



Sandra Wright Shen

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STEINWAY SOCIETY

The Bay Area

Piano Concerts

September 2018–January 2019

steinwaysociety.com



Henry Kramer



Kate Liu



Manasse/ Nakamatsu Duo

PIANO CONCERTS 2018–2019



Zlata Chochieva

Saturday, September 15, 2018, 7:30 p.m.
Trianon Theatre, San Jose



Manasse/Nakamatsu Duo

Saturday, October 13, 2018, 7:30 p.m.
McAfee Performing Arts and Lecture Center, Saratoga



Henry Kramer

Sunday, November 11, 2018, 2:30 p.m.
Trianon Theatre, San Jose



Sandra Wright Shen

Saturday, December 8, 2018, 7:30 p.m.
Trianon Theatre, San Jose



Kate Liu

Saturday, January 12, 2019, 7:30 p.m.
Trianon Theatre, San Jose



Vyacheslav Gryaznov

Sunday, February 10, 2019, 2:30 p.m.
Trianon Theatre, San Jose



Benjamin Grosvenor

Tuesday, March 12, 2019, 7:30 p.m.
McAfee Performing Arts and Lecture Center, Saratoga



Nikolay Khozyainov

Saturday, April 6, 2019, 7:30 p.m.
Trianon Theatre, San Jose



Charlie Albright

Saturday, May 11, 2019, 7:30 p.m.
Trianon Theatre, San Jose

President's Letter



Dear Patron,

Steinway Society is privileged this season to bring you nine nationally and internationally acclaimed pianists performing great works from our musical heritage. The season's artists, selected under the leadership of our Artistic Committee Chair, Nancy Daggett Jensen, grace these works with sublime interpretations and dazzling virtuosity.

This season celebrates the Romantic era (1825–1900), which saw the birth of the first celebrity pianists. While democratic ideals and the Industrial Revolution changed the fabric of Western society, musicians were freed of dependence on the church and royal courts. Musical forms were expanded to express “romanticism,” including artistic individualism and dramatic ranges of emotion. The spirit of romanticism infuses this 24th Steinway Society season.

Our first artist, **Zlata Chochieva**, begins with compositions inspired by Bach, then enchants with Romantic composers Chopin and Liszt, and closes with Scriabin, an explorer of romanticism's boundaries. The **Manasse/Nakamatsu Duo** treats us to a clarinet sonata by the classic-Romantic composer Brahms along with music of Chopin and jazzy works commissioned for the Duo. **Henry Kramer's** program ranges from Schubert, who straddled classicism and romanticism, to Debussy, who moved beyond romanticism to create impressionism. **Sandra Wright Shen** brings the season's first half to a close by visiting Classical, Romantic, and Modern ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future. **Kate Liu's** program opens the new year with a reflective work by Beethoven, followed by a youthful work by Brahms and another by the exotic and experimental Romantic Scriabin.

We hope you will bring both family and friends to share the delights and surprises of music that will strengthen your love affair with classical piano.

Lorrin Koran, M.D.

President, Board of Directors, Steinway Society–The Bay Area

Front cover photos: Henry Kramer, © Jack Kennealy; Kate Liu, © Stuart Rodgers Photography; Manasse/Nakamatsu Duo, courtesy of the Arts Management Group.

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Manasse/Nakamatsu Duo

Founded in 2004, the Manasse/Nakamatsu Duo, comprising clarinetist Jon Manasse and pianist Jon Nakamatsu, immediately established itself as one of the country's premier chamber-music ensembles. They have performed in distinguished venues such as Lincoln Center, the National Gallery of Art, Duke University, and for the Van Cliburn Foundation, and have appeared locally under the auspices of the Bay Area's own Montalvo Center for the Arts and the San Jose Chamber Music Society.

Manasse and Nakamatsu are dedicated to expanding the concert repertoire. They have commissioned several works, including John Novacek's *Four Rags for Two Jons* and Paquito D'Rivera's *The Cape Cod Files*; excerpts of each appear on tonight's program.

Nakamatsu is the Gold winner of the Tenth Van Cliburn Piano Competition. Manasse, as principal clarinetist of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, has performed under such renowned conductors as James Levine and Andrew Davis. They have each released several acclaimed CDs. The *New York Times* described their 2008 debut CD of the Brahms Clarinet Sonatas as "meltingly beautiful" and exclaimed that "their partnership is complete."

