



Program Notes

SEMI-FINAL SOLO ROUND

CLEVELAND
INTERNATIONAL
PIANO
COMPETITION
for Young Artists

Program Notes

SEMI-FINAL SOLO ROUND

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Composer Index

Isaac Albéniz	5
Charles-Valentin Alkan	6
Johann Sebastian Bach	8
Frédéric Chopin	10
Claude Debussy	12
Manuel de Falla	13
Franz Liszt	14
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart	16
Sergei Prokofiev	18
Sergei Rachmaninoff	20
Jean-Philippe Rameau	22
Maurice Ravel	24
Domenico Scarlatti	26
Robert Schumann	27
Alexander Scriabin	32
Dmitri Shostakovich	34
Igor Stravinsky	36
Hiromi Uehara	38

Composer | Works

Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909)



Isaac Albéniz was born in Spain, where he was quickly noticed as a child prodigy, performing on the piano for audiences by the age of five. He lived an itinerantly, performing recitals and studying throughout Europe, and returning often to to Spain if his money ran out abroad. His piano compositions were often influenced by the music native to Spain and Catalunya, so much so that his compositions for piano are often adapted for (and better known for) flamenco guitar. Throughout his career, Albéniz also conducted operas and **zarzuelas**, a type of Spanish theater hearkening back to the seventeenth century, featuring theatrical scenes, comedic dialogues, and musical numbers interspersed.

-AM

WORK

Triana from *Iberia*, Book II

Albéniz’s “Triana” is the third piece in Book II of *Iberia*, a collection of twelve piano pieces composed between 1905 and 1909. Named after Triana, the historic district of Seville closely associated with flamenco culture, the piece evokes the energy of an Andalusian celebration. Written in **F-sharp minor**, “Triana” is one of Albéniz’s most rhythmically vibrant works, combining Spanish dance idioms with richly coloristic piano writing.

Listen for the **syncopated** accents, where stresses fall in unexpected places or on offbeats, giving the music its lively, dance-like character. The piece also suggests **hemiola**, a rhythmic effect in which the music seems to shift between groups of two and groups of three. Albéniz contrasts smooth **legato** passages, where notes are connected, with sharper **staccato** chordal writing, where notes are detached and percussive. These contrasts help the piano imitate the sounds of flamenco: guitar strumming, **palmas** or hand clapping, and **zapateado**, the percussive footwork of flamenco dance.

The music’s changing textures create the atmosphere of a **juerga**, or flamenco gathering. Bright rhythmic figures, triplet passages, and guitar-like sonorities propel the piece forward, evoking a vivid world of dance and color.

-JLY

Charles-Valentin Alkan

(1813-1888)



Born **Charles-Henri-Valentin Morhange** in Paris, Charles-Valentin Alkan was one of the great composer-pianists of the Romantic period. A child prodigy, he entered the Paris Conservatoire at an exceptionally young age, studying piano with French pianist Joseph Zimmermann, whose pupils also included Georges Bizet, César Franck, Charles Gounod, and Ambroise Thomas. By the 1830s and 1840s, Alkan was admired alongside Chopin and Liszt as one of the leading virtuoso pianists in Paris, a city in which he spent nearly his entire life. His artistic circle included figures such as Eugène Delacroix and George Sand.

Alkan's music is famous for its exceptional technical demands: huge **leaps**, intricate **rhythms**, dense **textures**, powerful chordal writing, and long stretches of physical and expressive intensity. He was also a notable champion of the **pedal piano**, or piano **pédalier**: a piano fitted with an organ-like pedalboard, allowing the pianist to play with both hands and feet. This made it possible to perform organ literature on the piano, as well as works requiring several independent musical lines at once. Alkan wrote a number of works for the instrument, some including Benedictus Op. 54, and the 12 Études pour les pieds seulement, Op. 69. He was also among the first composers to bring Jewish liturgical melodies and themes into Western art music, weaving Ashkenazi synagogue chants into his keyboard and choral works. Although Alkan increasingly withdrew from public concert life after the 1840s, he later returned in the 1870s to give a series of recitals. He left behind a strikingly original body of keyboard music that continues to draw pianists to the outer limits of Romantic virtuosity.

-JLY

WORK

Scherzo Focoso in B Minor, Op. 34

Charles-Valentin Alkan's Scherzo-focoso in B minor, Op. 34, composed around 1847, is a work of formidable virtuosity and dramatic contrast. Its title combines two expressive ideas: **scherzo**, meaning a "joke" or playful piece, and **focoso**, meaning "fiery" or "with fire." Rather than presenting a lighthearted joke in the conventional sense, Alkan transforms the **scherzo** into something vividly brilliant.

The piece opens with explosive energy, built from articulated **motives**, or short musical ideas, wide **leaps**, dense **textures**, and rapid **octaves** exchanged between the hands. An octave is the distance between two notes with the same letter name, such as one B to the next B; in this piece, Alkan uses **octaves** to create energy and sweeps across the keyboard. Throughout the work, the opening material is continually transformed, moving across the full range of the piano and reappearing in new textures.

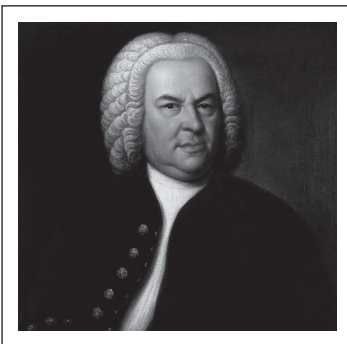
Alongside this virtuosic drive, Alkan introduces more lyrical episodes marked **dolce ed espressivo**, meaning sweetly and expressively. In these passages, the melody often emerges from within rich chordal writing, creating a warm and resonant contrast to the surrounding brilliance. As the work progresses, ascending **arpeggiated figures**—broken chords played one note after another—and **scalar passages** increase the sense of motion and anticipation.

In the final **più mosso coda**, a closing section with greater motion and urgency, the music accelerates through sweeping scales, strong bass octaves, and fast exchanges between the hands, driving toward its final transformation into B major. Marked **fff**, meaning extremely loud, the ending turns the scherzo's fiery energy into a majestic and dramatic conclusion.

-JLY

Johann Sebastian Bach

(1685-1750)



The German composer **Johann Sebastian Bach** was one of a massive musical family of Bachs whose musical prowess stretched over two hundred years. J.S. Bach became a musician, earning the coveted role as *Thomaskantor* (the cantor/music director) for the Lutheran church of St. Thomas in Leipzig. At St. Thomas, Bach composed cantatas for just about every major church holiday, featuring a variety of different voice types and instruments, and from which his famed chorales are sung to this day in churches and choral productions. As an organist, he was well known for his ability to improvise extensively on hymn (chorale) tunes, and for reharmonizing older melodies to fit his Baroque aesthetic. Many of these tunes also remain recognizable in church hymnals. Just as his chorales serve as a basis in composition technique for young musicians today, his collection of keyboard works entitled *The Well-Tempered Clavier* serves even now as an introduction to **preludes** and **fugues** for students of the piano. These span all of the major and minor keys, and became an inspiration for Chopin's (and others') collections of preludes for the piano.

As well as a great teacher, Bach also proved himself an adept student; he travelled across Germany on foot to hear the great organists of the time perform, and meet with Handel (who was not home at the time). During his travels, his first wife passed away, and in 1721, he married Anna Magdalena Wilcke, who became a great influence on the composer's works. She was also a musician, singing professionally before and after her marriage to Bach, and transcribing some of his (and her own!) works for performance or teaching purposes. J.S. Bach's music underwent a revival in the 19th century, when proponents such as Mendelssohn revitalized his music.

-AMO

WORK

Chaconne in D Minor, BWV 1004 (arr. Ferruccio Busoni)

Although it comes bundled in a collection of other Baroque dances, J.S. Bach's Chaconne in D minor, a piece originally composed for solo violin, stands alone. Traditionally, a chaconne is a simple set of variations over a repeating bass pattern. At two hundred and fifty-six measures, though, and with most performances lasting over fifteen minutes, this particular chaconne is a unicorn: nothing in any of Bach's other compositions for a solo instrument comes close to matching it in terms of size and complexity. Its uniqueness has long fascinated audiences. In a letter to Clara Schumann, Johannes Brahms waxes lyrical: "On a single staff, for a small instrument, the man writes a whole world of the deepest thoughts and most powerful feelings. If I imagined that I could have created, even conceived this piece, I am quite certain that the excess of excitement and earth-shattering experience would have driven me out of my mind." Brahms eventually attempted to transcribe the work for piano, limiting himself to the use of his left hand to try and recreate something of the poetic difficulties he saw in renditions on the instrument for which it was originally intended.

Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924), on the other hand, saw no use for any such limitations in his own treatment of the Chaconne. Busoni was an incredibly gifted Italian pianist and a prolific composer, who throughout his career also had an avid interest in creating piano versions of other people's work. Particularly fascinating to him were the challenges of adapting J.S. Bach's compositions. Premiered in 1893, Busoni's Chaconne transcription (although "transposition" was his chosen term) runs the gamut of modern pianistic technique. He makes use of virtuosic, organ-like chords stretched over multiple octaves, and liberally applies the **sostenuto pedal** (the middle pedal on the piano that sustains only the note(s) held at the time it is pressed). The score even occasionally spills over into a third staff, as if calling for a third hand from the performer.

With the rich sonorities of the keyboard at his disposal, Busoni endeavours to realize the harmonic possibilities implied in Bach's original piece to their most colorful extent. His efforts, though, did not meet with universal approval. The pianist to whom he dedicated his work, Eugen d'Albert, declared it "too modern," arguing that "the Chaconne won't tolerate an arrangement for two hands." Nevertheless, Busoni's transcription has remained a testament to the composer's virtuosic imagination since its premiere, allowing audiences to make up their own minds about the success of his work.

