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*Piano Series Recital*

**Geoffrey Burleson**

SATURDAY, 7:00 P.M.

MAY 4, 2019

CAPISTRANO CONCERT HALL

From <i>Album</i> , Op. 72	Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)
No. 1: Prélude	
No. 2: Carillon	
No. 5: Final	
Étude, Op. 111 No. 4: <i>Les Cloches de Las Palmas</i>	Saint-Saëns
Fantaisie sur Quintette de Étoile du Nord de Meyerbeer	Saint-Saëns
Fantaisie sur Lohengrin de Wagner	Saint-Saëns

## INTERMISSION

Aghvani (2009)	Mary Kouyoumdjian (b. 1983)
Dances for Solo Piano	Laurie San Martin (b. 1968)
1. Tangozilla (2004)	
2. Zambra? (2004; rev. 2007)	
3. Ziozuki (2007)	
Rituál (1987)	Tania León (b. 1943)
Après une lecture du Dante-Fantasia quasi Sonata, from <i>Années de Pèlerinage</i> , Volume II	Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

**Geoffrey Burleson** has performed to wide acclaim throughout Europe and North America, and is equally active as a recitalist, concerto soloist, chamber musician and jazz performer. The *New York Times* has hailed his solo performances as “vibrant” and “compelling”, and has praised his “command, projection of rhapsodic qualities without loss of rhythmic vigor, and appropriate sense of spontaneity and fetching colors”. His numerous acclaimed solo appearances include prominent venues in Paris (at the *Église St-Merr*), New York, Rome (American Academy), Athens (Mitropoulos Hall), Mexico City (National Museum of Art), Rotterdam (De Doelen), Chicago (Dame Myra Hess Memorial Series), Boston, Washington, Switzerland, England, Spain, and elsewhere.

Mr. Burleson made his New York City solo recital debut at Merkin Hall in 2000, sponsored by the League of Composers/ISCM. Concerto appearances include the Buffalo Philharmonic, Boston Musica Viva, Arlington Philharmonic, New England Philharmonic, and the Holland Symfonia in the Netherlands, performing repertoire ranging from Mozart, Weber and Saint-Saëns to Gershwin, Yehudi Wyner, David Rakowski and Klaas de Vries. Mr. Burleson is a core member of the American Modern Ensemble, Boston Musica Viva, The Tribeca New Music Festival, and David Sanford’s Pittsburgh Collective. Recent touring projects include “Akoka: Messiaen Remix”, a CD and program featuring Messiaen’s Quartet for the End of Time, and including new works commenting on it by David Krakauer and DJ Socalled, with David Krakauer, clarinet; Matt Haimovitz, cello; and Todd Reynolds, violin. The “Akoka” CD was nominated for a 2015 Juno Award for Classical Album Of The Year.

Currently, Mr. Burleson is recording the complete piano works of Camille Saint-Saëns, being released on 5 CD volumes on the new Naxos Grand Piano label. *Saint-Saëns: Complete Piano Works 1: Complete Piano Études*, the inaugural release on the new label, *Saint-Saëns: Complete Piano Works 2*, and *Character Pieces* (Vol. 3) were all released in 2012, and *Saint-Saëns: Complete Piano Works 4: Dances & Souvenirs* was released in February 2016. All have met with high international acclaim.

A graduate of the Peabody Conservatory, New England Conservatory, and Stony Brook University (D.M.A.), his principal teachers include Gilbert Kalish, Leonard Shure, Veronica Jochum, Lillian Freundlich, and Tinka Knopf. Mr. Burleson teaches piano at Princeton University, and is Professor of Music and Director of Piano Studies at Hunter College-City University of New York.

A seminal figure in the history of French Romantic music, Camille Saint-Saëns was also one of the greatest keyboard prodigies of the past 200 years. When he made his piano recital debut at the age of 10 in the Salle Pleyel, he announced to the audience that he would be pleased to perform any of Beethoven's 32 sonatas as an encore. A good deal later, Liszt referred to him as the greatest organist on earth. Saint-Saëns was a prolific composer in all genres, and created a bountiful body of works for both organ and piano.

**Album, Op. 72**, emanates from the middle of Saint-Saëns' career, and includes a wider range of colors, textures, and genre associations. The opening **Prélude**, in E Major, begins with a melody in tentative alternating notes between the right and left hands, initially in ethereal textures but gradually building into more ardent territory, and then surging in feverish arpeggios. A retransition over slowly descending chromatic bass tremolos leads us back to the tranquil delicacy of the opening material. The next piece, **Carillon**, is ominous, mysterious and often quite chromatic. It is also in 7/4 time, a highly unusual time signature for 1884. Saint-Saëns amplifies the ambiguity of the meter via his rhythmic setting, which makes it difficult for the ear to decide whether it hears 3 beats followed by 4, or 4 followed by 3. The **Finale** (No. 6) is an extremely effective climax, initially somewhat suggesting Schumann via his quick chordal triple meter movements from his own character sets. The middle *Poco meno mosso* section presents rivulets of chromatic quintuplets in the right hand against left hand triplets to create elusive, haunting music that eventually explodes back into the opening material. These two sections continue to alternate again in a more fragmented fashion, until the first section manifests itself a final time in a resplendent climax.

