



The Vancouver
CHOPIN
SOCIETY

2021-2022 **SEASON**

MUSIC GIVES SOUL TO
THE UNIVERSE

BRUCE (XIAOYU) LIU

Sunday, Feb 20, 2022

2:00 PM Chan Centre

BRUCE (XIAOYU) LIU

Monday, Feb 21, 2022

2:00 PM The Orpheum

MESSAGE FROM OUR ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

We begin our spring season with the Vancouver debut of Canadian pianist, Bruce (Xiaoyu) Liu, winner of the 18th International Piano Competition in Warsaw in 2021.

As always, we strive to present performances by seasoned concert artists as well as outstanding musicians who are at the outset of their artistic journey and musical career. We are confident that you will be moved by the musicianship and pianism of our artists.

The VCS aims to promote cultural interaction among the people of Vancouver, who come from a rich variety of ethnic backgrounds, and to emphasize the importance of music in our lives. We have chosen to name our Society after the Polish composer Frederic Chopin because of the universal appeal of his music and his world-wide reputation as one of the greatest composers for the keyboard.

The VCS is a member of the International Federation of Chopin Societies, based in Vienna. This connection puts us in touch with some fifty other Chopin Societies worldwide, creating exciting possibilities for inviting international musicians to Vancouver.

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BRUCE (XIAOYU) LIU

**Nocturne in C-Sharp Minor,
Op. 27, No. 1**

CHOPIN

Rondo à la mazur in F Major, Op. 5

Ballade No. 2 in F Major, Op. 38

Ballade No. 3 in A-Flat Major, Op. 47

Intermission (5 minutes only - please remain in your seats)

**Sonata No. 2 in B-Flat Minor,
Op. 35 "Funeral March"**

CHOPIN

**Andante spianato and Grande Polonaise
Brillante in E-Flat Major, Op. 22**

We thank the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra for generously allowing us to use their Hamburg Steinway at the Orpheum.

This concert is part of the world tour organized by the Chopin Institute in Warsaw for the winner of the of the 18th International Chopin Piano Competition. Vancouver is the only North American stop in this tour.

This concert is being recorded by **CBC Music** for broadcast on Sunday, March 13 on In Concert, heard weekly from 11 to 3 with host Paolo Pietropaolo.



*We acknowledge the financial support of:
Province of British Columbia
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Chan Endowment Fund at the University of British Columbia*



NOTES

It is difficult to think of a more lovely musical experience than an all-Chopin recital. Bruce has generously chosen a feast of masterpieces from the composer's oeuvre to share with you, our audience, this afternoon.

The oft-repeated observation that Chopin's music is vocal in nature is evident in the **Nocturne in C-sharp minor** (Op. 27, No. 1). The right hand gives us a duet between soprano and contralto where the left hand plays a deceptively calm accompaniment with widely spaced broken chords. Polish pianist Jan Kleczynski, in the typically colourful, highfalutin language of the 19th century, writes about the work as, "*A description of a calm night at Venice, where, after a scene of murder, the sea closes over a corpse and continues to serve as a mirror to the moonlight.*" Melodramatic? Perhaps. But it does give us a sense of the quietly menacing quality of the music.

Throughout his life, the mazurka was the form for which Chopin recorded his most private thoughts. The composer's Polish roots is evident in the charming **Rondo a la Mazur in F major** (Op. 5). For lack of a better description, the work is Polish in feeling and in its rhythmic character, and filled with beautifully florid passagework typical of his early compositions. Written when the composer was only 16 years old, it already displayed how far Chopin had developed and matured as a composer since his very earliest works.

One could arguably say that it is difficult to find greater contrasts within a single work than in the **Ballade No. 2 in F major** (Op. 38), from the calm, floating chords in the first measures, to the dramatic, angry, almost out of control emotions, of the second section. The calm of the opening returns, before the music builds to an even more dramatic and shattering coda. Surprisingly, the composer ends the work by returning, albeit briefly, to the calm of the opening, not in the original F major but in A minor, giving listeners the feeling of beholding a scene of devastation after the storm.

