Program Notes and Translations: *Romantic Era Russian Song and Piano Music*

Since the second half of the 18th and during the 19th centuries, Russian composers’ contribution to the piano literature became an ongoing effort that started to exert influence on the development of Western piano music.

The lyrical qualities associated with the Russian folk music found a reflection and a special place in music of Mikhail Glinka, Pyotr Tchaikovskiy, and Sergey Rachmaninov. The intimate, lyrical side is often suggested by long phrases of flowing melodies - a fascinating blend of calm, expressive, simple, yet profound evocations.

**Mikhail Glinka** (1804-1857) was the first Russian composer of note to make a lasting impression on the international stage. Surprisingly, he enjoyed no formal musical training, but during his extensive travels throughout Europe, he established close relationships with famous composers of the day, notably Berlioz, Mendelssohn, Bellini and Donizetti. He is considered the father of the Russian sound.

**Pyotr Tchaikovskiy** (1840-1893), one of the luminaries of the Russian school of romantic composition, is widely recognized for his symphonies, operas, ballets, concerti, chamber music, solo piano music, and songs for voice and piano. Tchaikovsky’s gift as a melodist and his remarkable subtle and individual musicality is fully represented in his songs for voice and piano.

**Sergey Rachmaninov** (1873-1943) was a brilliant Russian virtuoso pianist, composer and conductor of the late Romantic period, some of whose works are among the most popular in the Romantic repertoire.

**Piano pieces:**

*Prelude op. 23 No. 7 in C Minor (1901-1903) and op. 32 No. 12 in G-sharp Minor (1910)*: Sergei Rachmaninov’s Op. 23 and Op. 32 Preludes are an effort of a mature master. Both his pianism and his piano compositions can be regarded as a culmination of the grand Russian pianistic style at the turn of the 20th century. Warm, expressive melodies, luxuriously rich textures, sincerity, melancholy are some of the qualities of his art. The pieces in this set are as expansive as a prelude genre would allow and each represents an entire world of feelings and experiences.

*Elegie Op. 3 No. 1 in E-flat Minor* is from *Morceaux de fantaisie* (Fantasy Pieces), a set of five piano solo pieces composed by Sergei Rachmaninoff in 1892. The set was dedicated to Anton Arensky, the composer’s theory teacher while his studies at the conservatory. *Elegie* contains the dark brooding intensity of mood. Rachmaninov positions the melody on the weak beats to create a series of suspensions resulting in high emotional expression with many dissonances, expressive timing, and a rubato effect. Lush harmonies and long, soaring melodic lines set above sweeping arpeggios make this piece one of the favorite romantic pieces.
Songs

Mikhail Glinka
It was in Italy that Glinka developed his admiration for the flowing melodies of the bel canto style, which he transported to his own vocal compositions with great skill and elegance. The subject matter of his art songs often harks back to his days in Italy, Venetian Night being just one of several examples. The setting of Pushkin’s infamous poem I recall the magnificent moment is one of Glinka’s most revered art songs. He had a personal connection with the poetry. Pushkin wrote the poem for Anna Petrovna Kern, a woman with whom the poet was deeply in love. Her family unfortunately forced her to marry someone else, so the relationship was never to be. Years later, Glinka fell in love with Anna’s daughter, Ekatarina. When her mother presented him with an original signed autograph of the poem, he wrote the song and dedicated it to Ekatarina.

Glinka’s setting of Do not sing to me, beauty, sad songs of Georgia is paired in this program with a setting of the same poem by Rachmaninov. Is it interesting to look at the two composers’ approach to Pushkin’s text. The two versions are vastly different. Glinka portrays the sadness and nostalgia with the most simple of melodies, in strophic form and almost reminiscent of folk music. Rachmaninov, on the other hand, delivers a highly emotional through-composed song with a reoccurring haunting counter-melody in the piano that takes the listener to the exotic spheres where Europe and Asia intertwine. K Nej (To Her) was taken from a Polish poem and set by Glinka as a joyful mazurka. It describes a boy admiring his girlfriend’s beauty while she babbles on endlessly. Glinka captures the wit of the song perfectly with humorous clipped rhythms and a rolling melody with few interruptions, interpreting the non-stop chattering of the young man’s girlfriend. Only at the end does the boy succeed in making his girl stop talking… with a kiss!

Pyotr Tchaikovsky wrote a total of about one hundred songs. Although he is generally not placed on the same pedestal as some of the German Lieder masters, many of his songs live on as true gems of vocal repertoire. They capture Tchaikovsky’s exquisite ability to express the core of human emotion, exposing vulnerability, sorrow, joy and passion with lyrical melodies and elegant piano parts, leaving much room for the singer to interpret the text and for the pianist to offer expressive support and augmentation.

