Ethan Valentin is from the studio of Marta Aznavoorian This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the degree Master of Music.

Masks must be worn at all times. As a courtesy to those around you, please silence all cell phones and other electronic devices. Flash photography is not permitted. Thank you.
Program Notes

Florence B. Price (1887-1953)
Sonata in E Minor (1932)
*Duration: 26 minutes*

Florence Price was born in 1887 to a prominent family in Little Rock, Arkansas. She began piano lessons at the age of 3, and by 19 had graduated from the New England Conservatory with highest honors. Her degree was in Piano Teaching and Organ Performance. In 1927, Florence and her husband fled Little Rock following riots and the lynching of a black man. They settled in Chicago, in a row house at 3835 S. Calumet, which still stands today. The music scene in Chicago’s Black Belt was rich and diverse; the area was littered with jazz and blues clubs. Just blocks away from her house, Gospel music was being born at Pilgrim Baptist Church. Her husband would lose his job during the 1929 stock market crash, and shortly after he beat Florence and threatened to kill her. She and her daughters left him and moved in with a student of hers, the composer and pianist Margaret Bonds. During this time, as a newly divorced single mother with unstable housing, on bedrest with a broken foot, she composed her Symphony in E Minor and her Sonata in E Minor. She entered both pieces in the prestigious Wanamaker Competition and won first prizes in both the symphonic composition and piano composition categories. She wrote to a friend, “But, oh dear me, when shall I ever be so fortunate again as to break a foot.”

The Sonata in E Minor consists of three movements: “Andante-Allegro”, “Andante” and “Scherzo.” The piece follows many traditional classical forms, and draws from influences in German and Russian Romanticism as well as spirituals and plantation dances. The first movement explores two spiritual themes that appear and develop throughout. The second movement more deeply explores the harmonic colors of the spiritual, and features lyrical melodic lines. The third movement is inventive and creative. It is a hybrid of several different formal styles, and features elements of plantation dances such as the cakewalk and the juba.

Gabriela Ortiz (b.1964)
Estudios entre preludios (2011)
*Duration: 8 minutes*

Gabriela Ortiz is one of the most prominent composers in Mexico today. Her musical language mixes tradition with the avant-garde, and achieves a balance between highly organized structure and improvisatory spontaneity. As she explains, “The departure point for these Preludes and Studies for piano stems from the idea of paying homage to those composers that I have always admired and who are certainly key influences in my work as a composer. In the Preludes, voices of Debussy’s *Preludes* and Takemitsu seep into my sound world, in this play of light and colors that create harmonious environments of ethereal calm. By contrast the Studies are tributes to Bartok and Ligeti.”
Estudio e Preludio No. 3 was commissioned by the pianist Ana Cervantes for the project “Canto de la Monarca: Mujeres en México (Song of the Monarch: Women in Mexico).” The piece is a tribute to Jesusa Palancares, a fictional character in the 1969 novel Hasta no verte, Jesus mio by Elena Poniatowska. The novel recounts Jesusa’s long and adventurous life, growing up in poverty in Oaxaca and later fighting in the Mexican Revolution. She is a self-assured woman who can be seen as a symbol of independence and strength.

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)
Sonata in B-flat Minor, Op. 35 (1840)
Duration: 25 minutes
In 1839, Chopin published the first of his mature sonatas, the Sonata in B-flat Minor, Op. 35. The sonata consists of four movements: a sonata-form opening movement marked “Grave - Doppio movimento,” a scherzo, a funeral march, and a finale. The first movement opens with a short but distinctive and memorable introduction. Chopin indicates that these opening chords should be played grave and forte, which gives them weight and strength. They boldly foreshadow the tragedy that is to come. The movement is in traditional sonata-allegro form; two conflicting themes are presented which will be developed and reprised throughout. The tension in the first movement continues and transforms in the second. The scherzo begins aggressively and demonically, depicting opposing poles of emotion. The trio emerges suddenly from silence, with its lyrical melody gently floating above the murmur of its oscillating bass. After the turmoil of the opening returns, the movement ends with a question, a nostalgic glance back at the trio.

The third movement, the climax of the sonata, is the funeral march which would accompany Chopin to his own grave in 1849 (it would later accompany the burials of John F. Kennedy and Winston Churchill). It has an incessant dotted rhythm which is accompanied by a droning bass, not unlike the funeral marches in Beethoven’s “Eroica” Symphony and his Piano Sonata Op. 26 (the latter of which was one of Chopin’s favorite pieces to teach). The somber march leads into a transcendent middle section in a major key, a surprisingly innocent and simple melody with accompanying nocturne-like arpeggios. The fourth movement is perplexing; it resists any attempt to analyze or classify it—none of our common words for describing form can be applied to describe the events of this 75-bar quip. Chopin described it by saying, “the left hand chatters in unison with the right after the march,” and Arthur Rubinstein called it “wind howling around the gravestones.”

Notes by Ethan Valentin