November 9, 2017 at 8:00pm
Pre-concert talk by Ruth Ochs at 7:00pm
Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

BENJAMIN **GROSVENOR,** *PIANO*

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
(1685-1750)

French Suite No. 5 in G Major, BWV 816
Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Gavotte
Bourrée
Loure
Gigue

JOHANNES BRAHMS
(1833-1897)
interspersed with
BRETT DEAN
(b. 1961)

Four Pieces, Op. 119
Hommage à Brahms
Intermezzo in B Minor (Brahms)
Angels' Wings 1 (Dean)
Intermezzo in E Minor (Brahms)
Harbor Bar Music (Dean)
Intermezzo in C Major (Brahms)
Angels' Wings 2 (Dean)
Rhapsodie in E-flat Major (Brahms)

INTERMISSION

CLAUDE DEBUSSY
(1862-1918)

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune
(arr. Leonard Borwick/George Copeland)

ALBAN BERG
(1885-1935)

Piano Sonata, Op. 1

MAURICE RAVEL
(1875-1937)

Gaspard de la nuit
Ondine. Lent
Le Gibet. Très lent
Scarbo. Modéré

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

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French Suite No. 5 in G Major, BWV 816
JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH
(1685-1750)

The suite—a set of dance movements organized into multi-movement instrumental cycles—was a central musical genre in England, Germany, and France during the Baroque era. As time went on, the order of the movements in these suites was standardized, and the dances themselves "stylized," that is, increasingly thought of as standing on their own as autonomous works and not necessarily intended to be danced to.

Suites played an important part in J. S. Bach's output; he wrote about forty-five of them, mostly for keyboard but some also for orchestra, as well as unaccompanied violin and cello. (Some of these works were actually called "partitas.") In a sense, all of Bach's suites are "French," since they are all based on the same types of French court dances (with only a few Italianate movements among them).

As a young man, Bach became familiar with the keyboard suites of many French composers from the late 17th century and immediately began writing similar works. During the six years he spent at the Cöthen court, Bach concentrated on the instrumental genres and produced, among others, the six "English" and the six "French" suites. (The main difference between the two sets is that the English suites contain opening preludes while the French suites do not. Incidentally, neither name comes from Bach himself.)

Each movement type in the suites has its precise character, defined by tempo and predominant rhythmic figures. Within those limits, however, each Allemande, Courante, Sarabande and Gigue also has its own distinctive features that mark them as individuals. Those four movements constitute the backbone of all suites as they are invariably present in each one. In addition, suites also contain some optional movements, known as "Galanterien" as they are often lighter in tone and, in certain ways, anticipate the "galant" style of Bach's sons' generation.

Like all the French suites, No. 5 begins with an Allemande in which the dance character is much attenuated, with the emphasis on a continuous motion in sixteenth-notes. The same kind of motion is typical of the Courante as well, but now the tempo is

faster and the 3/4 meter conveys a stronger dance feel. The Sarabande is a slow movement in 3/4 meter, made eminently danceable by the symmetrical structure of the musical phrases. The Gavotte and the Bourrée, two "Galanterien," are both fairly straightforward fast dances in duple meter, but the next movement, the Loure, is again slow, and introduces contrapuntal imitation for the first time in the suite. The Loure is, in essence, a slow form of the gigue, and is here followed by a fast gigue which, in fact, is the last movement of every Baroque suite. The present Gigue takes the form of a full-fledged fugue in three parts, or rather two fugues, because the second half of the piece is really a new fugue where the theme of the first fugue is inverted (that is, turned upside down, with ascending intervals becoming descending ones and vice versa). Contrapuntal writing, then, gradually takes over the entire suite.

Four Pieces, Op. 119
JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)
Hommage à Brahms
BRETT DEAN (b. 1961)

In his late piano music, Brahms comes across as a composer withdrawn from the world and playing to himself or a few of his closest friends such as Clara Schumann. Most of the twenty short pieces published as Opp. 116–119 are lyrical and introspective in character. Many of them are called "intermezzi" not because they come between two larger works (as the original meaning of the word would suggest) but because the name connotes something light, transient, and indefinite. Brett Dean is an Australian composer and violist who served as principal violist in the Berlin Philharmonic before devoting himself full-time to composition. He won one of the most prestigious awards available to composers, the Grawemeyer Award, in 2009 for his violin concerto *The Lost Art of Letter Writing.*

In 2013, Dean composed three short piano pieces in homage to Brahms, intended to be interspersed with the Op. 119 piano pieces, and it is this composite suite that we are going to hear tonight. The pieces were jointly commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association; Symphony Center Presents, Chicago; Cal Performances, University of California, Berkeley; and Carnegie Hall, New York City. The first performance was given by Emanuel Ax in Chicago, on February 21, 2014.

