



The Vancouver
CHOPIN
SOCIETY

2023-2024 **SEASON**

WHERE WORDS FAIL
MUSIC SPEAKS

ANNA GENIUSHENE
Sunday, April 7, 2024
3 PM Vancouver Playhouse

MESSAGE FROM OUR ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Our concerts in 2024 begins with performance by Rafal Blechacz, a familiar visitor and an old friend of our society. This will be followed by the Vancouver debut of Anna Geniushene, and recitals by the legendary Yefim Bronfman and Canada's own Bruce Liu – surely a star-studded line-up of performances to greet the arrival of Spring!

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 highlight the importance of great music in our lives. We named our Society after the Polish composer Frederic Chopin because of the universal appeal of his music and his acknowledged reputation as one of the greatest composers for the keyboard.

Our society 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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ANNA GENIUSHENE

Sonata E flat major Op. 1
Two pieces Op. 1
Rondo in C minor, Op. 1
Wiegenlied, Op. 1
Variations on the name "Abegg"

Intermission

Sonata Op. 1
Sonata No. 1, Op. 1

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NOTES

Clementi: Sonata in E flat major, Op. 1, 1771

Today's program allows us to hear the first published works of seven different composers, bringing insight into the creative energy of youthful talent. Muzio Clementi (1752-1832) grew up in Rome and was trained in music from a young age. When he was fourteen years old, a traveller from England, Sir Peter Beckford, "bought Clementi of his father for 7 years," which meant he moved to rural England, and until he was twenty-one, in exchange for providing entertainment in the household, he was allowed to practice the harpsichord and study music on his own for many hours a day. He went on to gain wide recognition as a performer, composer, teacher, publisher and piano manufacturer, but the sonata we hear today was published when he was about nineteen years old, cloistered on an estate in the south of England. The sonata is in two movements, a cheerful *Allegro con comodo* followed by an elegant *Tempo di Minuetto*. There is no trace yet of the romantic expressiveness Clementi would develop—this is pure classicism, suitable for harpsichord or piano.

Tchaikovsky: Two pieces, Op. 1, 1867

At age nineteen, Tchaikovsky graduated from the Imperial School for Jurisprudence and embarked on a career as a civil servant. He had music training as a child, but his parents could not see how this could be a career for him. Three years later, the newly formed St. Petersburg Conservatory accepted him into its first class of students and gradually he found his way as a composer. This, his first published work, was issued while he was teaching at the new Moscow Conservatory a couple of years after completing his program in St. Petersburg. The *Scherzo à la russe* is based on a Russian folk tune that the composer heard sung by the gardeners while he was on vacation in Ukraine. The simple tune receives virtuosic transformations culminating in a spectacular coda. It was premiered by his friend and mentor in Moscow, Nikolai Rubenstein. The second piece, *Impromptu in E-flat minor*, was written earlier; its main idea, *Allegro furioso*, has dire triplet octaves framing a vision of serenity in the central episode.

Chopin: Rondo in C minor, Op. 1, 1825

Chopin wrote this Rondo when he was a fifteen-year-old high school student, as part of his after-school studies at the Warsaw Conservatory.

His first effort at an extended piece in classical form, it shows his mastery of the fashionable bravura style. Three statements of the sprightly main theme surround contrasting episodes in a not-entirely-regular scheme of themes (A BC A DB A). Schumann wrote of this piece, "a lady would say that it was very pretty, very piquant...but there is plenty of spirit in it and few difficulties."

Weinberg: Wiegenlied, Op. 1, 1935

Mieczysław Weinberg (1919-1996) grew up in a musical Polish family and attended the Warsaw Conservatory throughout his teenage years. He was sixteen when he published this little *Cradle Song* which shows hints of the originality that pleased his teachers. Months after his graduation from the Conservatory in 1939, the Nazi invasion meant that because he was Jewish, Weinberg had to flee for his life to Russia, where he was soon granted citizenship and where he spent the rest of his life. Shostakovich became his friend and supporter, and he became an important composer whose works included 22 symphonies and over 40 film scores.

