



The Vancouver
CHOPIN
SOCIETY

2024-2025 **SEASON**

MUSIC IS AN OUTBURST OF
THE SOUL

~ Frederick Delius ~

DANG THAI SON

Sunday, April 13, 2025
3:00 PM Vancouver Playhouse

JJ JUN BIN BUI

SOPHIA LIU
KAI-MIN CHANG

MESSAGE FROM OUR ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Our season continues with appearance by Dang Thai Son and three distinguished young pianists who are already seasoned performers and winners at international competitions: J.J Jun Li Bui, Sophia Liu and Kai-Min Chang.

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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DANG THAI SON & THREE DISTINGUISHED YOUNG PIANISTS

JJ JUN LI BUI

Pavane pour une infante défunte
La Valse (version for piano solo)

RAVEL
RAVEL

SOPHIA LIU

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

CHOPIN

KAI-MIN CHANG

4 Klavierstücke, Op. 119

BRAHMS

Intermission

DANG THAI SON

Two Nocturnes

in C minor, Op. 48, No. 1

in C sharp minor, Op. posth.

CHOPIN

Barcarolle in F sharp major Op. 60

Four Waltzes:

in E major, Op. posth.

in E flat major, Op. posth.

in G flat major Op. 70 No. 1

in B minor Op. 69 No. 2

CHOPIN
CHOPIN

Scherzo No. 2 in B flat minor Op. 31

CHOPIN

We acknowledge the financial support of
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NOTES

Ravel, *Pavane pour une Infante défunte*

Dances of times past are a recurrent theme in Ravel's compositions. He once said his "Pavane for a Dead Princess" was an evocation of some long-ago little princess dancing at the Spanish court. The piano version was written in 1899, but it wasn't until he orchestrated it eleven years later that it became a big success.

Ravel, *La Valse*

Ravel had the idea of a piece which would be a tribute to the waltzes of Johann Strauss and the old Vienna as early as 1906. Events of World War I interrupted his work, so the score was not complete until 1920. The composer called it a choreographic poem, but ballet impresario Diaghilev's response when he heard it was, "it's a masterpiece but it isn't a ballet; it's a portrait of a ballet." Ravel claimed the setting was a ballroom scene at an Imperial Court about 1855, but the dancing is disrupted by fragmented themes and disturbing juxtapositions, building to an explosive climax in the final bars. The orchestral score was Ravel's main goal, but he also simultaneously completed versions for solo piano and for two pianos. The solo version is not often played because of its formidable technical demands.

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

Chopin was 17 years old and still attending Warsaw's High School for Music when he wrote these variations on Mozart's popular duet. Two years later, after graduating in 1829, he took a quick trip to Vienna, where he had an opportunity to play these variations. He wrote home, "Everyone clapped so loudly after each variation that I had difficulty hearing the orchestral tutti." 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. It begins with a slow introduction, followed by the theme and five variations which impressed Schumann with their 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.

Brahms, *Klavierstücke, Op. 119*

No. 1, Intermezzo in B minor, Adagio

No. 2, Intermezzo in E minor, Andantino un poco agitato

No. 3, Intermezzo in C major, Grazioso e giocoso

No. 4, Rhapsody in E-flat major, Allegro risoluto

The pieces of Op. 119 are Brahms' last works for piano, written as his lifelong friend Clara Schumann struggled with pain and illness. Now at age 74, Clara could only play the piano for short periods of time, and that was surely one reason for his interest in short character pieces around the year 1893. Upon receiving the B minor Intermezzo, Clara wrote, "You must have known how enthusiastic I should be when you were copying out that bittersweet piece which, for all its discords, is so wonderful. No, one actually revels in the discords, and, when playing them, wonders how the composer ever brought them to birth. Thank you for this new, magnificent gift." From the sadness of the first Intermezzo we move to the rather anxious E minor Intermezzo with its nostalgic middle section which transforms the theme into tender E major. The C major Intermezzo brings a moment of joy, while the final Rhapsody bursts forth with energetic resolve. Complex motivic relationships, innovative harmonies and contrapuntal voice leading can be discovered in all of four, each one a polished gem.

Chopin, *Two Nocturnes*

C minor, Op. 48, No. 1

C-sharp minor, Op. posth.

The C minor Nocturne from 1841 opens with a melancholy song which gives way to a slow chorale. This begins as an expression of comfort, but the chorale is interrupted by strident chromatic octaves which eventually overwhelm the texture; the first theme returns transformed with agitation and grief. The haunting C-sharp minor Lento comes from ten years earlier when the 21-year-old Chopin was alone in Vienna, hearing reports of battles with Russia coming from his Polish homeland. He mailed a copy

to his sister Ludwika, who would have recognized the quotations Chopin worked in from other compositions he had not yet published, including three from his F minor Piano Concerto. It remained unpublished until 1875.

Chopin, *Barcarolle in F-sharp major, Op. 60*

Although Chopin never travelled to Italy, his Barcarolle taps into a long tradition of Venetian boat songs. Completed in 1846 a few years before his death, it has been called the greatest of his nocturnes. Gently rocking left hand figuration evokes the motion of a slender gondola propelled through still water. The right hand enters with a melodic duet moving always in thirds and sixths, like a tender and passionate conversation between lovers. The long double line of melody develops continuously, supported by an array of chromatic harmonies.

Chopin, *Four Waltzes*

E major, Op. posth.

E-flat major, Op. posth.

G-flat major, Op. 70, No. 1

B minor, Op. 69, No. 2

Chopin published only eight waltzes during his lifetime, but he left many more in his posthumous papers and distributed as gifts among his friends and relatives (one of these was brought to light just last year). The four we hear today were all published well after he died, between 1855 and 1902. While they are neither long nor flashy, all exude the ineffable Chopin charm and elegance.

