



presents

The Ben and A. Jess Shenson Piano Series
Sponsored by Fred M. Levin & Nancy Livingston, the Shenson Foundation

Dubravka Tomsic, piano

Saturday, April 26, 2008, 8pm

Herbst Theatre

PROGRAM

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART	Adagio in B minor, K.540
DOMENICO SCARLATTI	Sonata in C Major, K.159 Sonata in C minor, K.11 Sonata in G Major, K.125 Sonata in D Major, K.29
SERGE PROKOFIEV	Piano Sonata No. 3 in A minor, Opus 28 <i>Allegro tempestoso; Moderato;</i> <i>Allegro tempestoso</i>
ALOJZ SREBOTNJAK	Macedonian Dances <i>Allegro vivace</i> <i>Andante</i> <i>Vivacissimo</i> <i>Adagio</i> <i>Allegro rustico</i>

INTERMISSION

JOHANNES BRAHMS	Intermezzo in A minor, Opus 118, No. 1 Intermezzo in A Major, Opus 118, No. 2 Intermezzo in E-flat minor, Opus 118, No. 6 Rhapsody in E-flat Major, Opus 119, No. 4
LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN	Piano Sonata in F minor, Opus 57 "Appassionata" <i>Allegro assai</i> <i>Andante con moto</i> <i>Allegro ma non troppo</i>

Dubravka Tomsic is represented by Thea Dispeker Inc. Artist Management, 59 East 54th Street, New York, NY 10022; 212.421.7676, www.dispeker.com.

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ARTIST PROFILE

This concert is Dubravka Tomsic's seventh appearance with San Francisco Performances. Previous concerts were in 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003 and 2005.

Dubravka Tomsic



The celebrated Slovenian pianist Dubravka Tomsic enjoys "something of a cult status among pianophiles" (*Gramophone* magazine). The only protege of legendary pianist Artur Schnabel, who considered her "a perfect and marvelous pianist," she gave her first public recital at age five and later embarked on an international career that took her to all five continents, performing more than 4,000 concerts to date.

Despite her legendary stature in music circles, it was only in 1989, after a hiatus of almost thirty years, that Tomsic was reintroduced to American audiences with a triumphant gala performance at the Newport Music Festival. In quick succession, recitals at the prestigious series of Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Cleveland, Kansas City, Atlanta, Seattle and Fort Worth followed, leading to countless re-engagements ever since.

In April 2008, Tomsic returns to the United States for her annual tour, this time with appearances at the Celebrity Series in Boston, San Francisco Performances, the Master Pianists Series in Kansas City, the Gilmore Festival, concerts in Middlebury and Schenectady, as well as her debut with the Honolulu Symphony. She is also slated to perform at the Festival International Piano aux Jacobins in Toulouse, France. Last season, she opened again

at the Newport Festival, made debuts with the Louisiana Philharmonic and the London Festival Orchestra, and returned to the Monterey Symphony with Chopin's *E minor Concerto*.

Highlights of recent seasons include several performances with the Boston Symphony under both Seiji Ozawa and Bernard Haitink at Symphony Hall and Carnegie Hall; a solo recital at the Tanglewood Festival; the Pasadena Symphony under Jorge Mester; the Mexico City Philharmonic; and recitals in Portland, Boston, San Francisco, Kansas City, Rockport and at New York's Alice Tully Hall.

Over the course of her career, Tomsic has also been heard in Munich, Berlin, Prague, Moscow, St. Petersburg, Budapest, Madrid, Amsterdam, London and Rome, and at the international festivals of Dubrovnik, Vienna, Prague, Naples, Dresden, Paris, Mexico City, Joliette (Canada), Newport, Tanglewood, and Mostly Mozart in New York City. Equally in demand as a soloist with orchestra, she has appeared with the Vienna Symphony, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra of London, Czech Philharmonic, Munich Philharmonic, Berlin Symphony, Mozarteum Orchestra in Salzburg, Moscow State Orchestra, the symphonies of Boston, Atlanta, Detroit, San Francisco, and the major orchestras of Australia.

