

# ONSTAGE

CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS AT PENN STATE

## JONATHAN BISS

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**CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS  
AT PENN STATE**

OPUS 3 ARTISTS  
present

# Jonathan Biss

*The Steinway piano used this evening is provided courtesy of  
Robert M. Sides Family Music Centers and Steinway & Sons of New York City.*

**7:30 p.m. Wednesday, January 19, 2011  
Schwab Auditorium**

*The concert includes one intermission.*

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The 2010–2011 season of the Center for the Performing Arts is supported, in part, by grants from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

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# PROGRAM

## **Sonata 1.X.1905, *From the Street***

**LEOŠ JANÁČEK**

(1854–1928)

*The Presentiment: Con moto*

*The Death: Adagio*

## **Three Pieces for Piano**

**Bernard Rands**

(1934– )

*Caprice*

*Aubade*

*Arabesque*

The Center for the Performing Arts co-commissioned Three Pieces for Piano through its membership in Music Accord.

## **Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57, *Appassionata***

**Ludwig van Beethoven**

(1770–1827)

*Allegro assai*

*Andante con moto*

*Allegro ma non troppo; Presto*

[ INTERMISSION ]

## **Fantasy in C Major, Op. 17**

**Robert Schumann**

(1810–1856)

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# PROGRAM NOTES

**Janáček:**

**Sonata 1.X.1905, *From the Street***

**E**ven after the successful premiere of his opera *Jenůfa* in 1904, Leoš Janáček remained relatively unknown outside of his native Moravia. His modest fame rested largely on his accomplishments as a teacher, organist, and musical folklorist. As a composer and performer, he was not especially partial to the piano; his pupil Rudolf Firkušný, however, testified that his performance of the last movement of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* was a revelation. Besides the sonata on tonight's program, Janáček wrote only a handful of major solo works for the instrument—*On the Overgrown Path*, a programmatic suite, and *In the Mists*, a set of four atmospheric tone poems.

Few of Janáček's works are as explicitly autobiographical as the intriguingly titled Sonata 1.X.1905. On this date—October 1, 1905—the composer witnessed the fatal stabbing of a young Czech man by an Austrian soldier. Tension between the Czech and German communities had been inflamed by the Czechs' campaign for an autonomous university, and the ensuing violence spilled onto the streets. Deeply moved, Janáček memorialized the tragedy in music;

he wrote on the manuscript: "Here an ordinary worker, František Pavlík, falls, stained with blood. He only came to plead for a university and was killed by cruel murderers." The composer seems to have harbored a death wish for his own creation: He burned the original finale just before the premiere in January 1906 and later tried to destroy the remaining two movements in the Vltava River. "They did not want to sink," Janáček recalled. "The pages bulged and floated on the water like white swans." It was not until 1924 that he allowed the work to be published.

Sonata 1.X.1905 was originally called *From the Street, 1 October, 1905*. The two movements are united by their elegiac mood and somber E-flat-minor tonality. *The Presentiment: Con moto* opens with a tender melody that fretfully wanders, constantly in danger of being swallowed by the turbulent harmonies. The music's restless lyricism is steeped in foreboding sentiment. *The Death: Adagio* is serene and agitated; its hollow octaves and irregular rhythms convey resignation and anguish. Janáček evidently preferred this quietly understated ending to his original funeral-march finale, which he considered "vulgar."

## Rands:

### Three Pieces for Piano

Composed during the summer of 2010, this work was commissioned by Music Accord for the gifted American pianist Jonathan Biss, who performed the world premiere in Mainz, Germany, on December 3, 2010. He follows that performance with a fourteen-concert tour ending at Carnegie Hall on January 21.

The music of these solo piano pieces reflects the composer's desire to explore the legacy of the piano music of three of his favorite composers—Scriabin, Debussy, and Ravel—not by stylistic imitation, but by extensions and transformations of their collective harmonic palette into his own musical language.

The first piece, *Caprice*, takes the meaning of the title literally in that a succession of four quite distinct musical ideas are frequently juxtaposed, reordered, and elaborated. Once the four musical characters are clearly established, the speed at which the juxtapositions and reordering occur increases, as does the degree of transformation until the final section is a “capricious,” unpredictable, faster succession of the original ideas that, nevertheless, remain easily recognizable.

The central piece, *Aubade*, is marked “very slow, quiet, vague with a feeling of indecision” and is in essence a condensed, harmonic reservoir of the two outer movements that, in many

different ways, draw upon its overtly-stated and subtly implied harmonies. As such, it is a harmonic “map” that recalls fundamental elements of *Caprice* and anticipates the underlying structures of *Arabesque*.

