

AMHERST COLLEGE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC  
PRESENTS

# **Gabriela Montero**

**piano**

Friday, February 17, 2023 • Buckley Recital Hall • 8 PM

MUSIC AT **AMHERST** SERIES

# PROGRAM

## **Sarcasms: Five Pieces for Piano, Op. 17**

Sergei Prokofiev  
1891 – 1953

1. Tempestoso
2. Allegro rubato
3. Allegro precipitato
4. Smanioso
5. Precipitosissimo — Andantino

## **Piano Sonata No. 2 in D minor, Op. 14**

1. Allegro ma non troppo
2. Scherzo. Allegro marcato
3. Andante
4. Vivace

## **Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 36**

Sergei Rachmaninoff  
1873 – 1943

1. Allegro agitato (B-flat minor)
2. Non allegro—Lento (E minor—E major)
3. Allegro molto (B-flat major)

—*Intermission*—

## **Piano Sonata (1924)**

Igor Stravinsky  
1882 – 1971

1. Quarter note = 112
2. Adagietto
3. Quarter note = 112

## ***The Immigrant* (film)**

Charlie Chaplin  
1889 – 1977

Improvised score by Ms. Montero

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*Kindly silence your mobile phone, pager, watch, or any other electronic noise-makers during the concert. And please refrain from using electronic devices with light-producing screens, as they are distracting to your fellow audience members.*

***Cameras and recording devices are strictly prohibited.***

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Gabriela Montero's visionary interpretations and unique compositional gifts have garnered her critical acclaim and a devoted following on the world stage. Anthony Tommasini remarked in *The New York Times* that "Montero's playing had everything: crackling rhythmic brio, subtle shadings, steely power...soulful lyricism...unsentimental expressivity."

Recipient of the 2018 Heidelberger Frühling Music Prize, Montero's recent and forthcoming highlights include debut invitations to perform with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, New World Symphony, New Zealand Symphony, and the Orchestre National de France; an extensive European tour with the City of Birmingham Symphony and Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla; residencies with the Sao Paulo, Prague Radio, and Basel symphonies, as well as regular appearances at the National Arts Centre of Canada where she was appointed Creative Partner to the organisation for four years from the 2020-2021 season.

The 2022-2023 season also sees the launch of "Gabriela Montero at Prager", a new ongoing artistic residency established at the Prager Family Center for the Arts in Easton, Maryland. Montero also makes venue debuts in Paris at the Seine Musicale and at the Philharmonie, the latter featuring the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony and Marin Alsop. Montero re-joins forces with Alsop for performances of her "Latin" Concerto with the Chicago Symphony at the Ravinia Festival and the Dallas Symphony, while bringing her 2018 composition *Babel* to the Oregon Symphony. Other recent performances of the "Latin" Concerto have been given with the Orchestra of the Americas on tour at the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, Edinburgh Festival, Carnegie Hall, and the New World Center in Miami, Florida.

## PROGRAM NOTES

### **Sergei Prokofiev *Sarcasms: Five Pieces for Piano, Op. 17***

*Sarcasms* represents a young artist's attempt to formulate his own voice. Prokofiev was already well known in 1912, two years before finishing his official studies at the Saint Petersburg Conservatory; he had established himself as a compositional rebel, the *enfant terrible* of Russian music. *Sarcasms*, a piece made up of five separate movements organized chronologically by the date of composition, which ranges from 1912 to 1914, shows much of what Prokofiev became known for as a mature artist: daring uses of dissonance and atonality; incorporation of accessible, folk-inspired melodies; and, of course, an incisive sense of humor.

This piece was, at its time, Prokofiev's most daring foray into musical invention. At the 1916 premiere, which Prokofiev himself performed, composer G. G. Neuhaus remarked that "Some of the audience, among whom more than a few socially respectable people were to be found, were delighted; others were, however, scandalized." In the third movement, Prokofiev ventures into polytonality — the use of different key signatures played simultaneously. Still, Prokofiev shows his lyrical capacity with cascading, surprisingly genuine — not sarcastic — passages in the first and third movement.

## **Sergei Prokofiev Piano Sonata No. 2 in D minor, Op. 14 (1912)**

Written in the same era as the first and earliest movement of *Sarcasms* — Prokofiev's Second Piano Sonata came hot on the heels of the breakout controversy of his Piano Concerto No. 1, which prompted fierce debate — both pro and con — after its July 1912 premiere. Acutely aware of the value of his contributions and his standing in the Russian music scene, Prokofiev demanded an unusually high fee of 200 rubles for the composition when he completed the Second Sonata in August 1912.