More than eighty CD recordings released since 1987 attest to Tomsic's status as a major recording artist. In addition to *The Art of Dubravka Tomsic* and a disc of favorite encores, she has recorded concertos by Brahms, Beethoven, Chopin, Grieg, Liszt, Mozart, Rachmaninoff, Saint-Saens, Schumann and Tchaikovsky, and recital works by Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin, Debussy, Liszt, Mozart, Scarlatti and Srebotnjak. She can be heard on Vox Classics, Koch International and other labels. In 2003 she won the Grand Prix du Disque of the Franz Liszt Society in Budapest for her CD on the IPO label, featuring an all-Liszt program that includes the *B minor Sonata*.

Tomsic began her studies at the Ljubljana Academy of Music and at age twelve moved to New York on the recommendation of Claudio Arrau to study with Katherine Bacon at the Juilliard School. While still a teenager, she earned a Bachelor of Science and Diploma in Piano with two special awards and made her New York Philharmonic, Town Hall and Chicago recital debuts. She also gave a recital at Carnegie Hall about which Artur Schnabel wrote a glowing account in his memoir *My Many Years*.

As a young pianist Tomsic won many awards and competitions, and now serves as juror for

several major international piano competitions, including the Van Cliburn, Leeds, Beethoven, Clara Haskil, Santander, AXA Dublin and the International Piano-e-Competition in Minneapolis. In May 2005 she was officially awarded the title of Honorary Citizen of Ljubljana by the city's mayor. She makes her home there and is full professor at the Ljubljana University Academy of Music.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Adagio in B minor, K.540

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART
Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg
Died December 5, 1791, Vienna

This brief *Adagio* is one of Mozart's least-known works for solo piano—and one of his finest. He wrote it on March 19, 1788, during what must have seemed a period of numbing transition for the 32-year-old composer. He had worked for most of the previous year on *Don Giovanni*, but that opera—successful at its Prague premiere—had not won over the Viennese so readily, and now Mozart was beginning to sense that his position in his adopted city had deteriorated. His financial situation was increasingly precarious, and that summer would come moves to cheaper apartments and painful appeals to friends for assistance.

The *Adagio* is dark and expressive music, yet one needs to be extremely careful about making easy connections between this music and the details of Mozart's life. Someone once observed that Mozart would no more consider writing music about how he was feeling than he would consider writing music about what he had had for breakfast; the features of his own life were not the subject of his art. We know virtually nothing about the background of the *Adagio* or why Mozart wrote it.

What we *can* feel is the greatness of the music itself, and critics have made some staggering claims on its behalf. Alfred Einstein calls the *Adagio* "one of the most perfect, most deeply felt, and most despairing of all his works," while Arthur Hutchings names it "Mozart's finest single work for solo piano." Yet this music is difficult to describe. One can speak (accurately) of its chromatic writing, surprising dynamic contrasts, unusual leaps across the range of the keyboard, and lean textures without ever getting at the intense quality of this music or at its curious fusion of bleakness and grace. Rather than trying to make tempting connections between Mozart's life and his art, it is far better to take this

brief *Adagio* for what it is: some of the most expressive music Mozart ever wrote.

Sonata in C Major, K.159 Sonata in C minor, K.11 Sonata in G Major, K.125 Sonata in D Major, K.29

DOMENICO SCARLATTI
Born October 26, 1685, Naples
Died July 23, 1757, Madrid

In a famous remark, Haydn once said that his isolation at Esterhazy had forced him to "become original." Such a comment might describe another composer who worked far from established music centers, Domenico Scarlatti. Trained as a keyboard player, Scarlatti held positions in Naples, Florence, Venice, Rome and Palermo before making in 1719 the long trip to Lisbon, where he served as court harpsichordist to the King of Portugal. When the Princess Maria Barbara married the Spanish Crown Prince in 1729, Scarlatti followed her to Madrid, where he spent the final three decades of his life. And it was there in Madrid, far from the cultured courts he had known as a young man, that Scarlatti "became original."

