

Hopkins Center for the Arts

at Dartmouth

presents

Sally Pinkas

From Brahms to Beaudoin

Wednesday, October 27, 7:30 pm

2021 • Spaulding Auditorium • Dartmouth College

Spaulding Auditorium's Hamburg Steinway concert grand piano was purchased with generous gifts from Members of the Hopkins Center and Members of the Hood Museum of Art; the class of 1942, in memory of Allan Dingwall '42; and anonymous donors. Its New York Steinway concert grand piano was restored with a generous gift by Huntley Allison '42 P'74.

Program

Préludes, Book I (1910)

I. *Danseuses de Delphes*

II. *Voile*

III. *Le Vent dans la plaine*

IV. *Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir*

V. *Les collines d'Anacapri*

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

La fille floutée (2010) for solo piano

Richard Beaudoin (b. 1975)

A prole do bebê (The Baby's Family, 1918)

I. *Branquinha* (The Porcelain Doll)

II. *Moreninha* (The Papier-mâché Doll)

III. *Caboclinha* (The Clay Doll)

IV. *Mulatinha* (The Rubber Doll)

V. *Negrinha* (The Wooden Doll)

VI. *A pobrezinha* (The Rag Doll)

VII. *O polichinelo* (Punch)

VIII. *A bruxa* (The Witch Doll)

Hector Villa-Lobos (1887-1959)

INTERMISSION

Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op. 24 (1861)

Johanne Brahms (1833-1897)

Program Notes

Préludes, Book I, Claude Debussy, (1862-1918)

Composed in 1909-1910.

Premiered by the composer on May 3, 1911 at a concert of Société Musicale Indépendante in Paris.

“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 when he was at work on his *Préludes*. “Then suddenly, without any deliberate consent on our part, one of those 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 a few 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). Though their generic appellation, which recalls the music of both Chopin and Bach, suggests abstraction rather than tone painting, Debussy’s 24 *Préludes* are quintessential examples of his ability to evoke moods, memories and images that are, at once, too specific and too vague for

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mere words. “The Impressionists’ objective was that music should appear directly to the senses without obtruding upon the intellect,” wrote Christopher Palmer in his book on *Impressionism in Music*. “Debussy’s *Préludes* develop this technique of seizing upon the salient details of a scene and fusing them deftly into a quick overall impression to a rare degree of perfection.” Book I of the *Préludes*, composed in 1909-1910 and published by Durand in May 1910, consists of twelve such poetic paintings in tone. This concert offers the first five of them.

The chaste austerity of *Danseuses de Delphes* (*Dancers of Delphi*), perhaps inspired by Greek vases in the Louvre, evokes the solemn rites at the Temple of Apollo in the hallowed ancient city of oracles.

Voiles (*Sails*), a study in whole-tone scales and augmented chords, suggests the gentle lapping of the tide against boats at anchor in a misty harbor.

Not just a breeze that rises to a cutting gale but also a sense of light, space and fragrance are captured in the iridescent *Le vent dans la plaine* (*Wind over the Plains*).

The title and voluptuous mood of *Le sons et les parfums tournent dans l’air du soir* (*Sounds and perfumes waft in the evening air*) derive from a line of Baudelaire’s poem *Harmonies du soir*, of which Debussy made a song in 1889.

Les collines d’Anacapri (*The hills of Anacapri*) evokes the sunny Italian island in the Bay of Naples through the impressionistic treatment of fragments of a Neapolitan folk song.

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La fille floutée (2010) for solo piano, Richard Beaudoin (b. 1975)

La fille floutée seems, at first, to translate as “The blurred girl”, but this is not quite the case. “Floutée” means “blurred”, but “la fille” refers not to a person, but to a piece of piano music by Claude Debussy: his “...*la fille aux cheveux de lin*”, published in 1910 as the eighth of his

Préludes for piano. It is Debussy’s prelude that is being blurred by mine, somewhat in the manner of a photograph taken by a rapidly moving camera.