Manasse/Nakamatsu Duo photo, courtesy of the Arts Management Group

PROGRAM

The Romantic and Classic Duo—*Progressing into the Twenty-First Century*

The Manasse/Nakamatsu Duo begins with a classic-Romantic Brahms work by turns brooding, bucolic, and exuberant; holds us spellbound in reverie with one of Chopin's most Romantic, dreamlike, and martial works; and concludes with commissioned works combining jazz, Latin, ragtime, and popular elements that are sure to set toes a-tapping.

Brahms, *Sonata for Clarinet and Piano in F Minor, Op. 120, No. 1*

- I. Allegro appassionato
- II. Andante un poco adagio
- III. Allegretto grazioso
- IV. Vivace

Chopin, *Andante spianato and grande polonaise brillante, Op. 22*

INTERMISSION

D'Rivera, "*Lecuonerías*" from *The Cape Cod Files*

Goodwin, *Four Views for Clarinet and Piano*

Novacek, "*Full Stride Ahead*" from *Four Rags for Two Jons*

PROGRAM NOTES

Clarinet Sonata in F Minor, Op. 120, No. 1

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

The great classic-Romantic composer Brahms originally planned to retire after completing his *String Quintet No. 2 in G Major* ("Prater"), Op. 111, in 1890. However, on a journey to Meiningen early the next year, he was inspired to take up the pen again after hearing performances of works by Weber, Mozart, and Spohr performed by clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld (1856–1907). Brahms was impressed by the beauty and tone of the clarinet, and by Mühlfeld's musicianship and ability to move easily between the instrument's registers. In quick succession, Brahms completed the *Clarinet Trio in A Minor, Op. 114* and the *Clarinet Quintet in B Minor, Op. 115*, both in 1891. In 1894 during his annual retreat to Bad Ischl, he completed the two *Clarinet Sonatas, Op. 120* (transcribing the two sonatas for viola in 1895). The two sonatas were the last chamber works Brahms completed before his death. All four works have become a vital part of the clarinet's repertoire.

The Sonata in F Minor, Op. 120, No. 1 demonstrates how intimately Brahms had come to understand the capacity of the clarinet and also reflects his tendency to expand and reinvent classical forms. Whereas previous works for clarinet typically gave the melodies to the soloist, Brahms treats the clarinet and piano as more or less equal partners in dialogue.

The sonata is laid out in a carefully planned four-movement structure. A dark and atmospheric first movement is organized in a concise, but thematically rich sonata form, with no less than four distinct musical ideas in the exposition and an intense, dramatic development section. The coda, marked *Sostenuto ed espressivo*, is gloriously inspired, and ends quietly in the parallel major key. The songlike slow movement and the rustic Austrian Ländler third movement that serves as something of an intermezzo (it is not really a scherzo) are both in ternary form and set in the relative major key, A-flat, with occasional excursions into other, and sometimes distant, keys. Having used the four-flat signature for the first three movements, Brahms turns in the fourth movement, an exuberant and extroverted altered rondo that effectively balances the weight of the first movement, to the parallel major key—a key structure he had never exploited before in a minor-key chamber work.

Andante spianato and grande polonaise brillante, Op. 22

Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)

Composed between 1830 and 1831, the *Grande polonaise brillante* in E-flat major was initially written for piano and orchestra. In 1834, Chopin wrote the *Andante spianato* in G major for solo piano, and in 1836 joined the two works together with a short martial interlude. Chopin's emphasis on the piano writing allows a solo piano performance of the combined work. The *Andante* is quiet, melodic, and nocturnelike, drawing its listeners into a dreamlike state before the *Polonaise* interjects. The *Polonaise* is marked *forte* and *espressivo*, and almost demands that the pianist deploy every virtuosic talent he or she possesses. It is a show-stopping piece, and the ending coda brings the work to a dazzling close.