*Arabesque* is built upon a series of rotations of pitch successions, each extending its register until the entire keyboard is engaged. Every individual pitch of the rotations is swiftly reiterated (*martellato a due mani*) and is always preceded by a group of “grace notes” played as fast as possible and invariably staccato (*secco*), akin to a snare drum flam. These playing techniques, coupled with demanding tempi and markings such as “relentless” and “restless,” result in virtuosic pianism.

This work is dedicated, in admiration and appreciation, to Jonathan Biss, whose live and recorded performances of the piano repertoire are a source of inspiration.

© Bernard Rands, 2010

## Beethoven:

### Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57, *Appassionata*

As a pianist, Ludwig van Beethoven was a force of nature who seemed incapable of playing by the rules of polite society. His unbridled energy at the keyboard and his formidable powers as an improviser are the stuff of legend. Beethoven's no-holds-barred playing wreaked havoc on the keyboard instruments of his day,

as Anton Reicha discovered in the 1790s. “He asked me to turn pages for him,” the Czech composer recalled. “But I was mostly occupied in wrenching the strings of the pianoforte, which snapped while the hammers stuck among the broken strings. Beethoven insisted on finishing the concerto, and so back and forth I leaped, jerking out a string, disentangling a hammer, turning a page, and I worked harder than Beethoven.”

Although increasing deafness forced Beethoven to curtail his performing career around 1805, there was no falling off in his compositional activity. The *Appassionata* sonata was slotted in among other works in progress, including the Triple Concerto, the three Razumovsky string quartets, and the piano sonatas of Op. 53 and Op. 54. According to his pupil Ferdinand Ries, Beethoven composed nonstop. One day in the summer of 1804, while the two men were taking a walk, a light suddenly went on in the composer’s head. Hurrying back to his house, he “ran to the piano without taking off his hat. I took a seat in the corner, and he soon forgot all about me. Now he stormed for at least an hour with the beautiful finale of the (Op. 57) sonata. Finally he got up, was surprised still to see me, and said, ‘I cannot give you a lesson today; I must do some more work.’”

The drama of the work is concentrated in the outer

movements, both of which are firmly anchored in F minor and can justly be described as “impassioned.” (The spurious *Appassionata* subtitle was affixed to the work more than a decade after Beethoven’s death.) Equally impressive is the concentration of the composer’s musical thought. The *Allegro assai*, for instance, is constructed around two contrasting ideas—the flowing, triadic melody heard at the beginning and the driving, percussive material. The *Andante con moto*, a set of variations in D-flat Major, is an oasis of calm in the eye of the storm. Without pausing for breath, Beethoven plunges back into the maelstrom of the *Allegro ma non troppo*—a brilliant, perpetual motion finale that has the tensile energy of a tautly wound spring.

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### **Schumann: Fantasy in C Major, Op. 17**

In the seven years before his marriage to Clara Wieck in 1840, Robert Schumann wrote some of his greatest piano works, including the first and second sonatas, *Kreisleriana*, *Kinderszenen*, and the C-Major Fantasy. Schumann was infatuated with the budding pianist-composer, who was ten years his junior; her father’s implacable opposition to the match only made their hearts grow fonder. The young lovers were forced to

conduct their courtship in writing and music. Schumann declared that his Sonata in F-sharp minor, Op. 11, was “a cry from my heart to yours.” In deference to Mr. Wieck’s feelings, however, he masked his identity on the title page under the names of his fictitious alter egos, the stormy Florestan and the ruminative Eusebius.

The lines by Schlegel that Schumann penned as an epigraph to the Fantasy were clearly meant for Clara: “Through all the tones in Earth’s many-colored dream, a quietly drawn-out tone sounds for one who listens secretly.” The germ of the work consisted of a single movement titled *Ruins*, doubtless a reflection of the lovesick composer’s despondency. Schumann later expanded it into a memorial triptych to Beethoven with the addition of panels labeled *Trophies* and *Palms*. By early 1838, however, he had reverted to his original conception, telling Clara that “the first movement is probably the most passionate I have ever

written—a deep lamentation for you.” For her part, Clara was especially taken with the second movement, in which she heard “an entire orchestra.” By the time the Fantasy was published in 1839, she was on the verge of defying her father and openly declaring her love for Schumann.