In composing intermezzi intended to be played in between the intermezzi, Dean took his cue from certain characteristic

accompaniment figures in Brahms' works but, more importantly, he matched Brahms' autumnal mood by writing soft, lyrical music that seems to flow naturally from the sources of inspiration. The first and the third of the Dean intermezzi are called *Engelsflügel* ("Angel's Wings") I-II; these are lyrical dreams that seem to be logical extensions of Brahms's musical ideas. Dean further developed this material in a wind ensemble piece, written the same year, also under the title *Engelsflügel.* The second added movement, which occupies the central position in the composite Brahms/Dean, is agitated and virtuosic: this *Hafenkneipenmusik* ("Harbor Bar Music") alludes to the rumor that the young Brahms may have played the piano in such seedy establishments to support himself. Pianist Orli Shaham, who has recorded the complete Brahms/Dean cycle for Canary Classics, has written: "Dean takes the beauty and character of Brahms' writing and adds his own remarkable sense of atmosphere to create three stunning movements."

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune
CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918)
arranged for piano by
Leonard Borwick & George Copeland

It is, to a large extent, its luxuriant orchestration, with its sensuous flute and oboe solos, that makes Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* a landmark work of musical impressionism. Yet Debussy was a pianist himself, and knew how to evoke poetic images on the keyboard just as well as he did through the manifold colors of the orchestra. His piano works have shown arrangers how to capture the exquisite dreamworld of the Faun even without resorting to the flute as a stand-in for the ancient panpipe.

Debussy based his short symphonic poem on an eclogue by Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898), one of the greatest innovators in the history of French poetry. Mallarmé's works, which abound in complex symbols and images, sought to represent states of mind rather than ideas, express moods rather than tell stories. The French poet tried to capture that elusive line between dream and awakening that most of us who are not poets are well aware of but are unable to put into words.

The first-person narrator in the eclogue (the word evokes associations with the pastoral poetry of the great Latin poet Virgil) is a faun, a mythological creature who is half man and half goat. The faun lives in the woods, near a river surrounded by reedy marshes; he is daydreaming about nymphs who may be real or mere figments of his imagination. The faun's desire is filtered through the vagueness of its object as he recalls past dreams, which emerge from the shadows only to recede into the darkness again.

In his music, Debussy admirably captured that delicious vagueness of contours which is so important in the poem. The themes do not follow any stable metric patterns, and instead of progressing in a certain direction, they remain entirely unpredictable, reflecting the unconstrained nature of the faun's meditations. The two pianist-arrangers, the British Leonard Borwick (1868–1925) and the American George Copeland (1882–1971), were younger contemporaries of Debussy, and had a natural feeling for the music, which they made their audiences hear in a way they had never heard it before.

Piano Sonata, Op. 1
ALBAN BERG (1885–1935)

As graduation pieces go, Alban Berg's Piano Sonata and Anton Webern's *Passacaglia* for orchestra, both written in 1908, are in a class all by themselves. Both young men had just completed a course of study with Arnold Schoenberg, who was probably the most exciting composition teacher active anywhere at the time. The three composers, soon to be known as the "Second Viennese School," pushed post-Wagnerian harmony to its limits and, by the early 1910s, reached a point where traditional major-minor tonality was replaced by "free atonality," where the relationships of the tones were determined only by the ear.

Berg's one-movement sonata still inhabits the world of tonality, even though it contains

sonorities that don't fit into the classical harmonic system. Yet Berg centered the piece around the key of B minor, which shines through at important moments and serves as a unifying factor. He also scrupulously respected the dictates of sonata form, with first and second themes, development and recapitulation. No doubt this was an assignment he had received from Schoenberg, and the 23-year-old graduate acquitted himself of the task with rare assurance and originality.

The sonata is in 3/4 time, and the rhythm of the waltz can occasionally be perceived "through a glass dimly," as it were. But the music never stays in the same character for very long. The tempo and the dynamics change as the sonata form unfolds. The arrival of the second theme is marked by a slower tempo, and then by a gradual *accelerando* (increase in speed) and *crescendo* (increase in volume) until a climax is reached. The closing idea of the exposition is played *quasi Adagio.* The development contains another huge surge from *pianissimo* to quadruple *forte*. Then all the earlier themes are recapitulated, retracing the same changes in tempo and dynamics; yet the recapitulation is far from literal. Schoenberg used to advise his pupils: "Never do what a copyist can do" – in other words, avoid exact repeats. Years later, Berg told one of his own students who had repeated a theme without making any changes: "How can you do this? Think of what your themes and motives have meanwhile 'experienced'!" Accordingly, the last portion of the sonata amounts to a free recasting of the exposition, ending dreamily on a soft and soothing B-minor chord.