My piece has a rather elaborate history: Robert Burns’ 18th-century poem “Lassie w’ the lint-white locks” inspired Charles Marie René Leconte de Lisle’s 19th-century poem “La fille aux cheveux de lin”, which Claude Debussy set to music in an unpublished 1882 song. Debussy later borrowed the title of Leconte de Lisle’s poem (and the key of his early song) for his piano prelude “...*la fille aux cheveux de lin*.” Alfred Cortot recorded Debussy’s prelude in London on July 2, 1931, and in 1991 this recording was re-issued on compact disc by Biddulph. Then, at Harvard University in the summer months of 2010, I made micro-temporal measurements of the precise rhythm of Cortot’s recording, graciously assisted by Olivier Senn.

The score you will hear tonight is a millisecond-level transcription of Cortot’s recording of Debussy’s piece, elongated and elaborated upon by my own music. Sally Pinkas has decided to dovetail Debussy’s original prelude into the conclusion of my piece, allowing the two works to talk with one another, reverse chronologically.

Richard Beaudoin

A prole do bebê (The Baby’s Family), Series One, Heitor Villa-Lobos, (1887-1959)

Composed in 1918.

Heitor Villa-Lobos, Brazil’s greatest composer, had little formal training. He learned the cello from his father and earned a living as a young man playing with popular bands, from which he derived much of his musical background. From his earliest years, Villa-Lobos was enthralled with the indigenous songs and dances of his homeland, and he made several trips into the Brazilian interior to study the native music and ceremonies. Beginning with his earliest works, around 1910, his music shows the influence of the melodies, rhythms and sonorities that he discovered. He began to compose prolifically, and, though often ridiculed for his daring new style by other Brazilian musicians, he attracted the

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attention of the pianist Artur Rubinstein, who helped him receive a Brazilian government grant in 1923 that enabled him to spend several years in Paris, where his international reputation was established. Upon his permanent return to Rio de Janeiro in 1930, Villa-Lobos became an important figure in public musical education, urging the cultivation of Brazilian songs and dances in the schools. He made his first visit to the United States in 1944, and spent the remaining years of his life traveling in America and Europe to conduct and promote his own works and those of other Brazilian composers. Villa-Lobos summarized his creative philosophy in an interview with *New York Times* critic Olin Downes by saying that he did not think of music as “culture, or education, or even as a device for quieting the nerves, but as something more potent, mystical and profound in its effect. Music has the power to communicate, to heal, to ennoble, when it is made part of man’s life and consciousness.”

Artur Rubinstein was one of Villa-Lobos’ greatest champions, and a prime mover in the international spread of his reputation. Their first meeting took place in 1918 in, of all unlikely places, a Rio movie theater, where the aspiring composer was playing in the orchestra. The French composer Darius Milhaud, who was waiting out the end of World War I in South America as secretary to the poet Paul Claudel, then France’s ambassador to Brazil, was the instrument of their introduction. Milhaud warned Rubinstein that Villa-Lobos was given to unconventional behavior, a contention proven when the composer later showed up under the pianist’s hotel window with a band of his pit-orchestra colleagues to serenade the world-famous virtuoso with some of his own music. Rubinstein was impressed and took on the ambitious young musician as a protégé. Soon after their meeting, Villa-Lobos set to work on a suite of short pieces incorporating fragments of Brazilian children’s songs for Rubinstein titled *A prole do bebê* (*The Baby’s Family*), musical portraits of a child’s doll collection; Rubinstein premiered the work when he returned to Rio de Janeiro on July 5, 1922 and thereafter regularly included it in his recitals. *A prole do bebê* was just one of a surprisingly large number of pieces associated with children that Villa-Lobos wrote following his marriage to the teacher and pianist Lucília Guimarães in 1913: two

additional piano suites with the same title—one (1921) inspired by dolls representing various animals, the other (1926, but never published) evoking children’s games; two *Suites Infantilis* for piano; a set of eight piano pieces based on children’s songs titled *Carnaval das Crianças Brasileiras* (*Carnival of the Brazilian Children*), depicting the merry-making of youngsters during Rio’s annual Carnival celebration; *Mômoprecóce* for piano and orchestra, whose title means both “precocious lad” and “young Momus,” i.e., the King of the Carnival; a series of instrumental *Cirandas*, based on a traditional Brazilian and Portuguese children’s singing game; and many songs and educational pieces for school use. That Heitor and Lucília had no children and separated in 1936 attaches a certain biographical poignancy to all these works.

