

Emanuel Ax, piano

Sunday, November 9, 3 pm, 2003
Zellerbach Hall

PROGRAM

- Claude Debussy Images for Piano, Book I
Reflets dans l'eau
Hommage à Rameau
Mouvement
- Jean-Philippe Rameau Pièces de Clavecin
La Poule
L'Enharmonique
L'Egyptienne
- Debussy Images for Piano, Book II
Cloches à travers les feuilles
Et la lune descend sur la temple qui fut
Poissons d'or
- Maurice Ravel Valses nobles et sentimentales

INTERMISSION

- Frédéric Chopin Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor, Op. 20
Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat Minor, Op. 31
Scherzo No. 3 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 39
Scherzo No. 4 in E Major, Op. 54

Steinway Piano

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Images for Piano, Books I and II
Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

"The sound of the sea, the curve of the horizon, the wind in the leaves, the cry of a bird enregister complex impressions within us," Debussy told an interviewer in 1911. "Then suddenly, without any deliberate consent on our part, one of these memories issues forth to express itself in the language of music." Debussy distilled in these words the essence of musical Impressionism—the

embodiment of a specific but evanescent experience in tone. With only rare exceptions (most notably the String Quartet of 1893 and the *Études* and three sonatas from the end of his life), his compositions are referential in both their titles and their contents, deriving inspiration and subjects from poetry, art, and nature (or nature, at least, as filtered through Monet's opulently chromatic palette). Debussy's two sets of *Images* for piano, composed in 1903–1905 and 1907, are among his most evocative creations. The composer himself valued them highly, telling his publisher, Jacques Durand, "I think I may say without undue pride that I believe these pieces will live and will take their place in the piano literature . . . either to the left of Schubert, or to the right of Chopin." Debussy originally proposed writing a third set of *Images* for piano, but the ideas for those pieces were used in the three *Images*

for orchestra that he composed between 1905 and 1912.

"If there is Impressionism in music," wrote Oscar Thompson in his study of Debussy, "*Reflets dans l'eau* ('Reflections in the Water') is one of the most perfect examples of it." All here is shimmering, luminous, evanescent, built, Debussy said, "in accordance with the latest discoveries in harmonic chemistry." Visual concordances seem inescapable in such suggestive, pastel-hued music. The British musicologist Frank Dawes offered this metaphor: "If one gazes fixedly at an object for long enough, the pupils of one's eyes dilate, the picture loses its sharpness of focus, and a feeling of pleasant drowsiness overcomes one. So it is here. One feels that the composer gazed long enough into his pool of water to become bemused by the spectacle of endlessly shifting reflections."

Debussy's entire career was dedicated to finding a uniquely French musical language, free from the German influence he believed had dominated Gallic composers since the late-18th century. To that end, he sought to revive the old, long-dormant traditions of French Renaissance and Baroque music, as much for their spirit as for their technique. "French music is all clearness, elegance; simple, natural declamation," he wrote. "The aim of French music is, before all, to please. The musical genius of France may be described as a fantasy of the senses." He viewed the two giants of French Baroque music—Jean Philippe Rameau (1683–1764) and François Couperin (1668–1733)—as the lodestars guiding his quest. *Hommage à Rameau*, composed in the style of a solemn sarabande while he was editing the score of Rameau's opera-ballet *Fêtes de Polymnie*, is Debussy's tribute, his memorial piece, what the French call a *tombeau* ("tombstone"), to his musical ancestor.

Mouvement, the most ambiguously titled of the *Images*, recalls the insouciant gaiety and incessant motion of Debussy's *Masques* of 1904, which depicts the character of Scaramouche, the clownish and easily deflated braggart of the old Italian *commedia dell'arte*.

The haunting *Cloches à travers les feuilles* ("Bells Sounding Across the Leaves") refers to a local custom of the Jura region, in eastern France, which was described by Louis Laloy, Debussy's first French biographer, as "the tolling that sounds, from village to village through the yellowing forests in the silence of the evening, between Vespers on All Souls Day [November 2nd] and the Requiem Mass for the Dead [the third, evening Mass of the day, the only time during the annual Catholic calendar, except Christmas, when more than one Mass may be observed]."

The mock-archaic parallel harmonies, exotic scales, and hints of Balinese gamelan bells led Debussy's biographer Louis Laloy to suggest the title *Et la lune descend sur la temple qui fut* ("And the Moon Descends on the Vanished Temple") for the second *Image* of Book II. Oscar Thompson wrote that the music's "rather rigidly moving blocks of hollow-sounding chords—a formula developed by Debussy to suggest the mystery of things ancient and immobile, as in a world that has been drugged and left behind—give it a strange and disquieting character."

