Sunday, October 13, 2024 • 3:00 PM
Tuesday, October 15, 2024 • 7:30 PM

Ordway Concert Hall

JEREMY DENK, PIANO

This concert is dedicated in honor of Catherine and John Neimeyer
by Nancy and Ted Weyerhaeuser

Romance Op. 21, No. 1, *Andante* (1853)	Clara Schumann (1819–1896)
Rituál (1987)	Tania León (b. 1943)
La lisonjera (The Flatterer) **Op. 50** (1897)	Cécile Chaminade (1857–1944)
Heartbreaker (2013)	Missy Mazzoli (b. 1980)
In Autumn **from Four Sketches, Op. 15** (1892)	Amy Beach (1867–1944)
Paris (1972)	Meredith Monk (b. 1942)
*Mélodie i*n **A-flat Major** (1846)	Louise Farrenc (1804–1875)
Study in Mixed Accents (1930)	Ruth Crawford Seeger (1901–1953)
Sumitones	Phyllis Chen (b. 1978)
Dreaming **from Four Sketches, Op. 15** (1892)	Amy Beach (1867–1944)

—— Intermission ——

4 *Klavierstücke (Four Piano Pieces)* Op. 119 (1893)	Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

   Intermezzo. Adagio
   Intermezzo. Andantino un poco agitato
   Intermezzo. Grazioso e giocoso
   Rhapsody. Allegro risoluto

Fantasie, Op. 17 (1836)	Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

   Durchaus fantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen; Im Legenden-Ton
   Mäßig. Durchaus energisch
   Langsam getragen. Durchweg leise zu halten.

PLEASE SILENCE ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES

4 Clavierstücke (Four Piano Pieces), **Op. 119** (1893)
Johannes Brahms (b. Hamburg, 1833; d. Vienna, 1897)

Clara Schumann's student Ilona Eibenschütz gave the premiere of Opus 119 in London in 1894. Nearly 60 years later, Eibenschütz recalled her introduction to the work: "One day after dinner Brahms said: 'I want to play you a few exercises I have just composed.' He played as if he were improvising, sometimes humming to himself, forgetting everything around him." Eibenschütz's enthusiastic letter to her teacher calmed the waters that still roiled between Clara and Brahms after a misunderstanding about the publication of her late husband Robert's Fourth Symphony.

The four pieces of Opus 119, Brahms's last for the piano, comprise a beautifully contrasted whole. No two share a key or time signature, and the keyboard textures are imaginative and varied. The first three are simple A-B-A forms, titled Intermezzo, a name Brahms gave to more than half of his keyboard pieces. The title may seem generic, but these pieces are anything but. They are intimate expressions that speak from the very heart of the composer to the listener, confessions shared through the medium of the piano. They are "a summation of what Brahms had learned," notes Jan Swafford, "almost scientific studies of compositional craft and of piano writing, disguised as pretty little salon pieces."

Brahms begins with chains of weeping thirds. A staple of popular harmony today, these "ninth-chords" sound sweet to us now, but Brahms thought them daring. "I should very much like to know how you get on with it," he wrote to Clara. "It teems with discords. These may be all right and quite explicable, but you may not perhaps like them . . . . Every bar and every note must be played as if *ritardando* were indicated, and one wished to draw the melancholy out of each one of them, a voluptuous joy and comfort out of the discords." As it happened, Clara liked the piece. "One actually revels in the discords," she replied. The second theme builds a melody of hopeful, *rising* thirds over a firm D-major foundation.

No. 2 could slyly be called "Variations on a Cadence Formula." The melody line wanders about restively, retracing its steps, never fully finding its way down to the tonic. One is tempted to hear in the major-mode middle a land of (perhaps Alpine) dreams, a counterpoint to the agitated (urban?) present of the outer sections. C major is the home key in No. 3, but there is a strong pull toward A minor. The melody is in an inner voice, and one finds some of Brahms's laciest writing at the end. The last piece is the most elaborate. Brahms calls it Rhapsody, a title he reserved for pieces with legendary overtones. The strongly rhythmic beat-groups—(2+2) + (3+3)—give rise to phrases of interesting length. Much is made of three hammer-strokes, and of three ascending steps that tentatively approach the second theme.

Program note © 2013 by David Evan Thomas