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Thursday, 18 November — 7pm AEDT

SONYA LIFSCHITZ

Online Concert



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PROGRAM

Johannes BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Selections from Six Pieces for Piano, Op. 118 (1893)

7 min

I *Allegro non assai, ma molto appassionato*

II *Andante teneramente*

Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)

Chaconne from Partita no 2 for solo violin in D minor, BWV1004
(arr Brahms for Piano Left Hand)

15 min

George CRUMB (b 1929)

Selections from *A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979* (1980)

13 min

Leoš JANÁČEK (1854-1928)

Piano Sonata *I.X.1905* (1905)

15 min

I *Předtucha* (Foreboding)

II *Smrt* (Death)

Sonya Lifschitz, Piano

MEET THE ARTIST

Sonya Lifschitz is a pianist working across many contexts, with repertoire spanning from 15th century Faenza Codex to works written for her today. She is known for her fiercely imaginative, daring collaborations across film, animation, spoken word, visual and performance art. Described as “a life force of extraordinary density and capacity” by a critic following a recent performance of Stalin’s Piano, Sonya’s artistry combines bold adventurousness with unparalleled musicianship. She is active as a soloist, creative collaborator, artistic director, educator, radio personality and arts advocate.

In 2018-2020 seasons, Sonya made a critically-acclaimed solo debut at the Barbican Centre (London), De Doelen (Rotterdam), and at one of New York’s most prestigious concert venues, Bargemusic, with other highlights including solo appearances at the Sydney (SIAF), Melbourne (MIAF), Adelaide (AF), Brisbane (BIAF), Canberra (CIMF) and Darwin Festivals; Extended Play, Metropolis and MONAFOMA New Music Festivals; and venues such as the Melbourne Recital Centre (Melbourne), City Recital Hall (Sydney), QPAC Concert Hall (Brisbane), National Gallery of Australia (Canberra), Elder Hall (Adelaide) and Detroit Institute of Art (Detroit, USA). Sonya’s performances are regularly broadcast by ABC Classic FM, ABC Radio National, 3MBS and 5MBS.

A fierce advocate for new music, Sonya has commissioned and premiered numerous large-scale works by composers such as Larry Sitsky, Kate Neal, Robert Davidson, Damian Barbeler, Andrew Schultz, Jessica Wells, Felicity Wilcox, Steve Adams, and Anthony Lyons. A passionate collaborator, she has worked with some of Australia’s leading performers and music ensembles, including Ensemble Offspring, Topology, Lisa Moore, Stephen Emmerson, Joe Chindamo, Claire Edwards, Miwako Abe, Caroline Henbest, Vanessa Tomlinson, the Kransky Sisters, Christine Johnston, and members of the Flinders Quartet, Australian Chamber Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony and Queensland Symphony Orchestras.

Sonya debuted with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra at age 18, performing Rachmaninoff’s Second Piano Concerto, broadcast on ABC Classic FM and SBS television. She has been a soloist with the Melbourne Symphony, Israel Symphony, John Hopkins Symphony, Western Australia Youth Symphony, Melbourne Symphonia, and Marroondah Symphony orchestras and has performed extensively in Australia, United States, Israel, Switzerland, Italy, Holland and England.

A Fulbright Scholar, Sonya studied under the legendary pianist-conductor Leon Fleisher at the Peabody Conservatory of Music (John Hopkins University, USA) and holds a PhD in creative practice from the University of Melbourne. Sonya is currently a Lecturer in Music Performance and Convenor of Creative Practice at the University of New South Wales and is a regular ABC Classic FM presenter.





Wed 1 Dec, 11am
The Concourse, Chatswood

Bernadette Harvey, Harry Bennetts & Miles Mullin-Chivers



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ABOUT THE MUSIC

Brahms dedicated his Six Pieces for Piano, Op. 118 to Clara Schumann, and they would prove to be not just his penultimate works for piano, but also his penultimate published works as a whole. They consist primarily of Intermezzi, with a Ballade and a Romanze thrown in. But the titles are misleading. There's little that's 'intermezzo-like' in pieces that Max Kalbeck believed to be part of a symphony, or that Clara mistook for a movement from a sonata.

Brahms was writing here for his own personal pleasure, so had no need to stick to traditional forms, and called these pieces whatever seemed right at the time, irrespective of strict definitions. No 1 in A minor, for instance, is stormier and more intense than any traditional intermezzo, while the opening to the second Intermezzo, in A major, is one of the most beautiful melodies in all the late piano pieces.

ADAPTED FROM A PROGRAM NOTE
© MARTIN BUZACOTT 2018

The **Bach** revival of the 19th century began with a performance of the *St Matthew Passion* in Berlin in 1829, conducted by the 20-year-old Felix Mendelssohn. It reached its stride at mid-century with the founding, by Robert Schumann and others, of the Bach-Gesellschaft, a society tasked with the publication of Bach's complete works. Over the next 50 years, European musicians had ever-greater access, at a pace of almost one new volume a year, to the complete range of Bach's creative output: cantatas, chamber

music, concertos, and orchestral suites, as well as works for harpsichord, clavichord and organ – the whole lot of it. Only one problem remained: getting the public on their side. The most popular solo instrument of the 19th century, both on the concert stage and in the family home, was the piano, and while Bach wrote for virtually every performing instrument of his time, the piano was not one of them. The piano only began to overtake the harpsichord in popularity in the 1770s, a good 20 years after Bach's death, so any work by Bach played on the steel-framed, three-pedalled 19th-century piano, with its wide range of dynamics and tonal colours, was by definition a *transcription*.