Chopin, *Scherzo No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 31*

The B-flat minor Scherzo of 1837 begins with a collection of strongly-contrasted motives—an ominous threat, a heroic protest, a quick scale, and then a melody propelled by rolling left hand figuration. The middle section is mostly lyrical, breaking into waltz-like figurations. After passing through a powerful development area, the opening material returns, building to a triumphant coda in D-flat major.

Ruth Enns,
Vancouver Academy of Music
March 2025

Dang Thai Son
Piano

JJ Jun Li Bui

Sophia Liu

Kai-Min Chang

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BIOGRAPHY

DANG THAI SON

In 1980, a relatively unknown pianist from Vietnam stunned the musical world by winning the gold medal at the 10th International Chopin Competition in Warsaw.

Since that eventful year, Dang Thai Son has become much sought after as recitalist, concerto soloist, competition adjudicator as well as master teacher. His students include some of today's most notable pianists, including Bruce Liu, Kate Liu, Eric Lu, Tony Yang, and JJ Bui.

Dang Thai Son has performed under the direction of conductors such as Sir Neville Marriner, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Pinchas Zukerman and Ivan Fischer. Since winning the Chopin Competition, he has maintained a close connection with Poland. In 2005, he was the only guest artist at the Opening Gala of the 15th International Chopin Competition. In 2018, Poland's Ministry of Culture awarded him the Gloria Arts Gold Medal for Merit to Culture.

A prolific recording artist with an extended discography, Dang has recorded for Deutsche Grammophon, Melodiya, Polskie Nagrania Muza, SONY, Analekta, Victor JVC, as well as the Fryderyk Chopin Institute.

JJ JUN LI BUI

Canadian-born pianist JJ Jun Li Bui won the 6th prize at the 18th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition at the age of 17, the youngest competitor in the competition.

He has also won prizes in the Beijing International Chopin Piano Competition for Young Pianists (2019), the Van Cliburn International Junior Piano Competition (2019), the Hanoi International Piano Competition (2018), and the Aarhus International Piano Competition (2017).

JJ has frequently performed recitals in North America, Asia, Europe, and South America. He has also played with orchestras such as the Warsaw National Philharmonic Orchestra, the China Guiyang Symphony Orchestra, the China Central Conservatory of Music Symphony Orchestra, the Hanoi Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Royal Conservatory of Music Academy Chamber Orchestra. JJ is currently pursuing his Bachelor's degree at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, under the tutelage of Dang Thai Son. He has previously studied at the Phil and Eli Taylor Performance Academy of the Royal Conservatory of Music, under Michael Berkovsky and Wang Li.

SOPHIA LIU

At just 16 years old, Canadian pianist Sophia Liu is quickly emerging as the most compelling pianist of her generation. Liu's "phenomenal virtuosity" (Bachtrack), coupled with her "poise and authority" (Boston Musical Intelligencer) and dynamic interpretations have captivated and mesmerised audiences worldwide.

Born in Shanghai, Liu was raised in Japan until moving to Montreal at age seven to study with Dang Thai Son. She made her debut with the Cleveland Orchestra and David Robertson in 2023.

Throughout the 2024/25 season, Liu appears at festivals and venues including the Festival International de Piano de La Roque d'Anthéron, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Fazioli Concert Hall, Société des Arts de Genève, International Chopin Piano Festival at Duszyni Zdrój, International Chopin and His Europe Festival in Warsaw, Nohant Festival Chopin, Festival La Grange de Meslay, Place des Arts Montreal, National Theater and Concert Hall Taipei and National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts-Weiweyung.

As a soloist, Liu made her debut with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Nice and Lionel Bringuier performing Saint-Saëns' Piano Concerto No.2 at La Folle Journée de Nantes in February 2025, a concert which was livestreamed on ARTE. In August 2025 she debuts with Orchestre national du Capitole de Toulouse performing Mozart's Piano Concerto No.22. Liu will return to Japan in October 2025 to make her concerto debut with the NHK Symphony Orchestra and Eva Ollikainen.

In 2025/26, Liu has been invited to perform recitals in Berlin, Lyon, Lille, Musashino, Nagoya, Seoul, Minneapolis, Portland and will return to La Folle Journée de Nantes. Previous recital highlights have included performances at Hyogo Prefectural Arts and Culture Center, Hanoi Opera House and Sala São Paulo.

Sophia Liu has won various prizes at international piano competitions, including First Prize in Category A at the 18th Ettlingen International Piano Competition, First Prize at the Thomas & Evon Cooper International Competition, and Second Prize, Youngest Semifinalist Prize and Audience Prize at the first edition of the Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli International Piano Competition. Her debut album released in 2024 features live recordings from her performances at the Michelangeli Competition.

KAI-MIN CHANG

Taiwanese pianist Kai-Min Chang recently won Fourth Prize as the youngest finalist at The Leeds International Piano Competition in 2024. He also received the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Society Award, which includes future collaborations with the orchestra.

Kai-Min first received worldwide attention at The 2021 Chopin International Competition in Warsaw. In 2023, he triumphed in winning the first Ljubljana Festival Piano Competition. He was then invited back to perform Brahms' second piano concerto with Maestro Yan Pascal Tortelier and The RTV Slovenia Symphony Orchestra at the opening concert of the Ljubljana Winter Festival in 2024.

After having performed with The Cleveland Orchestra at Severance Hall when Kai-Min was 17, he moved to the United States to study with Dang Thai Son in the Oberlin College and Conservatory. He is currently pursuing a Master's degree in the New England Conservatory of music.

2025 - 2026 SEASON

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