

THE SCHOOL OF MUSIC, THEATRE, AND DANCE PRESENTS

VIRTUOSO SERIES CONCERT

Hyeji Seo

PIANO

The Music We Write:
THE LEGENDS

OCTOBER 21, 2024 7:30 P.M.

ORGAN RECITAL HALL



**COLORADO STATE
UNIVERSITY**

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VIRTUOSO SERIES CONCERT: HYEJI SEO, PIANO

THE MUSIC WE WRITE: THE LEGENDS

MONDAY, OCTOBER 21, 7:30 P.M., ORGAN RECITAL HALL

PROGRAM

Trois pièces pour piano

Mel Bonis (1858-1937)

Phœbé, op.30,
Viviane, op. 80,
Salomé, op. 101/1

Dreaming, op. 15 no. 3

Amy Beach (1867-1944)

From Blackbirds Hills, op. 83

(An Omaha Tribal Dance)

Suite pour Piano (romantique)

Young Ja Lee (b. 1931)

INTERMISSION

Trois Romances, Op. 11

Clara Schumann (1819-1896)

Nocturno Nazqueño

Gabriela Lena Frank (b. 1972)

Fantasie Nègre No. 1

Florence Price (1887-1953)

Trois pièces pour piano by Mel Bonis

Mel Bonis (1858-1937) was a prolific French late-Romantic composer who wrote over 300 works, including piano pieces, chamber music, choral works, and songs. Despite showing early musical talent and studying at the Paris Conservatoire with luminaries like César Franck, Bonis faced significant obstacles as a female composer in the late 19th century, leading her to publish works under the gender-neutral pseudonym “Mel Bonis”.

In 1909, Mel Bonis published a collection of three evocative character pieces for solo piano titled “Trois pièces pour piano”. Dedicated to the composer Paul Locard, this set included: Phœbé, op.30, Viviane, op. 80, Salemé, op.101/1. Each piece in the set depicts a legendary female figure, presenting Bonis’s gift for musical portraiture and poetic expression at the piano.

Viviane portrays the fairy of the lake. A charming, dance-like theme represents Viviane’s grace, while majestic chords and fluid harmonies depict her underwater castle and power.

Phœbé evokes the moon goddess in a nocturnal atmosphere suffused with a sense of the ethereal, languor, and vastness. The unsynchronized rhythms between the hands reinforce the feeling of otherworldliness.

Salomé, inspired by the biblical character, is characterized by sensual, mysterious, and violent moods. Bonis juxtaposes elements like slow syncopations, delicate glissandos, chant-like passages, and surprising tempo changes to capture Salomé’s complex personality.

In 1913, Bonis expanded the set by adding two more pieces, Desdémona (op. 101) and Mélisande (op. 109), to create a five-piece collection. Much later in 2003, musicologist Christine Géliot gathered seven of Bonis’s character pieces composed between 1909-1925, including the original “Trois pièces”, into a set titled “Femmes de légende” (Women of Legend).

The 1909 “Trois pièces pour piano” marks the beginning of Bonis’s fascinating musical portraits of legendary women. These expressive works show the poetry, rich harmonies, and impressionistic colors that define her unique compositional style.

Dreaming and From Blackbird Hills by Amy Beach

Amy Marcy Cheney Beach (1867-1944) was a pioneering American composer and pianist who defied gender barriers to achieve remarkable success. A child prodigy, she became the first American woman to have a symphony performed by a major orchestra and developed a distinctive style that blended Romantic tradition with American influences. Beach's legacy as a composer, pianist, and advocate for women in music continues to inspire musicians today.

"Dreaming" is a short character piece for solo piano composed by Amy Beach in 1892, as part of her set of four sketches Op. 15. The work opens with a gentle, rocking figure in the left hand that evokes the hazy, drifting quality of a dream state, over which Beach introduces a wistful, yearning melody. The music gradually builds in intensity, as if the dream is becoming more vivid and emotionally charged, with a contrasting middle section that takes on a more agitated character before subsiding.

Throughout "Dreaming", Beach demonstrates her mastery of the piano's expressive capabilities, using voicing, dynamics, and pacing to create a sense of atmosphere and story. The piece exemplifies her early style, which often focused on short, poetic forms that explored a single idea or emotional state. While perhaps not as well-known as some of her larger works, "Dreaming" remains a favorite of both pianists and audiences for its beautiful melodic writing and its ability to evoke a powerful mood within a compact framework.

"From Blackbird Hills" is a character piece for solo piano composed in 1922. The work is subtitled "An Omaha Tribal Dance" and depicts a scene from Native American life.

The main theme of the piece is based on the steady drumbeat and stomping feet of children dancing in a ring. Beach creates a vivid atmosphere, with the pounding rhythms in the bass suggesting the drums and dance steps. The central Adagio molto section takes a more pensive tone - here Beach imagined tribal elders "looking sadly over the shoulders of the happy living children at play", perhaps remembering their own youth.