Though his primary responsibility was to write vocal music for the court, Scarlatti is remembered today for his 550 keyboard sonatas, most of them written over the final decade of his life. Scarlatti called these pieces *esercizi* ("exercises"), and while they are not actually in sonata form, they look ahead to that form as it would develop across the remainder of the century. They are in one movement, but in binary form, built on themes of contrasting tonalities. Scarlatti would have played them on the harpsichord (or *gravicembalo*, as it was known in Spain), and these sonatas are remarkable for the brilliance of the keyboard technique he demands: they require fast runs, hand-crossing, arpeggios across the range of the keyboard, great cascades of sound, and rapid repetition of notes. The sonatas are quite brief—usually between three and five minutes—but in these short spans Scarlatti creates miniature worlds full of drama, excitement, color and beauty.

Many listeners will find that they already know the *Sonata in C Major, K.159* (the K numbers refer to the numbering in Ralph Kirkpatrick's catalog of these sonatas), with its cascading fanfares that have seemed to many to evoke the sound of hunting horns; despite brief excursions into minor tonalities, the exuberance of this music remains the principal

impression. The *Sonata in C minor, K.11* wears its tonality very consciously: that key's somber hue feels particularly dark at the restrained tempo here (Scarlatti marks it *Molto moderato*). An unusual feature is that occasionally both lines of the music are written in the treble clef, and at times the left hand must reach over and play above the right. The *Sonata in G Major, K.125*, marked *Vivo*, dashes along its 3/8 meter through music full of grace notes, mordants, and long runs that move smoothly between the two hands. The *Sonata in D Major, K.29*, marked *Presto*, offers two quite different kinds of melodic material: long chains of sixteenth-notes alternate with a more somber second subject, heard above steady chordal accompaniment. The writing is at times quite brilliant here, and along the way Scarlatti demands some deft handcrossings.

Piano Sonata No. 3 in A minor, Opus 28

SERGE PROKOFIEV

Born April 23, 1891, Sontsovka, Ukraine

Died March 5, 1953, Moscow

The year 1917 brought profound changes to Russia, and it was also the most productive of Prokofiev's life. That year, he wrote his *Classical Symphony*, *First Violin Concerto* and *Visions fugitives*, and—in the midst of all this new music—he also looked back. As a young music student in St. Petersburg, Prokofiev had sketched a number of piano sonatas, but then—realizing how quickly he was developing as a composer—left these early works in manuscript. Now, at age 26, he returned to these youthful sketches and discovered that he still found much of the music attractive. Very quickly he composed two new piano sonatas, his *Third* and *Fourth*, and based them on themes he had written as a teenager. To make clear their origin, he published each of the sonatas with the subtitle “From Old Notebooks.”

The *Sonata No. 3 in A minor* has become one of Prokofiev's most popular keyboard works, despite its unusual brevity: it is in one movement that gets past in only seven minutes. They are, however, a pretty dazzling seven minutes. Prokofiev notates the meter as 4/4(12/8), and that rush of triplets will energize the opening statement, which Prokofiev marks *Allegro tempestoso*. A two-measure vamp rockets us straight into the main idea of this sonata-form movement, which is stamped out *fortissimo*, and this has already begun to evolve by the time Prokofiev arrives at his second subject. The contrast could not be more complete. After that white-hot open-

ing, Prokofiev goes out of his way to emphasize how different this second theme should sound: it is marked *Moderato, tranquillo, pianissimo, legato* and *semplice e dolce*. This second idea does sing beautifully, but the opening furies return at the development, and the sonata drives to a huge climax (marked both *fortissimo* and *con elevazione*). The long coda begins with murmuring energy and gradually builds to a thunderous cadence.

Much of Prokofiev's early music met with scorn and misunderstanding. Not this sonata, however. Prokofiev gave the premiere in St. Petersburg on April 15, 1918, during a week-long festival of his music sponsored by the Conservatory. But the acclaim that greeted these works did little to reconcile the young composer to the changing political climate in Russia: three weeks later he left for the United States, and he would not return for fifteen years.

