



Great Artists Series '22:
Kirill Gerstein and
Garrick Ohlsson, piano duo

Annual Pillsbury Event

Program

Concert Paraphrase on *Powder Her Face* (2009) Thomas Adès
(b. 1971)

Symphonic Dances, Op. 45 (1940) Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873 - 1943)
I. *Non allegro*
II. *Andante con moto. Tempo di valse*
III. *Lento assai—Allegro vivace*

Intermission

Fantasia Contrappuntistica, BV. 256 (1921) Ferruccio Busoni
(1866 - 1924)
Chorale Prelude 'Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr'
Fugue I
Fugue II
Fugue III
Intermezzo
Variation I
Variation II
Variation III
Cadenza
Fugue IV
Chorale
Stretta

La Valse (1920) Maurice Ravel
Mouvement de valse viennoise (1875 - 1937)

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Management for Mr. Ohlsson:
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Program Notes

The piano has occupied a central place in domestic and professional music-making since the late 18th century. By using a mechanism that struck the strings with rebounding hammers rather than plucking the strings with quills as found in harpsichords, the piano offered performers a newfound array of expressive musical choices. The hammers permitted crescendos, decrescendos, and the ability to shape musical phrases. Additionally, the piano's pedals allowed the musician to sustain notes and alter the musical sound. The instrument's flexibility emboldened performers to explore and create diverse musical textures, timbres, and colors. Due to the piano's sonic diversity, skilled pianists can capture and mimic the musical effects of large orchestral or operatic performances. Such is the case with tonight's performance, where most of the selections are piano arrangements of orchestral or operatic works.

Since the invention of the piano, performers have enjoyed showcasing the instrument's range through symphonic and operatic transcriptions. The music-printing industry boomed with copies of operatic and orchestral arrangements in the nineteenth-century. As an alternative to visiting the concert hall, nineteenth-century amateur musicians could enjoy the latest opera offerings at their piano. However, piano transcriptions were not just limited to the domestic sphere. Instead, these arrangements became an important part of the concert repertoire as a way to highlight a performer's virtuosic and artistic skills. The most famous such examples are Franz Liszt's transcriptions, which ranged from Beethoven symphonies to Schubert songs, to the operas of Gounod and Bellini. As Liszt pointed out in a letter to his editor, the ability to faithfully translate these larger works derived from the piano's expansive sonic palette. "In the compass of its seven octaves, it is able to reproduce all the characteristics, all the combination, all the forms of the deepest and most profound works of music." Tonight's performance pushes this expressive range even further by programming virtuosic transcriptions for two pianos.

The artistic virtuosity of Liszt's transcriptions inspired composer Thomas Adès (b. 1971) to arrange his first opera, *Powder Her Face*, as a Concert Paraphrase for piano. Premiering in 1995, the opera's libretto, written by Philip Hensher, depicts the scandalous romantic exploits of Margaret Campbell, the Duchess of Argyll, during her 1963 divorce hearings. As opera critic Andrew Clements observes, the musical score reflects the expansive harmonic variety of well-known 20th-century composers such as Richard Strauss, Alban Berg, and György Ligeti while illustrating the Duchess's eccentric glamour with challenging vocal lines. Adès noted how the role's vocal virtuosity motivated

him to adapt the work for the piano. "In the opera, the Duchess's grace and glamour are figured in the music by a certain virtuosity which encouraged me to feel that parts of the music would translate into a piano Paraphrase rather in the manner of Liszt or Busoni." Adès premiered the work, originally scored for solo piano, in Vancouver in 2010. Five years later, Adès rearranged the piece for two pianos and began touring the *Paraphrase* with his frequent collaborator—and one of tonight's performers—Kirill Gerstein.

As music critic Joshua Barone attests, "The music of Thomas Adès isn't easy." Additionally, Mr. Gerstein has noted, "If you practice a lot, it's almost comfortable." The music's challenging quality comes from the composer's repeated manipulation of time and rhythm. Adès frequently shifts between various divisions of the musical measure. These rhythmic shifts challenge the listener to perceive a consistent beat or tempo. As the composer states, "For me, the creative reality is on the edge of chaos." The piece's opening consists of chaotic, disjunct, and highly dissonant melodic lines. Music critic Anthony Tommasini describes the piece as the "outtakes from a recording of a wild piano piece that have been spliced together." However, Adès juxtaposes these moments of controlled musical chaos with shimmering melodic threads which return throughout the piece.

