

Jon Nakamatsu, Piano

New Orleans Friends of Music, Monday, November 10, 2025

PROGRAM

Two Chorale Preludes J. S. Bach (1685–1750) arr. Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924)

1. Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ (I Cry Out to You, Lord Jesus Christ)
2. Nun komm' der Heiden Heiland (Now Comes the Savior of the Gentiles)

Sonata No. 15 ("Pastorale"), Op. 28 Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

1. Allegro
2. Andante
3. *Scherzo*: Allegro vivace
4. *Rondo*: Allegro ma non troppo

Intermission

Fantasy in F-Sharp Minor, Op. 28 Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

1. Con moto agitato
2. Allegro con moto
3. Presto

Tre Sonetti del Petrarca

(from *Années de pèlerinage, Deuxième Année: Italie*) S. 161 Franz Liszt (1811–1886)
(Three Petrarch Sonnets, from *Years of Pilgrimage, Year 2: Italy*)

1. Sonetto 47: Benedetto sia l'giorno
2. Sonetto 104: Pace non trovo
3. Sonetto 123: I'vidi in terra angelici costume

Andante Spianato et Grande Polonaise Brillante, Op. 22 Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)

PROGRAM NOTES

by Marc Loudon

[Note: Performance links provided in these notes are generally available *YouTube* links that in some cases start with advertisements. You can skip the ads by clicking on the "Skip" message that will appear on the lower right of the video after a few seconds.]

The Bach–Busoni Preludes. In the late 19th century, the music of **Johann Sebastian Bach** was rarely heard in concert halls, and the organ music of Bach was heard even less. Nevertheless, Italian **Ferruccio Busoni**'s amateur-musician father grounded his son's study of piano with the works of Bach, and Busoni's subsequent career was devoted to the performance and publication of Bach's works. In 1888, Busoni and a pupil attended an organ recital in Thomaskirche in Leipzig (where, 138 years earlier, Bach ended his career). In this recital he heard a performance of Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in D major* (BWV 532) for organ, which has one of the most virtuosic of Bach's organ fugues. Busoni's pupil suggested that he arrange the fugue for piano,



and a week later, Busoni played it for her, never even have written it down. This was the beginning of Busoni's transcriptions of Bach's organ works for piano, which culminated in the 13 volumes of the *Bach–Busoni Editions* produced from 1916–1920. (The photo shows Busoni in 1913.) Busoni stated in his introduction to the transcriptions that he “regards the interpretation of Bach's organ pieces on the pianoforte as essential to a complete study of Bach.” Modern organists would probably dispute this view in light of the ready availability today of Bach scholarship and Bach's organ music both in print and in recitals, but this view is understandable in the context of Busoni's era; and we owe Busoni, as we owe Felix Mendelssohn, a debt of gratitude for reviving interest in Bach's works. These works offer an intriguing interpretation of Bach by a romantic-era pianist.

The first two selections on tonight's program are from a collection of ten Bach chorale preludes for organ “transcribed for the piano in chamber style” by Busoni in the period 1907–1909. The two preludes illustrate deeply contrasting styles of Bach's chorale improvisations. The first, *Ich ruf zu dir* (BWV 639) is from the *Orgelbüchlein*, a collection of 46 short organ preludes that consists of a few preludes for each liturgical season of the church year. Bach wrote these in the period 1713–1717, when he was organist for the ducal court in Weimar. In only twenty-six measures, in trio style, the chorale melody is presented almost explicitly, with very little improvisation or ornamentation, over a throbbing bass line and a lovely moving inner voice.

The second prelude, *Nun komm' der Heiden Heiland* (BWV 659), is from a collection of eighteen monumental chorale preludes known to organists as “The Great Eighteen.” Bach assembled this collection in the last decade of his life while music director at Thomaskirche. In this prelude for the season of advent (one of three based on this chorale in the Great Eighteen, and a perennial favorite of organists), we hear a very elaborate improvisation on the chorale melody with highly contrapuntal interludes between phrases of the chorale.

We provide here links to performances of these two preludes on the organ by Leo van Doeselaar, the organist of the Netherlands Bach Society. These authentic organ performances on a baroque-style organ provide an interesting frame of reference for the Busoni arrangements.

[*Ich ruf zu dir*](#)

[*Nun komm' der Heiden Heiland*](#)

Beethoven, Sonata in D Major, Op. 28. The nickname “Pastorale” for this sonata was not provided by Beethoven, but by a publisher, who, according to pianist Andras Schiff, can be forgiven for this addition because it is very apt. The sonata, composed in 1801, is dedicated to Joseph von Sonnenfelds, who was an Austrian and German jurist and novelist. He was among the leaders of the Illuminati movement in Austria, whose stated goals were to oppose (among other things) abuses of state power by monarchs.