The piece's first movement is organized in the familiar classical sonata form. It opens with a rhythmically tense theme which rises up, step by step, creating tension while remaining lyrical. By way of contrast, Prokofiev introduces a *valse triste* (sad waltz) before developing earlier themes. A full recapitulation follows to finish the movement. The second movement, a scherzo, reworks a piece he wrote as a class assignment. A staccato-heavy theme bookends a gentle middle section featuring a repeated octave phrase. The andante, based on two themes, provides emotional depth to balance the dynamism of the surrounding movements. The first theme is a quiet and simple melody; the second is wider-ranging. The lively finale recalls the *valse triste* of the first movement, giving the Sonata a sense of formal unity.

## **Sergei Rachmaninoff Piano Sonata No. 2, Op. 36 (1913)**

Already a famous composer and piano virtuoso, Rachmaninoff composed his Second Sonata while on break from exhausting years of touring. The break, a family trip to Rome, was short-lived, as his daughters contracted typhoid fever.

The dramatic first movement features a bright main theme, which itself combines chromaticism and a falling phrase. The second theme, texturally similar to a chorale, contrasts with the brilliance of the first. Rachmaninoff develops these in various ways throughout the movement, setting them in different keys and interspersing different motives and textures. The second movement, the sonata's slow movement, provides both emotional and technical contrast; the mood is thoughtful and intimate. Despite the contrast, the second movement recalls material from the first; in the movement's middle section, a familiar bell-like texture repeats. The intense finale combines and transforms new melodic material alongside more variations of earlier themes from the first movement, before ending with a chromatic coda. Known for his own virtuosity, Rachmaninoff's first edition of the sonata is technically challenging and, according to the composer, contains superfluous moments of bombast and bluster. In 1931, 18 years after first publishing the piece, he revised it, making major cuts and reducing the level of technical difficulty.

## **Igor Stravinsky Piano Sonata (1924)**

A hugely influential and important composer of the 20th century, Igor Stravinsky's most remarkable quality is arguably not any one compositional technique, but rather his phoenix-like qualities. Indeed, through his long career — he was an active composer from 1908 until 1970 — he reinvented himself many times over, not just keeping up with modern trends, but setting them himself. In his Sonata, Stravinsky exhibits his neoclassical

instincts; having progressed from an era of avant-garde, Russian folk-inspired compositions, he spent much of his career looking back on 18th-century forms and customs and reviving them with a distinct freshness.

The Sonata's first and third movements are closely related: both require the same tempo, both are written in sonata form, and thematic material from the first movement is repeated in the coda of the third. The third movement, however, has a lively sixteenth-note, invention-like theme, reminiscent of Baroque styles associated with Bach. The second movement features dense ornamentation, typical of Romantics like Beethoven, in contrast to the simpler style of the first movement.

*Notes by Nicholas Edwards-Levin '25*

### **Chaplin and *The Immigrant***

There are 40 seconds in *The Immigrant* that encapsulate exactly why I fell in love with Charlie Chaplin, just as millions across the world have done before me. As the boat bringing the Tramp and his fellow immigrants nears the United States, the Statue of Liberty comes into view – Charlie bites his lip with emotion, but the moment is broken as the stewards pen them in like cattle. Charlie asserts himself in typical slapstick fashion: the kick to the backside of the authority figure. Hope, emotion, irony, rebellion, courage, childishness, comedy – all crammed into one little sequence. In all his films, Chaplin constantly flits like this between aspects of the human spirit and bigger social issues, using infinite shades of light and dark.

Without speaking a word, he says the most profound things about us. His sympathy is always with the underdog, in this case beleaguered people coming to the US. When filming started in 1917, the US Immigrant Act had just been passed, restricting the entry of 'undesirables', people from Asia and the illiterate, so the issue was very real. And yet he also allows us to laugh at the seasick old man, murderous gamblers and the difficulties of trying to eat during a storm.

Chaplin's own arrival in the US was far more agreeable. He first went in 1910 on the SS Cairnrona, aged only 21 but already an up-and-coming star of the London music hall, as part of Fred Karno's prestigious vaudeville troupe (alongside Stan Laurel of later Laurel and Hardy fame). *Variety* wrote of his performance in "The Wow-Wows", or "A Night in a London Secret Society", that 'Chaplin will do all right for America.' His first North American tour lasted 21 months, and he returned only a few months later, in October 1912, never to live in his homeland again. His comedic talent was spotted by Keystone Film Company scouts and, in September 1913, he signed a contract for \$150 a week as an actor. From that point, his rise was meteoric. In 1916 he joined Mutual with a salary of \$675,000 to make 12 two-reel comedies – which would include *The Immigrant* – making him one of the best-paid people in the world.