“Lecuonerías” from The Cape Cod Files

Paquito D’Rivera (b. 1948)

Cuban-born Paquito D’Rivera, clarinetist, saxophonist, and composer, the winner of five GRAMMY awards, composes and plays both Latin jazz and classical music. He studied in the 1960s at the Havana Conservatory of Music, and while on tour in Spain in 1981, sought asylum in the United States. He is a founding member and co-director of the ensemble

Irakere, which performs a mixture of jazz, rock, classical, and traditional Cuban music; together the group was awarded a GRAMMY in 1979. D’Rivera has recorded an astounding 30 solo albums, and in 1991 he won a Lifetime Achievement Award from Carnegie Hall for his contributions to Latin music. In 2018 he was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Musical Arts from the Manhattan School of Music.

As a composer, D’Rivera has won numerous awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship in Music Composition; his compositions reflect his wide-ranging influences.

D’Rivera’s *The Cape Cod Files* was commissioned in 2009 for the Manasse/Nakamatsu Duo by the Cape Cod Chamber Music Festival to celebrate the festival’s 30th anniversary. *The Clarinet* calls the four-movement suite “a major work that is technically and rhythmically challenging and an engaging merging of jazz, popular, and classical elements.” Mr. Manasse will perform the third movement, “Lecuonerías,” written for solo clarinet. The movement begins with an exotic, dark, and quasi-Phrygian scale that runs up and down the registers of the instrument before adopting more joyful and boisterous tones. The movement features improvisations around some of the melodies written by one of the foremost Cuban composers, pianist extraordinaire Ernesto Lecuona (1895–1963).

Four Views for Clarinet and Piano

Gordon Goodwin (b. 1954)

American pianist, saxophonist, composer, arranger, conductor, and four-time GRAMMY winner Gordon Goodwin has risen to prominence with his big band, The Big Phat Band, in which he plays piano, tenor and soprano saxophone, and for which he provides all the music charts. The band performs a wide variety of swing, funk, Latin, film, and concert music, releasing six albums to date. Goodwin has scored dozens of hit films and television programs, and while working for Warner brothers, won three Emmy awards. In 2004, he won a GRAMMY for Best Instrumental Arrangement for the film *The Incredibles*, and he won another GRAMMY in 2012 for his instrumental arrangement of Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*. He has performed with a wide range of artists, including Chick Corea, Mel Tormé, and Ray Charles, and has written two string quartets for Quartet San Francisco.

Goodwin's *Four Views for Clarinet and Piano* was commissioned in 2012 by Vandoren by DANSR Inc. for the Manasse/Nakamatsu Duo. The first movement features virtuoso double-tonguing; the second, rapid-fire trading of bits of melody between the instruments; and the third seems to bear the influence of film music of the 1990s.

Goodwin's philosophy? "I have one responsibility and that is to write music that sounds good to me ... music that has integrity."

"Full Stride Ahead" from Four Rags for Two Jons

John Novacek (b. 1964)

Award-winning pianist John Novacek has toured the world, performing over 40 concerti from Bach to Barber with the world's leading orchestras, taking the stage in venues from Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center to Wigmore Hall, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, and the great concert halls of Japan. As a chamber musician, Novacek appears with such renowned artists as Joshua Bell, Yo-Yo Ma, and Leila Josefowicz, and has over 140 chamber works in his active repertoire. He appears regularly at leading festivals such as Mostly Mozart, Ravinia, BBC Proms, and Verbier. He has given world premieres of works by such composers as John Adams, George Rochberg, and John Williams, and has recorded over 30 CDs of solo and chamber works, including many contemporary and original compositions. Novacek is a Steinway Artist and holds a master's degree from Mannes School of Music.

Novacek's own compositions have been performed by soloists, duos, quartets, quintets, full symphony orchestras, and by such renowned groups as The Three Tenors. The composer has made a particular study of ragtime—one of America's most original musical genres, known for its syncopated or "ragged" rhythms—both as composer and performer.

Novacek's *Four Rags for Two Jons* was commissioned in 2006 by the Manasse/Nakamatsu Duo. The artists will perform the fourth movement, "Full Stride Ahead." The work opens with triadic clarinet flourishes rudely interrupted by jolting dissonances from the piano. Soon the two instruments join together in a riotous romp, the pianist playing bouncing, off-the-beat, jumping left-hand chords reminiscent of stride piano, and the clarinet mocking the piano with blaring blasts and glittering trills. Both instruments traverse madly up and down the scale in a virtuosic wild ride, punctuated by shouts of joy from the performers. The work seemingly comes to an end with a prolonged jazzy tremolo seventh chord, only to be followed by a quick cadenza-like descent from the clarinet and a final glissando from the piano.