Frédéric Chopin

(1810-1849)



The Polish child prodigy and pianist **Frédéric Franciszek Chopin** had published his first compositions by the age of eight years old. He was born in 1810 outside of Warsaw, where his family soon moved, and where he spent his childhood through teenage years. While his time spent with piano teachers was sporadic, by the age of twenty he was planning his European tour as a concert pianist. He had, however, worked with composing and theory teachers through his early teens, which helped shape his compositional voice by the time he left Warsaw. Unfortunately, the political situation surrounding the November Uprising of 1830 left the Polish pianist in a less than favorable position to begin a debut tour in Vienna, Austria. The pianist eventually made his way to Paris, where he made his living, first through his virtuosic public performances and by publishing pieces, and later through teaching and by performing at intimate salons. In 1838, Chopin began a relationship with the novelist George Sand, and eventually divided his time between Paris and her hometown, Nohant, France, where he polished compositions for publication.

Chopin was in high demand as a piano teacher, and he became known for his wide variety of études, which were not merely technical “studies” for learning to play the piano, but expressive and virtuosic works encompassing many moods, affects, and characters. The pianist suffered from ill health (and possibly bad doctors) throughout his life; he died in 1849 at the age of 39, with a pupil and Sand’s daughter at his deathbed. Today, Chopin is well known for a variety of compositional styles for the piano. These include dance forms, such as mazurkas or waltzes, music that sought to generate a national style such as polonaises or marches, and his lyrical, singing nocturnes, and, of course, the études.

-AMO

WORKS

Rondo in E-flat Major, Op 16

It is hard to believe that even a composer like Chopin has pieces in his catalogue that are rarely heard in performance. The *Rondo in E-flat Major* was composed in 1833 alongside the lesser known *Bólero*. This period also saw the composition of the *Grande Valse Brillante*, a set of Nocturnes and Mazurkas, as well as the publication of the first set of *Études*, *Op. 10*. The *Rondo* is a sparkling showpiece for pianists, allowing for technical display and charm without the gravitas of Chopin’s more popular works.

Following the example of similar concert pieces of the day, the *Rondo* begins with a slow, stately introduction. Chopin does not keep it contained for long as dazzling runs and rapid-fire passages quickly interject. The action relaxes slightly as the dominant chord provides tension before the main rondo theme. In classical forms, rondos contain a repeated melody or passage that returns throughout the piece. Listen for the skipping theme as it reappears between arpeggios and singing melodies. The end of the piece is signaled by a series of running scales that climb up the keyboard. A declarative chord brings the work to a finish.

-CK

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

Chopin wrote roughly sixty Mazurkas throughout his life, making them a sort of musical diary as these miniatures evolved with the composer. Inspired by the dances of his homeland, Poland, these compact works are a significant representation of ethnic influence in classical music. Though short, the Mazurkas are not without their challenges as they require a keen sense of rubato and emotional depth.

The opus seventeen Mazurkas were composed between 1832-1833 after Chopin settled in Paris for the first time. The last in this set of four in A Minor is one of the most popular of all the Mazurkas and was even used by John Williams in his score for the film *Empire of the Sun*. It begins with a three-measure introduction of steady chords in the left hand. This accompanying figure continues as the somber but expressive melody spins out above. The middle section in the parallel key of A Major brings a bit more sunshine, but the steady accompanying chords continue underneath. The piece ends with the same three-measures as the beginning, this time played without pedal as the music fades away.

-CK

Scherzo No. 4 in E Major, Op. 54

The scherzo was a popular title given to works of a fun or playful quality, often considered musical jokes. They typically appear as parts of larger works like symphonies or sonatas, offering a moment of lightness in an otherwise heavy work. Chopin’s four scherzos are among his most masterful compositions for piano. Though they are filled with sweeping melodies and fancy finger-work, they are no joking matter.

Often considered the most difficult of Chopin’s scherzos, the fourth in E Major reveals Chopin’s metaphysical qualities. The piece begins with a modest march-like theme, sheepishly exploring the keyboard before bursting into a virtuosic frenzy. The middle section is one of Chopin’s more dream-like passages. The music lands on a lyrical melody, almost as if by accident, which spins out over an undulating accompaniment. The opening material returns to close out the piece, which ends with a rapidly ascending scale.

-CK

Claude Debussy

(1862-1918)



Now considered one of the fathers of “modern music,” **Claude Debussy** was a French pianist, composer and music critic whose harmonic language and colorful textures are some of the most recognizable in the Western art music repertoire. Debussy attended the famous Paris Conservatoire beginning at age 10; however, his skills as a pianist were dwarfed by those he showed as a composer even at an early age. Debussy’s encounters in the 1880s would dramatically shape his artistic output moving forward. First, he was hired in 1880 to teach piano to the children of Nadezhda von Meck, a name that may be familiar to some due to her longtime financial support of Tchaikovsky. While in her employ, Debussy had the opportunity to travel Europe and Russia, and was exposed to a wealth of Russian Romantic music that inspired

much of his output. In hearing the works of composers like Rimsky-Korsakov or Borodin for the first time, Debussy was particularly entranced by their use of “oriental” modes – an out-of-date term that refers to scales that use different intervals than the major or minor scale – as well as their seeming contempt for academic compositional rules.

Once he returned to Paris, Debussy embodied the “struggling artist” trope, frequenting literary and artist cafes with fellow composers and symbolist poets, such as Robert Godet and Raymond Bonheur. Like the Russian music he encountered earlier, the core philosophies underpinning Symbolist thought – the rejection of realism, the indifference to the public, and an attraction towards the mysterious – played a significant role in Debussy’s aesthetics, heard in the dreamlike world he often created through sound. In addition, Debussy was fascinated by his encounter with a Javanese gamelan ensemble (an Indonesian orchestra of metal, xylophone-like instruments and gongs) at the 1889 Universal Exposition, leading to the use of new textures and **pentatonic** melodies (i.e. using only the black keys of the piano).

Debussy’s music is often called “impressionist,” drawing a parallel with the visual art movement of the same name. While Debussy himself did not particularly like this term, the similarities between a Monet painting and a Debussy piano work is audible: shimmering colorful harmonies create atmospheres of sound that are reminiscent of Monet’s delicate paint strokes, both evoking a particular mood within the spirit of the viewer or listener. Debussy’s harmonic language stays away from being “major” or “minor” – instead, he seems to revel in the beauty of harmonies for their own sake, allowing them to progress in new ways that extend beyond what was considered traditional at the time.

-MGM

WORK

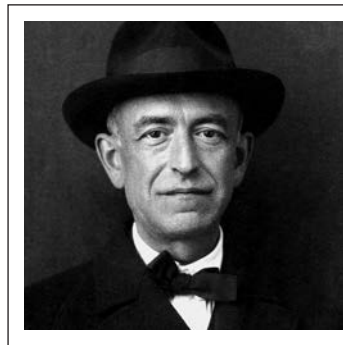
Étude No. 6, “Pour les huit doigts”

Composed in 1915, Claude Debussy’s *Études* comprise twelve pieces in miniature, each concentrating on a different aspect of the pianist’s technical toolbox. As the title of the sixth étude suggests, it targets the *huitdoigts*, or “eight fingers”—which is to say, the pianist is forbidden to play with their thumbs. Debussy, in any case, writes in such a way that to cheat and use a thumb would be unnecessary, even downright inconvenient. Flitting through a series of rapid, unrelenting runs, this study requires both precision and agility. The challenge: to draw out the delicate melody that emerges from the bumblebee-like hum of Debussy’s cascading scales.

-JS

Manuel de Falla

(1876-1946)



A central figure in 20th century Spanish music, **Manuel de Falla** was a celebrated composer whose music straddled the boundaries between Spanish nationalist themes and European – especially French – cultural influences.

As a young man, de Falla began performing his own compositions in public in the mid-1890s, eventually enrolling at the Madrid Conservatory where he won awards in piano. While de Falla was a good pianist, he was not exceptional, and therefore was not able to make a living as a pianist like his Spanish predecessor, Enrique Granados, nor did he have early success as a composer of art music. Instead, his first success came working on *zarzuelas*, a lyric and dramatic genre with spoken and sung parts that incorporated

popular music, similar to English operettas. Although he did win one opera composing competition in Spain during this early period, de Falla mostly failed as a composer in his home country, and elected to move to France, where he met the movers and shakers of the European art world: composers like Ravel, Debussy, and Stravinsky, and even the famed Ballet Russe impresario, Diaghilev. His time in France not only influenced his music, but also heightened his reputation as a composer, allowing him to return to Spain with both an elevated status and with extensive European connections that would serve him well; for example, Diaghilev helped produce a production of de Falla’s *Three Cornered Hat* in 1917 that featured sets designed by none other than Pablo Picasso himself.

De Falla’s standing in his home country was often uneasy: his fascination with French culture – heard explicitly in much of his music – had political ramifications, as some audiences believed these attractions left him susceptible to foreign influences more broadly. Luckily for de Falla at first, the First World War brought more foreign visitors to Spain that helped catalyze a shift in Spanish mentality towards a more cosmopolitan outlook, which benefited the reception of de Falla and his music. While he was celebrated for several decades due to this shift, de Falla again found himself in political turmoil after Francisco Franco’s victory in the Spanish Civil War, due to his deeply held Catholic beliefs. As a result, de Falla fled to Argentina, where he lived and worked for over a decade until he passed away.

-MGM

WORK

Serenata Andaluza

Manuel de Falla’s *Serenata Andaluza* (“Andalusian Serenade”), composed in 1900, belongs to a collection entitled *Tres piezas de la juventud* (“Three pieces from childhood”). Although it was written in Madrid, it transports the listener to de Falla’s native Cádiz, in the south of Spain. The serenade opens with sparse, nostalgic **dotted rhythms** (paired notes of uneven length that produce a dance-like feel) that gradually broaden into a more flowing melody, reminiscent of the Andalusian folk songs de Falla might have heard as a child. This piece balances lyricism and virtuosity, painting an entire landscape for the mind’s ear.

-JS

Franz Liszt

(1811-1886)



Hungarian composer **Franz Liszt** is widely recognized as a revolutionary figure in the Romantic period, both as a composer and as the greatest virtuosic pianist of his time. Liszt was identified early on as a unique talent; he began studying with Carl Czerny at age 8, who was one of the most influential piano instructors of the 19th century (and, whose music will be presented during Session Two of the First Round). In a review of his first public concert in 1822 at age 11, the *Allgemeine Zeitung* reported that his playing bordered on the unbelievable, referring to him as a “little Hercules... fallen from the clouds.” After such an auspicious beginning, it is no surprise that his performance career quickly blossomed. Liszt settled in Paris in the 1830s, a place where he formed his ideas about Romanticism and the power of emotion and theatricality in small salons, rubbing elbows with figures like Victor Hugo, Georges Sand, Eugene Delacroix and many others. But Liszt was most well-known as a dramatic showman, who was the first to successfully take the piano out of the salon and into the concert hall.

