



WASHINGTON
PERFORMING ARTS

2022/23 SEASON THE WORLD IN OUR CITY



IGOR LEVIT, piano

THURSDAY, OCT. 20, 7:30 p.m.

THE JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
TERRACE THEATER



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PERFORMING ARTS

2022/23 SEASON

THE WORLD IN OUR CITY

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The legendary Denyce Graves joins a multi-disciplinary team of creators for this powerful new song cycle connecting African American ancestors and their heirs of today.

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Presents

IGOR LEVIT, piano

THURSDAY, OCT. 20, 7:30 p.m.

THE JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
TERRACE THEATER

SCHUMANN

(1810-1856)

Waldszenen, Opus 82

I. *Eintritt*

II. *Jäger auf der Lauer*

III. *Einsame Blumen*

IV. *Verrufene Stelle*

V. *Freundliche Landschaft*

VI. *Herberge*

VII. *Vogel als Prophet*

VIII. *Jagdlied*

IX. *Abschied*

FRED HERSCH

(1955-)

Variations on a Folksong

INTERMISSION

WAGNER

(1813-1883)

Prelude to Tristan und Isolde (arr. Zoltán Kocsis)

LISZT

(1811-1886)

Piano Sonata in B Minor, S.178

Lento assai; Andante sostenuto; Allegro energico

This performance is made possible through the generous support of the following sponsors: Susan S. Angell; Anne and Burton Fishman; and Ellen and Michael Gold.

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This is one of twenty 2022/23 season performances included in Washington Performing Arts's The World in Our City initiative, which promotes cross-cultural understanding and cultural diplomacy via the presentation of international visiting artists, globally inspired local programming, and the award-winning Embassy Adoption Program, a partnership with D.C. Public Schools.

Special thanks to the following lead supporters of Washington Performing Arts's mission-driven work: Jacqueline Badger Mars and Mars, Incorporated; the National Capital Arts and Cultural Affairs Program and the U.S. Commission of Fine Arts; D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities; and the Dallas Morse Coors Foundation for the Performing Arts.

PROGRAM NOTES

Waldszenen, Opus 82

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

As a composer, Robert Schumann pitched between periods of white-hot creativity and intervals of depression that left him unable to work at all. But the years 1848-49 were fertile for him, and music seemed to rush out of him. In 1848, Schumann completed his opera *Genoveva*, began work on incidental music for Byron's *Manfred*, and wrote the *Album für die Jugend* for his oldest child Marie. Early in 1849, he composed two of his most popular chamber works—the *Phantasiestücke* for clarinet and piano and the *Adagio and Allegro* for horn and piano—as well as the *Conzertstück* for four horns and orchestra.

From the midst of all this creative energy came a set of nine piano pieces that Schumann titled *Waldszenen*, or “Forest Scenes.” It is a measure of his productivity during this period that he was able to complete the entire work in just over a week: beginning December 29, he had it completed on January 6. *Waldszenen* hovers right at the intersection of two worlds. At some level, it feels like children's music in the manner of Schumann's own *Kinderszenen* or *Album für die Jugend*: it offers a series of portraits of woodland scenes for young listeners, and some of the movements are within reach of young performers. But not all of them. Several of the movements are very difficult technically, and at moments

this music seems to draw us into a nightmare world, a world far from the sensibilities of the child.

