

3-17-1998

## Guest Artist Recital: Frederic Chiu, piano

Frederic Chiu

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*“It is  
my plan  
to build  
a school  
of music  
second  
to none.”*

—William  
Grant Egbert  
(1867–1928)  
Founder,  
Ithaca  
Conservatory  
of Music

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FREDERIC CHIU, piano

Music for Children, op. 65

Sergei Prokofiev  
(1891-1953)

*Morning*  
*Promenade*  
*Fairy Tale*  
*Tarantella*  
*Regrets*  
*Waltz*  
*Parade of the Grasshoppers*  
*Rain and the Rainbow*  
*Tag*  
*March*  
*Evening*  
*Moonlit Meadows*

Children's Corner Suite

Claude Debussy  
(1862-1918)

*Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum*  
*Jimbo's Lullaby*  
*Serenade for the Doll*  
*The Snow is Dancing*  
*The Little Shepherd*  
*Golliwog's Cakewalk*

Kinderscenen, op. 15 (Scenes from Childhood)

Robert Schumann  
(1810-1856)

*Strange Lands and People*  
*Curious Story*  
*Blind Man's Buff*  
*Pleading Child*  
*Perfectly Contented*  
*An Important Event*  
*Reverie*  
*By the Fireside*  
*The Knight of the Rocking-Horse*  
*Almost too Serious*  
*Frightening*  
*Child Falling Asleep*  
*The Poet Speaks*

INTERMISSION

Twelve Etudes, op. 10

Frederic Chopin  
(1810-1849)

*No. 1 in C Major*  
*No. 2 in A minor*  
*No. 3 in E Major*  
*No. 4 in C-sharp minor*  
*No. 5 in G-flat Major*  
*No. 6 in E-flat minor*  
*No. 7 in C Major*  
*No. 8 in F Major*  
*No. 9 in F minor*  
*No. 10 in A-flat Major*  
*No. 11 in E-flat Major*  
*No. 12 in C minor*

**Ford Hall Auditorium**  
**Tuesday, March 17, 1998**  
**8:15 p.m.**

Harmonia Mundi

Exclusive Management: Arts Management Group, Inc.  
150 Fifth Avenue, Suite 845, New York, NY 10011-4311

## THE ARTIST

Currently residing in France, Frederic Chiu was born in Ithaca, New York and raised by Chinese immigrant parents. Frederic Chiu's cosmopolitan background brings a unique approach to his music-making. "He has reinvented virtuosity . . . a phenomenon that must be heard," stated *Le Monde*.

As adept in the recording studio as on the stage, Frederic Chiu has released nine compact discs, including music of Mendelssohn, Rossini, and Ravel. Currently available are six volumes of the complete piano works of Prokofiev, a recording project that has elicited enthusiasm from *Fanfare* to the *Wall Street Journal* to France's *Le Figaro* and *Elle* magazine. His release of three rarely-played sonatas of Mendelssohn was chosen as "Record of the Year" by Stereo Review. In the 1996-97 season he recorded the Chopin *Etudes*.

Since the release of his first compact disc, which was devoted to piano transcriptions, Chiu has been cited as a champion of this under-explored repertoire. In this respect Chiu is following the example of his former teacher at the Juilliard School, Abbey Simon. Not only do his programs often include transcriptions, he has also written his own arrangements, including pieces from Prokofiev's *Lieutenant Kijé Suite*, which have met with rousing success in concert and on record, and are currently being prepared for publication.

After finishing his studies at Indiana University, in piano with Karen Shaw and also in computer science, Frederic Chiu continued his studies at the Juilliard School; he decided to begin his career in Paris. He has since toured extensively in France, becoming one of the most well-known American pianists playing there. His concerts have taken him to most of the major European cities: Rome, Milan, Brussels, Antwerp, Berlin, Frankfurt, the Hague, Warsaw, Prague, London. In the United States, Mr. Chiu has played in Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York City and the Ambassador Theatre in Pasadena, and has travelled across the United States on extended recital tours with Community Concerts. Last season he returned to Lincoln Center for a recital, and he made his Washington debut at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

He is the recipient of many prestigious awards, including a 1996 Avery Fisher Career Grant, the Petscheck Award, and the American Pianists Association Fellowship. But it was the lack of an award in 1993 that first brought him international attention: a rare foray into the competition circuit took Frederic Chiu to Fort Worth, Texas, where his elimination before the final round of the Ninth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition roused enormous protest. Prominent stories in the *New York Times* referred to him as the "Maverick American Pianist."

