

Selections from *Játékok* (“Games”) for Piano, Four Hands György Kurtág (born in 1926)

Composed in 1979.

György Kurtág was born on February 19, 1926 in Lugoj, a town whose territory had been ceded to Romania by Hungary following World War I. Kurtág took piano and composition lessons in Timișoara before entering the Budapest Academy of Music in 1946, where he earned diplomas in composition (his teachers included Sándor Veress and Ferenc Farkas), piano (Pál Kadosa) and chamber music (Leo Weiner). He became a Hungarian citizen in 1948. In 1957-1958, Kurtág was in Paris to study with Messiaen and Milhaud, but an equally important influence on him at that time were his sessions with the psychologist Marianne Stein, whose deep understanding of the artistic temperament helped to unlock his creativity. He composed his Op. 1, the String Quartet No. 1, upon his return to Hungary and dedicated the score to her. From 1958 to 1963, Kurtág worked as a coach at the Bartók Secondary School of Music in Budapest, and occupied a similar position with the National Philharmonic from 1960 to 1968, helping to train such outstanding Hungarian musicians as Zoltán Kocsis, András Schiff and the first Takács String Quartet. In 1967, Kurtág

was appointed to the faculty of the Budapest Academy of Music, where he taught piano and chamber music until his retirement in 1986; in 1993 he moved to southwestern France to be near his son’s family. He has served as Composer-in-Residence with the Berlin Philharmonic (1993-1995) and the Vienna Konzerthaus (1995-1996), and has been recognized with the Erkel Prize (1954, 1956, 1969), Kossuth Prize (1973), Order of the Star with the Golden Wreath from the Hungarian Government (1986), Monaco’s Prix de Composition Musicale (1993), Austria’s State Award for European Composers (1994), Kossuth Prize for Life’s Work (1996), Munich’s Siemens Music Award (1998), membership in the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts (1987) and West Berlin’s Academy of Art (1987), Grawemeyer Award from the University of Louisville (2006) and Royal Philharmonic Society Gold Medal (2013).

Games (*Játékok* in Hungarian) is a still-growing collection of some 250 greatly varied musical aphorisms for solo piano and piano duet that includes style studies, technical etudes, character pieces, homages to friends, colleagues and other composers, and random musical thoughts. (The fifth, sixth and seventh volumes, published in 1995, are subtitled, “Diary entries, personal messages.” The first four volumes appeared in 1979.) The Japanese educator, conductor and pianist Furiya Miyako, a student of Kurtág, reported that in 1994 he gave her the following explanation for composing *Games*: “In 1960, my son became six years old and he began to learn to play the piano. I composed for him ‘five little piano pieces’ that were eventually included in the first volume of *Games*. But his piano teacher was not interested in them, and my idea was not developed. In 1973, I composed the *Hommage à Kadosa* — *Twelve Microludes* in celebration of the birthday of my teacher, Pál Kadosa. These later appeared in volume two. In 1974, I traveled to Italy and other places, and received much inspiration and returned to Hungary with an impulse to compose something. At that time, Marianne Teoke, who is the ‘Pedagogical Collaborator’ of *Games*, asked me to write some pieces for children, and I began to compose at a stretch, and I still continue.”

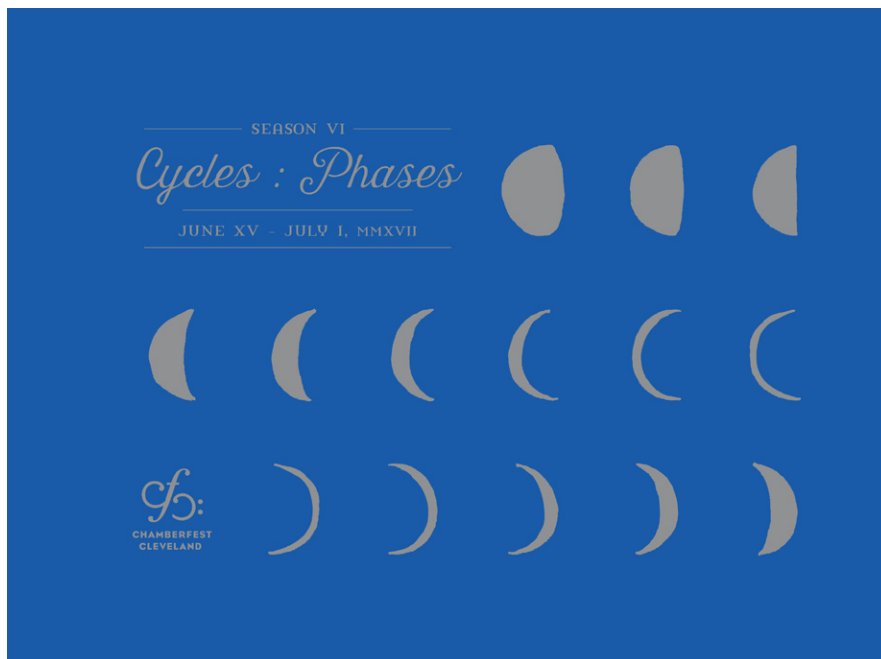
Hommage à J.S.B. [Johann Sebastian Bach] acknowledges a composer whose influence has threaded through Kurtág’s creative life.

