

PROGRAM NOTES BY KEN MELTZER

JUHO POHJONEN, PIANO

Thursday, March 28 at 6 pm
Trinity United Methodist Church

JEAN-PHILIPPE RAMEAU (1683–1764)
Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de Clavecin
(1726–1727)

Suite in A minor, RCT 5

- I. *Allemande*
- II. *Courante*
- III. *Sarabande*
- IV. *Les Trois Mains*
- V. *Fanfarinette*
- VI. *La Triomphante*
- VII. *Gavotte avec les Doubles de la Gavotte*

Suite in G Major, RCT 6

- I. *Les Tricotets*
- II. *L'indifférente*
- III. *Menuet I-Menuet II*
- IV. *La Poule*
- V. *Les Triolets*
- VI. *Les Sauvages*
- VII. *L'Enharmonique*
- VIII. *L'Egyptienne*

INTERMISSION

ALEXANDER Scriabin (1872–1915)
Piano Sonata No. 8, Opus 66 (1913)
Piano Sonata No. 10, Opus 70 (1913)

Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de Clavecin
(1726–1727)

Jean-Philippe Rameau was baptized in Dijon, France, on September 25, 1683, and died in Paris, France, on September 12, 1764.

 *Approximate performance time is 46 minutes.*

 *SMF performance history: SMF premiere*

“Although I have attended the theatre since I was twelve, I first worked for the Opéra only at 50, and even then I did not think myself capable.” So the brilliant 18th-century French composer Jean-Philippe Rameau wrote to an acquaintance. And indeed, it was not until October 1, 1733, that the 50-year-old Rameau’s first opera, *Hippolyte et Aricie*, premiered at the Opéra in Paris. But from then until his death more than 30 years later, Rameau was a major, albeit controversial, force in French opera.

Rameau’s operas, with their highly expressive vocal writing, bold melodies, colorful instrumental sonorities, and harmonic daring, inspired a wide range of audience reaction, both positive and negative. Today, Rameau is universally recognized as one of the early giants of the French lyric theater.

Prior to his operatic success, Rameau had demonstrated similar qualities in his numerous works for keyboard, including his Suites in A minor and G Major, published collectively as his *Nouvelles Suites de Pièces de Clavecin* (*New Suites of Pieces for the Keyboard*).

Suite in A minor, RCT 5

I. *Allemande*—An *Allemande* (*German*) is a dance in duple meter and moderate tempo. The A minor Suite’s opening *Allemande* is an expansive, noble movement in two parts, each capped by more playful triplets. Rameau’s exploration of the instrument’s lower register provides striking coloristic effects.

II. *Courante*—A *Courante* (*Running*) is a quick-tempo dance in 3/2 time. In this *Courante*, eighth-note scale passages are juxtaposed with dramatic, dotted rhythm statements.

III. *Sarabande*—A dance in triple meter featuring prominent dotted rhythms. Here, the key shifts from A minor to A Major.

IV. *Les Trois Mains*—The key returns to A minor for *Les Trois Mains* (*The Three Hands*), in which Rameau (and the performer) magically create the impression of three hands at the keyboard.

V. *Fanfarinette*—In D Major and duple meter, the *Fanfarinette* evokes a leisurely country dance.

VI. *La Triomphante*—*La Triomphante* (*The Triumphant*) is a bold and vigorous episode, in duple meter.

VII. *Gavotte avec les Doubles de la Gavotte*—For the final movement, the key returns to A minor, the setting of a *Gavotte*, a court dance in duple meter. The introduction of the stately principal theme is followed by six variations.

Suite in G Major, RCT 6

I. *Les Tricotets*—*Tricoter* is the French verb “to knit.” In this lovely *rondeau*, the flow of the music, and perhaps even the movement of the keyboard player’s hands, evoke the motion of knitting needles.

II. *L'indifférente*—*L'indifférente* (*The Indifferent*), in G minor, is a tripping dance in 3.

III. *Menuet I-Menuet II*—A *Minuet* is an elegant dance in triple meter. Here, Rameau juxtaposes a cheerful *Minuet* in G Major with a more severe one in the parallel minor key.

