



Celebrity Series of Boston

**Sunday, March 26, 2017 at 3pm
NEC's Jordan Hall**

Paul Lewis, piano

Notes on the Program

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

Partita No. 1 in B-flat Major, BWV 825 (1726)

Bach's six Partitas for solo harpsichord followed two earlier sets of suites, the so-called "English" Suites and "French" Suites—all of which reflected an earlier French tradition. While the dances referenced in these suites dictated particular tempos and rhythms, Bach's compositions were not actually meant as dance accompaniments; the Partitas in particular were challenging solo works intended for the publishing market, appearing under the title *Clavier-Übung*, or *Keyboard Practice*.

In the opening *Prelude*, distinctive trills make each successive entrance of the main theme stand out. In the *Allemande* that follows, restless runs and arpeggios flesh out the dance style named for its German origins. The physicality continues in the *Corrente*, to use the Italian heading found in Bach's first edition. Also known as the *Courante* in French, this name translates as *Running*, an indication matched by the quick triplet pulse.

The *Sarabande* originated in Spain's American colonies before it made its way to France, where it became more measured and graceful, as heard in this stately example. Bach's linked *Menuets*, striding elegantly in a three-beat gait, expand upon another beloved dance from French high society. High spirits return in the closing *Gigue*, a dance style adapted from the reeling jigs from the British Isles.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 4 in E-flat Major, Opus 7 (1796-97)

From the time Beethoven arrived in Vienna in 1792, he enjoyed a reputation as the leading keyboard virtuoso in the Imperial capital, filling the absence left by Mozart's death a year earlier. While Beethoven worked toward his grand ambitions to compose symphonies and operas, he pieced together a freelance livelihood by composing, performing, publishing, teaching, and cultivating well-to-do patrons. One gig that seemed to have worked out particularly well was providing piano lessons for a gifted teenager, Countess Barbara "Babette" von Keglevics, whose wealthy family lived across the street in Vienna. Supposedly Beethoven showed up for lessons in his robe and slippers!

The Piano Sonata in E-flat Major that Beethoven completed in 1797 and dedicated to Babette was his longest and most substantial sonata to date, suggesting that the young countess was no mere dilettante. Repeated notes in the rather fast opening movement impart a strong forward momentum, while the jarring contrasts between *fortissimo* accents and *pianissimo* responses show Beethoven moving beyond a tidy Classical spectrum and into the bold extremes he explored in later decades.

Repeated notes crop up in the accompaniments of the slow movement, and again in the third and fourth movements, creating a through-line that unifies this grand sonata. After the minor-key harmonies and rumbling arpeggios of the third movement's contrasting passage, the *Rondo* finale seems to leave behind any lingering disturbance with the light touch of its main theme, but a thunderous minor-key episode injects yet another wave of heightened emotions before this epic composition reaches its hushed conclusion.

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)

Selected Waltzes

Frédéric Chopin was a piano prodigy who published his first works at age seven. Though essentially self-taught as a pianist, he received training in composition at Warsaw's High School of Music. Chopin left Warsaw in late 1830 for what was meant to be his first European tour, but a populist uprising in Poland and the subsequent crackdown by Russian forces ruled out the possibility of Chopin returning to his homeland. His travels eventually brought him to Paris, where he made a name for himself performing at exclusive salons (though rarely in public concerts), teaching private students, and publishing a steady stream of piano music.

Chopin's output centered on compact genres such as Nocturnes, Mazurkas, Polonaises and Waltzes. His earliest Waltzes dated from his teenage years in Warsaw, even before he spent time in Vienna (the epicenter of the waltz craze) and Paris. The familiar, three-beat sway of the waltz provided a universal point of reference in works that Chopin published for an international clientele.

Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826)

***Sonata No. 2 in A-flat Major, Opus 39* (1814-1816)**

Carl Maria von Weber is best known for three operas he composed in the last decade of his life: *Der Freischütz*, *Euryanthe*, and *Oberon*. He came from a theatrical family, and his lifelong dedication to German-language opera, both as a composer and as a conductor, helped break the stranglehold of Italian works in Europe's leading opera houses.

Until the success of the opera *Der Freischütz* in 1821, instability reigned in Weber's life. He lost a good job in Stuttgart in 1810 over a corruption scandal and some bad debts, and he traveled for three years before he found his next permanent employment in Prague, starting in 1813. He spent an unhappy three years there as the music director for a theater, during which time he also composed a modest amount of instrumental music, including most of a new Piano Sonata in A-flat Major. He did not complete the score until 1816, when he and his fiancée left Prague for greater opportunities in Berlin. While she was appearing as a star singer, he worked to impress the city's tastemakers, an endeavor in which his virtuosic new sonata could be a valuable tool.

Even in the abstract genre of the piano sonata, Weber's theatrical leanings are never far beneath the surface. The *tremolo* texture that begins the first movement has the feel of a curtain raiser, and the singing tunes soon issued by the pianist's right hand have a soaring, voice-like quality. The slow march of the second movement is a marvel of restraint and pacing, building patiently to the full intensity of triplet accompaniments pounded out in forceful octaves.

In the third movement that Weber labeled as a "capricious minuet," his sense of humor comes to the fore, along with his considerable facility at the keyboard. The charming finale plays up its conversational exchanges, including snippets of chromatic scales that bring a sassy quality with them, like the musical equivalent of a raised eyebrow.