



NUS Centre For the Arts

Touch 2016

by NUS Piano Ensemble

A member of NUS Center for the Arts

26 March 2016, 8pm

SOTA Concert Hall



ABOUT NUS CENTRE FOR THE ARTS

Established in 1993, NUS Centre For the Arts (CFA) is a vibrant space for the appreciation of the arts and nurturing of the creative and inquiring spirit. It supports student engagement with the arts and the integration of the arts into the life of the University.

CFA encompasses the NUS Museum, NUS Baba House and a Talent and Development arm that oversee 22 student arts excellence groups. Through our myriad of programmes, practices, exhibitions, workshops and outreach, such as NUS Arts Festival and the ExxonMobil Campus Concerts, we enhance and augment the university experience and contribute to the building of knowledge and transformation of students.

CFA also manages facilities such as the University Cultural Centre, with its 1600-seat Hall and 450-seat Theatre, and rehearsal spaces in Runme Shaw CFA Studios and University Town.

For more information, visit cfa.nus.edu.sg.

ABOUT NUS PIANO ENSEMBLE

Founded in 1987 by a handful of undergraduates with a passion for piano and performance, the objectives of NUS Piano Ensemble (NUSPE) have remained largely intact since its inception. Under the management of NUS Centre For the Arts (CFA), NUSPE seeks to promote the appreciation of piano ensemble music, provide opportunities for aspiring pianists to perform, and give its members the novel experience of playing in collaboration with different people. In its beginnings, the group concentrated on works for solo piano, but gradually explored piano works for duet and duo, which forms the core of its repertoire today. NUSPE has grown into a dynamic and semi-professional classical music group, staging creative and well-received recitals and concerts throughout the year.

PROGRAMME

C. Gurlitt

Sérénade Op. 96, 2nd & 4th movements

W. A. Mozart

Larghetto & Allegro in E-flat Major, K. deest

C. Debussy

Clair de Lune

L. M. Gottschalk

The Banjo (arr. J. Moross)

F. Rzewski

Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues

A. Copland

4 Dance Episodes from 'Rodeo' - 'Saturday Night Waltz' & 'Hoe-Down'

F. Poulenc

Sonata for Two Pianos, FP 156, 1st & 2nd movements

— *Intermission* —

J. S. Bach

Concerto in C major BWV 1061, 1st movement

R. Schumann

6 Études in Canon Form, Op. 56 Nos. 1, 2 & 4

A. Rubinstein

Fantasie, Op. 73, 2nd movement

A. Arensky

Suite No. 1, Op. 15, 1st & 2nd movements

C. Saint-Saëns

Danse Macabre, Op. 40

F. Poulenc

Concerto for Two Pianos, FP 61, 2nd & 3rd movements

MUSIC DIRECTOR



Timothy Ku studied the piano under Lam Kim Lian and Ong Lip Tat. Upon winning a prize in the 1989 National Music Competition, Timothy left to study music in New York City, where he also acted as chamber pianist, academic tutor and teaching assistant and received several scholarship offers. Timothy has worked with a number of prominent pianists and pedagogues, including Adam Wodnicki, Marc Silverman, Nina Svetianova, Michael Roger and Agustin Anievas. He also studied the harpsichord under the renowned Louis Bagger, and conducting with Glen Cortese and Bruce Macintyre.

Back home in Singapore, Timothy has evolved into an insightful performer as well as an inspirational educator. In the past, he has worked as the resident pianist for the Singapore Symphony Chorus under Bart Folse. Presently, he is a Principal-Study-Teacher-Lecturer at School of the Arts. He is also the music director of NUS Piano Ensemble, NTU Piano Ensemble a tutor with the VJC Piano Ensemble.

