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CONCERT  
SEASON

# PIANO FEST

Raven's Cry Theatre, Sechelt



Friday, Feb 27, 2026

**KEVIN CHEN**

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Saturday, Feb 28, 2026

**CHARLES RICHARD-HAMELIN**

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Sunday, Mar 1, 2026

**JANINA FIALKOWSKA**

## KEVIN CHEN

Chen displays a “*sparkling virtuosity redolent of great pianists...a superstar talent*”

— Malcolm Miller (*Classical Music Daily*)

20 year-old pianist **Kevin Chen** recently took second prize at the 19th International Frederic Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw—a competition regarded as the Olympics of the piano world. Polish critics called his interpretation of the complete Chopin *Etudes op. 10* “a complete musical story, not a show of virtuosity.”

He's also taken First Prize at the Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition (Tel Aviv 2023), the Concours de Genève (2022), the Franz Liszt International Piano Competition (Budapest 2021), the Hilton Head International Piano Competition (2020), and the International Piano-e-Competition (Minneapolis 2019).

Kevin has appeared with major orchestras including the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Taipei Symphony Orchestra, Hungarian National Orchestra, Edmonton Symphony Orchestra,

*Continued on next page*



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# The artists (continued)

and Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra and has given recitals throughout Europe and Asia.

Born in Edmonton, and raised in Calgary, Kevin began piano studies at the age of five and soon attracted national attention, winning first place at the Canadian Music Competition at eight. He was later named one of the CBC's "Top 30 Hot Canadian Classical Musicians Under 30" and one of *Maclean's* magazine's "100 Remarkable Canadians."

He currently studies at the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover with Professor Arie Vardi.

## CHARLES RICHARD-HAMELIN

A *"supremely artistic, highly sensitive yet thoroughly masculine"* pianist with *"strikingly original ideas"*  
— (*Gramophone*)

Ten years ago, **Charles Richard-Hamelin** also won the silver medal at the International Piano Competition in Warsaw. Since then, he's received the Ordre des arts et des lettres du Québec and the Prix Denise-Pelletier, becoming the youngest recipient in the history of the Prix du Québec. Most recently, Charles Richard-Hamelin came away a double winner at the Prix Opus Awards. These awards were given to outstanding artists in Quebec for both recording and live performances presented in 2025. Charles won Album of the Year – Classical, Romantic, Post-Romantic Music for his recording *Échos: Chopin, Granados & Albéniz*, and Concert of the Year – Classical, Romantic, Post-Romantic Music for his live performance of Brahms Sonatas with Andrew Wan. He was also nominated for Concert of the Year (Solo Recital).

He's played at major festivals throughout Europe and has performed with all the major Canadian symphony orchestras (Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, Metropolitan, Quebec City, Edmonton, Calgary, etc.) as well as the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, Sinfonia Varsovia, Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Korean Symphony Orchestra, OFUNAM (Mexico), Les Violons du Roy and I Musici de Montréal.

Charles Richard-Hamelin is also active as a chamber musician. He has performed with Andrew Wan, James Ehnes, Marie-Nicole Lemieux, Marc-André Hamelin, the Dover Quartet, the New Orford Quartet, the Apollon Musagète Quartet and the Meccore Quartet, among others.

Charles Richard-Hamelin has recorded eleven albums, all released on the Analekta label. Five of these are dedicated primarily to the solo piano works of Frederic Chopin; there are also four recordings with Andrew Wan, concertmaster of the OSM. He has also recorded both Chopin piano concertos with the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal conducted by Kent Nagano, and Mozart's *Piano Concertos nos. 22 and 24* with Les

Violons du Roy conducted by Jonathan Cohen.

Previous CRS performances: March 2018 and November 2023.

## JANINA FIALKOWSKA

*"...she is an interpreter of sublime inspiration...a musician of extraordinary sensibility and captivating, artless purity ..."*

— Ivan Hewett, *The Telegraph* (London)

For 50 years, concert pianist **Janina Fialkowska** has enchanted audiences and critics around the world. She has been praised for her musical integrity, her refreshing natural approach and her unique piano sound thus becoming "one of the Grandes Dames of piano playing" (*Frankfurter Allgemeine*).