The gleaming, rippling strains of *Poissons d'or* ("Golden Fish") are said variously to have been inspired by a Chinese or Japanese print or embroidery or lacquer tray, and they undoubtedly arose from both Debussy's fascination with Orientalism and his interest in creating a musical equivalent for the play of light on water.

Three Pièces de Clavecin

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683–1764)

Jean-Philippe Rameau, France's leading musical figure of the mid-18th century, was born in 1683 in Dijon, where his father was a church organist. Rameau's early training as a lawyer came to naught, and in 1701, he traveled briefly in northern Italy as a violinist and organist before settling first at

Avignon and later at Clermont-Ferrand to play organ and teach. He began composing works for the harpsichord and for church use at that time, and in 1705, he moved to Paris, hoping to establish himself in Europe's most sophisticated city. Though he published his first book of harpsichord pieces during his three years there, he did not find great success in the capital, and in 1708, he returned to Dijon to succeed his father as organist at Notre Dame. In 1722, he went again to Paris to publish his *Traité de l'harmonie*, a monumental treatise codifying the important advances in music theory and harmony during the preceding decades. He became organist at Sainte-Croix-de-la-Brétonnerie, and continued to compose keyboard works while preparing a sequel to his treatise. His work eventually brought him to the attention of La Riche de la Pouplinière, a wealthy tax collector who devoted a considerable portion of his fortune to supporting musicians. La Pouplinière made Rameau head of his household orchestra, and, when he learned of his protégé's ambition to compose for the stage, put him in touch with the librettist Simon-Joseph Pellegrin. Together they produced the opera *Hippolyte et Aricie* in Paris in 1733 (Rameau had just turned 50), which stirred the rage of the conservative partisans of Lully's operas when it achieved a fine and unexpected success because of its harmonic audacities and extravagant orchestration. As other successful operas followed—*Les Indes galantes* (1735), *Castor et Pollux* (1737), *Dardanus* (1739)—his opposition increased, notably from that great lover of all things natural and unspoiled, Jean Jacques Rousseau, who contended that the simple style of Italian opera was superior to Rameau's elaborate French variety of the genre. Despite Rousseau's venomous attacks, however, Rameau's acclaim continued, and he wrote steadily for the stage until his death at the age of 81 in 1764; he left nearly 30 examples of the *tragédie lyrique* and *opéra-ballet* to supplement his reputation as a theorist and composer for the harpsichord.

The French composers of Rameau's time commonly headed their instrumental pieces with descriptive titles noting the music's mood or technique, or perhaps evoking a person or a programmatic subject. Rameau's four collections of *Pièces de Clavecin* (i.e., harpsichord) are filled with such evocative numbers, including three of the best-known—*La Poule*, *L'Enharmonique*, and *L'Egyptienne*—from the *Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de Clavecin*, published in 1728. *La Poule* ("The Hen") is one of the most famous musical vignettes of the 18th century. The deeply felt *L'Enharmonique* reflects Rameau's belief that he wanted his listeners "to be touched rather than surprised." The unusual and expressive "enharmonic" chordal progression (the re-interpretation of a chord or note as being in a new key) midway through the movement was, he contended, "founded on reason and authorized by Nature herself." The association of the title of *L'Egyptienne* has been lost, though it could have been inspired by some exotic dance or dancer, or perhaps by a theme party or the costume of an aristocratic patron of the composer.

Valses nobles et sentimentales

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

"The title, *Valses nobles et sentimentales*," Ravel wrote, "shows clearly enough my intention to compose a chain of waltzes in the style of Schubert. In place of the virtuosity that characterized *Gaspard de la Nuit*, there was a style cleaner, clearer, which emphasized the harmonies and brought them to life." The specific works for piano by Schubert that influenced Ravel were his *Valses nobles*, Op. 77, and *Valses sentimentales*, Op. 50. The musical style, however, is French rather than Viennese, with the spirit of Satie hovering above many measures of Ravel's music. The title page even bears a cryptic, Satie-esque inscription that Ravel drew from the writings of Henri de Régnier: "The delicious pleasure, always new, of a useless occupation." This work of highly refined sensibility and sophistication comprises seven continuous miniature waltzes followed by an epilogue that provide a variety of contrasting moods, keys, and tempos encompassing more emotional states than the title implies. The hushed epilogue recalls disembodied wisps from most of the preceding waltzes.

Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor, Op. 20

Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)

Chopin left Warsaw in November 1830 for his second visit to Vienna, hoping to further his career as a virtuoso pianist by building on the success that he had enjoyed in that city

a year earlier. His hope was in vain. The Viennese were fickle in their taste for musical culture, and Chopin had expended his novelty value upon his first foray, so he found little easy response there to his attempts to produce some concerts for himself. His difficulties were exacerbated by the Polish insurrection against Russian oppression that erupted only days after he arrived in the Habsburg capital. Conservative Austria was troubled by the anti-monarchical unrest to its north, and feared that the Czar might petition them for help against the uprising. Polish nationals in Austria were therefore thrown into an uncomfortable situation, and Chopin took considerable care in expressing his patriotic sympathies too openly. In addition, he was worried for the safety of his family and friends in Warsaw, and sorely missed a sweetheart for whom he had hatched a passion shortly before leaving. He vacillated about returning home to join the cause, and actually started out on one occasion, but quickly changed his mind and retreated to Vienna. (Years later, George Sand said that "Chopin is always leaving—tomorrow.") In addition, he was earning no money, and became depressed enough on one occasion to write, "To live or die—it is all the same to me." He wallowed in indecision for another six months, unsure whether to head for London or Munich or Milan, but finally settled on Paris, where he arrived in September 1831. Within a year, he had become one of the most acclaimed musicians in France.

Though Chopin composed little during his difficult time in Vienna in 1830–1831, he did write the first of his Scherzos, a work of strong, almost violent emotions that may well reflect some of his frustrations of those months. The "scherzo" as perfected by Beethoven has about it an air of humor, or at least *joie de vivre*, that is reflected in its name, which, in both German and Italian, means "joke." There is, however, little light-hearted sentiment in the outer sections of Chopin's Scherzo in B Minor ("How is 'gravity' to clothe itself, if 'jest' goes about in dark veils," Schumann wondered), but the central reaches of the piece turn to sweeter thoughts by presenting a sumptuously lyrical theme derived from the old Polish Christmas song "Sleep, Baby Jesus."

Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat Minor, Op. 31

Chopin

Early in 1837, Chopin fell victim to the influenza epidemic sweeping Paris. He spent several miserable weeks in bed with a high fever and a bloody cough, and his spirits were further dampened by a letter from Countess Teresa Wodzinska, upon whose daughter, Maria, he had long had marital designs. The Countess hinted that the family might meet Chopin in Germany that summer, but the plans were left frustratingly tentative. Chopin was further unsettled that spring by insistent pleas from George Sand, whom he had first met at a party given by Franz Liszt a few months before, to visit her at her country house at Nohant, near Châteauroux in the province of Berry. He agreed, then reneged, and finally decided to accompany the pianist, publisher, and sometime composer Camille Pleyel on a business trip to London. Chopin enjoyed taking in the sites around southern England, and he created a sensation at a reception sponsored by the piano maker Broadwood, but found England gloomy and a bit too well-ordered for his taste. By July, he was back in Paris, where he received a letter from Countess Wodzinska confirming that she and Maria would not be seeing him that year; his hopes of marrying the girl vanished. Emotionally emptied by this turn of events but not yet ready to let George Sand into his life, Chopin found solace in composing and receiving the public approbation inspired by the publication of a steady stream of his music between October and December: the second set of *Études* (Op. 25, dedicated to Countess Marie d'Agoult, Liszt's mistress and the mother of Cosima, later Richard Wagner's second wife); the *Impromptu* in A-flat Major (Op. 29); the four Op. 30 *Mazurkas*; the Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat Minor (Op. 31, dedicated to an aristocratic student, Countess Adèle de Fürstenstein); and the Two *Nocturnes*, Op. 32.

The Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat Minor retains the expressive urgency of the Scherzo in B Minor (Robert Schumann called it "Byronic"), but folds its emotions into the sort of perfectly balanced and precisely integrated form in which Chopin wrapped the most profound of his mature utterances. The work is large in scale and subtle in formal detail, but falls essentially into three sections: A–B–A. The outer portions are, by turns, sepulchral and tempestuous, given to sudden outbursts and dramatic statements; the central section is flowing and lyrical, with a grace and buoyancy that turn serious as the recapitulation of the opening music approaches.

