



The Vancouver  
**CHOPIN**  
SOCIETY

2023-2024 **SEASON**

WHERE WORDS FAIL  
**MUSIC SPEAKS**

**BRUCE LIU**  
Sunday, May 19, 2024  
3 PM Orpheum Theatre

# MESSAGE FROM OUR ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

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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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# BRUCE LIU

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**Piano Sonata in B minor Hob.XVI:32**  
**Piano Sonata No. 2 in B flat minor, Op. 35**  
**Variations, Op. 41**

**HAYDN**  
**CHOPIN**  
**KAPUSTIN**

*Intermission*

**Pieces de Clavecin**

- Les Tendres Plaintes
- Les Cyclopes
- Menuets I et II
- Les Sauvages
- La Poule
- Gavotte et six doubles

**RAMEAU**

**Piano Sonata No. 7**

**PROKOFIEV**

*We thank the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra for kindly allowing us to use their Steinway piano for this recital.*

*We acknowledge the financial support of  
The Province of British Columbia  
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# NOTES

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## Haydn: *Sonata in B minor, No. 47, Hob. XVI:32*

Allegro moderato

Menuet

Finale, Presto

In 1776 when he published this sonata, Haydn had spent about fifteen years working for the wealthy Esterhazy family and was in his mid-forties. The new fortepianos were becoming popular, but no doubt Haydn had in mind to write pieces that would also work on the older harpsichords and clavichords. His patron Prince Nicholas had recently become interested in mounting productions of comic operas, and this sonata adopts the light-hearted tone and sense of witty banter of comic opera of the time. The first movement sounds like someone in a bad mood, stomping around, but still in elegant courtly dress. In the development the dotted rhythms get quite insistent, and the movement ends emphatically, without getting in a better mood. The Menuet in B major has a soothing feminine character, setting in relief the Trio which is back in B minor and still gruff and grumpy. The Finale, like the first movement, is in sonata form. There is a sense that things are going comically awry, with insistent repeated notes, descending octaves and whirling right-hand figurations, culminating in a strong ending low in B minor.

## Chopin: *Piano Sonata No. 2 in B flat minor, Op. 35*

Grave... Doppio movimento

March funèbre

Scherzo

Presto

The famous funeral march which became the third movement of this sonata was written two years before the rest of the piece. In 1839, during Chopin's first summer at the country home of his partner George Sand, he added three sharply contrasted movements that prepare and follow it. Four opening measures of Grave begin with a dramatic plunging motive, and then with breathless urgency the first theme enters, introducing a collection of short motivic fragments. The soulful second theme begins with a soaring melody accompanied by triplets, a fleeting dream. The development builds to an agitated climax, working on the motives from the first theme. When the tonic key returns, we do not hear the expected first theme; instead, the ethereal second theme returns in B flat major, followed by a coda which quells for a moment the threats of the first theme.

The Scherzo is fiery and grim, set in relief by the quiet lyricism of its middle section. The feeling of disaster we are left with sets up the Funeral March which follows, the heart of the cycle, a ceremonial acknowledgement of grief relieved by happy memories or hopes for a better future in the trio. The last movement is a postlude to the march, a whirling perpetual motion with the hands always playing an octave apart. Chopin once said it showed the left and right hands gossiping after the March; Anton Rubenstein said it was like "night winds sweeping across churchyard graves."

## Kapustin: *Variations, Op. 41*

Nikolai Kapustin (1937-2020) was born in Ukraine and trained at the Moscow Conservatory, graduating in 1961. A jazz enthusiast from his teenage years, he went on to play piano in the Oleg Lundstrem Jazz Orchestra, touring across Russia from 1961-72. His compositions, including twenty piano sonatas and six piano concertos, combine elements of jazz improvisation with classical genre and form. He claimed not to be a real jazz pianist, because he was interested in the language of jazz but not in improvisation. He once said, "All my improvisations are written, of course, and they became much better; it improved them."

This set of Variations, completed in 1984, is based on a jazzed-up version of the opening bassoon solo of Stravinsky's ballet, *The Rite Of Spring* (which in turn was based on a Lithuanian folk song). The theme is followed by seven variations exploring styles ranging from swing to blues to bebop.