Schumann frames the set with two gentle outer movements. The opening *Eintritt* (“Entrance”) has a once-upon-a-time quality, while the concluding *Abschied* (“Farewell”) trails off quietly, its progress complicated only by some three-against-two rhythms. In between come a series of impressions of forest life. Two of them, full of bluff energy, depict hunters. Several are welcoming in their depictions of a comfortable inn (*Herberge*) or of what Schumann calls a *Freundliche Landschaft* (“Friendly Landscape”). But two of these forest visions deserve special attention. The seventh, *Vogel als Prophet* (“Prophetic Bird”), is built on delicate, suspended arabesques of sound, draped lightly over dotted rhythms and subtle splashes of color. The most striking movement, though, is the fourth, marked *Verrufene Stelle*, or “A Haunted Place.” This movement does indeed seem haunted. Schumann prefaces it in the score with a poem by Friedrich Hebbel that translates loosely: “The flowers that grow so high here are pale as death. Only one in the middle stands there in dark red. It has that color not from the sun nor from its heat, but from the earth, which has drunk human blood.” The music itself is suitably spooky, moving haltingly along double-dotted rhythms. The other movements in *Waldszenen* may offer welcoming visions of the forest, but this one

does not, and Schumann's wife Clara always omitted it when she performed *Waldszenen*.

Variations on a Folksong

Fred Hersch (1958-)

Fred Hersch trained as a classical pianist, but he encountered jazz while in college and promptly dropped out of school to make a career as a jazz pianist, composer, and educator. It has been a most successful career: Hersch has performed with most of the leading jazz artists of the era, he has composed over seventy jazz works, he has been nominated numerous times for Grammy awards, and in 2015 he was named *Downbeat* magazine's Pianist of the Year.

If Hersch has made his reputation primarily as a jazz artist, he has never lost his passion for "classical" music, and he has written a number of sets of variations for solo piano, most notably his *24 Variations on a Bach Chorale*, written in response to the events of 9/11. Pianist Igor Levit, long an admirer of Hersch, commissioned *Variation on a Folksong* and gave the premiere in Carnegie Hall in January of this year. The folksong is the famous *O Shenandoah*, a song that appears to have originated among boatmen in the American West during the early nineteenth century, and Hersch takes that familiar tune through twenty different variations in a variety of styles. In its review of the premiere, the *New York Times* described the variations as "a musical vision of nearly unbroken serenity and benevolence."

Prelude to Tristan und Isolde (arr. Zoltán Kocsis)

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

During the 1850s Wagner was at work on the operas that would make up *The Ring of the Nibelungen*. Partway through Act I of *Siegfried*, however, his plans took an unexpected detour when he became fascinated by the ancient Irish legend of Tristan and Iseult, lovers who find fulfillment only in death. Wagner laid aside his work on *Siegfried* and composed *Tristan und Isolde* between 1856 and 1859.

The *Prelude* to that opera is one of the most remarkable works in the orchestral repertoire, so remarkable that many feel that modern music begins with the *Prelude to Tristan und Isolde*. The *Prelude* opens this tale of unfulfilled love with music that is itself the very embodiment of unfulfilled longing—a falling cello line intersects dissonantly with a rising oboe line, and that harmonic clash does not resolve. That same pattern repeats in a new key, again without resolution. It will *never* resolve. The music's failure ever to find harmonic stasis mirrors the lovers' failure to find fulfillment in life, and—despite the beauty of the music—its effect is intentionally unsettling. Berlioz confessed that he was "completely baffled" when he heard Wagner conduct the *Prelude* in Paris in 1859, and he was quite right to feel assaulted. This music annihilated the conception of a tonal center decades before those other two works that have seemed to launch modern music—Debussy's *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun* and Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*—were conceived. At this concert Igor Levit plays a

piano transcription of the *Prelude to Tristan und Isolde* made by the late Hungarian pianist Zoltán Kocsis.

Piano Sonata in B Minor, S.178

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Liszt wrote his *Sonata in B Minor* in 1852-3 and dedicated it to Robert Schumann. The first public performance took place four years later in Berlin in 1857, when it was played by Liszt's son-in-law Hans von Bülow. The *Sonata in B Minor* is in all senses of the word a revolutionary work, for Liszt sets aside previous notions of sonata form and looks ahead to a new vision of what such a form might be. Schumann himself, then in serious mental decline, reportedly never heard the piece but could not have been especially comfortable with the dedication of a piece that flew so directly in the face of his own sense of what a sonata should be. Another figure in nineteenth-century music, however, reacted rapturously: Wagner wrote to Liszt to say, "The Sonata is beautiful beyond any conception, great, pleasing, profound and noble—it is sublime, just as you are yourself."

