

Steinway Society



THE BAY AREA

PRESENTS

Mao Fujita



November 18, 2023

PIANO CONCERTS 2023–2024



Nikolay Khozyainov

Saturday, October 7, 2023, 7:30 p.m.

McAfee Performing Arts and Lecture Center, Saratoga



Anne-Marie McDermott

Sunday, October 29, 2023, 2:30 p.m.

Visual and Performing Arts Center, De Anza College, Cupertino



Mao Fujita

Saturday, November 18, 2023, 7:30 p.m.

Visual and Performing Arts Center, De Anza College, Cupertino



Nicolas Namoradze

Sunday, January 21, 2024, 2:30 p.m.

Montgomery Theater, San Jose



Janice Carissa

Sunday, February 18, 2024, 2:30 p.m.

Hammer Theatre Center, San Jose



Alessio Bax

Saturday, March 2, 2024, 7:30 p.m.

McAfee Performing Arts and Lecture Center, Saratoga



Pavel Kolesnikov

Sunday, April 7, 2024, 2:30 p.m.

Cubberley Community Center Theatre, Palo Alto



Trio Wanderer

Saturday, April 20, 2024, 7:30 p.m.

St. Francis Episcopal Church, San Jose



Federico Colli

Saturday, May 4, 2024, 7:30 p.m.

Cubberley Community Center Theatre, Palo Alto



“When his fingers touched the keys...waves of airy filigree, beautifully formed and finished, emerged in almost uninterrupted streams for his two-hour solo recital.”

– Oussama Zahr, The New York Times

With an innate musical sensitivity, 24-year-old pianist Mao Fujita is one of those special talents to come along only rarely, equally at home with Mozart as with the major Romantic repertoire. Fujita was born in Tokyo, and was still studying at the Tokyo College of Music in 2017 when he took First Prize at the Concours International de Piano Clara Haskil in Switzerland, along with the Audience Award, Prix Modern Times, and the Prix Coup de Cœur. He was the Silver Medalist at the 2019 Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow.

Fujita made his highly anticipated US recital debut at Carnegie Hall in January 2023 to great acclaim. He has appeared in recital at major international festivals and has performed with major orchestras worldwide.

In 2022, Mao released his debut recording, the complete Mozart Piano Sonatas, on the Sony Classical label.

Front cover: Mao Fujita, ©Eiichi Ikeda

Inside front cover: Nikolay Khozyainov, © Marie Stagat; Anne-Marie McDermott, Matteo Trisolini; Mao Fujita, © Eiichi Ikeda; Nicolas Namoradze, © Nathan Elson; Janice Carissa, © Chris McGuire; Alessio Bax, © Marco Borggreve; Pavel Kolesnikov, © Eva Vermandel; Trio Wanderer, © Marco Borggreve; Federico Colli, © Kate Kondratieva

Top of this page: Mao Fujita, ©Foto Dovile Sermokas

PROGRAM

Chopin, *Two Polonaises, Op. 26*

1. No. 1 in C-sharp Minor
2. No. 2 in E-flat Minor

Chopin, *Two Polonaises, Op. 40*

3. No. 1 in A Major
4. No. 2 in C Minor

Chopin, *Polonaise in F-sharp Minor, Op. 44*

Chopin, *Polonaise in A-flat Major, Op. 53*

Chopin, *Polonaise-Fantaisie in A-flat Major, Op. 61*

INTERMISSION

Liszt, *Piano Sonata in B Minor, S. 178*

PROGRAM NOTES

THE POLONAISE

The *polonaise*, one of five Polish national dances, did not begin with Chopin—polonaises can be found among the oeuvre of Bach and Beethoven—but it was Chopin who refined the genre for the solo piano to a high art. In 3/4 time, the dance began as a *chodzony*, a “walking dance.” Before Chopin’s time, the Polish/Lithuanian aristocrat and diplomat Michał Kleofas Ogiński (1765–1833), the “epitome of Polish national pride” and one of the earliest composers to write Romantic music, had composed mazurkas, waltzes, marches, and polonaises. By the late 16th century, the folk versions of polonaise, accompanied by singing, were commonly danced by the lower Polish nobility, but the dance was not known under its current name until the 17th century. By Chopin’s era, the Polish, Swedish, and French nobility had adopted the form for ceremonial and social occasions. The polonaise is still a very popular dance in Poland today, and is often the opening dance at official balls and ceremonies.

Chopin wrote his first polonaise in 1817, when he was 7; his last was the *Polonaise-Fantaisie* of 1846, written and published three years before his death. Among the best known of his works in the genre are the *Polonaise in A, Op. 40, No. 1* (the “Military”), and the *Polonaise in A-flat, Op. 53* (the “Heroic”). Also among his most beloved works is the *Andante spianato et Grande polonaise brillante in E-flat, Op. 22* for piano and orchestra, which also exists in the more commonly heard solo piano version. One of Chopin’s earliest published works, the *Introduction and polonaise brillante in C Major, Op. 3*, for cello and piano, incorporates the polonaise, and is one of only a small handful of the composer’s works with a cello part.