## Rameau: *Pièces de clavecin*

Les tendres plaintes (Tender complaints)

Les sauvages (The savages)

Les Cyclopes

La poule (The hen)

Menuets I et II

Gavotte et six doubles

Jean-Philippe Rameau (1683-1764) was lucky to live a long life; he was born two years before Bach, Handel and Domenico Scarlatti, but he outlived them all. It was not until he was age fifty that he became well-known as a composer, when he finally got the chance to write opera. The pieces we hear today are earlier works, two from his second collection of harpsichord pieces (1724) and the rest published in 1728, consisting of a mixture of dances and character pieces with fanciful titles.

*Les tendres plaintes* is a gentle rondeau, while *Les Cyclopes* depicts the one-eyed giants from Homer's *Odyssey* with extravagant gestures, athletic leaps and strong contrasts. Rameau was apparently inspired to write *Les sauvages* after seeing a pair of indigenous dancers from the wilds of Louisiana who were displayed at the Théâtre Italien in Paris in 1725.

*La poule* lovingly portrays the clucks and scratches and pecks of a domestic hen busy in the courtyard. The concluding gavotte is treated to variations which become increasingly complex, ending with a vigorous display of displacements in the left hand.

**Prokofiev: Sonata No. 7 in B-flat Major, Op. 83**

Allegro inquieto

Andante caloroso

Precipitato

In 1936, in the midst of the Stalin years, Prokofiev decided to move back home to Russia. His first years there were successful -- he was even allowed to travel abroad -- but by the winter of 1939-40, he was seriously affected by the control Stalin placed on Soviet artists. It was in this period, in the shadow of World War II, that he began the three sonatas which became known as the War Sonatas. In 1941, he left his family to live with the young writer Mira Mendelson and in spring of 1942, he completed this Sonata, the second of the set of three. It was premiered by Sviatoslav Richter in January 1943, shortly before Russia's success in defending Stalingrad from Hitler's army.

The first movement *Allegro inquieto* begins with a restless, motoric march in 6/8 time, dissonances and ostinatos insistent in the left hand. The chromatic second theme (Andantino) is marked "expressive and sad," but is soon left behind, as the tempo accelerates into an even more intense development. Briefly we hear the second theme once more, but again it is overwhelmed by the turbulent first theme.

A warm, singing theme in the baritone range opens the middle movement *Andante caloroso*, a melody which makes reference to a song by Schumann with the title "Wehmut" (Sadness). Its middle section becomes passionate and contrapuntal, but this recedes; we hear bells tolling and the haunting first theme returns. Then we are thrown into the frenzy of the finale *Precipitato*, a perpetual motion toccata in 7/8 time. Its blazing virtuosity, heavy dissonance and demonic ostinatos suggest a savage struggle resolving finally in victory.

**Ruth Enns,**

*Vancouver Academy of Music*

May 2024



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# BIOGRAPHY

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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. Since then he has toured the world, appearing at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, Vienna Konzerthaus, BOZAR Brussels, Tokyo Opera City, Sala São Paulo, and the Royal Festival Hall with the Philharmonia Orchestra. Orchestral appearances also include the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, and Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra.

In the 2022-23 season, Mr. Liu will appear in recital on the main stage of Carnegie Hall while orchestral appearances include performances with the Montreal Symphony, Toronto Symphony, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and Wiener Symphoniker at the Musikverein. His festival appearances include la Roque d'Anthéron, Klavier-Festival Ruhr, Rheingau, Edinburgh, Chopin and his Europe, Duszyni, and Gstaad Menuhin. Past highlights include performance with the Cleveland Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, and a tour of North America with the China NCPA Orchestra.

An exclusive recording artist with Deutsche Grammophon, Mr. Liu's first album featuring the winning performances from the Chopin Competition won a Fryderyk Award and received international acclaim including both the Critics' choice and Editor's choice in Gramophone Magazine, which proclaimed his debut disc as "simply one of the most distinguished Chopin recitals of recent years". They also included it in the list of Best classical albums of 2021, and described Mr. Liu's playing as "evoking Shura Cherkassky and Georges Cziffra in a single breath".

Born in Paris to Chinese parents, Bruce 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 long tradition, North American dynamism and openness. Following his artist path with optimism and a smile, his teachers include Richard Raymond and Dang Thai Son.

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