As Adès stated, a primary inspiration for his *Concert Paraphrase* was the Italian pianist-composer Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924). The similarities between the two are apparent given the ways both composers drew upon compositional models of the past while introducing an expanded harmonic vocabulary. Busoni's first biographer, Hugo Leichtentritt, described him as "a pioneer, [and yet] he is anchored in the past by many roots." Busoni's fascination with earlier music largely derived from his keen interest in Johann Sebastian Bach. He frequently transcribed Bach's organ works, and these pieces remain a vital part of the piano repertory today. His love of Bach's counterpoint also emerged in his compositions such as the *Fantasia Contrappuntistica* written in 1910 and arranged for two pianos in 1922. The composition combines music by Bach as well as his signature contrapuntal and fugal style with Busoni's experimental harmonic language. This "newly-found harmony," which Busoni outlined in his 1907 treatise, *Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music*, derived from a renewed interest in melody and polyphony, whereby emphasis is given to the unfolding of individual lines realized through a modernist aesthetic.

In the *Fantasia*, Busoni weaves together his transcriptions of Bach's collection *Art of the Fugue*. Busoni drew upon the main theme that resurfaces throughout the collection as well as the three subjects Bach combines in the final, unfinished fugue. Listeners can hear the three subjects from the "Unfinished Fugue" introduced in *Fugue I, II, and III*. Each fugue starts with a

main theme or subject that the composer interweaves throughout the piece while performing complicated counterpoint. Fugal writing allows a musician to show off their compositional skill and wit by combining themes in novel ways to create complex and exhilarating textures. One example of this musical witticism is the "Bach motive" in *Fugue III*. In German nomenclature, a B-natural is named "H" and a B-flat is named "B." The subject's first four notes—B-flat, A, C, and B-natural—therefore spell out Bach's name. Busoni followed the three fugues with an intermezzo (on the Bach theme), a set of variations on the three fugue's subjects, and a fourth fugue that combines all three themes with the main theme from *The Art of the Fugue*.

The remaining two pieces on the program employ the flexibility of the piano to translate large 20th-century orchestral works. Early in his career, Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) expressed a desire to compose a ballet. Starting in 1914, he repeatedly approached Michel Fokine, principal choreographer of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, with the wish to collaborate. Nothing came of these hopes until 1939. After the success of Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* (1934), Fokine asked to use the *Rhapsody* for his new ballet, *Paganini*. By 1939, Rachmaninoff had stopped composing; the strain of touring as a virtuoso pianist while being a highly sought-after conductor left little time. However, he suddenly returned to composing in 1940 after renting an estate near Huntington, Long Island. These ideal conditions inspired him to complete his *Symphonic Dances*, his last original work, that year. While orchestrating the piece, the composer also arranged the work for two pianos. Rachmaninoff hoped to collaborate again with Fokine to adapt *Symphonic Dances* into a ballet. Unfortunately, Fokine died in 1942, leaving the collaboration unrealized.

The *Symphonic Dances* has three movements, originally titled "Noon," "Twilight," and "Midnight." The first movement opens with a frantic march, driven by a consistent eighth-note pulse. The march returns after the slow middle section and is followed by an expansive coda. The coda shockingly quotes the minor theme from Rachmaninoff's poorly received First Symphony in a major key. The second movement, a waltz, starts with a trumpet fanfare motive before giving way to a melancholic and mysterious waltz. The finale, another fast movement with a slow middle section, quotes two ecclesiastical chants. The listener can hear the Vespers chant "Blessed art thou, Lord" which Rachmaninoff also used in his 1915 choral composition, *All-Night Vigil*. The piece's dramatic conclusion includes multiple statements of the *Dies Irae* melody in a major mode, potentially affirming Rachmaninoff's faith that "Death shall be swallowed up in victory."

