Invesco Piano Concerts
Gabriela Montero: Innocence and Experience
Sunday, November 25, 2018 at 3:00pm
Pre-concert Talk at 2:00pm
This is the 888th concert in Koerner Hall

PROGRAM
Robert Schumann: *Kinderszenen*, op. 15
   “Von fremden Ländern” (Of Strange Lands and People)
   “Curiose Geschichte” (A Curious Story)
   “Hasche-Mann” (Blind-Man’s Buff)
   “Bittendes Kind” (Entreating Child)
   “Glückes genug” (Happy Enough)
   “Wichtige Begbenheit” (Important Event)
   “Träumerei” ( Reverie)
   “Am Camin” (By the Fireside)
   “Ritter vom Steckenpferd” (Knight of the Hobby Horse)
   “Fast zu Ernst” (Almost too Serious)
   “Fürchtenmachen” (Being Frightened)
   “Kind im Einschlummen” (Child Falling Asleep)
   “Der Dichter spricht” (The Poet Speaks)

Chick Corea: Selections from *Children’s Songs*

Gabriela Montero: *Memories from Childhood*
   “Amanecer en Caracas” (Sunrise in Caracas)
   “The Crazy Parrots”
   “El borrachito” (The Drunk)
   “Extrañando mi país” (Missing Home)
   “La canción de mi madre” (My Mother’s Lullaby)

INTERMISSION

Dmitri Shostakovich: Piano Sonata No. 2 in B Minor, op. 61
   I. Allegretto
   II. Largo
   III. Moderato con moto

Gabriela Montero: Improvisations

Reflecting William Blake’s own *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, this program presents a musical collision of innocent childhood with the inevitable impact of later life in the adult world. Schumann and Chick Corea’s childhood reflections give way to Shostakovich and the impact of war. Before they do, however, I insert my own *Memories from Childhood*, five entirely improvised reflections of life growing up in Caracas, Venezuela. - Gabriela Montero

**Robert Schumann**
Born in Zwickau, Saxony, June 8, 1810; died in Endenich, nr. Bonn, German, July 29, 1856
Kinderscenen ( Scenes from Childhood), op. 15 (1838)
Clara Schumann, to whom Robert Schumann was secretly engaged at the time he wrote his Kinderscenen, once described her husband as ‘a moonstruck maker of charades.’ Schumann retained an unselfconscious ability to marvel at things and to re-live the world of his childhood memories. The 13 short character pieces of the Kinderscenen ( Scenes from Childhood) enter this world and portray it through the eyes of an adult. These are pieces about childhood, not pieces for children to play, as was the case in his easier Album for the Young. The process even allowed Schumann to lift himself out of depression. Writing to Clara in March 1838, he said: “I have composed books full of things: wonderful, crazy, solemn stuff. You will open your eyes when you come to play it. In fact, sometimes I feel quite bursting with music.” As the inspiration continued, Schumann grouped the short pieces into three of his most successful keyboard cycles: Novelleten, Kinderscenen, and Kreisleriana. He explained his concept of Kinderscenen in a letter to a friend as “the reflections of an adult for other adults.” The titles of many of the pieces confirm this perspective – “Happy Enough,” “Being Frightened,” and so on. But a more distanced, adult perspective also creeps in with “Entreating Child,” and “Child Falling Asleep,” both of which end inconclusively, with a question. The latter leads to a third perspective – that of the poet, or Schumann himself, as he bids a gentle, nostalgic farewell to the sleeping child.

Chick Corea
Born in Chelsea, Massachusetts, June 12th, 1941 (as Armando Anthony Corea)
Selections from Children’s Songs (1971-80)
The 20 Children’s Songs that American jazz pianist, composer, and band leader Chick Corea wrote and published during the 1970s share something of Schumann’s wide-eyed exploration and discovery of new things. It is as though Corea sets out to see, with the eyes of a child, his own progression as a leading jazz musician in the early years of a performing career spanning more than half a century, through the fusion movement of the day, the avant-garde scene, and his own desire for more lyrical melodies, Latin rhythms, and melodic vocal writing. Classically trained listeners will spot the marked influence of Bartók’s Mikrokosmos throughout these short one to two-minute miniatures, each exploring particular rhythmic patterns, an ostinato, a rapid-fire musical idea, and so on – all overlaid with Corea’s sophisticated, often brilliantly percussive, other times quietly lyrical keyboard idiom. But they also embrace an accepting of the hallmarks of Reich, Glass, Hindemith, Satie, and many a distinctive jazz soloist. The pieces lend themselves, like the Bartók and several of the Schumann, Chopin, and Bach keyboard collections, to excerpting into contrasting groups and arranging for other instrumental combinations, while constantly communicating joy in their playful improvisatory feel.