Macedonian Dances

ALOJZ SREBOTNJAK

Born April 27, 1931, Postojni, Slovenia

Slovenian composer Alojz Srebotnjak studied at the Ljubljana Music Academy while in his twenties and then sought a wider world: he continued his studies in Italy, Paris, and finally in London, where he was a composition student of Peter Racine Fricker. He then returned to Slovenia and taught at the Ljubljana Music Academy from 1970 until 2001.

Srebotnjak is a prolific composer who has written in many genres and styles, ranging from film scores to serial composition to folk music-based works. He composed the *Macedonian Dances* in 1975, basing them on characteristic dance rhythms from Macedonia, that region of the former Yugoslavia that borders northern Greece. The work is in five brief movements, and these emphasize the percussive character of the piano, a sonority often exploited by Bartók. The percussive nature of the writing helps clarify the asymmetric rhythms of this music (the *Macedonian Dances* have been arranged for an ensemble of six woodwinds, and it is worth noting that this arrangement includes a part for a percussionist, specifically to emphasize the rhythmic vitality and pointillistic sound of this music).

In their folk rhythms and dance tunes, the *Macedonian Dances* communicate instantly with audiences, and this music requires little detailed comment. One might note that the odd-numbered movements are fast, the even-numbered slow. Particularly noteworthy are

the final two movements. The *Adagio*, the longest movement in the set, has a dark and somber splendor, and this contrasts with exotic episodes, full of color. The aptly-named *Allegro rustico*, which races along shifting accents and unexpected rhythms, brings the set to an energetic (and emphatic) close.

Alojz Srebotnjak dedicated the *Macedonian Dances* to his wife, Dubravka Tomsic.

Intermezzo in A minor, Opus 118, No. 1 Intermezzo in A Major, Opus 118, No. 2 Intermezzo in E-flat minor, Opus 118, No. 6 Rhapsody in E-flat Major, Opus 119, No. 4

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Born May 7, 1833, Hamburg

Died April 3, 1897, Vienna

Brahms had a curious relationship with the piano. As a young man, he made his reputation as a virtuoso pianist and in those early years composed huge works in classical forms: of his first five published works, three are massive piano sonatas, all written before he was 21, and there are sets of variations from this period that rank among the most difficult piano music ever written. The composer—described in these years by a friend as “the young, heaven-storming Johannes”—seemed on the verge of creating a vast (and heroic) literature for solo piano. But then an unexpected thing happened: at age 32 Brahms simply stopped writing music for solo piano. Over the final three decades of his life, he returned to the genre only twice: in 1878-9 (when he composed ten brief pieces) and at the very end of his life, when he wrote the twenty pieces that make up his Opp. 116, 117, 118 and 119.

The twenty pieces of these four final sets are all very brief (they may accurately be described as miniatures, for all last only a few minutes), and Brahms gave them a range of titles: capriccio, intermezzo, ballade, romance and rhapsody. But these are general titles, and their use can seem arbitrary: Brahms himself did not distinguish carefully between them. Almost all are in ABA form: an opening theme, a countermelody usually in a contrasting tempo and mood, and a return to the opening material, which is always varied on its reappearance. This is intensely personal music, as if Brahms were distilling a lifetime of experience and musical refinement into these pieces as he returned one last time to his own instrument.

Brahms composed the six pieces of his Opus

118 in the years 1892-93 and published them under an utterly neutral title—*Klavierstücke*: “piano pieces”—that makes clear his own belief that this is a gathering of six quite different pieces rather than a unified set. The sequence begins with two pieces he calls intermezzos. Brahms specifies that the *Intermezzo in A minor* should be *molto appassionato*, and passionate it certainly is, with the right-hand melody soaring over rolling accompaniment. The structure of this particular piece is unusual: rather than setting it in ternary form, Brahms repeats two separate sections, then allows the music to trail off to a quiet close. The *Intermezzo in A Major* is like a lullaby (Brahms’ marking is *Andante teneramente*: “tenderly”), and that gentle mood prevails throughout, though the center section is elaborate and varied before the subtle reintroduction of the opening material. The *Intermezzo in E-flat minor* offers some of the bleakest, and most beautiful, music Brahms ever wrote. His marking is *largo e mesto* (“slow and sad”), and the pianist’s hands seem to inhabit different worlds at the beginning: the right hand has the spare melodic line while the left accompanies with quiet flurries of 32nd-note runs. The central section—staccato, muttering, dark—suddenly flares to power and incorporates the somber melody from the very beginning. Gradually Brahms returns to his opening material and draws the music to its stark conclusion on a slowly arpeggiated E-flat minor chord.