The sun has set starts as an enchanted meeting of lovers at night, developing a repeated rhythmic cell to build a sense of passionate persuasion, until the final phrase bursts out with explosive happiness. The tender Lullaby is a perfect example of Tchaikovsky’s graceful style, and one of his finest sentimental songs. The piece was dedicated to Mrs. Rimski-Korsakov, who at the time was expecting their first child. To forget so soon is built on a single melodic element, often in dialogue with the piano, which develops throughout the song to illustrate the heart ache and dejection. The allegro ending gives a sense of desperation to the song.

Sergey Rachmaninov was lucky to have an amazing array of talented singers to work with, and compose for, throughout his life. Perhaps this helps explain why he composed such a great variety of songs for different types of voices. In the silence of the mysterious night, a lover describes the
recollection of a bygone liaison. My sorrow I have grown to love is the story is told of a woman left behind as her husband is called to war. The wailing melody heard in the beginning repeats at the end of the song in textless form, and expresses her deep loneliness and the reluctant acceptance of her fate. Don’t sing to me, beauty, songs of Georgia is a lament of homesickness, the haunting melody reminiscent of eastern tunes, full of melancholy and longing. It is paired in this program with Glinka’s setting of the same poem.

One of the composer’s most delicate songs is undoubtedly Lilacs. Lilacs were Rachmaninov’s favorite flowers, and the song draws a connection between the lilacs and a distant memory. The score demonstrates a constant fluidity in the piano part, depicting the early morning haze, on which the voice floats an elegant melody. Perhaps Rachmaninov’s most famous art song is Spring Streams. A fairly early work, it reveals many of Rachmaninov’s best qualities as a song composer: an elaborate and lively piano score illustrating the rebirth of spring, carrying the highly excited, passionate vocal part, which in turn is filled with drawn-out lyrical passages and outcries of joyful anticipation. It was one of the first songs to give Rachmaninov widespread recognition in his native country, and today, it is still favored by many performers around the world.

Text and Translations

Закатилось солнце...

The sun has set...
Danyl M. Ratgauz (1868-1937)

Закатилось солнце, заиграли краски легкой позолотой в синеве небес...
The sun has set, the flickering colors
В обаянье ночи сладострастной ласки тихо что-то шепчет задремавший лес...
Charmed by the languorous caresses of the night
И в душе тревожной умолкают муки и дышать всей грудью в эту ночь легко...
Now within my troubled soul my worries fall silent
Ночи дивной тени, ночи дивной звуки нас с тобой уносят, друг мой, далеко.
The shadows and sounds of this marvelous night
Вся объята негой этой трестной, ты ко мне склонилась на плечо главой,
Embraced by the languor of this passionate night,
Я безумно счастлив, о, мой друг прекрасный,
You have reclined upon my shoulder with your head,
бесконечно счастлив в эту ночь с тобой!
Endlessly happy on this night with you.

Translation by Laura Claycomb
В молчаньи ночи тайной

О, долго буду я, в молчаньи ночи тайной,
Коварный лепет твой, улыбку, взор случайный,
Перстам послушную волос густую прядь,
Из мыслей изгонять, и снова призывать;
Речей моих с тобой, исполненных смущенья,
И в опьянении, наперекор уму,
Заветным именем будить ночную мглу.
О, долго буду я, в молчаньи ночи тайной,
Заветным именем будить ночную мглу.

Венецианская ночь

Ночь весенняя дышала светло - южною красой;
Тихо Брента протекала, серебрям луной;
Отражён волной огнестой блеск прозрачных облаков,
И восходит пар душистый от зелёных берегов.
Свод лазурный, томный ропот
Чуть дробимыя волны,
Померанцев, миртов шопот
И любимый свет луны.
Упоенья аромата
И цветов, и свежих трав,
И вдали напев Торквата гармонических октав.
Всё вливает тайно радость,
Чувствам снится дивный мир;
Сердце бьётся; мчится младость
На любви весенний пир,
По волнам скользят гондолы,
Искры брызнут под веслом звуки нежной баркаролы
Веют лёгким ветерком.

In the silence of the mysterious night

Oh, for a long while, in the silence of the mysterious night,
Your beguiling murmur, smile, fleeting glance,
A luscious strand of your hair, obedient to my fingers,
Will I banish from my thoughts - but then recall again;
Breathing impulsively, alone, unseen by anyone,
Blushing and burning with vexation and shame,
I will search for secret messages
In the words you uttered;
Whisper and reconsider the phrases
Of my embarrassed conversations with you,
And, as if intoxicated, against all reason,
With your cherished name awaken the nightly haze.