In June 1917, he signed to First National to make eight films for \$1 million, with his own studio and total control over his own films. He was living the archetypal American dream. His wild success is even more surprising given the intense poverty and hardship in which he grew up. The son of music hall entertainers, he was brought up by his mother Hannah Chaplin, but when he was only seven, she had a breakdown and he was sent to the Lambeth Workhouse with his older brother Syd. He spent much of his childhood

shuttling between various institutions for destitute children, and the care of his alcoholic father, also Charles. Maybe as an escape from all of this, he developed a bug for performing and joined the Eight Lancashire Lads clog-dancing troupe, touring England with them at the age of ten. By 13, he had abandoned education, although he remained an auto-didact throughout his life and enjoyed peppering his writings and interviews with unusual words that make him sound somewhat pretentious. He was also passionate about music from an early age, writing in his autobiography about the moment he fell in love with it: 'I suddenly became aware of a harmonica and a clarinet playing a weird, harmonious message... It was played with such feeling that I became conscious for the first time of what melody really was. My first awakening to music.'

His musicality was self-evident – when he was still working with Karno on tour in Paris in 1909, Debussy came to see him backstage and told him: 'You are instinctively a musician and a dancer.' Nijinsky once told him, 'Your comedy is balletic, you are a dancer'. Chaplin taught himself violin, cello and piano, as he explains: 'Since the age of sixteen I had practised from four to six hours a day in my bedroom. Each week I took lessons from the theatre conductor or from someone he recommended. As I played left-handed, my violin was strung left-handed with the bass bar and sounding post reversed. I had great ambitions to be a concert artist, or, failing that, to use it in a vaudeville act, but as time went on I realised that I could never achieve excellence, so I gave it up.'

He even plays the violin in two films – the 1916 *The Vagabond* and the 1952 *Limelight*, but over time his interest in music transferred towards composing, and he wrote beautiful, evocative scores for his feature films, and also went back later in life to score many that originally featured a live accompanist.

At one point, he even owned a music publishing company, which published his tunes, including 'Oh, that cello'. A studio press release written in 1917, just after *The Immigrant* was finished, stated: 'His chief hobby, however, is found in his violin. Every spare moment away from the studio is devoted to this instrument. He does not play from notes excepting in a very few instances. He can run through selections of popular operas by ear and if in the humor, can rattle off the famous Irish jig or some negro selection with the ease of a vaudeville entertainer. Chaplin admits that as a violinist he is no Kubelik or Elman but he hopes, nevertheless, to lay in concerts some day before very long.'

Indeed, the idea for *The Immigrant* was initially a musical one, he wrote: 'Even in those early comedies I strove for a mood; usually music created it. An old song called "Mrs. Grundy" created the mood for *The Immigrant*. The tune had a wistful tenderness that suggested two lonely derelicts getting married on a doleful, rainy day.' Inspired by this tune, Chaplin worked on the café scene of the second half of *The Immigrant*. One of the luxuries of his situation was that he could keep filming over and over again, improvising until he was happy – this scene took 384 takes (his scene partner Edna Purviance reportedly became sick from eating so many beans). It was only when that was finished, and he was looking for ideas for a second reel, that he invented the backstory on the boat. By the time that was filmed, he had 40,000 feet of film to reduce to 1,800, a task that took four days and nights.

The film went on to become one of Chaplin's most popular films, and his only short film selected by the Library of Congress in 1998 for preservation in the US National Film Registry as being 'culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant' – alongside several of his later features.

In 1917, when *The Immigrant* came out, films were silent, and accompanied by a pianist, organ or an orchestra, depending on the size of the venue. They either improvised or worked off cue sheets provided by the film company – Chaplin supervised these for his early films. Everything changed in 1927 with the release of Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer*. New technology meant that you could hear the actors speak and music became integral to the film. Handsome actors with squeaky voices were suddenly out of work (as parodied in *Singin' in the Rain*) and the many musicians who had worked in cinemas lost their work. Chaplin resisted. He knew that the Tramp's power, which made him beloved from Argentina to Zimbabwe, depended on him never speaking. In 1928 he started work on *City Lights* as a silent film, but featuring his own soundtrack for the first time (though heavily aided by Arthur Johnson). He compromised further with *Modern Times*, which started filming in 1934, and featured sound effects and Chaplin singing a nonsense song at the end. Chaplin never learned to read music, but in his scores for *City Lights* and *Modern Times*, he demonstrates an innate musical sense of pace, rhythm and structure, and an understanding of how drama and music relate to each other.

He wrote: 'I tried to compose elegant and romantic music to frame my comedies in contrast to the tramp character, for elegant music gave my comedies an emotional dimension. Musical arrangers rarely understood this. They wanted the music to be funny... I wanted the music to be a counterpoint of grace and charm.' While the encroachment of sound was problematic for Chaplin, it meant that Los Angeles became a magnet for composers and musicians from all over the world, some fleeing for their lives from the Nazis (Schoenberg, Korngold, Waxman, Rózsa, for example), or as political dissidents (Stravinsky, Prokofiev and Rachmaninov) – and some just to make a buck in the new market. The self-taught former cockney urchin with aspirations to high culture was like a kid in a sweetshop. Illustrious artists would often stop at his studio just off Sunset Boulevard or come to dinner, and Chaplin's autobiography is full of wonderful anecdotes about these encounters.

He describes dining with Rachmaninov at the house of the pianist Horowitz: 'Rachmaninov was a strange-looking man, with something aesthetic and cloistral about him... Someone brought the topic round to religion and I confessed I was not a believer. Rachmaninov quickly interposed: "But how can you have art without religion?" I was stumped for a moment. "I don't think we are talking about the same thing," I said. "My concept of religion is a belief in a dogma – and art is a feeling more than a belief." "So is religion," he answered. After that I shut up.'

Chaplin nearly produced a film with Stravinsky, inventing at dinner with the composer a passion play about the crucifixion, set in a night club, surrounded by a baying mob and businessmen making money out of the entertainment. The only person upset by the scene is a drunk, who gets thrown out. 'I told Stravinsky, "they throw him out because he is upsetting the show." I explained that putting a passion play on the dance floor of a

night-club was to show how cynical and conventional the world has become in professing Christianity. The maestro's face became very grave. "But that's sacrilegious!" he said.' Stravinsky (who had written *Le Sacre du printemps* in 1913) subsequently changed his mind, and wrote to Chaplin about doing the film, but by then Chaplin's attention had moved on.

There are no direct references in Chaplin's writings to Prokofiev, but the composer mentions him in his own diaries, referring to a meeting in France in 1931: 'Tomorrow we dine with Charlie Chaplin. I never met him in my life before. It will be interesting to see him.' Chaplin's own immigration story did not end happily ever after in the US. On 18 September 1952, aged 63, he and his family set sail to London for the world premiere of *Limelight*. The next day, the US Attorney General revoked his re-entry permit, subject to an interview about his politics and moral behaviour. He had been under the eye of J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, since 1922 – his files stretching to 1900 pages. Sequences such as kicking the officer in *The Immigrant*, the prescient anti-fascism of *The Great Dictator* and anti-capitalist sentiment of *Modern Times* may have opened him up to this paranoia, as well as the generally humanist and anarchic subtexts of his films – especially during the 40s and early 50s, when the US was in the grip of its 'Red Scare'.

He never took American citizenship and was politically active supporting Soviet-American groups during the Second World War, but ultimately, there is no proof that he was an active Communist. (Claims about his morality were on firmer ground, though.) It later emerged that the Immigration and Naturalization Service would not have had enough evidence to exclude Chaplin on his way back, but by then he had decided not to attempt to return, and continued with his family around Europe. He eventually settled in Corsier-sur-Vevey in Switzerland, where he died in 1977, at the age of 88. In 1972, he was given an honorary Oscar and returned to the US for the first time to accept it – receiving a 12-minute standing ovation from the best-known faces of Hollywood. It was recognition and a resolution of sorts, but a bitter one. Chaplin films most often end with him picking up his cane, dusting off his hat and walking into the sunset on his own, with a resolute hop-skip (spoiler alert: *The Immigrant* is a rare exception). He may have been the most famous man on the planet, and one of the wealthiest, but maybe he ultimately remained *The Immigrant*.

*Note by Ariane Todes*

## Amherst College Music Department Upcoming Events

- 2/18 **McBride Concert.** Commission by C. Nichols. Powerhouse. 8:30 PM
- 3/3 **M@A Gryphon Trio.** R. Clarke, D. Wijeratne, & Brahms. 8 PM. \$
- 3/4 **ASO Concert.** Brahms, C. M. Weber and Hindemith. 8 PM.
- 3/9 **Jazz@Friedmann Room.** Keefe Campus Center. 9 PM.
- 3/10 **Jazz Shares.** Wadada Leo Smith/Angelica Sanchez Duo. 7:30 PM. \$
- 3/23 **Jazz@Friedmann Room.** Keefe Campus Center. 9 PM.
- 3/24 **M@A Nathaniel Dett Chorale.** Afrocentric Choral Works. 8 PM. \$
- 3/25 **Choral Society.** 8 PM
- 3/31 **Arts@Amherst.** "In the Works". 8 PM.

*All events are free and held in Buckley Recital Hall unless otherwise noted*  
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