

A portrait of Nicolas Namoradze, a young man with dark hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit and shirt. He is sitting at a Steinway piano, with his right hand resting on his head. The background is a warm, wooden interior. The piano has the Steinway logo and name visible on the right side.

Arabesque

PIANO MUSIC OF SCHUMANN AND NAMORADZE

NICOLAS NAMORADZE



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ROBERT SCHUMANN

Gesänge der Frühe, Op. 133

- 1 I. Im ruhigen Tempo 3:17
- 2 II. Belebt, nicht zu rasch 2:22
- 3 III. Lebhaft 2:44
- 4 IV. Bewegt 2:27
- 5 V. Im Anfange ruhiges,
im Verlauf bewegtes Tempo 3:21
- 6 Arabeske in C major, Op. 18 6:51

NICOLAS NAMORADZE

- 7 Arabesque 5:50

ROBERT SCHUMANN

Humoreske in B flat major, Op. 20

- 8 I. Einfach 5:19
- 9 II. Hastig 4:54
- 10 III. Einfach und zart 4:52
- 11 IV. Innig 2:40
- 12 V. Sehr lebhaft 3:37
- 13 VI. Zum Beschluss 6:02

NICOLAS NAMORADZE

- 4 Etude I, Major Scales 1:40
- 15 Etude II, Mostly Triads 1:38
- 16 Etude III, Moving Mirrors 2:12

Playing Time: 60:02



This album presents some of my reflections on the work of Robert Schumann, from both pianistic and compositional viewpoints. The program is centered on two arabesques, and the structure of the recital is itself reminiscent of an arabesque-like texture, interleaving Schumann's work with my own. The opening sunrise of Schumann's *Songs of Dawn* is followed by a pair of arabesques, Schumann's work exerting an influence on aspects of the formal structure of my piece of the same name. Two considerably more virtuosic and extroverted selections complete the program: Schumann's monumental *Humoreske*, followed by three of my piano etudes.

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856) | Gesänge der Frühe, Op. 133 (1853)

Im ruhigen Tempo | *Belebt, nicht zu rasch* | *Lebhaft* | *Bewegt* |

Im Anfange ruhiges, im Verlauf bewegteres Tempo

Schumann's contemporaries largely considered his last works perplexing and bizarre, attributing the change in his compositional style to the decline in his mental health. However, recent reappraisals of his late oeuvre, unclouded by the assumption that his manic depression would affect his compositional skill detrimentally, discuss previously overlooked qualities of these works; these include a rich and audacious harmonic palette and a greater economy in thematic material, as well as the anticipation of compositional procedures of later composers. Some of these stylistic hallmarks are encapsulated in his penultimate work, the *Gesänge der Frühe* ("Songs of Dawn"), which Schumann called "musical pieces that describe feelings at the approach and growth of morning, but more as expressions of feeling than painting."

The sparse antiphony of the opening movement is at odds with its quietly jarring dissonances, a simultaneous glance to the past and the future that is at the heart of Schumann's late style. The second movement is arguably the most enigmatic of the set, constantly flitting between different textures and characters and avoiding settling on the tonic key until the very end. The lively third

movement is driven by a distinctive galloping rhythm, while the fourth is a poignant *Lied* for piano that maintains a song-like texture throughout. The reserved, chorale-like opening of the final movement refers back to the atmosphere of the first, before a gentle stream of notes—entering at first almost imperceptibly—begins to fully permeate the texture, carrying the work to its conclusion.

ROBERT SCHUMANN | Arabeske, Op. 18 (1839)

As is typical of Schumann's compositional style, the *Arabeske* presents a variety of moods and characters within a short time span. Charmingly delicate and fluid passages in the home key of C major alternate with darker, passionate sections in foreign keys. The conclusion of this dramatic narrative, a touching and pensive coda, is an iconic moment in Schumann's piano music.

NICOLAS NAMORADZE (b. 1992) | Arabesque (2018)

The *Arabesque* is based on principles that define arabesques in visual art: those of ornate, spiraling and interlacing patterns. The pianist's hands are superimposed throughout the work, playing intertwined figurations where the individual strands can only be distinguished by dynamic shifts between the hands. Two types of sections alternate with each other—one ascending, the other descending—creating a slow oscillation in the upper half of the keyboard and a rondo-like structure that bears the influence of Schumann's homonymous work. A study in gentle changes of color and sonority, the shifts between various textures occur extremely gradually throughout the work, in a manner reminiscent of M.C. Escher's *Metamorphosis* prints.

ROBERT SCHUMANN | Humoreske, Op. 20 (1839)

*Einfach; Sehr rasch und leicht | Hastig | Einfach und zart | Innig |
Sehr lebhaft; Mit einigem Pomp | Zum Beschluss*

By 1838, the budding relationship between Robert Schumann and the love of his life, Clara Wieck, had come up against an obstacle: the refusal of Clara's father to allow them to marry. In March 1839, Schumann, despondent at not having seen his beloved for several months due to an extended and difficult trip in Vienna, found himself feverishly writing a new piano work, as he explained to her in a letter:

Not to have written to you for a week, is that right? But I have been rhapsodizing about you, and have thought of you with a love such as I have never experienced before. The whole week I have been sitting at the piano, composing and writing, laughing and crying all at once. All this you will find nicely portrayed in my Op. 20, the grand Humoreske, which is also about to be engraved. You see, that's how quickly things go with me: conceived, written out and printed. And that's how I like it.

(Translation by Misha Donat)

While the title *Humoreske* was common in literature, this was the first such usage in music. Rather than denoting a work of a humorous nature, the title alludes to the deft juxtaposition of a great number of contrasting characters, and the influence of Jean Paul, one of Schumann's favorite writers, is especially evident in this work. The piece is hardly cheerful throughout; in fact, Schumann described it in a letter as perhaps his most melancholy work to date.

Though the *Humoreske* is, strictly speaking, a single, 963-bar movement, it is not without clear subdivisions. Most of the resulting six shorter pieces are set in recursive forms. The palindromic

structure of the first piece is especially remarkable. It opens *in medias res*, with a touching song-like melody appearing as if in mid-stream. After a harmonically daring detour this vocally inspired introduction gives way to a sprightly, gamboling theme, *Sehr rasch und leicht* ("Very fast and light"), that seems to trip over itself a few times before finally becoming buoyant and taking off. This is in turn succeeded by an even quicker section that juxtaposes a number of different characters, including ominous grumblings in the lower registers, a bright march, and a dizzying hurtle through many different keys. This vertiginous section forms the center of the palindrome, being succeeded by a reprise of the *Sehr rasch und leicht* section, the decelerating conclusion of which dissolves into a recapitulation of the theme that began the work.

The uneasy, searching opening of the second piece, *Hastig* ("Hastily"), contains a mysterious feature that has led to much scholarly discussion and debate: an "inner voice" marked in the score only to be imagined by the performer, not played. After a central section of inexorable growth in speed and tension, a harmonic skeleton of the opening returns in the form of a series of quiet, hauntingly pure arpeggiated chords. The third piece similarly juxtaposes serenity and excitement, with lyrical passages framing an energetic, driven *Intermezzo*.

In the fourth piece a touching theme that gently climbs up the register of the piano alternates with sections that are sometimes puckish, sometimes pensive. The headlong rush of the fifth movement masquerades as an exciting finale; Schumann disorients the listener by upstaging a conclusive-sounding cadence with an imposing march that unexpectedly crashes in and eventually grinds proceedings to a halt. Only now does the real denouement of the work begin: an extended, movingly expressive passage emblematic of the composer's "story-telling" style. This sixth piece ends with a brief but majestic flourish that rounds off the whole work.

NICOLAS NAMORADZE

Etude I, Major Scales (2015) | Etude II, Mostly Triads (2017)

Etude III, Moving Mirrors (2017)

Each piano etude is inspired by a specific technical, pianistic challenge that serves as a basis for the textures and figurations. In *Major Scales*, the hands switch between different types of scales in various keys, at first in a coordinated manner but soon falling out of sync and bouncing off each other in different directions. An increasingly chaotic interaction between the two hands leads to the eventual disintegration of the passagework. *Mostly Triads* alternates between various types of chordal textures. A study in frequent changes of hand position, the etude fades in at the top of the keyboard and makes its way downwards, departing at the bottom of the piano's register. In *Moving Mirrors*, short figurations undergo several forms of inversions and distortions in pitch, accentuation, register, melodic shape and rhythm, and as the rate of these transformations increases the passagework gets increasingly frenetic.

— *Nicolas Namoradze*



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Pianist and composer **NICOLAS NAMORADZE**, whose performances have been hailed by critics as “sparkling... sensitive and coloristic” (*New York Times*) and “simply gorgeous” (*Wall Street Journal*), came to international attention in 2018 upon winning the triennial Honens International Piano Competition in Calgary, Canada—the largest piano prize in the world. His often sold-out recitals around the world have been met with universal critical acclaim, and his recent album releases have received extraordinary accolades and awards, including the Choc de Classica, Record of the Month in *Limelight*, Instrumental Disc of the Month in *BBC Music Magazine*, Editor’s Choice in *Gramophone* and Editor’s Choice in *Presto Classical*.

“I’m not often lost for words, but Nicolas Namoradze’s recital almost defeated me”, wrote Michael Church in *International Piano Magazine* following his recent Wigmore Hall debut, declaring the performance “astonishing”. The recital was also chosen as Editor’s Favorite of the Month in *BBC Music Magazine*. Following his sold-out Carnegie debut at Zankel Hall in New York, Roman Markowicz in *ConcertoNet* called Namoradze “an artist representing that rare breed, a thinking virtuoso” and “a pianist who proved that, once in a while, the distinguished members of the jury make a good choice and select a winner who plays like a true artist.”

His current activities include recitals at concert halls including the Konzerthaus Berlin, Tokyo Bunka Kaikan, Boston’s Gardner Museum, New York’s 92nd Street Y and Tokyo Toppan Hall; appearances at Tanglewood, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Toronto Summer Music, Miami International Piano Festival, Telavi Music Festival, Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Tbilisi Piano Fest and the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival; and performances with orchestras including the Budapest Festival Orchestra, London Philharmonic, Milwaukee Symphony, Calgary Philharmonic, Winnipeg Symphony and Ottawa National Arts Centre orchestras, with conductors such as Iván Fischer, Karina Canellakis, Ken-David Masur and Daniele Rustioni. Upon the invitation of Sir András Schiff, Namoradze is presenting recitals at leading venues around Europe including deSingel Antwerp,

Munich Allerheiligenhofkirche, Orpheus Stiftung Zurich and the Gstaad Menuhin Festival in the “Building Bridges” series.

A Gramophone “One to Watch” and BBC Music Magazine “Rising Star,” Namoradze was recently named among WQXR’s “20 for 20: Artists to Watch,” a list that “includes long-time heroes, established favorites and newcomers set for stardom who are redefining what classical music can be.”

Namoradze is the author of *Ligeti’s Macroharmonies*, a book published by Springer in the Computational Music Sciences series. The work is based on his doctoral dissertation, which explores the late etudes of Ligeti through a novel lens of statistical-graphical analysis and discusses questions regarding listeners’ perception of stability in musical texture. His doctoral work received a distinction for exceptional achievement with a nomination for the Barry Brook Award.

Highlights of his activities as a composer include commissions and performances by leading artists and ensembles including Ken-David Masur, Tessa Lark, Metropolis Ensemble and the Momenta, Verona and Barkada Quartets, at festivals such as the Chelsea Music Festival, Honens Festival, Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival and Klavier-Festival Ruhr, among others. He has also composed and produced a number of film soundtracks, including *Walking Painting* by Fabienne Verdier and *Nuit d’opéra à Aix*, a short film made in association with the Festival d’Aix-en-Provence. His compositions are published by Muse Press.

Namoradze was born in Tbilisi, Georgia in 1992 and grew up in Budapest, Hungary. After completing his undergraduate studies in Budapest, Vienna, and Florence, he moved to New York where he received his master’s degree from The Juilliard School and his doctorate from the CUNY Graduate Center, where he held the Graduate Center Fellowship. His teachers and mentors have included Emanuel Ax, Yoheved Kaplinsky, Zoltán Kocsis, Matti Raekallio, András Schiff and Elisso Virsaladze in piano, and John Corigliano in composition. For several years Namoradze served on the faculty of Queens College, where he taught chamber music, composition and music history.

He now pursues postgraduate studies in neuropsychology at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience at King's College, London, where his research interests include the effects of mental practice and mindfulness on musical performance.

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