



Vyacheslav Gryaznov

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STEINWAY SOCIETY

The Bay Area

Piano Concerts
February 2019–May 2019

SteinwaySociety.com



Benjamin Grosvenor



Nikolay Khozyainov



Charlie Albright

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



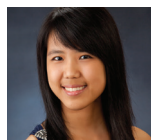
Henry Kramer

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



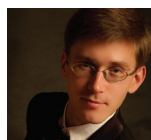
Sandra Wright Shen

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



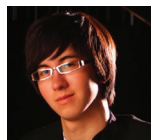
Benjamin Grosvenor

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 concerts continue this season with four nationally and internationally acclaimed pianists.

In this, our 24th year, we are honoring 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.

The season continues with 21st-century Romantic pianist, **Vyacheslav Gryaznov**, who brings us gorgeous music of Rachmaninoff. **Benjamin Grosvenor** follows with music of Schumann, Janáček, and Prokofiev, who brought a new vision to romanticism. **Nikolay Khozyainov** treats us to additional works of Chopin, Beethoven, and Rachmaninoff. **Charlie Albright** concludes the season by surveying romanticism's variations, and by improvising, as did the great pianists of the Romantic era.

To bring world-class pianists to Silicon Valley and provide musical experiences in public schools, Steinway Society depends on the support and donations of our friends. We hope you might consider an estate gift to our Legacy Fund, which will bring great classical piano performances to generations to come. Please contact us at office@steinwaysociety.com if you would like more information.

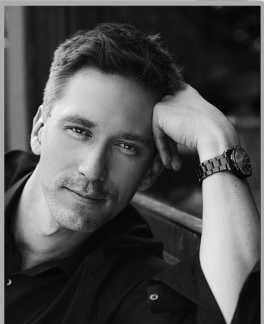
We hope you will invite family and friends to share in the beauty and majesty of music that ignites love affairs with classical piano.

Lorrin Koran, M.D.

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

Front cover photos: Vyacheslav Gryaznov, © Lisa-Marie Mazzucco; Benjamin Grosvenor, © Patrick Allen Opera Omnia; Nikolay Khozyainov, © Arim Manuele; Charlie Albright, courtesy of AMG.

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Vyacheslav Gryaznov

In his astounding 2016 West Coast debut with Steinway Society, Vyacheslav Gryaznov thrilled the audience and generously played two encores. Since then his international fame has continued to grow through appearances at prestigious venues including Berlin Philharmonie and Carnegie Hall.

His mastery is highly acclaimed, as evidenced by numerous awards in international competitions. Among his Firsts/Grands: Moscow's Rubinstein Competition and Italy's "To the Memory of Rachmaninov" Competition.

Gryaznov is on the faculty of the Moscow Conservatory and a visiting professor of piano at Japan's Kurashiki Sakuyo University of Science and Arts. In 2016 he entered Yale, at the University's invitation, and was awarded the Artist Diploma in 2018.

His artistry is matched by his creativity, shown in his popular transcriptions for piano, which are published by Schott Music and are among their top-ten best-selling scores internationally.

Vyacheslav Gryaznov inset photo. © Lisa-Marie Mazzucco

PROGRAM

A 21st-Century Romantic Pianist Revisits and Revitalizes Rachmaninoff

Vyacheslav Gryaznov, himself a composer and transcriber in the Romantic style, brings works of Rachmaninoff to vibrant life. In an interview, Rachmaninoff told his student Glenn Quilty that he regarded himself as the last Romantic composer and that he reflected the philosophy of Old Russia "with its overtones of suffering and unrest, its pastoral but tragic beauty, its ancient and enduring glory."

