



ST MATTHEW'S  
CATHEDRAL  
ARTS  
2020-2021 SEASON

# MIKHAIL BERESTNEV

PIANO

WITH ARTWORKS BY MARGO LEE MILLER

JORDAN HAMMONS AND RYAN LESCALLEET • VIDEOGRAPHERS

FILMED IN THE GREAT HALL OF  
ST. MATTHEW'S EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL  
DALLAS, TEXAS  
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# PROGRAM

Prélude, Choral et Fugue, FWV 21 (1884)

César Franck (1822-1890)

*Pavane pour une infante défunte* (1899)

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

*La valse* (1920)

## INTERMISSION FEATURE

Mary Dibbern interviews Mikhail Berestnev

Improvisation No. 1 in B flat minor, Op.31/1 (1914)

Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951)

Variations on a theme of Corelli, Op.42 (1931)

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)



## THE ARTISTS

Pianist **Mikhail Berestnev** has been described as having “...flawless technique and constant inspiration...superb sonority...” (Belgian *La Libre Magazine*) and “...an astonishingly gifted pianist...equally at home as a soloist and collaborative pianist” (*Theater Jones*, U.S.).

He has been a featured soloist with the Sydney Symphony, Brazilian Symphony, the Royal Chamber Orchestra of Wallonia, Fort Worth Symphony, San Angelo Symphony, Meadows Symphony, Metropolitan Winds and the Irving Symphony Orchestra. Mikhail has performed with orchestras and as a recitalist at the Grand Hall of the Tchaikovsky Conservatory and at the International Music House in Moscow, the National Concert Hall in Dublin, Flagey Theater in Brussels, the Sydney Opera House, English Hall at the St. Petersburg Music House, Dallas’ Moody Performance Hall and the Eisemann Center for Performing Arts in Richardson.

His awards include Fourth Prize at the Sydney International Piano Competition of Australia, Silver Medal at the BNDES International Piano Competition in Rio de Janeiro, the Eric Sorantin Young Artist Award, the Harold von Mickwitz Piano Award from Meadows School of Arts at SMU and the Judith Solomon Piano Award in Chamber Music from the TCU School of Music. He was First Prize Winner at the International Delphic Games Competition (Minsk, Belarus) and Winner at the International Piano Competition named after Stanislav Neuhaus (Chelyabinsk, Russia).

In chamber music, Mikhail has shared the stage with violinists Emanuel Borok, Aaron Boyd, Eunice Keem, Hubert Pralitz and Mai Ke, pianist Andrei Ponochevny, French hornist David Alan Cooper, the Seraphim Trio (Melbourne, Australia) and the Julius String Quartet (U.S.). In July of 2019, he made his debut at the Basically Beethoven Music Festival in Dallas, playing together with violinist Grace Wollet and clarinetist Danny Goldman. The group was described afterwards by The Dallas Morning News: “The ensemble’s style fit the character of the music like a tailored suit...” Since September of 2019, the three have been playing together as the MAKE Trio, featured at the Fine Arts Chamber Players’ Hallam Family Concert Series in Dallas and at Pop-Up Concerts by The Cliburn Foundation in Fort Worth. MAKE has recently partnered with Samsung Live in 360 to produce three-dimensional, 360-degree classical music concerts filmed in virtual reality for the public. These videos have been viewed in over 40 countries.

Mikhail holds degrees from the Gnssins Russian Academy of Music in Moscow, the Texas Christian University School of Music in Fort Worth and the Meadows School of Arts at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. He has studied with professors Irina Grebyonkina, Andrei Khitruk, Alexei Skavronski, Vladimir Tropp, Tamas Ungar and Joaquín Achúcarro. He is also Guest Artist and Collaborative Pianist with the Musica Nova Ensemble and the Chamber Orchestra of the University of Texas at Dallas School of Arts and Humanities, under the direction of renowned composer Robert Xavier Rodriguez.

**Margo Lee Miller** is an abstract painter currently working with acrylic, mixed media and collage. She excels at combining these elements to create tension and provoke discussion, striving to engage the viewer by expressing the movement, beauty and complexity of life. Employing metallic components, her artworks often create a shimmering effervescence as one passes by. Margo is also a muralist, working with various non-profit groups in Dallas and during her visits to Nepal. A native Texan, she received a B.A. in Art from Southern Illinois University and an M.L.A. from Southern Methodist University. She has taught visual art in public schools, groups and private sessions and is exhibited in galleries from Chicago to Dallas. She also believes that joy in life is chiefly realized in the act of giving. Margo is currently a resident artist at Dallas’ Goldmark Cultural Center. Visit her online at [badmargoart.com](http://badmargoart.com).