Besides solo work, his concert activities also include a large amount of chamber music. He participates regularly in the festival "Consonance" in Saint Nazaire, France, which he co-founded in 1991 with violinist Philippe Graffin. His collaborations with invited artists include Gary Hoffman, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Jeremy Menuhin, St. Lawrence Quartet and Christian Ivaldi.

Growing up with a violinist brother and having worked closely with Josef Gingold at Indiana University, Frederic Chiu reserves a special place for the violin/piano repertoire and plays often with Pierre Amoyal and Joshua Bell.

## PROGRAM NOTES

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953). *Music for Children*, op. 65

Born in the Ukrainian village of Sontzovka, Prokofiev received his first piano lessons from his mother, an amateur pianist, who, he wrote, "had little musical talent; she acquired technique with difficulty. . . . She had three virtues: stubbornness, passion, and good taste." When he was five he composed his first work, which his mother notated. "I wrote three pieces in the spring and summer of 1897: a 'Waltz,' a 'March,' and a 'Rondo.' When he was thirteen, Sergei entered the St. Petersburg Conservatory where he studied piano (Mme. Essipova), composition (Rimsky-Korsakov, Wihtov, and Liadov), and conducting (Nicolas Tcherepnin). When he graduated in 1914, he received the Anton Rubenstein prize (a grand piano) for his performance of his first piano concerto. After conducting the first performance of his *Classical Symphony* in 1918, Prokofiev left Russia. By 1932 he had a decision to make: remain in the West as an emigré like Stravinsky, or return to the USSR and become a Soviet citizen. He chose the latter, and settled in Moscow in December 1935.

For Prokofiev, writing for children came naturally, because of his love of fairy tales and his "unique understanding of the way children viewed the world": simple, unexpected, and pictorial. *Music for Children: Twelve Easy Pieces* was written during the summer of 1935 in Polenovo and premiered in Moscow in 1936. These tonal pieces, which are less dissonant and textually simpler than his other piano music, were an instant success. In 1941 Prokofiev orchestrated numbers 1, 5, 6, and 9-12 in a suite for small orchestra entitled *Summer's Day*; he used "Waltz" and "Evening" in his last ballet, *The Stone Flower* in 1950.

Claude Debussy (1862–1918). *Children's Corner Suite*

In 1933 Alfredo Casella recalled:

To the end [Debussy] remained what the French call *grand enfant*. That same wonderful innocence and limpidity of feeling which is the fundamental

characteristic of his art transpired in all his deeds and words. At fifty he amused himself more than did his little daughter Chouchou with the toys brought home for her by her mother.

The suite, which was published in 1908 and dedicated to “My dear little Chouchou, with fond memories from her father for what follows,” is not a story about Chouchou and her toys; the suite is about Chouchou viewing her toys with the simple, unaffected faith of a child. The English titles are in mock deference to Chouchou’s English nanny.

“Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum” is a respectful but playful parody of Clementi’s famous 1807 keyboard studies, *Gradus ad Parnassum*. “Jimbo’s Lullaby,” which is subtitled *Berceuse des éléphants* (the elephant’s lullaby), has an allusion to the children’s song “Dodo, l’enfant, do,” and it expresses the elephant’s comicality with its use of the keyboard’s lower register and the direction *doux et un peu gauche* (gentle and a little clumsy). “The Serenade of the Doll” was published in 1906 as “Sérénade à la poupée.” Much ink has been spilled discussing Debussy’s mistranslation. What is significant is that the doll is being serenaded, perhaps by another doll in the toy box or a child. With its ostinatos and defined textures, “The Snow is Dancing” is an estampe with a delicate melancholy. The monophonic phrases divide “The Little Shepherd” into three sections, each of which closes with a conventional ii<sup>7</sup> V<sup>7</sup> I cadence. Golliwogg was the name of a black doll which was popularized in an 1895 picture book entitled *The Adventures of Two Dutch Dolls and a Golliwogg*. Chouchou had a Golliwogg, as did most children. In 1903 Debussy heard Sousa play a cake-walk in Paris and proclaimed him “its king.” The cake-walk is normally danced to a ragtime, which is characterized by a syncopated melody against a march-like beat. The slower middle section contains a parody of Wagner’s *Tristan* that is marked *avec une grande émotion*.