Florestan takes center stage at the onset: A broad, majestic melody soars above rippling sixteenth notes. But the gentle spirit of Eusebius dominates the first movement’s prayer-like middle section and the tender *Adagio* at the end, in which Schumann quotes from the song Beethoven wrote to his own “immortal beloved.” The second movement is a crisply energetic march pulsing with rhythmic vitality; the boldly annunciatory main theme returns several times in different guises. The finale owes its dreamy mood to Schumann’s searching harmonies and his characteristic technique of embedding the melody in a rich skein of figuration.

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**John Scofield and  
Joe Lovano  
Quartet**

7:30 p.m. January 27  
Schwab Auditorium

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American pianist **JONATHAN BISS**, regarded for his artistry and deeply felt interpretations, has won international recognition for his orchestral, recital, and chamber music performances on four continents and for his award-winning recordings. Noted also for his prodigious technique, intriguing programs, and musical intelligence, he performs a diverse repertoire ranging from Mozart and Beethoven through the Romantics to Janáček and Schoenberg, as well as works by contemporary composers, including commissions from Leon Kirchner, Lewis Spratlan, and Bernard Rands.

Biss, whom the *Toronto Globe and Mail* describes as “one of the most striking North American pianists of the new generation,” made his New York Philharmonic debut in 2001 and has since appeared with the foremost orchestras of North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. He is a frequent performer at leading international music festivals and gives recitals in major music capitals both at home and abroad.

This season his recital appearances take him to ten countries across Europe and the United States with highlights that include his debut at the Edinburgh Festival, his opening the Master Piano series at the Concertgebouw, and his much-anticipated debut at Carnegie Hall’s Isaac Stern Auditorium.

Biss’s orchestral debuts include the Gewandhaus Or-



© Jimmy Katz

chestra Leipzig, the London Symphony, the Seoul Philharmonic, and the Montreal Symphony, and he returns for performances with a dozen other major North American and European orchestras, such as the New York Philharmonic; the Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco symphonies; and the National Arts Centre and Budapest Festival orchestras. In addition, in his second United States tour with the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields, Biss plays with the ensemble (and directs) in two Mozart piano concertos—K. 271 and 414—in ten cities.

An enthusiastic chamber musician and a frequent participant at the Marlboro Music Festival, Biss collaborates with many of today’s finest players, which this year includes performances with violinist Midori, cellist Antoine Lederlin, and violist Nobuko Imai at Carnegie Hall’s Japan Festival and the Kennedy Center. He also performs the complete cycle of

Beethoven's ten sonatas for violin and piano with Miriam Fried in Seoul, Korea.

Biss's newest recording is an album of Schubert's Sonatas in A Major, D. 959 and C Major, D. 840, and two short Kurtág pieces from *Játékok*. The album was released in October 2009 on the Wigmore Hall Live label and was named one of the best albums of the year by *NPR Music*. It follows four acclaimed recordings he made for EMI Classics, including an all-Schumann recital album, which won a Diapason d'Or de l'année award, and a recital album of Beethoven Piano Sonatas Op. 13, 28, 90, and 109, which received an Edison Award. He recorded Mozart Piano Concertos 21 and 22 in a live performance at Queens College in New York City with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, about which the *Sunday Times* in London wrote, "These are outstanding interpretations, the interplay of soloist and orchestra that of equals in complete sympathy." His first album for EMI Classics was a 2004 recording of works by Beethoven and Schumann on EMI's Debut series.

In 2000, at age 20, Biss made his New York City recital debut at the 92nd Street Y's Tisch Center for the Arts and his New York Philharmonic debut under Kurt Masur that same season. Among the many conductors he has worked with are Marin Alsop, Daniel Barenboim, Herbert Blomstedt, James

Conlon, Charles Dutoit, Bernard Haitink, James Levine, Lorin Maazel, Sir Neville Martin, Michael Tilson Thomas, Christoph von Dohnányi, and Pinchas Zukerman.

Biss represents the third generation in a family of professional musicians that includes his grandmother Raya Garbousova—one of the first well-known female cellists (for whom Samuel Barber composed his cello concerto)—and his parents, violinist Fried and violist/violinist Paul Biss. Growing up surrounded by music, Biss began his piano studies at 6, and his first musical collaborations were with his parents. He studied at Indiana University with Evelyne Brancart and at The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia with Leon Fleisher.

Biss has been recognized with numerous awards, including the Leonard Bernstein Award presented at the 2005 Schleswig-Holstein Festival, Wolf Trap's Shouse Debut Artist Award, the Andrew Wolf Memorial Chamber Music Award, Lincoln Center's Martin E. Segal Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, the 2003 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award, and the 2002 Gilmore Young Artist Award. He was an artist-in-residence on American Public Media's *Performance Today* and was the first American chosen to participate in the BBC's *New Generation Artist* program.