Rachmaninoff, *Ten Preludes, Op. 23*

1. F-sharp minor (Largo)
2. B-flat major (Maestoso)
3. D minor (Tempo di minuetto)
4. D major (Andante cantabile)
5. G minor (Alla marcia)
6. E-flat major (Andante)
7. C minor (Allegro)
8. A-flat major (Allegro vivace)
9. E-flat minor (Presto)
10. G-flat major (Largo)

INTERMISSION

Rachmaninoff, *Six moments musicaux, Op. 16*

1. B-flat minor (Andantino)
2. E-flat minor (Allegretto)
3. B minor (Andante cantabile)
4. E minor (Presto)
5. D-flat major (Adagio sostenuto)
6. C major (Maestoso)

PROGRAM NOTES

Ten Preludes, Op. 23

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

Rachmaninoff published his *Ten Preludes, Op. 23* in 1904, having written them between 1901 and 1903 during the first flowering of his compositional maturity. Despite the successful premiere of his first opera *Aleko*, for which he had won the Great Gold Medal at the Moscow Conservatory when he was 19, Rachmaninoff fell into a prolonged depression and creative slump following the disastrous 1897 premiere of his First Symphony. Only after undergoing psychotherapy could he compose again in earnest, completing his Second Piano Concerto, one of his most enduring and beloved works, in 1901. His compositions from this period display a newfound distinctiveness of style, harmonic complexity, and mastery of form. While most of Rachmaninoff's works of these years are in large-scale symphonic and operatic forms, the preludes of Op. 23 revisit the smaller Romantic character pieces of his youth, but with greater assuredness and originality. Like Bach, Chopin, Alkan, and Scriabin before him, Rachmaninoff ultimately composed 24 preludes in each of the major and minor keys (Bach in fact had done so twice). Rachmaninoff's preludes are most clearly indebted to Chopin's *24 Preludes, Op. 28*, but are generally longer and more complex than those of Chopin, and exhibit an unmistakably Russian ethos, pride, and nostalgia.

The Op. 23 preludes alternate between minor and major keys. The first is a melancholy aria in F-sharp minor accompanied by murmuring sixteenths; it gradually builds to a climax before subsiding again into the shadows. The second prelude, in a thunderous B-flat far removed from the first in tempo and mood, is replete with virtuosic leaps, daunting left-hand arpeggiations, and death-defying octaves. The third prelude, marked *Tempo di minuetto*, is perhaps a nostalgic look back at Baroque dance suites, but with a tinge of sadness. A Chopinesque D-major nocturne, which sounds as if it were written for three hands, follows; its irresistible melody betrays the influence of Tchaikovsky and of Russian folk song. Next is a favorite of pianists and audiences alike, the revolutionary and martial G-minor prelude, which features a gorgeously lyrical contrasting central section. Following this perhaps most well-known work of the set is the lyrical sixth prelude, an Andante in E-flat whose joyful and rising operatic melody is accompanied by flowing sixteenths. The seventh prelude, with its sweeping arpeggios and turbulent passagework, recalls the composer's Second Piano Concerto in

both key and pianistic figurations. A work of surprisingly good humor for the melancholy composer follows, a study in A-flat for the right hand whose figuration is somewhat reminiscent of Schumann. The set's penultimate work is a virtuosic E-flat minor etude that recalls Chopin's double-note studies in sixths and thirds. The last piece returns to the tonality of the opening prelude (now in G-flat, the enharmonic parallel major key) in a work of unsurpassed beauty, its tender melody intricately interwoven in counterpoint, a fitting capstone to the set.

Six moments musicaux, Op. 16

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

Rachmaninoff's *Six moments musicaux, Op. 16*, the title a borrowing from Schubert's identically named set of 1828, were composed in haste during the late fall of 1896 when the composer found himself short of funds. Despite their originating more from necessity than inspiration, the works display the hallmarks of the more mature Rachmaninoff in their inspired melodies, striking harmonies, and virtuosic figuration.