Liszt’s incredible skill opened up new technical and expressive possibilities on the piano that had never been explored, leading to a wider dynamic range, new colors and a bigger sound. Indeed, he had physical advantages that similarly shaped his compositional practice: for example, a lack of webbing between his fingers meant that he could do wide stretches with ease, so many of his pieces assume that players can stretch to intervals of a 10th (an octave plus two more steps). His piano music is characterized by leaps and glissandi (when a pianist slides their fingers up or down the keyboard) in addition to pushing harmonic boundaries.

It is also worth noting that Liszt is credited with many innovations in the piano performance world. He was the first to play entire programs from memory, the first to intentionally program and perform the full range of keyboard repertoire, and is believed to have invented the masterclass (a lesson with a famed performer that is presented in public). It is no wonder that Liszt’s influence continues to resonate for our contestants today.

-MGM

WORKS

Transcendental Études, S. 139

No. 1 in C Major, “Preludio”

With a run-time of under a minute, Liszt’s Transcendental Étude No. 1 in C is a firecracker. I’d say blink and you miss it, but its acrobatic runs and bombastic chordal punctuation make it nigh on impossible to ignore. This punchy étude is the curtain-opener to Franz Liszt’s set of *Études d’exécution transcendante*, or in English, his “Transcendental Études”. They were published in 1852, but their history stretches back further: the “transcendental” études elaborate a set of twelve “grand” études written in 1837, which themselves take up subjects originally broached by a fifteen-year old Liszt in 1826, who wrote a collection of twelve exercises – no adjective needed. If an étude is intended to test the technique of its performer, these pieces certainly do that, in almost every dimension. But this is not virtuosity for virtuosity’s sake: the tag “transcendent” signals Liszt’s ultimate purpose, which is the cultivation of a technique that surpasses the material limitations of the instrument in order to access the essence of the music.

-JS

No.10 in F Minor

Marked “Allegro agitato molto” (fast and very agitated), Transcendental Étude No. 10 is a highly dramatic work that requires the pianist to tap into extremes of power and delicacy. The piece begins with a frenetic introduction that introduces a fluttering chord pattern shared between the hands, which reappears throughout, and fragments of the main theme that anticipate its proper entrance. Thereafter, the piece is in **sonata** form, and the sequence of ideas in the first half of the piece (the **exposition**) is reproduced in the second half (the **recapitulation**), suitably modified so that the piece returns to the home key at the end. Particularly striking is the climax of both of these sections, where a forceful chromatic descending melody rings out at maximum volume in the middle of the keyboard, over cavernous peals of the bass and writhing right-hand flourishes.

-M.L.

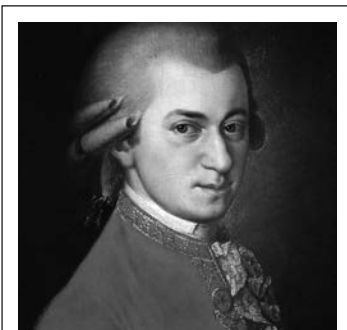
Mephisto Waltz No.1, S. 514

Best known for his imaginative and dense programmatic works, Franz Liszt composed his first Mephisto Waltz, *Der Tanz in der Dorfschenke* (The Dance in the Village Inn), for orchestra between 1859 and 1862. Liszt found inspiration from Nikolaus Lenau’s 1836 verse drama Faust, particularly an early episode in the narrative, which sees the Devil accompanying the titular character to a nearby village celebration. Mephistopheles snatches the village fiddler’s instrument and begins to play an intoxicating melody. Faust, entranced, joins into the raucous dance and waltzes out of the room and into the nearby woods. As the Waltz progresses, you will hear the sounds of the devilish fiddling growing fainter and fainter, until the song of a nightingale breaks through the musical texture.

-CK

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

(1756-1791)



The most important composer of the Classical period, **Johann Chrysostomus Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** grew up in a musical family, led by father Leopold Mozart, a violinist and writer and mother Anna Maria who had seven children, only two of which lived past infancy: Maria Anna, who was called Nannerl by her family, and youngest child Wolfgang. A prodigious talent from his youth, Mozart studied the keyboard and violin, and was paraded before the nobility of Europe with his sister when he was as young as five years old. Already he was composing as well, his father Leopold dutifully writing down the little pieces that he would write at the keyboard. He finished his first symphony at eight years old, and his compositional and performing prowess launched him and his family on a series of tours throughout Europe, all the way from Italy to London.

Mozart's style is often thought to represent the best examples of various genres of the Classical era: his sonatas, concertos, symphonies, and operas created a standard that Mozart's good friend Haydn thought would not be surpassed for over a century. Mozart transformed the Sonata form from a short instrumental piece (sonata literally meaning "sounded") to a formal shape that includes themes, secondary themes, harmonic interpolations in the first movement, and then followed by other movements with contrasting tempo markings. Mozart conceived of music in the unfettered terms of orchestral or operatic scoring, and his keyboard works bear the hallmarks of not only soaring instrumental lines or pungent bowed and percussive bass, but operatic devices such as hunting calls, French overture style, and musical conflict and resolution.

-AMO

WORKS

Sonata No. 9 in D Major, K. 311

I. Allegro con spirito

Sonata No. 9 in D Major emerged from Mozart's 1777 stay in Mannheim and is regarded as bearing hallmarks of that city's musical influence, including the sharp dynamic contrasts that defined the Mannheim orchestra. After a decisive opening on the tonic chord of D Major, the right and left hands begin a delicate question-and-answer form that is only interrupted by the arrival of the second theme. This new material overtakes the movement, influencing not only the trajectory of the development section but the final bars of Allegro itself. The opening theme of the Andante con espressione demonstrates the composer's vocally-influenced stylistic language, with forte chords breaking into the texture to counterbalance the melodic material. The dynamic contrasts of the final Rondo movement reflect the back-and-forth of soloist versus orchestra alternations used in a concerto texture, and the movement gains energy and intensity through cadential passages written to showcase the performer's technical skill.

Fantasia in D Minor, K. 397

Composed in Vienna in the 1780s, this Fantasia begins like a simple, improvised musing upon the keys as an introduction to a poignant Adagio. This reflects a classical and romantic practice called **preluding**, in which a performer, before performing another composer's work, would introduce it by an improvised prelude, often in a key distantly related to the piece, but eventually concluding the prelude in such a way as to introduce the piece. From this arpeggiated introduction, Mozart then begins the Fantasia in earnest. A fantasia was also a type of piece meant to sound improvised, building on itself within the performer's fancy in a given moment of performance or composition.

-AMO

Fantasia in C Minor K. 475

The Fantasia in C Minor, K. 475 was composed for Therese Trattner. The daughter of a court musician and wife of famed publisher and bookseller, Trattner was one of Mozart's talented piano students for whom he wrote works, in addition to being a promoter of his music within the performing music scene of Vienna.

In its first moments, this piece immediately shows the influence that J.S. Bach had on Mozart's compositional style at the time of its writing. A few years before, Mozart had moved to Vienna and began attending weekly salons hosted by Baron Gottfried van Swieten, who asked Mozart to transcribe Bach's fugues from *The Well-Tempered Clavier* for groups of strings. In so doing, Mozart was immersed in Bach's contrapuntal and harmonic language, and brought those Baroque sensibilities into some of his own works. Each section of the Fantasia in C Minor has significant contrasts in mood and color, reminiscent of a Bach fantasy in its improvisatory nature. While there are glimpses of Mozart's characteristic balanced melodic phrases and clear Classical harmonic structure, the piece overall is full of drama with many tonal centers, showing Mozart's mastery not only of his own craft, but of those that came before.

-MGM

Sonata No. 15 in F Major K. 533/494

Mozart's Sonata in F major, K. 533/494, is unusual among his piano sonatas because it was assembled from music composed at different times. The final movement, the cheerful Rondo K. 494, was first written as an independent piece in 1786. In 1788, Mozart composed the first two movements, K. 533, and later joined them with a revised and expanded version of the earlier Rondo to create the three-movement sonata. This combination merges Mozart's earlier style with the contrapuntal richness, chromaticism, and motivic complexity of his later writing.

The first movement, marked **Allegro**, is in **sonata form**, a structure built around the exposition, development, and recapitulation of musical themes. It opens with a graceful **motif**, or short musical idea, first heard in the right hand and then answered by the left. From this simple beginning, Mozart creates a highly intricate movement filled with triplet figures, descending scales, ascending **arpeggios**, and lively exchanges between the hands. In the **development** section, Mozart moves through darker and more distant keys, including **D minor**, **B-flat major**, and **G minor**, while inverting voices and using **imitation**, where one musical line echoes another. The **recapitulation** then brings the music back to the home key of **F major**, but not without surprising turns along the way.

The second movement, an **Andante** in **B-flat major**, offers a slower and more serene contrast. Its ornate writing, full of turns, appoggiaturas, and expressive ornamentation, recalls the Empfindsamkeit, or sentimental and expressive style associated with C. P. E. Bach. Even in this lyrical movement, Mozart's writing is deeply contrapuntal, with independent musical lines weaving through the texture.

-JLY

Sergei Prokofiev

(1891-1953)



From an early age, Sergei Prokofiev strove to balance his progressive nature with a nuanced appreciation for the Western art music that came before him. Beginning piano lessons with pianist and composer Reinhold Glière at age 4, Prokofiev was hailed as a prodigy by his teens, leading to his enrollment at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, where he studied orchestration under Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Even in his early conservatory days, Prokofiev was considered to be a rebel: his music gravitated towards the percussive (or even barbaric!), yet always revealing a reverence for Classical and Romantic forms and compositional devices. This balance between innovative modernist tendencies and traditional structures not only led to the

birth of “Neo-Classicism” as a compositional style – which Prokofiev is credited with inventing – but also likely kept Prokofiev alive and (mostly) thriving throughout the turmoil of the Stalinist regime.

