

8 Maps and Legends

Music@Menlo's eighth season, *Maps and Legends*, explored a wide compass of times, places, and universal phenomena. The season's offerings ranged from programs that celebrated a nation's identity to music composed in response to the changing of the seasons and the trauma of war. The 2010 edition of Music@Menlo *LIVE* chronicles this fascinating journey, preserving for listeners the exceptional performances that made *Maps and Legends* such a memorable experience.

Finnish pianist Juho Pohjonen made his sensational Music@Menlo debut with a program highlighting the theme-and-variations form. Bringing together music by Mozart, Grieg, Handel, and Brahms, Pohjonen's thoughtfully curated recital explored how composers across the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic eras approached the same compositional technique to achieve a broad, expressive palette.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791): Sonata in A Major, K. 331 (1781–1783)

On August 4, 1782, in Vienna, Mozart married Constanze Weber—without the blessing of his father. Papa Leopold thought that the humble, uneducated girl was not worthy of his brilliantly talented son, and he made no secret of his opposition to the union. In an attempt to heal the family rift, the new Herr and Frau Mozart parked their first child, six-week-old Raimund Leopold, with a nurse in a Viennese suburb and headed for Salzburg at the end of July 1783. They called on several of Wolfgang's old friends, but their reception was cool both from the members of the town's archiepiscopal music



Juho Pohjonen

establishment (from whose service Mozart had bolted two years before without permission) and from his father and sister. Wolfgang tried to put a good face on the situation, but he was bitterly disappointed at the results of the Salzburg sojourn. He never again returned to the town of his birth. The three piano sonatas, K. 330–332, were Mozart's most important creative endeavors during his Salzburg visit, written perhaps as teaching material, perhaps for his own performances; they were published by Artaria the following year. Mozart infused the second of the Salzburg sonatas, in A major (K. 331), with great popular appeal. Its first movement is a set of variations on a gracious theme Mozart may have derived from a German folk song. The second move-

ment is a large minuet in a richly expressive, almost Romantic style. The finale—the rousing *Alla turca*—is a delightful march “in the Turkish manner.”

EDVARD GRIEG (1843–1907): Ballade in g minor in the Form of Variations on a Norwegian Folk Song, op. 24 (1875–1876)

“Now I sit here unspeakably lonely and forsaken. I have not been able to pull myself together for anything whatsoever. Life and death and eternity, religion and art—everything creates hazy pictures before my inner eye, pictures I still have not been able to comprehend.” Thus did Edvard Grieg write of his sorrow to his friend the Danish pianist and composer August Winding early in 1876 from Bergen, where he had suffered the loss of both his parents within five weeks the preceding autumn. Grieg sought solace in work, and by the end of 1875 he had begun a new piece for piano, a large set of variations on a Norwegian folk melody that seemed to match his mood, a composition that he said he wrote “with my life’s blood in drops of sorrow and despair”—the Ballade in g minor in the Form of Variations on a Norwegian Folk Song. Grieg borrowed the mournful melody, “The Peasant Class of the Northland,” from the second volume (1858) of Ludvig Mathias Lindeman’s collection of *Norwegian Mountain Melodies Old and New*. He worked ten formal variations on the theme that range in style from lamenting to virtuosic, from introspective soliloquy to demonic scherzo. He then ran quickly through several contrasting keys to lead to an almost frenetic major-key development in which he seemed to try to play away his grief at the keyboard, stretching both hands across its full range and attacking the keys *con tutta forza* (“with all possible force”). This music is suddenly broken off by a violent, ascending crescendo and a brief pause before the original minor key returns for a fast, intense passage to be played *Allegro furioso...sempre più* [always more] *furioso...molto pesante e* [very heavy and] *furioso*. Mere commotion cannot here conquer grief, however, and the ballade ends as it began, with the sad, unadorned song of the Norwegian mountains.

GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685–1759): Suite in B-flat Major, vol. 2, no. 1, HWV 434 (1733)

Handel’s suites for harpsichord were apparently composed soon after he became Director of Music in 1717 to the household of James Brydges, Earl of Carnarvon, at Cannons, the family estate in Middlesex. Among Handel’s noble students at the time was Anne, eldest daughter of the Prince and Princess of Wales, and it is thought that he may have composed some of the suites anew or arranged them from earlier of his keyboard pieces for her instruction. (They are called “Lessons” in some early editions.) The Suite in B-flat Major, HWV 434, opens with a prelude of sweeping chords and running figurations. The bustling second movement is titled sonata, an old usage of the term to indicate an instrumental piece as opposed to a cantata, one for voice. The *Aria con variazioni* comprises a set of five variations on a regal theme.

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897): Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel, op. 24 (1861)

One of the pieces that Brahms wrote for his tours through northern Europe as a pianist early in his career was the splendid Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel of 1861, which he based on the closing movement of Handel’s Suite in B-flat Major. The theme and the first variation pay homage to the eighteenth-century style of their model but then veer into Brahms’s world of Romanticism while preserving the sixteen-measure, two-part structure of the original melody. The twenty-five variations encompass a wide range of keyboard styles, expressive moods, and pianistic hues before they are capped by a stupendous fugue in four voices, whose subject is freely based on the opening notes of the theme.

EDVARD GRIEG: Til våren (To Spring), op. 43, no. 6 (1886)

Among the most characteristic of Edvard Grieg’s creations rooted in the songs, dances, and spirit of his native Norway are his sixty-six *Lyric Pieces* for piano, composed throughout his career and published in ten books between 1867 and 1901. These fra-

grant miniatures not only solidified his rank as the leading musician of his country but also became some of the most popular music of the day, sounding from parlor pianos throughout Europe and America and constantly in demand on his recitals. The six *Lyric Pieces*, op. 43, composed during the early spring of 1886 in Copenhagen, close with the evocative *To Spring*.

FRANÇOIS COUPERIN (1668–1733): *Ordre 27ème de clavecin in b minor: L'exquise* (1728)

François Couperin, born in Paris in 1668, was appointed organist of St. Gervais in 1683 and ten years later was named one of four organists to the court of Versailles. By the turn of the century, Couperin was appearing regularly as harpsichordist and composer at the court's musical events, though he was not officially given the title *Ordinaire de la Musique de la Chambre du Roi pour le Clavecin* until 1717, a year after his pedagogical treatise *L'art de toucher le clavecin* appeared; it was one of the era's most important manuals concerning the ornamentation and performance of French keyboard music. At the same time, Couperin published the first of four large volumes of *Pièces de clavecin*, which contain over two hundred separate items, many with fanciful or descriptive titles inspired by friends, feelings, or fashions. *L'exquise* (*The Exquisite One*, Book IV, Ordre [suite] 27, Number 1) is Couperin's final *Allemande*, a gracious dance in moderate duple tempo. In his comprehensive study of Couperin's keyboard music, Philippe Beaussant speculated that "the title describes the character of the music itself more than it evokes a particular 'exquisite' woman or a pattern, scene, or other subject."

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About Music@Menlo

Music@Menlo is an internationally acclaimed three-week summer festival and institute that combines world-class chamber music performances, extensive audience engagement with artists, intensive training for preprofessional musicians, and efforts to enhance and broaden the chamber music community of the San Francisco Bay Area. An immersive and engaging experience centered around a distinctive array of programming, Music@Menlo enriches its core concert programs with numerous opportunities for in-depth learning to intensify audiences' enjoyment and understanding of the music and provide meaningful ways for aficionados and newcomers of all ages to explore classical chamber music.