

presents...

Shenson Piano Series

LISE DE LA SALLE | Piano

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

ALBÉNIZ

Cantos de España, Opus 232

*Prélude
Orientale
Sous le palmier
Córdoba
Seguidillas*

LISZT

Mephisto Waltz No. 1, S.514 "The Dance in the Village Inn"

INTERMISSION

GINASTERA

Danzas Argentinas, Opus 2

*Danza del viejo boyero
Danza de la moza donosa
Danza del gaucho matrero*

LISZT

Piano Sonata in B Minor, S.178

Lento assai; Andante sostenuto; Allegro energico

**The Shenson Piano Series is made possible by Fred M. Levin,
The Shenson Foundation**

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Lise de la Salle is represented by Frank Salomon Associates, Inc
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Hamburg Steinway Model D, Pro Piano, San Francisco

ARTIST PROFILE

San Francisco Performances presents *Lise de la Salle* for the third time. She made her SF Performances recital debut in January 2009.



Through her acclaimed international concert appearances and her award-winning Naïve recordings, **Lise de la Salle** has established a reputation as one of today's most exciting young artists and as a musician of uncommon sensibility and maturity. Her playing inspired a *Washington Post* critic to write, "For much of the concert, the audience had to remember to breathe... the exhilaration didn't let up for a second until her hands came off the keyboard."

A native of France, Ms. de la Salle first came to international attention in 2005, at the age of 16, with a Bach/Liszt recording that *Gramophone Magazine* selected as "Recording of the Month." Ms. de la Salle was then similarly recognized in 2008 for her recording of the first concertos of Liszt, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich—a remarkable feat for someone only 20 years old. Recent recordings offer works of Schumann, the complete works of Rachmaninoff for piano and orchestra with the Philharmonia Zurich, and the acclaimed *Bach Unlimited*. Spring 2021 saw the release of her most recent recording *When Do We Dance?* on Naïve, an odyssey of dance inspired works from around the globe that span a century.

Lise de la Salle has played with many of the world's leading orchestras and conductors. She made her London Symphony Orchestra debut with Fabio Luisi, who invited her to become the first Artist-in-Residence

of the Zurich Opera in 2014. Her 2022-2023 season sees her returning to the Aspen Music Festival, Music Toronto, and San Francisco Performances in recital and to the Dallas, Houston and Atlanta Symphonies among others.

Born in Cherbourg, France in 1988, Ms. de la Salle began studying the piano at the age of four and gave her first concert at nine in a live broadcast on Radio-France. When she was 11, she received special permission to enter the Paris Conservatoire Supérieur de Musique to study with Pierre Réach. At 13, she made her concerto debut in Avignon and her Paris recital debut at the Louvre before going on tour with the Orchestre National d'Île de France. Ms. de la Salle graduated in 2001 and subsequently enrolled in the postgraduate cycle with Bruno Rigutto. In 2003, Ms. de la Salle won the European Young Concert Artists Auditions in Paris, and in 2004, the Young Concert Artists International Auditions in New York.

PROGRAM NOTES

Cantos de España, Opus 232

ISAAC ALBÉNIZ
(1860-1909)

Albéniz composed the first three movements of his *Cantos de España* in 1892, then returned to the score six years later and added the final two movements. These are not literally "Songs of Spain" but instead a suite of short piano pieces that evoke a Spanish atmosphere, particularly the atmosphere of Andalusia, that part of southern Spain famous for its citrus, wine, and olives and strongly influenced by its Christian and Moorish heritage. Albéniz roots much of this music in the song and dance rhythms of flamenco music, which can incorporate the folk and gypsy music of Andalusia.

The opening *Prélude* will be familiar to many, who will know it in Francisco Tárrega's arrangement for guitar. Albeniz originally published this music under the title *Asturias* as part of his *Suite espagnole* of 1886. It works brilliantly as guitar music, with the melody emerging from within the busy textures. The piece is in ternary form, with a slow middle section marked *cantando largamente ma dolce*; the opening rush returns, but the piece winks out on a return of the central episode.

Orientale is the vaguest of titles. It does not refer to the Orient but instead evokes

an exotic atmosphere. The meter is 3/8, but on this meter Albeniz can drape some quite fluid rhythms, from languid triplets to flowing melodies. *Sous le palmier* translates literally as "Under the Palm Tree," though Albéniz gives it the subtitle *Danse espagnole*; this Spanish dance is cast as a habanera.

Córdoba is a slow, evocative nocturne in tribute to a city Albéniz loved. It opens with the sound of tolling church bells, and we are reminded of the great Mosque in that city that almost violently fuses Christianity and Islam. The piece is sectional in construction, sometimes dancing ahead, then holding back.

The concluding *Seguidillas* was also drawn from Albéniz's *Suite espagnole*. A seguidilla is an old dance that originated in the city of Castile, is in a triple meter, and consists of a sequence of sections (the title means "sequence" in Spanish).

Mephisto Waltz No. 1, S. 514 "The Dance in the Village Inn"

FRANZ LISZT
(1811-1886)

In 1860, as he neared the end of his tenure as music director at the Weimar court, Franz Liszt wrote a pair of orchestral works that he titled *Two Episodes from Lenau's Faust*. Nicolas Lenau (1802-50) was a Hungarian-Austrian poet who wrote his own versions of the Faust legend, different from Goethe's. Liszt's pieces depict two scenes from Lenau's dramatic poem, and the second has become one of Liszt's most familiar orchestral works. Liszt titled it *Der Tanz in der Dorfschenke* ("The Dance in the Village Inn"), though it is most commonly known today under the title *Mephisto Waltz No. 1*. Liszt completed this music in January 1861 and led its first performance at Weimar on March 8, 1861. At the same time, Liszt prepared a piano version of this music—it is virtually the same musically as the orchestral version, though it differs in a few pianistic details.

