

Farquhar College of Arts and Sciences

Agony and Ecstasy

A Musical Exploration
of
Suffering and Redemption

Wednesday, March 16, 2011
7:30 p.m.

Performing and Visual Arts Wing
Room 309
Don Taft University Center

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Farquhar College of Arts and Sciences



Jennifer Donelson is an assistant professor in the college's Division of Performing and Visual Arts. She received her D.M.A. in Piano Performance from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, where she studied with Paul Barnes, Mark Clinton, and Ann Chang. A specialist in the piano works and writings of Olivier Messiaen, she has lectured on and given performances of portions of the *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* throughout the United States, France, and Mexico. Donelson has been awarded numerous academic fellowships, as well as a grant supporting her research at the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France* on the controversy

surrounding the premiere of Messiaen's *Vingt Regards*. She has presented her work on Messiaen at the national conferences of the College Music Society and Society for Catholic Liturgy, as well as in forthcoming publications of the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* and *Antiphon: A Journal for Liturgical Renewal*. Her work in the field of piano pedagogy focuses on the development of expressive playing and interpretive skills in young students and has been featured at the Florida state and national MTNA conferences, the International Music Camp, the *Conservatorio de las Rosas* in Morelia, Mexico, and in a recent article in *Clavier Companion*.

Having studied Gregorian chant at the Catholic University of America and Abbey of St. Peter in Solesmes, Donelson has served as the director of music at St. Gregory the Great Seminary (Diocese of Lincoln, Nebraska) and St. Thomas Aquinas Newman Center (UNL), where she founded the *Cor Immaculatae Schola Cantorum*, a semi-professional vocal ensemble dedicated to the performance of Gregorian chant and sacred polyphony. She has given workshops in Gregorian chant across the United States, is a founder of the annual *Musica Sacra Florida* Gregorian chant conference, and has served on the faculty of the annual colloquium of the Church Music Association of America. Her daily work in Gregorian chant spans two dioceses in South Florida, where she directs scholae cantorum at St. Michael the Archangel and Sts. Francis and Claire parishes in Miami, and teaches according to the Ward method in the children's choirs at the Oratory of Ave Maria, Florida.

The Farquhar College of Arts and Sciences
Division of Performing and Visual Arts
at Nova Southeastern University
presents

Agony and Ecstasy:
A Musical Exploration of Suffering and Redemption

~Program~

Prelude in B Minor, from the.....J.S. Bach (1685-1750)
Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1,
BWV 869

Sonata in A Major, Wq. 55/4.....C.P.E. Bach (1714-1788)
I. *Allegro assai*
II. *Poco Adagio*
III. *Allegro*

Fantasy in C Minor, K. 475..... W.A. Mozart (1756-1791)

The Seven Last Words of Christ..... F.J. Haydn (1732-1809)
V. *Sonata IV: My God, my God,*
why hast thou forsaken me?

Sonata in A Major, D. 664,.....F. Schubert (1797-1828)
Op. posth. 120
I. *Allegro moderato*
II. *Andante*
III. *Allegro*

Agony and Ecstasy: A Musical Exploration of Suffering and Redemption

Prelude in B Minor, from the *Well-Tempered Clavier, Book 1*, BWV 869
J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

The human heart longs for happiness, peace, joy, and love. It suffers from the absence of these things, and when it possesses just a taste of them, it longs for them all the more earnestly, hoping for fulfillment in their complete attainment. These desires evidence the longing of the human heart for something greater than itself, something that is an infinite otherness.

Perhaps better than any other composer, Johann Sebastian Bach is capable of encapsulating the longing of the human heart in a single motive. This *Prelude in B Minor* begins with a rising perfect fourth (F# to B) in the right hand. These two notes form the seed from which the entire piece sprouts. In the ascent of this motive, one can perceive a desire which reaches up and beyond itself. Rather than beginning from a point of rest (the pitch B in the key of B Minor is perceived by the ear as being at rest), it begins on a note (F#), which is almost as far from B as is possible, but which almost inevitably leads to B. F#, the fifth note of the scale, by this time has for over a century tended toward the first note of the scale (B), and our ears have become conditioned to this tendency; to our ears, the first note of the scale marks the fulfillment of the musical line flowing from the fifth.

