

presents...

JAVIER PERIANES | Piano

Wednesday, February 7, 2024 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

C. SCHUMANN **Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann, Opus 20**

R. SCHUMANN **Sonata for Piano in F Minor, Opus 14**
III. Quasi variazioni. Andantino de Clara Wieck

BRAHMS **Variations on a Theme of Robert Schumann, Opus 9**

INTERMISSION

GRANADOS **Goyescas**
Los requiebros
Coloquio en la reja
El fandango de candil
Queja o la maja y el ruiseñor
El amor y la muerte
Epílogo: Serenata del espectro

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ARTIST PROFILE

San Francisco Performances presents Javier Perianes for the second time. He first appeared in May 2017.

The international career of **Javier Perianes** has led him to perform in the most prestigious concert halls, with the world's foremost orchestras, working with celebrated conductors including Daniel Barenboim, Charles Dutoit, Zubin Mehta, Gustavo Dudamel, Klaus Mäkelä, Gianandrea Noseda, Gustavo Gimeno, Santtu-Matias Rouvali, Simone Young, Vladimir Jurowski, and François-Xavier Roth.

The 2023–24 season features an array of high-profile concerts including the US and Canadian premieres of Jimmy López Bellido's *Ephemeræ* with The Philadelphia Orchestra and Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, and the world premiere of a new concerto by Francisco Coll with London Philharmonic Orchestra and the Canadian premiere with Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Other highlights include Royal Concertgebouworkest, Orquesta Nacional de España, Brussels Philharmonic, NDR Radio Philharmonie, Norrköping Symphony Orchestra, Iceland Symphony, Bern Symphonieorchester, and play/directing Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, Orquesta Ciudad de Granada, Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra and Orquesta Sinfonica del Principado de Asturias. Perianes' Beethoven cycle with Sydney Symphony Orchestra continues in summer 2024 with Beethoven *Piano Concerto No.1*.

Perianes frequently appears in recital across the globe, with performances in Bilbao, Frankfurt, Regensburg, Canary Island Festival, San Francisco, Montreal,

and Vancouver this season. A natural and keen chamber musician, he collaborates regularly with violist Tabea Zimmermann and Quiroga Quartet, and appearing at festivals such as the BBC Proms, Lucerne, Argerich Festival, Salzburg Whitsun, La Roque d'Anthéron, Grafenegg, Prague Spring, Ravello, Stresa, San Sebastian, Santander, Granada, Vail, Blossom, Ravinia, and Canary Island. This season sees Perianes and Zimmermann tour to Boulez Saal, SPOT Groningen and Heidelberg Festival.

Career highlights have included concerts with Wiener Philharmoniker, Leipzig Gewandhausorchester, Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, Washington's National, Yomiuri Nippon and Danish National symphony orchestras, Oslo, London, New York, Los Angeles and Czech philharmonic orchestras, Orchestre de Paris, Cleveland, Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal and Philharmonia orchestras, Swedish and Norwegian Radio orchestras, Mahler Chamber Orchestra and Budapest Festival Orchestra.

Recording exclusively for harmonia mundi, Perianes has developed a diverse discography ranging from Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schubert, Grieg, Chopin, Debussy, Ravel, and Bartók to Blasco de Nebra, Mompou, Falla, Granados, and Turina. The 2020–21 season saw the release of *Jeux de Miroirs* and *Cantilena*. *Jeux de Miroirs* centres around Ravel's *Concerto in G* recorded with Orchestre de Paris and Josep Pons and includes the piano and orchestral versions of *Le tombeau de Couperin* and *Alborada del gracioso*. Together with Tabea Zimmermann, he released *Cantilena* in April 2020, an album which is a celebration of music from Spanish and Latin America. His other recent al-

bums pay tribute to Claude Debussy on the centenary of his death with a recording of the first book of his *Préludes* and *Estampes*, and *Les Trois Sonates—The Late Works* (with Jean-Guihen Queyras), which won a *Gramophone Award* in 2019. In July 2021 Perianes released his latest album featuring Chopin's *Sonatas No. 2 and No. 3* interspersed with the three *Mazurkas* from Op.63.

Perianes was awarded the National Music Prize in 2012 by the Ministry of Culture of Spain and named Artist of the Year at the International Classical Music Awards (ICMA) in 2019.