IV. *La Poule*—*La Poule* (*The Hen*) opens with a motif, under which is written a transcription of the bird’s clucking song: “co co co co coco dai.” In this tour-de-force, Rameau suggests the activity and decibel level of far more than a single hen!

V. *Les Triolets*—*Les Triolets* (*Triplets*) is a gorgeous lyrical outpouring, in G Major, and triple meter.

VI. *Les Sauvages*—*Les Sauvages* (*The Savages*) may have been inspired by a performance Rameau witnessed in Paris, given by two Native Americans from Louisiana. Rameau later added this music to his “heroic ballet,” *Les Indes galantes* (*The Gallant Indies*) (1735).


VII. *L'Enharmonique*—*L'Enharmonique* (*The Enharmonic*) refers to the different methods of listing the same note (ex. D-flat=C-sharp). During *L'Enharmonique*, in G minor and a leisurely duple meter, Rameau explores modulations that most certainly raised the eyebrows of contemporary listeners.

VIII. *L'Egyptienne*—The Suite concludes with *L'Egyptienne* “*The Egyptian Woman*,” in G minor and with fleet, virtuoso writing from start to finish.

Piano Sonata No. 8, Opus 66 (1913)

Alexander Scriabin was born in Moscow, Russia, on January 6, 1872, and died there on April 27, 1915.

 Approximate performance time is 16 minutes.

 SMF performance history: SMF premiere

1903 marked a stunning turning point in the life of pianist and composer Alexander Scriabin. A classmate of Sergei Rachmaninov at the Moscow Conservatory, Scriabin became a professor of piano at that institution in 1898. However, in 1903 Scriabin left the Conservatory to focus on his musical compositions and a series of concert tours. That same year, Scriabin abandoned his wife and family to live in Western Europe with a young admirer named Tatyana Schloezer.

Schloezer, a devotee of cult philosophy, encouraged Scriabin in his messianic sense of creative omnipotence, based first upon his interpretations of the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche and later, the theosophy of Helena Blavatsky. Scriabin's notebooks from that period include such musings as: “I am God”; “I want to be the brightest light, the greatest (and only) sun. I want to illuminate the universe with my light...I want to seize the world as a man takes a woman”; “I create all history as I create all future. As is my wish, my dream, and I am aware of all this.”


Scriabin's mystical exploration manifested itself in many ways, including experimenting with musical conventions. The final three Piano Sonatas, Nos. 8-10, are a notable example. Scriabin worked on the Sonatas from 1912-13. Each is remarkable for its concentration of ideas and expression, and a harmonic language that extends the conventional notions of tonality to, and beyond, their limits. The writing for the piano

also reflects the fact that Alexander Scriabin was one of the finest virtuosos of his era.

The Sonata No. 8 was the last of the trio that Scriabin completed. He never performed the work in public, but did hold the Sonata in high regard. Each of the final three Sonatas is a single-movement work. The Sonata No. 8 opens with a slow-tempo episode (*Lento*) in 9/8 time. After a brief pause, Scriabin launches the surging *Allegro agitato*, in 6/8. Among the episodes are portions Scriabin marks as “Tragique” (the composer acknowledged that parts of the Sonata constituted “the most tragic episode of my creative work”). The brilliant final portion (*Presto*) resolves to the closing bars that Scriabin directs be played in “sweet, languid” fashion.

Piano Sonata No. 10, Opus 70 (1913)

 Approximate performance time is 12 minutes.

 SMF performance history: SMF premiere

Scriabin premiered the last of his Piano Sonatas, No. 10, at the Great Hall of the Society of Nobles in Moscow on December 12, 1913. Scriabin is often quoted: “My Tenth Sonata is a sonata of insects. Insects are born from the sun...they are the kisses of the sun.” Others have heard a more general evocation of nature in the Sonata, with its frequent, magical appearance of trills. The Sonata begins with a *Moderato* introduction, to be played in a “very sweet and pure” fashion. The *Allegro* (“with emotion”) follows. Throughout, Scriabin urges the pianist to play “with joyous exaltation,” “more and more radiantly,” “with a sweet intoxication,” and “with a luminous, vibrant élan.” The final measures (*Moderato*) bring the Sonata to a hushed close.