

Tri-C Classical Piano Series: a conversation with Lise de la Salle

by Mike Telin



Life is busy for Lise de la Salle. The French pianist is currently on a six-week North American tour which has included stops at New York's Town Hall, the Phillips Collection in Washington D.C., and the Detroit Institute of Arts. "It's a long tour," the 29-year-old said by telephone from Dallas, where she was performing Beethoven's Fourth Concerto with Fabio Luisi and the Dallas Symphony. "But concerts like these more than make up for it."

On Sunday, March 18 at 2:00 pm at the Cleveland Museum of Art's Gartner Auditorium, the Tri-C Classical Piano Series will present [Lise de la Salle](#) in a free program that is all about love.

"I call it my transcendental love program," the pianist said. "It's a selection of diverse pieces that reflect the many stages of love, from the happy life and the peaceful love that you find in Schumann's *Widmung* and *Frühlingsnacht*, to the dramatic and dark death in Wagner's *Isoldes Liebestod*. And Schumann's *Fantasie in C*, especially the first movement, is a 'love scream' from Robert to Clara — how deep the emotions are, but this is impossible, tortured love because of Clara's father."

No program about love would be complete without the most famous tale of *amour*, and de la Salle has chosen to play Prokofiev's Ten Pieces from *Romeo and Juliet*. "There's almost no need to explain because it is one of the most amazing romantic stories. The piece goes from innocent and pure discovery of love, to passion, and then to death. It has all the emotions that one human being can feel."

The pianist, who made her concert debut at the age of nine, said that from the beginning of her career she has carefully chosen her repertoire. "I know this may sound stupid, but I do believe you have to play what you like and want to play. Even

when I was young, my programs always included many composers — I never wanted to focus on one because I needed to have diversity, and to go through a lot of different emotions.”

While at the Verbier Festival in 2016, de la Salle recorded a [Papercast Interview](#) during which she said that she has always admired the artistry of Sviatoslav Richter. “I started to listen to him when I was very young, so at first it was love from a child and you don’t really analyze why. Now that I know myself a little bit better and can take a step back, I realize I am attracted to people with strong personalities. Sometime you can disagree with him, but he always takes a position and is engaged in what he does — it doesn’t leave you feeling neutral. Even as a kid I felt that music should always make a strong statement. It’s supposed to make you feel something, and that’s what I enjoy about Richter’s playing.”

In 2017 the pianist released her ninth CD, [Bach Unlimited](#), which she describes as a very personal album that express the idea that Bach never really left us. In addition to the master himself, the album includes works by Liszt, Busoni, Roussel, Poulenc, and Thomas Enhco.



“I think this is true for every musician: we all start with little pieces by Bach. He’s a very good teacher because there are so many aspects to his music and so many important things that we will use later — like polyphony, different voicings, and understanding the architecture of a piece. Some passages can be challenging technically if you want them to be clear and shine like diamonds. There’s a lot of humanity in his music — it’s not only intellectual — and all of this is why I think Bach never left us.”

The album travels through four centuries and is a snapshot of the history of composers who paid homage to Bach's genius through transcription and use of the prelude and fugue form, as well as composing works on the letters of his name.

The recording includes Bach's *Italian Concerto* (18th century), Liszt's *Fantasy and fugue on B.A.C.H.*, and Busoni's *Chaconne* (19th century). "For the 20th century I chose Roussel's *Prelude and Fugue* — the fugue is on B.A.C.H. — and Poulenc's funny, short *Valse-improvisation on B.A.C.H.* For the 21st century I commissioned my friend Thomas Encho to write four pieces based on aspects of Bach's music that I could put in between the others as interludes. It's quite cool and I had fun putting it together because it has so many levels and is a beautiful musical journey." The album is available on Amazon and iTunes.

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