After the success of Maurice Ravel's (1875-1937) ballet *Daphnis and Chloé* in 1912, Sergei Diaghilev, the impresario for the Ballets Russes, commissioned

a new piece from the composer. In 1920, Ravel, along with Marcelle Meyer, performed for Diaghilev a two-piano transcription of what would eventually become *La Valse*. Even though Diaghilev passed on the project, *La Valse* became a mainstay of orchestral and piano repertoire. Ravel initially began working on the piece in 1906 as a tribute to the “Waltz King,” Johann Strauss II. However, other projects as well as the start of World War I derailed his progress. After the war, the jovial waltz genre ceased to have the same sociological implications. Post-war listeners looked back on the dance with a combination of nostalgia, disenchantment, and awareness of the war’s cataclysmic effects. Despite Ravel insisting the piece was not a reflection of post-war Europe, audiences have frequently drawn a connection between the turbulent music and the sociological trauma of the war.

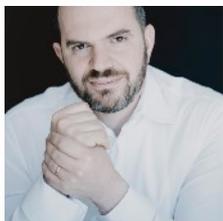
The piece starts with low tremolos and a series of fragmented waltz melodies. Ravel composed the opening to depict clouds gradually dispersing to reveal a grand waltz in progress. As the clouds clear, the fragmented melodies coalesce, and the lush harmony of a Viennese waltz emerges. As the piece develops, however, the music reveals itself to be sort of a *danse macabre*. The waltz melody begins to fracture and splinter as Ravel begins to overlap the dance tunes. Additionally, the composer introduces tritone intervals (the augmented fourth or diminished fifth), a dissonant sonority heard in every horror film. The precarious harmonic footing creates a frenetic energy that builds as the competing dance tunes whirl around one another during the piece’s dramatic finale.

Andrew Tubbs, Ph.D. student in Musicology, Washington University in St. Louis

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About the Artists



Kirill Gerstein

"This is the kind of serious, intelligent and virtuosic music-making that keeps classical music alive." - *The Observer*

Pianist Kirill Gerstein's heritage combines the traditions of Russian, American, and Central European music-making with an insatiable curiosity. These qualities and the relationships that he has developed with orchestras, conductors, instrumentalists, singers, and composers, have led him to explore a huge spectrum of repertoire both new and old. From Bach to Adès, Gerstein's playing is distinguished by a ferocious technique and discerning intelligence, matched with an energetic, imaginative musical presence that places him at the top of his profession.

Born in the former Soviet Union, Gerstein is an American citizen based in Berlin. His career is similarly international, with solo and concerto engagements taking him from Europe to the United States, China, and Australia. Highlights of the 2021-22 season include performances of Kurtág, Beethoven, Strauss, and Rachmaninov with Royal Concertgebouw and NDR Elbphilharmonie under Alan Gilbert; Mozart with Camerata Salzburg and Andrew Manze; Schumann with Chicago Symphony and Karina Canellakis; Schönberg with the Bayerischer Rundfunk Symphonieorchester and François-Xavier Roth; Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto in the urtext version with the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra and Sebastian Weigle; both of Ravel's Piano Concertos with City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra; Brahms's First and Second Piano Concertos with Helsinki Philharmonic; and all five Beethoven Piano Concertos over two nights with the Grand Rapids Symphony. In recital, Gerstein will be heard at London's Wigmore Hall; with Garrick Ohlsson on tour across America; and at Budapest's Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music and the Kölner Philharmonie with his close colleagues the Hagen Quartet.

Over the last year, Gerstein's decade long relationship with Thomas Adès came to fruition with the release of two recordings: the world première of Adès's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra written expressly for Gerstein and released by Deutsche Grammophon; and a compendium of Thomas Adès's works for piano on Myrios Classics. Both discs garnered an impressive series of accolades which included a 2021 International Classical Music Award, a 2020 Gramophone Award and three GRAMMY Award nominations. During the new season, Gerstein will give Adès's Piano Concerto its French, Belgium,

and Russian premieres with the composer, its Italian premiere with Sir Antonio Pappano and Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, and South American premiere with Thierry Fischer and São Paulo Symphony Orchestra.

