

Richard Goode's Musical Short Stories

by Stephanie Manning

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In Richard Goode's mental directory of acoustically great places, Finney Chapel easily makes the list.

"I think about places partly in terms of how the hall sounds," he says. So when he finds venues with fabulous acoustics, "I remember them with great affection. The atmosphere was so perfect that when you played, you felt that everything mattered."

The highly-respected American pianist, known for his interpretation of Mozart and Beethoven, has performed on the Oberlin Artist Recital Series quite a few times. It's been nine years since his last appearance in Finney. "I don't remember what I played," he says. "I just remember how good it felt."

On Wednesday, April 29 at 7:30 p.m., Goode will return to Finney Chapel and the Artist Recital Series with his program "Fancies and Goodnights." He will pair that personally curated selection of short works with two sonatas by Mozart and Schubert.

The "Fancies and Goodnights" title comes from John Collier's short story collection of the same name. Collier's stories are funny, weird, and even a little cruel, so Goode found the name fitting for a group of off-the-beaten-path pieces. "I'm not terribly one for encores," he says, "so there were these pieces that I couldn't find a place for."

Not to mention, the title just has a certain ring to it. "Most of the pieces that we play and love are called sonata or symphony or impromptu or something like that, but poetic names are lovely."

The nine pieces are presented in roughly chronological order and span five centuries, from Carlo Gesualdo in 1603 to Leoš Janáček in 1900. Goode says he felt "absolutely stunned" by Gesualdo's "O vos omnes" from *Sacred Cantiones for Five Voices, Book 1*.

“I’m simply playing the voices on the piano. I’m not arranging it in any way,” he explains. “I think it’s such a remarkable work that I’m just happy to be able to play it.”

For some pieces, he remembers exactly how he first heard them. A recording by Rachmaninoff introduced him to G. Sgambati’s transcription of Christoph Willibald Gluck’s Melody from *Orfeo and Eurydice* — “one of the most beautiful melodies ever written.” And he once heard a recital by Glenn Gould that championed the music of William Byrd, leading Goode to discover Byrd’s *My Ladye Nevells Booke*.

Meanwhile, Georges Bizet’s Adagietto from *L’Arlesienne* (trans. L. Godowsky) is a memento of Goode’s years at the Marlboro Music School and Festival, where he first attended as a teenager and served as co-artistic director with Mitsuko Uchida for 14 years.

Although Goode has performed Ignacy Jan Paderewski’s *Legende*, Op. 16, No. 1 in the past, he only recently grew to recognize Paderewski’s musicianship. “I had never really appreciated his music fully before,” he says. *Legende* “is a very sentimental piece, but really very beautiful.”

Franz Schubert’s *Ungarische Melodie* and two pieces by Jean-Philippe Rameau — *The Assembly of the Birds* and *The Indiscreet One* — add some warmth and levity to the proceedings. Eventually, the set comes to an end with Leoš Janáček’s aptly-titled “Dobrou Noc!” (Good Night!), from *On an Overgrown Path*.

Bookending the musical short stories sit two longer pieces — one of Goode’s favorite Mozart’s piano sonatas, the A Minor, K. 310, and Schubert Piano Sonata No. 21 in B-flat Major, D.960. The Schubert sonata is one of Goode’s signature pieces. At around 37 minutes long, it “really requires such a long span of tension,” he says. Although “I don’t play the repeat, which I think asks maybe a little too much of the listener.”

Another thing Goode is known for is his love of books. As his bio mentions, he lives in New York City with his wife, Marcia, and their collection of some 5,000 volumes. But as to whether he’ll be visiting MindFair Books or any other bookstores during his visit to Oberlin, he says the jury is still out. “I have bought too many books, so I try not to indulge myself.”

However, something he’s sure he will be doing is teaching a masterclass with conservatory piano students. “I learn a great deal by listening to people’s various approaches to pieces,” he says. “So I’m looking forward to that.”

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