

Lara Saldanha, piano  
Student of Christina Dahl  
Dissertation Recital

Monday, October 9<sup>th</sup> 2023, 5 p.m.  
Staller Recital Hall

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Blue Salvia (2022, Premiere)

Kt Allenbaugh (b. 1998)

*Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1914-1917)

M. Ravel (1875-1937)

*Prélude*

*Fugue*

*Forlane*

*Rigaudon*

*Menuet*

*Toccata*

Intermission

Sonata, op. 1 (1909)

A. Berg (1885-1935)

Sonata in C major, op. 53 “Waldstein” (1803-1804)

L. van Beethoven (1770-1827)

*Allegro con brio*

*Introduzione: Adagio molto*

*Rondo. Allegro moderato-Prestissimo*

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This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Musical Arts degree.



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Kt Allenbaugh's *Blue Salvia* was written in the spring and summer of 2022, at my request for a piece to program with *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. In the Victorian language of flowers, blue salvia signifies thinking of someone. *Blue Salvia* is a *tombeau* of sorts to a past relationship, depicting a cycle of emotional processing over the course of the 10-minute work. Wistful chorale-like melodic fragments are interspersed with increasingly frenzied cascades of tremolando figures. The first couple minutes are written in Kt's characteristic vaguely atonal harmonic style, which loosens over the course of the piece into an almost-tonal ending.

*Le Tombeau de Couperin* was started in July 1914, a month before the start of World War I. A month after the start of the war, despite being 39 years old and having been exempted from the army because of "general weakness," Ravel enlisted in the army. The decision is puzzling also because Ravel had a complicated relationship with French nationalism. When asked to sign his name to an initiative banning the performance of German music during the war, Ravel wrote back, demurring: "It would even be dangerous for French composers to ignore systematically the productions of their foreign colleagues, and thus form themselves into a sort of national coterie: our musical art which is so rich at the present time, would soon degenerate [...]. It is of little importance to me that Mr. Schoenberg, for example, is of Austrian nationality."

By September, Ravel was on the front, caring for the wounded and working on *La Valse* and *Tombeau*, most of which was written by the end of that year. Conditions for Ravel became more perilous in 1915, when he joined an artillery regiment as a truck driver, transporting equipment by night while often being shelled until his deteriorating health made surgery necessary in September of 1916. The end of his convalescence coincided with the death of his mother in January 1917, a grief from which Ravel never truly recovered. Discharged from the army, Ravel spent the summer of 1917 outside of Paris, completing *Tombeau*.

The term *tombeau* is a reference to both to a French poetic form, typically a collection of short poems commemorating a person of distinction, and a French baroque musical form, a movement in memory of the composer's teacher or colleague. Ravel's *Tombeau* is perhaps more analogous to the former, each of its movements being dedicated to a friend who perished in the war. That is not to diminish the influence of the French baroque musical tradition, however, which Ravel and Debussy both admired. Ravel sketched the *Forlane* of Couperin's fourth *Concert Royal* in preparation, which is loosely quoted in the C and D sections of his *Forlane*. The piece premiered on April 11<sup>th</sup>, 1919, four months after the end of the war, by the widow of the dedicatee of the *Toccata*, Marguerite Long.

Berg's *Sonata, op. 1* was written at the end of his seven years of studies with Arnold Schoenberg. It was a graduation piece of sorts, the culmination of Schoenberg's process: several years of harmony and counterpoint exercises, progressing to studies of form, and finally sonata form. The *Sonata* is an ideal representation of Schoenberg's principle of developing variation, the idea that the coherence of a work is derived by the manipulation of a single motivic idea. In the case of the *Sonata*, the seed of the entire piece is in the first phrase, in which chromatic, whole tone, and quartal harmonies are immediately superimposed, and yet resolve into an authentic cadence. Like Ravel, Berg grounds his extended harmonies over more conventional basslines, and a perceptible sonata-allegro form (or in the case of Ravel, a sonata, fugue, rondo, two ternaries, and another sonata.)

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It is not just its consummate construction that makes the *Sonata* a miraculous opus one, however. It is a portrait of a world on the brink of collapse. The five years in which the *Sonata* and *Le Tombeau de Couperin* were written was the end of the *belle époque*, several decades of relative peace and stability in Europe. The next decade would see the outbreak of the deadliest war in human history to that point with 10 million casualties; the subsequent redrawing of the map of Europe, with the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman Empires being split; the Spanish flu that killed an additional 50 million, and particularly decimated the younger generation that had fought in the war; and the start of a unstable diplomatic *détente* that ultimately set the stage for the Second World War.

In the summer of 1802, Beethoven took a house in the village of Heiligenstadt, hoping to slow the deterioration of his hearing. In that summer, he completed the second symphony, the three op. 30 violin sonatas, and the three op. 31 piano sonatas—an astounding burst of productivity. In October he wrote the Heiligenstadt Testament to his brothers, and then wrote the “Eroica,” the “**Waldstein**,” and the “Kreutzer.” It is hard to imagine how Beethoven created some of the crowning achievements of these three genres in that particular year. These three works not only pushed the symphony, piano sonata, and violin sonata to new heights, but contain music that speaks of triumph, power, joy, determination, humor, and infectious kinetic energy.

I believe part of the explanation of the writing in the “Waldstein” and the “Kreutzer” lies in the instrument itself. In 1803, Beethoven received a new piano from the English manufacturer Erard. This was the first English-style instrument Beethoven had owned, with greater range, power, and sustain than the Viennese instruments on which he previously worked, and a foot pedal mechanism instead of knee levels for the first time. One has the sense in both works of Beethoven exploring the new sonorities available to him: in the piano cadenza at the opening of the first movement of the “Kreutzer,” the use of the extreme ends of the piano throughout the first movement of “Waldstein,” and in the long pedal markings and octave glissandi in the third movement of “Waldstein,” for example.

The “Waldstein” has in common with the “Eroica” a new level of motivic economy, which could anachronistically be called a kind of developing variation. In the “Eroica,” the seed is the immediate presentation and unfolding of the E-flat major chord; in “Waldstein” it is even more simply the major third. In the first movement, the secondary key areas have a tertian relation to the primary, the opening motif of the second movement is an ascending sixth, and the theme of the third movement features a constant oscillation between E and E-flat, highlighting the third scale degree, and a barrage of major thirds at the end of the coda.

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