## NOTES

Belgian-born **César Franck (1822-1890)** was a twelve-year-old piano prodigy when his parents moved to Paris so that their gifted son could have the advantages of the sophisticated musical city. At the Conservatoire, young César carried off prizes in piano, organ, and fugue, a circumstance that seemed to assure his career as a concert pianist and a composer. But he suffered an affliction well known to talented youth, namely an overly ambitious parent. Soured by being exploited, the innately serious prodigy withdrew from the public arena as soon as he was old enough to assert himself. Marrying at 26 – and, to his father's chagrin, to an actress – he embarked on a circumscribed life as a composer, as organist at the Basilica of Sainte-Clotilde and as a teacher at the Paris Conservatoire. He was well-loved, even deified, by his students, among whom were the composers d'Indy, Chausson and Duparc. The short list of solo piano pieces in Franck's output reflects his gradual disenchantment with the instrument. The **Prélude, Choral et Fugue** was written in 1884, when Franck was in his early 60's. In writing a prelude and fugue (the chorale was added as an afterthought), Franck was obviously paying homage to Bach. The actual composition, however, points to a number of other allegiances, namely Beethoven, Schumann and Liszt, the latter man occupying a special place in Franck's heart for having befriended him at the beginning of his career. But the music is pure Franck, engaging repeatedly in conflicts between organ-loft ruminations and fervent rapture, setting up arguments in a harmonic language of intense chromaticism and freely employing the cyclical form endorsed by Liszt and Wagner. The Prélude, in B minor, begins with and is dominated by swift figurations, interrupted twice by a strong motivic idea that anticipates the subject of the Fugue. The Chorale, in the distant key of E-flat major, seems to strive for Bachian sturdiness but is most notable for achieving Franckian mysticism and loftiness, the latter by way of an imposing seven-note motif that is brought back in the Fugue then combined with the fugal subject in a grand manner. Franck's waverings between religiosity and virtuosity are probably unavoidable given his role as the high priest of French music and his early life as a crowd-pleasing performer. At any rate, the Prélude, Choral et Fugue remains Franck's most viable solo piano piece, a distinctive work masterfully crafted.

**Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)** is often associated with *impressionism* along with his elder contemporary Claude Debussy, although both composers rejected the term. In the 1920's and 1930's Ravel was internationally regarded as France's greatest living composer. Born to a music-loving family, Ravel attended France's premier music college, the Paris Conservatoire. But he was not well regarded by its conservative establishment, whose biased treatment of him caused a scandal. After leaving the Conservatoire, Ravel found his own way as a composer, developing a style of great clarity and incorporating elements of modernism, baroque, neoclassicism and, in his later works, jazz. He liked to experiment with musical form and made some orchestral arrangements of other composers' music, of which his 1922 version of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* is the best known. A slow and painstaking worker, Ravel composed fewer pieces than many of his contemporaries. Among his works to enter the repertoire are pieces for piano, chamber music, two piano concertos, ballet music, two operas and eight song cycles; he wrote no symphonies or church music. Many of his works exist in two versions: first, a piano score and later an orchestration. His Swiss father inspired in his son a love for things precise and mechanical that carried over into his impeccable music, provoking Stravinsky to dismiss him as a "Swiss watchmaker."

A *pavane* is a slow processional dance from Padua (*Pava* is a dialect name for Padua). According to an old Spanish tradition, it was performed in church as a stylish gesture of farewell to the dead. The ***Pavane pour une infante défunte (Pavane for a dead princess)*** was conceived as piano music and benefited greatly from its translation to a full orchestral score. The piano piece was an instant success. Ravel later realized that music of such apparent ease—a simple melody over broken chords—is doomed to a life at the hands of amateur pianists, and eleven years later he rescued the *Pavane* and rescored it for the modern virtuoso orchestra. As to the identity of the dead princess, Ravel finally admitted he picked the title only because he liked the sound of the words.