Translation by Sergej Rybin

Venetian Night

The spring night breathed
A perfume of the South
The water flowed,
Moon-silvered,
Reflecting in its sparkling waves
The brilliance of clouds,
And fragrance rises
From the green banks.

Azure sky, languid murmur
Of a broken wave,
Whispering blossoms of orange and myrtle,
Romantic moonlight.
Intoxicating fragrance,
Of flowers and fresh grass,
And in the distance,
The faint sound of a melody.

All instills a secret happiness,
My senses dream of a wondrous world.
The heart beats, and youth hastens
To Love's sumptuous spring feast!
Gondolas glide over the waves,
Sparks splash under the oars,
The sound of a tender barcarolle,
Drift on a light breeze.
Колыбельная песня

Спи, дитя моё, усни,
Сладкий сон к себе мани:
В няньки я тебе взяла
Ветер, солнце и орла.

Улетел орёл домой;
Солнце скрылось под водой:
Ветер, после трех ночей,
Мчится к матери своей.

[Ветра спрашивает] мать:
«Где изволил пропадать?
Али звезды воевал?
Али волны всё гонял?»

«Не гонял я волн морских,
Звезд не трогал золотых;
Я дитя оберегал,
Колыбелочку качал!»

Спи, дитя моё, спи,
усни! спи, усни!
Сладкий сон к себе мани:
В няньки я тебе взяла
Ветер, солнце и орла.

Я помню чудное мгновенье

Я помню чудное мгновенье:
Передо мной явилась ты,
Как мимолётное, виденье,
Как гений чистой красоты.

В томленьях грусти безнадежной,
В тревогах шумной суеты,
Звучал мне долго голос нежной,
И снились милые черты.

Шли годы. Бурь порыв мятежный
Рассеял прежние мечты,
И я забыл твой голос нежный,
Твои небесные черты.

В глуху, во мраке заточенья

Lullaby

Sleep, my baby, sleep, sleep, fall asleep!
Beckon sweet dreams to yourself:
I have as nannies for you
The Wind, the Sun and the Eagle.

The Eagle has flown back home,
The Sun has hidden under the waters,
And three nights later
The Wind is rushing away to her Mother.

The Wind’s mother has been asking:
"Where have you been for so long?
Have you been fighting the stars?
Have you been chasing the waves?"

"I haven’t been chasing the sea-waves,
I haven’t been touching the golden stars,
I have been guarding a baby
And rocking gently his little cradle".

Selection by Laura Claycomb

I remember that magical moment
Aleksandr S. Pushkin (1799-1837)

I remember that magical moment
When before me you appeared
Like a fleeting vision,
Like a spirit beautiful and pure

In the languorous melancholy of despair
In the anxious noisy bustle
For a while, your voice stayed with me
Your dear features filled my dreams

Years passed. The restless impulse of storms
Scattered the dreams of the past
And I forgot your tender voice
Your heavenly features

In the wilderness, in the gloom of captivity
Тянулись тихо дни мои; Без Божества, без вдохновенья, Без слёз, без жизни, без любви.

Душе настало пробущденье: И вот опять явилась ты, Как мимолётное виденье, Как гений чистой красоты.

И сердце бьётся в упоенье, И для него воскресил вновь И божество, и вдохновенье, И жизнь, и слёзы, и любовь.

Translation by Tom Kennedy

Полюбила я на печаль свою
Полюбила я на печаль свою, Сиротинушку бесталанного. Уж такая мне доля выпала!

Разлучили нас люди сильные; Увезли его, сдали в рекруты... И солдаткой я, одинокой я, Знать, в чужой избе и состареюсь...

Уж такая мне доля выпала.

Translation by Anne Evans

Забыть так скоро...
Забыть так скоро, боже мой, Всё счастье жизни прожитой! Все наши встречи, разговоры, Забыть так скоро, забыть так скоро!

Забыть волненья первых дней, Свиданья час в тени ветвей! Очей немые разговоры, Забыть так скоро, забыть так скоро!

Забыть, как полная луна На нас глядела из окна, Как колыхалась тихо штора... Забыть так скоро, забыть так скоро, так скоро!

Translation by Anne Evans

To my sorrow I have grown to love
Aleksey N. Plescheyev (1825-1893)

To my sorrow I have grown to love, My wretched little orphan. That is the fate which has befallen me! Powerful people separated us; They took him away to be a recruit... A soldier's wife, a lonely soul, It seems that I shall grow old in a stranger's home. That is the fate which has befallen me!