Henry Kramer

Laureate of the 2017 American Pianist Association Awards and lauded as "triumphant" and "thrilling" by *The New York Times*, Henry Kramer is well known in the Bay Area through his participation in Music@Menlo's International Program.

He is rapidly establishing himself as one of the most exciting young pianists on the concert stage. A native of Maine, he earned top prizes in the 2016 Queen Elisabeth Competition in Belgium, 2015 Honens International Piano Competition, the 2011 Montreal International Music Competition, and the Sixth China Shanghai International Piano Competition.

Mr. Kramer holds both a master's and a bachelor's degree from The Juilliard School and an Artist Diploma from the Yale School of Music, where he is currently finishing his doctorate degree. His recording dedicated to Liszt's Oratorio Transcriptions was recently released on the NAXOS label.

Henry Kramer photos, © Vanessa Briceño

PROGRAM

The Romantic Pianist—Discovers the Fantastic and Impressionism

Henry Kramer opens with music of Franz Liszt, the Romantic pianist most famous and infamous in the mid-19th century, and continues with a composer who straddled the border between classicism and romanticism, Franz Schubert. The realm of fantasy as envisioned by Scriabin is explored before visiting tone portraits by the father of musical impressionism, Claude Debussy.

Liszt, *Two Orchestral Movements from the Oratorio Christus* (S. 3)

1. Hirtengesang an der Krippe (“Song of the Shepherds at the Manger”) (Pastorale), S. 498b, No. 4
2. Die heiligen drei Könige (“The Three Holy Kings”) (March), S. 498b, No. 5

Schubert, *Wanderer Fantasy in C Major, Op. 15*

INTERMISSION

Scriabin, *Piano Sonata No. 2 in G-sharp minor, Op. 19 (Sonata-Fantasy)*

Debussy, *Suite bergamasque*

- I. Prélude (Moderato)
- II. Menuet (Andantino)
- III. Clair de lune (Andante très expressif)
- IV. Passepied (Allegretto ma non troppo)

Debussy, *L'isle joyeuse*

PROGRAM NOTES

Two Orchestral Movements from the Oratorio Christus, S. 3

Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

In 1865, Franz Liszt received the tonsure and thereafter became known as Abbé Liszt. Residing in Rome, he began focusing on writing religious music, including most notably his nearly three-hour oratorio, *Christus*. Completed in 1866, *Christus* charts the traditional narrative of Jesus's life in three parts: Christmas Oratorio, After Epiphany, and Passion and Resurrection. In 1873, Liszt adapted two orchestral movements from the Nativity Scene for solo piano: the first is a lush evocation of voices and shepherds' pipes celebrating the newborn Jesus, while the second is a monumental march depicting the arrival of the Three Kings of the Orient.

Wanderer Fantasy in C Major, Op. 15

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

In 1822, soon after leaving his *Unfinished Symphony* ... well, unfinished, Schubert channeled his energy into a remarkably innovative work for piano, the *Wanderer Fantasy*. Cast in four movements that transition seamlessly into each another, the Fantasy is a quasi-symphonic exploration of the range of expression that a single musical motif can convey.

This motif originates from Schubert's 1816 song *Der Wanderer*, in which the Wanderer laments that he is a stranger wherever he goes. In the course of the *Wanderer Fantasy*, Schubert transforms the Wanderer theme through an astonishing range of emotions. In the opening *Allegro*, he begins with a dazzling march, followed by a somber *Adagio*. He does an about-face in the *Scherzo*, transforming the theme into a rollicking dance. A thundering fugato on the theme opens the *Finale*, returning to the opening movement's radiant mood.

