

Department of Music
Sophomore Recital
8:00 p.m. February 27, 2016



BRIDGES
1915 100 2015
HALL OF MUSIC

Alexander Woods, piano

French Suite in E-flat Major, BWV 815

Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Gavotte
Air
Menuet
Gigue

Johann Sebastian Bach
1685–1750

Sonata No. 2, *Concord, Mass., 1840-60*
III. The Alcotts

Charles Ives
1874–1954

Sonata in E-flat Major, Op. 7
Allegro molto e con brio
Largo con gran espressione
Allegro
Rondo. Poco Allegretto e grazioso

Ludwig van Beethoven
1770–1827



In the sensitive acoustic environment of Lyman Hall, your neighbors can hear you! Please be considerate of the audience and performers and silence your telephone ringers, beepers, and alarm watches. Recording devices and cameras may not be used during the performance.

It is customary to hold all applause until the end of a piece or set of pieces.

Audience members arriving late will be seated during a suitable break in the program.

PROGRAM NOTES

French Suite BWV 815 As a multi-movement instrumental genre from the Baroque era, the suite can be found in orchestral, chamber, and solo works. Each movement of a keyboard suite is a highly stylized European dance, with the German Allemande, French Courante (or Italian Corrente), Spanish Sarabande, and English/Irish Gigue (jig) providing the backbone. To make up the remaining 3 or 4 movements, an opening Prelude or Overture, as well as numerous other dances such as the Gavotte, Menuet, Bourrée, Polonaise, or Chaconne are commonly included.

In the late Baroque (1685-1750), J.S. Bach was one of the premier composers that championed the suite style. His suites for keyboard include the English Suites, BWV 806-811, the French Suites, BWV 812-817, and the Partitas, BWV 825-830 (Part I of the Clavier-Übung). The labels of “English” and “French” for the first two works were popularized by later scholars and critics and do not have any meaningful implications about style or character. In fact, in all but two of the French Suites, the traditionally French Courante (which is in a slow 3/2 meter) is actually written in the Italian style—that is, in a quick 3/4—and would more aptly be referred to as a “Corrente.”

Semantic considerations aside, the manuscripts of the French Suites are also intriguing. They were written between 1722 and 1725, but were never actually published under Bach’s direction. All of the later prints were primarily compiled using the differing scores that Bach copied out for his students, which has resulted in many discrepancies among editions. Most noticeably, differences can be found regarding what movements are included in each work. Tonight’s suite, for example, is also published without the Menuet and Gigue, or with the addition of a Prelude and a second Gavotte. Furthermore, a wide range of ornaments (written into the manuscripts by Bach or his students) are shown in the various editions. In the Baroque, choices of ornamentation were made individually by each performer rather than pre-planned by the composer; thus, it is to be expected that each of Bach’s pupils would have performed the French Suites with their own personal flair. I hope to strive for such a spirit during tonight’s performance by including ornaments of my own design.

The Alcotts Sonata No. 2, *Concord, Mass., 1840-60*, widely known as the Concord Sonata, is as much of a testament to Charles Ives’s scholarly prowess as it is to his artistic genius. This massive sonata, originally finished in 1915 and revised between 1940 and 1947, serves as Ives’s tribute to the mid-19th-century transcendentalist writers of Concord. Each of its four movements is dedicated to a different figure: Emerson, Hawthorne, Bronson Alcott and his family, and Thoreau. For many of us, these names might evoke memories of the high school English classroom, but for Ives they held a more profound significance. Indeed, the personality and philosophy of each writer resonated with him to the extent that he believed they deserved re-creation in a musical medium.

Ives expounds on such notions in his *Essay Before a Sonata*, which was completed in 1919 and published in the subsequent editions. This essay is written in separate parts, providing a few paragraphs before each movement to describe the spirit of its designated writer. While the music could be just as meaningful on its own, these explanatory sections provide important context, ensuring that the listener and performer have the opportunity to hear the music as Ives intended. The text that accompanies tonight’s movement is provided below. It describes the Alcott family, their home (“Orchard House”), and the worldview that pervaded their hometown of Concord. Ives’s writing provides an effective characterization of the music, but one might also add that the movement’s main musical gesture is an imitation of the famous first theme from Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. With this observation in mind, Ives’s passing references to Beethoven take on a poignant significance:

Concord village, itself, reminds one of that common virtue lying at the height and root of all the Concord divinities. As one walks down the broad-arched street, passing the white house of Emerson—ascetic guard of a former prophetic beauty—he comes presently beneath the old elms overspreading the Alcott house. It seems to stand as a kind of homely but beautiful witness of Concord’s common virtue—it seems to bear a consciousness that its past is living, that the

“mosses of the Old Manse” and the hickories of Walden are not far away. Here is the home of the “Marches”—all pervaded with the trials and happiness of the family and telling, in a simple way, the story of “the richness of not having.” Within the house, on every side, lie remembrances of what imagination can do for the better amusement of fortunate children who have to do for themselves—much-needed lessons in these days of automatic, ready-made, easy entertainment which deaden rather than stimulate the creative faculty. And there sits the little old spinet-piano Sophia Thoreau gave to the Alcott children, on which Beth played the old Scotch airs, and played at the *Fifth Symphony*.

There is a commonplace beauty about “Orchard House”—a kind of spiritual sturdiness underlying its quaint picturesqueness—a kind of common triad of the New England homestead, whose overtones tell us that there must have been something aesthetic fibered in the Puritan severity—the self-sacrificing part of the ideal—a value that seems to stir a deeper feeling, a stronger sense of being nearer some perfect truth than a Gothic cathedral or an Etruscan villa. All around you, under the Concord sky, there still floats the influence of that human faith melody, transcendent and sentimental enough for the enthusiast or the cynic respectively, reflecting an innate hope—a common interest in common things and common men—a tune the Concord bards are ever playing, while they pound away at the immensities with a Beethovenlike sublimity, and with, may we say, a vehemence and perseverance—for that part of greatness is not so difficult to emulate.

We dare not attempt to follow the philosophic raptures of Bronson Alcott—unless you will assume that his apotheosis will show how “practical” his vision in this world would be in the next. And so we won’t try to reconcile the music sketch of the Alcotts with much besides the memory of that home under the elms—the Scotch songs and the family hymns that were sung at the end of each day—though there may be an attempt to catch something of that common sentiment (which we have tried to suggest above)—a strength of hope that never gives way to despair—a conviction in the power of the common soul which, when all is said and done, may be as typical as any theme of Concord and its transcendentalists.

Sonata Op. 7 At the beginning of 1796, Beethoven had been happily settled in Vienna for three years, and was becoming well-known in elite circles as a virtuoso pianist, improviser, and composer. With his career on a decisive upswing, he left Vienna in February to go on a concert tour. He made appearances in Prague and Dresden in March and April, and later gave several performances in Berlin for Friedrich Wilhelm II, the King of Prussia. There is no record of Beethoven’s activity following his return to Vienna in the summer, but some accounts have suggested that he had fallen seriously ill during this span.¹ If this is true, then by late November he had recovered enough to travel again, this time to Pressburg (now known as Bratislava), where he gave a concert and visited the Keglevics Palace. It was during this time that he composed tonight’s Op. 7 piano sonata, dedicating it to his pupil Countess Babette von Keglevics. The sonata was published the following year along with his two Op. 5 cello sonatas, which he had performed for King of Prussia with the court cellist, Jean Louis Duport.

In the midst of the prevailing Classical-era style, Beethoven’s compositional ideas in this early Vienna period were quite innovative. His Op. 2, 7, 10, and 13 piano sonatas all take advantage of the great advances that were being made in piano technique, although he never touted virtuosity on its own—rather, it functioned as a tool to implement the larger musical ideas of the composition. A strict formal structure also appears to be of primary importance in Beethoven’s works from this period. He made great efforts to distinguish the material of separate sections within a piece, rather than having different parts

¹ Joseph Kerman, et al, “Beethoven, Ludwig van,” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40026pg13>.

bleed together. Perhaps most distinctive, however, is his pioneering use of dynamic contrast. Where Haydn might have juxtaposed loud and soft material for comedic purposes, Beethoven used dynamic differences to convey drama and vigor.² In this way, he was developing a new musical language, one whose power and versatility we can experience in tonight's sonata. In the first movement, the main theme is initially presented quietly, but later returns at a full volume. The next three movements contain numerous instances of what the pianist András Schiff refers to as a "Beauty and the Beast" effect³—that is, a stark shift from the light and lyrical to the blustery and rumbling, and vice-versa.

—AW

² Ibid.

³ Beethoven Lecture-Recitals, London, 2004-6, <http://wigmore-hall.org.uk/podcasts/andras-schiff-beethoven-lecture-recitals>.