Born in Canada, she began her piano studies with her mother at age four, continuing in her native Montreal with Yvonne Hubert. In Paris she studied with Yvonne Lefébure and in New York at the Juilliard School with Sascha Gorodnitzki, experiencing the best of both French and Russian piano traditions. Her career was launched in 1974, when the legendary Arthur Rubinstein became her mentor after her prize-winning performance at his inaugural Master Piano Competition, calling her a "born Chopin interpreter", laying the foundation for her lifelong identification with this composer.

Since then she has performed with the foremost orchestras worldwide under the baton of such conductors as, Bernard Haitink, Lorin Maazel, Zubin Mehta, Sir Roger Norrington, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Mäkelä and Yannick Nézet-Séguin. Fialkowska's discography includes many award-winning discs, including the *BBC Music Magazine's* 2013 "Instrumental CD of the Year" award as well as a Juno Award in 2018.

Her native Canada has bestowed upon her their highest honors: Officer of the Order of Canada, the Governor General's 2012 Lifetime Achievement Award in Classical Music, as well as three honorary doctorates. She passes on her wide musical experience in master classes and at her annual International Piano Academy in Bavaria, where she now resides and makes frequent appearances as a juror of the world's most prestigious piano competitions.

In October 2021 her autobiography, *A Note in Time*, was published to universal acclaim by Novum Publishers in London. It is now available worldwide as a hard cover and e-reader. ("Mesmerizing memoir" – "A totally absorbing read" – "A volume to savour and treasure").

Previous CRS performances: April 1997, February 2006, March 2016 and March 2020.

# The program

**KEVIN CHEN: Friday, Feb. 27 at 2:00**

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN**

32 Variations in c minor, WoO 80

**FREDERIC CHOPIN**

Fantaisie in f minor, op. 49

Ballade no. 3 in A-flat major, op. 47

Polonaise in A-flat major, op. 53

INTERMISSION

**ALEXANDER Scriabin**

Prelude in B major, op. 11 no. 11

Fantasy in b minor, op. 28

Vers la flamme, op. 72

**FRANZ LISZT**

Années de pèlerinage III, Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este, S. 163 no. 4

Les préludes (Symphonic poem), S. 97 (solo piano transcription by Kevin Chen)

**CHARLES RICHARD-HAMELIN: Saturday Feb. 28 at 2:00**

**FREDERIC CHOPIN**

Nocturne op. 32 no. 2 in A-flat major

Nocturne op. 48 no. 1 in c minor

**FRANZ SCHUBERT**

Sonata in c minor, D. 958

1. *Allegro*

2. *Adagio*

3. *Menuetto: Allegro – Trio*

4. *Allegro*

INTERMISSION

**FREDERIC CHOPIN**

Trois nouvelles études:

Étude no. 1 in f minor

Étude no. 2 in A-flat major

Étude no. 3 in D-flat major

**ROBERT SCHUMANN**

Carnaval op. 9

1. *Préambule*

2. *Pierrot*

3. *Arlequin*

4. *Valse noble*

5. *Eusebius*

6. *Florestan*

7. *Coquette*

8. *Replique*

9. *Papillons*

10. *Lettres dansantes*

11. *Chiarina*

12. *Chopin*

13. *Estrelle*

14. *Reconnaissance*

15. *Pantalon et Colombine*

16. *Valse allemande*

18. *Aveu*

19. *Promenade*

20. *Pause*

21. *Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins*

**JANINA FIALKOWSKA: Sunday, March 1 at 2:00**

**EDVARD GRIEG**

Lyric Pieces:

Once upon a time, op. 71, no. 1

At your feet, op 68. no. 3

Butterfly, op 43, no. 1

Evening in the mountains, op. 68, no. 4

Homeward, op. 62. no. 6

**ROBERT SCHUMANN**

Fantasiestücke, op. 12

1. *Des Abends (In the Evening)*

2. *Aufschwung (Soaring)*

3. *Warum? (Why?)*

4. *Grillen (Whims)*

5. *In der Nacht (In the Night)*

6. *Fabel (Fable)*

7. *Traumes Wirren (Dream's Confusions)*

8. *Ende vom Lied (End of the Song)*

INTERMISSION

**MAURICE RAVEL**

Valses nobles et sentimentales – 8 Waltzes:

1. *Modéré, très franc*

2. *Assez lent, avec une expression intense*

3. *Modéré*

4. *Assez animé*

5. *Presque lent, dans un sentiment intime*

6. *Vif*

7. *Moins vif*

8. *Épilogue: lent*

**FREDERIC CHOPIN**

Mazurka in a minor, op. 59, no. 1

Mazurka in a minor (*Notre temps*)

Scherzo no. 1 in b minor, op. 20

# The program notes

KEVIN CHEN

## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN –

December 17, 1770 – March 26, 1827

### 32 Variations in c minor, WoO 80

The theme that Beethoven chose for his *32 Variations in c minor* (1806) has a Baroque feel to it, with its chaconne-like harmonic pattern in the left hand and sarabande-like second-beat emphasis in the right. Within the eight bars of this theme lurks a mini-drama of struggle, crisis, and resolution that is reproduced in each of the 32 variations that follow.

The left-hand harmonic pattern is built upon a bass line that descends like the decrees of Fate. Opposed to this is a courageously heroic right hand that reacts to these alarming developments and struggles to escape in the opposite direction, falling back each time, but inching up a semitone higher with every attempt. Finally a crisis is reached when both hands land together, *sforzando*, on a massive F-minor chord. Both hands then join together in unison to effect a whimpering cadence, their tails between their legs, chastened for their efforts.

## FREDERIC CHOPIN –

March 1, 1810 – Oct. 17, 1849

### Fantaisie in f minor, op. 49

Despite its generic title, Chopin's *Fantaisie in f minor* of 1841 is every bit as nationalist in sentiment as his mazurkas and polonaises, based as it is on many of the patriotic songs nostalgically sung by his fellow Polish emigrés in Paris who, like Chopin himself, were unable to return to their native land after the failed Warsaw uprising of November 1830. Theodor Adorno has described the work as a "tragically decorative song of triumph to the effect that Poland was not lost forever, that some day [...] she would rise again."

It begins in the low register of the keyboard. An imitation of the clop-clop of horses' hooves in a military parade soon drifts almost imperceptibly into the gentle lilt of dance music in an elegant aristocratic salon. The various sections of the work move through moods of restless anxiety to forthright defiance and finally to the exultation of military triumph, evoked in a strutting cavalry march.

At the very heart of the piece, however, is a restrained *Lento sostenuto* that calls a momentary truce to all the patriotic posturing to express the simple nobility of the Polish soul, an echo of which is heard in recitative before the work swells resolutely in rippling arpeggios to its conclusion.

### Ballade no. 3 in A-flat major, op. 47

Chopin's four ballades all share a tone of epic narration, but

the third of the set stands apart for its bright sonorities and optimistic mood. It lacks the vehemence of expression that characterizes the other three ballades with their terrifying codas of whirlwind intensity.

The work opens with a gently rocking theme of pastoral simplicity. This soon gives way to episodes of growing rhythmic vitality and harmonic richness. Throughout the piece, Chopin juxtaposes elegance with agitation, allowing moments of turbulence to ripple beneath the surface without ever fully darkening the overall character.

It all comes to an end with joyously rambunctious passagework over large swaths of the keyboard.

### Polonaise in A-flat major, op. 53

Chopin's *Polonaise in A-flat major, op. 53* is often called the "Heroic Polonaise". Written in 1842 during a period of relative stability in Chopin's life, the piece transforms the traditional Polish polonaise, a stately court dance, into a grand statement of national pride and defiance.

It opens with a bold, martial character, driven by commanding chords and a proud rhythmic pulse. Throughout the work, Chopin contrasts this heroic outer material with more lyrical, reflective passages. The famous middle section, with its relentless left-hand octaves, creates a sense of unstoppable momentum, evoking images of galloping horses or a triumphant march.