Suite pour Piano (romantique) by Young-Ja Lee

The Suite pour Piano (romantique) is a captivating work for solo piano by the renowned Korean composer Young-Ja Lee. Born in 1931, Lee is considered one of the most important and influential Korean composers of Western classical music. Her works combine elements from French, West African, Indonesian gamelan, and traditional Korean music to create

fascinating intercultural compositions. The *Suite pour Piano (romantique)* stands as an early example of Lee's innovative style and her pioneering efforts to forge a new Korean classical music tradition.

Composed in 1967, the *Suite pour Piano (romantique)* consists of five evocative movements, each with a descriptive French title, *Histoire (History)*, *Melancolie (Melancholy)*, *Le Moulin (The Mill)*, *Caprice* and *Le pays du Matin Calm (The country of the Calm Morning)*. Throughout the *Suite pour Piano (romantique)*, Young-Ja Lee showed her distinctive compositional voice, one that bridges Korean and Western musical traditions. Especially, the last movement, 'the country of the Calm Morning' is a poetic name of Korea that she used in the piece. Her imaginative writing for the piano is both idiomatic and evocative, demanding both technical mastery and artistic sensitivity from the performer.

Trois Romances, Op. 11 by Clara Schumann

Clara Schumann was a renowned pianist and composer of the Romantic era, known for her virtuosic and expressive piano playing. Her piano writing demonstrates her exceptional technical skill and musical sensitivity, with works like her *Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 7*, and her *Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 17*, featuring demanding passagework, striking dynamic contrasts, and lyrical melodies.

Trois Romances, Op. 11 is a set of three-character pieces for solo piano composed in 1838-1839. This piece shows Clara Schumann's development as a composer in her late teens, revealing her growing maturity and unique artistic voice.

The romances were written during a difficult period in Clara's life when her father Friedrich Wieck separated her from her fiancé Robert Schumann. Despite this challenge, the 19-year-old Clara found solace in composing these emotionally charged pieces and dedicated them to Robert.

Romance No. 1 in E-flat minor (Andante)

The first romance conveys a sense of melancholy and unrest, reflecting the emotional turmoil Clara was experiencing. The E-flat minor sets the tone for this introspective piece, as it is often associated with feelings of deep sorrow and distress.

Romance No. 2 in G minor (Andante - Allegro passionato)

The second romance, in G minor, is regarded as the emotional centerpiece of the set. Robert

Schumann was deeply affected by this piece, feeling it reaffirmed his belief that he and Clara were meant to be together. The romance opens with a melancholic, syncopated melody that gradually intensifies, leading into an impassioned Allegro section. It then returns to the initial theme, demonstrating Clara's ability to express deep emotions through her compositions.

Romance No. 3 in A-flat major (Moderato - Animato)

The final romance provides a more uplifting conclusion to the set. The A-flat major key lends a sense of warmth and contentment, while the Moderato tempo allows for moments of tender lyricism. An animated middle section adds contrast before the romance comes to a gentle close, perhaps signifying a glimmer of hope amidst the challenges Clara faced.

Nocturno Nazqueño by Gabriela Lena Frank

Gabriela Lena Frank is an acclaimed American composer and pianist known for drawing inspiration from her multicultural background, especially her mother's Peruvian heritage. Born in Berkeley, California to a mother of Peruvian/Chinese ancestry and a father of Lithuanian/Jewish descent, Frank's works often incorporate Latin American musical styles, poetry, and mythology within a Western classical framework. She has received numerous awards including a Latin Grammy and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

"Nocturno Nazqueño" is a solo piano work inspired by the ancient geoglyphs of the Nazca region in Peru. These massive, enigmatic designs were etched into the Peruvian desert over 1500 years ago.

Frank masterfully brings the mysterious spirit of the Nazca lines through evocative and colorful writing for the piano. The music opens with a haunting melody that shimmers with an atmospheric accompaniment, perhaps depicting the desert landscape under the night sky. As the piece unfolds, pentatonic motives and syncopated rhythms characteristic of Andean music are woven into the texture. Frank's virtuosic and idiomatic writing for the piano exploits the instrument's full expressive range. Intricate passagework and striking dynamic contrasts create a vivid soundscape. The music builds to several dramatic climaxes before settling into a contemplative epilogue.

“Nocturno Nazqueño” shows Gabriela Lena Frank’s distinctive compositional voice, grounded in her creative exploration of Latin American musical traditions. With this captivating work, she transports the listener to an ancient time and place, offering a musical reflection on one of Peru’s most fascinating archaeological treasures.

The piece was commissioned for the New York International Piano Competition. It stands as a great example of Frank’s imaginative and expressive musical language that has established her as one of the leading voices in American classical music today.

