



Jiyang Chen

22|23 SEASON



UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

presents

## STEPHEN HOUGH, piano

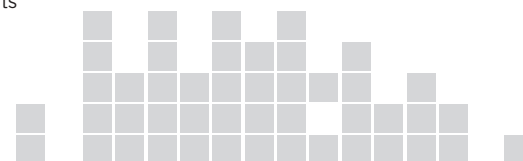
SUN, APR 2, 3:00 pm

Hodgson Concert Hall

Supported by  
**JOHN A. MALTESE**

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## PROGRAM

**Federico Mompou** (1893-1987)

*Cants màgics* [9:30]

I. *Energic*

II. *Obscur*

III. *Profond-Lent*

IV. *Misteriós*

V. *Calma-Inquiet*

**Claude Debussy** (1862-1918)

*Estampes* [12:30]

I. *Pagodes*

II. *La soirée dans Grenade*

III. *Jardins sous la pluie*

**Aleksandr Skryabin** (1871-1915)

Sonata No. 5, Op. 53 [12:30]

## INTERMISSION

**Stephen Hough** (1961- )

Partita [13:00]

I. Overture

II. Capriccio

III. *Cançion y Danzas I*

IV. *Cançion y Danzas II*

V. Toccata

**Franz Liszt** (1811-1886)

3 Petrarch Sonnets, S. 161, Nos. 4-6, from Italian

*Années de Pèlerinage* [20:30]

Petrarch Sonnet 47

Petrarch Sonnet 104

Petrarch Sonnet 123

**Franz Liszt**

*Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata,*

S. 161, No. 7, from Italian *Années de Pèlerinage* [17:30]

Program is subject to change.

## ARTIST STATEMENT

There are a couple of themes occurring throughout this program: firstly the world of charms and spells: Mompou's Magic Songs, then Skryabin's audacious conjuring of ecstatic fire, then Debussy's triptych with its dreams of Asia, Spain and France. We end the concert in hell with Liszt!

But also I wanted to celebrate composer-pianists, not so much as performers but as creators at the piano. It is impossible to imagine the music on the first half of this program as having been written away from the keyboard, so direct is the connection from hands to strings to sound. Liszt first made a whole concert out of solo piano music, inventing the word "recital" to describe it, so pianists ever since are in debt both to his design and to his hand, which shaped the patterns on the keys which we all trace in his shadow. —*Stephen Hough*

## PROGRAM NOTES

By Laurie Shulman

*Cants màgics* (1917-19)

**Federico Mompou** (1893-1987)

Two things are essential to know about Federico Mompou. One is that he was Catalan; the other is his propensity for bell sounds.

Born in Barcelona to a mother of French descent and a Catalan father, Mompou appeared to be headed toward a career as a pianist. He heard the French pianist Marguerite Long play an all-Fauré program in 1909, when he was 16, and realized he was destined to be a composer rather than a performer. After securing a letter of recommendation from his older countryman Enrique Granados, he set out for Paris.

Like many of his countrymen (Granados, Albéniz, Falla, Joaquín Nin, and later Rodrigo) Mompou found the magnet of Parisian life irresistible. Arriving in 1911, he enrolled at the Conservatoire

to study piano and harmony, immersing himself in the panoply of cultural options available. He came of age in the heady atmosphere of the French capital and cultivated a circle that included composers, sculptors, painters, and literati. When the Great War erupted, Mompou left France for Barcelona. He returned to Paris in 1921 and was based there for two decades.

Not surprisingly, there is abundant French influence in Mompou's compositions. He is frequently compared to Erik Satie, but most listeners also discern an impressionist flavor in his works, reminiscent of Debussy. Yet the pull of native Catalan music remained strong as well. Mompou was particularly fascinated by 15th-century Catalan music of the high Renaissance, an era when Spain was one of Europe's richest and most powerful countries and support for church music was lavish.

Most of Mompou's piano pieces are miniature tone poems in a quasi-impressionist style. Many omit key signatures, bar lines, and perfect cadences, which links them to Satie's

iconoclasm. Their distinctive character, however, derives primarily from Mompou's unique harmonic vocabulary. Neither fish nor fowl, it is an amalgam of tonal, modal, occasionally pentatonic scales and chords, and Catalan folk tunes. He was determined to plumb the essence of music by returning to its most primitive elements.

