't hesitate to proclaim the Fantasy to be one of the summits of 20th-century piano literature, the work unites "extraordinary power and great tenderness, clarity and enigma, a strong will and intense trepidation, a fleeting moment and all eternity." Everything in this work, Bruck writes, happens "for the first, but also for the last time." In the concluding Capriccio, Ryabov, in Bruck's words, "reconciled Harmony and Chaos." This is no ordinary, superficially virtuosic Capriccio; like the Brahms capriccios, it plumbs extraordinary depths as it goes to the limits of the piano's expressive possibilities. The ending sounds almost like a hallucination: Ryabov creates a completely new sound world in which an eerie and ominous perpetual-motion figure is punctuated by a series of individual pitches above and below. The musical material seems to disintegrate completely, leaving us with feelings of hopelessness and despair as the music fades into silence.

Peter Laki
Visiting Associate Professor
Bard College

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generous donations to the **William Hall Visiting Professorship**.*

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