

# Krystian Zimerman, *piano*

Sunday, April 27, 2003, 7 pm  
Zellerbach Hall

## PROGRAM

- Johannes Brahms Six Klavierst ckce ( Piano Pieces ), Op. 118  
Intermezzo in A minor  
Intermezzo in A major  
Ballade in G minor  
Intermezzo in F minor  
Romanze in F major  
Intermezzo in E-flat minor
- Ludwig van Beethoven Sonata No. 31 in A-flat major, Op. 110  
Moderato cantabile, molto espressivo  
Allegro molto  
Adagio ma non troppo  
Allegro ma non troppo

## INTERMISSION

- Fr d zric Chopin Impromptu No. 2 in F-sharp major, Op. 36
- Chopin Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 58  
Allegro maestoso  
Scherzo; molto vivace  
Largo  
Finale: Presto non tanto

Krystian Zimerman performs on a Hamburg Steinway-D.  
Piano technical services provided by Pro Piano New York.

Krystian Zimerman records for Deutsche Grammophon.

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### **Six Klavierst ckce ( Piano Pieces ), Op. 118 Johannes Brahms (1833 1897)**

It was Brahms  ability as a pianist that brought him his earliest fame. His father, Jakob, a double bass player of meager success in Hamburg, early recognized the boy s musical talents, and started him with piano lessons when he was seven. Just three years later, Johannes was playing well enough to be offered a tour of America as a child prodigy, but he was instead accepted for further training (at no cost) by Eduard Marxsen, a musician whose excellent taste and thorough discipline helped form his student s

elevated view of the art. Marxsen guided Brahms's earliest attempts at composition, and prepared him for his first public recital, given in Hamburg in September 1848, when he was 15 years old. Significantly, the program included a fugue by Bach. A year later, Brahms presented a second concert, which featured another selection by Bach as well as Beethoven's Waldstein Sonata.

Such high-minded music-making was, however, only one aspect of Brahms's life when he was a budding teenage pianist, since at the same time as he was studying the great classics with Marxsen, he was earning money for the always-pinched household budget by playing in what were euphemistically called dance halls in Hamburg's rough dock district, work he began when he was just 13. This exposure to the seediest elements of city life affected the young Brahms deeply, and was probably the reason that he could not achieve a satisfactory relationship with any respectable woman later in his life. (He once vowed that there were two things he would never attempt: an opera and a marriage.) It is a tribute to the innate strength of his personality that he was able to absorb the amazing range of his experiences as a youth—from the transcendent to the unseemly—and emerge only a few years later as one of the most significant artistic figures of his time.

Brahms made his recital debut in Vienna in 1862, and he returned there regularly until settling permanently in that city in 1869. By then, his reputation as a composer was well established, and he was devoting more time to creative work than to practicing piano. He continued to play, however, performing his own chamber music and solo pieces both in public and in private, and even serving as soloist in the premiere of his daunting Concerto No. 2 on November 9, 1881, in Budapest. His last public appearance as a pianist was in Vienna on January 11, 1895, just two years before he died, in a performance of his clarinet sonatas with Richard Mühlfeld.

Brahms's pianism was noted less for its flashy virtuosity than for its rich emotional expression, fluency, individuality, nearly orchestral sonority, and remarkable immediacy, especially in performances of his own music. The English pianist Florence May, who studied with him in the 1870s, reported, "Brahms playing . . . was not [that] of a virtuoso, though he had a large amount of virtuosity (to put it mildly) at his command. He never aimed at mere effect, but seemed to plunge into the innermost meaning of whatever music he happened to be interpreting, exhibiting all its details, and expressing its very depths."

Brahms's compositions for solo piano are marked by the same introspection, seriousness of purpose, and deep musicality that characterized his playing. His keyboard output, though considerable, falls into three distinct periods: an early burst of large-scale works mostly in Classical forms (1851-1853); a flurry of imposing compositions in variations form from 1854 to 1863 on themes by Schumann, Haydn, Handel, and Paganini; and a late blossoming of 30 succinct capriccios, intermezzos, ballades, and rhapsodies from 1878-1879 and 1892-1893, issued as Opp. 76, 79, 116, 117, 118, and 119. To these must be added the dance-inspired compositions of the late 1860s: the *Waltzes* (Op. 39) and the *Hungarian Dances*. Brahms's late works, most notably those from 1892 and 1893, share the autumnal quality that marks much of the music of his ripest maturity. "It is wonderful how he combines passion and tenderness in the smallest of spaces," said Clara Schumann of this music. To which William Murdoch added, "Brahms had begun his life as a pianist, and his first writing was only for the pianoforte. It was natural that at the end of his life he should return to playing this friend of his youth and writing for it. This picture should be kept in mind when thinking of these last sets. They contain some of the loveliest music ever written for the pianoforte. They are so personal, so introspective, so intimate that one feels that Brahms was exposing his very self. They are the mirror of his soul."