Schubert regarded the *Wanderer Fantasy* as his most technically difficult work for piano. The score is littered with punishingly strenuous octaves, arpeggios, and tremolos, such that Schubert himself had trouble doing the piece justice, and quipped that “*the devil may play it!*”

Piano Sonata No. 2 in G-sharp minor, Op. 19 (Sonata-Fantasy)

Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915)

The *Sonata-Fantasy* is in two movements, with a style that combines Chopin-like Romanticism with an impressionistic touch. It is one of Scriabin's most popular pieces. Following the example of Beethoven's

Moonlight Sonata of nearly a hundred years before, the opening movement is slow. Scriabin's program note for the piece reads: "The first section represents the quiet of a southern night on the seashore; the development is the dark agitation of the deep, deep sea. The E-major middle section shows caressing moonlight coming up after the first darkness of night. The second movement represents the vast expanse of ocean in stormy agitation." The work was published in 1898 after Scriabin had worked on it for five years.

Suite bergamasque

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

Prior to penning his groundbreaking symphonic poem *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1894), Debussy wrote in a harmonically conservative style influenced by his elders, Massenet and Fauré. As his reputation as a revolutionary composer blossomed, Debussy grew more reluctant to see his earlier compositions published, feeling they were not representative of his mature style. Thus, he did not agree to publication of his 1890 *Suite bergamasque* until after extensively revising it in 1905.

The work's title is derived from Paul Verlaine's 1869 poem "*Clair de lune*," which references the "floating world" of artificial aristocratic pastoralism as painted by Antoine Watteau in the early 18th century. The opening *Prélude* is imbued with baroque poise and a whiff of wistfulness, while the assertive *Menuet* features a tinge of Spanish flair. *Clair de lune* is rightfully famous for its masterful juxtaposition of the moon's luminous stasis with its observer's passionate meditations. Rounding out the suite is the *Passepied*, a sprightly dance with origins in the maritime region of Brittany.

L'isle joyeuse

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

Possibly inspired by the 1719 Watteau painting *The Embarkation for Cythera*, *L'isle joyeuse* (1904) is as much a programmatic evocation of Arcadia as it is a study in the interactions between the major scale, the Lydian mode (a major scale with the 4th degree raised a half step), and the whole-tone scale. An extemporaneous introduction in whole tones gives way to a main theme featuring characteristically Lydian raised fourths. The expansive second theme is cast in the traditional major key. The development section becomes an exploration and recombination of these three harmonic syntaxes along with their respective themes, leading to a climax that integrates all the melodic ideas.



Sandra Wright Shen

A Bay Area treasure, international star, and Steinway Artist, Shen is among Silicon Valley's most well-respected classical musicians. She has thrilled audiences at the Kennedy Center, Frankfurt Cultural Center, and Forbidden City Concert Hall. She won First Prize at the International Piano Competition of France and the Taiwan National Piano Competition, and is a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Furman University.

In 2017–18, Sandra Wright Shen was Artist in Residence with the Charleston Symphony Orchestra. Whenever she appears in the Bay Area, her many fans and admirers find it an occasion to reconnect with all they love in classical piano music.

PROGRAM

The Romantic Pianist—Visits the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future

Sandra Wright Shen gives life to composers of Christmas-inspired music of the Baroque (1600–1750), Classical (1750–1825) and Romantic eras before works of two 20th-century Neo-Romantic and Modern composers, Grainger and Novák. Composers who explored the future via atonalism (Messiaen) and “extended techniques,” such as reaching into the piano and plucking the strings to produce eerie and fantastical effects (Crumb), follow.

Corelli-Godowsky, *Pastorale (Angelus) from the Christmas Concerto, Op. 6, No. 8*

Bach, *Partita No. 5 in G Major, BWV 829*

- I. Preambulum
- II. Allemande
- III. Corrente
- IV. Sarabande
- V. Tempo di Minuetto
- VI. Passepied
- VII. Gigue

Liszt, *Selections from Weihnachtsbaum (Christmas Tree), S. 186*

1. In dulci júbilo: The Shepherds at the Manger
2. Adeste fideles: March of the Three Holy Kings
3. Scherzoso: Lighting the Candles on the Tree
4. Carillon

INTERMISSION

Grainger, *The Sussex Mummers' Christmas Carol (British Folk-Music Settings, No. 2)*

Novák, *Christmas Night (Songs of a Winter's Night, Op. 30, No. 3)*

Messiaen, *Le baiser de l'enfant-Jésus (“The Kiss of the Infant Jesus”) from Vingt regards sur l'enfant-Jésus (“Twenty Contemplations of the Infant Jesus”), No. XV*