Scherzo No. 3 in C-sharp minor, Op. 39

Chopin

By the summer of 1838, Chopin's health was showing disturbing signs of decline, and George Sand told him that they needed to leave Paris before damp winter set in. They settled on the distant Mediterranean island of Majorca, off the eastern coast of Spain, which friends (who had not been there) assured them was blessed with abundant sunshine and fresh air. Chopin sold the rights to his Preludes to the publisher Camille Pleyel to help finance the trip, and he, George, and her son and daughter left Paris in October. Sand recorded that Chopin was "fresh as a rose and rosy as a turnip" when they embarked from Barcelona for Majorca on November 7th, and that he had stocked up on manuscript paper in anticipation of a fruitful retreat away from Paris. Their high spirits were little dampened when they had trouble finding a place to stay in Palma—they had to settle for noisy rooms above a cooper's shop—and Chopin reported to his university friend Julius Fontana, "I am at Palma, among palms, cedars, cactuses, olive trees, oranges, figs, pomegranates, etc. The sky is turquoise, the sea like emeralds, the air as in heaven. A superb life! I am close to what is most beautiful. I feel better."

The company moved to a sparsely furnished house at the edge of Palma a few days later, where the bad luck that was to mark the Majorca stay continued. While they were out for a long walk across rugged country, a violent storm blew up, and Chopin contracted a severe case of bronchitis. The rains returned, the house became miserably dank, and Chopin got worse. The physician that Sand summoned diagnosed Chopin's malady as consumption, the highly contagious scourge of the 19th century, and their

landlord demanded that they leave his

property before it became infected. The party transferred to the French embassy for a few days and then moved to converted cells in a deserted monastery at Valldemosa, situated in a wild and romantic spot six miles from town.

Chopin was well enough by the end of December to write down two more of the Preludes that he had promised to Pleyel, as well as the Mazurka in E Minor, Op. 41,

No. 2 and the final revision of the Ballade in F Major, Op. 38, though his work was considerably hampered by a dilapidated old piano, the only one he could find for himself on the island. The storms continued, and his health varied from day to day, but he still found some joy in the time on Majorca—"everything here breathes poetry and the scenery is wonderfully colored," he wrote to a friend. A good piano, sent from Paris two months before by Pleyel, finally arrived in mid-January, and it inspired him to undertake the Polonaise in C Minor, Op. 40,

No. 2 and the Scherzo No. 3 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 39, but by then, the Spartan accommodations, the shabby treatment by the locals (whose antagonism had been aroused by the visitors' unmarried state), the rambunctious children, the poor weather, and the continuing fragility of Chopin's health had brought them to a state of loathing the island. Sand concluded that the Majorca venture had been "a complete disaster." When they sailed for Barcelona on February 15th, Chopin's health was much worse than when they had arrived three months before. Their crossing, in a cargo boat laden with live pigs, was rough, and Chopin developed a serious hemorrhage of the lungs, from which he lost much blood. A French doctor in Barcelona stabilized him well enough so that he could be taken to Marseille, and the company stayed there until leaving for Sand's country villa at Nohant in May. Chopin's strength revived with the coming of spring, and he completed the Scherzo in C-sharp Minor at Nohant during the summer of 1839. Chopin, George Sand, and the children, a year older, finally returned home to Paris in October.

The Scherzo No. 3 in C-sharp Minor, the most dramatic of Chopin's four specimens of the form, is built from the alternation of two sharply contrasting musical elements. The first, passionate and stormy, is marked by strong accents and thundering scales in stark, open octaves. The other is graceful and luminous, combining a richly harmonized chorale phrase with an incandescent ripple of falling notes.

Scherzo No. 4 in E Major, Op. 54

Chopin

In 1842, Sand hustled Chopin off to Nohant in April, somewhat earlier than usual to help assuage his grief over the recent death of his life-long friend Jan Matuszynski. She invited some of Chopin's favorite people to visit, including the painter Delacroix, who drew a portrait of the composer. Though Chopin abandoned the concert stage that year (he did not play in public again until 1848), he remained active as a teacher and composer, and the summer of 1842 witnessed the creation of four major works: the Impromptu in G-flat Major (Op. 51), the Ballade in F Minor (Op. 52), the Polonaise in A-flat Major (Op. 53), and the Scherzo No. 4 in E Major (Op. 54).

The Scherzo No. 4 derives its overall three-part form (A–B–A) and its rapid triple meter from the Beethovenian model, but invests the medium with a sensitivity and range of expression that are unique to Chopin. The most extended but also the most halcyon of Chopin's four examples of the form, it is, according to Herbert Weinstock, "happiness made manifest. There is a sense in which the sunny motion of the Scherzo in E Major is aimless—by which I do not mean that it is formless, but that it seems spontaneous and lacks portentousness. . . . It is rich in invention, pleasant to play, and generous with intensely interesting structural and harmonic ideas."