One near-constant element is bell-like sonorities. They are autobiographical: Mompou grew up within earshot of his family's bell foundry, and was fascinated by the sound of bells his entire life. Another recurrent trait is the innocent lilt of Catalan folk music. These snatches of melody have the timelessness of tradition. One senses that Catalonian children have sung these tunes for centuries.

*Cants mágics* (Magic Songs) was Mompou's first published composition, appearing in 1920 in Spain by Unión Musical Española and in France by Éditions Salabert. The work was a major step toward establishing Mompou's reputation as a composer as well as a pianist.

*Energic* opens with bold chords that diminish to a mysterious, chorale-like mode representative of his propensity for pealing sonorities and overtones. *Obscur* begins with a chant-like melody that serves as the subject for free variations. *Profond-lent* is hypnotic, with a steady pedal point first on a low B-flat, then on E-flat.

*Misteriós* also features a pedal point, expanding to swirling quasi-arpeggios in both hands. The form is A-B-A-B, all constructed around the mournful melody. *Cants mágics* concludes with *Calma-Inquiet*, with unstable harmonies in its first section and a nervous

tarantella in the central section. Mesmerizing as a whole, these five pieces both unsettle and captivate

### ***Estampes*** (1903)

**Claude Debussy** (1862-1918)

Debussy's early piano pieces were conceived in the tradition of the 19th-century salon miniature. After 1900, however, he began to experiment with piano textures and techniques that would alter the course of solo keyboard music for the new century. He also began to draw his inspiration from visual stimuli.

On the heels of the neo-Baroque suite *Pour le piano* (composed between 1894 and 1901 and published in 1901), Debussy chose an entirely new path for his next solo piano work, *Estampes*. The French title means "prints." Print collecting was quite fashionable in Paris at the turn of the century, and Japanese colored wood block prints were especially prized. Debussy was already well acquainted with Japanese art; the sculptor Camille Claudel (Rodin's mistress) had introduced him to it in the 1880s. When *Estampes* was published in 1903, Debussy was quite particular about the shades of Japanese blue and gold that would appear on the cover of Durand et Fils's first edition.

The three *Estampes* have descriptive titles and evoke different places: Japan (or more broadly, the East), Spain, and France, respectively. Each movement is highly stylized, with a different pianistic personality. "Pagodes" is closely aligned with the sonorities of the Javanese gamelan, which Debussy had heard at the Paris exhibitions of 1889 and 1900. The main theme recurs in different registers and with

altered rhythms, as a sort of variation study on the pentatonic scale.

There is little harmonic action, and extended pedal points enhance the feeling of stasis. Debussy's magic incorporates some counterpoint and filigree embroidery, suggesting bells, gongs, and other metallophones. The piece requires masterful pedaling and superb control of dynamics.

"*La soirée dans Grenade*" transports us to the Andalusian city of Granada in southern Spain. It is based on a dance; habanera rhythm provides a rhythmic ostinato throughout. The musical material is abundant. Some five independent ideas intersect, as if a cinematographer were shifting the camera to take in multiple sights in the evening streets. We hear snatches of guitar strumming, a hint of flamenco, a suggestion of castanets. The slow sections employ Arabic scales—perhaps the call to prayer of the muezzin—while faster passages marked *très rythmé* suggest dancing and singing. Quiet chords in rapid succession demand a controlled touch and expert pedaling. Debussy navigates a no man's land between major and minor, committing to neither. At the end, we have left center city and the urban activity dissipates to silence.

In "*Jardins sous la pluie*," a small child looks out the nursery window on a rainy day. We know we are in France because Debussy incorporated two nursery songs into the piece: the lullaby "*Dodo, l'enfant do*" and the child's ditty "*Nous n'irons plus au bois*." They are easy for the listener to discern because they emerge from the toccata-like stream of sixteenth notes that depict the nonstop splatter of the rain. Debussy transforms the tunes, which would have been familiar to any French listener, with

his harmonies, also subjecting them to rapid dynamic changes. "*Jardins*" concludes with a virtuoso flourish and a last fragment of one of the songs.

Debussy's friend Ricardo Viñes played the first public performance of *Estampes* at the Société Nationale in Paris on 9 January 1904. The piece was received enthusiastically, and Viñes repeated "*Jardins sous la pluie*" as an encore. Debussy dedicated the work to Jacques-Émile Blanche, a painter who had recently completed Debussy's official portrait. The painting is now housed at the Cité de la Musique in Paris.