This set concludes with the final piece from Brahms’ *Vier Klavierstücke, Opus 119*, also composed in 1892-93, the powerful *Rhapsody in E-flat Major*. Brahms marks this music *Allegro risoluto*, and resolute it certainly is: the pounding chords from the beginning seem to echo throughout; they intrude even into the *grazioso* middle section. Instead of having that thunderous opening reappear in its original form, Brahms takes it through a subtle evolution on its return, and—rather than returning to the home key of E-flat major—he drives the music to its (resolute) close in E-flat minor.

Piano Sonata in F minor, Opus 57 “Appassionata”

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Born December 16, 1770, Bonn

Died March 26, 1827, Vienna

Between May and November 1803, Beethoven wrote the *Eroica*, a symphony on a scale never before imagined. Nearly half an hour longer than his *Second Symphony*, Beethoven’s *Third* thrust the whole conception of the symphony—and sonata form—into a new world, in which music became heroic struggle and sonata form the stage for this drama rather than an end in itself. It was a world of new dimensions, new sonorities, new possibilities of expression, and with the *Eroica* behind him, Beethoven began to plan two piano sonatas. These sonatas, later nicknamed the *Waldstein* and the *Appassionata*, would be governed by the same impulse that shaped the *Eroica*.

While Beethoven completed the *Waldstein Sonata* quickly, the other sonata, delayed by his work on *Fidelio*, was not finished until early in 1806. The subtitle “*Appassionata*” appears to have originated with a publisher rather than with the composer, but few works so deserve their nickname as this sonata. At moments in the *Appassionata* one feels that Beethoven is striving for a texture and intensity of sound unavailable to the piano, reaching for what Beethoven’s biographer Maynard Solomon calls “quasi-orchestral sonorities.” Despite the volcanic explosions of sounds in this sonata, however, it remains piano music; the *Appassionata* may strain the resources of the instrument, but this music is clearly conceived in terms of a pianistic rather than an orchestral sonority.

The *Allegro assai* opens with the ominous first theme in 12/8. Despite its *pianissimo* dynamic, this idea is alive with energy and the potential for development. As this first theme slowly unfolds, deep in the left hand is heard the four-note motto that will later

open the *Fifth Symphony*, and out of this motto suddenly bursts a great eruption of sound. The movement’s extraordinary unity becomes clear with the arrival of the second theme, which is simply a variation of the opening theme. The movement develops in sonata form; its opening rhythm is stamped out in the coda, and the movement ends as the first theme descends to near-inaudibility.

The second and third movements are connected. The second, *Andante con moto*, is a theme with four variations. The calm theme, in two eight-bar phrases, is heard immediately, and the tempo remains constant throughout, though the variations become increasingly complex, increasingly ornate. Beethoven insists that the gentle mood remain constant; in the score he keeps reminding the pianist: *dolce*, and even the swirls of 32nd-notes near the end remain serene. The finale, *Allegro ma non troppo*, bursts upon the conclusion of the second movement with a dotted introduction, and the main theme, an almost *moto perpetuo* shower of sixteenth-notes, launches the movement. The searing energy of the first movement returns here, and Beethoven introduces a completely new theme in the fiery coda.

Beethoven offered no program for this sonata, nor will listeners do well to try to guess some external drama being played out in the *Appassionata*. But Sir Donald Francis Tovey, trying to take some measure of this sonata’s extraordinary power and its unrelenting conclusion, has noted: “All his other pathetic finales show either an epilogue in some legendary or later world far away from the tragic scene . . . or a temper, fighting, humorous, or resigned, that does not carry with it a sense of tragic doom. [But in the *Appassionata*] there is not a moment’s doubt that the tragic passion is rushing deathwards.”

Program notes by Eric Bromberger © 2008.