Translated by Anne Evans

To forget so soon
Aleksey N. Apuhtin (1840-1893)

To forget so soon, oh, God! all the happiness we had together! All our meetings, our talks! To forget so soon, so soon!

To forget the excitements of our first days together, Our meetings in the shadow of branches, Mute talks between our eyes! To forget so soon! So soon!

To forget how the full moon Was looking at us through the window, How the curtains fluttered - To forget so soon! To forget so soon, so soon!
Забыть любовь, забыть мечты,
Забыть те кланты помнишь ты, помнишь ты,
помнишь ты?
В ночную пасмурную пору, в ночную пасмурную пору, Забыть так скоро, забыть так скоро!
Боже мой!

To forget our love, our dreams, our vows!
Do you remember? Do you remember?
Do you remember
The ones we said during the dark and Cloudy night? To forget so soon!
To forget so soon!
Oh, God!

Translation by Sofia Peycheva

Не пой, красавица, при мне

Не пой, красавица, при мне
Ты песен Грузии печальной;
Напоминают мне оне
Другую жизнь и берег дальний.

Увы, напоминают мне
Твои жестокие напевы
И степь, и ночь, и при луне
Черты далекой, бедной девы!

Я призрак милый, роковой,
Тебя увидев, забываю;
Но ты поёшь, и предо мной
Его я вновь воображаю.

Do not sing, my beauty, to me
Alekmsandr S. Pushkin (1799-1837)

Do not sing, my beauty, to me
Your sad songs of Georgia;
They remind me
Of that other life and distant shore.

Alas, They remind me,
Your cruel melodies,
Of the steppe, the night and moonlit
Features of a poor, distant maiden!

That sweet and fateful apparition
I forget when you appear;
But you sing, and before me
I picture that image anew.

Translation by Anton Bespalov

К Ней

Когда в час веселый откроешь ты губки,
И мне ты воркуешь нежнее голубки,
Я с трепетом внемлю, я весь вне себя,
Боюсь проронить хоть единое слово,
Молчу, не желаю блаженства иного,
Все слушал бы, слушал и слушал тебя.

Но глазки сверкнули живее кристаллов,
Жемчужные зубки блестят средь кораллов,
Румянец в ланитах уж начал играть!
Теперь я смелее смотрю тебе в очи,
Уста приближаю и слушать нет мочи,
Хочу целовать, целовать, целовать!

My darling, when in a joyous moment
You begin to chatter and wail and coo,
Such lovely cooing, chattering and wailing
Not wanting to miss a single word,
I dare not interrupt, I dare not respond,
I only wish to listen!

But when the vividness of speech lights your eyes
And rosies the berries more intensely
Pearly teeth shine among corals,
Ah! then I will look boldly in your eyes
I hurry my lips and do not demand to listen,
Only to kiss!

To Her
After the Polish by Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1856)
Сирень

Po utru, na zare,
Po rioskoy travе,
Я пойду свежим утром дышать;
И в душистую тень,
Где теснится сирень,
Я пойду свое счастье искать...

В жизни счастье одно
Мне найти суждено,
И то счастье в сирени живёт;
На зелёных ветвях,
На душистых кистях
Моё бедное счастье цветёт...

Весенние воды

Ещё в полях белеет снег,
А воды уж весной шумят —
Бегут и будят сонный брег,
Бегут, и блещут, и гласят...

Они гласят во все концы:
"Весна идёт, весна идёт!
Мы молодой весны гонцы,
Она нас выслала вперёд

Весна идёт, весна идёт!"
И тихих, теплых майских дней
Румяный, светлый хоровод
Толпится весело за ней!

Lilacs
Ekatarina A. Beketova (1855-1892)

In the morning, at daybreak,
over the dewy grass,
I will go to breathe the crisp dawn;
And in the fragrant shade,
Where the lilac crowds,
I will go to seek my happiness...

In life, only one happiness
It was fated for me to discover,
And that happiness lives in the lilacs;
In the green boughs,
In the fragrant bunches,
My poor happiness blossoms...

Spring streams
Fyodor I. Tyutchev (1803-1873)

The fields are still covered with white snow,
But the streams are already rolling in a spring mood-
Running and awakening the sleepy shore,
Running, and glittering, and announcing loudly...

They are announcing loudly to every corner:
“Spring is coming, Spring is coming!
We are the messengers of the young Spring,
She has sent us to come forward.

Spring is coming, Spring is coming!”
And the quiet, warm May days
Follow her, merrily crowded
Into the rosy, bright dancing circle!

Translation by Jennifer Gliere
Translation by Anton Bespalov
Translation by Malcolm Gain