On the performance scene, Timothy is a highly adventurous and versatile soloist, ensemble pianist and accompanist, whose repertoire includes Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, Hindemith's *The Four Temperaments*, Brahms' *Horn Trio*, Rebecca Clarke's *Viola Sonata*, Barber's *Piano Sonata*, and solo works by Mompou. His solo and chamber concerts at Victoria Concert Hall and Esplanade Recital Studio have mostly been sell out successes. Concert appearances in the region also won him rave reviews and return engagements. Timothy appears regularly in concert with his wife, pianist Soon Liok Kee, his sister, violist Marietta Ku, and the chamber group, *Spritze*. In May 2006, he appeared in a chamber concert at the Esplanade, featuring works such as Vieuxtemps' *Viola Sonata* and Brahms' *Clarinet Trio* amongst others. With his piano duo partner Soon Liok Kee, Timothy performed the Singapore premiere of Grainger's *The Warriors* (2005), Poulenc's *Capriccio D'après Le Bal Masqué* (2006) and Bolcom's *The Serpent's Kiss: Rag Fantasy* (2007). In 2009, the duo gave a successful two-piano recital featured in the Artiste Series of SMU's inaugural piano festival, *Klaviesta!*

TOUCH 2016

Touch has been the annual concert series for the NUS Piano Ensemble (NUSPE). First held in 1998 at the Victoria Concert Hall, *Touch* continues to be the keystone performance event of the group that both members and concert-goers look forward to every year.

The word “touch” carries many meanings to the ensemble, each of them equally important to music-making. In the technical sense, the very act of touching the keys creates various shades of tone, the mixture of which colours the musical atmosphere with mood. Whether it be stateliness or dignity, or wildfire and passion, the touch of the pianist plays the central role in conveying emotions or ideas to the listener. It ranks highly in the priorities of any proficient musician, and is especially important to us, given the varied emotional landscape of our repertoire tonight.

However, it is important that technique and individual skill does not eclipse all else in the process of music-making, especially in an ensemble where musicians work together to produce the desired quality of performance. After all, what can musical excellence really mean to a performer, if he pursues it without consideration for his listeners and partners? This is where the other, more emotionally sensitive definition for “touch” comes in: the need for music to form a strong connection between performers and audiences. Even if classical music may not be your cup of tea, it is our great hope that our enthusiasm, chemistry, and genuine feeling will tide you over into a happiness afterward.

Here's to a tacit agreement between us, of mutual regard and joyful feelings. After all, or as we in NUSPE believe, *no one ever plays alone*.

PROGRAMME NOTES

***II. Nocturno & IV. Finale,* from *Sérénade Op. 96* by C. Gurlitt**



Janice Foo



Bruce Lim



Khwang Jia
Ying



Nataniel Tan

Cornelius Gurlitt (1820-1901) was born in Germany and began his formal musical education under Johann Peter Rudolph Reinecke, who was head of the Leipzig Conservatory for six years. Besides being a pedagogue, Gurlitt was also highly skilled in composition, composing many studies alongside a few chamber works which are still popular today.

Serenade Op. 96 is one of the few pieces he composed for eight hands on two pianos. The *Nocturno* is a melodious piece, with its lyrical motif brimming into short bursts of animated passages in the middle of the piece. In contrast, *Finale*, starts out with the famous main motif - a constant galloping accompanied by a detached and repetitive bass line. Nevertheless, Gurlitt makes use of dissonant harmonies and sudden dynamic jumps to break the consistency, making it an enjoyable work for both performers and audiences alike.

***Larghetto & Allegro in E-flat Major, K. deest* by W. A. Mozart (arr. F. Beyer)**



Sherlyn Lim



Chng Jia Hui

It can be argued that no other classical composer today is able to exceed the fame and familiarity Wolfgang A. Mozart (1756-1791) currently possesses. The Austrian born composer was talented to such an extent that he began composing solo piano pieces at the age of five and symphonies at eight. In his short life he composed over 600 works, ranging over nine different genres, leaving some, like the *Larghetto & Allegro in E-flat Major*, unfinished.

Completed posthumously by the German composer Ferdinand Beyer (1803-1863), the opening of *Larghetto* is dominated by expressive vocal lines, while the *Allegro* is set in a pianistic and playful tone, utilizing lyrical melodies with great momentum. However, despite Beyer's success in supplementing an aptly-crafted fill-in that does justice to the work, many still inevitably conjecture how differently the piece might have turned out if Mozart had finished it.