Gaspard de la nuit
MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)

The same year the 23-year-old Alban Berg wrote his post-Romantic graduation piece in Vienna, Maurice Ravel, ten years his senior, composed his most ambitious piano piece, *Gaspard de la nuit*, one of the most technically demanding works in the entire piano repertoire.

Ravel stretched the musical idiom of the 19th century in a different direction than did the Viennese. He developed a new kind of virtuosity in order to find musical counterparts to the poetic and visual ideas that had inspired him. Concurrently with but independently from Debussy, and sometimes even ahead of his older contemporary, Ravel had revolutionized piano technique in his early *Jeux d'eau*

(1901). Seven years later, he crowned his pianistic oeuvre with a dazzling triptych after poems by Aloysius Bertrand (1807-1841), a precursor of French symbolism unappreciated in his own time, who is credited, today, with inventing the prose poem. Bertrand's masterpiece, the collection *Gaspard de la nuit* (printed on pages 8 and 9 of the program), was published posthumously and, at first, sold exactly twenty copies. One of those twenty, however, fell into the hands of poet Charles Baudelaire and as a result, Bertrand's fame increased in the Parisian literary world. More than twenty years after his premature death, the once-obscure poet became a veritable cult figure.

The name Gaspard (Caspar) is of Persian origin and means "guardian of the treasure." One possible explanation of the title could come from Bertrand's desire to bring to light some unsettling secrets hidden in the darkness of the night. The three prose poems chosen by Ravel are certainly disturbing enough. The mermaid "Ondine," very different from the creature depicted in the Debussy prelude of the same name (written two years later), is quite a complex character; she can be passionate, menacing, and mocking as she tries to seduce her prospective victim. With its relentless repetitions of a single B-flat octave surrounded by a plaintive melody, "The Gibbet" conveys the poet's macabre vision in all its spookiness. Finally, the playful antics of the dwarf Scarbo, which become positively frightening by the end, called forth a ferocious scherzo of monumental proportions. In 1908, this was truly avant-garde music; nor has it lost any of its edge in the 109 years since its creation.

Gaspard de la nuit
By **ALOYSIUS BERTRAND** (1807–1841)

ONDINE

I thought I heard
A faint harmony that enchants my sleep.
And close to me radiates an identical murmur
Of songs interrupted by a sad and tender voice.
—Charles Brugnot (*The Two Spirits*)

Listen! – Listen! – It is I, it is Ondine who brushes drops of water
on the resonant panes of your windows lit by the gloomy rays of the moon;
and here in gown of watered silk, the mistress of the chateau gazes
from her balcony on the beautiful starry night and the beautiful sleeping lake.

Each wave is a water sprite who swims in the stream, each stream is a footpath
that winds towards my palace, and my palace is a fluid structure, at the bottom of the lake,
in a triangle of fire, of earth and of air.

Listen! – Listen! – My father whips the croaking water with a branch of a green alder tree,
and my sisters caress with their arms of foam the cool islands of herbs, of water lilies,
and of corn flowers, or laugh at the decrepit and bearded willow who fishes at the line.

Her song murmured, she beseeched me to accept her ring on my finger,
to be the husband of an Ondine, and to visit her in her palace and be king of the lakes.

And as I was replying to her that I loved a mortal, sullen and spiteful, she wept some tears,
uttered a burst of laughter, and vanished in a shower that streamed white
down the length of my bluestained glass windows.

THE GIBBET

What do I see stirring around that gibbet?
–Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (*Faust*)

Ah! that which I hear, was it the north wind that screeches in the night,
or the hanged one who utters a sigh on the fork of the gibbet?

Was it some cricket who sings lurking in the moss and the sterile ivy,
which out of pity covers the floor of the forest?

Was it some fly in chase sounding the horn around those ears deaf to the fanfare of the halloos?

Was it some scarab beetle who gathers in his uneven flight a bloody hair from his bald skull?

Or then, was it some spider who embroiders a half-measure of muslin for a tie on this strangled neck?

It is the bell that tolls from the walls of a city, under the horizon,
and the corpse of the hanged one that is reddened by the setting sun.