Furious Chorale layers a hymn-like phrase upon the jagged, aggressive accompaniment that suggested the movement’s title.

Bells, “Hommage à Stravinsky” is a tintinnabulous tribute to one of 20th-century music’s most influential composers.

The ethereal *Hommage à Soproni* honors József Soproni (b. 1930), the Kossuth Prize-winning composer and former director of the Liszt Music Academy in Budapest.

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Reflections on the Theme B-A-C-H for String Quartet
Sofia Gubaidulina (born in 1931)

Composed in 2002.

Premiered on March 10, 2002 at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire by the Brentano String Quartet.

Sofia Gubaidulina, born in Chistopol in 1931, is among the handful of composers from the former Soviet Union whose music has gained widespread notoriety in the West. Her father was descended from the ancient lineage of Genghis Khan’s Tatar tribes and her mother was a Russian Jew; Gubaidulina once described herself as the place where East and West meet. She studied piano and composition at the Kazan Music Academy (1946-1954) before attending the Moscow Conservatory from 1954 to 1962 as a student of Nikolai Peiko (an assistant of Shostakovich) and Vissarion Shebalin. In 1975, she founded, with Victor Suslin and Vyacheslav Artyomov, the ensemble “Astreya,” which specialized in improvisation and special performance techniques using folk instruments from Russia and central Asia. Gubaidulina’s music shows the wide range of influences inherent in the diverse cultural backgrounds of her parents,

as well as a dedication to self-expression and avant-garde techniques that in 1980 earned for her a denunciation by Tikhon Khrennikov, the Communist Party’s musical spokesman. It was only with the fall of the Soviet Union and her move to Germany in the early 1990s that her music received full recognition at home, though her reputation in the West grew quickly after she attended the Boston Festival of Soviet Music in 1988.

In the early 1740s, when he was nearing the age of sixty and his eyesight was beginning to fail, Johann Sebastian Bach undertook a series of works intended both as a summing-up of his creative career and as demonstrations of the highest technical skill attainable in the field of musical composition — *A Musical Offering*, *Schübler Chorales*, *Chorale Variations on “Vom Himmel Hoch,”* *B minor Mass* and *The Art of Fugue*. *The Art of Fugue*, largely composed in 1748-1749, was an exhaustive compendium of the available techniques for creating fugues and canons; Bach heightened the challenge in *The Art of Fugue* by basing all the examples on a single theme. He had planned to close the collection with a stupendous four-voice *Fuga a Tre Soggetti* (“*Fugue on Three Subjects*,” i.e., a long-note version of the principal theme and two variants) and then to cap that movement with the entry of a counter-subject based on the letters of his name: B-A-C-H (B-flat-A-C-B-natural, in German notation). His strength flagged before he completed the monumental *Fuga a Tre Soggetti*, however, and the work was left incomplete at his death.

To celebrate its tenth anniversary in 2002, the Brentano String Quartet invited ten composers to write companion pieces to various movements of *The Art of Fugue*. Gubaidulina chose the unfinished closing fugue as the inspiration for her *Reflections on the Theme B-A-C-H*, though that motto is not presented distinctly until it is heard in the top voice of the four chords that end the work. Mark Steinberg, first violinist of the Brentano Quartet, wrote, “Gubaidulina’s piece responds with music of heart-wrenching intensity, using the Bach themes, often obfuscated by wailing, writhing figures of her own. Searching glissandi, ghostly *ponticello* [bowed at the bridge] tremolos, and poignant, intense silences color her response to the Bach that amplify and shed new light on this deeply spiritual and enigmatic music.”



