



TN 98

Andrew J. Yang

Nationalität: American/Icelandic



Kurzvita:

Deemed a “prodigy, [running] the emotional gamut from brooding introspection to manic exuberance” (San Francisco Examiner), pianist Andrew J. Yang has an active international performance career across Europe, the Americas, and Asia. Born and raised in California (U.S.A.), since 2020, Yang has resided in Iceland, where he has established himself as one of the most important pianists in the country. After a successful November 2022 debut at Harpa Concert Hall in Reykjavík, Fréttablaðið remarked: “Yang’s playing was confident and precise, full of emotion with amazing musical high points. Small nuances were beautifully executed, the keystrokes were refined, even dreamy.” Yang is the founder and artistic director of the Iceland Piano Festival and the International Westfjords Piano Festival. He is also the co-founder of the Icelandic Schumann Society.

Yang has won several prizes from international piano competitions, including the top prize at the 30th International FLAME Piano Competition (Paris) and at the 5th Metropolitan International Piano Competition (New York City). He has also received awards from the Los Angeles Liszt Piano Competition, Thaviu-Issac Piano Competition, Heida Hermanns International Piano Competition, among others. In 2018, Yang received the “White Rose” Medal of Honor for musical excellence from President of Finland, Sauli Niinistö. Recent performances include recitals at the Mozarthaus, Harpa, Musiikkitalo, Judaica Foundation in Krakow, Murphy Recital Hall, Hoheikan, and performances at most of the major New York venues including Victor Borge Hall, Carnegie Hall, and the Museum of Modern Art.

Important teachers and musical mentors include William Wellborn, Antoinette Perry, Dang Thai Son, and Ruth Slenczynska. Yang received both a B.A. in Economics and B.M. in Piano Performance from Northwestern University. Upon graduation with a M.M. in Piano Performance from Mannes School of Music, he received the Steinway & Sons Award, a distinction given to the most outstanding graduating pianist. Yang then spent three years as a full-tuition scholarship D.M.A. doctoral student at USC Thornton School of Music, where as a Studio T.A. he taught university piano major students.

A former competitive athlete in badminton and basketball, Yang pursued an amateur boxing career, training out of the legendary John's Boxing Gym in the Bronx, NY. He trained mixed martial arts (MMA) under Justen Hamilton at Modern Martial Arts in Pasadena, California. Yang is currently on the piano faculty at Tónlistarskólinn í Grafarvogi and Tónskóli Sigursveins, both in Reykjavík. Yang is also passionate about guitar, violin, music production, cooking, travelling, and literature.

**TN 98****Programm und Konzept der ersten Runde**

Titel: During Times of War: WWI & WWII

Werke:

M. Ravel: Menuet in G Major from Le Tombeau de Couperin (1917) (6.5')

S. Rachmaninoff: Etude-Tableau in D minor, op. 39 no. 8 (1917) (4')

F. Poulenc: Mélancolie, FP 105 (1940) (7')

S. Prokofiev: Sonata No. 6 in A Major, IV. Vivace (1940) (7.5')

Konzept:

War is the embodiment of human tragedy. In the 20th century, the two World Wars devastated the lives of so many, and yet even in periods of a horrible reality, art fails to stop. Art sustains and affirms humanity when humanity seems devoid and forlorn. During the two World Wars, composers living in the midst of chaos and political turmoil continued to write music – some directly depicting the horrors around them, others commemorating those who had passed away, and yet others with more veiled emotions and messages.

Ravel joined the army Thirteenth Artillery Regiment in 1915, and over the next couple years witnessed many horrors, suffered a myriad of ailments, and witnessed many of his friends' deaths. Le Tombeau de Couperin is a set of six pieces celebration the tradition of Couperin, each movement dedicated to a friend who died in the war. The Menuet, No. 5 in the set, was dedicated to Jean Dreyfus. Dreyfus was the stepson of Madame Fernand Dreyfus, to which 55 surviving letters from Ravel exist from March-October 1916, detailing his wartime experiences at the Front. After Ravel's demobilization and the death of his mother, he recuperated at the Dreyfus family home. The Menuet is wistful yet not necessarily dreary and dark. Ravel himself said: "The dead are sad enough, in their eternal silence."

Rachmaninoff's Etude-Tableaux, composed in 1917, were the last works that he composed before his permanent departure from Russia later in the same year. In addition to the bleak times of WWI (which did not affect Rachmaninoff as personally as it did for Ravel), The February 1917 Revolution which began in Saint Petersburg greatly affected Rachmaninoff. By April 1917, his estate was in chaos after Social Revolutionary Party seized it as their own communal property. With the political situation continuing to deteriorate around him, Rachmaninoff eventually found a way to take his family and him to Scandinavia before permanently settling down in the United States. After this departure, his compositional output greatly decreased, as he relied on performing concerts to support his family.