Although Chopin rarely attached explicit narratives to his music, this polonaise has long been associated with the composer's deep patriotism and longing for his native Poland, which at the time was under foreign rule. The work's triumphant conclusion affirms not only technical brilliance but also an unyielding spirit, making the *Polonaise in A-flat major* a lasting symbol of courage, dignity, and national identity.

## ALEXANDER SCRIBIN –

January 6, 1872 – April 27, 1915

### Prelude in B major, op. 11 no. 11

It is easy to see why Alexander Scriabin was known as "the Russian Chopin." He wrote almost exclusively for the piano and began his career by composing mazurkas, waltzes, nocturnes, preludes and études, just like his Polish musical forebear.

The piano textures of Chopin are apparent in the *Prelude in B major, op. 11 no. 11* with its sweeping left-hand accompaniment figures, studded with countermelodies in the tenor. And yet its wistfully lyrical melody, doled out in poised, evenly balanced phrases, barely ranges over more than an octave.

### Fantasy in b minor, op. 28

A much more muscular posture, very much at odds with Scriabin's reputation for finely shaded melodic nuance and

# The program notes (continued)

perfumed harmonies, is presented in his *Fantasy in b minor op. 28*. While moments of lyric relief do arrive in this piece, it is overwhelmingly dominated by flying octaves, thick textures, disruptive rhythmic convulsions and flamboyant multi-octave arpeggios in both hands. Swaying between a brooding restlessness and a search for ecstatic release, the mystic side of Scriabin comes clearly to the fore.

## Vers la flamme, op. 72

The “piano poem” *Vers la flamme (Towards the flame)* is among the last works that Scriabin composed. It represents a psychedelic aural imagining of the world moving slowly and inexorably “towards the flame”, heating up until it is finally consumed in a great conflagration of fire and light. The harmonic vocabulary of this piece is extremely advanced with the subversive sound of tritones ringing in the ear from the very start of the piece, when time seems to stand still, frowning in worry at what is to come. A second stage is reached when deep bass rumblings arise in a murky 5-against-9 rhythm. Tongues of flame arrive in the treble when double tremolos curl around the middle register, eventually breaking out into silvery flashes of brilliance above until the piece ends in a dazzling aural snapshot of pure white light

## FRANZ LISZT –

October 22, 1811 – July 31, 1886

### Années de pèlerinage III, Les jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este, S. 163 no. 4

*Les jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este* is one of Liszt’s most visionary piano works. Composed during his time in Italy, the piece was inspired by the fountains of the Villa d’Este in Tivoli, whose cascading waters shimmer throughout the music in delicate, fluid textures.

This work reflects a contemplative and spiritual voice. Rapid figurations ripple across the keyboard, creating a luminous sound world that suggests flowing water, sunlight, and constant motion.

At the head of the score, Liszt includes a biblical inscription—*Sed aqua quam ego dabo ei, fiet in eo fons aquae salientis in vitam aeternam* (“But the water that I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life”)—revealing the work’s deeper symbolic meaning. The fountains are not merely picturesque but serve as a metaphor for spiritual renewal and transcendence.

Both sensuous and meditative, *Les jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este* transforms the piano into an instrument of color and light, offering a profound reflection on nature, faith, and the passage of time.

### Les préludes (Symphonic poem), S. 97 (solo piano transcription by Kevin Chen)

Liszt’s *Les Préludes* stands as one of the earliest and most

influential examples of the symphonic poem, a genre the composer virtually invented. Completed in 1854 and based loosely on the prelude to *Nouvelles Méditations Poétiques* by French poet Alphonse de Lamartine, the piece explores the philosophical idea that life itself is a series of preludes to something greater—whether love, struggle, or peace.

Liszt’s score unfolds as a continuous, single-movement work that fuses narrative drama with symphonic development. The main motif, noble and questing, recurs in many guises. Its harmonic richness and sweeping transformations give musical voice to the human journey—from lyrical tenderness to heroic conflict and triumphant resolution. At its premiere in Weimar, *Les préludes* captivated audiences and became one of Liszt’s most frequently performed orchestral works, here brilliantly realized for solo piano by Kevin Chen. It encapsulates the Romantic spirit—bridging poetry, philosophy, and music.