The first piece, the longest of the set, is a dark and syncopated nocturne in B-flat minor whose middle section features an unusual 7/4 meter and a filigree-like cadenza that precedes a highly figured return of the opening theme. Throughout the following dark Allegretto, which Rachmaninoff revised and recorded in 1940, an impassioned and chromatic melody in octaves is set against a restless accompaniment of turbulent sixteenths that cease only with the terse and enigmatic final chords. The melancholy mood continues in the third piece, a brooding work incorporating funeral-march rhythms, a melody almost entirely in thirds and sixths, and highly expressive ninth and eleventh chords. Number four, a brilliant E-minor Presto showpiece whose virtuosic figurations continue unabated, concludes with an assertive quadruple fortissimo. The fifth piece is a nocturne reminiscent of Chopin, its calm reflected in an undulating, barcarolle-like bass in triplets. The sixth piece, a vigorous and demanding Maestoso whose predominantly stepwise melody in unison octaves is accompanied by bravura passagework in thirty-second notes in both hands, concludes the set with a C-major quadruple-fortissimo affirmation.



Benjamin Grosvenor

Among the world's most admired pianists, and sought after and praised for his distinctive sound, Benjamin Grosvenor is described as "poetic and gently ironic, brilliant yet clear-minded, intelligent but not without humour, all translated through a beautifully clear and singing touch" (*The Independent*).

Grosvenor became the youngest-ever winner of the BBC Young Musician Competition at age 11. At age 19 he became the youngest British musician ever signed by Decca Classics; his first album won the Gramophone award for best instrumental album of the year. He has also won the Classic Brit Critics' Award, UK Critics' Circle Award for Exceptional Young Talent, and a Diapason d'Or Jeune Talent Award. Grosvenor has been featured in two BBC television documentaries, BBC Breakfast and The Andrew Marr Show, as well as in CNN's Human to Hero series.

Recent orchestral engagements include concerto performances with the Boston and Chicago Symphony Orchestras, The Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, London Philharmonic Orchestra, and the London, Melbourne, San Francisco, and Washington National Symphony Orchestras. Solo recitals this season are scheduled throughout Europe.

Benjamin Grosvenor performance photo, © Juan Diego Castillo; inset photo, © Patrick Allen Opera Omnia

PROGRAM

Romanticism, Realism, and Visions

Benjamin Grosvenor begins with the prolific composer, Robert Schumann, who was inspired by the great Romantic writer of his time, E. T. A. Hoffmann. Schumann reviewed and extolled the music and performances of Romantic-era pianists in his periodical, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* (New Journal of Music). Leoš Janáček's research into Czech folk music inspired his compositions, while many of Prokofiev's *Visions fugitives* were composed for friends, one of whose poems gave rise to the collection's title.

Schumann, *Blumenstück*, Op.19

Schumann, *Kreisleriana*, Op. 16

- I. Äußerst bewegt (Extremely animated), D minor
- II. Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch (Very heartfelt and not too fast), B-flat major
- III. Sehr aufgereggt (Very agitated), G minor
- IV. Sehr langsam (Very slow), B-flat major/G minor
- V. Sehr lebhaft (Very lively), G minor
- VI. Sehr langsam (Very slow), B-flat major
- VII. Sehr rasch (Very fast), C minor/E-flat major
- VIII. Schnell und spielend (Fast and playful), G minor

Janáček, 1. X. 1905 (*Sonata "From the Street"*)

- I. Předtucha ("Foreboding") (Con moto)
- II. Smrt ("Death") (Adagio)

INTERMISSION

Prokofiev, *Selections from Visions fugitives*, Op. 22

1. Lentamente (No. 1)
2. Andante (No. 2)
3. Allegretto (No. 3)
4. Con una dolce lentezza (No. 18)
5. Con eleganza (No. 6)
6. Pittoresco (Arpa) (No. 7)
7. Ridicolosamente (No. 10)
8. Con vivacità (No. 11)
9. Assai moderato (No. 12)
10. Allegretto tranquillo (No. 9)
11. Feroce (No. 14)
12. Dolente (No. 16)