Like many of his Russian contemporaries, Prokofiev’s life and compositional output were profoundly shaped by the politics of his home country. The October Revolution in 1917 catalyzed Prokofiev’s departure from Russia, like several other Russian composers at the time. When he arrived in the United States in 1918, Prokofiev came face to face with one such individual – Sergei Rachmaninoff – who by that point had already built a wildly successful performance career overseas. While Rachmaninoff had mastered satisfying American tastes through his varied performance programs, Prokofiev had difficulty coming to terms with these new expectations, leading him to eventually move to Europe. Yet, unlike Rachmaninoff, who never returned to his homeland, Prokofiev always retained contact with the Soviet Union through concert tours and performances of his works, ultimately moving back in 1936, almost 20 years after he departed.

At the time of Prokofiev’s return, there were strict restrictions on the types of music that could be composed under the Stalinist regime. Under social realism, music could depict only the triumphs and struggles of the people, primarily through traditional and simple Russian melodies. This “new simplicity” aligned – at least mostly – with Prokofiev’s neo-Classical style; and, due to Prokofiev’s ability to appease the state, he was primarily able to continue composing in his own idiom. However, this changed significantly after the Second World War as the Soviet Union became even more isolationist in its view of appropriate artistic expression. Once Stalin appointed composer Andrei Zhdanov to direct cultural policies in the state, Zhdanov held a three-day conference in 1948 with over 70 composers and musicians in which they denounced “formalism” and more broadly, any Western art music influences, leading to the explicit banning of music by Prokofiev, Dmitri Shostakovich, Aram Khachaturian, and others. While Prokofiev was able to continue composing after this decree, it had a significant impact on his output and his mental health, leading to his early death at age 61 on March 5, 1953, fittingly – or maybe somewhat ironically – sharing this death date with Stalin himself.

-MGM

WORKS

Étude in C Minor, Op. 2, No. 3

Prokofiev composed a set of four études in 1909 while he was a student at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. Like many of his early, short piano works, the études are rarely performed in concert settings though they represent a significant milestone in his compositional progress. As a composer, Prokofiev was heavily influenced by classical themes and ideas, but he transformed these into his own musical sound and style. The four études are notable for their rhythmic and percussive elements, characteristics that would feature prominently in his more popular piano sonatas and concertos.

The third Étude in C Minor opens with a unison melody in both hands. The music progresses steadily, but with a sense of urgency and anticipation underneath. Before long, the true virtuosic test comes with an accelerating pattern of chromatic notes in the right hand (one is reminded of Chopin’s own chromatic étude, Op. 10, No. 2). This section comes to an abrupt end with a return of the heavy chords from the opening, and a short transition to a repeat of the chromatic section. The chromatic textures thicken with inner voices moving in rapid harmony against heavily accented outer notes. The Étude comes to declarative end with its final, full chords.

-CK

Suggestion Diabolique, Op. 4, No. 4

The Suggestion Diabolique is the final movement of a set of four piano pieces composed when Prokofiev was just seventeen years old. These short but impactful works firmly established Prokofiev as a modernist composer, pushing the boundaries of compositional form and structure. While each of the four pieces demonstrate Prokofiev’s developing style and character, the Suggestion Diabolique emerged as one of his most well-known and performed piano works. Prokofiev was rather proud of this piece, citing his desire to express strong emotions through this music. In 1935, he recorded the piece himself along with a handful of his other popular piano works.

The piece opens with a sinister grumble in the low register of the piano. A blasting tremolo releases some of the musical tension and signals the frenetic energy to come. In the main section of the piece, the left hand makes devilish leaps across a series of insistent chords in the right hand, punching out a melody line in the top register with low bass notes answering in response. As the piece gains momentum, fast scales and heavily accented chords add a sense of urgency and insistence. It ends as quietly as it began with one final statement of the main theme deep in the bass as the music vanishes like magic.

-CK

Sonata No. 4 in C Minor, Op. 29

Prokofiev wrote piano sonatas throughout his life; Sonata No. 4 is a relatively early work, composed and premiered in 1917—shortly before the composer left Russia. Like Sonata No. 3 that preceded it, the work is subtitled “from old notebooks,” a marker of the work’s origins in Prokofiev’s early juvenilia; but it is a more serious, somber work than its predecessor. Cast in a traditional pattern of three movements, in a fast-slow-fast order, the sonata begins in a key of surprising restraint. The opening movement is in a measured three-to-a-bar, and is in sonata form: two musical ideas are presented in different keys in the first part of the sonata (the exposition), and then reprised in the home key, after some intervening activity, in the second part (the recapitulation). But the whole movement is stamped with a shaking trill-like motive, heard right at the beginning in the bass register and then repeatedly throughout; Prokofiev’s lifelong love of contrapuntal textures, with multiple, interlocking lines of music sounding simultaneously, is much in evidence. In the central slow movement, a plodding accompaniment pattern supports long-limbed, plaintive melodies in the right hand. Finally, in the third movement (the briefest of the three), the minor-key gloom of the sonata thus far lifts: a helter-skelter chase across the piano begins, marking this movement out as a sort of toccata (a fast piece involving tricky repeated notes and plenty of nimble fingerwork).

-ML

Sergei Rachmaninoff

(1873-1943)



Sergei Rachmaninoff is the quintessential Russian composer-pianist, successful equally in both fields throughout his career. After struggling academically due to family turmoil in St. Petersburg as a young man, Rachmaninoff was sent to live with famed teacher Nikolai Zverev (just like Scriabin only a few years later), who put him on a rigorous musical schedule through courses at the Moscow Conservatory. Zverev instructed all of his students to focus only on piano performance, so Rachmaninoff was discouraged from pursuing composing until after he completed his piano degree. Upon graduation, he was awarded the Great Gold Medal in composition, leading him to sign a publishing contract with Gutheil that helped

jumpstart his compositional career. It was in this early stage that Rachmaninoff composed his first big hit – his Prelude for solo piano in C# Minor – a piece that became so popular that Rachmaninoff felt almost obliged to perform it as an encore for every concert, even as it became tiresome for him. Beginning in the late 1890s, he took up the baton for the first time, and toured across Russia and Europe for several decades as a pianist and conductor.

However, once the revolution began in 1917, Rachmaninoff escaped with his family, never to return. Leaving Russia – while crucial for the safety of his family – also meant leaving his wealth and land. Once he departed, Rachmaninoff was forced to focus on his performance career over and above his composing so that he could make enough money to support his family. As a result, all of the works featured during the CIPC were originally composed before this time. By 1919, he was living in New York and had been offered a Steinway piano as a gift, leading him to perform 40 concerts during the 1919-1920 season. Much of the remainder of his career was spent traveling between the United States and Germany as a performer. Like many other Russian composers of the period, Rachmaninoff had a complicated relationship with his homeland after the Revolution; by 1931, he publicized his feelings by sending a letter to the New York Times with two fellow Russian ex-pats criticizing Soviet policies. This public challenge was met with a bitter attack by the press in Moscow, leading to the ban on the performance and study of his works in Russia for two years.

As a performer, Rachmaninoff has been credited with carrying on the legacy of pianist Anton Rubinstein, the last of the line of Romantic greats. Like Chopin and Liszt before him, Rachmaninoff’s compositions for piano reveal his incredible piano technique, which included a particularly refined legato and the ability to have clarity within the most complex of textures (in addition to being able to comfortably reach a 12th!). But Rachmaninoff’s compositions were not about showcasing overwhelming pianistic virtuosity; instead, his focus was always on exploring the full expressive possibilities of the piano, with virtuosity instead being a necessary prerequisite for the piano to shine.

-MGM

WORKS

Humoresque, Op. 10, No. 5

Rachmaninoff’s *Humoresque* in G major, Op. 10, No. 5, is part of his *Morceaux de salon*, or “Salon Pieces,” a set of seven short works for solo piano composed in 1893-94 and published in 1894. A **humoresque** is usually a playful or whimsical **character piece**, while a character piece is a short work that evokes a particular mood, scene, or personality. Although this piece belongs to Rachmaninoff’s early period, it already shows his gift for creating surprise and conveying contrasting moods in his piano writing.

Marked ***Allegro vivace***, meaning lively and fast, the opening section is playful and bouncy, driven by short **staccato** gestures, or detached notes, and quick repeated patterns. The music is filled with **syncopated rhythms**, where accents fall in unexpected places, creating a teasing, off-balance energy. Alternating sixteenth-note chords give the piece its playful energy.

The middle section shifts to a more lyrical ***Andante***, meaning a slower, walking tempo. This contrast creates a moment of warmth before the lively opening material returns. The piece follows a broad **ternary** form, meaning an A-B-A structure: a melodic opening section, a more expressive contrasting middle section, and a return of the opening character. Rachmaninoff later revised the *Humoresque* in 1940, creating a tighter and more concise version of this early miniature. The piece lives up to its title while already hinting at the virtuoso style of Rachmaninoff’s later piano music.

-JLY

Lilacs, Op. 21, No. 5

Rachmaninoff’s “Lilacs,” Op. 21, No. 5, began as a song for voice and piano, part of his collection 12 Romances, Op. 21, composed in 1902 around the time of his marriage to Natalya Satina. In Russian music, a romance is an art song: a poem set for voice and piano, often intimate and lyrical in character. “Lilacs” sets a poem by the Russian poet Ekaterina Beketova, in which lilacs become a symbol of happiness. The speaker searches for happiness among the fragrant lilac branches, where it seems to bloom. Rachmaninoff later transcribed the song for solo piano around 1913-1914, and the piece became a beloved encore in his own recitals.

In the piano transcription, the original vocal line is transformed into a singing melody in the upper register, often doubled in **octaves**. Set in **A-flat major** and in **triple meter**, the piece preserves the intimacy of the original song while giving the piano a delicate, shimmering texture. Listen for the way the melody floats above inner voices and accompaniment patterns, creating the impression of a voice emerging from within the piano.

The music moves from the dreamy warmth of **A-flat major** into a more mysterious and melancholy **F minor** middle section before returning to its opening serenity. Rachmaninoff’s writing often features a subtle three-against-two rhythm, where groups of three notes are heard against groups of two, giving the music a gentle sense of motion and breath. Although brief, “Lilacs” captures one of Rachmaninoff’s most characteristic qualities: the ability to make the piano sing with the tenderness and longing of the human voice.