The *Children’s Corner Suite* clearly illustrates Debussy’s empathy with Chouchou and her dolls. As Paul Roberts has written, “part of the power of *Children’s Corner* lies in the impression it conveys of simplicity in which profundity lies, the simplicity that we strive to recapture in the adult world, having lost what as children we had so naturally.”

Robert Schumann (1810–56). *Kinderszenen*, op. 15

In 1837, after Schumann became engaged to Clara Wieck, her father, Friedrich, who was determined to break them up, took Clara on a concert tour to Vienna. In March 1838 Schumann wrote to her that he had just composed

some thirty droll little things, from which I have selected a dozen or so and called them *Kinderszenen*. You will enjoy them — though you will have to forget you are a virtuoso. They have titles like ‘By the Fireside,’ ‘Catch-as-catch-can,’ ‘Pleading Child,’ ‘Ride a Hobbyhorse,’ ‘From Distant Lands,’ and so forth. You can see what they are like — and they are easy to carry off.

The titles, which were added as guides for the performer, reflect the Romantic belief that inspiration can be drawn from one world and transmuted into the values of the other. *Kinderszenen* are not pieces for children; they are addressed to adults. These vignettes, cast in either binary or ternary form, are, as Schumann wrote, “reminiscences of a grownup for grownups;” “Der Dichter spricht” serves as an epilogue. Each of these miniatures, which had wide and instant appeal, is a cameo with its own distinctive qualities. The challenge for the performer is to unite them into a whole.

Frédéric Chopin (1810–49). *Twelve Etudes*, op. 10

After Chopin played his first public concert in Paris on 26 February 1832, François-Joseph Fétis wrote in the *Revue musicale*:

Beethoven has composed pianoforte music, but I speak here of pianists' music, and it is by comparison with the latter that I find in M. Chopin's inspirations an indication of a renewal of forms which in time may exercise much influence over this department of the art.

Fétis's words were prophetic. Chopin's music led composers to a new direction in piano music, and Schumann's advocacy in the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (6 February 1836) was a significant factor in its growing popularity and acceptance.

The études, which are dedicated to Liszt, were probably written between 1829–32; only a few have been dated precisely. In them, as James Sampson maintains, Chopin “addressed himself systematically to the world of pianistic technique which had spawned the virtuoso style.” But these technical studies rise above the dry exercises of Carl Czerny (1791–1857), J. B. Cramer (1771–1858), Friedrich Kalbrenner (1785–1849), or Sigismond Thalberg (1812–71): Chopin gave them poetry. Like Czerny, Chopin remained true to the didactic idea of addressing one principal technical problem in each exercise. The first étude is designed for the contraction and extension of the right hand. The a minor étude, with its emphasis on finger crossings and melodic figuration, is a virtuoso piece. Abandoning the monothematic idea for the third étude, Chopin focuses on the control of the *legato* melodic line. The fifth and sixth études date from 1830. The so-called “Black-Key” étude in G♭ major is a bravura exercise with a toccata-like motive. With its expressive use of appoggiaturas and chromatic harmonies, the e♭ minor étude has a brooding intensity. It is a contrapuntal study that requires careful control of the various layers. The seventh and eighth études, in C and F, respectively, break the pattern established in the first six of tonal pairings (the major key and its relative minor). The f minor étude is unique because it is directed towards the control of the wide-spread, left-hand accompaniment. All of the previous études focused on right-hand technique. The A♭ major étude, an exercise in cross rhythms and shifting accents, demands technical dexterity from both hands. The E♭ major étude, with its extended arpeggio chords in both hands in 1:1 writing, requires tremendous control to allow the melody and countermelody to emerge from



the textural fabric. Written in 1831 at the time of the final suppression of the Polish uprising against the Russians, "The Revolutionary Etude" in c minor is the most famous of the op. 10 études. Here Chopin has turned attention to a *legatissimo* control of the left-hand, figured arpeggios.

These op. 10 études, begun when Chopin was only eighteen, are a compendium of keyboard resources. As Fétis predicted and Arthur Hedley noted, the op. 10 études are

a remarkable contribution to the literature of the piano . . . . These pieces are extraordinarily mature: no trace of stumbling. The lad of eighteen set out to write technical exercises and ended creating a new *genre*, the *étude* as we know it, wherein material for technical study is made the vehicle for the expression of a deeper musical conception.

Mary I. Arlin