Saint-Saëns's Op. 111, No. 4 piano étude, **Les Cloches de Las Palmas (The Bells of Las Palmas)**, is both haunting and extremely forward-looking, anticipating impressionistic textures and effects that do not otherwise really appear until Ravel's *Jeux d'Eau*, published two years later. The étude begins with a right-hand repeated figure, soon accompanied by slow sonorities in the left hand, projecting an initial carillon-like tintinnabulation. This passage serves as an introduction for the main body of the work, with fast, liquid sextuplets in the right hand containing the melodic notes at the beginning of each sextuplet, and slow, haunting, sometimes quite dissonant chords in the left hand. This is followed by a more dissonant harmonic variation of all the preceding material, and a melancholy coda exploiting the same textures.

In June of 2013, I found several unpublished solo piano manuscripts of Saint-Saëns in Paris' Bibliothèque Nationale. After much maneuvering with

personnel at the Bibliothèque, I was allowed to make copies of the manuscripts, and given permission to record them. One of the unpublished works is his ***Fantaisie sur la Quintette de L'Etoile du Nord de Meyerbeer***. Meyerbeer's operas were extremely popular in the mid-19th century, followed by a precipitous fall after his death in 1864. Conceivably due in part to Meyerbeer's great popularity in the mid-19th century, Saint-Saëns actually wrote several fantasy-transcriptions on themes from his operas, as did Franz Liszt. *L'etoile du nord* is an *opéra comique* in 3 acts, centered on the historical figures of Russia's Peter the Great and his second wife Catherine I. The Quintet occurs in Act II, wherein Catherine is watching Peter The Great, in disguise as a lowly carpenter, and a pastry chef carousing with two *vivandières* (women attached to military units as "canteen keepers", whose role it was to sell wine, food and sundries to the troops.) Saint-Saëns begins the work with a free, rhapsodic, cadenza-like opening, centered on the principal motive of the Quintet. Then the aria proper arrives, full of much more textural variety in Saint-Saëns' version than in Meyerbeer's. The final third of the work then deviates from the aria structure, and flourishes into a full-fledged fantasy on the Quintet.

***Fantaisie sur Lohengrin de Wagner*** is another unpublished solo piano manuscript by Saint-Saëns that I found at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Written in 1859 according to the dated signature in the composer's own hand, it incorporates several themes from the opera to create a vivid, imaginative, virtuosic, and very effective work. Saint-Saëns commences with a few verbatim phrases of *Elsa's Traum*, but then soon diverges into variations and interweaving of other themes from the opera. There is a wide range of textural writing on display, as well as a fugal section, and an ultimate climax that builds from the *Jubelweisen* at the end of Act I.

Based off of the poem "Carpet Weavers" by Brenda Najimian Magarity, Mary Kouyoumdjian's ***Aghavni (Doves)*** follows the lives of a group of women before and during the Armenian Genocide, closing with a retrospective look at those women and what they lost from a "present day" perspective. The first movement, 1910, features rhapsodic folk material in a quasi-improvisational, theme-and-variations format. II. 1915 begins with a *cri de cœur* produced via an alternately bitonal and acrid folk modal melody, played *fortissimo* in the extreme registers of the piano. This then settles into more ruminative, quasi-impressionistic material. Finally, III. 1986 serves as a kind of gentle peroration, with the melodic material from the first movement recalled as a kind of distant, faintly nostalgic yet defiant memory.

Mary Kouyoumdjian is a composer with projects ranging from concert works to multimedia collaborations and film scores. As a first-generation Armenian-American, she uses a sonic palette that draws on her heritage, interest in music as documentary, and background in experimental composition to progressively blend the old with the new. Kouyoumdjian has received commissions from the Kronos Quartet, Carnegie Hall, Alarm Will Sound/Mizzou International Composers Festival, the American Composers Forum/JFund, New York's WQXR, and the Los Angeles New Music Ensemble. Her music was presented by the 2016 NY Philharmonic Biennial at Lincoln Center, and her artist residencies include Roulette/The Jerome Foundation, Montalvo Arts Center, the Mizzou International Composers Festival, and Exploring the Metropolis. Currently pursuing her Composition D.M.A. as a Teaching Fellow at Columbia University, Kouyoumdjian studies primarily with George Lewis and Georg Friedrich Haas. She holds an M.A. in Scoring for Film & Multimedia from New York University and a B.A. in Music Composition from the University of California, San Diego.