Villa-Lobos used a distinctly Brazilian dialect of Claude Debussy’s Impressionist harmonic language in his *A prole do bebê*, a quality that facilitated his acceptance into Parisian musical life when he arrived there in 1923. *Branquinha* (*The Porcelain Doll*) suggests both music-box innocence and winking wit. *Moreninha* (*The Papier-mâché Doll*) is appropriately fluttery and nearly hyperactive. *Caboclinha* (*The Clay Doll*) uses the subtle syncopations of a dreamy Brazilian dance. *Mulatinha* (*The Rubber Doll*) is playful and impetuous. *Negrinha* (*The Wooden Doll*) is a flamboyant showpiece in driving rhythms. *A Pobresinha* (*The Rag Doll*) draws a touching melancholy from its simple melodic components. *O Polichinelo* (*Punch*) represents the fierce, crafty character in traditional Italian commedia dell’arte distinguished by his black-and-white costume and his long nose. (Rubinstein reversed the published order of this and the last movements in his performances; many performers follow his example.) *Bruxa* (*The Witch Doll*) evokes a wind-blown, midnight broomstick ride.

Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, Op. 24, Johannes Brahms, (1833-1897)

Composed in 1861.

Premiered in November 1861 in Hamburg by the composer.

It was upon his skill as a pianist and composer for piano that Brahms’ early reputation was founded. As a teenager

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in Hamburg, he studied the classics of the keyboard literature with Eduard Marxsen (the city's most illustrious piano teacher and a musician whose excellent taste and thorough discipline helped form his student's elevated view of the art), but was at the same time forced to earn money for the always-pinched household budget by playing in what were euphemistically called "dance halls" in the rough dock district, work he began when he was just 13. He gave his first public recital in September 1848, when he was 15 (significantly, the program included a fugue by Bach), and a year later presented a second concert that featured another selection by Bach and Beethoven's "Waldstein" Sonata. In 1850, he met the violinist Eduard Reményi, who had been driven to Hamburg by the civil uprisings in Hungary in 1848, and three years later they undertook a concert tour through Germany, a venture that not only allowed Brahms to extricate himself from the waterfront taverns, but also to meet Joseph Joachim, who, at 22, only two years his senior, was already regarded as one of the leading violinists of Europe. Joachim introduced him to Robert and Clara Schumann, who were overwhelmed by Brahms' talent when he played them some of his own compositions, including his first published works—the C major (Op. 1) and F-sharp minor (Op. 2) Piano Sonatas. It was because of the Schumanns' encouragement that he began his First Piano Concerto in 1854; Brahms was soloist in the work's premiere on January 22, 1859 in Hanover.

One of the pieces that Brahms wrote for his tours through northern Europe during the next decade was the splendid *Variations and Fugue on a Theme* by Handel of 1861. Though published without a dedication, the work was composed as a birthday tribute to his dear friend Clara Schumann, who wrote in her diary after visiting Brahms at his home just outside Hamburg in November 1861, "Interesting talk with Johannes on form. How is it the older masters are perfect in their use of form while

modern composers are confined within the most rigid small forms? He, himself, emulates the older masters, and especially admires Clementi's large, free employment of form." *The Handel Variations* exemplifies Brahms' interest in the grand formal gesture, which he here informed with his strict control of motivic development, his supple but rigorous exercise of formal structure, and his rich harmonic palette. Though composed when he was only 28, the work testifies to Brahms' mastery of the traditional modes and forms of musical expression, and even excited the admiration of Richard Wagner when the two met at the redoubtable Richard's villa in the Viennese suburb of Penzing on February 6, 1864. After Brahms played the *Handel Variations* for him, Wagner stated: "It shows what still can be done with the old forms by somebody who knows how to handle them."