The sonata is in four movements (unlike many Beethoven sonatas, which have three movements). This delightful work contains a good bit of humor and suggestive tone-painting. The opening movement, in 3/4 meter, begins with three tympani-like notes in the bass setting the stage for the opening 9-measure theme, which is repeated again at the octave. An episode leads to the second theme, a Schubert-like song superimposed over a murmuring figure suggestive of a

flowing stream. These two ideas are developed in sonata form throughout the movement, which ends very quietly with two staccato chords.

The second movement has A–B–A form in d minor. The bass is a staccato figure in a walking tempo that might be played by a bassoon in the orchestra, and the melody is developed with *legato* three-voice chords tinged with sadness. The B section is a little march in D major, which features sequences of three abrupt chords (in the rhythm of the word, “Nach-ti-gall” [Nightingale]) followed by a treble interlude that suggest a birdsong. The return of the theme in the second A section shows Beethoven’s penchant for variations on the theme.

The third movement is a little scherzo. The first part is four notes, each a full measure, descending by an octave, then four agitated measures. The second part is a little waltz, or Ländler, in which the octave leaps reminiscent of the movement’s opening from the bass line. The trio section is also in two parts: first, a melody over rapid octaves in the bass, then a variation on the same melody with a similar agitated bass. Then we’re back to a recapitulation of the opening, as is typical of a scherzo.

The final movement is a rondo in 6/8 meter with a drone bass that reminds us of a shepherd playing a bagpipe. The theme is very suggestive of the 5th movement of Beethoven’s “Pastoral” Symphony, an observation that particularly justifies the nickname of this sonata. Each exposition of the rondo theme is followed by episodic material. For example, after the second appearance of the rondo theme, Beethoven treats us to a remarkable little fughetta sequence *a la* Bach. Another repetition of the rondo theme and the following arpeggios that end *pianissimo* set us up for a surprise: the very difficult and virtuosic coda, marked *Più allegro*, which pianist and writer Charles Rosen suggested, tongue in cheek, that Beethoven may have added to “annoy the amateur pianist.”

The following link leads to a performance of the Pastoral Sonata by Sir Andras Schiff.

[Beethoven Sonata Op. 28 performed by Sir Andras Schiff](#)

Arguably the two greatest works of **Felix Mendelssohn** for piano solo—and not often heard—are the *Variations Serieuses* and the **F-sharp Minor Fantasy**, sometimes called the *Scottish Fantasy*. There are indications that Mendelssohn had largely composed the *Fantasy* in 1829, but it wasn’t published until 1834.

Mendelssohn was among many nineteenth-century German composers who were fascinated by Scotland, by its folk music, history and literature. Mendelssohn was the only one who visited Scotland, when at the age of twenty during the summer of 1829, on a celebrated walking tour, he found the inspiration for his Scottish Symphony and the “Hebrides” Overture. But well before his 1829 tour, he was reading the poetry and novels by Scottish authors. Probably in 1828 or early 1829 the young composer attempted his first full-scale work inspired by a Scotland he had not yet seen or experienced. The three-movement Fantasia in F sharp minor, Op 28, eventually released in 1834, took shape originally as a *Sonate écossaise* (Scottish Sonata) mentioned already in family correspondence from early 1829. Four years later, early in 1833, Mendelssohn revised the work, but then published it the following year as a Fantasia, without its Scottish attribution.

In three movements (slow, moderate, and very fast), its broad outlines recall the “Moonlight” sonata of Beethoven. Indeed, it has been suggested that it was consciously modeled after the “Moonlight.” Be that as it may, Mendelssohn captured characteristic aspects of Scottish folk music in the harp-like preluding of the opening measures, the use of drone effects, and widely

spaced chords. The close of the first movement, an especially memorable passage, uses an open pedal to create a deliberately blurred effect suggesting the mists over a Scottish landscape. The second movement, in a Scherzo (A–B–A) form, like the second movement of the “Moonlight,” is rather brief and simple compared to the two massive movements before and after. The turbulent finale, like the finale of the “Moonlight,” has gained notoriety as a technical *tour de force*. It has a restless energy that looks forward to the finale of the Scottish Symphony.