Laurie San Martin writes music that creates a compelling narrative by exploring the intersection between texture and line. Her music has been performed across the United States, Europe and Asia. Most recently she has enjoyed writing for virtuoso soloists including violinists Hrafnhildur Atladottir and Gabriela Díaz, percussionists Chris Froh and Mayumi Hama, Haleh Abghari (soprano), Yi Ji-Young (Korean gayageum) and David Russell (cello). Recent awards include the 2018 Andrew Imbrie Award in Music from the Academy of Arts and Letters, and a 2016 Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship. She has also received awards from Harvard University's Fromm Foundation, the American Academy of Arts and Letters (Charles Ives Scholarship), League of Composers-ISCM, the International Alliance for Women in Music, and the ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer's Awards. Laurie holds a PhD from Brandeis University in Theory and Composition. She has taught at Clark University and is currently Professor of Music at the University of California, Davis. Her music can be found on the Left Coast Chamber Ensemble's "San Francisco Premieres" CD, released in 2005 and a recent Ravello CD "Tangos for Piano" performed by Amy Briggs.

***Dances for Solo Piano*** is a collection of three works written for separate occasions and performers. *Tangozilla* takes its inspiration both from William Bolcom's *Death Moth Tango*, and Astor Piazzolla tangos in general, specifically the dark and playful character that Ms. San Martin is particularly drawn to in all of these works. The piece consists of an introduction and two sections, the second of which explosively appears after the first seems to

evaporate. *Zambra?* features irregular and off-balance rhythms to lend it a kind of nervous quality, and features many pedal points and flamenco rhythms. In contrast to the very assertive first movement, *Zambra?* seems to be on a journey with a mysterious destination. The final dance, *Ziozuki*, was written for Karen Rosenak, and is more similar in character to *Tangozilla*, although it is a good deal more episodic. There are brief sections in the piece that Ms. San Martin dubs "digressions", which grow longer as the piece progresses.

Tania Leon is highly regarded as a composer and conductor and recognized for her accomplishments as an educator and advisor to arts organizations. She has been profiled on ABC, CBS, CNN, PBS, Univision, Telemundo, and independent films. Commissions include works for the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the International Contemporary Ensemble, Ursula Oppens and the Cassatt Quartet, Nestor Torres, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, New World Symphony, Koussevitzky Foundation, Fest der Kontinente (Hamburg, Germany), Cincinnati Symphony, National Endowment for the Arts, NDR Sinfonie Orchester, American Composers Orchestra, The Library of Congress, and The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. León has received Honorary Doctorate Degrees from Colgate University, Oberlin, and SUNY Purchase College, and has served as U.S. Artistic Ambassador of American Culture in Madrid, Spain. A Professor at Brooklyn College since 1985 and at the Graduate Center of CUNY, she was named Distinguished Professor of the City University of New York in 2006. In 2010 she was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

***Rituál*** was composed in 1987, and very effectively evokes a kind of ecstatic catharsis promised by its title. After a slow, mysterious, atmospheric introduction, incisive fragments of music in a compound meter dance rhythm are introduced, which continue to build, accumulating speed, energy and resonance. The piece becomes more and more kinetic, with constant virtuosic skips featuring large chords through all the registers of the piano, until it finally achieves a kind of satisfied exhaustion, and dissipates with a few slow bars at its conclusion.

Liszt's *Années de Pèlerinage* (Years of Pilgrimage) exists in three volumes; the first two were written during his extensive wanderings in Europe between 1835 and 1839, always in the company of his paramour, the Comtesse Marie d'Agoult. ***Après une lecture du Dante-Fantasia quasi Sonata*** is the final culminating work of the second volume, which contains pieces inspired by his travels in Italy and is an evocation of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*. Written

in the 14th century in the form of an epic form, the *Divine Comedy* is cast in three volumes: *Inferno* (hell), *Purgatorio* (Purgatory) and *Paradiso* (Heaven.) Liszt's work seems to focus not on specific narratives within the Divine Comedy, but on evoking the atmospheres and moods of the poem, from the terror of *L'Inferno* to the spiritual euphoria of *Paradiso*.

The piece opens with descending octave *tritones* in a fanfare-like rhythm, with a central motto for the entire work. The tritone, incidentally, is the most dissonant—or clashing—interval in the western musical system. The tritone itself is formed from any two notes that are three whole steps apart. It has long acted as a musical code for the devil, from the medieval period through the present. In addition to the descending tritone motive, the main generative theme of the piece is a circulating line made up of rising and falling chromatic scales. The opening contour of this melody is also heard in a hymn-like theme that appears more and more explosively throughout the piece. There are also brief glimpses into *Paradiso*, always presented in a high register on the keyboard, and always in Liszt's "divine" key of F# Major, which he favored whenever he wrote music evoking the heavenly firmament.