Bellini-Liszt, *Réminiscences de Norma: Grande fantasia*, S. 394

PROGRAM NOTES

Blumenstück, Op. 19

Robert Schumann (1810–56)

Blumenstück (“flower piece”), an intimate character piece from 1839, comprises several short sections that vary in mood between wistful longing and robust declamation. Set in an elegantly proportioned rondo-like structure, the piece recalls the composer’s Op. 18 *Arabeske*, a similarly graceful and charming work of the same year. Clara Wieck, whom Schumann was finally able to marry the next year after a prolonged separation, considered the *Blumenstück* to be one of Robert’s finest pieces and made it a regular staple of her own concert programs.

Kreisleriana, Op. 16

Robert Schumann (1810–56)

Schumann claimed to have written *Kreisleriana*, a set of eight fantasy pieces dedicated to Chopin, in just four days in 1838, though he made subsequent additions to the work and revised it in 1850. He considered it to be one of his finest compositions. Inspired by E. T. A. Hoffmann’s fictional Johannes Kreisler, a moody and passionate composer, *Kreisleriana* is a masterpiece of the Romantic style. The work’s contrasting sections exhibit the dual aspects of Schumann’s psyche—Florestan, the wild and impetuous upstart, and Eusebius, the introspective dreamer. Musically encoded throughout is an expression of Schumann’s “very wild love” for his as-yet unattainable fiancée.

The first movement surges in a tempestuous D minor that contrasts with a plaintive and dreamlike central section in B-flat. The longest movement, beginning also in an introspective B-flat, tinged with melancholy, follows; it interpolates two intermezzis, one each in B-flat and G-minor, keys that will predominate throughout the rest of the work. The third movement is extremely agitated but again features a dreamlike central section. Harmonic instability is reinforced in the ponderous fourth, the passionate fifth, and the slowest and most meditative movement, the sixth; each starts or ends on a dominant or dominant seventh rather than a tonic chord. The seventh and stormiest movement goes harmonically even further afield, commencing with a precipitous plunge into C minor; the movement features a central fugato section and ends in a slow and chorale-like E-flat major. The dark and evocative set ends in G minor in a dotted-rhythm will-o’-the-wisp jiggle that gradually fades away to a whisper, concluding on a single triple-pianissimo low G. The opening key of the work, D minor, was never heard again.

1. X. 1905 (Sonata “From the Street”)

Leoš Janáček (1854–1928)

Janáček wrote *1. X. 1905* in protest: on the date memorialized in the title, a 20-year-old woodworker was killed by Austrian soldiers while he took part in demonstrations for the establishment of a Czech-language university in Brno. The sonata was originally cast in three movements, but Janáček destroyed the third movement before it could be performed. In 1906, he hurled the remaining movements into the Moldau; the sonata was saved from oblivion only because the pianist who had premiered the two-movement version had kept her performance copy.

The sonata demonstrates Janáček’s idiosyncratic style, influenced by folksong and the distinctive patterns of Czech speech. The work features explosive jabbings and jarring laments. The first movement, conveying fear and foreboding, is largely in sonata form. The second movement, likewise in a gloomy E-flat minor, is almost unbearably dramatic; its repeated rests on the first beat suggest a gasping for breath. Fortissimo clashes and tremolos depict the armed conflict, but the main theme returns, its life force ebbing away, until at last it falls silent. On the title page, Janáček attached an epigraph: “The white marble of the steps of the Brno Guildhall. The labourer František Pavlík falls, stained with blood. He came only to champion higher learning but was struck down by cruel murderers.”

Selections from Visions fugitives, Op. 22

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953)

Prokofiev composed the Op. 22 miniatures, entitled “fleeting visions” after a line from the poet Balmont, between 1915 and 1917, often performing one or two of them as encores. The works display the full range of Prokofiev’s musical language, ranging from sardonic and aggressive mockery to lugubrious melancholy and delicate lyricism. They demonstrate a variety of compositional techniques, including bitonality, quartal harmony, white-key melodies, parallel chords, dissonant grace notes, and extended chromaticism. Several of the pieces, though whimsically dissonant and evincing a playful naiveté, recall the earlier impressionism of Debussy.