Alongside the international premières of Adès's Piano Concerto, Kirill Gerstein will give the Scandinavian and German premières of Thomas Larcher's Piano Concerto which was also commissioned especially for him. A co-commission from the Berlin, Czech, and Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestras and the Vienna Konzerthaus, Kirill Gerstein gave the world première of Larcher's Piano Concerto in May 2021 with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic under Karina Canellakis. In Bergen, he will première the concerto with the Bergen Filharmonie Orkester and Edward Gardner; and in Berlin, with the Berliner Philharmoniker and Semyon Bychkov who initiated the commission.

A long-time believer in the role of teaching in the life of a musician, Kirill Gerstein is currently on the faculty of Kronberg Academy and Professor of Piano at Berlin's Hanns Eisler Hochschule. Under the auspices of Kronberg Academy, his series of free and open online seminars entitled *Kirill Gerstein Invites* is now in its third season. Featuring conversations with leading artistic minds guest speakers have included Ai Weiwei, Andreas Staier, Brad Melhdau, Thomas Adès, Iván Fischer, Alex Ross, Matthew Aucoin—who has also written a new work for Gerstein to be premiered in the new season—Kirill Serebrennikov, Elizabeth Wilson, Simon & Gerard McBurney, Robert Levin, Reinhard Goebel, Simon Callow, Emma Smith, Deborah Borda, Rafael Viñoly, Sir Antonio Pappano, and Samuel Jay Keyser.

Kirill Gerstein's latest release is a recording of Mozart Four-Hand Piano Sonatas with his mentor of 17-years, Ferenc Rados on Myrios Classics. His first collaboration with Myrios Classics was 10 years ago and, through the partnership has been able to realize many thoughtfully curated projects: Strauss's *Enoch Arden* with the late Bruno Ganz (*Wings of Desire; Downfall*); Busoni's monumental Piano Concerto with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Sakari Oramo; *The Gershwin Moment* with the St. Louis Symphony and David Robertson, including special appearances from Storm Large and Gerstein's former mentor Gary Burton; Liszt's *Transcendental Études* which was picked by *The New Yorker* as one of 2016's notable recordings; and Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto in the composer's own final version from 1879. Earlier recordings on the label include *Imaginary Pictures* coupling Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* with Schumann's *Carnaval*; two discs of sonatas for viola and piano by Brahms, Schubert, Franck, Clarke, and Vieuxtemps recorded with Tabea Zimmerman; and a recital disc of works by Schumann, Liszt, and Knussen. Gerstein has additionally recorded Scriabin

with the Oslo Philharmonic and Vasily Petrenko for LAWO Classics; and Tchaikovsky with Semyon Bychkov and the Czech Philharmonic as part of *The Tchaikovsky Project* released by Decca Classics.

Born in 1979 in Voronezh, Russia, Kirill Gerstein attended one of the country's special music schools for gifted children and taught himself to play jazz at home by listening to his parents' record collection. Following a chance encounter with jazz legend Gary Burton in St. Petersburg when he was 14, he was invited as the youngest student to attend the Berklee College of Music in Boston, where he studied jazz piano in tandem with his classical piano studies. At the age of 16, Gerstein decided to focus on classical music completing his undergraduate and graduate degrees with Solomon Mikowsky at New York's Manhattan School of Music, followed by further studies with Dmitri Bashkirov in Madrid and Ferenc Rados in Budapest. Gerstein is the sixth recipient of the prestigious Gilmore Artist Award—enabling him to commission new works from Timo Andres, Chick Corea, Alexander Goehr, Oliver Knussen and Brad Mehldau - First Prize winner at the 10th Arthur Rubinstein Competition and an Avery Fisher Career Grant holder. In May 2021, he was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the Manhattan School of Music.



Garrick Ohlsson

Since his triumph as winner of the 1970 Chopin International Piano Competition, pianist Garrick Ohlsson has established himself worldwide as a musician of magisterial interpretive and technical prowess. Although long regarded as one of the world's leading exponents of the music of Frédéric Chopin, Mr.

Ohlsson commands an enormous repertoire, which ranges over the entire piano literature. A student of the late Claudio Arrau, Mr. Ohlsson has come to be noted for his masterly performances of the works of Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert, as well as the Romantic repertoire. To date he has at his command more than 80 concertos, ranging from Haydn and Mozart to works of the 21st-century, many commissioned for him. In 2018/19 season he launched an ambitious project spread over multiple seasons exploring the complete solo piano works of Brahms in four programs to be heard in New York, San Francisco, Montreal, Los Angeles, London, and a number of cities across North America.