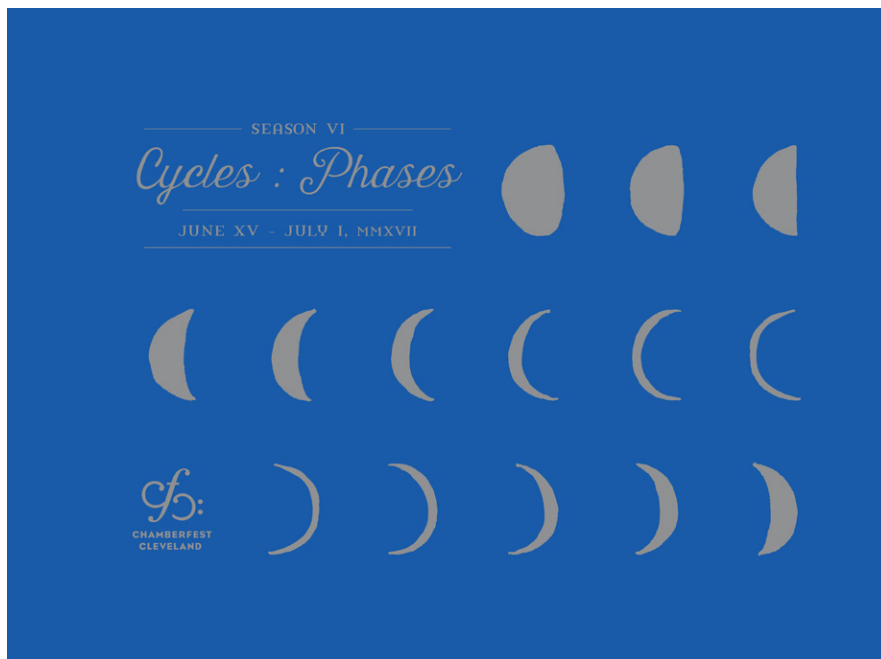
to the brilliant arpeggios of sunlight that sweep across the instrument's full compass. The *Danse rustique* begins with a vigorous but rhythmically asymmetrical strain which is nicely balanced by a central section of regular motion and quieter sentiment. The opening dance returns in an exhilarating variation that becomes more flamboyantly virtuosic as the movement nears its close.

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Sonata No. 5 in G major, Op. 27, No. 5 Eugène Ysaÿe (1858-1931)

Composed in 1924.

Though he was famed internationally as a supreme master of the violin, Eugène Ysaÿe (ee-sy-uh) also composed a sizeable number of original works, most of them for his own instrument. His smaller pieces for violin and piano are regular recital items, but his most admired compositions are the six Sonatas for Unaccompanied Violin (Op. 27), which he was inspired to compose after hearing Joseph Szigeti play a Bach solo sonata in 1924. These Sonatas are in an advanced stylistic idiom influenced by the modern music of France, and call for feats of technical mastery that rival those required by the solo Caprices of Paganini. The Sonata No. 5, dedicated to the Belgian virtuoso Mathieu Crickboom, a student of Ysaÿe, a member of his string quartet and later a founder of his own ensemble and a distinguished teacher, comprises two complementary character pieces. The first is titled *L'Aurore (The Dawn)* and evokes its subject from the quiet of night and the morning stirrings of the earth