To read about Biss' life as a musician and to learn more, visit [www.jonathanbiss.com](http://www.jonathanbiss.com).

## Merce Cunningham Dance Company performs at Penn State as part of final tour

By John Mark Rafacz

**M**erce Cunningham, who died at age 90 in 2009, was a giant figure in American modern dance—both as a choreographer and as a dancer.

“Over a career of nearly seven decades, Mr. Cunningham went on posing ‘But’ and ‘What if?’ questions, making people rethink the essence of dance and choreography,” wrote Alastair Macaulay in the *New York Times* Cunningham obituary. “... Mr. Cunningham ranks among the foremost figures of artistic modernism and among the few who have transformed the nature and status of dance theater, visionaries like Isadora Duncan, Serge Diaghilev, Martha Graham, and George Balanchine.”

The Merce Cunningham Dance Company’s final, two-year world tour showcases seminal works from throughout Cunningham’s career. The Legacy Tour, which visits State College and more than three dozen other cities, provides the last chance to see Cunningham’s choreography performed by the company he trained.

Like Pascal Rioult, the choreographer and artistic director who brought his company to the Center for the Performing Arts in October, Cunningham first made a



Above: Merce Cunningham in 1958.  
Opposite: Cunningham in 2009.

name for himself as a member of the Martha Graham Dance Company.

The scheduled program for the February 12 Merce Cunningham Dance Company performance at Eisenhower Auditorium includes *Duets*, *Second Hand*, and *Sound-dance*.

*Duets*, which debuted in 1980 in New York City, moves to John Cage’s score of electronic manipulations of percussion music by Mel Mercier and Peadar.

“Merce Cunningham demonstrated that two can be very pleasant company when the Merce Cunningham Dance Company presented the season’s first performance of *Duets ...*,” the *New York Times*’ Jack Anderson wrote after seeing a 1982 performance.

During each of the duets, another couple makes a short traversal of the stage. At the end, all six couples dance together.

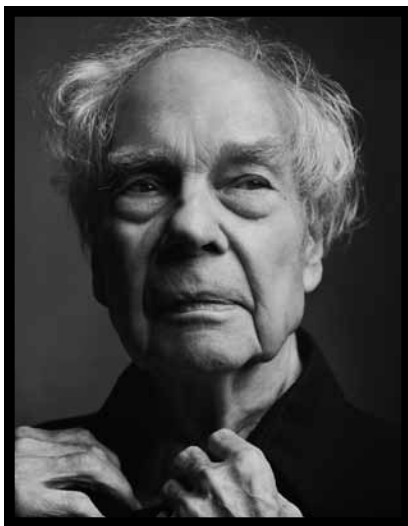
“Technically, *Duets* occasionally seemed indebted to classical ballet,” Anderson observed, “and yet it could never be mistaken for *Swan Lake* or even an abstraction by George Balanchine.”

*Second Hand*, with music by Cage and costume design by painter Jasper Johns, was first performed in 1970 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The three-movement work includes a male solo, a male-female duet, and a group dance.

Cunningham had hoped to set the work to a Cage piano arrangement of Erik Satie’s *Socrate*. But Satie’s estate refused permission for the use of *Socrate* both in its original form and in a Cage arrangement. So Cage composed music based on the structure and phraseology of Satie’s composition. Cage titled his music *Cheap Imitation*, which inspired Cunningham’s choice of *Second Hand* for the dance title.

The title of *Sounddance*, first performed in 1975 in Detroit, comes from a line in James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*. After spending nine weeks in France choreographing a work with the Ballet of the Paris Opera, Cunningham returned to the United States wanting to create a high-energy dance for his own troupe.

“I felt like doing something vigorous, fast, complex,” he



Mark Seliger

said. “The general impression is of a space observed under a microscope.”

The Legacy Tour culminates in New York City—the troupe’s home since it was founded in 1953—with performances on December 29 through 31, 2011. The company closes following the New Year’s Eve performance.

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*The Penn State International Dance Ensemble Endowment underwrites dance presentations at the Center for the Performing Arts. Artistic Viewpoints, an informal moderated discussion featuring a visiting artist or local expert, is offered in Eisenhower one hour before the performance and is free for ticket holders.*

**For tickets or information, visit [www.cpa.psu.edu](http://www.cpa.psu.edu) or phone 814-863-0255. Outside the local calling area, dial 1-800-ARTS-TIX.**

*John Mark Rafacz is the editorial manager of the Center for the Performing Arts.*