The **Ballade No. 3 in A-flat major** (Op. 47) brings us into a very different sound world. In his review of the work, Robert Schumann writes, "*In it we may recognize the refined and intellectual Pole, accustomed to moving in the most distinguished circles of the French capital.*" James Huneker agrees that the composition is "*aristocratic, gay, graceful, piquant*", but he continues that there is "*also something more.*" This "something more" Huneker refers to is probably the more turbulent middle section. But even this slightly

unsettling musical section, with some remarkable harmonic modulations, does not take away the warmth, lyricism and ardour of this composition.

Of the four movements of the 1839 **Sonata in B-flat minor** (Op. 35), Schumann refers to them as "*four of his most reckless children*". The tone of the first movement – agitated, restless and pulse-stirring – is evident with the brief, four-measure introduction. Even the beautiful, song-like second theme cannot completely dispel the gloom that pervades the movement. The second movement (scherzo) begins aggressively and "*hurtles along at breakneck speed*" (Alan Walker), challenging the pianist with double thirds and fourths, as well as flying leaps to the opposite extremes of the keyboard. In 1969, an auction house in New York had in its catalog a manuscript by Chopin, consisting of only eight measures, with no title other than the making Lento cantabile (slow and songful). This musical fragment is indeed the theme of the middle section of the iconic Funeral March, the third movement of the sonata, suggesting that this theme was written earlier. Indeed, the Funeral March itself was written in 1837, when Chopin had no thoughts of incorporating it into a larger work. The first occasion the march was actually played at a funeral was, ironically, at the composer's own funeral at Paris' Madeleine Church, on October 30th, 1849. Anton Rubinstein's description of the sonata's final movement as, "*Night winds sweeping over the churchyard graves*", is so compelling that one struggles to find a better association with this remarkable and most original movement – tuneless and keyless – like disembodied spirits hovering over a desolate landscape.

Chopin's **Andante spianato and Grande Polonaise Brillante in E-flat major** (Op. 22) contains in the opening section one of his most beguiling melodies, one that shows the composer in his "*most suave, his most placid mood*" (Huneker). The polonaise is indeed brilliant, with beautiful, endlessly inventive figurations and ornaments, but filled with technical and musical hurdles, hurdles that our talented young artist will more than successfully and beautifully surmount.

Patrick May,
January 2022

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Vancouver classical music information in one place

BIOGRAPHY

BRUCE (XIAOYU) LIU

SUNDAY, FEB 20, 2022

2:00 pm Chan Centre

MONDAY, FEB 21, 2022

2:00 pm The Orpheum

Bruce Liu was brought to the world's attention in 2021, when he won the First Prize at the 18th Chopin International Piano Competition in Warsaw.

Following his competition's success, he immediately embarks on a world tour, appearing at Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, BOZAR Brussels, Tokyo Opera City, Sala São Paulo, Musikverein with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, the Mariinsky Orchestra under Valery Gergiev, Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, NHK Symphony Orchestra, and Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra. Past highlights include performance with ensembles such as the Cleveland Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as North-America tour with the China NCPA Orchestra.

His upcoming highlights include debut with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, U.S tour with Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, European tour with Montreal Symphony Orchestra, festival appearances at la Roque d'Anthéron, Rheingau, Riga Jurmala, Chopin and his Europe, Duszniki, and Argerich Festival at Teatro Colón.

His first album on Deutsche Grammophon label, featuring the winning performances from the Chopin Competition, received international acclaim including both the Critics' choice and Editor's choice from the Gramophone Magazine.

"*What we all have in common is our difference*", the young pianist likes to say. Born in Paris to Chinese parents, Bruce (Xiaoyu) Liu grew up in Montreal. His life has been steeped in cultural diversity, which has shaped his differences in attitude, personality and character. He draws on various sources of inspiration for his art: European refinement, Chinese millennial tradition, North American dynamism and openness. Having followed his artist path with optimism and a smile, he studied with Richard Raymond, and is currently a student of Dang Thai Son.



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