### **Sonata No. 5 Op. 53**

**Aleksandr Skryabin** (1871-1915)

With the exception of six orchestral works and a piano concerto, Alexander Skryabin composed exclusively for solo piano. Historically, he has been regarded as the direct heir to Chopin. The connection is particularly evident in Skryabin's early works, which include mazurkas, preludes, etudes, nocturnes, and other small salon pieces. One can easily discern the influence of Chopin and other Slavic composers—rather than Russian ones—in much of Skryabin's early music.

In his later works, Skryabin composed in larger forms, particularly sonatas and some broader scale *poèmes*. These are futurist works, providing the transition in piano music from the post-romantic to the modern era. He worked on the Fifth Sonata concurrently with his orchestral *Poème d'extase*, arguably his most grandiose composition. He wrote the poem in verse and published it in 1906. Both the poem and the orchestral piece are imbued with mystical fantasy. Skryabin's personal philosophy, which



evolved out of his acquaintance with the writings of Nietzsche and Wagner, was Orpheism. He viewed art as religion and as a transformer of life.

The Fifth Sonata (1908) bears an epigraph from *The Poem of Ecstasy*.

*Je vous appelle à la vie, ô forces mystérieuses!  
Noyées dans les obscures profondeurs-  
De l'esprit créateur, craintives  
Ébauches de vie, à vous j'apporte l'audace.*  
I call you to life, O mysterious forces!  
Bathed in obscure depths  
Of the creator spirit, fearful  
Rough draft of life, I bring you audacity.

The sonata is nothing if not audacious. Skryabin's explosive opening erupts over the entire keyboard expanse in a firestorm of fingerwork. Tender, dreamy music follows in a segment marked *Languido*. Skryabin caresses the piano in richly chromatic music that leaves conventional chords unresolved. He shifts gears again in a highly virtuosic *Presto con allegrezza*. Rapid staccato in the left hand counterposes big chords in the right hand, darting about at such speed that we barely notice the two hands are in cross rhythms with one another. These three contrasting opening segments are the fodder for the balance of the Sonata, which is more like a free fantasy.

As Skryabin parses these three contrasting approaches to the keyboard, his slower music grows more extravagant, emphasizing inner voices as the textures thicken. The *Presto* sections grow more urgent and vertiginous, striving for the ecstasy and exaltation of the poem that inspired this remarkable work.

## Partita (2019) Stephen Hough (b.1961)

*Mr. Hough's biography appears on page 13 of this program.*

Stephen Hough is no musical orphan. A master interpreter of dozens of composers—including many composer-pianists—he has absorbed multiple ideas about keyboard technique and the handling of harmony and rhythm at the piano. In his compositions, he has developed a personal voice that both reflects and transcends this heritage. His composer's note for the Partita explains:

My Partita was commissioned by the Naumburg Foundation for Albert Cano Smit. Having written four sonatas for piano of a serious, intense character, I wanted to write something different—something brighter, more celebratory, more nostalgic. Written in 2019, it is in five movements. The outer, more substantial bookends have an “English” flavor and suggest the world of a grand cathedral organ. The first of these alternates between ceremonial pomp and sentimental circumstance, whereas the final movement, taking thematic material from the first, is a virtuosic toccata—a sortie out of the gothic gloom into brilliant Sunday sunshine. At the center of the work are three shorter movements, each utilizing the interval of a fifth: a restless, jagged Capriccio of constantly shifting time signatures, and two *Cançon y Danzas*, inspired by the Catalan composer Federico Mompou.

Hough adds that the second movement Capriccio is inspired by Béla Bartók,

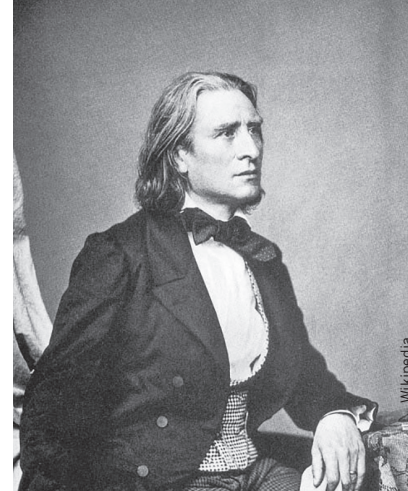
and that the third and fourth have a Catalan connection. “Albert (Cano Smit) is from Barcelona and (Federico Mompou is Barcelona's great musical son, so I thought it would be a nice little tribute,” he says.

