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CHOPIN
SOCIETY

2024-2025 **SEASON**

MUSIC IS AN OUTBURST OF
THE SOUL

~ Frederick Delius ~

KEVIN CHEN
Saturday, September 21, 2024
7:30 PM Vancouver Playhouse

MESSAGE FROM OUR ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

We begin our season with the debut of Canada's own Kevin Chen, who has been creating major sensations wherever he plays.

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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KEVIN CHEN

Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23

Polonaise-Fantaisie in A-flat Major, Op. 61

Variations on "Là ci darem la mano", Op. 2

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Intermission

Ballade No. 2 in B minor, S. 171

Erlkönig, S. 558 No. 4

**Années de pèlerinage II, Sonetto 104 del
Petrarca, S. 161 No. 5**

Réminiscences de Don Juan, S. 418

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*We acknowledge the financial support of
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NOTES

Chopin, Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23

Chopin apparently invented the instrumental ballad, inspired by popular ballad poetry and song which was often based on legendary tales that end in tragedy. Although he did not supply his four Ballades with programs, they have a narrative quality that lives up to the name. He finished this first Ballade when he was twenty-five years old, shortly after settling in Paris in part because of a revolution in his home country of Poland.

A mysterious recitative-like introduction precedes the presentation of the two main themes. While the first theme maintains its straightforward character in later appearances, the second undergoes radical transformations of harmony and figuration as the form unfolds, suggesting grand confrontations. Several developmental episodes suggest a great struggle which reaches a devastating catharsis in the final pages.

Chopin, Polonaise-Fantaisie in A-flat major, Op. 61

This is a late work of Chopin, published in 1846 as his relationship with Aurore Dudevant (better known by her pen name George Sand) was disintegrating and his tuberculosis worsened. The last of his polonaises, it is a kind of fantasy on the idea of a polonaise, a dance of the Polish nobility which Chopin used throughout his career for brilliant pieces with nationalistic sentiment.

The introduction opens with the arresting motive of a falling fourth in dotted rhythm, and then four slow arpeggios rise up the keyboard, like the story-teller's harp setting the stage for an epic tale. The rhythm of the dance is established in the left hand, while the right hand introduces the main theme. Continuous variation is the procedure, with complex harmony and the interplay of many voices. A free ternary form is created by having a lyrical middle section, resolving into a cadenza with double trills in both hands. As the first section returns, all is transformed with galloping octaves building to a grand climax.

Chopin, Variations on "La ci darem la mano" from Mozart's Don Giovanni, Op. 2

Chopin was seventeen years old and still attending Warsaw's High School for Music when he wrote these variations on Mozart's popular duet. After graduating in 1829, he took a quick trip to Vienna, where he had an opportunity to play these variations. It became the first work of his to be published outside his native Poland. Schumann came across this score in

1831, and it inspired him to write his first published review, which included the famous phrase, "Hats off, gentlemen, a genius!"

The variations follow a typical pattern for this sort of piece, designed to display the pianistic and compositional talents of the young musician. A slow introduction is followed by the theme and five variations of impressive originality and expressiveness. After the slow fifth variation, where the melody receives decorative arabesques, there is a spectacular Finale Alla Polacca, propelled by heroic polonaise rhythms.

Liszt, Ballade No. 2 in B minor, S. 171

After the death of Chopin in 1849, Liszt was caught up in writing a biography of Chopin and also explored composing in the genres of music most associated with Chopin, genres he had avoided earlier. This Ballade of 1853 continues with many of the features of the instrumental ballade as established by the Polish composer—it has the air of an old legend without an actual program supplied by the composer, and it has two main themes transformed in dramatic ways. Some people believe Liszt had in mind the Greek myth in which brave Leander swims across the ocean each night to spend time with his girlfriend Hero, until one night he is swept away in a storm. The first theme features rolling wave-like figurations, while the second could express the love which blossoms between the two. Written the same year as his Piano Sonata in the same key, this Ballade has come to be admired as among the composer's finest works.

Schubert-Liszt, Erlkönig, S. 558 No. 4

Liszt called Schubert "the most poetical composer who has ever lived." In the decade of 1838-47, years when he was travelling extensively as a virtuoso, Liszt made fifty-three transcriptions for solo piano of Schubert's Lieder, proof of the respect he had for the songs. "Erlkönig" sets a ballad poem by Goethe, describing a father and son galloping through a dark forest, the gait of the horse suggested by relentless triplet octaves. Unseen by the father, a ghostly Elf King tries to entice the boy to join him. As the son recoils in fear, he is touched by the King of the Elves, and by the time the riders reach their destination, the boy has died. Each character is delineated with distinctive music, with the father's voice low and reassuring, the son's high and anxious, and the Erlking at first alluring and then fearsome.