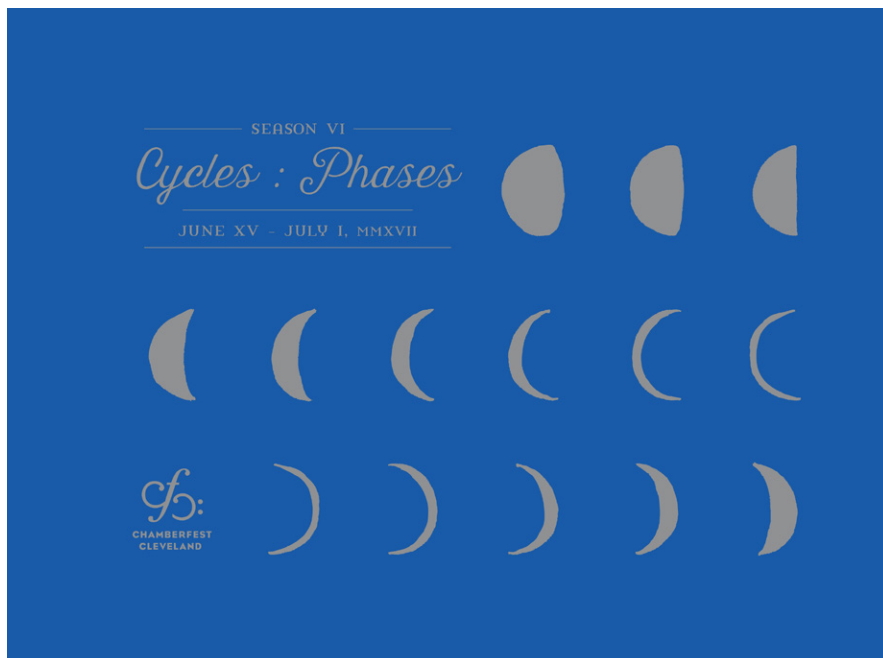


Spring Waltz derives from director Alexander Dovzhenko's 1949 film *Michurin*, about the Russian botanist and geneticist Ivan Vladimirovich Michurin (1855-1935), whose theories were adopted by the Soviets to improve agricultural production. *Waltz-Joke* comes from Shostakovich's 1933 ballet *The Bolt*, about a worker fired from his job for drunkenness who schemes to ruin a lathe by inserting a bolt into the machinery; he is stopped by guards just in time. The third movement, titled simply *Waltz*, was written for the film *Maxim's Return* (1937), the second part of a trilogy about the rise of a Soviet "everyman" who begins his political indoctrination in prison in 1910, returns as a Bolshevik agent in 1914, and is appointed head of the national bank after the revolution. The film's director was Grigori Kozintsev, with whom Shostakovich collaborated on a dozen movies between 1928 and 1971, including screen adaptations of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. The concluding *Barrel-Organ Waltz* is taken from the music for the film *The Gadfly* (1955), based on a novel by the late-19th-century English writer Ethel L. Voynich set in 1840 in Austrian-occupied Italy. The "Gadfly" is a revolutionary leader, so called because his "sting" had become legend.

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Four Waltzes for Flute/Piccolo, Clarinet and Piano
Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)
Arranged by Levon Atovmyan (1901-1963)

Shostakovich earned his enduring international reputation with his symphonies, concertos, operas and chamber works, but throughout his life he also composed in the more popular idioms — film scores, incidental music, ballets, jingoistic anthems — that were not only officially encouraged by the Soviets but in which he also firmly believed. "I consider that every artist who isolates himself from the world is doomed," he maintained. "I find it incredible that an artist should wish to shut himself away from the people." He composed incidental music for no fewer than thirteen theatrical productions in Moscow and Leningrad and contributed scores to some three-dozen films, and during the 1950s and 1960s excerpts from several of them were arranged into concert works — including the *Four Waltzes for Flute/Piccolo, Clarinet and Piano* — by his friend Levon Atovmyan (1901-1973), a composer, one-time musical assistant to the famed Russian theater director Vsevolod Meyerhold (who was arrested in 1939 and executed the following year for his non-conformist productions), and administrator in various composers' and music associations.



***Techno-Parade* for Flute, Clarinet and Piano** **Guillaume Connesson (born in 1970)**

Composed in 2002.

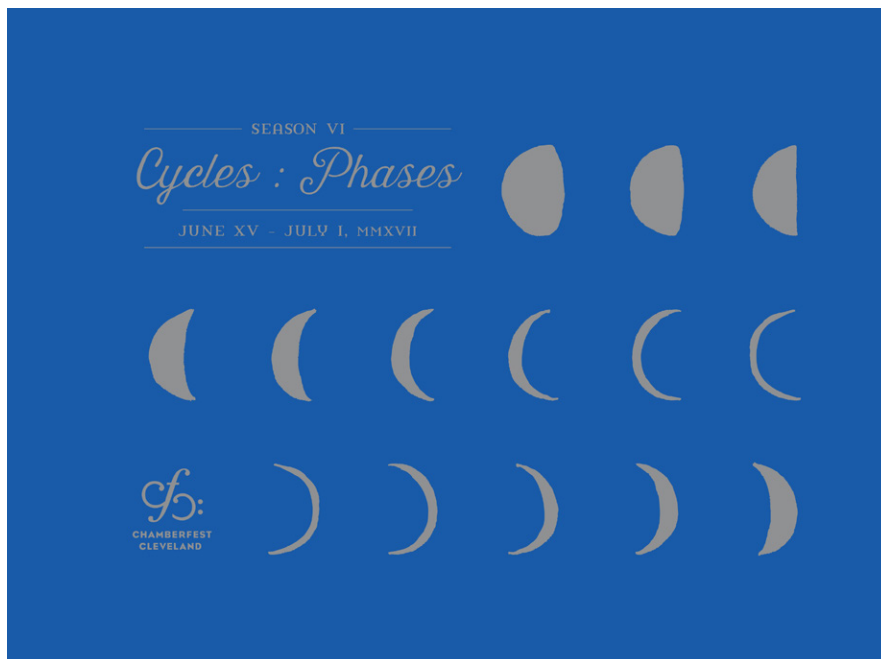
Premiered on August 3, 2002 at the Festival de l'Empéri in Salon-de-Provence, France by flutist Emmanuel Pahud, clarinetist Paul Meyer and pianist Éric Le Sage.