**Sonata No. 31 in A-flat major, Op. 110**

### Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Beethoven's painful five-year court battle to secure custody of his nephew Karl from his brother Caspar's dissolute widow (whom the composer disparaged as the "Queen of the Night") finally came to an end early in 1820. He won, but lost the boy's affection (Karl, half crazed from his uncle's overbearing attention, tried, unsuccessfully, to kill himself); the case also exploded his pretension that he was of noble blood. Beethoven was further troubled by deteriorating health and a certain financial distress (he needed a loan from his brother Johann, a prosperous apothecary in Vienna, to tide him over that difficult period), so it is not surprising that he composed little during the time. With the resolution of his custody suit, however, he returned to creative work, and began anew the titanic struggle to embody his transcendent thoughts in musical tones. In no apparent hurry to dispel the rumors in gossipy Vienna that he was "written out," he produced just one work in 1820, the Piano Sonata in E major, Op. 109. The A-flat Sonata was dated on Christmas Day, 1821, and his last piano sonata, the Op. 111, appeared just three weeks later. The year 1822 was the most productive he had known in a decade: the *Missa Solemnis* was completed, as were the Overture to *The Consecration of the House*, most of the *Diabelli Variations*, and a few smaller works, and substantial progress was made on the Ninth Symphony and the Op. 127 string quartet. It was in the three piano sonatas that launched this burst of creativity that Beethoven first realized the essential technique—the complete fusion of sonata, variation and fugue—that fueled the soaring masterpieces of his last period.

The Op. 110 sonata, one of the very few of Beethoven's major works to have been published without a dedication (though Anton Schindler claimed that the intended inscription to Antonie Brentano, whom the composer's recent biographer Maynard Solomon has convincingly identified as the "Immortal Beloved," was omitted through publisher's oversight), is one of the towering peaks of the piano literature. Or, perhaps more appropriately, one of its sublimely peaceful Alpine valleys, since its essence is halcyon rather than heaven-storming. In his fine book on Beethoven's last decade, Martin Cooper noted that in this music the composer moved away "from the dramatic principle of contrast with its implicit idea of struggle. In its place we find a unified vision where music borrows nothing from the theater . . . and aspires to its own unique condition . . . . The listener is taken as a friend whose interest and understanding can be taken for granted, rather than an audience to be captured, dazzled, touched, or excited. In this work, the rhetorical element is virtually non-existent." In place of the dramatic gesture, which he had used so successfully in his middle-period works, Beethoven here posited a language of pure music, one impenetrable by mere words and upon which even the most learned technical analysis seems little more than an inquisitive flea upon an elephant. Cooper: "However we regard it, we can hardly avoid the impression that Beethoven's [goal] is the contemplation of a harmonious world whose laws are absolute and objective, neither subject to human passion nor concerned with anything beyond themselves."

The forms and balances of the movements of Beethoven's late works were no longer subject to the traditional Classical models, but grow inexorably from the unique qualities and potentials of each individual composition. The opening movement of Op. 110 is technically in sonata form, but one so seamlessly made and so consistently sun-bright in mood that unity rather than contrast is its dominant characteristic. Next comes an energetic movement in the spirit (though not the meter) of a scherzo whose thematic material was apparently inspired by two Austrian folksongs for which Beethoven had provided simple piano accompaniments in 1820. Closing the work is a musical essay whose lyricism and ultimate gentleness belie its stupendous formal concept. A mournful *scena*, an *arioso dolente*, is given as the opening chapter, and leads without pause to the life-confirming retort of a tightly argued fugue. This fugue is not, however, one of those mighty,

gnarled constructions that Beethoven employed elsewhere in his last years, but a pellucid, songful, joyous example of the form. The *arioso*, with its thrumming, chordal accompaniment, intrudes itself upon the undulant flow of the fugue, and is again answered by Beethoven's celebratory counterpoint, marked, on this last appearance, to be infused by the pianist "more and more with new life."

**Impromptu No. 2 in F-sharp major, Op. 36**  
**Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)**

By the summer of 1838, Chopin's health was showing disturbing signs of decline, and George Sand told him that they needed to leave Paris before damp winter set in. They settled on the distant Mediterranean island of Majorca, off the eastern coast of Spain, which friends (who had not been there) assured them was blessed with abundant sunshine and fresh air. Chopin sold the rights to his Preludes to the publisher Camille Pleyel to help finance the trip, and he, George, and her son and daughter left Paris in October. Sand recorded that Chopin was "fresh as a rose and rosy as a turnip" when they embarked from Barcelona for Majorca on November 7th, and that he had stocked up on manuscript paper in anticipation of a fruitful retreat away from Paris. Their high spirits were little dampened when they had trouble finding a place to stay in Palma—they had to settle for noisy rooms above a cooper's shop—and Chopin reported to his university friend Julius Fontana, "I am at Palma, among palms, cedars, cactuses, olive trees, oranges, figs, pomegranates, etc. The sky is turquoise, the sea like emeralds, the air as in heaven. A superb life! I am close to what is most beautiful. I feel better."

The company moved to a sparsely furnished house at the edge of Palma a few days later, where the bad luck that was to mark the Majorca stay continued. While they were out for a long walk across rugged country, a violent storm blew up, and Chopin contracted a severe case of bronchitis. The rains returned, the house became miserably dank, and Chopin got worse. The physician that Sand summoned diagnosed Chopin's malady as consumption, the highly contagious scourge of the 19th century, and their landlord demanded that they leave his property before it became infected. The party transferred to the French embassy for a few days and then moved to converted cells in a deserted monastery at Valldemosa, situated in a wild and romantic spot six miles from town. "He is recovering, and I hope he will soon be better than before," wrote Sand on December 14th, just before they installed themselves at Valldemosa. "His goodness and patience are angelic."

Chopin was well enough by the end of December to write down two more of the Preludes that he had promised to Pleyel, as well as the Mazurka in E minor, Op. 41, No. 2 and the final revision of the Ballade in F major, Op. 38, though his work was considerably hampered by a dilapidated old piano, the only one he could find for himself on the island. The storms continued, and his health varied from day to day, but he still found some joy in the time on Majorca—"everything here breathes poetry and the scenery is wonderfully colored," he wrote to a friend. A good piano, sent from Paris two months before by Pleyel, finally arrived in mid-January, and it inspired him to undertake the Polonaise in

C minor (Op. 40, No. 2), the Scherzo No. 3 in C-sharp minor (Op. 39), and the Impromptu in F-sharp major (Op. 36), but by then, the Spartan accommodations, the shabby treatment by the locals (whose antagonism had been aroused by the visitors' unmarried state), the rambunctious children, the poor weather, and the continuing fragility of Chopin's health had brought them to a state of loathing the island. Sand concluded that the Majorca venture had been "a complete disaster." When they sailed for Barcelona on February 15th, Chopin's health was much worse. Their crossing, in a cargo boat laden with live pigs, was rough, and Chopin developed a serious hemorrhage of the lungs, from which he lost much blood. A French

doctor in Barcelona stabilized him well enough so that he could be taken to Marseilles, and the company stayed there until leaving for Sand's country villa at Nohant in May. Chopin's strength revived with the coming of spring, and he completed the Impromptu in F-sharp major at Nohant during the summer of 1839. Chopin, George Sand, and the children, a year older, finally returned home to Paris in October.

Though the best-known precedents for Chopin's Impromptus were the eight pieces with that name that Franz Schubert composed during the summer and autumn of 1827, Schubert did not invent the title—the designation had been current since at least 1822, when the Bohemian-Austrian composer Johann Vorisek issued a set of brief, ternary-form works of extemporized nature under that name. The term (from *à l'improvvisation* or *à l'improvisation* in French) was meant to convey a certain sense of improvisation-like spontaneity, but in a clearer form than was usually implied by the title *Fantasia*. Chopin first tried out the idiom and the designation in his *Fantaisie-Impromptu* of 1834 (later the source of the hit Tin Pan Alley tune "Always Chasing Rainbows"), and he followed that with three further specimens of the genre. The Impromptu No. 2 in F-sharp major, sketched during Chopin's ill-fated stay with George Sand on Majorca early in 1839 and completed that summer at Sand's country house at Nohant, is reminiscent of a nocturne in its placid flow and gentle spirit. The opening section contains a sweet, simple melody in even notes and a more animated one supported by block chords. The central episode is given over to a theme of sturdier character presented above a leaping, dotted-rhythm ostinato in the bass. The opening phrase returns as expected (at first, however, in the surprising tonality of F major), but the reappearance of the second theme is delayed by a passage of sweeping figurations in the right hand.