Schumann: Variations on the Name "Abegg," Op. 1, 1830

No one has discovered the identity of the Countess Pauline von Abegg to whom Schumann dedicated this set of variations; she is surely one of the imaginary characters with which he peopled his journalistic reviews and piano pieces. The appeal of her name to the puzzle-loving composer is clear in the opening measures of the piece—it can be spelled out to form a musical motto: A B-flat E G G. This is the piece with which he chose to introduce himself as a composer at the age of twenty, with the statement of the Theme followed by three virtuosic Variations, an improvisatory *Cantabile*, and a *Finale alla Fantasia*. In a letter to his mother in 1831, Schumann wrote, "Is it not a consoling thought that this first leaf of my fancy that flutters into the ether may find its way to some sore heart, bringing balm to soothe its pain and heal its wound?"

Berg: Sonata, Op. 1, 1910

Although he had scant musical training in his childhood, Alban Berg (1885-1935) grew up in a cultured family and started writing songs when he was fifteen, the year his father died. A few years later, beginning in 1904, he decided to study music theory and composition with Arnold Schoenberg, and this relationship became pivotal in Berg's musical development.

Using Schoenberg's principal of developing variation, he worked out this one-movement piano sonata in which many aspects of the melodic and harmonic material are derived from the opening gestures. The movement uses traditional sonata form and still holds on to tonal resolutions, but we can hear Berg following his teacher in pushing at the boundaries of tonality. The romantic intensity of expression combined with the intellectual density of the writing make this an engrossing work from a composer who was just twenty-five years old when it was published.

Brahms: Sonata in C major, Op. 1, 1853

In May of 1853, twenty-year-old Brahms played this sonata for the great violinist Joachim and it changed his life. Joachim was so impressed by what he heard that he befriended and promoted the awkward blond boy from Hamburg, introducing him to leading patrons and musicians including Liszt and Robert and Clara Schumann. The technical demands of the sonata are high, with plenty of doublings in octaves and thirds, a reminder of the pianistic powers of the young artist.

The Sonata follows the traditional pattern of four movements, starting with a bold *Allegro* in sonata form (its opening measures pay tribute to Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata). The *Andante* begins with an old German song, "Stealthily the Moon Rises," played in the simplest way, and then magically transformed, beginning mysteriously in C minor but ending in warm C major. A fiery *Scherzo* in E minor blazes past, octaves roaring; its trio begins more lyrically in C major, then rises in passion to lead to the return of the Scherzo.

The Finale, *Allegro con fuoco*, is a free rondo (ABACACABA) whose theme is based on the opening idea of the first movement. Each appearance of the main theme is varied, building to a triumphant coda in the spirit of Beethoven.

Ruth Enns,
Vancouver Academy of Music
March 2024



Anna Geniushene
Piano

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BIOGRAPHY

Anna Geniushene's scheduled Vancouver debut had to be postponed because of the pandemic, but here she is now!

In 2022, Anna travelled to Fort Worth, Texas, swept the audience off its feet, caught the jury members' ears, and walked off with the silver medal of the Van Cliburn Piano Competition. Her magisterial performance of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 that closed the competition prompted Gramophone magazine to write, "I couldn't help but equate Anna Geniushene's seasoned pianism to Cliburn at his best."

Accolades ensued—Musical America named her Young Artist of the Month in July 2022 and Pianist magazine featured her on the cover in June 2023—and invitations from well-respected institutions followed. Recent and upcoming engagements are highlighted by debut recitals for Washington Performing Arts at the Kennedy Center, Wiener Konzerthaus, and the Bravo! Vail and Grand Teton Music Festivals; debut concerts at Tonhalle Zurich and Stadtcasino Basel, replacing Daniel Barenboim in recital; and collaborations with the Taipei and Lithuanian Symphony Orchestras, conductors Gábor Takács-Nagy, Eliahu Inbal, and Miguel Harth-Bedoya, and pianists Wu Han and Dmytro Choni.

Anna's newest album—a deeply personal project of lullabies spanning from John Field and Liszt to Dutilleux and Weinberg—is released in September 2023, and she is set to record a duo disc with her husband and frequent collaborator, pianist Lukas Geniušas, for release next year on the Alpha label. She joins the roster of the Bowers Program of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center in 2024–2027.

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