## CHARLES RICHARD-HAMELIN

## FREDERIC CHOPIN –

March 1, 1810 – Oct. 17, 1849

### Nocturne op. 32 no. 2 in A-flat major

Composed in 1837, the piece opens with a serene, almost improvisatory melody floating over gently undulating accompaniment. Its long, arching phrases evoke a sense of suspended time, as if the music is breathing in slow motion. Beneath the surface calm, however, Chopin introduces harmonic turns that hint at unease—moments where the melody seems to question itself before settling again.

The central section intensifies this emotional ambiguity. The texture thickens, the harmonic language darkens, and the once-placid atmosphere becomes charged with tension. Chopin’s use of chromaticism and unexpected modulations creates a feeling of searching, as though the music is momentarily lost in shadow.

The piece concludes with a stark, declamatory coda. This somber, almost tragic gesture transforms the nocturne’s character in its final moments, leaving the audience with a sense of unresolved introspection.

Overall, the *Nocturne in A-flat major, op. 32 no. 2* is a study in contrasts: luminous yet shadowed, tender yet unsettled. It reveals Chopin at a moment of artistic evolution, expanding the emotional and structural possibilities of the nocturne while preserving its essential lyricism.

### Nocturne op. 48 no. 1 in c minor

Composed in 1841, Chopin’s *Nocturne in c minor* stands among the most dramatic and architecturally expansive of his nocturnes.

# The program notes (continued)

While the genre is often associated with intimate lyricism, this work pushes far beyond salon delicacy, unfolding instead as a miniature tragedy in three acts.

The opening presents a solemn, almost prayer-like melody over dark, tolling chords. Chopin's harmonic language here is unusually stark, and the long, unbroken melodic lines demand a singer's breath and a poet's sense of pacing.

A sudden shift launches the turbulent middle section that erupts into a powerful chorale-like passage—majestic, declamatory, and almost orchestral in scope. This is Chopin at his most operatic: the left hand surges with rolling waves of sound while the right hand proclaims a theme of fierce resolve. It's a moment of defiance or transcendence, a vision of light breaking through the nocturne's shadows.

In the final section, the melody, now fragmented and anguished, struggles against restless triplet figures that churn beneath it. The music seems to fight for equilibrium, only to collapse into a stark, desolate coda. These final chords—quiet, bare, and unresolved in spirit—leave the listener suspended between resignation and lingering grief.

**FRANZ SCHUBERT –**  
January 31, 1797 – November 19, 1828

## **Sonata in c minor, D 958**

Schubert's admiration for Ludwig van Beethoven is vividly on display in the opening bars of his *Sonata in c minor, D 958*, composed in September 1828, just shortly before his death. Schubert had served as a pallbearer at Beethoven's funeral the year before, and his own death from tertiary syphilis was only months away, which may perhaps account for the unusually serious tone of this work.

The key chosen for the sonata, c minor, is synonymous with Beethoven's most turbulent musical thoughts, as expressed in the *Pathétique Sonata*, the *Fifth Symphony*, and the last piano sonata *Op. 111*.

Schubert has not lost himself entirely, however, in Beethoven's musical personality. You'll also hear a lovingly affectionate little hymn with chiming, bell-like pedal tones that he somehow manages to transform into a dance.

Schubert's second movement is a real adagio, a comparative rarity in the works of a composer whose lyrical instincts tended to emerge at a livelier pace.

There is an anxious, worrying quality about the Minuet and Trio that it is hard to put your finger on. Minuets in a minor key are a bit odd to start with. Its irregular phrase lengths, the sudden disturbing changes in dynamics and unexpected silences are more ghostly than toe-tapping.

And ghostly is a good description of the last movement in which Schubert unleashes his inner playful demon with wicked glee. This moto perpetuo movement is both thrilling and strangely ominous. The keyboard writing is brilliantly effective, especially in the galloping second theme, with its cross-handed texture of melodic fragments jockeying between high and low register, leaping across a steady horse-hoof pulse in the middle of the keyboard.

