Santa Fe CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

51ST SEASON

Tuesday
12 p.m.

AUGUST 13

St. Francis Auditorium in the
New Mexico Museum of Art

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM by Eric Bromberger

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–49)
Polonaise-Fantasy in A-flat Major, Op. 61 (1846)

The Polonaise-Fantasy is one of Chopin's final works—and one of his most brilliant. A polonaise is a national Polish dance that's in triple time and is characterized by unusual rhythmic stresses; the fact that it's usually at a moderate tempo rather than a fast one gives it a statelier quality compared to most other dance forms. Many composers have written polonaises, but the ones Chopin wrote remain the most famous, and some feel that this distinctly Polish form gave the Polish-born composer a channel for his strong nationalist feelings during his exile in Paris.

A polonaise usually has three parts: a first subject, a contrasting middle section, and a return of the opening material. Chopin keeps this general pattern in his Polonaise-Fantasy, but he adds his own touches, writing with unusual harmonic freedom and incorporating both themes into the brilliant conclusion. He also seemingly felt that he'd reshaped the polonaise form here to such a degree that he needed to append the word *fantasy* to the title of the work.

The Polonaise-Fantasy's introduction section, marked *Allegro maestoso*, is long and rather free, while the first theme group, in A-flat Major, is remarkable for the drama and virtuosity of its writing. This makes the quiet middle section, in the unexpected key of B Major and marked *Poco più lento*, all the more effective: A chordal melody of disarming simplicity is developed at length before the opening material gradually returns.

The final pages of this work are dazzling—Chopin combines both themes, and at one point he makes one of the accompanying figures function thematically as the Polonaise-Fantasy winds down to its powerful final chord.

FRANZ LISZT (1811–86)
Polonaise No. 2 in E Major, S. 223 (1851)

Liszt and Chopin were good friends, and as Chopin's health began to decline in the late 1840s, Liszt began to compose a series of piano works in forms that were identified with Chopin, including ballades, waltzes, a mazurka, and a berceuse. These works—which may be understood at least in part as an act of homage to a friend and a composer Liszt greatly admired—also include two polonaises, which Liszt composed in 1851, two years after Chopin's death.

The polonaise is a stately, triple-time dance of Polish origin. It was originally intended as ceremonial music, and it was sung or danced as part of festive processionals. Liszt kept the general three-part shape of Chopin's polonaises (an opening statement; a middle section in a contrasting key and tempo; and a return, usually modified, of the opening material), but he brought a level of conscious virtuosity to the form that isn't found in Chopin's polonaises, difficult as they may be. As a result, the Polonaise No. 2 in E Major demands a pianist of incandescent skill.

This polonaise bursts to life on a series of fanfares that Liszt marks *Allegro pomposo con brio*, and the music takes wing on the dancing polonaise theme. Along the way, Liszt offers, out of nowhere, a series of breathtaking runs marked *Velocissimo* ("As quickly as possible").

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The trio section is remarkable because, instead of introducing a new theme, it's built on a variant of the opening polonaise melody, which is now marked *Patetico* ("With deep feeling"). Liszt adds purely virtuoso passages here—including one that has both hands playing in hammered octaves—and then adds one more surprise: a long cadenza built on trills that eventually climaxes in a passage marked *Quasi improvisato*.

The return to the opening material is quite brilliant—full of ringing, shimmering sounds in the piano's highest register—and the music concludes on a brief but powerful return of the opening polonaise theme.

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–56)
Faschingsschwank aus Wien (Carnival Scenes from Vienna), Op. 26 (1839–40)

In the fall of 1838, Schumann began an extended visit to Vienna with the thought that he and Clara Wieck, whom he would marry in 1840, might make that fabled city their home. But the city that proved so attractive to Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Bruckner, and Mahler held little appeal for Schumann. He found it to be a closed society—and one so conservative in its attitudes that he couldn't imagine it being a place where he'd be able to publish the progressive journal of music criticism that he founded.

Yet the trip wasn't a total loss, as Schumann composed a great deal of music while he was in Vienna. In the spring of 1839, he began a large-scale work for piano, but he wasn't sure what form he wanted it to take. He described the piece to Clara as a "big romantic sonata," but those plans came to nothing, and he set the manuscript aside. He returned to the manuscript in January 1840, when he was back in Leipzig, and finished it. The finished work wasn't a sonata, and Schumann gave it an unusual name: *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* (*Carnival Scenes from Vienna*).

In 1834, Schumann had composed his *Carnaval,* a series of 21 brief pieces that offer portraits of various characters all swirling past in a carnival setting. *Carnaval* quickly became Schumann's first real success as a composer, and in *Faschingsschwank aus Wien* he adopted the same general plan, with each of the five movements projecting its own mood. These moods are abstract—Schumann gives the five pieces only general music titles—and they form a suite of contrasting movements.

The opening *Allegro*, by far the longest movement, contrasts three quite different themes in music that is by turns lyric and brilliant. (It also features a brief, camouflaged quotation of the "Marseillaise," which was banned in the politically conservative Vienna of the time.) The *Romanze* presents a tender melody over minimal accompaniment, while the characteristic dotted rhythm of the *Scherzino* recurs virtually throughout.

It's a mark of Schumann's indecision about the final form of what eventually became *Faschingsschwank* that he published the *Intermezzo* separately in December 1839, before he returned to the larger work and incorporated this music as its fourth movement. And this music is striking, as Schumann has the right hand lay out the declarative main theme over rippling left-hand accompaniment.

The work's concluding *Finale* is its most overtly virtuosic movement, with great hammered chords and brilliant passagework driving *Faschingsschwank* to its grand close.

ERIC BROMBERGER earned his doctorate in American literature at UCLA and for 10 years taught literature and writing courses at Bates College and San Diego State University. Then he quit teaching to devote himself to his first love, music. Bromberger, a violinist, writes program notes for the San Diego Symphony, the La Jolla Music Society, San Francisco Performances, the University of Chicago Presents, Washington Performing Arts at The Kennedy Center, and many other organizations. He was a pre-concert lecturer for the Los Angeles Philharmonic for more than 20 seasons.