Réminiscences de Norma: Grande fantasia, S. 394

Vincenzo Bellini (1801–35) and Franz Liszt (1811–86)

During the 19th century, touring pianists regularly performed operatic pastiches, often little more than clap-trap bravura featuring showy passagework. Liszt elevated the genre to a high art, often performing one or more of his 60-odd paraphrases during his tours of the 1830s and 1840s. The brilliant pianist Marie Pleyel, the former fiancée of Berlioz and estranged wife of the piano manufacturer Camille Pleyel, had requested a virtuosic showpiece from Liszt. In 1841 he obliged, composing no fewer than three operatic *réminiscences*—a term he coined to characterize a free fantasy rather than a close paraphrase—on Bellini’s *Norma*, Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, and Meyerbeer’s *Robert le diable*. Schott’s publication of Liszt’s *Norma* fantasy in 1844 featured a facsimile of the dedicatory letter in which Liszt addressed Pleyel as his “dear and ravishing colleague,” provoking an explosion from the Countess d’Agoult. Liszt refused to remove the dedication despite her angry insistence.

The *Réminiscences de Norma* masterfully summarizes Bellini’s opera, artfully weaving together seven of its most beloved themes—excluding, however, its most famous aria, “Casta diva.” The fantasy’s cascades of arpeggios, dazzling roulades, prolonged passages in octaves and tenths, and dangerous leaps demand the utmost virtuosity. The work traverses the full expressive range of the opera from the high drama of its opening chords, to the tragic gloom of the central aria, and finally to one of the greatest climaxes in Liszt’s music, a conclusion of transcendent ecstasy.



Nikolay Khozyainov

The music world is taking notice of the “stunning virtuosity and prodigious technique” of Nikolay Khozyainov, writes *The New York Times*, and audiences agree: they have acclaimed his performances at Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, and Tchaikovsky Hall in Moscow.

Khozyainov made his debut at the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory at the age of seven and went on to study at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory. He has won first prizes in numerous international competitions and was awarded Distinction in the 2010 Fryderyk Chopin Competition, where he was the youngest finalist.

His powers of expression as a great Romantic artist perhaps come in part from the way Khozyainov views music. As he told *Russian Mind*, “Whenever I play, I express what I am feeling and thinking about the music and give all of my heart to the audience. I aim to be myself and always try to be completely honest. All composers speak as if they were addressing their god and, when re-creating their works, we performers should seek to find that voice.”

Nikolay Khozyainov photos, © Arim Manuele

PROGRAM

The Most Beloved Romantic Pianist, His Forbear, and His Descendant

Nikolay Khozyainov treats us to additional radiant works of perhaps the most beloved of Romantic pianist-composers, Chopin, and complements these with the aptly named “Appassionata” Sonata of Romanticism’s forbear, Beethoven. The artist concludes with Rachmaninoff’s grandest solo piano work, the towering Sonata No. 1, composed in Dresden, a major center for the visual arts in the waning years of the Romantic era.

Chopin, *Ballade No. 2 in F Major, Op. 38*

Chopin, *Nocturnes*

1. Op. 27, No. 1 in C-sharp minor (Larghetto)
2. Op. 48, No. 1 in C minor (Lento)

Beethoven, *Sonata No. 23 in F Minor, Op. 57 (“Appassionata”)*

- I. Allegro assai
- II. Andante con moto
- III. Allegro ma non troppo–Presto

INTERMISSION

Rachmaninoff, *Sonata No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 28*

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Lento
- III. Allegro molto

PROGRAM NOTES

Ballade No. 2 in F Major, Op. 38

Frederick Chopin (1810–49)

Chopin’s four ballades represent, together with his two mature piano sonatas, the pinnacle of his musical creativity, combining the poetic romanticism of his smaller pieces with monumental drama. The Second Ballade, completed in 1839 at Mme. Sand’s country estate, Nohant, is the shortest and most unorthodox of the ballades. It alternates two wildly distinct musical ideas: a gently rocking F-major pastorale, and a virtuosic storm in A minor. The work develops in an increasingly dark and agitated direction before ending, after a terrifying coda, with a tragic A-minor recollection of the opening hymn, its original innocence a distant memory.