Although the Partita was written for Smit, Hough knew that he wanted to play it himself. In addition to the salutes to Bartók, Mompou, and his English countrymen mentioned in his composer's note, other influences are discernible. Throughout the Partita, motoric sections allude to Baroque motor rhythms that bring Bach to mind. Quieter passages are tinged with jazz and often reveal a French spirit: perhaps the Ravel of *Le tombeau de Couperin* in the Overture, and a touch of Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales* commingling with Mompou in the *Cançon* sections of the two *Cançon y Danza* movements. Hough's emphasis on fifths in the inner movements often lend his music the feeling of bitonality. His reuse of material from the Overture in the Toccata gives the Partita cyclic unity. The whole feels like a connected arch embracing multiple architectural styles.

## 3 Petrarch Sonnets, S. 161 Nos. 4-6

**Franz Liszt** (1811-1886)

Liszt's *Années de pèlerinage* (Years of Pilgrimage) are three volumes of piano music originating in the mid-1830s, when he and his mistress Marie d'Agoult eloped from Paris, for Switzerland, then to Italy. The first volume is subtitled *Suisse*, the second *Italie*; the third, which was not published until 1883, remained untitled. Liszt continued to work on the *Années de Pèlerinage* until the late 1870s. Most of the pieces are descriptive, and



many of them exist in more than one version.

The three *Sonetti di Petrarca* are Nos. 4-6 of the second *Année de pèlerinage*. All three *Sonetti* originated as songs for tenor and piano setting Petrarch's verse. In 1846, Liszt published the *Sonetti* on their own, transcribed for solo piano, twelve years before the entire *2ème Année de pèlerinage* appeared. He revised them for the 1858 publication of the larger set. In that version, which most pianists play, they are structured to echo the shape, mood, and sentiment of Petrarch's verse. While the entire volume focuses on Italy's sunny climate and astounding cultural heritage, Liszt biographer Sacheverell Sitwell singles out the 3 *Sonetti* as “the most perfect examples of Liszt's art.” Though they sound nothing like Chopin, these pieces are analogous to the Polish master's most ambitious Nocturnes.

*Sonetto No. 47, “Benedetto sia 'l giorno”* (Blessed be the day) begins with a passionate introduction that establishes the mood. Liszt modulates almost immediately from A major to D-flat major, setting forth chromatic material that metamorphoses over the course of the movement. Later, he

continues the tonal journey through sections in G and E, before resolving in D-flat. It is a remarkable study in key relationships, and quite harmonically adventurous for its time. The melodic line—which extols the moment the poet became captivated by the beloved Laura’s eyes—emerges clearly through Liszt’s syncopated pianism. One needs to suspend the popular perception of his music as flamboyant display. A brief double-note cadenza is the sole concession to bravura technique. The music is ineffably tender and heartfelt.

*Sonetto No. 104* is thought to be the finest of the three. Subtitled “*Pace non trovo*” (I find no peace) after the poetic incipit, this is vintage Liszt. It has more of the rhetorical flourishes we associate with Lisztian piano technique. Though housed within a reverie, we sense the poet’s agitation as he copes with restlessness and despair caused by the beloved. Liszt incorporates recitative and other vocal gestures that are borrowed from Italian bel canto opera. Mostly reflective, occasionally passionate, the *Sonetto No. 104* is six minutes of understated romantic extravagance.

*Sonetto Petrarca No. 123*, “Io vidi in terra angelici costume/E celeste bellezza” (I beheld on earth celestial graces and heavenly beauties) is dreamy and meditative. Its central *Sempre lento* section, setting forth the song’s melody, is the closest Liszt comes to a Chopinesque style in these three pieces. Two impassioned climaxes interrupt the reverie, but this *Sonetto* is primarily about lyrical expression and the sweetness of nature’s harmony.