SCARBO

(He looked under the bed, in the chimney,
in the cupboard; – nobody. He could not
understand how he got in, or how he escaped.
— E.T. A. Hoffmann. (*Nocturnal Tales*)

Oh! how often have I heard and seen him, Scarbo, when at midnight
the moon glitters in the sky like a silver shield on an azure banner strewn with golden bees.

How often have I heard his laughter buzz in the shadow of my alcove,
and his fingernail grate on the silk of the curtains of my bed!

How often have I seen him alight on the floor, pirouette on a foot
and roll through the room like the spindle fallen from the wand of a sorceress!

Do I think him vanished then? the dwarf grows between the
moon and me like the belfry of a gothic cathedral, a golden bell shakes on his pointed cap!

But soon his body becomes blue, translucent like the wax of a candle,
his face pales like the wax of a candle end – and suddenly he is extinguished.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

British pianist Benjamin Grosvenor is internationally recognized for his electrifying performances and insightful interpretations. He is renowned for his distinctive sound, described as "poetic and gently ironic, brilliant yet clear-minded, intelligent but not without humour, all translated through a beautifully clear and singing touch" (*The Independent* - London), making him one of the most sought-after young pianists in the world today.

Benjamin first came to prominence as the outstanding winner of the Keyboard Final of the 2004 BBC Young Musician Competition at the age of eleven, and he was invited to perform with the BBC Symphony Orchestra at the First Night of the 2011 BBC Proms at just nineteen. Since then, he has become an internationally regarded pianist and was announced in 2016 as the inaugural recipient of The Ronnie and Lawrence Ackman Classical Piano

Prize with the New York Philharmonic. As part of this, he returns to New York City in April 2018, performing Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 under the baton of Esa-Pekka Salonen as well as chamber music with members of the orchestra at the Tisch Center for the Arts at 92nd Street Y.

Recent and future highlights include engagements with the Boston Symphony, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Gürzenich-Orchestra Cologne, Cleveland, Gulbenkian and Hallé Orchestras, Leipzig Gewandhausorchester, Filarmonica della Scala, the London, Melbourne, San Francisco, Singapore, Tokyo, and Washington National Symphony Orchestras, and an appearance at the Last Night of the Proms with the BBC Symphony Orchestra under Marin Alsop. Among his major recital dates are Vienna Konzerthaus, Théâtre des Champs Elysées Paris, Muziekgebouw Amsterdam, Carnegie Hall New York City, Konzerthaus Berlin, Barbican Centre London, Musashino Civic Cultural Hall Tokyo, the Lucerne and Gilmore Festivals, La Roque d'Anthéron, the International Piano Series at London's Southbank Centre, as well as his first tour of South America.

"poetic and gently ironic, brilliant yet clear-minded, intelligent but not without humour, all translated through a beautifully clear and singing touch."

The Independent (London)

Benjamin enjoys playing chamber music, including performances with the Escher, Elias, and Endellion String Quartets, chamber ensembles of the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal, the New York and Naples Philharmonic Orchestras, and at venues such as Paris' Musée du Louvre and London's Queen Elizabeth Hall. Since the 2015-16 season Benjamin has been invited to participate in the prestigious "Junge Wilde" series by Konzerthaus Dortmund, where over the course of three years he will perform on a number of occasions, including in June 2018, with violinist Hyeyoon Park.

In 2011 Benjamin signed to Decca Classics, becoming the youngest British musician ever to sign to the label, and the first British pianist to sign to the label in almost 60 years. Benjamin's fourth CD on the label, *Homages* (2016), explores a number of works in which great composers pay tribute to their predecessors, including Busoni's transcription of Bach's great

solo violin Chaconne, Franck's Choral, Prelude and Fugue and Liszt's tribute to Italian folk song, *Venezia e Napoli*. Awarded a Diapason d'Or, the disc was described by *BBC Music Magazine* as "showing off his fluid virtuosity, musical sensitivity and fearless approach" and named Instrumental Choice of the Month.

During his sensational career to date, Benjamin has received Gramophone's Young Artist of the Year and Instrumental Awards, a Classic Brits Critics' Award, UK Critics' Circle Award for Exceptional Young Talent and a Diapason d'Or Jeune Talent Award. He has been featured in two BBC television documentaries, BBC Breakfast and The Andrew Marr Show, as well as in CNN's *Human to Hero* series. The youngest of five brothers, Benjamin began playing the piano aged 6. He studied at the Royal Academy of Music with Christopher Elton and Daniel-Ben Pienaar, where he graduated in 2012 with the 'Queen's Commendation for Excellence,' and in 2016 was awarded a Fellowship. Benjamin has been supported since 2013 by EFG International, the widely respected global private banking group. This concert marks his Princeton University Concerts debut.