Nocturnes

Frederick Chopin (1810–49)

Chopin’s nocturnes inhabit a twilight realm of dreamlike fantasy. Supremely Romantic, they suited well the flickering candlelight and soft shadows of the salons of the 19th century. Credited to the Irish virtuoso John Field, who contributed some pleasant if unmemorable works to the genre, nocturnes were vocally inspired, owing much to the bel canto arias of Bellini. All have a ternary form (the contrasting B section usually in a related key), a slow tempo, a singing and rubato cantilena supported by a left hand that provides the rhythm and the changing harmonies, and an improvisatory character. Chopin’s nocturnes occupied the entirety of his creative life. A reflection of his genius is the unending variety that he brought to the simple form.

The C-sharp minor nocturne of 1836 and the C-minor nocturne of 1841 are among the composer’s most dramatic works. Departing from the serenity that characterizes Chopin’s other nocturnes, the two have, in their central sections, a restless storminess so profound that it threatens to burst the bounds of the genre. The C-sharp minor nocturne begins in deep melancholy over a broken chordal bass, moving in the central section to wildly distant keys with insistent triple-fortissimo chords; after a brief cadenza, the first section returns, ending quietly in the parallel major. The C-minor nocturne, an epic work, is the grandest of the genre. Its opening section has the character of a tragic aria; the middle section thunders in martial octaves before giving way to an agitated return of the opening melody in a passionate *doppio movimento*.

Sonata No. 23 in F Minor, Op. 57 ("Appassionata")

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Dispirited in 1802 over his increasing deafness, Beethoven penned the "Heiligenstadt Testament," a letter to his brothers in which he contemplated suicide but ultimately resolved to live for his art. (The letter was never delivered.) Upon his return to Vienna, Beethoven expressed dissatisfaction with his former manner of composition, and resolved instead to find a "new way," marking the start of his so-called middle period. His music in the following years, during which he revolutionized the style he had inherited from his predecessors Mozart and Haydn, takes on a newfound grandeur and intensity of expression. One of the greatest works of 1804–5 is his *Appassionata* Sonata (a name assigned not by Beethoven, but by a publisher some decades later). Perhaps no work better demonstrates the emotional turmoil that characterizes the period.

The first movement is marked by startling motivic, dynamic, and harmonic contrasts; it alternates between sections of anxious foreboding and increasingly passionate, even explosive, outbursts. The opening statement, a misterioso elaboration of the F-minor triad, is repeated immediately in the flattened supertonic; this surprising rise of a half-step figures not only in the third movement also, but often appears elsewhere in Beethoven's works. An extended coda of arpeggios spans the entire range of the instrument; the movement ends with a rumbling tremolo and a triad that features what was then the lowest note of the keyboard. The middle movement, an unruffled D-flat theme and variations in increasingly rapid notes, comes to an abrupt end with a fortissimo diminished seventh chord, leading directly to the third-movement storm. The second part of the movement is repeated, a departure from the form of the classical sonata. The tremendous energy built up in the previous two movements is released in an explosive coda.

Sonata No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 28

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

In 1906, in search of a quiet place to work, Rachmaninoff moved to Dresden. There, inspired by Liszt's *Faust* Symphony, he began work on a sprawling D-minor piano sonata whose movements, at least initially, evoked characters in Goethe's famous play. Rachmaninoff completed the work, whose movements are structured like those of a classical sonata (fast–slow–fast), in 1908.