Polonaise in C-sharp Minor, Op. 26, No. 1

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849)

The two polonaises of Op. 26, both composed in 1836 and dedicated to his friend, the Austrian composer Josef Dessauer, were Chopin’s first published polonaises, though earlier examples of the genre have since come to light and entered the standard repertoire. Both of the Op. 26 works are known for the great technique and energy they require.

The first polonaise of the set begins with rhythmically intense, descending forte octaves that lead into a passionate theme in C-sharp minor. After a series of virtuoso ascending arpeggio figures, a tender second theme that flirts with E major brings a calmer mood and a more fluid texture. But the turmoil of the opening theme returns. A calmer mood is established in a central *meno mosso* section in D-flat major, the enharmonic equivalent of C-sharp minor. The thunderous opening section is repeated, *da capo al fine*, and the piece ends quietly in the opening key.

Polonaise in E-flat Minor, Op. 26, No. 2

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849)

The second polonaise of Op. 26 opens ominously with a repeated pianissimo descending figure and E-flat minor chords, *maestoso* (stately and dignified), but it soon becomes more agitated and passionate. A quieter central section in a nonetheless martial B major, *meno mosso*, provides some contrast to the earlier dark atmosphere. Following the return of the main theme, and a passionate ascent to a triple fortissimo, the piece accelerates in a final stretto, and closes subtly with pauses and nuanced dynamics, ending quietly in a triple pianissimo.

Polonaise in A Major, Op. 40, No. 1 (the “Military”)

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849)

The two polonaises of Op. 40 were composed in 1838. Chopin originally intended to dedicate the first of the set to Tytus Woyciechowski, the great friend of his youth and his fellow student at the Warsaw Lyceum, but ultimately placed the name of Julian Fontana, the pianist, composer, and lawyer who shared lodgings with the composer in Paris from 1836 to 1838 (and who was ultimately his musical executor) as the dedicatee of both works. The great Chopin interpreter Arthur Rubinstein characterized the first piece of the set as “a tribute to Polish glory,” and the second as “a tribute to Polish tragedy.”

The first polonaise opens in A major, *Allegro con brio*, and continues in a typically martial polonaise rhythm. A second section, constituting a trio, declaims a theme in longer notes, in D major, and rises even to a triple fortissimo, after which the opening is repeated. The piece is played entirely at a forte level or even louder.

Polonaise in C Minor, Op. 40, No. 2

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849)

The second polonaise of Op. 40 opens with a dark and mournful theme declaimed ponderously in *sotto voce* octaves in the left hand, accompanied by eighth-note chords in the right—a contrast to the majestic and joyful character of the first polonaise of the set. Chopin calls for the opening section to be repeated, but this time, *forte*. A more serene theme is heard in 16th notes in the right hand, before a trio section in A-flat major intervenes, *espressivo*. The main theme is then repeated but largely abridged, with an added dramatic melody in the right hand. The piece ends with a triple fortissimo crash in C minor.

Polonaise in F-sharp Minor, Op. 44

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849)

By 1841, Chopin had refined the polonaise genre to incorporate contrapuntal and fantasy elements; by this time he had abandoned formulas based on dance and folk practice. The work epitomizes the “grande polonaise” character that his Op. 53 “Heroic” Polonaise and Op. 61 Polonaise-Fantaisie share; it often receives the term “Tragic” due to its darkly intense nature. The Op. 44 polonaise is dedicated to Princess Charles de Beauvau (née Ludmille Komar), a prominent member of the Polish émigré community in Paris.

The Op. 44 polonaise is a composite work in ternary form. It opens with a short, menacing passage that soon develops into a dark and furious polonaise theme. Immediately preceding a central section is a passage that Alan Walker describes as a “military cavalcade of unbridled ferocity”—36 bars of unisono octaves, “stripped of song” and “hammered out with unremitting force”—“there is no parallel elsewhere in Chopin, where melody abounds.” The central section, *Doppio movimento (Tempo di Mazurka)*, is in effect a mazurka in A major that provides a romantic *sotto voce* contrast. The mazurka

soon submits to darker harmonies, and the polonaise returns after two shocking torrents of fortissimo ascending notes in octave unison—essentially a brilliant, short cadenza that provides a bridge back to the opening *Tempo di Polacca*. At length, the reprise seems to lose force and momentum, quieting to a pianissimo, and suddenly concludes with a gripping F-sharp double octave, fortissimo.