Kevin Chen
Piano

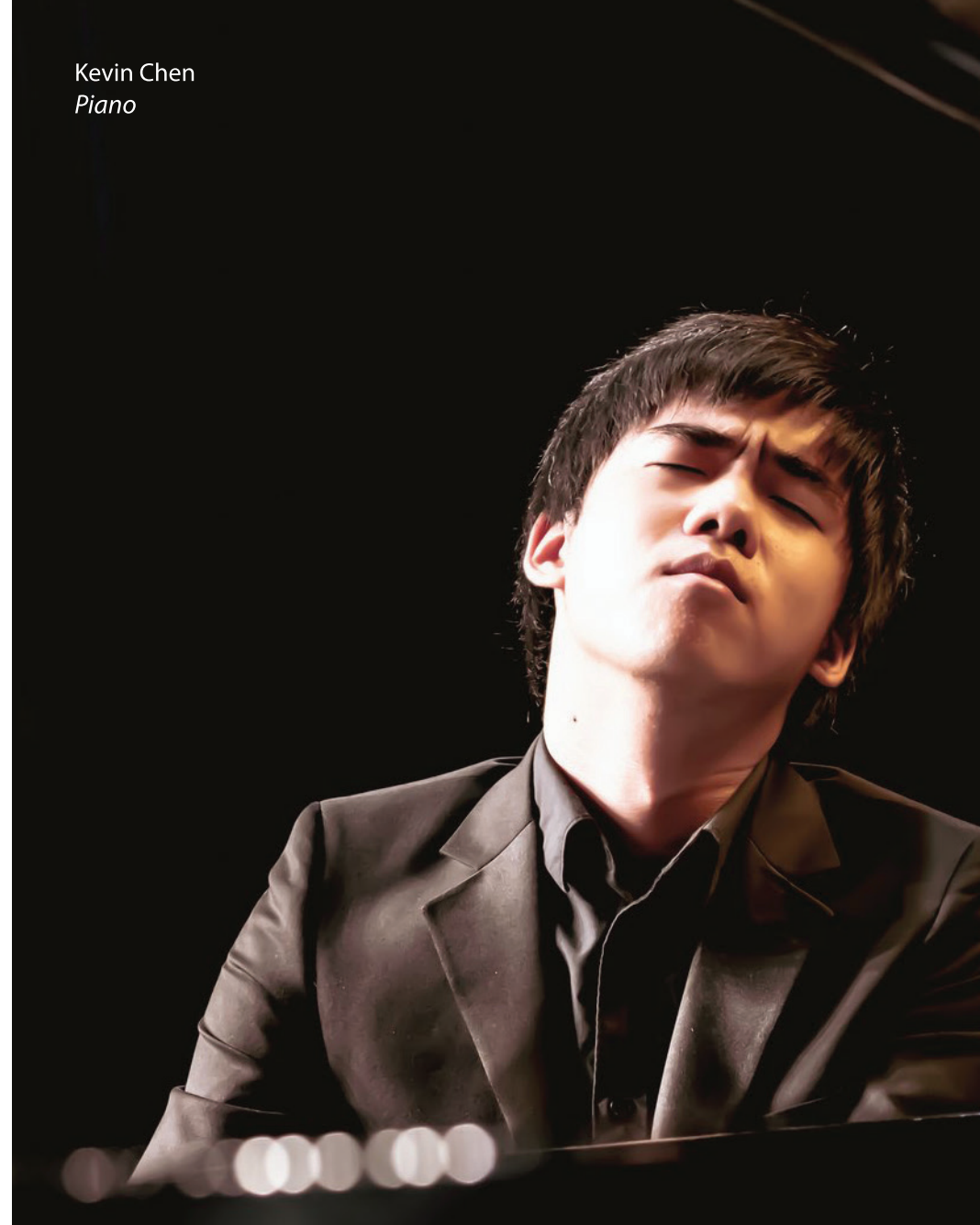
**Liszt, Sonetto 104 del Petrarca, from *Années de pèlerinage II*,
S. 161 No. 5**

Italy is the focus of the second volume of Liszt's three-part collection *Years of pilgrimage*, and it includes three pieces inspired by the sonnets of medieval poet Petrarch, who wrote 317 sonnets addressed to Laura, his ideal and distant beloved. Liszt first set Sonnet No. 104 as a song for voice and piano, later reworking it as a piano solo. The second piano version of 1858 became part of the Italian volume of the *Années suites* and has since become a favourite in the virtuoso repertory. The poem juxtaposes opposing images to invoke the poet's inner upheaval caused by his love for his lady: "I find no peace—yet have no will to war; . . . I hold nothing but embrace the whole earth." Liszt represents the beloved with a transcendent theme heard in various guises, heavenly and unreachable or full of passion.

Liszt, *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, S. 418

Writing instrumental solos based on themes from popular operas was common in the 19th century. Here we have Liszt's commemoration of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* based on three themes: the ominous music of the Commendatore predicting Don Juan's downfall, the seduction duet between the Don and the peasant girl Zerlina ("La ci darem la mano," which also attracted Chopin's attention), and Don Juan's Champagne aria. Liszt does a wonderful job of developing these themes into a showcase for the pianist which also rings true to the themes of the opera. The opening is grand and ominous, full of threat for the misbehaving Don. The duet begins with a clear differentiation of the low male voice in persuasive mode and the high female responses, showing how Zerlina is tempted by his advances. There are two variations of the duet, each more fantastical than the last and suggesting that this may be something of a ruthless pursuit rather than an innocent flirtation. The last theme is from Don Juan's party song, where he envisions wine flowing and women succumbing to his charms—the incredible virtuosic display adds a touch of darkness to the Don's braggadocio. As opera fantasies go, this is one of the most entertaining and technically challenging in the piano repertoire.

Ruth Enns,
Vancouver Academy of Music
September 2024



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BIOGRAPHY

Born in Calgary, Kevin has, in spite of his youthfulness, already triumphed in a string of major piano competitions, including 1st prize at the Liszt Competition in Budapest, 1st prize at the Mozart Competition in Lugano, 1st prize at the Hilton Head Competition, and 1st prize at the 17th Arthur Rubinstein Piano Competition.

In the summer of 2023, Kevin made his debut in Poland, performing at the prestigious Duszyni Festival as well as at the Chopin and His Europe Festival. His appearances at both festivals caused a major stir among music lovers, who declared that they had never heard piano playing of such genius.

Kevin has also appeared as concerto soloist with the Calgary and Edmonton symphony orchestras, and with the Minneapolis Orchestra. This multi-talented young artist is also an avid composer, with over 100 compositions to his credit, including symphonies and a piano concerto.

The Vancouver Chopin Society is pleased and proud to be presenting the Vancouver recital debut of this distinguished young Canadian artist.

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