III. Clair de Lune from Suite Bergamasque (1890)

by C. Debussy (arr. H. Dutilleux)



Tricia Tan



Nicholas Chew

Achille-Claude Debussy (1862-1918) was born in France to a middle-class family. Along with Maurice Ravel, he is considered one of the finest impressionist composers to date. His music, characterised by pentatonic harmonies and mysterious yet lyrical harmonies, is famous for the sensory images and sentiment evoked, leaving impressions such as flowing water or in the case of this piece, moonlight upon the listener.

Clair de Lune, meaning ‘moonlight’, is the third and most famous movement of Debussy's *Suite Bergamasque*. Published 15 years after its completion in 1890, this work is the most adventurous in the suite, using a compound triple meter compared to the other movements. Loosely based on ternary form, the sentimental piece exudes elegance and fragility with unexpected key juxtapositions and sonorities, rising up and dissolving into the airy atmosphere.

The Banjo (1853)

by L. M. Gottschalk (arr. J. Moross)

Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869) was a popular American composer and pianist who toured extensively throughout the United States with his virtuosic showpieces. At the age of 13, he applied for The Paris Conservatoire to study music but was rejected due to his being American. Despite this setback, he worked his way into the music scene with the help of several family friends.

The Banjo, famous for sounding strikingly similar to an actual banjo, mimics its playing techniques, including combinations of “down-stroke” and “up-picking”. Indeed, its closeness to the style of the banjo is such that several critics have suspected Gottschalk may have transcribed this realistic imitation from an actual unknown banjo piece. Today, the solo version of the piece is considered a favourite encore among many pianists around the world for its virtuosic flavour.

IV. Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues from North American Ballads (1979)

by F. Rzeweski



Ng Ze Wei



Ng Wen Yan

Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues, by Frederic Rzewski (1938-), is the final movement of the set *North American Ballads* (1979). Rzewski effectively paints the piano as a massive sounding cotton-machine, achieved through the use of contemporary compositional techniques such as tone clusters played with the fist to the entire forearm.

The original *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues* is an old blues tune dating to the 1930s, sung by African-American cotton-mill workers singing and labouring at their hard tasks under difficult circumstances at the Winnsboro Cotton Mill in South Carolina. Laborious and dehumanising factory work is lamented in this piece, and Rzewski wittily depicts the struggles experienced by the labourers in trying to sing their blues, but in vain. Only through a dramatic gathering of sound and energy did the human voice finally break through, but what returns at the end of the composition truly epitomises the frustrations of the then-African-American working class.

III. Saturday Night Waltz & IV. Hoe-Down from Four Dance Episodes from Rodeo (1942)

by A. Copland (arr. A. Gold & R. Fitzdale)



Matthew Seah



Tan Min

Aaron Copland (1900-1990) was an American composer and conductor, famously known for his other works such as *Appalachian Spring*. *Rodeo* is a ballet choreographed by Agnes de Mille and scored by Copland at her request, presenting the narrative of a tomboyish cowgirl's attempts to win the attention of the Head Wrangler.

Saturday Night Waltz accompanies the scene as the cowgirls and cowboys begin to pair off to dance - and the lead character is approached by the Champion Roper. Following a brief but grandiose introduction, the main 'Texas Minuet' theme is introduced. It gradually unfurls into a stately dance rhythm and motif, characterised by the steady, rhythmic bass line. This leads into the middle section, which takes on a more romantic, melancholic feel. The waltz concludes with the returning main theme, fading off quietly to end off the movement.

A *Hoe-Down* is a type of American folk dance characterised by duple meter and a lively tempo. The energetic movement opens with dissonant chords and a frantic melodic line and gains in momentum with the main theme introduced as a simple two-part counterpoint melody. Like an energetic barn dance, *Hoe-Down* develops through several repetitions of the theme which eventually serve as the backdrop for the romantic climax of the ballet; shortly thereafter, the piece closes with a loud, energetic fanfare.