-JLY

Zdes’ khorosho, Op. 21, No. 7 (“How Fair is the Spot”) (arr. Arcadi Volodos)

This piece is an arrangement of Sergei Rachmaninoff’s 1902 art song, Zdes’ khorosho, or “How fair this spot,” by pianist **Arcadi Volodos** (b. 1972). Rachmaninoff originally set the Russian poet Glafira Galina’s words, and the verse is short enough to include Philip Bullock’s translation here:

How fair this spot... Just look, there in the distance
The river is ablaze;
The meadows are like a radiant carpet,
And the clouds are white.
There is nobody here... here silence reigns...

Here I am alone with God.
And the flowers, and the old pine tree,
And you, my dream!

Volodos’s brief piano arrangement dissolves into Rachmaninoff’s rich, luxurious harmonies. The overall effect is shimmering and impressionistic, and in Volodos’s hands, the vocal and piano lines meld together to evoke the romantic countryside of Galina’s poetry. Both composer and arranger face a special challenge, one confronted in different ways by composers through the centuries: the musical representation of silence. We leave it to you to judge if, with the wordless song of the piano, Volodos’s transcription comes closer than Rachmaninoff’s original...

-JS

Jean-Philippe Rameau

(1683-1764)



Known for his operatic compositions, **Jean Phillipe Rameau** did not become a composer until the age of 50 years old; he was known prior to then as a music theorist, writing many treatises on how music is constructed and understood. His opera scores, especially dances and overtures, were later often excerpted and transcribed as keyboard works.

As a courtly and public composer of opera, Rameau inherited the mantle long held by Jean-Baptiste Lully in the court of Louis XIV, the “Sun King,” in the second half of the seventeenth century. French opera was characterized not only by its allegorical depictions of the monarchy and state of France through panegyric expressions of praise for Louis and his descendants, but also by the scathing wit pointed at courtiers who tried to rise above their social status (as in Rameau’s *Platee*), or the burgeoning international and colonial trade that France was embarking upon, which introduced the French aristocracy to the native peoples of the Americas and Africa (as satirized in Rameau’s *Les Indes galantes*). These operas and others catapulted Rameau into international fame, performing and composing for princes and princesses of France and Spain and beyond.

-AMO

WORKS

Suite in A Minor, RCT 5: VII. Gavotte and variations

Rameau’s *Gavotte et six doubles* is the seventh and final movement of his Suite in A minor, RCT 5, originally written for harpsichord and published in 1727 as part of the *Nouvelles suites de pièces de clavecin*. A gavotte is a French dance in duple meter, traditionally associated with graceful but clearly marked steps. The dance takes its name from the Gavot people of southeastern France. RCT stands for *Rameau Catalogue Thématique*, the thematic catalogue used to organize Rameau’s works.

After presenting the gavotte theme, Rameau follows it with six doubles, or variations. In Baroque dance suites, a **double** often decorates or elaborates the original dance with more intricate embellishments.

In the first double, flowing sixteenth notes decorate the right hand while the left hand supports with chords. In the second, the hands reverse roles, with the left hand taking over the rapid **scalar motion** while the right-hand plays chords. The third double introduces several independent voices, creating a **contrapuntal** texture, meaning that multiple musical lines move at the same time. Listen especially for the singing top line in the right hand as the inner voices weave beneath it.

The fourth double brings a more detached character, with the hands closely overlapping and chords adding rhythmic bite. The fifth double offers a richer contrast, expanding the range of the keyboard and giving the music a broader, more resonant sound. In the final double, right-hand chords are set against energetic left-hand sixteenth notes, leaps, and wide **intervals**, creating a brilliant close to the set of variations. Through these transformations, the listener hears how the theme can be reshaped, expanded, and brought to life through different keyboard techniques.

-JLY

La Poule (The Hen) from Suite in G Major, RCT 6

Rameau is known for his **pièces de caractère**, or character pieces: short works that evoke a specific image, mood, or scene. In *La Poule*, or “The Hen,” Rameau turns the keyboard into a lively portrait of a chicken. Originally written for harpsichord, the piece is now frequently performed on the modern piano and has also been arranged for various ensembles.

The piece famously opens with the words “co co co co co dai” written into the score, imitating the clucking of a hen. This comic gesture becomes the source of the entire piece, as Rameau transforms the clucking motive into rapid repeated notes, sharp rhythms, and restless keyboard motion. Listen for the repeated **thirds** and **chordal** figures, which help create the persistent, pecking character of the hen. The many **agréments**, or French Baroque ornaments, add a playful energy to the texture. The contrasting **fort** and **doux** markings, meaning strong and soft, further emphasize the imitative character of the work. The shifts between louder accents and softer passages suggest the hen’s sudden pecks, clucks, and restless movements.

La Poule is in **rounded binary form**, meaning it has two main sections, with the opening material returning near the end. The first section presents the clucking motive in a compact, memorable way before being repeated, while the second section moves through contrasting keys and continues to develop the hen-like gestures. Near the end, Rameau brings back the opening material, giving the piece a satisfying return before its close.

-JLY

Maurice Ravel

(1875-1937)



French pianist and composer **Maurice Ravel** is often associated with his countryman, Claude Debussy, who was a generation older. Although the two composers worked in the same circles and even shared some compositional impulses, Ravel was always unable – and unwilling – to conform to the musical expectations associated with the establishment. Like Debussy, Ravel decided to devote himself to composition at an early age, attending the Paris Conservatoire first as a pianist in the preparatory program and later with a focus on theory and composition. However, unlike Debussy's quick ascendancy in the Conservatoire, Ravel failed to win the Prix de Rome – the highest honor given by the institution – a

staggering five times. Even though his final loss in 1905 was shrouded in scandal (all of the winners were students of a jury member, something we explicitly forbid at the CIPC!), the fact that the prize remained elusive for Ravel was indicative of his stance with the establishment more generally. In this vein, Ravel famously nursed a public feud with critic Pierre Lalo, who accused Ravel of being indebted to Debussy without giving proper due. Ravel and Debussy were on good terms – in fact, Ravel did look up to him – but not surprisingly, he took offense to being characterized as an imitator, rather than an innovator.

Ravel's commitment to pushing the boundaries of musical expression led him to found the Société Musicale Indépendante in 1909, a group that was explicitly open to performing French and foreign works regardless of genre or style, and appointed his former teacher, Gabriel Fauré, as president. Once Debussy passed away in 1918, Ravel was elevated in public opinion and was considered to be France's leading composer; however, at the same time, Ravel chose to isolate himself, moving outside of Paris and increasing his traveling and touring across Britain and the United States. Once a nonconformist, always a nonconformist.

Like Debussy, Ravel was strongly influenced by attending a performance of a Javanese gamelan ensemble at the 1889 Universal Exhibition in Paris, as well as by hearing the eastern modes and rhythms of Rimsky-Korsakov's music. However, Ravel's musical style is distinct from Debussy's in a number of important ways. First, Ravel prided himself as an expert craftsman, focusing on perfection and proportion. Where Debussy's attraction to short forms and ethereal sound worlds were indicative of his fascination with symbolism, Ravel was instead a follower of Edgar Allan Poe, who often wrote about the need for deliberate, logical planning as a crucial part of the compositional process. Second, while Debussy largely eschewed functional harmony, Ravel maintained a connection to functional tonality, especially audible through his use of basslines to outline tonal direction. Ravel's music is also characterized by the use of **extended chords** – i.e. using 9ths or 11ths, commonly heard in jazz – as well as creating a sense of space through blurring the boundaries between harmony and melody and using **ostinatos**, or short phrases that are repeated over and over.

-MGM

WORK

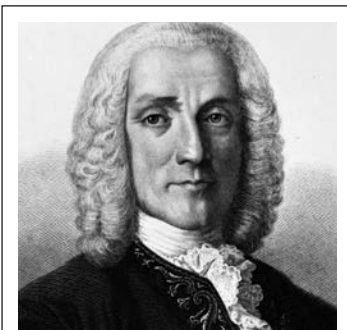
Online from *Gaspard de la nuit*, M.55

A piece famous for its difficulty, *Gaspard de la nuit* is a three-movement work based on poems from the 1842 collection of the same name by Aloysius Bertrand. Each poem is almost nightmarish in its fantasy, concepts that Ravel explicitly tries to depict throughout the work. The first movement, *Ondine*, depicts a story of a water nymph singing to seduce listeners into following her to their death at the bottom of a lake. With double-note passages and fast repetition of chords, the melody emerges from the watery arpeggios, always moving more slowly than the flowing notes that surround it.

-MGM

Domenico Scarlatti

(1685-1757)



Domenico Scarlatti hailed from what was then the Kingdom of Naples, and his father was the famous composer Alessandro Scarlatti. The big names of late seventeenth-century Italy are among those who contributed either to his education, or his style: Francesco Gasparini, Bernardo Pasquini, and Muzio Clementi. Employed to teach music to the Portuguese princess, Maria Magdalena Barbara, Scarlatti lived in Lisbon for a time, building a career in teaching and composing. He later married in Rome, spent four years in Seville, then finally Madrid, where he was again taught the princess (now married into Spanish royalty). Scholars don't have a wealth of information about the composer's life and career, but some of his biography survives in the letters of the acclaimed castrato singer, Farinelli.

Mostly in Madrid, Scarlatti composed a massive 555 sonatas for the keyboard. Unlike sonatas that come later (beginning with Mozart and Haydn and carrying on through the 19th century), these are mostly **bipartite** meaning they are in two short sections, each of which repeats. These two sections will often explore the same material from different approaches to melody or harmonization.

-AMO

WORK

Sonata in D Minor K. 517/L. 266

Marked **prestissimo**, or "very fast," this sonata, likely written during Domenico Scarlatti's later "Spanish" period, careens through a series of sequences and scales in D minor. It showcases some of the prolific composer's trademark techniques: overlapping hands, range-traversing leaps, and daring (for the time) harmonic maneuvers. Like most of his massive oeuvre of 555 sonatas, this piece was originally composed for the early keyboard instruments that preceded the modern piano. It unfolds in dramatically percussive fashion, demanding rigorous attention to detail and metronomic sense of tempo from the performer. The minor mode combined with the rapid pace lends the whole affair a brooding, restless quality.