Guillaume Connesson is among the leading figures in the current generation of composers that conductor Stéphane Denève says is “returning melody, rhythm and harmony” to French music. Connesson, born in 1970 in Boulogne-Billancourt, the Parisian district framed by a bend in the Seine to the south and the Bois de Boulogne to the north, took piano lessons as a youth and enrolled in the local state-supported Conservatoire National de Région to study keyboard and choral music. He continued his studies at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique in Paris. Connesson currently teaches at the Conservatoire National in the north Paris suburb of Aubervilliers. He has earned such distinctions as the Prix Cardin de l’Institut de France, Prix Nadia et Lili Boulanger, Prix de la Société des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Éditeurs de Musique, Grand Prix Lycéen des Compositeurs and Grand Prix for

Symphonic Music from SACEM, the French performing rights society.

Connesson wrote, “My *Techno-Parade* [2002] is in one movement with a continuous beat from beginning to end. Two incisive motifs swirl and clink together, giving the piece a festive but also a disturbing character. The wails of the clarinet and the obsessive patterns of the piano try to replicate the raw energy of techno music. In the middle of the piece, the pianist and the page-turner chase after the rhythms with a brush and sheets of paper (placed on the strings inside the piano), accompanied by the distorted sounds of the flute (rather like the tone of a side drum) and the glissandi of the clarinet. After this percussive ‘pause,’ the three instruments are pulled into a rhythmic trance and the piece ends in a frenzied tempo.”

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Quintet for Piano, Two Violins, Viola and Cello in A major, Op. 81 Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Composed in 1887.

Premiered on January 6, 1888 in Prague.

By the time that Dvořák undertook his Piano Quintet in A major in 1887, when he was nearing the age of fifty, he had risen from his humble and nearly impoverished beginnings to become one of the most respected musicians in his native Bohemia and throughout Europe and America. His set of *Slavonic Dances* of 1878 (Op. 46) was one of the most financially successful music publications of the 19th century, and the work's publisher, Fritz Simrock of Berlin, convinced Dvořák to add a sequel to it in July 1886 with the *Slavonic Dances*, Op. 72. (Dvořák received almost ten times the payment for Op. 72 as he had for the earlier set.) Simrock also saw the possibility of financial gain on the chamber music front at that time, and he encouraged Dvořák to compose a piece for piano and strings. To meet Simrock's request, in the spring of 1887 Dvořák dusted off a Piano Quintet in A major he had composed in 1872 but filed away after its premiere as a failure. His attempts at revision proved futile,

however, so he decided to compose a completely new Quintet in the same key, which he did between August 18th and October 8th at his recently acquired country summer home at Vysoká, forty miles north of Prague. The composition was enthusiastically received at its premiere, in Prague on January 6, 1888, and quickly became a favorite of chamber players throughout northern Europe and Britain.

Dvořák's range of expression, melodic invention and skill at motivic elaboration are abundantly evident in the Piano Quintet's opening movement. The cello presents a lovely melody, almost folkish in its simple phrasing and touching directness, as the main theme. This motive progresses through a number of transformations before the viola introduces the subsidiary theme, a plaintive tune built from a succession of short, gently arching phrases. The main theme, rendered into the melancholy key of the viola's melody, returns to close the exposition. Both themes are treated in the expansive development section. A full recapitulation and a vigorous coda round out the movement.

The *Dumka* was a traditional Slavic (especially Ukrainian) folk ballad of meditative character often describing heroic deeds. As was typical of the folk form, the *Dumka* that occupies the Quintet's second movement uses the slow, thoughtful strain of the opening as a returning refrain to separate episodes of varying characters. The movement may be diagrammed according to a symmetrical plan: A-B-A-C-A-B-A. The "B" section, quick in tempo and bright in mood, is led by the violin before being taken over by the piano. "C" is a fast, dancing version of the main *Dumka* theme given in imitation.

Though the *Scherzo* bears the subtitle *Furiant*, the movement sounds more like a quick waltz than like the fiery, cross-rhythm dance of Bohemian origin. The central trio is occupied by a quiet, lilting metamorphosis of the *Scherzo* theme.

The *Finale*, woven from formal elements of sonata and rondo, abounds with the high spirits and exuberant energy of a Czech folk dance. The playful main theme is introduced by the violin after a few introductory measures; contrasting material offers brief periods of repose. The development section includes a fugal working-out of the principal theme. A quiet, hymnal passage in the coda provides a foil for the joyous dash to the end of this masterwork of Dvořák's maturity.