**FREDERIC CHOPIN –**  
March 1, 1810 – Oct. 17, 1849

## **Trois nouvelles études**

Chopin's *Trois nouvelles études* occupy a unique corner of his output. Written in 1840 they were intended as pedagogical pieces, yet they transcend the didactic purpose that produced them. These works are not driven by virtuoso display. Instead, they explore refinement, balance, and expressive nuance—the kind of “teaching” Chopin valued most. They show how Chopin could transform a technical problem into a moment of poetry, and how even his “simplest” works demand sensitivity, imagination, and emotional honesty. In performance, they offer listeners a glimpse of Chopin the teacher, the poet, and the craftsman—all in miniature.

### **Étude no. 1 in f minor**

The first étude focuses on smooth legato playing. A gently sighing melody unfolds over a murmuring accompaniment, creating an atmosphere of intimate melancholy. The piece feels less like an exercise and more like a nocturne distilled to its essence—restrained, elegant, and quietly searching.

### **Étude no. 2 in A-flat major**

The second étude is a study in chromatic inner-voice motion and supple hand coordination. Its graceful lines weave through shifting harmonies that never quite settle, giving the music a luminous, floating quality. The challenge lies in maintaining clarity and evenness while preserving the étude's warm, singing tone. It is one of Chopin's most understated gems, a miniature that glows from within.

### **Étude no. 3 in D-flat major**

The final étude explores the independence of the hands, with a serene, chorale-like melody in the right hand set against a rippling accompaniment in the left. The music radiates calm assurance, its harmonic turns gentle but deeply satisfying. What begins as a technical study becomes a meditation on balance and inner stillness—a fitting close to the set.

# The program notes (continued)

**ROBERT SCHUMANN –**  
June 8, 1810 – July 29, 1856

## **Carnaval op. 9**

Robert Schumann's kaleidoscopic mini-drama of scenes from a masked ball, composed in 1834, features a colourful cast of the real and imagined characters that dominated his personal and artistic life. There are stock characters from Commedia dell'arte, his two love-interests (Ernestine & Clara), fellow musicians, and even the two sides of his own split personality (Eusebius & Florestan). Completing the line-up is the Davidsbund (League of David), the youthful defenders of "real art" and sworn enemies of fossilized musical culture.

In the *Préambule*, we hear a fanfare, then sounds of bustling guests and hints at waltzes to come. *Pierrot*, the sad clown, clumsily walks past, followed by the nimble, leaping *Arlequin* and then it's time for the first waltz, a grandiloquent and gracious *Valse noble*.

In the corner, dreamy-eyed *Eusebius* muses to himself until the passionately extrovert *Florestan* emerges, talking a mile a minute. A *Coquette* flirts into view, her fan all a-flutter, attracting a suitor offering his *Réplique* (reply) to her provocative glances. Meanwhile the *Papillons* (revellers) whirl about the room at breakneck speed. Even the letters ASCH—SCHA begin to dance out their cryptic messages, until *Chiarina* (Clara) strides into view with a grave and haughty waltz. Schumann restores calm with an achingly poetic melody but the entrance of *Estrella* (Ernestine) sets the room a-boil once again, making male hearts beat faster at the thought of winning her *Reconnaissance* (acknowledgement).

*Pantolon & Columbine* play out a comic scene, as he chases her around a table. No matter, a seductive *Valse allemande* (German waltz) draws everyone to the dance floor, interrupted only by Paganini's impromptu concert before the waltz returns again. Meanwhile, a couple bills and coos in a touching *Aveu* (confession of love).

Now it's time for a *Promenade* in the garden for a bit of people-watching, but a commotion breaks out during a pause in the dancing. In come the young members of the League of David in a *Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins*, mocking the old fogeys in the crowd, who then strike up the Grandfather's Dance that traditionally ends such festivities, but to no avail. The upstarts demand the exciting music of the *Préambule*, and they get their way, triumphant to the end.

**JANINA FIALKOWSKA**

**EDVARD GRIEG –**  
June 15, 1843 – September 4, 1907

## **Lyric Pieces**

***Once upon a time, op. 71, no. 1***

***At your feet, op. 68, no. 3***

***Butterfly, op. 43, no. 1***

***Evening in the mountains, op. 68, no. 4***

***Homeward, op. 62, no. 6***

Grieg's *Lyric Pieces* form one of the most intimate and revealing musical diaries of the Romantic era, blending Norwegian folk color with poetic miniatures that capture fleeting moods, landscapes and personal reflections. These short works—66 in total—span Grieg's entire creative life, offering a window into his evolving style and his deep connection to Norwegian identity.