The most immediately distinctive feature of the sonata is that it is in one continuous span rather than being divided into separate movements. Despite the single-span structure, Liszt achieves something of the effect of a traditional three-movement sonata form by giving the work a general fast-slow-fast shape. The entire sonata is built on just four themes, all introduced in the opening moments: the slowly-descending scale heard at the very

beginning, marked *Lento assai*; the jagged, leaping theme in octaves that follows immediately—this is marked *Allegro energico*; dove-tailed into this is a propulsive figure of repeated eighth-notes, played first deep in the left hand; and a powerful hymn-like theme marked *Grandioso* and stamped out over steady accompaniment. These themes undergo a gradual but extensive development—a process Liszt called "the transformation of themes"—and are often made to perform quite varied functions as they undergo these transformations. For example, the propulsive left-hand figure, which sounds so ominous on its first appearance, is later made to sing in unexpected ways, while the jagged *Allegro energico* theme becomes the subject for a fugue at the opening of the third "movement." At the end, Liszt winds all this energy down, and the sonata concludes on a quiet recall of the slowly descending *Lento assai* from the very beginning. After so much energy, the sonata vanishes on a very quiet B deep in the pianist's left hand.

The *Sonata in B Minor* was to some extent shaped by Schubert's "Wanderer" *Fantasy* of 1822, a work Liszt knew and greatly admired. In the "Wanderer" *Fantasy* Schubert built an extended work in several contrasted sections, all based on a theme from his song *Die Wanderer*. Liszt allows himself more themes, but his technique is exactly the same as Schubert's: a single span of music evolves out of the ingenious transformation of just a few thematic ideas.

The *Sonata in B Minor* is extremely dramatic music, so dramatic that many guessed that it must have a program, as so much of Liszt's music does. But Liszt insisted that this is not descriptive or programmatic music. He wanted his sonata accepted as a piece of "pure music," to be heard and understood for itself.

Program notes by Eric Bromberger

ABOUT THE ARTIST



With an alert and critical mind, he places his art in the context of social events and understands it as inseparably linked to them. *The New*

York Times describes Igor Levit as one of the "most important artists of his generation." Igor Levit is *Musical America's* "Recording Artist of the Year 2020" and the 2018 Gilmore Artist. In June 2022, his Album *On DSCH* has been awarded the "Recording of the Year" Award as well as the Instrumental Award of the *BBC Music Magazine*.

As a recitalist Igor Levit regularly performs at the world's most renowned concert halls and festivals. He is a regular soloist with the world's leading orchestras such as the Cleveland Orchestra, the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and the Vienna Philharmonic. Igor Levit opened the 2022 Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival together

with Alan Gilbert and the NDR Elbphilharmonieorchester followed by recitals at the Salzburger Festspiele and the Lucerne Festival as well as concerts with the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia and Sir Antonio Pappano at the Musikfest Berlin and at Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie. In the 2022-23 season, Igor Levit presents his new recital program featuring works by Brahms, Hersch, Liszt and Wagner among others in Berlin, Hamburg, London, Madrid, Milano, New York, Paris, Prague, and Rome. Igor Levit is one of Vienna's Musikverein's portrait artists of the 2022-23 season. In June 2023, he joins the San Francisco Symphony and Esa-Pekka Salonen for a multi-week residency. In spring 2021, Igor Levit and the Lucerne Festival announced a multi-year collaboration for a new piano festival curated by Igor Levit, its first edition to take place in May 2023. With the 2022-23 season, Igor Levit joins the Festival Heidelberger Frühling music festival as its Co-Artistic Director. Igor Levit's 2019 highly-acclaimed first recording of the 32 Beethoven-Sonatas was awarded the *Gramophone* "Artist of the Year" award as well as the Opus Klassik in autumn 2020. In spring 2021, Hanser published Igor Levit's first book *House Concert*, co-authored by Florian Zinnecker. During Fall 2022, Igor Levit released a new solo album for Sony Classical called *Tristan* - featuring his first orchestral recording Henze's *Tristan* with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and

Franz Welser-Möst - as well as the release of the feature documentary *Igor Levit – No Fear* in cinemas in Germany.