Not much is known about Poulenc's Mélancolie, besides that it was composed during the German occupation of France during WWII. Its lush harmonies and nostalgic sentiment are nuanced and wistful. The piece was dedicated to Raymond Destouches, a chauffeur with whom Poulenc was engaged in a romantic affair.

Prokofiev's War Sonatas (Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Sonatas) are probably the most well-known and oft performed works for solo piano that evokes the horrors of WWII. The fourth movement of the Sixth Sonata evokes a variety of emotions and characters. Right from the beginning, the steely and relentless sixteenth notes paint a bleak, violent, and inexorable atmosphere. A sardonic second theme seems to be mocking and sinister, and the expressive andante middle section paints a bleak and lonesome picture. The aggressive ending is virtuosic with rhythmic juxtaposition and relentless inertia.



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Programm und Konzept der finalen Runde

Titel: 1854: Brahms, Liszt, & Schumann

Werke:

J. Brahms: Ballade in B Major, op. 10 no. 4 (1854) (9')

F. Liszt: Sonata in B minor (1854) (33')

R. Schumann: 2 Pieces from Kinderszenen, op. 15: Child Falling Asleep, The Poet Speaks (1838) (5')

Konzept:

“Brahms and Liszt” is funnily enough British slang for “drunk”. Although the origin of the saying is obscure, the relationship between Brahms and Liszt was contentious. The two only met once in 1853 in Weimar. The infamous story goes that as Liszt performed his recently completed Sonata in B minor, Brahms unimpressively fell asleep in his chair. Soon after this unfortunate meeting, in October 1853, Brahms visited the Düsseldorf home of Robert and Clara Schumann, one of classical music’s most beloved and endearing love stories. This meeting instigated an important period of intense personal and musical intimacy between Brahms and Schumanns. However, Robert Schumann’s mental health had already started to deteriorate at the time, and in five months’ time in February 1854, attempted to commit suicide before being confined to the asylum at Endenich. After this traumatic incident, Brahms moved into the Schumann house to help Clara with various responsibilities and serving as a go-between for her and Robert (whom she was not allowed to visit on doctor’s orders).

Liszt and the Schumanns had a rather long and complicated relationship. However, over the years, Clara’s perception of his had become increasingly negative, as he found him deluded and overly showy in his performances, amongst other personal drama (including an episode when Liszt showed up inebriated and late to a dinner party). However, Robert and Liszt had seemingly maintained musical respect for one another throughout their lives. Although Liszt finished his Sonata in 1853, it was published in 1854 with a dedication to Robert. In May 1854, the work arrived at the Schumann’s home. It seems unsure whether Liszt had at that point heard of the tragedy surrounding Robert’s suicide attempt, but nonetheless shows an admiration for Schumann for dedicating his *magnus opus* to him. The Sonata itself is a one-movement Sonata, defying and pushing the boundaries of the usual three or four movement form. Its ingenious thematic transformations and colossal emotional scope pushed the musical boundaries of the Sonata form. It depicts the opposing forces of the divine and the diabolic, the struggle of the human condition, and spiritual transcendence. Liszt’s more radical approach to music would soon thereafter also be the antithesis to the more conservative approach of Clara and Brahms; the two opposing philosophies gave birth to what scholars often refer to as the “War of the Romantics” which took form by the end of the 1850s.

It is unknown if Robert had the opportunity to hear Liszt’s Sonata in B minor for himself from Endenich. When Brahms played the Sonata for Clara in the Schumann house after the score’s arrival, Clara wrote in her diary “This is nothing but sheer racket – not a single healthy idea.” However, we do know that at Endenich, Brahms himself performed his Ballades, op. 10 for Schumann, in which Schumann apparently expressed “his enthusiasm through continuous exclamations”. These Ballades were written in the Summer of 1854, while Brahms was still living in the Schumann house to tend to Clara and the Schumann’s children. Of the fourth, Robert astutely writes: “How beautiful that the strange opening melody note sways, to the end, between major and minor, and stays wistfully in the major”.

Although Brahms and Liszt seemed to be such opposing forces, both shared a close relationship with Robert Schumann. The program ends with the last two short pieces from his endearing *Kinderszenen* op. 15. Robert Schumann does seem like he was the bridge and balance between the “War of the Romantics”. Throughout his life, he admired both more conservative composers such as Mendelssohn, and yet also greatly admired more radical compositional techniques. Schumann’s *Kinderszenen* is deeply poetic, pure, and tender.

The program showcases the deeply touching and immense musical language of three great composers of the golden Romantic era, and the incredible backstory of their intertwined lives.