Immediately after the right hand plays this initial fourth, another voice in the right hand adds another fourth (C#-F#) to which the first voice answers with yet another fourth (G#-C#). It is as if Bach is pointing to the fact that the fulfillment of a small desire is never complete. The yearning of the heart is always greater than the fulfillment of a single goal, no matter how significant. All the while, the bass line in the left hand walks along in steps, unremittingly marking the passage of time; time, which is punctuated by the ever-increasing desire of the human heart for a complete and total fulfillment. Fourth after fourth lays bare the human condition; our hearts are a series of never-ending and evolving desires which roll out into eternity, searching for their ultimate consummation.

For Bach, this drama enfolds in the entirety of human experience. His compositions are never a dry intellectual exercise in which one plugs in factors to solve an equation. Rather, the intellect perceives the logical working out of these motives, and the motives spin out into ravishing melodic lines and a harmonic web that touches the deepest parts of the human spirit and emotion.

Sonata in A Major, Wq. 55/4
I. *Allegro assai*
II. *Poco Adagio*
III. *Allegro*
C.P.E. Bach (1714-1788)

Written nearly 45 years after the completion of his father's first book of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, this *Sonata in A Major* showcases Emanuel Bach's ability to explore diverse emotions. Christian Schubart's 1806 treatise on the aesthetics of keys describes A Major as a key which is used to express "declarations of innocent love, satisfaction with one's state of affairs, [...] youthful cheerfulness and trust in God." Indeed, the outer movements of this work, which are in A Major, present us with an experience of boundless jubilation. Bach chooses time

signatures, rhythms, and melodic figures that fly off the page to create a sense of jubilant excitement. This joy is tempered only periodically by modulations to the minor keys which, rather than dampening the mood, serve only to increase the earnestness in rejoicing when major keys and harmonies resume.

The center of gravity of the piece, however, lies in the middle movement in F# Minor. Schubart's colorful description best summarizes the pathos of the key: "[a] gloomy key: it tugs at passion as a dog biting a dress. Resentment and discontent are its language." This middle movement is often taken by musicologists as an exemplar work that best embodies mid-18th Century *Empfindsamer Stil*, or "sensitive style," often characterized by a brooding and unpredictable moodiness. Utilizing unstable harmonies, poignant ornamentations, and "Scotch snaps," this movement eschews some of the edgier moments of *Empfindsamkeit* in Bach's other works. Instead, it presents a clear structure, making it easier for the listener to appreciate the turns of phrase which Bach uses to project an unmistakable melancholy.

The juxtaposition of these two keys (A Major and F# Minor) and their co-requisite affects presents listeners with a question: Does Bach intend to take listeners on an emotional roller-coaster ride, presenting us with moods which do not necessarily logically and easily flow from one to another? A clue can be heard at the end of the first movement...

Fantasy in C Minor, K. 475
W.A. Mozart (1756-1791)

Although the key of C Minor appeared famously just a few years earlier as the choice for his *Great Mass*, written as an offering of thanksgiving to God for the recovery of his wife Constanze from a grave illness, the composition of the *C Minor Fantasy* comes at a point of relative professional and financial success for Mozart, and the *Fantasy's* melancholy seems to be more a habitual response of Mozart's character to the possibilities of the key of C Minor than to life's circumstances. Composed in 1785, the *Fantasy's* opening melodic profile bears a strong resemblance to the 1786 *C Minor Concerto* (K. 491), often exploring unstable intervals in stark octaves. Additionally, Mozart seems to have found in the key of C Minor a fertile ground for chromaticism; his K. 426 *Fugue* in C minor states the subject in octaves and spins out into a melody that uses 10 of the 12 pitches in the chromatic scale. The last of his string quartets dedicated to Haydn earlier in 1785, although in C Major, begins with a foreboding passage in C Minor, which earned the quartet the nickname "Dissonance."

Mozart's works exhibit naturalness and joy which are both deep and radiant, and which often take the form of a major key. It is when we are confronted with his works in minor, however, that we explore the character of a composer who, while not given to the brooding of someone like Beethoven, as an artist of the highest order experienced the depths of human emotion in a profound way. In works like the *Fantasy*, we experience Mozart's exploration of the darker feelings of the human heart; but through it, we also experience the melting away of these feelings and the appearance of a childlike and beautiful joy. Episodes in D and B-flat Major cannot help but accompany the austere octaves and chromaticism of the opening and closing sections. Mozart inevitably points to the joy and hope which attend even the most profound tragedies in life.