Born in Nizhni Novgorod, Igor Levit moved to Germany with his family at the age of eight. He completed his piano studies in Hannover with the highest score in the history of the institute. His teachers included Karl-Heinz Kämmerling, Matti Raekallio, Bernd Goetzke, Lajos Rovatkay, and Hans Leygraf. Igor Levit was the youngest participant in the 2005 International Arthur Rubinstein Competition in Tel Aviv, where he won silver, the special prize for chamber music, the audience prize, and the special prize for the best performance of contemporary pieces. In spring 2019, he was appointed professor for piano at his alma mater, the University of Music, Theatre and Media Hanover.

For his political commitment Igor Levit has been awarded the 5th International Beethoven Prize in 2019 followed by the award of the "Statue B" of the International Auschwitz Committee in January 2020. His 53 Twitter-streamed live house concerts during the lockdown in spring 2020 garnered a worldwide audience, offering a sense of community and hope in a time of isolation and desperation. In October 2020 Igor Levit was recognized with the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany. In Berlin, where he makes his home, Igor Levit is playing on a Steinway D Grand Piano kindly given to him by the Trustees of Independent Opera at Sadler's Wells.

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One of the most established and honored performing arts institutions in America, Washington Performing Arts has engaged for more than half a century with artists, audiences, students, and civic life. The city is truly our stage: for decades, in venues ranging from concert halls and clubs to public parks, we have presented a tremendous range of artists and art forms, from the most distinguished symphony orchestras to both renowned and emerging artists in classical music, gospel music, jazz, international genres, and more. Washington Performing Arts also has an ever-expanding artistic and educational presence on the internet, addressing the programming challenges of this time of pandemic while envisioning ongoing opportunities for online connection and community in a post-COVID world.

Washington Performing Arts deeply values its partnerships with local organizations and other arts

institutions. Through events online and in a myriad of performance venues and neighborhoods, Washington Performing Arts engages international visiting artists in community programs and introduces local artists to wider audiences. We place a premium on establishing artists as a continuing presence in the lives of both young people and adults through residencies and education programs.

For its achievements, Washington Performing Arts has been recognized with a National Medal of Arts and with three Mayor's Arts Awards from the D.C. Government. We have now embarked upon our second half-century, ever inspired by the motto of our founder, Patrick Hayes: "Everybody in, nobody out."

For more information, please visit washingtonperformingarts.org.

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Washington Performing Arts is grateful for generous gifts from members of our community to support dedicated endowment funds to recognize rising artists. **The Ruth Bader Ginsburg Memorial Fund** was established in 2021 to honor the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's life, legacy, and passion for music with an annual award to a distinguished artist that includes the opportunity to choose a musical talent deserving of wider recognition to be presented in a Washington Performing Arts recital in Justice Ginsburg's memory. **"The Reggie"** is an annual award established in 2018 to honor former Washington Performing Arts Board Chair Reginald Van Lee, granted to a high school junior or senior member of the Washington Performing Arts Children of the Gospel Choir to pursue additional arts-related education or activities. For more information about Washington Performing Arts's endowed fund opportunities, contact Meiyu Tsung at MTsung@WashingtonPerformingArts.org.

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Legacy Society members appreciate the vital role that performing arts play in the community, as well as in their own lives. By remembering Washington Performing Arts in their will or estate plans, members enhance our annual fund, endowment, or donor-designated programs and help make it possible for the next generations to enjoy the same quality and diversity of presentations both on stages and in our schools and community.

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As of October 4, 2022

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