

WEDS@7 Aleck Karis, piano

October 5, 2016 – 7:00 p.m.
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall

Études, book I (1915) Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
I. pour les “cinq doigts”: d’après Monsieur Czerny
II. pour les Tierces
III. pour les Quartes
IV. pour les Sixtes
V. pour les Octaves
VI. pour les huit doigts

Exégesis sobre La Galatea (2016) Victor Ibarra (b. 1978)

Intermission

The moon is following us (2015) Lei Liang (b. 1972)

Harrison’s Clocks (1998) Harrison Birtwistle (b. 1934)
I
II
III
IV
V

Six Études, book I (1915)

Debussy wrote his twelve études in the summer of 1915, while enjoying a brief period of remission from the cancer which would take his life three years later. They are his final works for piano. Dedicated to Chopin, whose études also fall into two sets, they are rigorous compositional studies more than they are virtuoso vehicles. Debussy kept abreast of new musical developments (he particularly admired Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*), and his études are forward-looking – experimental even. They are more abstract and less pictorial than most of his earlier piano music, and had a strong influence on Messiaen, Boulez, and others. The Book I études follow a logical order, beginning with a study for the “five fingers” and then following with explorations of expanding intervals: thirds, fourths, sixths, and octaves. The set concludes with “for the eight fingers.” The first étude is a light-hearted homage to Czerny, with simple five-note figures giving way to colourful, imaginative, playful flights. The interval studies make an interesting contrast to Chopin's études in thirds, sixths and octaves (he did not write one in fourths). Debussy's are slower, and range more widely in colour and mood, and as much as possible he restricts himself to the featured interval in both hands. This means that the harmonies are largely determined by vertical treatments of the intervals. The final étude, for the “eight fingers,” is based on four-note scalar figures, to be played without use of the thumbs.

– Aleck Karis

Exégesis sobre La Galatea (2016)

Exégesis sobre La Galatea, for solo piano, was written thanks to the support of the National System of Art Creators for Aleck Karis. It was commissioned by the International Cervantino Festival within its 44th edition, dedicated precisely to Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, in the 400th year of his death.

As indicated by its title, *Exégesis* is a personal interpretation of *La Galatea* (Cervantes' first novel published in 1585); specifically of Galatea's sonnet in the sixth and last book. This interpretation comes from the assimilation of the poem, trying to present a musical equivalence to it. Although not in the pursuit of an objective, audible similarity, out of the de-codification of the text, but quite the opposite: by conceiving the organization of a piece from a given literary structure that allows the message's undertone, in an intuitive way - and to the extent possible - to sink in.

Tanto cuanto el amor convida y llama
al alma con sus gustos de apariencia,
tanto más huye su mortal dolencia
quien sabe el nombre que le da la fama.

Y el pecho opuesto a su amorosa llama,
armado de una honesta resistencia,
poco puede empecerle su inclemencia,
poco su fuego y su rigor le inflama.

Segura está, quien nunca fue querida
ni supo querer bien, de aquella lengua
que en su deshonra se adelgaza y lima;
mas si el querer y el no querer da mengua,
¿en qué ejercicios pasará la vida

la que más que al vivir la honra estima?

E'en as Love ever seeks the soul to entame,
Tempting it by the semblance of delight,
E'en so she from Love's deadly pangs in flight
Turneth, who knows its name bestowed by fame.

The breast that doth oppose his amorous flame,
The breast with honourable resistance armed,
By Love's unkindness is but little harmed,
Little his fire and rigour doth inflame.

Secure is she who never was beloved,
Nor could love, from that tongue which in dispraise
Of her honour, with subtle glow doth gleam.
But if to love and not to love have proved
Fruitful in harm, how shall she spend her days

Who honour dearer e'en than life doth deem?

– Victor Ibarra

***The moon is following us* (2015)**

The moon is following us is based on a folk song that is personally meaningful to me, for I learned it when I was growing up in Beijing, China. The song, *Shangqu gaoshan wang pingchuan*, sings of the high mountains in Qinghai province.

In this rendition, the folk song is reinterpreted through a variety of means. With the aid of technology, one can “enter” the interior of the song. A voice becomes a multitude of voices, heard at diffused distances. A melody becomes a landscape, and the composer a traveler traversing through its inner terrain.

The title is from a casual remark made by my 5-year-old son Albert. I imagine taking Albert for a stroll through a landscape - both aural and visual - just as my parents did with me in my childhood.

The moon is following us was commissioned by Ewell Concert Series, College of William and Mary. Pianist Yin Zheng gave its world premiere on April 10, 2015 at Ewell Recital Hall, the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia.

– Lei Liang

Harrison's Clocks (1998)

The title of these five musical timepieces refers to the 18th century clockmaker John Harrison whose struggle to develop the first reliable navigational chronometer is related in Dava Sobel's book *Longitude*. The work continues the composer's preoccupation with time and the idea of musical mechanisms.

– Harrison Birtwistle

ALECK KARIS has performed recitals, chamber music, and concertos across the Americas, Europe, Japan, and China. As the pianist of the new music ensemble Speculum Musicae he has participated in over a hundred premieres and performed at major American and European festivals. His appearances with orchestra have ranged from concertos by Mozart, Beethoven and Chopin to those of Stravinsky, Messiaen and Carter. His six solo discs on Bridge Records include Chopin/Carter/Schumann, Mozart, Stravinsky, Cage, Feldman/Webern/Wolpe, and Poulenc. His two discs on Roméo Records are Music of Philip Glass and Late Chopin. His recording of Feldman's last work, "Piano, Violin, Viola, Cello" was listed as one of the top 25 classical releases of 2015 in the New York Times and one of the 10 best contemporary releases of 2015 in the Sunday Times of London. Of his recent Poulenc disc, Icon magazine wrote: "Aleck Karis plays with dazzling, radiant, detail throughout." He has studied with William Daghlian, Artur Balsam and Beveridge Webster, and is a distinguished professor of music at the University of California San Diego.

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