### **Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 58**

#### **Chopin**

Chopin first met the flamboyantly iconoclastic novelist George Sand late in 1836 at a party given by Franz Liszt. Their friendship deepened into sincere if tempestuous and unconventional love during the following months, and Sand served for the next decade as Chopin's muse and protectress. Beginning in 1839, they escaped from the summer heat and dust of Paris to Sand's country villa at Nohant, near Châteauroux in the province of Berry. The composer's biographer William Murdoch described the *château* there as "a large, rambling house, surrounded on all sides by lawns, flanked by flowers, shrubs and trees, very much like an English country house that is carelessly looked after. Matthew Arnold wrote of it as "a plain house by the roadside, with a walled garden." In the distance, beyond the fields and meadows, was the River Indre. One had a feeling of roominess and comfort and complete freedom from care." Nohant met several needs for Chopin: it gave him a place to unwind from his busy schedule of winter-time teaching and socializing (the private soirées at which he played provided much of his livelihood during his years in Paris—he did not perform a single public concert between 1842 and 1848); it provided the time and secluded venue he required for composition; it offered a chance to meet at leisure with friends, most notably Delacroix, who drew a portrait of the composer at Nohant; and it served as a personal sanatorium, where Sand mothered his frail constitution and sustained his spirit.

Just as the couple was preparing to leave for Nohant in May 1844, Chopin learned that his father had died in Warsaw. The news devastated him, exacerbating the tuberculosis that was beginning to sap his strength, and Sand took him to Nohant as soon as he had recovered sufficiently to travel. She was concerned enough over his health and state of mind that she wrote to his mother, suggesting that a visit from the family might help to restore him. It was agreed that his sister Ludwika, who had not seen Chopin for 14 years, would travel to Paris with her husband, Kalasantý. Sand wrote back that the guests would stay first in her Parisian apartments and then

continue to Nohant, but went on to warn Ludwika not to be too frightened by her brother's appearance: "You will find my dear boy weak and much changed since you last saw him, but please don't be alarmed about his health. It has been pretty much the same for the last six years, during which I have seen him every day . . . . I hope that with time his constitution will be strengthened, but at least I am sure that with a regular life and care it will last as well as anyone else's." Chopin was stirred enough by the news of Ludwika's visit that he started to compose again, and began sketching a large piano sonata in B minor in July.

Early in August, Chopin hurried to Paris to meet Ludwika and Kalasanty. Brother and sister fell tearfully into each other's arms, and Frzdźric celebrated their reunion by shepherding the couple around Paris's sightseeing, attending *Les Huguenots* at the Opéra, arranging soirées to show her off to his friends, visiting the aristocrats in whose apartments he performed. Chopin was worn out after two weeks of this hyperventilated activity, and gladly took Ludwika and Kalasanty to Nohant. They were welcomed effusively, and the company spent the next three weeks touring the neighborhood, listening to Sand read from her writings, engaging in dramatic improvisations and dancing, and joining in informal concerts. Chopin was greatly revived in mind and body (Sand later wrote to assure Ludwika that she was "the best physician he has ever had, because merely speaking to him about you is enough to restore his love of life"), and returned to his B-minor sonata with enthusiasm after his sister's departure at the beginning of September. The work was completed by the time he returned to Paris in late autumn. The summer of 1844 was the last one of unclouded happiness that Chopin was to spend at Nohant. His relationship with Sand, already strained by that time despite the care, love, and financial security she brought to him, began to deteriorate seriously soon thereafter, and they were largely estranged within two years. The break affected him profoundly—spiritually and creatively—and the sonata was the last large-scale piano work that he composed before his death in 1849.

The key of B minor was virtually unprecedented in the Classical piano sonata literature—no such works by Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Dussek, or Hummel exist in that tonality. (Liszt did not begin his

Sonata in B minor until 1852.) Chopin apparently chose the key for both the darkly colored emotional ambiance that it creates for the music and for the opulent sonorities that it allows to be drawn from the piano. Both of these qualities are evident in the opening movement, which is marked by the rich figurations, precise motivic control, and melodic fecundity ("the movement is packed with material sufficient for 25 sonatas by a composer 25 years previously," according to Peter Gould) that characterize the creations of Chopin's fullest maturity. Formal delineation is provided by the contrasting second theme, an arching lyrical inspiration buoyed by a rippling arpeggio accompaniment. The remainder of the movement proceeds according to the traditional sonata model, except for the not unimportant point that the main theme is omitted in the recapitulation, which therefore begins directly with the lyrical subsidiary subject. The compact Scherzo balances its mercurial outer sections with a smoothly flowing melody in the baritone range for the central Trio. The Largo, reminiscent in its rapt eloquence of Chopin's finest Nocturnes, was judged by Alfred Frankenstein to be "one of the high points in all of Chopin and in all of the music of the Romantic era." The closing movement, compounded formally of elements of sonata and rondo, is febrile and almost tempestuous until it turns to the brighter tonality of B major for its energetic coda. "In subject matter, in handling, in scope and in sheer sonorous beauty," wrote Herbert Weinstock, "the finale is one of the major musical achievements after Beethoven. It entitles Chopin to a place with all masters of imagination and form."