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Emanuel Ax (piano) is renowned not only for his poetic temperament and unsurpassed virtuosity, but also for the exceptional breadth of his performing activity. Each season his distinguished career includes appearances with major symphony orchestras worldwide, recitals in the most celebrated concert halls, a variety of chamber music collaborations, the commissioning and performance of new music, and additions to his acclaimed discography on Sony Classical.

Ax captured public attention in 1974 when, at age 25, he won the first Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Competition in Tel Aviv. In 1975, he won the Michaels Award of Young Concert Artists, and four years later, took the coveted Avery Fisher Prize. He has been an exclusive Sony Classical recording artist since 1987, making his debut on that label with a collection of Chopin scherzos and mazurkas. His recent releases include the third in a series of Haydn piano sonatas, a two-piano program (with Yefim Bronfman) of works by Rachmaninoff; period-instrument performances of Chopin's complete works for piano and orchestra (on two discs); and the Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2 with Bernard Haitink and the Boston Symphony. Other notable recordings are a Grammy Award-winning album of Haydn piano sonatas, the two Liszt concertos paired with the Schoenberg concerto, three solo Brahms albums, an album of tangos by Astor Piazzolla, and a recording of John Adams' Century Rolls with the Cleveland Orchestra for Nonesuch.

Throughout the 2003–04 season at Carnegie Hall, Ax will focus on the music of Debussy. This season-long "Perspectives" series features Ax in performances with the Boston Symphony under Bernard Haitink, with the Juilliard Orchestra under Charles Dutoit, in three chamber music concerts at Zankel Hall, and in a solo piano recital. These programs also feature world premieres of three Carnegie Hall commissions.

In recent years, Ax has turned his attention to the music of 20th-century composers, performing works by such diverse figures as Sir Michael Tippett, Hans Werner Henze, Paul Hindemith, Ezra Laderman, Peter Lieberon, Joseph Schwantner, William Bolcom, André Previn, and Aaron Copland.

He gave the world premiere of John Adams' Century Rolls with the Cleveland Orchestra in 1997, the European premiere with the Concertgebouw Orchestra in 1998, and the New York premiere with the Cleveland Orchestra at Carnegie Hall in 2000. Another concerto dedicated to him, Christopher Rouse's *Seeing*, was premiered in 1999 with Leonard Slatkin and the New York Philharmonic (its European debut was at the BBC Proms in 2001). In 2000, Ax joined the Boston Symphony for the first performances of Bright Sheng's *Red Silk Dance*, and in March 2003, he joined Yo-Yo Ma, David Zinman, and the New York Philharmonic to premiere Sheng's *Song and Dance of Tears*. Ax premiered Krzysztof Penderecki's *Resurrection* with the Philadelphia Orchestra in May 2002, and in May 2003, he premiered a concerto written for him by Melinda Wagner, *Extremity of Sky*, with Daniel Barenboim and the Chicago Symphony.

Devoted to chamber music literature, Ax regularly works with such artists as Young Uck Kim, Cho-Liang Lin, Yo-Yo Ma, Peter Serkin, and Jaime Laredo, and he was a frequent collaborator with

the late Isaac Stern. He has made a series of acclaimed recordings with Yo-Yo Ma, and as a duo they have won three Grammy Awards for the Beethoven and Brahms sonatas for cello and piano. The pair has also teamed with Richard Stoltzman for a Grammy Award-winning album of clarinet trios and with Pamela Frank, Rebecca Young, and Edgar Meyer for the Schubert "Trout" Quintet. The Ax–Stern–Laredo–Ma Quartet recorded the piano quartets of Beethoven, Brahms, Dvořák, Fauré, Mozart, and Schumann for Sony Classical.

Born in Lvov, Poland, Emanuel Ax moved to Winnipeg, Canada, with his family when he was a young boy. His studies at The Juilliard School were greatly supported by the sponsorship of the Epstein Scholarship Program of the Boys Clubs of America, and he subsequently won the Young Concert Artists Award. His piano teacher was Mieczyslaw Munz. Additionally, he attended Columbia University, where he majored in French.

Emanuel Ax resides in New York City with his wife, the pianist Yoko Nozaki. They have two children together, Joseph and Sarah. For more information about his career, please visit www.EmanuelAx.com.

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