

NICOLAS NAMORADZE

p i a n i s t + c o m p o s e r

programming philosophy

Here I describe some of the principles by which I create programs. For current program offerings, please see the separate document on recital programs. I also currently present an alternative event type, a new concept called “mindful recitals” that intersperses performances with guided mindfulness exercises and thought experiments that explore various perspectives on the listening experience. More information on these kinds of events can be found in a document on mindful recitals.

Overarching themes and narratives

“His beautifully considered program, delivered at Kapelle Gstaad, showcased his skills... Encores were finely judged.” – International Piano

I seek to build my programs around particular concepts, to present the audience a cohesive musical statement formulated in an engaging narrative. The works on the program are all selected in relation to this concept, rather than the program simply being an assemblage of works in my current repertoire. There are several themes it might revolve around. It can sometimes be a certain topic or musical motif, such as a current “Dies Irae” program: the two primary pillars of the recital are based on the medieval plainchant, Liszt’s Totentanz and Rachmaninoff’s Sonata No. 1. It could also be a certain form or genre, such as all-Etude recital programs I presented last season. In others, certain kinds of connections between works are highlighted, e.g. a program focused on unexpected cross-temporal relationships. Whatever the concept, the works are arranged so that they carry the listener on a clearly progressing journey from first note to last—and the choice of encores also generally adheres to this conception.

Juxtapositions and order

“The very first look at the program demonstrated the unusual mind of an artist who goes against the obvious... It was an intriguing and atypical idea that I salute.” – ConcertoNet

Beyond the selection of works, the order and pairing of works on the program plays a major role in how my programs are built. Sometimes, a compelling connection between two works may even be the starting point around which other pieces are selected. These pairings are often stark and radical, revealing connections in works in very different genres, styles, or time periods. For example, the program on cross-temporal relationships opened with Scriabin’s Sonata No. 9 followed directly by Bach’s F minor Sinfonia, highlighting features in the work of one composer typically associated with the other—in this case, the intricate polyphonic textures in Scriabin’s Sonata and the daring chromaticism of Bach’s brief Sinfonia. Such combinations shed new light on familiar works, encourage us to reconsider them with new perspectives.

Spacing and segues

“His choice to flow directly from the Scriabin into Bach’s Sinfonia No. 9 in F minor brilliantly illuminated the kind of continuity a perceptive mind can find.” – Blogcritics

A facet of recitals that I generally find under-explored is how we bridge the gap between works on the program. There is much potential in playing with how much time is left between pieces and whether one cuts the flow for applause. In virtually all my programs I explore such possibilities with the kinds of pairings described above, and they are usually facilitated by tonal connections. In the aforementioned Scriabin Sonata + Bach Sinfonia combination, I’d segue directly into the Bach following a several seconds of silence after the Scriabin, the final low F of the Scriabin Sonata opening the door to the low F with which the Bach Sinfonia commences. Pairings such as Bach’s D minor French Suite + my Etudes or selections from Bach’s Art of Fugue + Rachmaninoff’s Sonata No. 1 create similar effects. Sometimes, dramatic themes are also highlighted: in the “Dies Irae” program, the opening bass Fs of Liszt’s liturgically-inspired Totentanz emerge directly out of the final low chord with which Bach’s “Ich ruf zu dir, Herr” (arr. Busoni) ends. The proximity of these tonal bridges and the tension of the silences which articulate them create a space that highlights the unique links between these works.

Familiar and unfamiliar

“Bowen is now all but forgotten, but his studies, written in 1919, are a fascinating blend of Romanticism and modernist experimentation. In this player’s hands they were riveting, each one brought out like a rabbit from a conjuror’s hat and allowed to run (very fast) wherever it liked.” – International Piano

I have always been fascinated by the lesser-known corners of the piano repertoire and thrilled by the sense of discovery when off the beaten path, and I am passionate about sharing this sense of discovery with audiences. Thus in my recitals I seek to present both known and unknown territory, juxtaposed in thought-provoking ways. For instance, in several recent recital programs the music of York Bowen was placed prominently, including works that had never been previously recorded and were being performed at those venues for the first time.

Original compositions

“Virtuosic works, [Namoradze Etude’s] evoked Ligeti’s Etudes, though much lighter in mood throughout. Engaging and brilliant, with names from Major Scales to Double Notes, they ironically suggested the theme of having fun during inevitable long practice sessions. But they also served as ample vehicles to demonstrate the composer’s wit along with digital prowess.” – Boston Musical Intelligencer

My profile as a composer is central to who I am as a musician, and most of my recital programs include my own works. These pieces are integrated into the recital programs in the manner described above; examples of pairings include my Arabesque with Schumann’s work of the same name, sets of my etudes with those by Scriabin or Bowen, and forthcoming programs include works by Rachmaninoff beside pieces of mine that are based on or relate to the composer’s music.

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nicolasnamoradze.com