**Krystian Zimerman** (*piano*) comes from a family with rich music-making traditions. Musicians would meet almost daily in his home to play various works, mostly chamber music. These performances afforded Zimerman a most intimate, natural, everyday contact with live music and provided an early impetus to his musical career. He made his first steps in music under his father's supervision, and at the age of seven started working with Andrzej Jasinski, a senior lecturer at the music conservatory in Katowice, Poland. This tutorship was crowned by Zimerman's graduation, 14 years later, from that school. Zimerman had no zest for contests, but he followed the common way of musical development for concert pianists, which brought him the highest prizes at several prestigious competitions devoted to Russian and Polish music and to the works of particular composers (Prokofiev and Beethoven). Then followed the Grand Prix at the Chopin Competition of 1975, which paved the way for performances in concert halls worldwide.

The 26 years of Zimerman's artistic activity have been marked by regular meetings with his own dedicated audiences, which ardently look forward to every concert. Wherever his concert tours take him—in the music centers of Europe, Asia, and America—he always recognizes familiar faces. During the last 11 seasons, since he has resolved to travel with his own concert piano, he has managed to accustom his audience and concert organizers to this unusual and only seemingly inconvenient gear. Zimerman has applied several technical inventions of his own that have made it possible for him, as for other musicians, to take his instrument along on tours. The confidence afforded by his own thoroughly familiar instrument, combined with his piano-building expertise—first acquired in Katowice and developed through permanent cooperation with the Steinway Company in Hamburg—allows him to eliminate, or reduce to the absolute minimum, everything that might distract him from purely musical issues.

Zimerman's comparatively early acquaintance with the main developments of European music—German, Russian, French, and others—precluded him from becoming a "Chopin specialist." Instead, it stirred in him the ambition, which he has achieved in the last 10 years, of performing music in the place and culture of its origin: French works in Paris; Beethoven, Mozart, and Schubert in Vienna; Brahms in Hamburg; American music in New York and, in one notable instance, conducted by the composer himself—Leonard Bernstein. "If I were an actor," he argues, "I would also set myself the aim of performing Shakespeare in London and Chekhov in Russia."

Witold Lutoslawski's honorable dedication of his Piano Concerto to Krystian Zimerman inspired the pianist to a similar treatment of that work: it was self-evident that it should be performed in Warsaw during the Warsaw Autumn Festival of Contemporary Music, with the composer as conductor. During each of his New York recitals, Zimerman has taken care to perform a Polish composition as part of the program or as an encore. For several consecutive seasons he performed Karol Szymanowski's works in music centers on three continents. His encounters with pre-eminent musicians—performers of chamber music and conductors—have been, he claims, his greatest luck. He has repeatedly performed with Kaja Danczowska, Kyung-Wha Chung, Gidon Kremer, and about 40 other celebrities of the musical world.

The piano is not Zimerman's only musical passion: he has always remained an exceedingly keen organist. He has also enriched his knowledge of conducting through collaboration with the most illustrious conductors of his time: Leonard Bernstein, Herbert von Karajan, Seiji Ozawa, Riccardo Muti, Lorin Maazel, Andrzej Previn, Pierre Boulez, Zubin Mehta, Bernard Haitink, Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, Sir Simon Rattle, and many others. In some instances (with Bernstein, Boulez, Karajan, Kondrashin, and Ozawa), the cooperation was particularly close and sustained by friendship. Zimerman and Leonard Bernstein worked together for 13 years: Zimerman was the last—for some time also the only—pianist who performed under Bernstein, both during recording sessions and at concerts in many European countries

and the United States. Working frequently and closely with an outstanding musical personality, a master of orchestral sound, was a formative experience for Zimerman. The same could be said about his close and long-time contacts with Herbert von Karajan. Zimerman also embraced the opportunity to meet and make a closer acquaintance of the older-generation masters: Claudio Arrau, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli, Arthur Rubinstein, and Sviatoslav Richter—all of whom exerted a powerful influence on his musical development.

During his 25-year collaboration with Deutsche Grammophon, Zimerman has made 22 records, for which he has frequently received the most prestigious awards.

Zimerman lives with his wife and two children in Switzerland, where he has spent the greater part of his life, dividing his time between family, concerts, performances of chamber music, and, in the last several years, a teaching position at the Music Academy in Basel.

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