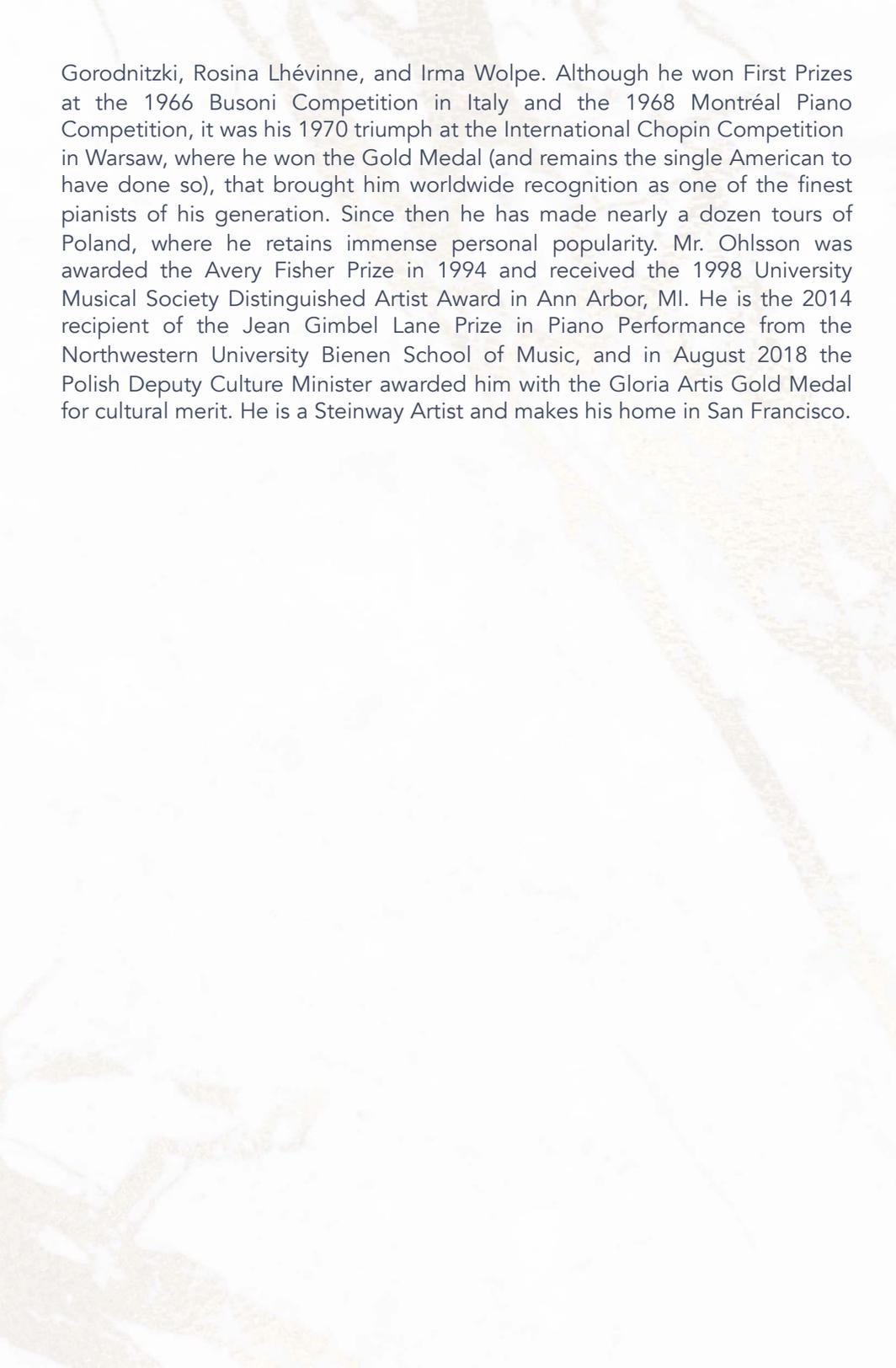
A frequent guest with the orchestras in Australia, Mr. Ohlsson has recently visited Perth, Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, and Hobart as well as the New Zealand Symphony in Wellington and Auckland. In February 2020 he accomplished a seven city recital tour across Australia just prior to the closure of the concert world due to Covid-19. Since that time and as a faculty member of San Francisco Conservatory of Music he has been able to