And the transcribers were many. Each saw in Bach the figure that most appealed to his own individual aesthetic outlook. The virtuoso pianist Ferruccio Busoni saw the prototype of the Romantic hero, a lonely, moody, solitary figure capable of making the stone walls of his great church tremble with the force of his musical personality. Brahms, who became a subscriber to the Bach Gesellschaft edition in 1856, took another view. For him, Bach was a musical craftsman whose surpassing merit resided deep in the formal structures of his scores, not in their surface effect.

His transcription of the Chaconne from Bach's *Partita in D minor for Solo Violin* BWV1004 is thus an attempt to reproduce, as faithfully as possible, the sound of the violin on the piano. And in keeping with the severity of his approach, he wrote for the left hand alone, in order to reproduce

for the performing pianist the challenges this polyphonic work would have originally posed for the solo violinist.

These challenges were not trivial. The chaconne is a musical form in which a thematic core, conceived of as a succession of chords, serves as the harmonic foundation for a series of variations. Bach's Chaconne opens with a stern and resolute chord pattern in the distinctive rhythmic profile of a Sarabande, with emphasis on the second beat of the bar. The work has a rough three-part design, beginning with 33 varied restatements in the minor mode, 19 in the major mode, and finally 12 more in the minor.

The majestic architecture and encyclopedic breadth of this work foreshadow the artistic heights that Bach was to scale in his *Goldberg Variations* and *Well-Tempered Clavichord*. Those used to hearing the Chaconne played in the more popular Busoni transcription will hear a new work in this rendition, one much more dependent on the musician's ability to convey with fewer notes the greatness of its musical design through nuances of phrasing, dynamics, and expressive detail.

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VANCOUVER RECITAL SOCIETY

Pianist Lambert Orkis writes:

During the 1970s, as pianist of the University of Pennsylvania's Penn Contemporary Players in Philadelphia and

Washington's 20th Century Consort, I often played the works of American composer **George Crumb** which gave me ample opportunity to refine my execution of his concept of the 'Extended Keyboard' – the designation which came to imply that the performer would directly manipulate the strings and other parts of the interior of the piano in order to produce sounds not normally associated with that instrument.

Mr Crumb was pleased with my performance of his works, especially my rendering of the extended keyboard sections, and decided to 'gift' me with his *A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979*.

The work is loosely based upon frescoes in the Arena Chapel in Padua, Italy, painted by the Renaissance artist Giotto, and gives aural representations of major elements of the Christmas story. This evening's performance features four movements selected from the full suite of seven. The solemn yet joyous meeting of Mary and Elizabeth (*The Visitation*) is depicted with mysterious chords interrupted with music of jubilation. There is a hushed lullaby to the baby Jesus (*Berceuse*) which evokes a sense of quiet wonder that returns with a creative rendition of the Coventry Carol in *Canticle of the Holy Night*. The work comes to a jubilant conclusion with the representations of clanging bells and a recapitulation of the joyous motif of the opening movement.

Throughout the work, the pianist interpolates extended keyboard techniques as well as the imaginative use of pedalling to create a sonic landscape of great luminosity and subtle colour.

Since my premiere and first recording of the piece, I have been pleased to learn that the work has been performed by many fine pianists throughout the world. I hope that you, the listener, can share in the deep sense of wonder the we pianists feel when performing this unique and exquisitely beautiful composition.

ADAPTED FROM A PROGRAM NOTE
© LAMBERT ORKIS

In 1905, Brno was in turmoil. On 1 October, the city's Czech-speaking residents took to the streets in protest, calling for a university in their native language. Troops were mustered to repress the situation, but violence ensued: František Pavlík, a 20-year-old Moravian carpenter, was bayoneted to death. Outraged by the senseless tragedy, **Leoš Janáček** composed a Piano Sonata in memory of the ill-fated worker.

But Janáček was ruthlessly self-critical, his temperament impulsive and irascible. The Sonata's third movement was incinerated, and the remaining movements were subsequently tossed into the Vltava River in the wake of the premiere, which evidently did little to mitigate the composer's crippling self doubt. Many years later, as he celebrated his 70th birthday, Janáček discovered that Ludmila Tučková (the pianist who had given the premiere some 18 years earlier) had made a copy of the manuscript. Relieved, Janáček sanctioned publication of the two movements as the Piano Sonata *I.X.1905*.

The first movement, *Foreboding*, begins pianissimo, with arpeggiated tonic triads underpinning a keening melody. An imitative dialogue ensues, before the harmony begins to undulate portentously. Tumbling octaves evoke a sense of scrambling panic, before the texture is saturated in chromaticism. The melody is all but lost amid the noise, as if depicting a solitary human voice – once clear and articulate, now smothered by the crowd. Pregnant rests heighten the drama at the movement's end, before it comes to rest on the tonic triad.

Death, the slow second movement, retains the key of E-flat minor, with a plaintive four-note motif permeating every phrase, expanding and contracting like the rhythms of Czech speech. Spasmodic eruptions and a tremolo-like left hand build the tension but, like the preceding movement, it all ends in the darkness of a receding whisper.

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Discover Musica Viva



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