PROGRAM NOTES

Variations on a Theme of Robert Schumann, Opus 20

CLARA SCHUMANN
(1819–1896)

In September 1853, Johannes Brahms—then 20 years old—appeared at the front door of Robert and Clara Schumann in Düsseldorf. The couple was charmed by the young man, his music, and his endless talent, and Robert published an appreciation of Brahms, hailing him as “a young eagle...a player of genius who can make of the piano an orchestra of lamenting and loudly jubilant voices.” Overwhelmed by the Schumanns' respect and affection, Brahms became a virtual member of the household. But this was a troubled time for the Schumann family. Never wholly stable, Robert became delusional in February 1854 and threw himself into the Rhine in a suicide attempt. Rescued by fisherman, he was placed in a mental asylum where he died two years later.

In the aftermath of the Robert's incarceration, young Brahms moved in with Clara and her seven children, assisting with the household and visiting Robert in the asylum. It was a stressful time for all involved: Brahms and Clara—both fiercely loyal to Robert—found themselves strongly attracted to each other. On May 27, 1854, three months after Robert was taken to the asylum, Clara played for Brahms her *Variations on a Theme of Robert Schumann*. Moved by this music, Brahms then wrote his own set of variations on that same theme and published it under the same title as his Opus 9. And so we have two sets of variations on the same theme, written in the same household under the same somber conditions at virtually the same time

(Brahms' variations will be heard later on this program).

The theme of these variations is the fourth movement of a collection of short pieces that Robert had published in 1852 under the title *Bunte Blätter, Opus 99*. Robert marked this chordal melody *Ziemlich langsam* ("rather slow"), and his original piece—only 24 measures long—preserves its quiet and expressive character throughout. Clara begins by restating her husband's brief piece in its entirety, and then she offers seven brief variations on it. These are melodic variations (her husband's original theme is clear throughout her set), and the variations remain very much within the subdued character of that theme. At the end, the music slips into silence on soft arpeggios.

This was one of Clara's final compositions. Overwhelmed by her responsibilities to her children and to her declining husband, she would shortly give up composition and devote the rest of her career to performing and to teaching.

Sonata for Piano in F Minor, Opus 14

ROBERT SCHUMANN

(1810–1856)

In 1836 Robert Schumann, then a struggling young composer and music journalist, wrote a difficult piece for piano in a huge (five-movement) sonata-like form, and he offered it to the publisher Tobias Haslinger of Vienna. Haslinger, who had been Schubert's publisher, recognized Schumann's talent, but he had doubts about this music's commercial viability, and he wanted some changes. Schumann was not comfortable with Haslinger's suggestions, but he wanted the piece published, and so it came out in 1836 in three-movement form; 17 years later he published a version that re-introduced one of the discarded scherzos.

The sonata's third movement, one of the movements that survives in all versions of the sonata, is a set of variations. Schumann titles it *Quasi variazioni* and then further specifies that the theme is an *Andantino de Clara Wieck* (Clara, 17 at the time Schumann wrote this music, would marry him four years later). Her theme is a subdued chordal melody, and Schumann now takes it through four variations. These become more impassioned as they proceed, then fall away to a curious close: nine repeated chords in F minor.

Variations on a Theme of Robert Schumann, Opus 9

JOHANNES BRAHMS

(1833–1897)

This is Brahms' set of variations on the same theme Clara had used for her variations on her husband's theme. After hearing her set of variations, Brahms worked quickly: over the next few weeks he composed 14 variations on that theme, giving each variation to Clara for review as she recovered from the birth of her child. Later that summer, Brahms came back to this music and added two more variations (Nos. 10 and 11), and the set was published under the title *Variations on a Theme of Robert Schumann*. Brahms' cryptic dedication of this music gives a sense of his state of mind at this difficult moment: "Little Variations on a Theme by Him. Dedicated to Her."