Crumb, *Canticle of the Holy Night (A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979, No. 6)*

Chopin, *Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor, Op. 20*

PROGRAM NOTES

Pastorale (Angelus) from the Christmas Concerto, Op. 6, No. 8
Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713)-Leopold Godowsky (1870–1938)

This is the eighth piece in legendary pianist Leopold Godowsky's *Renaissance*, a collection also known as *16 Free Transcriptions of Old Master Pieces*. In adapting for piano the lovingly serene *Pastorale* from Arcangelo Corelli's posthumously published *Christmas Concerto* (1714), Godowsky employs every pianistic device at his disposal, capturing the sense of rapture and wonder at the birth of Christ that Corelli expressed so potently some two centuries earlier.

Partita No. 5 in G Major, BWV 829

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Composed between 1825 and 1831, the six keyboard partitas were the first of Bach's works to be published. Each partita is structured around a core of baroque dances (allemande, courante, sarabande, and gigue) with various other *galanteries* rounding out the set. In the *G-Major Partita*, a festive *Preambulum* precedes the *Allemande*, whose duple meter is enriched by triplets. The *Corrente* is of the swift Italian style, while pastoral thirds dominate the texture of the double-dotted *Sarabande*. The *Tempo di Minuetto* is a delicate little dance whose hemiolas (two groups of three beats replaced by three groups of two beats) add a touch of whimsy to the minuet rhythm. A joyous *Passepied* is followed by the fugal *Gigue*, whose angular theme makes for precarious passagework.

Selections from Weihnachtsbaum (Christmas Tree), S. 186

Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

The spirit of Christmas shines merry and bright in Liszt's 12-piece suite, *Christmas Tree*, written between 1873 and 1876 for his granddaughter, Daniela von Bülow. For *In dulci júbilo: The Shepherds at the Manger*, Liszt sets the eponymous medieval Christmas carol to a swaying pastoral rhythm. In *Adeste fideles: March of the Three Holy Kings*, he mixes a straightforward four-part setting of the familiar carol with ruminations upon its melodic fragments. *Scherzoso: Lighting the Candles on the Tree* features fleeting, elfin music in the spirit of Liszt's own *Gnommenreigen*. And finally, *Carillon* opens with brilliant tremolos that sound like an alarm clock going off on Christmas morning, waking the children up in wide-eyed anticipation.

The Sussex Mummers' Christmas Carol (British Folk-Music Settings, No. 2)

Percy Grainger (1882–1961)

The Australian composer Percy Grainger was an avid collector and arranger of British folk music; he methodically recorded the origins and circumstances of each song he transcribed. Thanks to his diligence, we know that this carol, whose composer is lost to history, was written down by a Miss Lucy Broadwood in Lyne, near Horsham in Sussex. There, Christmas mummers performed the carol in 1880 and 1881 as part of the play *St. George, the Turk, and the Seven Champions of Christendom*. Grainger sets the mummers' carol to a rich chordal texture similar to that of his famous arrangement of *Danny Boy*.

Christmas Night (Songs of a Winter's Night, Op. 30, No. 3)

Vítězslav Novák (1870–1949)

Vítězslav Novák, a Czech composer, composed largely in a Late Romantic idiom with forays into impressionism and modernism. His *Songs of a Winter's Night* (1903) is a nostalgic depiction of Christmas Eve's calm and expectation.

Le baiser de l'enfant-Jésus ("The Kiss of the Infant Jesus") from Vingt regards sur l'enfant-Jésus ("Twenty Contemplations of the Infant Jesus"), No. XV

Oliver Messiaen (1908–1992)

In 1944, three years after being released from a German concentration camp, Messiaen completed his monumental *Vingt regards sur l'enfant-Jésus*, a cycle of 20 movements, each meditating upon a specific aspect of the Christ Child. The 15th movement, *Le baiser de l'enfant-Jésus*, begins with a slow chorale that incorporates a fragment of the "Thème de Dieu," one of the *leitmotifs* that pervades the entire suite. Upon repetition, the chorale is decorated with glittering passagework high in the keyboard. Only after a cadenza does the Thème de Dieu appear in its entirety, accompanied by soft, twinkling octaves and gaining new layers of figuration in each restatement. The music snowballs to a cacophonous climax before breaking into a rapturous melody representing the Kiss of the Infant Jesus. The *Coda* presents the Thème de Dieu for the last time, and the movement comes to a close in a blissful authentic cadence.