The first movement's opening theme, a questioning rise and fall of a fifth punctuated by an emphatic authentic cadence, is said to represent Faust's conflicted soul. In contrast, the simple sustained melody of the second theme evokes Russian Orthodox chant, which so frequently inspired Rachmaninoff. The second movement is a portrait of Gretchen: its radiant main theme is followed by a sublime soprano cantilena that arcs above a restless accompaniment. The raging final movement, with a thundering appearance of the medieval *Dies Irae* plainchant, depicts the demon Mephistopheles. As the tumultuous proceedings near their close, a triple-fortissimo rendition of the opening movement's Orthodox chant rings out, with a terrifyingly effective harmonic change and a crash of a falling fifth.



Charlie Albright

Praised by *The New York Times* for his “jaw-dropping technique and virtuosity meshed with a distinctive musicality,” Albright has performed with artists such as Bobby McFerrin, Joshua Bell, and Yo-Yo Ma. He is widely respected as a pianist and also as a composer and a musician with a gift for improvisation.

Recipient of the prestigious 2014 Avery Fisher Career Grant and 2010 Gilmore Young Artist Award, Albright also won the 2014 Ruhr Klavier Festival Young Artist Award and the 2009 Young Concert Artists International Auditions.

Albright has been on tour with the BBC Concert Orchestra, and has performed with the Boston Pops and San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, among many others. He is performing this season in five national and international music festivals. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* raved that he “brought the art of classical-music improvisation to a new level.”

Albright’s debut recording, *Vivace*, has sold thousands of copies worldwide. He released the first of a three-part series of live, all-Schubert recordings in 2017. A sought-after teacher, Mr. Albright is presenting a preconcert lecture at 6:45 p.m. and will be available after the concert to meet with patrons.

Charlie Albright, inset photo, © TC Elofson

PROGRAM

The Romantic Pianist Creates Variations, Improvises, and Celebrates Old Vienna

Charlie Albright begins with the most Romantic of piano sonatas, the “Moonlight,” by the movement’s forefather, Beethoven, before moving to two excerpts from a Menotti opera, which, though more modern, are charged with that most Romantic of sentiments: a longing for the unattainable—the golden past. Mr. Albright then performs music by Chopin, the most beloved composer of the era. Albright closes our season by first improvising, as did all the great pianists of the past, and finally concludes with Schulz-Evler’s dazzlingly virtuosic tribute to the “beautiful blue Danube,” the celebrated river that flows through that most Romantic of musical capitals, Vienna.

Beethoven, *Sonata quasi una fantasia in C-sharp Minor, Op. 27, No. 2*
 (“Moonlight”)

- I. Adagio sostenuto
- II. Allegretto
- III. Presto agitato

Menotti, *Ricercare and Toccata on a Theme from The Old Maid and the Thief*
Chopin, *Variations on “Là ci darem la mano” from Mozart’s Don Giovanni,*
Op. 2

INTERMISSION

Albright, *Improvisation (on notes suggested by the audience)*

Schulz-Evler, *Arabesques on Themes from “On the Beautiful Blue Danube” of*
Johann Strauss

PROGRAM NOTES

Sonata quasi una fantasia in C-sharp Minor, Op. 27, No. 2 (“Moonlight”)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

After establishing his mastery of the classical forms inherited from his predecessors, Beethoven embarked on a series of increasingly innovative sonatas. His title for each of the two works of Opus 27, *Sonata quasi una fantasia*, drew attention to their improvisatory character.