**ROBERT SCHUMANN –**  
June 8, 1810 – July 29, 1856

## **Fantasiestücke, op. 12**

Robert Schumann composed his *Fantasiestücke* in 1837, a year marked by emotional turbulence and artistic intensity. The title—*Fantasy Pieces*—captures the spirit of the collection: eight short character pieces, each a vivid psychological snapshot.

If you've ever wondered what it might sound like to eavesdrop on a composer's inner life, Schumann's *Fantasiestücke* is about as close as it gets. Schumann liked to imagine that two characters lived inside him: Florestan, fiery and impulsive, and Eusebius, dreamy and introspective. You'll hear both of them, sometimes taking turns, sometimes interrupting each other, sometimes blending into something wonderfully ambiguous.

### **1. *Des Abends (In the Evening)***

The opening piece is a study in quiet radiance. Its gentle, shimmering textures evoke twilight calm, as if the music were suspended in a moment of stillness. Schumann marks it *zart und mit Ausdruck*—tender and expressive—setting the introspective tone of Eusebius.

### **2. *Aufschwung (Soaring)***

A sudden burst of energy breaks the calm. This is Florestan at his most impassioned: sweeping gestures, surging rhythms, and a sense of breathless urgency. The music seems to leap upward, propelled by restless momentum.

### **3. *Warum? (Why?)***

A question without an answer. The piece unfolds in a series of

# The program notes (continued)

sighing phrases, harmonically searching yet never fully resolving. Its simplicity is deceptive; beneath the surface lies a quiet emotional ambiguity.

## 4. *Grillen (Whims)*

Playful and unpredictable, this movement dances between lighthearted charm and sudden shadows. Schumann's mercurial imagination is on full display, with abrupt contrasts that feel like fleeting thoughts.

## 5. *In der Nacht (In the Night)*

One of the emotional centers of the set, this piece is turbulent and dramatic. Its dark, driving lines suggest nocturnal struggle—perhaps a storm, perhaps an inner battle. The music's intensity eventually gives way to a luminous, hard-won calm.

## 6. *Fabel (Fable)*

A narrative quality runs through this movement, as if telling a story without words. Its lyrical lines and gentle rhythmic sway create a sense of wonder, like a tale unfolding in a quiet voice.

## 7. *Traumes Wirren (Dream's Confusions)*

A whirlwind of rapid figurations evokes the strange, shifting logic of dreams. The music sparkles with nervous energy, constantly changing direction, never quite settling.

## 8. *Ende vom Lied (End of the Song)*

The final piece brings the cycle to a triumphant yet bittersweet close. Its festive opening suggests celebration, but Schumann soon introduces a reflective middle section that hints at farewell. The ending feels both resolute and wistful, as if the fantasy dissolves into reality.

## MAURICE RAVEL –

March 7, 1875 – December 28, 1937

### **Valses nobles et sentimentales, M. 61**

Maurice Ravel's *Valses nobles et sentimentales* is a fascinating tribute to the Viennese waltz seen through a distinctly modern French lens. Written in 1911, Ravel described his collection as “a series of waltzes in the spirit of Schubert,” yet he also insisted on a certain “transparency” and “clarity” that sets them apart from the lushness of late-Romantic Viennese style. Ravel filters the tradition through shimmering harmonies, sharp edges, and a refined sense of irony. The result is a work that feels both nostalgic and boldly contemporary.

Ravel's waltzes capture the elegance of a bygone era while revealing the modern world just beneath the surface. These waltzes feel like memories of a ballroom rather than the ballroom itself—glimpses of elegance seen through a modern, slightly surreal lens.

The set moves through eight short dances, each with its own

personality. The first waltz strides in with bright confidence, almost brittle in its clarity. The mood softens, turns lyrical, then suddenly darts away again. Some waltzes feel like they're smiling at you; others seem lost in thought. One or two have a shadowy, late-night quality, as if the dancers have stepped away from the party and into their own private reverie.