I. Prologue & II. Allegro molto, from Sonata for Two Pianos, FP 156
by F. Poulenc



Joan Quah



Clarisse Teo

Francis Jean Marcel Poulenc (1899-1963) was a member of the group of French composers known as 'Les Six', the name coined by the music critic Henri Collet. Their musical style was characterized by a rejection of romanticism (especially the music of Wagner) and everyday Parisian life. However, just a few years after their christening by Collet, the group disbanded and Poulenc was the only remaining member who adhered steadfastly to their ideals.

This sonata was composed in 1953 and dedicated to the Gold-Fizdale piano duo. Although the sonata is in four movements, the first and second may be understood as a larger movement. The work is primarily episodic in nature, whereby Poulenc often introduces numerous melodic motifs throughout the various movements without developing them further.

Concerto for 2 Harpsichords in C Major, BWV 1061

by J. S. Bach



Koh Ren Jie



Mark Cheng

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) remains to date one of the most prolific composer of the Baroque period. On top of his many keyboard pieces composed by the German, such as *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, he had also written numerous concertos. Despite not being fully recognised in his time, Bach's music is now revered for their great technical and aesthetic brilliance.

While Bach's concertos do not usually call for a large number of players for its sonorities, the orchestra has a vital part to play as the counterpart to the soloist. However, the *Concerto in C major* stands in contrast to the other concertos, as it originated as a concerto for two harpsichords unaccompanied. A lively piece from start to end, the piece is driven forward by the spirited tempo. The harpsichords play in an antiphonal manner through semi-independent in interaction, often delivering alternate phrases.

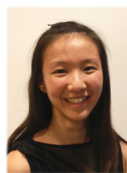
Nos. 1, 2 and 4, from Six Études in Canon Form,

Op. 56

by R. Schumann (arr. C. Debussy)



Tan Zhi Quan



Mok Zi Huan

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) was first exposed to the pedal piano in 1843 at Leipzig Conservatory and found the instrument suitable for effectively bringing out multiple interweaving voices through the use of the additional pedal-board. In 1845, Schumann was inspired by his study of J.S. Bach to write three pieces for pedal-piano, inclusive of the *Six Études in Canon Form, Op. 56*.

No. 1 opens with a baroque-like motif playing in strict canon with a lyrical theme of running notes, while *No. 2* takes on a melancholic mood more characteristic of Schumann. Unlike the previous Études, *No. 4's* canonic material are not like-for-like, functioning instead as an accumulation of successive series of questions and answers. With the ostinato chord pattern below the melody which carries a lyrical line marked by the occasional chromatic accidental, this movement is arguably the most romantic and passionate one in the set.

Fantaisie Op. 73
by A. Rubinstein



Vanessa Loh

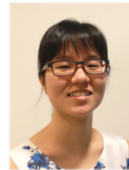


Ang Hui Ting

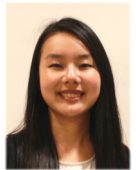
Anton Grigorevich Rubinstein (1829-1894) was a Russian-Jewish pianist, composer and conductor. A great keyboard virtuoso in his own right, his technical ability was great enough to impress even Chopin and Liszt. In 1854, he embarked on a four-year tour of Europe that saw much success. Despite some questions and doubts raised over his composing skills, little could be disputed regarding his technical brilliance at the keyboard.

The *Fantaisie* is a three-movement work, dedicated to his brother, Nikolai. It was composed in 1864, shortly after Rubinstein founded the Saint Petersburg Conservatory. The second movement opens with a *Moderato*, characterized by extensive imitation between the two pianos, evoking a mood of uncertainty and unease. This is followed by the more energetic *Allegro vivace*, sustained by dotted rhythm motifs. A sense of triumph permeates as the opening theme, initially harmonically uncertain, eventually concludes with a resolute ending.