***La valse, poème chorégraphique pour orchestra (The waltz, a choreographic poem for orchestra)***, was conceived as a ballet and first performed on December 12, 1920 in Paris. It has been described as a tribute to the waltz, and the composer George Benjamin summarized the ethos of the work: "Whether or not it was intended as a metaphor for the predicament of European civilization in the aftermath of the Great War, its one-movement design plots the birth, decay and destruction of a musical genre: the waltz." In his 1937 tribute to Ravel after the composer's death, Paul Landormy described *La valse* as "the most unexpected of the compositions of Ravel, revealing to us heretofore unexpected depths of Romanticism, power, vigor, and rapture in this musician whose expression is usually limited to the manifestations of an essentially classical genius." Apart from the two-piano arrangement, which was first publicly performed by Ravel and Alfredo Casella, Ravel also transcribed this work for one piano. The solo piano transcription is infrequently performed due to its difficulty.

**Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951)** belongs in any conversation about the greatest piano composers of the 20th century. A late Romantic, he is often dismissed in unfavorable comparison with better-known composers, particularly his contemporaries and countrymen Rachmaninoff (his life-long friend and champion) and Scriabin, but also – in a nod to his Teutonic ancestry and some shared rhythmic devices – Brahms. Medtner's natural command of counterpoint, rhythm and thematic development, combined with a consuming dedication to his craft, led to an early and rapid stylistic maturation and, as a result, a large number of exquisitely constructed piano works. Medtner was a formidable pianist himself, and all of his published output is either for solo piano or includes his instrument. His music is notoriously difficult both to sight-read and to play, which is one reason why it has not been commonly performed. Another reason, perhaps more significant, is that it can be hard to digest on first listen. One of the hallmarks of Medtner's compositional style is an unassuming complexity, as a result of which not only the performer is challenged to render it clearly, but also the listener to apprehend it clearly. A pianist who performs Medtner places rigorous intellectual and technical demands on his audience as well as himself. The advent of several compelling modern recordings has helped make strides toward bringing Medtner's music to a wider audience. Of the three pieces in **Opus 31**, the most substantial is the **Improvisation in B flat minor** (in variation form), subsequently known as the First Improvisation to distinguish it from the Second Improvisation, Op 47, of 1928. The theme is quintessentially Medtnerian, of utmost simplicity but rhythmically supple and unpredictable. Five variations follow, bursting with fantasy and pianistic ingenuity, at one point breaking into a joyous Russian hymn in B flat major.

**Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)** was a Russian composer, virtuoso pianist and conductor of the late Romantic period. The influence of Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Balakirev, Mussorgsky and other Russian composers is seen in his early works, later giving way to a personal style notable for song-like melodicism, expressiveness and rich orchestral colors. Born into a musical family, Rachmaninoff took up the piano at the age of four. He graduated from the Moscow Conservatory in 1892, having already composed several piano and orchestral pieces. In 1897, following negative critical reaction to his Symphony No. 1, Rachmaninoff entered a four-year depression and composed little until successful therapy allowed him to complete his enthusiastically received Piano Concerto No. 2 in 1901. In the course of the next sixteen years, Rachmaninoff conducted at the Bolshoi Theatre, relocated to Dresden, Germany, and toured the United States for the first time. Rachmaninoff often featured the piano in his compositions, and he explored the expressive possibilities of the instrument through his own skills as a pianist. Following the Russian Revolution, Rachmaninoff and his family left Russia. They settled in New York City in 1918. With his main source of income coming from piano and conducting performances, demanding tour schedules led to a reduction in his time for composition. By 1942, failing health led to his relocation to Beverly Hills, California. One month before his death, Rachmaninoff was granted American citizenship.

The *Variations on a theme of Corelli* was completed in June of 1931, during one of Rachmaninoff's European summer breaks. For this, the only work for solo piano he composed after leaving Russia in 1917, he chose the old dance melody known as 'La Folia'—not actually composed by Corelli, but used by him in his Violin Sonata No 12. The Corelli Variations seem to have been a catalyst for his next new work, the *Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini* for piano and orchestra. Not only is the Rhapsody set in the form of variations, but there are several clear premonitions of its ideas in the Corelli set. The Corelli-based theme is followed by twenty variations, with an intermezzo between variations 13 and 14, and a coda to finish. Not entirely convinced of the success of the Corelli Variations, Rachmaninoff generally omitted some of the variations in performance. In three instances (Nos. 11, 12 and 19) he even allowed that option in the score. He explained himself drily in a letter to Nikolai Medtner in December of 1931: "I was guided by the coughing of the audience. Whenever the coughing increased, I would skip the next variation. Whenever there was no coughing, I would play them in proper order." In fact the design works perfectly well without such surgery, the variations grouping themselves into a quasi-four-movement sonata, in which the 'slow movement' begins in the major mode after a cadenza-like 'intermezzo'.

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