Brahms borrowed the theme for this work from Handel's Suite in B-flat major, which in its original version, published in 1733, served as the basis of a set of five variations. The theme and the first variation pay homage to the 18th-century style of their model, but then veer into Brahms' world of Romanticism while preserving the 16-measure, two-part structure of the original melody. The 25 variations encompass a wide range of keyboard styles, expressive moods and pianistic hues before they are capped by a stupendous fugue in four voices whose subject is freely based on the opening notes of the theme.

The Handel Variations has often been compared to Bach's *Goldberg Variations* and Beethoven's Diabelli Variations in its scope and achievement, and drew the following praise from Brahms' biographer Richard Specht: "*The Handel Variations*, in its purely pianistic problems, in the powerful and healthy concision of variants resembling a series of portraits by old masters, in its sonority and manifold architecture, surpasses even the boldest of Beethoven's works in the form."

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About the Artist

Following her London debut at Wigmore Hall, Israeli-born pianist **Sally Pinkas** has garnered universal acclaim as soloist and chamber musician. Among highlights are performances with the Boston Pops, the Aspen Philharmonia, New York's Jupiter Symphony and the festivals at Marlboro, Aspen, Rockport, Pontlevoy (France), Havana (Cuba) and HCMC Conservatory (Vietnam). From a first-ever performance of Beethoven's *Emperor* Concerto in Indonesia, to premieres of George Rochberg's monumental *Circles of Fire* for two pianos in Russia and Nigeria, and a revival of rarely-heard 19th-century Filipino Salon Music in its birth city Manila, Pinkas commands an unusually large repertoire, which she shares enthusiastically with young pianists through masterclasses and workshops.

Praised for her radiant tone and driving energy, Pinkas' extensive discography includes music by Mozart, Schumann, Fauré, Debussy, Gaubert, Martinů, Shapiro, Pinkham and Wolff for the MSR, Centaur, Naxos, Toccata Classics and Mode labels. Her 2021 CD release of the Piano Sonatas by Shostakovich and Bridge (her so-called 'Pandemic Project') was recently hailed by *Fanfare Magazine* as "A mandatory purchase for all pianophiles: two major works, in performances of utter power... ideal melding of strength and emotional pliancy..."

Pinkas tours regularly as a member of the Hirsch-Pinkas Duo (with her husband pianist Evan Hirsch) and Ensemble Schumann, and with the Adaskin String Trio. Other frequent collaborators include the Apple Hill String Quartet, Cuarteto Latinoamericano and the UK's Villiers Quartet. Recent pre-pandemic travels took her to Spain, where she made her recital debut in Madrid and Barcelona, and back to Brazil with the Hirsch-Pinkas Duo. Upcoming plans include tours of China with both Ensemble Schumann and the Hirsch-Pinkas Duo, and a CD release of works by American composer Miguel del Águila with Cuarteto Latinoamericano.

Sally's principal teachers were Russell Sherman, George Sebok, Luise Vosgerchian and Genia Bar-Niv (piano), Sergiu Natra (composition) and Robert Koff (chamber music). She holds performance degrees from Indiana University and the New England Conservatory of Music, and a PhD in Composition from Brandeis University. Pianist-in-residence at the Hopkins Center at Dartmouth College, she is Professor of Music at Dartmouth's Music Department. She lives in Medford, Massachusetts, with her pianist husband, two cats and three pianos, and is an enthusiastic gardener and hiker.

Connecting Artists to the Community

In advance of *From Brahms to Beaudoin*, Sally Pinkas visited the Dartmouth College East Wheelock house community on Thursday, October 21 for a dinner and concert in an intimate setting where she played some pieces from the October 27 program.