



Xun Chi

23|24 SEASON

 UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

presents

LANG LANG, piano

SAT, APR 27, 7:30 pm

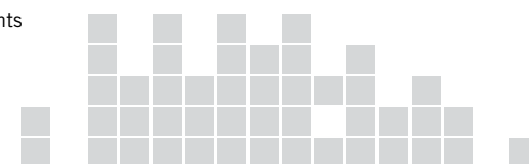
Hodgson Concert Hall

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#ugapresents



PROGRAM

GABRIEL FAURÉ (1845-1924)

Pavane, Op. 50

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Kreisleriana, Op. 16

- I. *Äußerst bewegt* (Extremely animated)
- II. *Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch* (Very inwardly and not too quickly)
- III. *Sehr aufgereggt* (Very agitated)
- IV. *Sehr langsam* (Very slowly)
- V. *Sehr lebhaft* (Very lively)
- VI. *Sehr langsam* (Very slowly)
- VII. *Sehr rasch* (Very fast)
- VIII. *Schnell und spielend* (Fast and playful)

INTERMISSION

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)

Mazurka in F Minor, Op. 7, No. 3

Mazurka in B-flat Major, Op. 17, No. 1

Mazurka in E Minor, Op. 17, No. 2

Mazurka in A Minor, Op. 17, No. 4

Mazurka in C Major, Op. 24, No. 2

Mazurka in B-flat Minor, Op. 24, No. 4

Mazurka in D-flat Major, Op. 30, No. 3

Mazurka in C-sharp Minor, Op. 30, No. 4

Mazurka in C Major, Op. 33, No. 3

Mazurka in B Minor, Op. 33, No. 4

Mazurka in D Major, Op. 33, No. 2

Mazurka in F-sharp Minor, Op. 59, No. 3

CHOPIN

Polonaise in F-sharp Minor, Op. 44

Program is subject to change.

PROGRAM NOTES

by Laurie Shulman ©2024

***Pavane*, Op. 50**

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)

This little six-minute jewel, originally for orchestra, encapsulates all the features that make Fauré so popular on concert programs. Melodious, melancholy without being depressing, and thoroughly French, the *Pavane* charms from beginning to end. The title derives from the Italian *pavana*, a sixteenth-century court dance in quadruple meter, usually slow and processional, and favoring continuous repetition of simple step patterns. Fauré composed his *Pavane* in late summer 1887. He had been for an extended visit to Countess Elisabeth Greffulhe's residence in Dieppe, on the Normandy coast, and took up music paper again in nearby Le Vésinet. On 12 September 1887, he wrote to Marguerite Bauguies:

The only new thing I have been able to compose during this shuttlecock existence is a *Pavane* — elegant, assuredly, but not particularly important — for the Danbé Concerts Orchestra.

Jules Danbé was then conductor at the Opéra-comique in Paris, which had burnt on 25 May. Awaiting its reconstruction, Danbé formed a concert orchestra. We do not know whether he did in fact play the *Pavane*, because no program has survived. The first documented performance took place in Paris on 28 April, 1888; Charles Lamoureux conducted.

In any case, Fauré seems to have had an opportunistic eye toward marketing this modest composition. Just weeks

after the letter to Marguerite Bauguies, Fauré wrote to his Dieppe hostess, Countess Greffulhe, that he had composed the *Pavane* specifically for her Paris salon. The countess' cousin, Count Robert de Montesquiou-Fézensac, had become an important literary adviser to Fauré. Montesquiou was a poet, essayist, art critic, and aesthete. He was also very rich. Apparently seeking to curry favor with the Count and his cousin Countess Greffulhe, Fauré set a poetic text by Montesquiou for optional chorus in the *Pavane*. He intended that the addition would make the piece both danceable and singable, and fit for performance in the countess' elegant Parisian living room. His version for solo piano followed in 1889. Ultimately it is more successful without the choral embellishment. As a piano piece, the *Pavane* benefits from the inherent restraint and tastefulness of Fauré's initial inspiration.