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The Seven Last Words of Christ

V. Sonata IV: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

F.J. Haydn (1732-1809)

Haydn describes the origin of this piece thus:

“Some 15 years ago, I was requested by a canon of Cádiz to compose instrumental music on the seven last words of Christ on the Cross. It was customary at the Cathedral of Cádiz [sic] to produce an oratorio every year during Lent, the effect of the performance being not a little enhanced by the following circumstances. The walls, windows, and pillars of the church were draped with black cloth, and the solemn darkness was broken only by a single large lamp hanging from the centre of the roof. At midday, the doors were closed and the ceremony began. After a short service, the bishop ascended the pulpit, pronounced the first of the seven words, and delivered a commentary on it. Then, he left the pulpit and prostrated himself before the altar; the ensuing interval being filled by music. The bishop then in like manner pronounced the second word, then the third, and so on; the orchestra following on the conclusion of each commentary. My composition was subject to these conditions, and it was no easy task to compose a succession of seven adagios lasting 10 minutes each, without fatiguing the listeners.”

In a letter from April 1787, he says, “Each Sonata, or rather, each setting of the text, is expressed by instrumental music alone, but in such a way that it creates the most profound impression on even the most inexperienced listener.”

The work was later adapted for choir and then for string quartet by Haydn. Although not transcribed in the present arrangement for keyboard by Haydn himself, Haydn did edit the score and thought highly of it.

Many of the movements from the work convey the pathos of their subject matter in a seemingly detached way that is too “happy” to be appropriate. The “appropriateness,” however, is seen in each movement’s unflinching gaze upon the text which forms its basis, providing the listener with an opportunity for extended meditation, uninterrupted by fickle sentimentality and fleeting choice in musical material. This fourth Sonata is unique in conveying the subject matter in a way which seems more believable to the modern ear, especially in its choice of a minor key, an often stern chorale-like texture, and solo lines reminiscent of the most affect-laden Baroque recitatives.

Sonata in A Major, D. 664, Op. posth. 120

I. *Allegro moderato*

II. *Andante*

III. *Allegro*

F. Schubert (1797-1828)

The key of A Major returns for a beautiful conclusion for the present program; and it takes on a charm made possible by Schubert's unique ability to craft melodies that blossom like the most delicate and fragrant of flowers. Frequently referred to as the "Little A Major" Sonata, this work draws the listener inward, and reveals the elegance, sincerity, and distilled nature of the interior life.

The first movement appears as a song one might sing to oneself, full of vibrancy and joy, and yet completely interior. And, like the deepest of human emotions, the joy is tinged with a longing that gives it a keen sense of poignancy. The sadness of the second movement is not sufficient to overwhelm the feelings of the first movement. Though the touches of the sorrow, which color the motives of the piece, grow more frequent, seemingly wanting to break through and overwhelm, they are always kept at bay and inevitably give way a conscious decision to maintain the appearance of complete happiness. The interior conflict created by this decision is ever present, and the final movement, which is more exterior in its joy, is marked by this sadness to the very end of the movement. The entire Sonata yearns for a redemption, which will wipe away every tear and make its joy complete.

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Premier Series

These events are held in the Performing and Visual Arts Wing in the Don Taft University Center, NSU's main campus. Admission is free, but reservations are required. To reserve seats, email nsutheatre@nova.edu or call (954) 262-8179.

Dance Concert

March 25–27, 2011 | Performance Theatre

Twelfth Night, or What You Will

April 8–10, 15–17, 2011 | Black Box Theatre

Renaissance and Juliet:

An Evening of Drama and Music

Tuesday, April 12, 2011

Performance Theatre

Studio Series

These events are held in the Performing and Visual Arts Wing in the Don Taft University Center, NSU's main campus. Admission is free, but reservations are required. To reserve seats, email nsutheatre@nova.edu or call (954) 262-8179.

Festival of Student Works

April 29–30, 2011

Black Box Theatre and

Performance Theatre

Exhibition Series

These events are held in Gallery 217 of the Performing and Visual Arts Wing in the Don Taft University Center, NSU's main campus. Admission is free.

Gallery Hours: Wednesdays noon–5:00 p.m.

Thursdays 12:30–5:00 p.m.

For more information, call (954) 262-7620.

Say What? Juried Student Art Exhibition

April 4–27, 2011

Opening Reception: April 4, 2011

6:00–8:00 p.m.