-JS

Robert Schumann

(1810-1856)



A poet of the piano and a significant musical aesthete of his time, **Robert Schumann** was a key member of a generation of composers including Chopin and Mendelssohn, whose works defined the sound of early Romanticism. Born in Saxony in what is now Germany, Schumann studied music from an early age, but like many musicians before him he was strongly encouraged by family to go into law. When the lure of music proved stronger than his legal studies, he took lessons with Friedrich Weick; Weick's daughter Clara—herself a child prodigy would become one of the most influential concert pianists of the entire century—would later become Robert's wife. Schumann's aspirations to become a concert pianist were thwarted when he permanently injured his hands, possibly through harmful practice techniques; from then on, he focused his energies on composition. Over the course of his career he made significant contributions to the symphonic literature and chamber music repertoire, as well as to the genres for which he is most famous—the accompanied song or *Lied*, and a range of unique and highly original works for solo piano. Schumann was also a significant early music critic, and founded one of the main nineteenth-century music journals, the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*; and towards the end of his life he befriended and mentored the young pianist and composer Johannes Brahms.

Schumann is well known among musicians for his alter egos, Florestan and Eusebius, two fictional characters who represent heroic confidence and gentle poetry, respectively. These two facets of Schumann's temperament show up repeatedly in his music, and he often ascribes works of movements to one or the other. It was this dual personality, however, that would eventually overcome Schumann. After a suicide attempt, his health began to rapidly decline, and he voluntarily entered a sanatorium where he lived out the rest of his days.

-CK

Please see the works of Robert Schumann listed on pages 26–29.

Robert Schumann

WORKS

Carnaval, Op. 9

The world of Robert Schumann’s piano works is a wonderland of musical exploration and creativity. Schumann’s compositions for piano remain staples of the pianist’s repertoire, frequently appearing on concert stages as showcases for pianists’ technical skill and artistic imagination. Composed between the years 1834-1835, *Carnaval* comes just before Schumann’s major piano cycles *Davidsbündlertänze*, *Kriesleriana*, and the *Fantasie*. In this early work, Schumann blends his fantastical ideals for music and art with his inimitable pianistic style. The title, *Carnaval*, is a reference to the period of celebration that ushers in the season of Lent. The work pays homage to many significant figures in Schumann’s life through musical quotes, stylistic imitations, and hidden messages. Though the cycle contains many of the maddening contrapuntal elements that will expand in the later cycles, *Carnaval* is among the most accessible and thus widely played of his works due to its celebratory and joyful nature.

The piece is comprised of twenty-one connected short movements, each depicting a different character or element of the carnival celebration. The first movement, *Préambule*, is a rousing fanfare announcing the beginning of the festivities. The next two sections represent Pierrot and Harlequin, two stock characters from the Italian form of theatre, *commedia dell’arte*. Right away, we sense a shift in emotion that will continue to occur throughout the piece as the music depicts these two opposing characters. Pierrot is a shy, sad clown observing the revelers at the party, while Harlequin is a mischievous jokester who carries a magic stick to change the scene of the action (listen for the flick of his wand in the upper register of the piano).

A bit later in movements five and six, we are introduced to another opposing duo, Florestan and Eusebius. These characters are inventions of Schumann’s own imagination and represent the duality of this own personality. Eusebius is calm and introspective while Florestan is wild and hot-headed. Movement eleven, *Chiarina*, is a musical portrait of Clara Wieck, the woman and accomplished pianist who inspired Schumann both romantically and musically. Marked *passionato*, this is an angsty and unsettled passage indicative of Schumann’s own love-sick heart. Next comes an homage to *Chopin*, with a soaring melody that sings out over a flowing accompaniment. The work concludes with the March des “*Davidsbündler*,” a parade of characters invented by Schumann to uphold the values of music and literature against the philistines of the day. Passages from throughout *Carnival* make an appearance, along with quotes from Schumann’s earlier work *Papillons* as well as Beethoven’s Emperor Concerto. The result is a dizzying conclusion to this colorful and dream-like festival.

-CK

Kreisleriana, Op. 16

Kreisleriana, an idiosyncratic piano suite of 1838, is an expression of precisely these opposing sides of Schumann’s personality, with a layer of meta-literary commentary thrown in. The title refers to a character featured in several novels by the Romantic critic, author, and musician E.T.A. Hoffmann. “Johannes Kreisler” is an antisocial composer-critic—and clearly an alter-ego for Hoffmann himself—who cannot create effectively on account of his mercurial moods and whims. Schumann identified strongly with this character, and he translated the concept of Kreisler into a suite of eight characteristic pieces. Composed in a tremendous rush in just four days, the set veers radically between extremes of tempo, mood, and character. But this is to significantly understate the contrast between agitation and tranquility that Schumann achieves. The fast pieces are fast, frenetic, quirky and unpredictable (Florestan?); the slow pieces, by contrast, seem to compete to achieve the slowest, stillest, most rapturous mood possible (Eusebius?), such that finding the beat itself is almost impossible. (Almost all of the tempo indications for the movements are intensified with the word *sehr*, “very”). All the movements featured nested contrasting sections in different keys, or featuring different textures, so the work overall is like an intricate set of nested matryoshka dolls.

In No. 1, Schumann does everything possible to destabilize the beat: against the rushing frenzy of the right hand, the left hand stabs erratically on off-beats, leading to a queasy staggering from section to section. No. 2 is a **rondo** of sorts; the graceful melody at the beginning comes back in the middle and at the end, framing two contrasting **episodes**. No. 3 features a galloping rhythm in the right hand, which whirls its way to a contrasting middle section—a Romantic, sweeping melody that runs up and down the scale. No. 4 is so slow it seems almost improvised on the spot, though its middle section flows more smoothly. No. 5 blends the rhythmic games of No. 1 with the playful rhythms of No. 3; the three-to-a-bar gives it the air of a kicking folk dance, but there is prolonged, gasping stretch of music running against the beat in the middle. No. 6 has the feeling of a cradle song, slowly rocking: all of sudden, it explodes in a violent outburst of minor-key feeling, whose memory lingers when the cradle song comes back. No. 7 is frenetic and out of control: yet its middle section features a frenzied evocation of that most controlled of Baroque genres, the **fugue**, as a racing left-hand melody is imitated in the right hand. And No. 7 concludes, surprisingly, with a gentle, hymn-like chorale. Finally, No. 8 ends the set with more playful mischief, the tripping rhythmic pattern in the right hand ill at ease over uncertain octaves in the deep reaches of the bass. After an impassioned middle section, the tripping rhythm eventually trips its way to the bottom of the keyboard and vanishes—like a vivid dream that immediately eludes the grasp of the conscious mind upon waking.

-ML

Robert Schumann

WORKS

Sonata No. 2 in G Minor, Op. 22

Romantic-era piano sonatas can often suffer from identity crises as they negotiate the confines of sonata form and the expansive potential of romantic composition. The piano sonatas composed by leaders of the Romantic period such as Brahms, Chopin, and Schumann, never found the popularity of their other piano works. This is understandable when you consider the exquisite sonatas left behind by Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven (who so successfully combined classical restraint with romantic sentiment). Schumann wrote three complete piano sonatas, and the second in G Minor is the most cohesive and the most popular.

Composed between the years 1830-1834 alongside his other major piano works, the second sonata is a terrific showpiece for pianists as it contains all of Schumann’s technical and emotional tricks within its short runtime. The first movement is labeled “as fast as possible,” instructing the pianist to increase tempo throughout. In classic Schumann fashion, a soaring melody sings out over an undulating accompaniment. The textures come together before a triumphant set of chords at the end of the first theme. Rhythmic and melodic motifs are developed in the middle section of the movement with the same churning accompaniment figure throughout. It is a race to the finish with Schumann’s instructions to play “faster” and “still faster.”

The slow second movement is in a heavy 6/8 time, like a slow waltz. Marked “worn,” the movement is a weighty contrast to the virtuosic first movement, but is not lacking forward momentum. As the texture thickens in the middle section, the sustained melody propels the music forward just enough to keep us hopeful. The Scherzo is characterized by large chords and dramatic descents down the keyboard. Syncopation is prevalent, giving the music a jaunty, mischievous nature. The fourth and final movement is a study in broken octaves. The original last movement was deemed too difficult by Clara Schumann who requested it be replaced with this current version in 1838. Once again we hear the contrast between flashy passages and sustained lyrical phrases. The sonata ends with a fiery cadenza and heroic finish.

-CK

Faschingsschwank aus Wien, Op. 26

Faschingsschwank aus Wien is one of Robert Schumann’s lesser performed works for piano, though it contains all his quintessential elements of whimsy and pianistic fireworks. Like his other major cycle, *Carnaval*, *Faschingsschwank* is a musical representation of a Mardi Gras celebration and was inspired by Schumann’s travels to Vienna in 1838. The work is in five movements; the first four composed in Vienna, and the last movement when Schumann returned to Leipzig. *Faschingsschwank* translates as “carnival joke,” and has its fair share of musical puzzles and hidden gems.

The first movement is the longest of the five and opens with a bombastic flair. Schumann hides a musical joke in this movement, cleverly inserting bits of the French national anthem, *La Marseillaise* which was banned in Vienna during this time for fear that its revolutionary lyrics would incite an uprising. Marked by its distinct rhythms and virtuosic passages, the opening movement switches rapidly between characters and musical themes until its triumphant ending. The second movement is a true contrast to the opening. Almost serving as a short transition, this slow and somber passage is the perfect musical embodiment of Schumann’s deep interior world. A jaunty Scherzo comes next before the impassioned Intermezzo with its soaring melody and rapid fire accompaniment. Overt virtuosity returns in the final movement with fast, lively passages and crossing hands - the fireworks signaling the end of the festivities.