***Kreisleriana*, Op. 16**

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

The solo piano works of the 1830s display Robert Schumann's genius at its most immediate and spontaneous. He was surely the greatest master of the romantic miniature, endowing smaller pieces in simple forms with layers of musical substance and expressivity. In the hands of a lesser composer, such pieces would have been merely salon music. Schumann elevated miniatures to the realm of the sublime. At his best, he compiled groups of them into cycles linked by musical motive, tonal relationships, and programmatic or autobiographical subtexts.

The eight movements of *Kreisleriana* are one of the most successful such

cycles. Idiomatic piano writing, subtle weaving of inner voices, and quicksilver mood changes make these pieces vintage Schumann. Nearly all of them are in relatively simple ternary form. Pacing, texture, and tempo vary widely within the cycle. The movements complement one another because of Schumann's instinctive gift for narrative and the flow of key centers from one piece to the next.

The title has nothing to do with Fritz Kreisler (1875-1962), the brilliant Viennese-born virtuoso celebrated for such nostalgic chestnuts as *Liebesfreud*, *Liebesleid*, and *Tambourin Chinois*. Schumann's inspiration was Johannes Kreisler, a fictional character who appears in three of E.T.A. Hoffmann's novels published between 1814 and 1822. Schumann was the son of a bookseller, both well-read and well-educated. He devoured Hoffmann's writings, identifying strongly with the eccentric Kreisler, a composer and conductor pushing against the mores of his time.

Schumann believed that Hoffmann's model for Kreisler was Ludwig Böhner, a violinist and conductor Schumann had heard in performance. In an 1834 letter after one of Böhner's concerts, he described him: "He was like an old lion with a thorn in his foot." A bipolar personality, Böhner eventually had a nervous breakdown that ended his conducting career, though he continued to compose. Given what we know today of Schumann's mental illness, it is hardly surprising that he would have identified with Böhner and with Hoffmann's fictional Kreisler.

Indeed, there is a direct parallel in Schumann's own writings, published in his journal *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. He often signed his critical essays with

the pseudonyms Florestan or Eusebius. Florestan represented the passionate, impulsive, excitable, and impetuous voice within all of us. Eusebius [pronounced oy-ZAY-bee-us] represented the dreamy, imaginative aspect of one's thoughts, impressions, and emotions: the opposite of Florestan.

These two characters manifested themselves in *Kreisleriana's* wild mood swings. All eight of Schumann's movements are in ternary form or modified rondo form (A-B-A-C-A). The Florestan movements are in D minor or G minor; the Eusebius ones favor B-flat major. Paradoxically, each of *Kreisleriana's* movements contains aspects of both characters. Schumann uses his B section in the ternary movements and his episodes in the rondos to shift the mood.

Schumann wrote *Kreisleriana* between May and September 1838. By then, he and Clara Wieck were deeply in love, and struggling to surmount Friedrich Wieck's opposition to the match. As with most of Schumann's piano music in the mid- and late-1830s, his passion and tenderness toward her are mirrored in the music. In a letter to Clara that year, he wrote:

Play my *Kreisleriana* often. A positively wild love is in some of the movements, and your life and mine, and the way you look. . . . you will smile so sweetly when you see yourself in them. Even to myself my music now seems wonderfully intricate in spite of its simplicity; its eloquence comes straight from the heart.

He was absolutely correct. From the tempestuous opening [*Äußerst bewegt*], Schumann's textures are masterful and commanding, exploding with passion.

The second movement [*Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch*]*—*one of the first in which a 19th-century composer labeled an interlude *Intermezzo**—*is one of Schumann's most heartfelt and intimate expressions. The irregular rhythms and harmonic adventures of the ensuing movements explore the full range of moods inherent in Florestan's and Eusebius's personae. Schumann disconcerts us with nervous figures that skitter up and down the keyboard, then ravishes us with complex inner voices, woven together with consummate skill.