Gabriela Montero
Born in Caracas, Venezuela, May 10, 1970
Memories from Childhood
“Amanecer en Caracas” (Sunrise in Caracas)
Caracas is a huge, chaotic urban mess, enveloped by the glorious Avila mountain. It has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. It is now a war zone, effectively. But waking up in Caracas, as I remember it back then, was glorious. The sound of exotic birds, frogs, and the multi-coloured skyline surrounding El Avila, is etched in my memory. Chaos within overwhelming beauty.
“The Crazy Parrots”
In Caracas, you can still see giant macaws, parakeets, and parrots zooming through the urban concrete maze. The wild birds of my childhood still excite the residents of this suffering, collapsed, urban jungle, colouring the Caracas skyline. Nature is the constant, while mankind can transform the South American experience with one brushstroke of ideology.
“El Borrachito” (The Drunk)
We lived in my grandmother’s apartment for a while in an area called “Sebucan.” The apartment faced an asylum, a small bodega (tiny market), and a newspaper stand. I remember a drunk vagrant, a rail-thin man who would march up and down the street playing salsa music on his little beaten up boombox.
“Extrañando mi país” (Missing Home)
When I was eight years old, my family took me to the US to continue my piano studies. I never recovered from leaving my beloved Venezuela. I always returned, intermittently, but the scars of abandoning everything and everyone I loved, remained with me. It was the most painful sacrifice I made for my music.

“La canción de mi madre” (My Mother's Lullaby)
As it is customary with most Venezuelan mothers, my mother would sing to me to put me to sleep. She is not a singer. In fact, I am the only musician in my family. But it is in this way that I first began connecting the sounds to my fingers. At just a few months old, I began to find the sounds on my little toy piano. There is no particular melody I improvise to in this last piece. It is just an emotional recollection of the sweetness of her voice, the innocent purity of that time, and a period of my life long gone.

- Gabriela Montero

Improvisations
In cultures where music remains a largely oral tradition, improvisation often forms the heart of a performance – for an audience, its most anticipated focal point. Even 18th century European organists would be expected to audition for positions at major churches by demonstrating improvisatory skills with chorale fantasies and fugues on given themes. Later in the century, the young Beethoven was widely commended as a pianist, and particularly (in the words of Czech composer Václav Tomášek) for “the daring flights of his improvisation, which stirred me strangely to the depths of my soul.” For Gabriela Montero, improvisation has been an instinctive thing from her earliest years. “I have always improvised. The first thing I would do as a very young girl, was sit down at the piano and improvise stories. I never learned to improvise ... and I do not believe you can practice it. When I improvise, it is always in the moment and I have no plan, no structure, and no awareness of what is happening or will happen. I find that the most liberating experience in my life. Of course, there are many different levels, but the essential goal should be to find your voice as a communicator – not a performer. What I am interested in is artists who LIVE music, not perform it.” [Interview with Houston Symphony, 2014].

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Dmitri Shostakovich
Born in St. Petersburg, Russia, September 12/25, 1906; died in Moscow, Russia, August 9, 1975

Piano Sonata No. 2 in B Minor, op. 61 (1943)
This wartime sonata is dedicated to the memory of a revered Conservatory mentor, piano teacher, and composer, Leonid Nikolayev (1878-1942), whose funeral in October 1942 Shostakovich had been unable to attend. Being wartime, Shostakovich was among a group of musicians evacuated from Leningrad to Kuibyshev, a city in the Urals. Towards the end of the year, he began sketches for the large-scale sonata, his first piano work since the Preludes, op. 33 (1934), but then caught typhoid fever, the very illness that led to the death of Nikolayev. By January 1943, he had recovered sufficiently to write to his close friend Ivan Sollertinsky: “When the pains stopped, I started thinking of my piano sonata. I have now thought it out and am starting to write it down bit by bit.” He completed the work in March, at a sanatorium outside Moscow, where he had been sent to recover.