-CK

R. Schumann/ F. Liszt

Widmung S. 566 (arr. Franz Liszt)

Piano transcriptions of popular works were a staple of the Romantic era, making well-known vocal, orchestral, and chamber pieces more accessible to the average musician. Liszt took this practice to the next level by creating concert showpieces out of art songs and opera arias, many of which still appear in performances today. His transcription of Schumann’s *Widmung* is both a noble representation of Liszt’s admiration for Schumann and a virtuosic transformation of an intimate love song.

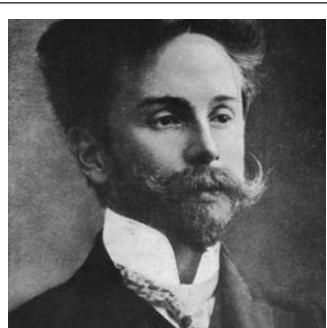
Widmung is the first song in Schumann’s *Myrthen*, a cycle of twenty-six songs composed as a wedding present for his bride, Clara Wieck. *Widmung*, or *Dedication*, is the most popular of the set and was a lasting favorite of Clara’s. The text was taken from a poem by Friedrich Rückert and is a deep expression of love and devotion with lines like “You my soul, you my heart...My heaven you, to which I aspire.” The original piano accompaniment has many qualities of Schumann’s solo piano works, including sweeping passages, dotted rhythms, and soaring melodies. At the end of the work, Schumann included a quote of Schubert’s *Ave Maria*, a popular wedding song and favorite of Clara’s.

In his solo piano arrangement, Liszt removes any restraint or properness present in the original song and creates a wildly passionate, ebullient declaration of love. The opening is nearly identical to the original, with the simple melody line singing out over the flowing accompaniment. Unlike in the original song, Liszt repeats the first section and flips the melody and accompaniment, transferring it to the tenor voice and giving the right hand the accompaniment figure in sixths. The middle section is faithful to the original, but the return of the opening melody is where the fun begins. Rapid arpeggios and flourishes add sparkle to the texture and big, full chords sing the melody one final time. The music relaxes and winds down as the piece reaches its end.

-CK

Alexander Scriabin

(1872-1915)



A composer highly revered particularly by pianists and piano lovers, **Alexander Scriabin** was an eccentric figure whose music transcended traditional ideas of tonality and structure. Like many Russian composer-pianists before and after him, Scriabin was known as an incredibly gifted pianist even as a young age, having studied (and even lived with!) the famous piano teacher Nikolai Zverev before attending the Moscow Conservatory. Scriabin found early success in his piano performance career and in his compositional career, in which he was supported financially by wealthy industrialist Mitrofan Belyayev (Belyaev) who ensured his music got published.

While Scriabin’s early music is tonal, his musical development into **atonality** (meaning the music has no tonal center) sets him apart from his contemporaries, the majority of whom wrote in a more late Romantic style. Indeed, while many identify Arnold Schoenberg as the father of atonal music, Scriabin similarly relied less and less on traditional tonal harmonic and melodic structures; these developments occurred around the same time as Schoenberg’s, albeit independently. Throughout his career, Scriabin’s music was also heavily influenced by his **synesthesia**, meaning that he associated particular notes and/or key areas with colors.

But it was not only Scriabin’s rejection of tonality that estranged him from his fellow pianists and composers; it was also his obsession with symbolism, and his belief that he was called in an almost messianic fashion to create spiritual sublime experiences in his work. At the time of his death at the young age of 43, Scriabin was working on a piece called *Mysterium*, intended to be a seven-day long megawork to be performed at the foothills of the Himalayas that would unite music, poetry, dancing, colors, and scents into a supreme ecstatic experience, bringing about the end of the world through sublime bliss. Would such a work have ever been possible? We will never know.

While Scriabin is now considered – at least by pianists – to be one of the most influential composers of the early modernist period, his impact was far from guaranteed. Directly after his death, his comrade Sergei Rachmaninoff, with whom he studied at Moscow Conservatory, performed solo recitals exclusively of Scriabin’s music, thereby introducing his works to a wider audience. However, he was quickly forgotten, and only “rediscovered” when a two-volume biography was published by music historian Fabion Bowers in 1969.

-MGM

WORK

Sonata No. 4 in F-sharp Major, Op. 30

The fourth sonata was written during a rush of activity in the summer of 1903, in which he wrote three dozen piano pieces after leaving his teaching position in Moscow, his wife and his four children to pursue another woman. This sonata shares characteristics with Sonata No. 2: first, it is in two movements, with the second being much faster than the first. The first movement features three melodic ideas that move in parallel, with complex rhythm and harmonies that almost seem to float above the surface. The second movement is dancelike and full of energy, with an outburst of exuberance that features the return of one of the first movement’s melodies.

Second, Sonata No. 4 also has a “program,” or more accurately a poem he wrote that describes his intention with the work:

Thinly veiled in transparent cloud
A star shines softly, far and lonely.
How beautiful! The azure secret
Of its radiance beckons, lulls me ...
Vehement desire, sensual, insane, sweet ...
Now! Joyfully I fly upward toward you,
Freely I take wing.
Mad dance, godlike play ...
I draw near in my longing ...
Drink you in, sea of light, you light of my own self ...

In this poem, we see the types of philosophies that Scriabin was already beginning to consider, with themes like light, color, erotic desire, dance, and even, as one scholar puts it, “the equation of the cosmos with his ego,” that would continue to play a significant role in his later works.

-MGM

Dmitri Shostakovich

(1906-1975)



Born in St Petersburg in 1906, **Dmitri Shostakovich** is regarded as one of the most famous composers of the twentieth century, and arguably the greatest produced by the Soviet Union. Having exploded onto the scene with his First Symphony, written at the youthful age of nineteen, Shostakovich eventually ran afoul of the Soviet regime, and his subsequent life and work were to a large extent circumscribed by the necessity to survive at a time when absolute state control over cultural production was a constant, looming presence. Any attempt to write a biography of Shostakovich—even an all-too-brief one like this—must be plagued by uncertainty. Hard evidence is scarce, as with so many important

figures from Soviet-era Russia. Shostakovich never kept a diary, destroyed almost all the letters he ever received, and closely guarded all forms of communication. To fill the historical gap, accordingly, different portraits abound: Shostakovich the fervent ideologue, Communist through-and-through, competes with Shostakovich the dissident rebel, artist and freedom fighter. The reality can only have been more complicated, but these different portraits all try in different ways to wield his music as evidence to support their position. As biographer Laurel Fay puts it, “There is pressing need to sort fact from fiction, substance from speculation, the man from the myths.”

Despite his tense relationship with the Soviet regime, Shostakovich managed to be remarkably productive. His music draws on a range of different techniques and styles to create soundworlds of astonishing variation and color. Shostakovich’s corpus includes three operas, fifteen string quartets, six concerti (two each for violin, cello, and piano), and numerous works for other chamber ensembles and solo instruments, but it is as a symphonist that he is most remembered. The fifteen symphonies stand as monuments of the repertoire, and around them debate still swirls as to the hidden meanings they might encode.

-JS

WORK

Prelude and Fugue in D-flat Major, Op. 87, No. 15

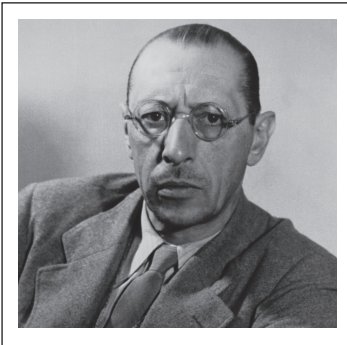
The paired **prelude** (short, introductory movement) and **fugue** (more complex, contrapuntal piece) is a genre more commonly associated with J.S. Bach, the Baroque cantor whose keyboard variations in this style form the famous *Well-Tempered Clavier* set. In fact, Shostakovich’s own collection of preludes and fugues was explicitly intended as a reply to Bach: the Russian composer began writing them in 1950, as a response to hearing Bach’s music played in his hometown of Leipzig for the two-hundredth anniversary of his death. Like a single book of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, Shostakovich’s cycle consists of twenty-four pairs, one for each distinct key. Unlike his Baroque model, however, Shostakovich follows the **circle of fifths** (a common way of understanding the relationships between different keys via an interval of five notes) rather than **stepwise** (ascending one-by-one up the scale), as Bach did.

Shostakovich’s collection contains many striking musical miniatures. This D-flat major pair is particularly memorable for its juxtaposition of a prelude in the form of an unsettling **waltz** (a courtly, triple-time dance) that alternates forced jauntiness with moments of arresting gravity; and a frantic, dissonant fugue. It might not surprise you to learn that the Union of Soviet Composers denounced this particular pairing as “spasmodic” and “cacophonous,” representative of the kind of avant-garde decadence they heard as destabilizing and threatening to the regime.

-JS

Igor Stravinsky

(1882-1971)



The son of a well-known opera singer, **Igor Stravinsky** was introduced into the music world at an early age, taking composition lessons with the famous Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. His musical father at first resisted the prospect of his son following in his footsteps, forcing young Stravinsky to study law at university. However, his passion and skill for music were undeniable, leading him to turn seriously towards its pursuit at age 19. Stravinsky's big break came in 1910, when he was asked to step in to compose a ballet based on the Russian folktale of the Firebird by Sergei Diaghilev, owner and impresario of the famed Paris-based ensemble Ballet Russes.

While Stravinsky may have been Diaghilev's third (!) choice to complete this work, Diaghilev took a chance on the young composer, having been impressed by arrangements that Stravinsky completed of Chopin works for the ballet the year before. As fate would have it, Diaghilev's risk paid off: *The Firebird* (selections of which we will hear during the Second Round) was an overnight success, serving as the beginning of a series of collaborations between the two artists that resulted in some of the most well-known works of the early 20th century, such as *Petrouchka* and *The Rite of Spring*. The success of *Firebird* also thrust Stravinsky into the international spotlight, where he would stay for the remainder of his long career. After living in France for several decades, Stravinsky spent much of his life in the United States, becoming a citizen in 1945 and leading a highly lucrative career (at least for a composer!).

Stravinsky's music embodies many trends within 20th century modernist aesthetics. Following the lead of his teacher Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky often looked to Russian folk music as his musical material; however, he often took these familiar tunes and abstracted them almost beyond recognition through rapid meter changes and increased dissonances. His music is characterized by a rhythmic insistency and the use of frequent repeated patterns – called **ostinatos** – on top of which he layered static blocks of sound with frequent interruptions. Stravinsky's ability to push the boundaries of basic musical building blocks – meter, rhythm, form, phrase structure – is always coupled with a palpable reverence for the structures that came before, audible even in the piano adaptations of his orchestral works.

-MGM

WORK

Infernal Dance from *The Firebird* (arr. Guido Agosti)

The *Firebird* ballet tells the folktale of a hero, Prince Ivan, and his interactions with the evil King Katchei. In the early part of the narrative, our hero captures the elusive and magical firebird, but decides to spare her life rather than kill her. This act of mercy allows the prince to call on the firebird whenever he needs her help, and the ballet progresses through their various trials. Stravinsky used specific types of musical material for different characters: humans were represented by simple folk melodies, while supernatural beings were represented by increased chromaticism. But rather than writing whatever music he wanted, Stravinsky insisted on working closely with choreographer Michel Fokine to write music that would fit the dancing and the story, audible especially in the transcriptions we will hear.

This piano version was completed in 1928 by Guido Agosti, an Italian pianist who dedicated the transcription to his late teacher Ferruccio Busoni (after whom another well-known piano competition is named). The transcription features two well-known sections of the *Firebird* ballet suite – the *Danse Infernale* (or infernal dance) and the end of the work, the *Berceuse* (lullaby) and *Finale*.

Like in many folktales, the prince falls in love with a princess who is already under the control of the evil king, leading to a standoff. Remember how the firebird promised to help the prince whenever he needed it? Well, King Katchei was not pleased with Prince Ivan's attempt to steal away one of his princesses (though, with thirteen under his spell, one would think he could have shared!). The king sends his minions after the prince, only to be bewitched by the returning firebird who causes them to dance in a crazed and fanatic manner. The movement is a classic Stravinskian dance, full of metric instability, dramatic interruptions and unrelenting rhythmic drive, truly bringing the demonic dance of King Katchei's underlings to life.

-MGM

Hiromi Uehara

(b. 1979)



Hiromi Uehara, known professionally as Hiromi, is a Japanese jazz pianist and composer born in 1979 in Hamamatsu, Shizuoka, Japan. She began studying piano at age six, and at seventeen was invited by Chick Corea to perform with him at a Tokyo concert. She later studied at Berklee College of Music, where she was mentored by jazz pianist Ahmad Jamal. Known for her explosive virtuosity, rhythmic imagination, and genre-crossing style, Hiromi blends jazz, classical technique, fusion, progressive rock, and popular culture into a distinctive musical language. Her debut album, *Another Mind* (2003), received the Foreign Jazz Album of the Year award at the 2004 Japan Gold Disc Awards. Since then, she has become an

internationally celebrated performer, appearing at major venues and festivals around the world. Her work has also included collaborations with artists such as Stanley Clarke and Chick Corea, a Grammy-winning appearance with The Stanley Clarke Band, and a featured performance at the Tokyo Olympics opening ceremony in 2021. More recently, she composed the soundtrack for the animated film *Blue Giant* (2023) and has continued to explore new sounds through projects such as Hiromi’s *Sonicwonder*.

-JLY

WORK

The Tom and Jerry Show

Hiromi’s “The Tom and Jerry Show,” from her debut album *Another Mind* (2003), transforms the cartoon world of the famous cat-and-mouse chase into a virtuosic jazz piano showpiece. In an NPR *Piano Jazz* interview with Marian McPartland, Hiromi described being drawn to the humor and exaggerated fights of *Tom and Jerry*. The piece captures that spirit through sudden contrasts, playful **syncopated** rhythms, and rapid changes of texture.

The piece often feels like a chase scene at the keyboard. Contrasting textures in the two hands help suggest different characters, while sudden **dynamic** changes create the feeling of quick cuts from one cartoon scene to another. Listen for the driving **boogie-woogie bass**, a jazz- and blues-inspired left-hand pattern that repeatedly moves up and down, creating a strong sense of momentum. Hiromi also uses **stride** piano techniques, where the left hand alternates between low **bass notes** and higher **chords**, creating an “oom-pah” feel that adds both humor and swing.

Throughout the piece, Hiromi plays with **syncopation**, giving the music its off-balance, surprising energy. Fast descending runs, alternating octaves, tremolos, trills, slides, and turns all contribute to the piece’s virtuosity. In the slower section, **triplets**, or groups of three notes, and a more **rubato**, or freely flowing, tempo create a looser swing feel. A pianistically demanding yet mischievous work, this piece transports the listener into a world of light-hearted surprise, adventure, and imagination.

-JLY

Semi-Final Solo Round:
Session 2

Mixon Hall | Cleveland Institute of Music
Saturday, July 25 | 2:00 PM

Semi-Final Solo Round:
Session 3

Mixon Hall | Cleveland Institute of Music
Sunday, July 26 | 2:00 PM

Institute Masterclass
with Alexander Schimpf

Presented by Dr. Malcolm and Vivian Henoch
Kulas Hall | Cleveland Institute of Music
Monday, July 27 | 2:00 PM

Semi-Final Chamber Round:
Session 1

Presented by Jeffrey and Norma Glazer
Mixon Hall | Cleveland Institute of Music
Monday, July 27 | 7:30 PM

Semi-Final Chamber Round:
Session 2

Presented by Jeffrey and Norma Glazer
Mixon Hall | Cleveland Institute of Music
Tuesday, July 28 | 7:30 PM

Jean-Yves Thibaudet in Recital

Presented by Dr. Michael Frank and Pat Snyder†
Gartner Auditorium | Cleveland Museum of Art
Thursday, July 30 | 7:30 PM

Final Concerto Round

Presented by the Walter and Jean Kalberer Foundation
Kulas Hall | Cleveland Institute of Music
Friday, July 31 | 7:30 PM

Winners Community Concert

Cleveland Museum of Natural History
Saturday, August 1 | 12:00 PM

†Deceased



Final Masterclass Round

Presented by Dr. Michael Frank and Pat Snyder†
Kulas Hall | Cleveland Institute of Music

Watch a master at work! Contestants learn from piano legend and Cleveland competition laureate, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, in real time during the first-ever Final Masterclass Round.

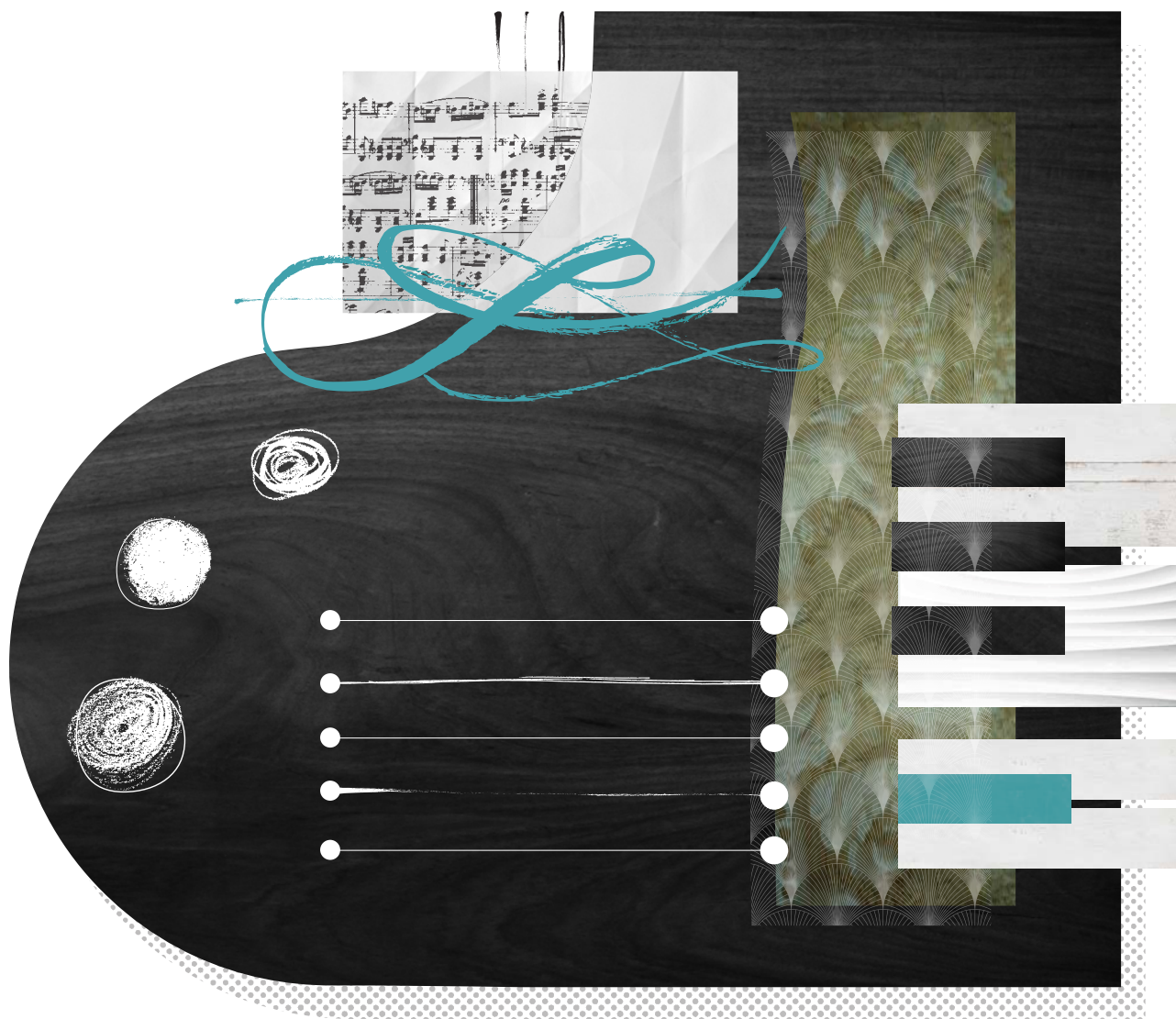
Session 1

Wednesday, July 29 | 4:00 PM

Session 2

Wednesday, July 29 | 7:30 PM

TICKETS AT [PIANOCLEVELAND.ORG](https://www.pianocleveland.org)



2027

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