Schumann wanted to dedicate the work to Clara, but Friedrich Wieck would not permit him to do so. When *Kreisleriana* was published, it bore a dedication to Frédéric Chopin.

Selections from Mazurkas, Opp. 7, 17, 24, 30, 33, and 59

Frédéric-François Chopin (1810-1849)

Mazurkas, a genre associated closely with Chopin, typify the defining sources of his music: song and dance. Most of his mazurkas share a more introspective character than the other, more "public" genres—waltz, etude, polonaise. Chopin's genius allowed him to expand his harmonic and expressive vocabulary regardless of the vessel enclosing his ideas.

The mazurka is a Polish folk dance in triple meter, often with the principal emphasis on the second or third beat, rather than the first. Several types exist. The *mazur* or *mazurek*, from the province of Mazovia, is spirited and aggressive, with a second beat accent. *Obertas* or *oberek* are also from Mazovia. They are even faster, usually buoyant, and accent the first beats, but not necessarily in every bar. A third type is *Kujawiak* from the Kujawy region, which is a slower, languorous cousin

to the mazurka, generally displacing the accent to the second beat. Chopin adapted all three types, sometimes within an individual mazurka.

His mazurkas are both an expression of Polish nationalism and a laboratory for harmonic experimentation. He published eleven sets of Mazurkas in the 1830s and 1840s. Nearly sixty examples survive: more than any other genre. Chopin was probably encouraged by the dance's popularity in aristocratic Parisian circles. His imagination and formal variety were limitless. Some draw their inspiration from rustic energy, while others pursue an elegiac path. Nearly all of them employ modal scales, which relates them to Polish folk music and lends a wistful, exotic character.

The Mazurkas are at once the simplest and the most complex of Chopin's shorter pieces. A few of them, such as the A minor Op. 17, No. 4, are often assigned to young pianists who have studied for three or four years, probably because a relaxed tempo, primarily chordal left hand, and relatively unadorned right hand make it technically possible. Technique has relatively little to do, however, with music of such harmonic and interpretive subtlety.

Even in those Mazurkas that are less technically demanding, Chopin asks searching questions about direction, roots, shape, and mood. His chromaticism is so exploratory that a specific tonality sometimes will not be clear until several measures into the piece. His atmosphere can be melancholy, even in a sunlit middle section in major mode. Throughout the Mazurkas, Chopin's detailed directives for limited pedaling require a superb *legato* in the right hand, and the

rubato passages must be just so. For those who studied any of these Mazurkas as a young person—or who have a child studying them now—hearing these mysterious works played by a master pianist is a revelatory experience.

Lang Lang has selected a dozen mazurkas ranging from Chopin's Opus 7 (written in 1830 and 1831; published in 1832) to his Opus 59 (composed and published in 1845). Collectively, they attest to the inexhaustible fertility of Chopin's imagination and—since we hear them in chronological order—to the evolution of his approach to the piano. They are also a loving salute to the homeland he left at age 20.

Polonaise in F-sharp Minor, Op. 44 Frédéric-François Chopin

Among the genres that Chopin cultivated, the polonaise is arguably the most powerful and masculine. First cultivated by Polish aristocracy and then by the upper classes throughout Europe, the dance became a vessel for Chopin's patriotism, an overt clarion cry of his nationalist sentiments. Each one was a tone poem for discussion of his homeland: its beauties, struggles, joys, and its hope for a future as an independent nation.

For most listeners, the Polonaise in A-flat, Op. 53 ("Heroic") holds pride of place among Chopin's examples. This F-sharp minor work, however, has its advocates, and connoisseurs consider it the greatest of his Polonaises. As early as 1900, James Gibbons Huneker wrote, "There is no greater test for the poet-pianist than the F-sharp minor Polonaise."