The sonata is frequently inward-looking and intense, in contrast to the radical, virtuoso, tumultuous, and epic-scaled Sonata No. 1 (1926), with which the young Shostakovich announced his arrival as both a pianist and composer to be reckoned with. The Second includes references to three of Nikolayev’s compositions as well as to his own First Symphony. The score reflects on its times, but less overtly than Prokofiev’s so-called ‘War Sonatas’ which, although very different from one another, together viscerally reflect something of the brutality and harshness of war. Shostakovich’s sonata frames a disquieting, skeletal, elegiac, deeply introspective central movement in A flat major, cast in a simple three-part song form, with two B minor outer movements. The first develops two contrasting, but related themes within a traditional sonata structure. The finale unfolds from a single line for the right-hand alone, spanning some 30 bars. This melodic line then forms the basis of a sequence of ten variations within a movement whose duration is almost as long as the first two combined, but which gradually reveals the work’s cumulative expressive weight.

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Gabriela Montero
Piano
Gabriela Montero’s visionary interpretations and unique improvisational gifts have garnered her critical acclaim and a devoted following on the world stage. A graduate and Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music in London, she has
performed with many of the world’s leading orchestras to date, including the Royal Liverpool, Rotterdam, Dresden, Oslo, Vienna Radio, and Netherlands Radio philharmonic orchestras; the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, NDR Sinfonieorchester Hamburg, NDR Radiophilharmonie Hannover, Zürcher Kammerorchester, Academy of St Martin in the Fields, and Australian Chamber Orchestra; the Pittsburgh, Detroit, Houston, Atlanta, Toronto, Baltimore, Vienna, City of Birmingham, Barcelona, Lucerne, and Sydney symphony orchestras; the National Arts Centre Orchestra of Canada, Württembergisches Kammerorchester Heilbronn, and the Cleveland Orchestra, Scottish Ensemble, orchestra of the Komische Oper Berlin, and Residentie Orkest.

Ms. Montero is also a frequent recital artist, giving concerts at such distinguished venues as the Wigmore Hall, Kennedy Center, Vienna Konzerthaus, Berlin Philharmonie, Frankfurt Alte Oper, Cologne Philharmonie, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Munich Herkulessaal, Sydney Opera House, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Luxembourg Philharmonie, Lisbon Gulbenkian Museum, Manchester Bridgewater Hall, Seoul's LG Arts Centre, Hong Kong City Hall, the National Concert Hall in Taipei, and at the Barbican’s ‘Sound Unbound,’ Edinburgh, Salzburg, Lucerne, Ravinia, Gstaad, Saint-Denis, Aldeburgh, Cheltenham, Rheingau, Ruhr, Bremen, Trondheim, Bergen, and Lugano festivals.

In addition to her brilliant interpretations of the core piano repertoire, she is also celebrated for her ability to improvise, composing and playing new works in real time.

As an award-winning and bestselling recording artist, her most recent album featured Rachmaninov’s Piano Concerto No. 2 and her first orchestral composition, “Ex Patria,” winning Ms. Montero her first Latin Grammy Award for Best Classical Album. Previous recordings include Bach and Beyond, which held the top spot on the Billboard Classical Charts for several months and garnered her two Echo Klassik Awards: the 2006 Keyboard Instrumentalist of the Year and 2007 Award for Classical Music Without Borders. In 2008, she also received a Grammy nomination for her album Baroque, and in 2010 she released Solatino, a recording inspired by her Venezuelan homeland and devoted to works by Latin American composers.

A committed advocate for human rights, whose voice regularly reaches beyond the concert hall, Ms. Montero was named an Honorary Consul by Amnesty International in 2015, and recognised with Outstanding Work in the Field of Human Rights by the Human Rights Foundation for her ongoing commitment to human rights advocacy in Venezuela. She was invited to participate in the 2013 Women of the World Festival at London’s Southbank Centre, and has spoken and performed twice at the World Economic Forum in Davos-Klosters. She was also awarded the 2012 Rockefeller Award for her contribution to the arts and was a featured performer at Barack Obama’s 2008 Presidential Inauguration.

*Gabriela Montero is making her Royal Conservatory debut this afternoon.*