Brahms begins with Schumann's theme, here spread over 24 slow measures. Its melancholy demeanor establishes the atmosphere for the entire set of variations—this music sets out not to show off a performer's virtuosity but rather to give voice to the sadness that ran through Brahms, Clara, and her children at this dismal moment. These are very accomplished variations. They are not so much melodic variations as subtle explorations of Schumann's theme: some are written in canon, some range far from the home key of F-sharp minor, and some contain private meanings and messages (the ninth variation quotes the second piece in Schumann's Opus 99). The set ends not in brilliance but with two subdued and expressive variations, and finally this very personal music fades into silence.

Clara was moved by Brahms's music, and so was her husband. From within the asylum (and from a moment of lucidity), he was able to examine Brahms' score and play through it, and he wrote to the young composer: "How I long to see you, dear friend, and hear your lovely Variations played either by you or by Clara...There is an exquisite coherence about the whole work, a wealth of fantastic glamor peculiarly your own...Thank you, too, my dear Johannes, for all your kindness to my Clara. She speaks of it constantly in her letters."

Goyescas

ENRIQUE GRANADOS

(1867–1916)

In the years 1909–1914 Enrique Granados composed a suite of six piano pieces inspired by the paintings of Francisco Goya, which he called *Goyescas* ("Goya-like"). While writing this music, Granados spoke of the charm of Goya's paintings for him: "I fell in love with the psychology of Goya and his palette...that rosy-whiteness of the cheeks contrasted with lace and jet-black velvet, those jasmine-white hands, the color of mother-of-pearl have dazzled me." *Goyescas* was an immediate success, and its difficulties make it one of the supreme tests for pianists, who usually choose to play only a selection of its movements on recitals. This concert offers the rare opportunity to hear the complete work.

Los requiebros (that title translates as "compliments" or "flattery") is the first movement of *Goyescas* and was inspired by Goya's painting *Capricho, Tal para cual*. Granados based it on themes drawn from an eighteenth-century *tonadilla* and cast his music in the form of a *jota*, a dance in triple-time from Aragon in northern Spain. This is endlessly elegant music—graceful, atmospheric, and fluid in its rhythmic pulse. Granados' method is straightforward: his themes undergo a process of continuous variation, and while this music always sounds ingratiating, it is quite difficult for the performer.

The title *Coloquio en la reja* translates as "Dialogue at the Window," but a better translation might be "Conversation through a Grille": Granados intended that this music should suggest the conversation between a young woman locked behind a grilled window in her house and her ardent lover outside. Granados marks the beginning *con sentimento amoro*, and that sets the tone for this extended piece. Granados' music is by turns quiet (with such markings as *Très calme* and *dolcissimo*) and fervent (*appassionato* and *espressivamente*), and one can well imagine the lovers' conversation. In the closing moments Granados offers a jaunty section marked *Allegretto arioso* (which translates as *graceful, elegant, spirited*), yet the music falls away to end very quietly, and perhaps we sense the young man's feelings in the final marking: *con dolore e appassionato*.

The title *El fandango de cantil* translates as "The Candlelit Fandango." A fandango

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is an old dance in triple time, perhaps of South American origin, and in the score Granados specifies that this is also a *Galardo*, another lively dance in triple time. This is music of tremendous rhythmic spring, and the pulsing triplet heard in the first measure will continue almost throughout as this music builds through sultry interludes to its powerful conclusion.

Queja o la maja y el ruiseñor (“Laments of The Maya and the Nightingale”) takes the (general) form of a series of variations on an old folk tune from Valencia, but more

specifically it is an evocative nocturne that casts a seductive spell. Marked *Andante malinconico* and for the most part fairly restrained, this is nonetheless extraordinarily difficult music for the pianist, who must master its many changes of tempo and mood, as well as the complexity of the writing (parts of it are written on three staves).

One of the longest movements in *Goyescas*, *El amor y la muerte* (“Love and Death”) is based on themes from earlier movements. Granados subtitles it *Balada* and stresses that the performance be both *Animato e drammatico* and *con molto espressivo e dolore*.

The composer said of this movement: “All of the themes of *Goyescas* are united in *El amor e la muerte*...intense pain, nostalgic love and the final tragedy—death.”

Epílogo: Serenata del espectro (“Epilogue: Serenade of the Ghost”) is marked *Allegretto misterioso*. It begins with the sound of the ghost’s plucking his guitar, continues with his serenade, and concludes quietly as the ghost departs, plucking the strings.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger