

Upcoming VCU Music Events

Faculty Showcase

Tuesday, October 18, 2016, 7 p.m.

W.E. Singleton Center for the Performing Arts

Free admission

VCU Flamenco Festival VI

Friday - Sunday, November 4 - 6

Concerts featuring guitarists Leah Kruszewski, Ricardo Marlow & Miguelito

W.E. Singleton Center for the Performing Arts

General admission for each concert \$15, Students \$10

University Band

Wednesday, November 9, 2016, 7 p.m.

W.E. Singleton Center for the Performing Arts

Tickets \$10, Free with VCU ID

Jazz Orchestra I

Thursday November 10, 2016, 8 p.m.

W.E. Singleton Center for the Performing Arts

Tickets \$10, Free with VCU ID

**For tickets and information, visit
ARTS.VCU.EDU/MUSIC/EVENTS**

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DEPARTMENT OF **MUSIC**

Faculty Recital

Russell Wilson, piano

Monday, October 17, 2016 | 7 p.m.

Sonia Vlahcevic Concert Hall

W.E. Singleton Center for the Performing Arts

Virginia Commonwealth University

922 Park Avenue | Richmond, VA

arts.vcu.edu/music



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Biography

Russell Wilson, a native of Memphis, Tenn., is an outstanding classical and jazz pianist who received his bachelor's and master's of music degrees in performance from Memphis State University now the University of Memphis. Formerly a member of the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, the Joe Kennedy Quartet, Virginia Union University's faculty and most recently, an Assistant Professor of Music at Virginia State University. He continues to serve as an adjunct piano instructor at Virginia Commonwealth University and serves as pianist for worship services at Second Baptist.

Wilson enjoys a distinguished career as a solo and chamber music performer and is the principal pianist of the Richmond Symphony Orchestra where he has performed as a soloist and has accompanied world class artists including Mel Tormé, Dick Hyman, Cab Calloway, Chet Atkins, Steve Allen and Carol Lawrence.

As a soloist, he has performed Beethoven's "Piano Concert No. 1 in C Major" with the Petersburg Symphony Orchestra, Duke Ellington's "New World a' Comin'" with the New River Valley and the Richmond Symphony orchestras and Mozart's "Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major." In 2016, he performed Rachmaninof's Piano Concerto in C minor with the Petersburg Symphony Orchestra. Wilson was also selected to perform in master classes conducted by Earl Wild and Leon Fleisher.

In addition to his performances, Wilson has conducted improvisational workshops for the Richmond Music Teachers Association, Virginia Museum, Richmond Jazz Society (Bach, Bop and Beyond), Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and Virginia State University with violinist Joe Kennedy Jr.

As a recording artist, he is featured as soloist on "Moonlight Piano" and "The Memphis Convention." During the summer of 1995 he became pianist for the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra conducted by David Baker and Gunther Schuller. Wilson toured the U.S., Canada, Spain, Italy, France, London, Istanbul, Helsinki and the Hague, performing "The Cotton Club Revue," featuring the music of Duke Ellington. During July 2002, in conjunction with the Smithsonian Associates and RAICES Latin Music Museum, Wilson presented a lecture/performance at the Museum of the City of New York tracing the development of Latin jazz and its influence on American jazz. He was also a Smithsonian Blues Scholar for the Long Beach, California public school system.

He received the Theresa Pollak Award for excellence in the arts in 2002.

Program

J.S.
Bach
(1685 - 1750)

Prelude and Fugue in A major
W.T.C. Book II, No. 19

Sergei
Rachmaninoff
(1873 - 1943)

Preludes, Op. 23
No. 3 in G minor
Tempo di minuetto
No. 4 in D major
Andante cantabile

Études - Tableaux, Op. 39
No. 1 in C minor
Allegro agitato
No. 2 in A minor
Lento assai

Intermission

Maurice
Ravel
(1875-1937)

Valses Nobles & Sentimentales
Modéré-très franc
Assez lent
Modéré
Assez animé
Presque lent dans un sentiment intime
Moins vif
Épilogue: Lent

Program Notes

Bach gave the title *Das Wohltemperirte Clavier*, to a book of preludes and fugues that are to be played in all 24 major and minor keys and was composed "for the profit and use of musical youth desirous of learning, and especially for the pastime of those already skilled in this study." They are regarded as being among the most influential works in the history of Western classical music. The range of styles is extraordinarily wide, more so than most pieces found in the piano literature. The prelude is most often played rather free while the fugue has more of a pronounced pulse and obvious polyphony.

The A major Fugue is a three voice fugue that employs a full range of contrapuntal devices readily found in the opening theme which is imitated in the alto, then the soprano voice.

Strange as it seems, Bach's style went out of favour around the time of his death and we find that most music of the Classical period had neither polyphonic complexity nor a great variety of keys. However, as the Classical period matured, we find Haydn and Mozart studying these works and other composers modeling after the "24" with Chopin's 24 Preludes and Dmitri Shostakovich's 24 Preludes and Fugues. I might add that Leonard Bernstein also favoured a fugal theme in his "Symphonic Dances from West Side Story."

Rachmaninoff's Ten Preludes Op. 23, abandoned the traditional short prelude form of Bach, Scriabin and Chopin and expanded them into complex polyphonic forms with musically independent sections. It has been said that they represent a culmination of the Romantic idiom reflecting Rachmaninoff's experience as a virtuoso pianist and master composer, testing the "technical, tonal, harmonic, rhythmic, lyrical and percussive capabilities of the piano." Present in these preludes are streaks of Russian nationalism and originality in rhythm and melody. The "Rachmaninoff sound" was often praised for its unusual and innovative bell-like quality in some pieces which can be heard towards the end of the D major Prelude No. 4. Russian writer, Maxim Gorky wrote, "How well he hears the silence."

The *Études-Tableaux* ("study pictures") was "coined" by Rachmaninoff and in the tradition of the etude, each presents a pianistic problem. In addition to this, an extra-musical idea is implied. Rachmaninoff was reluctant to disclose any program idea to these works and he stated, "I do not believe in the artist disclosing too much of his images. Let them paint for themselves what it most suggests."

The C minor étude makes use of continuous moving figurations in the right hand, contrasted with block chords in both hands and tremolo figures. Marked *Allegro Agitato*, it is one of Rachmaninoff's most chromatic compositions. The underlying challenge for this piece is voicing the underlying chromatic pitches which provides continuity in the various textures of sound and making sure that the pedaling is extremely clear.

No. 2 A minor étude, also known as "The Sea and the Seagulls" contains many musical textures that make it a difficult study in touch and "poses virtually every difficulty a virtuoso pianist is capable of conquering" 2 over 3 timing, hands crossing and large spans of arpeggiated figures for the left hand. The pianist must exercise restraint and yet not sound monotonous. From the very beginning, brief references to Rachmaninoff's *idée fixe*, the *Dies irae* chant can be heard.

Ravel was intrigued by the waltz genre and by 1906, had started composing what later would become *La valse*. The seed for this fascination was his desire to identify with Franz Schubert, who wrote separately-grouped noble and sentimental waltzes, whereas, Ravel did not differentiate the noble waltzes from the sentimental ones. *Valses nobles et sentimentales*, declared the composer, "indicates clearly enough my intention of composing a chain of waltzes following the example of Schubert." At the head of the score he inscribed a quotation from the poet Henri de Régnier: "...le plaisir délicieux et toujours nouveau d'une occupation inutile."

Ravel aspires to a more advanced norm of dissonance, and the music in consequence cuts with a new edge of piquancy and nervousness. The seven waltzes strike many subtle contrasts of mood and character, and No. 8, the *Epilogue*, has been perfectly summarized by Rollo Myers as "a kind of résumé of all the seven preceding waltzes, disembodied fragments of which come floating to the surface...Ravel passes in review what has gone before, not insisting on but alluding discreetly and nostalgically to the seven links that have formed his golden chain."

At a performance of new works where the composers were not identified, Ravel's composition generated a disturbing chorus of boos and catcalls. Many were disturbed by the acerbic harmonic palette that he employed. Consider him a radical among composers who fared better: Erik Satie, Vincent d'Indy and Zoltán Kodály. Other than the name and the waltz form, there is little similarity between Ravel's and Schubert's works.