Op. 27, No. 2, completed in 1801, begins with a slow movement in A-B-A form rather than the customary Allegro in sonata form. The *alla breve* time signature suggests a somewhat faster pace than implied by the “Adagio sostenuto” tempo indication. Beethoven instructed that the movement be played with the pedal depressed throughout, accounting in part for its nocturnal and ghostly character. In 1832, the poet Ludwig Rellstab remarked that the movement reminded him of the moonlight on Lake Lucerne; the unofficial title, the *Moonlight*, has adhered to the work ever since. The second movement is a cheerful scherzo and trio in D-flat, a calm before the fiery storm of the third movement, the weightiest and most virtuosic of the three.

The sonata influenced Chopin’s *Fantaisie-Improptu*, which manifests the same key relationships, tempo changes, and chordal structure; its rapid passagework resembles that of the sonata’s third movement. The *Moonlight* was already very popular in Beethoven’s day, exasperating the composer, who remarked to Czerny, “They are always talking about the C#-minor sonata—surely I’ve written better things.” More than 200 years later, it remains one of the composer’s best-known and most beloved works.

Ricercare and Toccata on a Theme from The Old Maid and the Thief

Gian Carlo Menotti (1911–2007)

Menotti, best remembered today for *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, composed the *Ricercare and Toccata* in 1951 on a theme from his opera, *The Old Maid and the Thief*, written 12 years earlier. *Ricercare* in the late Renaissance and early Baroque were improvisatory preludes; much like toccatas, they featured contrasting sections that provided opportunity for virtuosic display. The term later came to mean a learned and contrapuntal work; in that sense, *ricercare* were precursors to the fugue.

The work begins with the contrapuntal exposition of a short theme that is sprightly and staccato in the opera, but Menotti slows the theme to an Andante and marks it legato. The movement at first exhibits a subdued and modal character before developing expansively through various transformations. A cadenza in thirty-second notes recalls the passagework of earlier *ricercare*. The last bars are marked by a pedal-point D under a dissonant, chromatic descent; the movement comes to rest on a quiet D-major chord. The ensuing neoclassical and imitative toccata casts the theme in its original humorous staccato. The movement features nonstop sixteenth notes until, after a final ascent in thirds, it concludes with a quiet G-major cadence.

Variations on “Là ci darem la mano” from Mozart’s Don Giovanni, Op. 2

Frederick Chopin (1810–49)

Variations on “Là ci darem la mano,” composed when Chopin was 17, bears the distinction of being the young composer’s first work to attract international attention. Premiered at one of Chopin’s debut concerts in Vienna in 1829, the work inspired Schumann, in a review in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, to pronounce his now-famous phrase: “Hats off gentlemen! A genius!” Though originally for piano and orchestra, like the later *Grande polonaise brillante*, the work can be performed on solo piano, the orchestra serving as little more than accompaniment to the brilliant piano writing.

Though the work largely conforms to the virtuoso piano style of the 1820s, it displays original features that became hallmarks of Chopin’s mature style, especially its delicate and ornamented passagework and its tendency towards chromatic harmony and sudden modulations. After a lyrical and improvisatory introduction, the main theme, which originated in the act-one duet of Don Giovanni and Zerlina in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, is presented. The theme is followed by five variations in conventional postclassical virtuoso idioms, including a dramatic recitative in the parallel minor, before the work concludes with a spirited *Alla Polacca*. The theme was later used by Liszt in his *Réminiscences de Don Juan*.

Improvisation (on notes suggested by the audience)

Charlie Albright (b. 1988)

Arabesques on Themes from "On the Beautiful Blue Danube" of Johann Strauss

Adolf Schulz-Evler (1852–1905)

Schulz-Evler, a Polish-born composer of virtuosic arrangements of popular works, is remembered primarily for his *Arabesques on Themes from "On the Beautiful Blue Danube"* of Johann Strauss. Owing to their immense popularity at the time, the waltzes of Strauss were a frequent basis for paraphrases, inspiring compositions by renowned pianists such as Carl Tausig, Moriz Rosenthal, and Leopold Godowsky. Schulz-Evler's *Arabesques*, with its introduction, five variations, and coda, is a work of dazzling virtuosity, sure to delight.

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