

Inna Faliks:
Reimagining
Schumann and Ravel

THURSDAY | JULY 7 | 7:30 PM
CASTLE HILL INN



This concert is dedicated in loving memory of **Tia Scigulinsky** in recognition of her decades of volunteerism and generous support of Newport Classical.

Inna Faliks, piano

JAN FREIDLIN *Ballade in Black and White*
(Approximate duration 6 minutes)

CLARA SCHUMANN Piano Sonata in G minor
I. Allegro
II. Adagio - con espressione e ben legato
III. Scherzo - leggieramente
IV. Rondo
(Approximate duration 20 minutes)

INTERMISSION

PAOLA PRESTINI *Variations on a Spell*

TIMO ANDRES *Old Ground*

BILLY CHILDS *Pursuit*

RAVEL *Gaspard de la Nuit*
I. Ondine
II. Le Gibet
III. Scarbo
(Approximate duration of second half 22 minutes)

This program celebrates and unites two recording projects/programs I completed during the Pandemic – Reimagine Beethoven and Ravel, 9 premieres, and the Schumann Project Volume 1. I am thrilled to be able to celebrate both with one of my favorite audiences in the world, at the magical Newport Classical Music Festival. – Inna Faliks

Clara Schumann (1819-1896): Sonata in G minor

I decided to embark on a journey I had always planned – recording all of Robert Schumann’s music – but to join it with Clara’s. Her compositional voice, while perhaps not developed to its full extent, speaks with individuality and brilliance. On one hand, I never

want to leave Robert's imaginary world of literary references, unfulfilled yearnings, hidden riddles, grand gestures, lyrical intimations – to me, no other composer of his time speaks as unguardedly and unabashedly from the heart, giving a performer as much room for fantasy, interpretive freedom, and the most intimate kind of communication. On the other hand, Clara was an indelible part of his world and his music, quite literally – Robert quoted her often, at times without credit. In turn, her own voice, with its meandering, uncomfortable chromaticism, unpredictable harmonic turns, imaginative and wild gestures, and profound tenderness, is like no other. "I had once believed I had creative talent, but I have given up this idea; a woman must not wish to compose – there was never one able to do it. Am I intended to be the one?" she asked in her diary. Her husband, presumably, never answered clearly.

Clara Schumann composed the Piano Sonata in G minor in 1841, at age 22. "I tried to compose something for Robert, and lo and behold, it worked! I was blissful at having really completed a first and a second sonata movement, which did not fail to produce an effect – namely, they took my dear husband quite by surprise," she wrote in her diary. Evidently, the work was not taken seriously until 1991 when it was finally published.

The Allegro movement opens with an almost operatic, dramatic statement that could be easily orchestrated; the main theme is at once lyrical, pained, and elegant, eventually turning to giddy joy. The movement propels forward with passionate momentum; in contrast, the Adagio is some of the most profound writing in the sonata, full of assured wisdom, clarity of markings and concise eloquence.

The Scherzo, published separately as part of Four Fleeting Pieces, Op. 15, is a delightful, staccato romp that leads into a lilting, virtuosic Rondo. The refrain's coquettish shape is somewhat reminiscent of the Rondo in Chopin's 1st concerto – a work she most certainly knew. This joyful movement, perhaps more drawn out than the others, presents interesting challenges thanks to its odd technical twists and turns, before a sudden, rather wild coda.

Paola Prestini (b. 1975): *Variations on a Spell* (Ondine)

Variations on a Spell is in two movements, Water Sprite and Bell Tolls, in two distinct sections. The work as a whole is a reimagining of Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit* (1908), and a response to Ondine, more specifically. Ravel based each movement on poems by Aloysius Bertrand from the collection *Gaspard de la Nuit*, *fantasies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot*, completed in 1836. "Variations" is a modern reimagining that takes as inspiration both Ravel's music and Bertrand's poetry. "Each wave is a water sprite who swims in the stream, each stream is a foot path that winds towards my palace, and my palace is a fluid structure at the bottom of the lake, in a triangle of fire, earth and air."

Timo Andres (b. 1985): *Old Ground* (Le Gibet)

Ravel's *Le Gibet* fascinates and repulses me; it's a brilliantly succinct textbook of harmonic possibility, but I'm simultaneously uncomfortable with its extramusical program, which depicts a hanged corpse at sunset. The music luridly romanticizes the already too-picturesque prefatory poem by Aloysius Bertrand, reducing the hanged victim to a scenic backdrop against which the poet projects his disturbed thoughts. Ravel represents the roles of observed and observer using an asymmetrical ostinato around which a palette of murky, ambiguous chords slowly churns. *Old Ground* reverses these roles. The opening ostinato is given agency and trajectory; the dark chords, which come in only at the end, accompany a silenced singer.