In the score Liszt printed a synopsis of the action that his music depicts. Faust and Mephistopheles wander into a village tavern, where Faust is smitten by a "black-eyed beauty." But he is afraid to approach her, and Mephistopheles chides him for being willing to stand up to the creatures of hell but cowering at the prospect of approaching a woman. Bored with the tavern, its in-

habitants, and the music, Mephistopheles challenges the local musicians to dig in and play with some life. He takes up a violin and begins to play, and his playing is so exciting that it whips those in the tavern into a frenzy of excitement. Under the spell of the music, Faust overcomes his fears and leads the “black-eyed beauty” out into the warm night, where they cross a meadow and enter a dark forest. Deep in that forest, they hear the music from the distant tavern as a nightingale sings overhead.

Liszt’s music does not set out to depict these events in the sort of realistic detail that Richard Strauss would have brought to the task a generation later. Instead, he offers a more generalized impression, and his piece is structured as a series of waltzes in 3/8: some are fiery, some languorous, and some dance with an almost Mendelssohnian lightness. After all this excitement, the music turns quiet as Faust and his companion enter the dark woods. In Liszt’s orchestral version a solo cello and a solo violin suggest the couple in the dark at this point, while a flute echoes the nightingale’s song. A sudden rush of energy propels the music to its powerful final chords.

Danzas Argentinas, Opus 2

ALBERTO GINASTERA

(1916–1983)

Alberto Ginastera was only 21 and still a student at the National Conservatory in Buenos Aires when he composed his *Danzas Argentinas* in 1937. Already he had discovered that native Argentinian materials—folksongs, rhythms, melodies—could furnish the basis for his own music, just as his friend Aaron Copland was making a similar discovery about American materials far to the north. Each of Ginastera’s brief *Danzas Argentinas* has a different topic, but all three have a pronounced Argentinian flavor: all are full of rhythmic energy that grows out of ostinato figures, and—while they are not dissonant—all three have a harmonic piquancy that results from Ginastera’s polytonal writing.

Danza del viejo boyero (a boyero is someone who takes care of oxen during long journeys) derives much of its energy from the opening ostinato, which will return throughout; Ginastera separates these returns with quiet lyric material before the dance comes to a sudden close. *Danza de la moza donosa* (“Dance of the Graceful Maiden”) rides along another ostinato, this one quiet, and over this Ginastera offers the

lilting and infectious main theme; the music rises to a strident climax, then returns to the opening material for the quiet conclusion. *Danza del gaucho matrero* (“Dance of the Cunning Gaucho”) is a portrait of the outlaw gaucho who hides in the woods. This is the most aggressive of the dances, bristling with energy and constant motion, and it drives to an exuberant close full of swoops across the range of the keyboard.

Piano Sonata in B Minor, S. 178

FRANZ LISZT

Liszt wrote his *Sonata in B Minor* in 1852–3 and dedicated it to Robert Schumann. The first public performance took place four years later in Berlin in 1857, when it was played by Liszt’s son-in-law Hans von Bülow. The *Sonata in B Minor* is in all senses of the word a revolutionary work, for Liszt sets aside previous notions of sonata form and looks ahead to a new vision of what such a form might be. Schumann himself, then in serious mental decline, reportedly never heard the piece but could not have been especially comfortable with the dedication of a piece of music that flew so directly in the face of his own sense of what a sonata should be. Another figure in nineteenth-century music, however, reacted rapturously: Wagner wrote to Liszt to say, “The Sonata is beautiful beyond any conception, great, pleasing, profound and noble—it is sublime, just as you are yourself.”

The most immediately distinctive feature of the sonata is that it is in one continuous span rather than being divided into separate, discrete movements. Despite the single-span structure, Liszt achieves something of the effect of traditional three-movement sonata form by giving the work a general fast-slow-fast shape. The entire sonata is built on just four themes, all introduced in the opening moments: the slowly-descending scale heard at the very beginning, marked *Lento assai*; the jagged, leaping theme in octaves that follows immediately—this is marked *Allegro energico*; dove-tailed into this is a propulsive figure of repeated eighth notes, played first deep in the left hand; and a powerful hymn-like theme marked *Grandioso* and stamped out over steady accompaniment. These themes undergo a gradual but extensive development—a process Liszt called “the transformation of themes”—and are often made to perform quite varied functions as they undergo these transformations.

For example, the propulsive left-hand figure, which sounds so ominous on its first appearance, is later made to sing in unexpected ways, while the jagged *Allegro energico* theme becomes the subject for a fugue at the opening of the third “movement.” At the end, Liszt winds all this energy down, and the sonata concludes on a quiet recall of the slowly-descending *Lento assai* from the very beginning. After so much energy, the sonata vanishes on a very quiet B deep in the pianist’s left hand.

The *Sonata in B Minor* was to some extent shaped by Schubert’s “Wanderer” Fantasy of 1822, a work Liszt knew and greatly admired—he performed it often and arranged it for piano and orchestra. In the “Wanderer” Fantasy Schubert built an extended work in several contrasted sections, all based on a theme from his song *Die Wanderer*. Liszt allows himself more themes, but his technique is exactly the same as Schubert’s: a single span of music evolves out of the ingenious transformation of just a few thematic ideas. Over the succeeding generations that idea would attract composers as different as Schoenberg (*Chamber Symphony No. 1*) and Sibelius (*Seventh Symphony*).

The *Sonata in B Minor* is extremely dramatic music, so dramatic that many guessed that it must have a program, as so much of Liszt’s music does. But Liszt insisted that this is not descriptive or programmatic music. He wanted his sonata accepted as a piece of “pure music,” to be heard and understood for itself.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger