

Mexican pianist Daniela Liebman returns to Tri-C Classical Piano Series

by Daniel Hathaway



She was fourteen when she first played on the Tri-C Classical Piano Series in 2016. Three years later, Mexican pianist Daniela Liebman returns for a free recital of works by Beethoven, Debussy, Prokofiev, and Chopin on Sunday, October 13 at 2:00 pm in Gartner Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

The original invitation to play in 2016 came through Antonio Pompa-Baldi. “He was on the jury when I won the Russian Piano

Competition in California at the age of nine,” Liebman said by telephone from Fort Worth, Texas. “I came to Cleveland to study with him for a couple of months, and I was delighted that he and Emanuela Friscioni invited me to play on the Tri-C series.”

Born in Guadalajara to an American father and Mexican mother, Liebman began studying the piano at a young age. “My dad’s a violinist who graduated from Eastman, but he ended up going into business. He started me on piano at the age of five. At first it was just an extracurricular activity, but by the time I was eight or nine it had quickly developed into a major part of my life,” she said, adding that her mother is not a musician, but has been very supportive of her activities.

“My dad still plays and will sight read for fun. He’s a tiger dad, but in a good way. I appreciate that very much, because although classical music is a beautiful thing, it can be a difficult life. It’s great having someone so willing to help with my career and my musical identity.”

Although Liebman's parents met in the States, her father convinced her mother that they should move to Mexico, where their daughter would be born. "He likes the country," she said. The pianist is now based in Fort Worth, where she has studied with Tamás Ungár at Texas Christian University for the last five years.

Part of Daniela Liebman's Cleveland program fulfills a long-held dream. "It's always been a personal goal to play the four Chopin Ballades together on the same concert. I once heard Eugen Indjic play them that way and spent 35 minutes totally immersed in Chopin's world."

Liebman noted that the four pieces chronicle Chopin's increasing musical maturity. "He wrote the first one when he was young, still in Poland, and just beginning to develop his own voice. By the fourth Ballade, it's all late Chopin with complex inner voices and harmony."

The pianist said she was interested in creating variety in the first half of the concert. "I chose to start with Beethoven's Opus 110 Sonata, which is so welcoming right from the opening chord. Then Debussy's 'Reflets dans l'eau,' 'Hommage à Rameau,' and 'Mouvement' from Book 1 of *Images* transition beautifully into Prokofiev's Third Sonata."

Asked if she has an all-time favorite composer, Liebman said that would probably be whoever's music she happens to be playing at the time, but noted she has a special affinity for Schubert and Debussy.

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