Billy Childs (b. 1957): *Pursuit* (Scarbo)

Scarbo: *Pursuit*, was commissioned by the great pianist, Inna Faliks, and Yamaha Artist Services, as part of a series of “commentary” pieces on the masterwork *Gaspard de la Nuit* by Maurice Ravel. *Pursuit* started out as an interpretive parallel to “Scarbo,” the third movement of *Gaspard*, but quickly turned into—in my mind—a sadly familiar American storyline, in which a black man is being pursued by either a slave catcher, a KKK lynch mob, or the modern-day police. There is no overly conscious formal structure, just two parts: a rapidly virtuosic repeated note section juxtaposed with a somberly lyrical passage. The two disparate segments alternate back and forth, creating more of an intuitive sense of a dramatic arc than a fixed musical design. Inna Faliks’s interpretation of this work is extraordinary; her deft, sure-handed, and dynamic technique captures the edgy pathos of the pursuit, while her sensitivity and delicacy of touch brilliantly conveys the angst of the slower sections.

— Billy Childs

Responses to Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)’s *Gaspard de la Nuit*

In 2017, I curated a piano festival called “Dialogues”, at UCLA. For the festival, I asked six composers from UCLA faculty – Peter Golub, Tamir Hendelman, Richard Danielpour, Ian Krouse, Mark Carlson, and David Lefkowitz – to respond to 6 Bagatelles opus 126 – the last work Beethoven wrote for the piano.

Wanting to enlarge the scope of the project, I turned to an iconic triptych of the piano repertoire – Ravel’s *Gaspard de la Nuit* (Ondine, Le Gibet, and Scarbo), a work that I recorded in 2008 and have frequently performed. Like the Beethoven Bagatelles, Ravel’s masterpiece is richly experimental and full of sonic contrasts and innovative effects. The original is itself a response to the poetry of Aloysius Bertrand; it was interesting to continue the chain of responses to the evocative subjects: Ondine, the sensuous water nymph, Gibet, the hypnotic, almost minimalistic gallows, and the diabolical, virtuosic imp Scarbo. It is considered one of the most pianistically challenging works in the repertoire, and I wanted responses that would be challenging and rich, as well. With the help of Yamaha Artist Services and UCLA’s Davise Fund, I turned to three composers – Paola Prestini, Timo Andres, and Billy Childs – who, I felt, would respond powerfully to the individual qualities in each of the Ravel pieces. The resulting pieces stand on their own as powerful additions to the piano repertoire. While responding to and elaborating on qualities singular to Ravel, they can be performed as individual works or a coherent suite. I am humbled and grateful to these nine brilliant composers who have responded with such passion and dedication to these great work from the piano repertoire.

Inna Faliks

“Adventurous and passionate” (*The New Yorker*) Ukrainian-born American pianist Inna Faliks has made a name for herself through her commanding performances of standard piano repertoire, as well genre-bending interdisciplinary projects, and inquisitive work with contemporary composers. After her acclaimed teenage debuts at the Gilmore Festival and with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, she has appeared on many of the world’s great stages in recital and with many major orchestras, performing with conductors Leonard Slatkin, Keith Lockhart, and many others. Her recent seasons include performances at Ravinia Festival in Chicago, National Gallery in Washington DC, Chigiana Academy in Italy, as soloist with US orchestras nation-wide, and repeated tours of all the major venues in China.

Ms. Faliks collaborates with and premieres music by some of today’s most significant

composers, including Billy Childs, Richard Danielpour, Timo Andres, and Clarice Assad. She founded the award-winning poetry-music series Music/Words in 2008, with dozens of performances in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, both on stage and on WFMT radio. She regularly tours her monologue-recital *Polonaise-Fantasie*, the *Story of a Pianist*, which tells the story of her immigration to the United States from Odessa with music by Bach, Chopin, Gershwin, and Carter (recorded on Delos).

Inna Faliks' discography includes *Reimagine: Beethoven & Ravel* (Navona, 2021), for which she commissioned nine composers to respond to Beethoven's Bagatelles op 126 and Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*. Also released in 2021 (MSR Classics) is *The Schumann Project, Volume 1*, which includes Clara Schumann's G minor sonata and Robert Schumann's *Symphonic Etudes* opus 13. Other releases include all-Beethoven and Rachmaninoff/Ravel/Pasternak discs for MSR Classics, and *The Master and Margarita* project, featuring three world premieres on Sono Luminus (2022).

Ms. Faliks is professor and head of Piano Studies at UCLA, and in demand world-wide as a masterclass artist and adjudicator. She is also a published writer, with articles and essays appearing in *Los Angeles Times* and *The Washington Post*, among other media outlets. A musical memoir, titled *Weight in the Fingertips*, will be published in 2023 by Globe Pequot. Inna Faliks is a Yamaha Artist.