And then there's the epilogue. It's as if the lights have dimmed and you're hearing echoes of everything that came before—little fragments drifting past, familiar but slightly out of reach. It's nostalgic without being sentimental, affectionate without being indulgent. Ravel never lets the music get too comfortable; he's always nudging it forward, keeping it fresh. This music invites you into a world that feels familiar and strange at the same time—a ballroom seen through a dream.

## FREDERIC CHOPIN –

March 1, 1810 – Oct. 17, 1849

### **Mazurka in a minor, op. 59, no. 1**

Chopin's mazurkas are often described as his most personal musical language, and the *a minor Mazurka* from op. 59 is a perfect example of how much emotional depth he could pack into a small, dance-inspired form. Written in 1845, late in his creative life, this piece feels less like something meant for the dance floor and more like a memory of one—filtered through nostalgia, introspection, and a touch of melancholy.

The opening immediately sets a reflective tone. The melody seems to hesitate, almost as if it's searching for the right words, while the harmony shifts in subtle, unexpected ways. Chopin draws on the rhythmic fingerprints of the traditional Polish mazurka—its characteristic accents and lilting sway—but he stretches and bends them, turning the dance into something more poetic and inward-looking.

As the piece unfolds, the music grows more animated, but never loses its sense of longing. There's a central section that feels like a brief escape into brighter light: the harmonies warm, the rhythm steadies, and the melody sings more freely. But this moment doesn't last. The opening mood returns, now tinged with a deeper sense of resignation, as if the memory has faded again.

What makes this mazurka so compelling is the way Chopin balances simplicity and sophistication. The piece is short, but every phrase feels carefully shaped, every harmonic turn quietly expressive. It's a dance, yes—but one heard from a distance, softened by time and emotion.

### **Mazurka in a minor (*Notre temps*)**

Chopin's mazurkas are stylized imitations of the folk dances of his native Poland, specifically those of the province of Mazovia near Warsaw. They come in a wide variety of moods, from the melancholy to the exuberant, with contrasting emotional states

# The program notes (continued)

often boldly juxtaposed in the same work.

This mazurka is in triple meter but with rhythmic emphasis “fleeing” the downbeat to land instead on the second or third beats of the bar where stomping or heel-clicking gestures often occurred in performance. Drone tones in the bass are sometimes used to imitate the bagpipes.

The melodies themselves tend to be “modular”, constructed out of repeated one- and two-bar units of rhythm, richly bejewelled with ornamentation. Using these simple “rustic” features of compositional design, Chopin composes pieces of considerable elegance, especially in the way he alternates between personal expression, tailored to the intimate setting of the salon, and rousing choruses with thumping rhythms that evoke the communal spirit of village dancing—all glued together by his abundant use of chromatic harmony.

## Scherzo no. 1 in b minor, op. 20

Chopin’s scherzos are muscular essays in pure pianistic power, projecting real anger, defiance, and even ferocity.

The *Scherzo no. 1 in b minor* dates from Chopin’s early trip to Vienna at the age of 20, when the Warsaw uprising against Russia made return to his Polish homeland impossible and his exile in Paris virtually inevitable. The main musical idea pursued from the outset is a nervous, petulant figuration, split between

the hands and rising from the lowest to the highest reaches of the keyboard in the space of a single phrase, alternating in its impetuous course with pauses for moments of reflection and pathos.

The trio middle section provides extreme dramatic contrast in the form of a lullaby: the old Polish Christmas carol *Lulajże Jezuniu* (*Sleep, Little Jesus*), with its hypnotically lulling rhythm and comforting pedal note in the bass.

The return of the agitated opening section brings a take-no-prisoners approach to the proceedings when it drives forward into a coda of unusual vehemence, nipping like a mad dog at the heels of the advancing harmonies in a series of off-beat accents. The work finishes as it began, with a pair of dramatic chords providing an uncompromising minor-mode “Amen” to this turbulent piece.

Program notes by Donald Gislason and Anonymous

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