

JUNIOR PIANO RECITAL

featuring

Jet Stephen Chong



performing works by

CHOPIN, DEBUSSY
and VINE



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Jet Stephen Co Chong

Piano Recital

Programme

DEBUSSY

Estampes, L.100

I. *Pagodes*

II. *La soirée dans Grenade*

III. *Jardins sous la pluie*

CHOPIN

Barcarolle in F-sharp Major, Op. 60

CARL VINE

Toccatissimo

About The Performer

Jet Stephen Chong is a Filipino Chinese pianist who started taking lessons at the age of five. He has bagged many prizes in several piano competitions, including the National Music Competition for Young Artists (NAMCYA), the Piano Teachers' Guild of the Philippines Foundation Incorporated (PTGPFI), and the UCSI International Piano Competition. He has played with orchestras several times, like when he had his orchestral debut at age 15 with the Manila Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Prof. Aries Caces and when he played the Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto with the ABS-CBN Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Gerard Salonga in 2019. Jet has given solo recitals in the Cultural Center of the Philippines and in Steinway Boutique Manila. He was also an active participant of the Taiwan International Maestro Piano Festival in 2017, Yong Siew Toh Conservatory's Piano Academy and the Manila International Piano Masterclasses Festival in 2018. Before entering Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, he was studying under Ms. Mary Evans Villalon and Mr. Anthony Say. Currently, he is a third year piano major in the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music under the tutelage of Assoc. Prof. Albert Tiu.

Programme Notes

DEBUSSY

Estampes, L.100

I. *Pagodes*

II. *La soirée dans Grenade*

III. *Jardins sous la pluie*

Although Debussy disliked being labeled as an Impressionist composer, one cannot deny that he paints like the visual artists of his era but with sound, creating musical landscapes guided by descriptive and poetic titles. In fact, this set of three musical "prints" is dedicated to his friend, painter Jacques-Émile Blanche, who has done two of Debussy's portraits. Composed in the summer of 1903 while he was staying in Bichain in the north of Burgundy, the set is considered to be the start of a new phase in Debussy's compositional style where he started exploring new sounds and developed a new approach to the piano, which became more solidified in his later compositions, *Images* and *Preludes*.

Debussy wrote in a letter to André Messager at that time, "If one cannot afford to travel, one substitutes the imagination", possibly referring to this musical triptych which illustrates the scenic places in the way he imagined them through music.

Pagodes (Pagodas) brings us to East Asia as it refers to a tiered tower with multiple eaves which can be found in the region and in the Japanese wood prints that Debussy came across.

However, the piece is inspired by Indonesian gamelan music which Debussy first witnessed in the Paris World Conference Exhibition in 1889, apparent in the use of the pentatonic scale and its similarity of motifs and texture to a Javanese gamelan ensemble. In the piece, one can hear the big gong that starts off each phrase in the bass, high sounding metallophones that decorate the top registers, a set of smaller sized gong-like instrument that does oscillating patterns, and the melody that usually occurs in the middle register played by the sarong, a metallophone that provides the core melody in the gamelan orchestra.

Leading us to the Southern part of Spain, *La soirée dans Grenade* (Evening in Granada) takes place in the Andalusian region that is known for having clear cultural traces of the Moorish occupation, specifically in its medieval architecture. Thus, the piece uses the Arabic scale and shows hints of guitar strumming and people dancing in the evening, all in the perspective of a pair of drowsy eyes. Underneath almost the entire piece is a graceful and lilting habanera rhythm. Despite Debussy having not much exposure to Spain at the time that this was composed, Spanish composer Manuel de Falla said the following of the movement:

"There is not even one measure of this music borrowed from the Spanish folklore, and yet the entire composition in its most minute details, conveys admirably Spain."

Finally, we go full circle with the *Jardins sous la pluie* (Gardens in the Rain) by going back to France as Debussy quoted French folk melodies, namely *Nous n'irons plus aux bois* (We'll Not Return to the Woods) and *Dodo, l'enfant dort* (Sleep, Child, Sleep). According to some sources, the piece specifically refers to the gardens in the Normandy town of Orbec, located in the Northwestern region near the coast. Thus, it has the type of climate which makes it humid, windy, and raining for many days of the year. Through this piece, Debussy paints a heavy rainstorm with clear raindrops and strong winds dancing through the leaves and branches in the gardens. However, another source stated that a scene recalled by the painter Jacques-Emile Blanche while doing a portrait of the composer one rainy afternoon was what inspired Debussy:

"I was in Auteuil, out of doors, and sketched an initial study of his head. It started to rain, and the trees gave his face a greenish tinge which the rain seemed to cover as though with enamel."

CHOPIN

Barcarolle in F-sharp Major, Op. 60

Composed between 1845 and 1846 while going through a fatal illness and an unhappy relationship with the writer George Sand, the piece is one of Chopin's last expansive works as it was written three years before his death, making it his only barcarolle ever composed. A combination of two Italian words, *barca* or boat, and *rollo* or rower, the barcarolle refers to a romantic song sung by Venetian gondoliers accompanied by a gentle and rocking rhythm. It was such a well-known song form in the 19th century used by many composers like Mendelssohn, Liszt, and Faure but Chopin's withstood the test of time and remains prevalent to this day for it is anything but a gentle boat song.

After a grand introductory passage, the piece unravels a gently-rocking ostinato that can be likened to the flow of Venice's Grand Canal. It is then topped by a romantic and pensive melody sung in the style of Italian *bel canto*, usually doubled in thirds or sixths. In leading to the A major section, the passage brings to mind a gondola going through an unlit tunnel, with the view of the edge of an ocean slowly getting bigger and clearer. As the gondola reaches

the ocean, there are now smaller and more frequent undulations for an ostinato and a more passionate and driving melody supported by a second voice. What comes after is outright suspenseful, with the accompaniment figures sounding like pounding heartbeats, slowly melting to a dreamy and improvisatory passage marked *dolce sfogato* (sweetly unconstrained). Full of mystery, the *dolce sfogato* leads back to the first theme in F sharp, now with absolute power and passion in facing the great rise and fall of the oceanic waves. A stark contrast from the waves of the restless sea, the music reaches calmer waters with contentment, having a trio sing in the low register decorated by scalar passages in the top, which then sweeps from the top

end of the keyboard to the other end, punctuated by four triumphant octaves to mark the end of the piece.

CARL VINE

Toccatissimo

With the coinage of the word “toccata” which refers to a keyboard work composed to show the performer’s technical prowess and the suffix “-issimo” which is an intensifier that translates to “extremely” or “very”, the title implies that this piece is a pianistic showcase, fitting as it was the commissioned piece for the 2012 Sydney International Piano Competition. After all, the Australian composer left behind the following program note:

“This is an extreme toccata, not for the faint-hearted.”

Starting off with a bang, the piece takes off with a pulsating drone headed by seemingly random sketches and doodles. The drone would develop into a rhythmic pattern going against the impassioned melody, which would then go back to a pulsating drone, now calm and undulating with the melody like splashes of water. After a steady build-up, the piece develops in Bartokian fashion by being more driving and percussive with hints of folk music; it enters a section where it is a dance between two contrasting personas characterized by different articulations, then followed by a waltz rhythm that suggests a tribal dance playing with syncopation. Following this, tension accumulates with the driving force of quick alternating hands, turning into an outward battle between the left hand on white keys and right hand on black keys. With no clear victor, a rematch was held but with the roles switched, going off with a bang.

Programme notes by Jet Stephen Co Chong.