Its challenges start with length and breadth. At approximately eleven minutes, it is one of the largest-scale Polonaises, and the first of the so-called *Grandes Polonaises*. In substance, it matches—even exceeds—the Ballades and the Scherzi. Comparison to the four Scherzi is particularly apt, because the overall structure is so similar.

The dramatic flow and rhetoric of this Polonaise, however, are unique. While all Chopin's Polonaises are ternary in form, this one has elements in common with the free-form fantasy. The theme is symmetrical and conforms to traditional polonaise rhythm—once we finally hear it. Chopin does not reveal his hand immediately. His opening is positively reckless, a series of nervous gestures that seem on the verge of explosion. We do not know for certain what key we are in. Everything implies instability, a temper ready to blow.

Chopin asserts order with the introduction of the principal theme, with its martial rhythms and classic polonaise contour. Everything communicates power, strength, and passion. Presently, a transition to

A major introduces a poetic aspect. This is startling—on the heels of passages where he seems to be possessed by a demon.

Most surprising is the central section, marked *Doppio movimento - Tempo di mazurka*. Chopin's switch to another Polish dance is bold and inclusive. Whereas polonaises were the province of the aristocracy, mazurkas were the dance of the people. In merging the

two within this astonishing work, Chopin was embracing multiple sectors of his country's culture.

Throughout Opus 44, the modulations veer in crazy directions, yet Chopin never loses his way in the complexity of key changes. He develops his material with skill and assurance, presenting themes in single lines, thirds, sixths, and octaves, and punctuating transitions with electrifying trills.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

LANG LANG

Lang Lang is a leading figure in classical music today—as a pianist, educator and philanthropist he has become one of the world's most influential and committed ambassadors for the arts in the 21st century. Equally happy playing for billions of viewers at the 2008 Olympics opening ceremony in Beijing or just for a few hundred children in the public schools, he is a master of communicating through music.

Heralded by the *New York Times* as “the hottest artist on the classical music planet,” Lang Lang plays sold-out concerts all over the world. He has formed ongoing collaborations with conductors including Sir Simon Rattle, Gustavo Dudamel, Daniel Barenboim, and Christoph Eschenbach and performs with all the world's top orchestras. Lang Lang is known for thinking outside the box and frequently steps into different musical worlds. His performances at the Grammy Awards with Metallica, Pharrell Williams and jazz legend Herbie Hancock were watched by millions of viewers.

For about a decade Lang Lang has contributed to musical education worldwide. In 2008 he founded the Lang Lang International Music Foundation aimed at cultivating tomorrow's top pianists, championing music education at the forefront of technology, and building a young audience through live music experiences. In 2013 Lang Lang was designated by the Secretary General of the United Nations as a Messenger of Peace focusing on global education.

Lang Lang started playing the piano aged 3 and gave his first public recital before the age of 5. He entered Beijing's Central Music Conservatory aged 9 and won First Prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition for Young Musicians at 13. He subsequently went to Philadelphia to study with legendary pianist Gary Graffman at the Curtis Institute of Music. He was seventeen when his big break came,

substituting for André Watts at the Gala of the Century, playing Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Christoph Eschenbach: He became an overnight sensation and the invitations started to pour in.

Lang Lang's boundless drive to attract new audiences to classical music has brought him tremendous recognition: He was presented with the 2010 Crystal Award in Davos and was picked as one of the 250 Young Global Leaders by the World Economic Forum. He is also the recipient of honorary doctorates from the Royal College of Music, the Manhattan School of Music, and New York University. In December 2011 he was honored with the highest prize awarded by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China and received the highest civilian honors in Germany (Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany) and France (Medal of the Order of Arts and Letters). In 2016 Lang Lang was invited to the Vatican to perform for Pope Francis. He has also performed for numerous other international dignitaries, including four U.S. presidents and monarchs from many nations.

For further information visit www.langlang.com / www.langlangfoundation.org.



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- Lang Lang



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