Polonaise in A-flat Major, Op. 53 (the “Heroic”)

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849)

One of the most famous and recognizable works by Chopin, the tremendously difficult *Polonaise in A-flat, Op. 53*, is favored by classical pianists as a virtuosic showpiece; it is referred to as the “Heroic,” after the emotional feeling that Chopin’s companion, George Sand, attributed to it. He completed the work in the summer of 1842 at her estate, Nohant, and dedicated it to his German banker, Auguste Léo. Chopin marked the work *maestoso*, and it was known that he did not like it to be played too fast.

A grand introduction in ascending chromatic notes, seemingly punctuated by two bars of drum rolls, has been likened to a call to arms. The first theme, in a dancelike A-flat major, forte, is accentuated by stately left-hand octaves; upon repetition, right-hand trills and octave reinforcements are added, fortissimo. Chord progressions and arpeggios maintain high energy as the piece moves between interludes, new themes, and the main theme. A second main interlude, a trio in the surprisingly distant key of E major, opens with six fortissimo arpeggiated chords, then ostinato octaves in the bass that accompany a martial theme in the right hand. The theme crescendos to a forte, then is repeated a half-step lower, notated by Chopin in D-sharp major rather than the more closely related enharmonic equivalent, E-flat. Liszt likened the octave passages to the canter of the horses of the Polish cavalry. A misterioso and quiet interlude intervenes, seemingly dying away before building in a crescendo to a glorious return of the main

theme. A brief concluding passage recalls the earlier octaves and the arpeggiated chords, and the piece concludes in a triumphant sforzando A-flat final chord.

Polonaise-Fantaisie in A-flat Major, Op. 61

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849)

In 1845, Chopin had told his family in Warsaw that he was working on a new composition for which he hadn’t yet found a name. He ultimately settled on *Polonaise-Fantaisie*, and completed and published the work in 1846, three years before his death, dedicating it to one Mme. A. Veyret. It embodies a composition style so utterly different from his earlier works—a melding of polonaise-like rhythmic elements in a seemingly unstructured fantasy—that it is sometimes referred to as the beginning of “last” rather than “late” Chopin. It is his most complex work. While the earlier sections clearly have the meter, rhythm, and dancelike melodies of a polonaise, the piece is filled with musical ambiguities more akin to those of a fantasy. Even the tonic key of A-flat is not established until more than 25 bars have elapsed.

The composition is marked *maestoso*; and after a brief opening rhythmic declaration, a shimmering arpeggiation ascends into the heights with dreamlike pedal effects. A polonaise theme enters in a more lyrical form and, signaled by the intensified chords and the faster pace, builds into something glorious. The overall mood is serious, thoughtful, meditative, and melancholy; and the final pages reach a height of emotion seldom surpassed elsewhere. Marked by such a different style, the piece was as confusing for first audiences to grasp as for Chopin to name. Even in the 1852 book *Chopin*, published under Liszt’s name (but containing some flowery and nearly unreadable prose penned by Liszt’s new paramour, the princess Carolyne von Sayn-Wittgenstein), the work is described as “bordering on delirium”—an assessment of which the putative

author later repented. It took many years before the Polonaise-Fantaisie advanced to becoming one of Chopin's most performed and beloved works.

Piano Sonata in B Minor, S. 178

FRANZ LISZT (1811–1886)

Few musicians would dispute that the *Sonata in B Minor* is one of the 19th century's greatest masterpieces. Liszt dedicated it to Robert Schumann, who, having already been committed to an asylum, never heard it. Clara Schumann received a copy in 1854 shortly after its publication, but loathed the work (and Liszt himself!): "merely a blind noise—no healthy ideas anymore, everything confused, one cannot find a single, clear harmonic progression—and yet I must thank him for [the dedication to Robert]. It really is too awful."

The sonata was premiered in 1857 in Berlin by Hans von Bülow, one of the century's greatest pianists; he married Liszt's daughter Cosima that year. The work was received joyfully by many of Liszt's contemporaries; Wagner (himself the future second husband of Cosima) wrote in 1855 that the work was "deep and noble." Critics, however, were sometimes not as complimentary.

Though in one movement, the work follows sonata form, prompting Liszt biographer Alan Walker to call it a "sonata within a sonata." Three of the five main themes are presented early in the first section, providing the pianist a variety of material, from descending scales to staccato octaves to legato melodies. The lack of separation between sections gave rise to much controversy and criticism in the 19th century. The work remains somewhat controversial, in part due to an accretion of performance practices not supported by the score. Today, the sonata is the source of analysis and debate, not just for its interesting harmonies and compositional techniques, but also for its possible symbols and meaning, with theories ranging from descriptions of the divine and diabolical to portraits of Faust, Gretchen, and Mephistopheles.

Thank You for Supporting the Arts



Like many arts organizations, we continue to face challenges post-COVID. We desperately need your help not only to support our 29th Season, but to ensure our very survival. Ticket sales have not kept pace with rising artists' fees, increased rates for venue and piano rentals, and growing operational costs. In addition, we have recently experienced a significant loss of government funding due to fewer public dollars being invested in arts organizations.

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Our deepest thanks.



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