Canticle of the Holy Night (A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979, No. 6)

George Crumb (b. 1929)

Crumb's *A Little Suite for Christmas, A.D. 1979* was inspired by Nativity frescoes in the Arena Chapel in Padua, Italy. The sixth movement, *Canticle of the Holy Night*, features the famous 16th-century *Coventry Carol*, a lullaby sung by the women of Bethlehem in response to King Herod's Massacre of the Innocents. In his rendition of this carol, Crumb calls for the pianist to pluck and strum the strings while simultaneously depressing the keys, creating an ethereal, lutelike effect.

Scherzo No. 1 in B Minor, Op. 20

Frederick Chopin (1810–1849)

Chopin composed his first Scherzo in 1831, during the Polish November Uprising against the Russian Empire. Ensnared between the *Presto con fuoco* of the exposition and the reprise is a sublimely calm Trio based on the Polish Christmas carol *Lulajże, Jezuniu* (Sleep, Little Jesus).



Kate Liu

Kate Liu begins with Beethoven, who oversaw the transition from classical poise and balance to Romantic heightened personal expression and richer harmonic language. Scriabin, influenced early by Chopin's romanticism but later developing an idiosyncratic, visionary style, is followed by Brahms, who looked back to the classical era but employed sweeping Romantic themes and lush harmonies.

First Prize winner at both the New York International Piano and the Asia-Pacific International Chopin Competition, Kate Liu has proven herself popular with audiences and judges worldwide.

At the 2015 Fryderyk Chopin Competition, judges awarded her the Bronze Medal, but in public opinion she was number one: listeners voted her Best Pianist in the radio competition, "My Chopin."

While still in high school, Liu was featured on PBS's "From the Top at Carnegie Hall" and Carnegie Hall's Big Break (YouTube contest). In addition to ongoing piano studies at Curtis Institute, she is a 2018–19 Gilmore Rising Star.

Kate Liu, inset photo, © Stuart Rodgers Photography

PROGRAM

The Romantic Pianist—*Imagines, Contemplates, and Breaks Free*

Kate Liu's program, comprising three great piano sonatas, begins with a reflective work of Beethoven's, followed by a youthful work by the classic-Romantic composer Brahms and another by the exotic and experimental Romantic Scriabin, written as each composer was ascending artistic heights. All three sonatas are united by a depth of expression and emotional complexity as well as by their enduring popularity.

Beethoven, *Sonata No. 31 in A-flat Major, Op. 110*

- I. Moderato cantabile molto espressivo
- II. Allegro molto
- III. Adagio ma non troppo—Arioso dolente—Fuga: Allegro ma non troppo—Arioso—Fuga

Scriabin, *Sonata No. 3 in F-sharp Minor, Op. 23*

- I. Drammatico
- II. Allegretto
- III. Andante
- IV. Presto con fuoco—Meno mosso

INTERMISSION

Brahms, *Sonata No. 3 in F Minor, Op. 5*

- I. Allegro maestoso
- II. Andante espressivo—Andante molto
- III. Scherzo: Allegro energico
- IV. Intermezzo: Andante molto
- V. Finale: Allegro moderato ma rubato

PROGRAM NOTES

Sonata No. 31 in A-flat Major, Op. 110

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Beethoven began writing Op. 110 in the spring of 1821 and finished it by December of that year. Though by now deaf, he continued to compose ever greater works, channeling his unending imagination in new directions. In his five late piano sonatas (Opp. 101, 106, and 109–11), the composer experimented with formal structure. The works also exploit innovative sonorities, sometimes containing several successive measures of shimmering trills, a colorful device that would later be adopted by other great Romantic composer-pianists such as Liszt.