I. Romance & II. Valse from Suite for Two Pianos
No.1 in F, Op. 15
by A. Arensky



Chu Lee Voon



Stephanie Lew

Anton Arensky (1861-1906) was a Russian pianist, conductor and composer. He studied composition at Saint Petersburg Conservatory under Rimsky-Korsakov, and later became a professor at the Moscow Conservatory, with Scriabin and Rachmaninov among his students. Among his compositions, Arensky wrote four suites for two pianos. *Suite No. 1, Op. 15*, the shortest of all, was written in 1888.

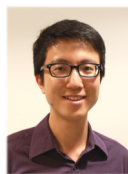
The suite consists of three movements – one song and two dances (*Romance*, *Valse* and *Polonaise*). The *Romance* opens with a flowing Allegretto passage that leads to a melancholic main theme embellished with chromaticism. The melody is passed between Primo and Secondo, treble and bass, rendering a different colour and touch to each variation. The mood of *Valse* is in stark contrast to *Romance*, with the melody being more light-hearted and playful in nature. It is played in turns by both pianists, as if they were indeed engaging in playful banter during a shared dance. The theme grows in intensity and eventually leads to a gradually accelerating melody and a series of arpeggios at the end of the movement.

Danse Macabre, Op. 40

by C. Saint-Saëns (arr. composer)



Matthew Mak



Gu Shimin

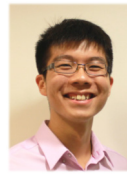
Charles-Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921), was an important French composer and pianist of the Romantic era. A musical prodigy, he performed many feats, analysing the orchestral score of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at the mere age of five, as well as completing his *Piano Concerto No. 2, Op. 22*, in the span of only two weeks. Although he is remembered as an overly conservative musical figure in the face of Stravinsky and Debussy, he was remarkably progressive for his time.

Danse Macabre for two pianos is Saint-Saëns' (1835-1921) transcription of his own tone poem in 1874. According to myth, the dead are summoned at midnight on Halloween and dance to devilish music. After twelve D notes which represent twelve strokes of midnight, dissonant tritones lead to two energetic themes that are played throughout the entire piece. The intensity grows until the abrupt entry of a single E-flat, which indicates dawn breaking and time for skeletons to return to their graves. French poet Henri Cazalis inspired Saint-Saëns with his poem *Égalité, Fraternité...* The text alludes to the admiration of death, where all humans are equal.

*Zig, zig, zig. What a saraband! / They all hold hands and dance in circles.
Zig, zig, zag. You can see in the crowd / The king dancing among the peasants.
But hist! All of a sudden, they leave the dance, / They push forward, they fly;
the cock has crowed.
Oh what a beautiful night for the poor world! / Long live death and equality!*

II. Larghetto & III. Finale from Concerto for 2 Pianos, FP 61

by F. Poulenc (arr. composer)



Seroyen Teo Jonathan Yeo

The *Concerto for 2 Pianos, FP 61*, was composed in the summer of 1932 and commissioned by Princess Edmond de Polignac, a wealthy American-born Parisian patron of the arts. Francis Jean Marcel Poulenc (1899-1963) cited many influences regarding this ‘gay and direct’ work, one of which was Mozart, most evidently portrayed in the beguiling melodies of the *Larghetto*. Of especial note are the prominent, lyrical melodies used in the final sections of each movement – likely modelled after the Balinese gamelan which he came across the year before, at the 1931 Paris Exposition.

The *Larghetto* starts off with a beguiling theme reminiscent of a toy piano, giving way to a passionate middle section, before returning back into calm in the reprise. In contrast, the brisk *Finale*, with its twin moods, is exciting throughout. With multiple runs in thirds and sixths judiciously distributed between the two pianists, a high level of precision is required.

CREDITS

NUS Piano Ensemble wishes to convey appreciation and thanks to the following people for their support:

Music Director

Mr. Timothy Ku

Stage Manager

Rebecca Choong

Stage Crew

Chong Ming Zhe

Priyadarshini D/O Thiruchelvam

Front of House I/C

Bryan Goh

And last but not least, all families, friends and supporters who have made this concert possible.

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