***Après une lecture du Dante:*  
*Fantasia quasi sonata* (1838-61)  
Franz Liszt**

Liszt was unquestionably the greatest pianist of the nineteenth century and may well have been the greatest pianist who ever lived. His virtuosity expanded keyboard technique to the same degree that Paganini expanded the violin’s, introducing dazzling *tours de force* that brought audiences literally to their feet and rendered them, figuratively, in the palm of his hand.

The so-called *Dante Sonata* concludes Book II of *Années de pèlerinage*. Liszt sketched an early version of the *Dante Sonata* in late summer 1839, performing it as a fragment that November. A decade later, shortly after settling in Weimar, he revised it extensively. In that version, it is the most ambitious component of *Années de Pèlerinage Book II*. The subtitle “*Après une lecture du Dante*” comes from a poem by Victor Hugo. We know, however, that Liszt and Marie d’Agoult read a great deal of Dante during their Italian sojourn. Liszt reacted powerfully to *L’inferno*, responding to the Italian poet’s verse evoking “strange tongues, horrible cries, words of pain, and tones of anger.”

He establishes the devil’s presence and power immediately with a dramatic series of descending tritones—the medieval *diabolus in musica*—then introduces us to the souls suffering in eternal damnation. A series of episodes unfolds, loosely connected by the recurrence of tritones, a contrasting theme suggesting Dante’s *Paradiso*, and a grand chorale lavishly decorated with Liszt octaves. As a grand rhetorical gesture, the *Dante Sonata* is a daunting pianistic mountain to scale. As descriptive program music, it is one of Liszt’s most ambitious achievements.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

### STEPHEN HOUGH

Sir Stephen Hough has distinguished himself as a true polymath, not only securing a reputation as a uniquely insightful concert pianist but also as a writer and composer. He is commended for his mastery of the instrument as well as an individual and inquisitive mind that has earned him a multitude of prestigious awards and a longstanding international following. In 2001, Sir Stephen became the first classical performing artist to win a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. In 2014 he was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) and was knighted in the Queen’s Birthday Honors in 2022.

Since taking first prize at the 1983 Naumburg Competition in New York, Sir Stephen has appeared with most of the major European, Asian and American orchestras and plays recitals regularly in major halls and concert series around the world, from London’s Royal Festival Hall to New York’s Carnegie Hall. His 2022-23 season includes the release of an all-Mompou album on Hyperion Records in February 2023, supported by an international recital tour featuring works by Mompou, Skryabin, Debussy, Liszt, and Sir Stephen’s own *Partita* in cities including Atlanta, Bristol, Jakarta, New York, Paris, Singapore, and Washington, among others.

Sir Stephen also performs a variety of concertos as a soloist with international orchestras, including Rachmaninoff concertos with the BBC Scottish Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony, Milwaukee Symphony, National Symphony Orchestra, and the Utah Symphony; Tchaikovsky’s Piano Concerto No. 1 with the St. Louis Symphony; Brahms’s Piano Concerto No. 1 with the Houston Symphony and Rochester Philharmonic; Brahms’s Piano Concerto No. 2 with the BBC Symphony Orchestra at Bath Mozartfest and the Indianapolis Symphony.

He regularly contributes articles for *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *Gramophone*, and *BBC Music Magazine*. His first novel, *The Final Retreat*, was released in 2018 by Sylph Editions, and was followed by *Rough Ideas: Reflections on Music and More*, an anthology of essays on musical, cultural, lifestyle, and spiritual subjects, published in 2019. His memoir, *Enough: Scenes of Childhood*, is being released this spring by Faber. As a composer, he has written for orchestra, choir, chamber ensemble, and solo piano. His compositions are published by Josef Weinberger, Ltd.

Sir Stephen records extensively for Hyperion Records. Many of his more than 60 albums have garnered international prizes including the Deutscher Schallplattenpreis, Diapason d’Or, Monde de la Musique, several Grammy nominations, and eight *Gramophone* Magazine Awards including the 1996 and 2003 “Record of the Year” Awards and the 2008 “Gold Disc” Award, which named his complete Saint-Saëns piano concertos the best recording of the past 30 years.

Sir Stephen resides in London where he is a visiting professor at the Royal Academy of Music and holds the International Chair of Piano Studies at his alma mater, the Royal Northern College in Manchester. He is also a member of the faculty at The Juilliard School. To learn more about Sir Stephen, visit his website [StephenHough.com](http://StephenHough.com) and follow him on Twitter at @HoughHough.