The following link is to a performance of the Fantasia by Murray Perahia:

[Performance of the Mendelssohn F-Sharp Minor Fantasia by Murray Perahia](#)

The **Three Petrarch Sonnets** of **Franz Liszt** are three piano pieces from Liszt’s *Années de pèlerinage* (Years of Pilgrimage), inspired by the Renaissance poet Francesco Petrarch’s love sonnets (*Canzone*) to a woman Laura, whom he idolized with unrequited love. Composed first for voice and piano in the early 1840s, Liszt later arranged them for solo piano in three different versions; and he published the version we hear tonight, the one most often played, in 1846 for his Years of Pilgrimage: Second Year (Italy) collection. The works are characterized by their lyricism, innovative harmonies, and a strong sense of the vocal line, capturing the passionate, often conflicting, emotions of Petrarch’s poetry.

The numbering of the sonnets in the program is Liszt’s. The actual *canzone* numbers, and the sonnets themselves, follow.

Sonnet 47: Benedetto sia l’giorno: Inspired by Petrarch’s Canzone 61.

Blessed be the day, and the month, and the year,
and the season, and the time, and the hour, and the moment,
and the beautiful country, and the place where I was joined
to the two beautiful eyes that have bound me:

and blessed be the first sweet suffering
that I felt in being conjoined with Love
and the bow, and the shafts with which I was pierced
and the wounds that run to the depths of my heart.

Blessed be all those verses I scattered
calling out the name of my lady,
and the sighs, and the tears, and the passion:

and blessed be all the sheets
where I acquire fame, and my thoughts,
that are only of her, that no one else has part of.

Sonnet 104: Pace non trovo: Inspired by Petrarch’s Canzone 134.

I find no peace, and yet I make no war:
and fear, and hope: and burn, and I am ice:
and fly above the sky, and fall to earth,
and clutch at nothing, and embrace the world.

One imprisons me, who neither frees nor jails me,
nor keeps me to herself nor slips the noose:

and Love does not destroy me, and does not loose me,
wishes me not to live, but does not remove my bar.

I see without eyes, and have no tongue, but cry:
and long to perish, yet I beg for aid:
and hold myself in hate, and love another.

I feed on sadness, laughing weep:
death and life displease me equally:
and I am in this state, lady, because of you.

Sonnet 123: I'vidi in terra angelici costumi: Inspired by Petrarch's Canzone 156.

I saw angelic virtue on earth
and heavenly beauty on terrestrial soil,
so I am sad and joyful at the memory,
and what I see seems dream, shadows, smoke:

and I saw two lovely eyes that wept,
that made the sun a thousand times jealous:
and I heard words emerge among sighs
that made the mountains move, and halted rivers.

Love, Judgement, Pity, Worth and Grief,
made a sweeter chorus of weeping
than any other heard beneath the moon:

and heaven so intent upon the harmony
no leaf was seen to move on the boughs,
so filled with sweetness were the wind and air.

The following link is to Yuchan Lim's performance of Sonnet 104 (S. 161) at the Gramophone Classical Music Awards in 2024.

[Yuchan Lim, performance of the Petrarch Sonnet 104 of Liszt](#)

Frédéric Chopin composed his **Grand Polonaise Brillante** for solo piano in 1830–1831 and later set it into a work for piano and orchestra. Three years later in 1834, he appended an **Andante spianato** (smooth and flowing), as a bel canto-style introduction to complete his Opus 22. This combination was first heard in a benefit concert in Paris on April 26, 1835, with Chopin as the soloist. This was his last concert as a piano virtuoso.

The *Andante spianato* has the character of a nocturne, and at the same time of a lullaby. It forges a dreamy mood that concludes with a four-part chordal section, almost like a chorale, then a brief return to the nocturne, from which the listener is aroused by the fanfare-like theme announcing the Polonaise.

The polonez, or in its French form, polonaise, is one of the five national dances of Poland. The folk music evolved from the dance into an elaborate compositional style made famous by Chopin and others. Its basis is **3/4** meter with a fanfare-like character.

The *Grand Polonaise* opens with a small stately introduction (played by the orchestra in the piano–orchestral version) before the pianist leads the way into the polonaise proper. Notice the characteristic rhythmic underpinnings in the left hand while the right hand continually spins an

elaborate melody and takes the limelight as the piece develops. The polonaise has some of the characteristics of a rondo, in which the episodes between repetitions of the theme are splendidly virtuosic and kaleidoscopic. Elaborate trills, double notes, and thrilling arpeggios, leaping passages, long runs, all performed with utmost fluidity, demand high technical expertise as Opus 22 moves to its exciting conclusion.

The following link leads to a spectacular performance of Opus 22 by Yulianna Avdeva, a Russian-born concert pianist who won first prize in the XVI Annual International Chopin Competition.

[Performance of the Andante spianato and Grand Polonaise by Yulianna Avdeva](#)