

The Bemidji State University
Department of Music presents

A Faculty Recital
Dr. Stephen Carlson
Piano

October 9, 2020
7:30 pm

Thompson Recital Hall
Bangsberg Fine Arts Complex

Dear Audience Members: Welcome to our first performance at Bemidji State since last March! Thank you for joining us and adhering to Minnesota State Law regarding the wearing of masks in a public venue. Your safety is our top priority. Please know that I have chosen not to wear a mask for this evening's performance due to logistical reasons and the exemption for performers that safely permits this.

Program

Thirty-two Variations on an Original Theme, WoO 80 Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Sonata in C minor, Hob. XVI/20 Franz Joseph Haydn
(1732-1809)

Moderato
Andante con moto
Finale: Allegro

Roumanian Dance op. 8a, no. 1; Sz. 43, no. 1 Béla Bartók
(1881-1945)

Intermission

Bruyères
La puerta del vino
L'Isle joyeuse Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)

Petrarch Sonnet 104
St. Francis of Paola Walking on the Water Franz Liszt
(1811-1886)

Program Notes

Today's program begins appropriately as this year marks the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth. Beethoven gave an approving opus number to only four of his twenty sets of variations for solo piano. This may reflect the less serious regard in which the genre was generally held during the Classical period, but it could also indicate Beethoven's dissatisfaction with his other sets. Although Beethoven apparently worked very hard on the *32 Variations in C minor*, he later dissociated himself from the piece. Perhaps he viewed this work as a compositional exercise since the variations are based on a harmonic progression in the style of a *chaconne*. Perhaps also, Beethoven was reluctant to be linked with his lesser contemporaries who were writing many crude etude-like pieces at the time. Whatever the case may be, Beethoven created a brilliantly original work whose variations survey practically every problem of Classical pianistic technique.

As is generally the case with his *Sturm und Drang* symphonies from the late 1760s and early 1770s, Haydn's *Sonata in C minor, Hob. XVI/20*, exemplifies the intense drama of this stylistic period. While Haydn employs thin textures in both his symphonies and this particular piano sonata, the intensity does not suffer as a result. Aside from abrupt dynamic and character changes, other hallmarks of Haydn's style are clearly evident. For instance, his economical use of themes, use of silence, and bold key changes are all dramatic features. These are undeniably elements that Beethoven inherited from studying composition with Haydn. While the two outer movements are in the *Sturm und Drang* style, the transparent and elegant middle movement is in the *galant* style and provides a peaceful respite. Aside from the parallels between his symphonies and sonatas, the influence of other genres can be found in his piano sonatas as he himself was not a pianist. This not only illustrates Haydn's compositional brilliance, but also exemplifies the versatility of the piano. The beautiful middle movement of this sonata is particularly notable in this respect as the texture largely suggests a string trio.

The Hungarian pianist and composer Béla Bartók is particularly interesting as he represents the long line of Austro-Germanic compositional style coupled with the infusion of Eastern European folk elements. In fact, due to his study of folk music of this region and notating much of it, we really regard him as the first modern ethnomusicologist. The *Roumanian Dance op. 8a, no. 1; Sz. 43, no. 1*, dates from 1909 and Bartók said that, "there is a certain relapse into the old-style piano technique" which can especially be found in the middle section of this short piece. He also stated that, "this is based on original thematic material, not on folk themes." The driving energy of Roumanian folk dances is obvious in this piece. Aside from that, other characteristics that are commonly found in his works are present such as his use of the phrygian mode, the symmetrical phrase lengths, and motivic development.

The twenty-four pieces that comprise Debussy's two books of Preludes illustrate an array of musical characters, textures, techniques and subject matters. *Bruyères* (Heather) and *La puerta del vino* (The Wine Gate) are both from Debussy's second book of Preludes which was published in 1913. *Bruyères* is a serene piece that depicts the plant with lavender flowers, commonly found in the Scottish highlands. *La puerta del vino* was apparently inspired by Debussy's receipt of a postcard depicting the so-called "Wine Gate" to the Alhambra Palace in

Granada. Debussy indicates that it is to be played “with sharp contrasts of extreme violence and passionate sweetness.”

