DMA Recital I

**Aljoša Jurinić, Piano**

May 19, 2022 at 7:30 pm
Walter Hall

**PROGRAMME**

Blumenleben, Op. 19 (Flowers’ Life)  
Dora Pejačević  
(1885-1923)

I. Schneeglöckchen (Snowdrops)
II. Veilchen (Violets)
III. Maiglöckchen (Lilies of the Valley)
IV. Vergißmeinnicht (Forget-me-nots)
V. Rose (Rose)
VI. Rote Nelken (Red Carnations)

Piano Sonata No. 21 in C major, Op. 53 (“Waldstein”)  
Ludwig van Beethoven  
(1770-1827)

Allegro con brio
Introduzione. Adagio molto
Rondo. Allegretto moderato – Prestissimo

**INTERMISSION**

Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23  
Frédéric Chopin  
(1810-1849)

Ballade No. 2 in F major, Op. 38

Ballade No. 3 in A flat major, Op. 47

Ballade No. 4 in F minor, Op. 52

This recital is in partial fulfilment of the Doctor of Musical Arts in Performance.

Aljoša Jurinić is a student of Dr. James Parker.

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.
Biography

Hailed as "a startlingly subtle and visionary pianist" with "a rare blend of charm and mastery", Aljoša Jurinić has established himself on the international stage at the world’s preeminent piano competitions. Best known for winning the 2012 International Robert Schumann Competition in the composer’s hometown of Zwickau, he was also a laureate at the 2016 Queen Elisabeth Piano Competition and the 2018 Leeds International Piano Competition, as well as a finalist at the 2015 International Chopin Piano Competition. Aljoša Jurinić has appeared as a soloist and with orchestras at prominent venues, such as the Carnegie Hall, Wiener Musikverein, Salle Cortot, Gasteig, Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall, Osaka Symphony Hall, La Sala Verdi, BOZAR Brussels, Lisinski Concert Hall, Kolarac, and others. In 2019, the president of Croatia awarded him the Order of the Morning Star for outstanding achievements in culture and the international promotion of his country.
Born in Budapest and residing mostly in Našice, Zagreb, and Munich, the Croatian composer Dora Pejačević lived in a single country throughout most of her life, although today those cities would belong to three different countries with three different languages. As a member of the aristocratic and influential family, Pejačević was privileged, but as a woman, she was not encouraged to become a composer, hence she was mostly self-taught. Although she died shortly after giving birth aged 38, she managed to leave an oeuvre of 57 published works, among which Blumenleben is one of the most beloved. Consisting of eight fleeting miniatures, the set delicately describes each of the flowers, vanishing just as momentum is gained. In a true late Romantic fashion, these gems experiment with harmonic progression while never venturing into abstraction. As the trends of the late 19th century music shifted towards realism and nationalism, fed by industrialism, and despite serving as a nurse in World War I and living in an area of peak nation-state aspirations, Pejačević didn't use her music to further any cause, but as a medium to communicate her extraordinary gifts in shaping her spirit into sounds, saying: “When I’m floating off into this invisible world of my most personal and inner thoughts, only then do I become my real self.”

The year 1804 was extremely important in the trajectory of Western classical music – Ludwig van Beethoven wrote his pivotal Eroica symphony innovating in symphonic form, length, harmony, emotional, and cultural content. Albeit in reduced scope, his Piano Sonata No. 21 did all that and effectively reshaped the genre of a piano sonata into a composition of greater freedom and unity. Surrounded by majestic outer movements, the second movement serves as an introduction to the last one, but it wasn’t always the case. The original movement – now a standalone piece Andante favori – was deemed to make the sonata too long and reluctantly substituted by Beethoven. Both the first and the last movement begin with a pianissimo melody, but vastly deviate from there: Allegro con brio proceeds in a sonata form and develops in a vigorous manner while unusually keeping the quiet dynamics for large stretches. In the last movement, the pianissimo opening is reserved for a lyrical first theme that is interspersed with the second theme and episodes that are both much faster and louder. The coda is very fast, light, and exciting – thus bridging the motivic content of the finale with the character of the opening movement.

1804 was also the year in which Napoleon crowned himself an emperor, which escalated the Napoleonic Wars that pitted the French Empire primarily against Austria, Prussia, and Russia. All three are the places of origin of the composers in this recital – when they were born, Pejačević’s Croatia didn’t exist, Beethoven’s Germany didn’t exist, and Chopin’s Poland was divided by those three powers. Yet, Chopin’s music is widely considered quintessentially “Polish”.

Without a clear predecessor or successor, Frédéric Chopin stands in the music pantheon like an isolated peak. His four ballades were composed between 1831 and 1842, thus bookending his most creative period and neatly summarizing the increasing complexity, chromaticism, and polyphony of his works. The textural difference is particularly evident between the first two (written in 1836-1839) and the last two ballades
(written in 1841-1843): the former two are transparent in the manner of their contemporary early nocturnes and waltzes, while the latter two have more in common with the denser Fantaisie, Op. 49 and other later works. These pieces are separated from each other but do share some elements, most notably a “ballade form” that slightly modulates an established sonata form by presenting two main themes in the opposite order in the recapitulation. Significantly, they are also mostly written in a 3-beat metre that complements their exquisite depth with dance-like elements. The sonata form remained an important tool in the 19th century composition, but by the 1830s, composers largely shifted from writing sonatas to “character pieces” that typically express a certain mood or extramusical content. Some have argued that Chopin’s ballades are inspired by the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz’s work, but there is no evidence to back that up and it is reasonable to assume that in line with his other works, Chopin’s ballades are an example of the absolute music. Ballade No. 1 is one of the best-known piano compositions in general and was a major feature of the Oscar-winning film The Pianist (2002). Its ubiquity poses a particular difficulty for any performer both implicitly and explicitly. How to separate a personal idea from an established tradition and how to offer an original interpretation without going too far from what the listeners already have ingrained in their brains after hearing the piece many times. Not the least of the difficulties lies in the very beginning: A G minor work that doesn’t begin in G minor, or any key for that matter, should arrive at the tonic with a kind of awe, but that is constrained by the fact that the audience knows what to expect. In fact, all four of the ballades take some time to lead us into a comfortable melodic and harmonic pattern. All of them also contain vastly contrasting parts, especially the Ballade No. 2, alternating between a divine Andantino melody and a passionate Presto con fuoco. Dedicated to Robert Schumann, it also resembles Schumann’s dueling alter-egos Florestan and Eusebius, although we don’t know how much of Schumann’s music Chopin knew at the time. All of the ballades are emotionally compact, progressively generating more and more excitement, particularly the Ballade No. 3, slowly building to its climax without ever looking back. The third ballade opens with a contrapuntal introductory material that immediately presents texture that is more densely woven into the melodic pattern than anything in the previous two ballades. A pinnacle of not only Chopin’s music but 19th century music as a whole, the Ballade No. 4 is a stunning work of such effortless complexity that no epithet would serve as a worthy epitaph. It begins with a striking repeated G for a work in F minor that evolves into a broad melody. What comes next is an amalgam of themes in a bel canto style, wave-like passages, small fugues, avant-garde chromaticism, and a fiery coda that serves as the end of the piece but feels like the end of the world.