Op. 110's opening movement in A-flat major is compact, with a *cantabile* (singing) melody; the movement is contemplative and modestly sized, rather than boisterous and expansive as some of the composer's Middle Period opening movements had been. The first theme reappears throughout the sonata, but its calm proves illusory. The second movement, a scherzo in F minor, opens with a fiery call and response and tumbles with increasing energy towards its dramatic conclusion. An F-minor coda of *sforzato* chords separated by measure-long rests presents an efficient summary; the coda concludes with a surprising and dramatic diminuendo and poco ritardando in the final cadence's parallel major key.

An adagio introduction to the third movement gives way to a somber song of lament ("Klagender Gesang") in the dark key of A-flat minor, a lyrical preparation for the finale's main event, a weighty fugue in A-flat major whose subject is derived from the first movement's opening theme. An even more intense adagio cry of despair precedes a second fugue whose subject inverts that of the first fugue. The motion becomes ever faster, and the sonata ends in an A-flat major coda of broken chords and a flurry of glistening arpeggios in a final and triumphant outburst of joy.

Sonata No. 3 in F-sharp Minor, Op. 23

Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915)

Scriabin's ten sonatas may justifiably be compared to Beethoven's 32 in that each set occupied the length of its composer's career, exhibited a remarkable range and progression of styles, and contained some of its composer's greatest creations. Scriabin composed the Third Sonata in 1897 and 1898 but did not perform it publicly until July 1900. Though a virtuoso pianist, the composer had small hands and found the wide stretches of the finale especially challenging.

The work is laid out in a traditional four-movement structure, with the first and fourth movements in sonata form, and the second and third movements ternary—an Allegretto scherzo and a ravishing Andante, respectively. Like many of the composer's works, it is filled with burning intensity and marked by ecstatic utterances. Scriabin described the sonata's program as "états d'âme" (states of the soul). Program notes written by his second wife describe the soul's progression: free and wild; restless, languishing, and tired of suffering; tender and sorrowful, musing on illusory dreams; and finally, momentarily rising in victorious creativity, it eventually—too weak to reach its desired zenith—plunges into an abyss of nothingness.

The sonata is replete with emphatic, heavy chords and marked by a recurring energetic and driven dotted-note rhythm that expresses the work's emotional turmoil. The tender Andante features a shimmering melody; Scriabin is said to have stated during a performance of the movement that "here the stars are singing." A contemporary observer noted that the composer's left hand sounded like "ringing silver bells glinting in light." In the final movement, Scriabin brings back themes from the first and the slow movements; such cyclic references are found also in the works of other great Russian composers such as Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff. In its peroration, the furious Presto con fuoco finale flirts with a dramatic climax in F-sharp major but instead gives up the ghost in an abrupt and bleak F-sharp minor final utterance.

Sonata No. 3 in F Minor, Op. 5

Johannes Brahms (1833–97)

Brahms wrote the large five-movement Sonata Op. 5 in 1853 at the age of 20 while informally under the tutelage of Robert and Clara Schumann. Robert had publicly praised Brahms as the next coming of Beethoven; and indeed, the first, third, and fourth movements of the sonata feature references to the so-called (and probably apocryphally named) "Fate" motif from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The Sonata Op. 5 was the last work that Brahms submitted to Schumann for approval before the latter's descent into madness and an early death. The sonata shows the young composer's early maturity in its expressive depth and complexity. Over his lengthy career, Brahms wrote extensively for piano, chamber and choral ensembles, and the orchestra, but never composed another piano sonata after Op. 5.

Brahms's piano sonatas are endowed with similar elements, which include massive orchestral texture, references to folk songs and poetical and musical works, and meanings that lie beneath the musical surface. Perhaps the greatest expressive warmth of the sonata is found in the expansive Andante second movement, with its chains of intervals of major and minor thirds (a compositional hallmark throughout Brahms's career), an inventive move to D-flat major, and the longing and ecstasy inherent in a quotation from the German poet Sternau (1823–62), whose works likewise inspired many of the Romantic composers. The rondo fifth movement of the F-minor Sonata proclaims the theme F-A-E—"frei aber einsam" (free, but lonely)—of Brahms's violinist friend Joseph Joachim. Perhaps there are youthful passages here that a more mature Brahms might have suppressed, but the F-minor Sonata's stunning beauty and originality have caused it to endure as a masterpiece of the Romantic piano repertoire.

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