Watteau’s painting, *L’Embarquement pour Cythère* (The Embarkment for Cythera), remains the likely source of inspiration for *L’Isle Joyeuse* (The Joyous Island) although some suggest otherwise. Regardless of what inspired this imaginative work, *L’Isle joyeuse* is, undeniably, one of Debussy’s most extroverted and brilliant pieces for the piano. This fact was certainly not lost on Debussy himself as he spoke emphatically about its extremist qualities to his publisher.

Liszt’s second book of the Years of Pilgrimage consists of character pieces written during his years in Italy. As was the case with his Swiss volume, he links many of these pieces with visual art or literature. In the case of the Petrarch Sonnet 104, Liszt first set the fourteenth-century poet’s sonnet to song before transcribing it for piano. It is a warmly exuberant piece that illustrates an operatic influence.

While living in Rome, Liszt became especially interested in Christianity and, in fact, took orders in the Franciscan Order. That is the reason why his *Two Legends* are about St. Francis himself, and another Franciscan. The second of Liszt’s *Two Legends* is based on an episode from the life of St. Francis of Paola, an Italian friar who lived during the last century of the Middle Ages. In his biography of St. Francis, Giuseppe Miscimarra recorded that a surly fisherman once refused to admit the saint to a boat crossing the Straits of Messina since he had no money to pay for the fare. To the amazement of the inhospitable fisherman, St. Francis then invoked divine help and successfully made it across the straits to Sicily with a raft made of his cloak and staff. Constructed similarly to his symphonic poems, Liszt’s piece is an amazingly descriptive work with portions conjuring up images of waves, a storm, triumphant exultation, and a thankful prayer.

- *Stephen Carlson*

Biography

Pianist **Stephen Carlson** began his undergraduate studies as a political science major and Army ROTC Scholarship Cadet. A member of the Bemidji State University Music Department since 2006, he is a versatile soloist and chamber musician who has performed at many colleges, universities, and festivals throughout much of the U.S. and Canada. In 2005, Dr. Carlson made his New York debut as a solo recitalist in Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall with a program that included Schumann’s *Symphonic Etudes*, Stravinsky’s *Three Movements from Petrushka*, and various works by Beethoven, Debussy and Scriabin. From 1995 to 2003, he appeared at Minnesota Valley Sommarfest (St. Peter, MN) where he performed an array of solo and collaborative works. He has appeared with the Bemidji Symphony Orchestra three times: in 2010 in which he played Beethoven’s *Emperor Concerto*, in 2009 when he played Tchaikovsky’s *Piano Concerto No. 1* and in 2007 when he played Beethoven’s *Triple Concerto* along with Michelle Laliberte and Patrick Riley. He also performed the Tchaikovsky with the Bismarck-Mandan Symphony, Mozart’s *Concerto in A major, K. 414* with the Gustavus Adolphus Chamber Orchestra, and Saint-Saëns’s *Carnival of the Animals* along with John

McKay and the Mississippi Valley Chamber Orchestra. In October of 2017, he also performed live in Minnesota Public Radio's studio.

He completed the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in piano performance and pedagogy at the University of Iowa where he studied with Uriel Tsachor. In March of 2017, he was honored by his doctoral institution as he was invited to give a solo recital and master class to doctoral students in partial celebration of the opening of their new \$189 million music building. He is also a graduate of the University of Illinois and Gustavus Adolphus College where he studied with Ian Hobson and John McKay, respectively.

Dr. Carlson has a successful undergraduate studio at Bemidji State and is pleased to see students go on to major graduate schools or private studio teaching. Also an innovative clinician with wide-ranging interests, he is frequently called upon to give master classes, piano teacher workshops, and to adjudicate contests. His clinic entitled, *An Athletic Approach Toward Playing the Piano*, was presented at the South Carolina Music Teachers Association Conference. Most recently, he instituted *Piano Day* with the support of the Bemidji State University Foundation and Department of Music. In addition, Dr. Carlson has published articles for the journal, *American Music*. Prior to coming to Bemidji State where he is Professor of Music and Chair of the Music Department, Carlson was a tenured faculty member at Coker College in Hartsville, South Carolina. He has also taught piano at the University of Arkansas Pine Bluff, Gustavus Adolphus College and St. Joseph's School of Music in St. Paul, Minnesota.