contribute to keeping music alive for a number of organizations with live or recorded recital streams. With the re-opening of concert activity in the US in summer 2021 he appeared with the Indianapolis and Cleveland orchestras, in recital in San Francisco, Brevard Festival, and 4 Brahms recitals at Chicago's Ravinia Festival. The 21/22 season began with the KBS orchestra, Seoul followed by Atlanta, Dallas, Seattle symphonies, BBC Glasgow, and European orchestras in Prague, Hamburg, Lyon and St. Petersburg. In recital he can be heard in Los Angeles, Houston, Kansas City as well as Poland, Germany, and England.

An avid chamber musician, Mr. Ohlsson has collaborated with the Cleveland, Emerson, Tokyo, and Takacs string quartets, including most recently Boston Chamber Players on tour in Europe. Together with violinist Jorja Fleezanis and cellist Michael Grebanier, he is a founding member of the San Francisco-based FOG Trio. Passionate about singing and singers, Mr. Ohlsson has appeared in recital with such legendary artists as Magda Olivero, Jessye Norman, and Ewa Podleś.

Mr. Ohlsson can be heard on the Arabesque, RCA Victor Red Seal, Angel, BMG, Delos, Hänssler, Nonesuch, Telarc, Hyperion and Virgin Classics labels. His ten-disc set of the complete Beethoven Sonatas, for Bridge Records, has garnered critical acclaim, including a GRAMMY® for Vol. 3. His recording of Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 3, with the Atlanta Symphony and Robert Spano, was released in 2011. In the fall of 2008 the English label Hyperion re-released his 16-disc set of the Complete Works of Chopin followed in 2010 by all the Brahms piano variations, Goyescas by Enrique Granados, and music of Charles Tomlinson Griffes. Most recently on that label are Scriabin's *Complete Poèmes*, Smetana *Czech Dances*, and études by Debussy, Bartok and Prokofiev. The latest CDs in his ongoing association with Bridge Records are the Complete Scriabin Sonatas, *Close Connections*, a recital of 20th-Century pieces, and two CDs of works by Liszt. In recognition of the Chopin bicentenary in 2010, Mr. Ohlsson was featured in a documentary *The Art of Chopin* co-produced by Polish, French, British and Chinese television stations. Most recently, both Brahms concerti and Tchaikovsky's second piano concerto were released on live performance recordings with the Melbourne and Sydney Symphonies on their own recording labels, and Mr. Ohlsson was featured on Dvorak's piano concerto in the Czech Philharmonic's recordings of the composer's complete symphonies and concertos, released July of 2014 on the Decca label.

A native of White Plains, N.Y., Garrick Ohlsson began his piano studies at the age of 8, at the Westchester Conservatory of Music; at 13 he entered The Juilliard School, in New York City. His musical development has been influenced in completely different ways by a succession of distinguished teachers, most notably Claudio Arrau, Olga Barabini, Tom Lishman, Sascha



Gorodnitzki, Rosina Lhévinne, and Irma Wolpe. Although he won First Prizes at the 1966 Busoni Competition in Italy and the 1968 Montréal Piano Competition, it was his 1970 triumph at the International Chopin Competition in Warsaw, where he won the Gold Medal (and remains the single American to have done so), that brought him worldwide recognition as one of the finest pianists of his generation. Since then he has made nearly a dozen tours of Poland, where he retains immense personal popularity. Mr. Ohlsson was awarded the Avery Fisher Prize in 1994 and received the 1998 University Musical Society Distinguished Artist Award in Ann Arbor, MI. He is the 2014 recipient of the Jean Gimbel Lane Prize in Piano Performance from the Northwestern University Bienen School of Music, and in August 2018 the Polish Deputy Culture Minister awarded him with the Gloria Artis Gold Medal for cultural merit. He is a Steinway Artist and makes his home in San Francisco.

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