Fantasie Nègre No. 1 in E minor by Florence Price

Florence Price (1887-1953) was a groundbreaking African American composer who became the first black woman to have a symphony performed by a major American orchestra when the Chicago Symphony premiered her Symphony No. 1 in 1933. Price’s music brilliantly fuses the European classical tradition in which she was trained with the melodies of African American spirituals and folk tunes.

Composed in 1929, the Fantasie Nègre No. 1 in E minor is one of Price’s most ambitious early works for solo piano. The piece was dedicated to Price’s student, composer Margaret Bonds, and combines classical European and African American musical styles. The main melody that recurs throughout is from the spiritual “Please Don’t Let This Harvest Pass.”

The work opens with an expansive, quasi-improvised introduction. Price’s harmonic language draws from late Romanticism, while rhythmically she incorporates patterns like the Juba dance from West Africa, reflecting her African American heritage.

A contrasting G major middle section provides a moment of radiant warmth before the piece returns to the brooding E minor tonality. The spiritual melody is harmonized in different guises upon each return, culminating in a virtuosic chromatic passage that builds to the impassioned climax.

In the Fantasie Nègre, Price achieves a distinctive and masterful synthesis of her classical training and the African American musical traditions she cherished. As one of the first works to showcase her unique compositional voice, it paved the way for Price’s future success in breaking barriers for black women composers.



A Korean-born pianist, **HYEJI SEO** was praised by her beautiful ‘cantabile’ lyricism and singing tone melody. She is a versatile pianist in solo and collaborative piano.

As a solo pianist, Seo made her debut at the Carnegie Weill Recital Hall in New York in 2016. She was invited to perform across continents, including Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, Belgium, Encore Series in Jacopone da Todi, Italy, Kimmel Art Center, Philadelphia, Miller Theatre and William Stewart Memorial Shell in Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp, Michigan, among others.

Her performances were internationally acclaimed in competitions such as American Protégé International Piano and String Competition, International Music Competition ‘Brussels’ Grand Prize Virtuoso, the Ise-Shima International Piano Competition in Japan, and the Bradshaw & Buono International Piano Competition in the USA. She was invited to serve as adjudicator at MTNA Colorado Competition, and International Keyboard Odysiad & Festival.

Seo has performed with orchestras in Seoul National University, Sookmyung Women’s University, and Western Illinois University. She has also been invited to perform at the Piano Gala Concert for the 110th anniversary founding of Sookmyung Women’s University, Gala Concert at Triumph Music Festival, EOULIM Concert Series, and the Young Artist Debut Concert sponsored by Music Education News in Seoul, Korea.

Her dedication to promoting new and underrepresented music shows in projects, featuring the works by lesser-known composers from diverse backgrounds. Her current concert series, *The Music We Write* features on music from Asian, female, and culturally diverse composers, presenting their unique identities and cultures. In 2023, she premiered *Arari* for piano and oboe which was commissioned by Korean Society of Women Composers.

She is a dynamic and sought-after collaborative pianist and chamber musician. Recently, she performed at the 56th International Horn Symposium, 53rd International Double Reed Society, Colorado Flute Fair and Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp in Michigan. Her extensive experience spans a wide spectrum of instrumental, vocal, choral, symphonic, chamber, and opera production, collaborating with professional musicians and guest artists alike. She coached in Michigan State University, Western Illinois University, and Centro Studi Carlo Della Giacoma Encore Series in Italy.

As a lecturer, she gave presentations and lectures at the College Music Society, Music Teachers National Association, Collegiate Chapters, Music by Women International Festival, and Women Composers Festival of Hartford. She is a passionate educator and she taught applied piano, piano ensemble, collaborative piano and chamber music. Her teaching experience spans institutions like Colorado State University, Sookmyung Women's University, Seoul, Michigan State University, Western Illinois University, St. Pius X School, and Expressions Music Academy, Michigan.

She holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Piano Performance, a master's degree in Collaborative Piano from Michigan State University, and bachelor's and master's degrees from Sookmyung Women's University and Western Illinois University, respectively. During her studies, she has been fully supported by Graduate Assistantship, Ralph Votapek Scholarship, and Dixon Collaborative Pianist Award. Her primary piano education was with Kyungmi Kim, Hyesoo Jeon, Tammie Walker, Zhihua Tang, and Deborah Moriarty. She has furthered her studies with Hae Sun Paik, Alan Chow, Zhe Tang, Robert Roux, Michael Lewin, Klaus Schilde, Sontraud Speidel, Aviram Reichert, and Laurent Cabasso.

In 2018, Seo joined the faculty at Colorado State University as an instructor of collaborative piano, where she continues to share her love for music and performance with students and audiences alike. Her dedication to music education and her passion for the piano remain at the core of her artistic journey.

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