



The Vancouver
CHOPIN
SOCIETY

2026-2027 **SEASON**

After silence, that which come nearest,
To expressing the inexpressible is

MUSIC

~ Aldous Huxley ~

KEVIN CHEN

piano

Sunday, September 20, 2026

3:00 PM Vancouver Playhouse

MESSAGE FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

As we are still basking in the pride we felt when, for the third time in a row, a Canadian artist came home with a major prize at the International Chopin Competition in Warsaw. We welcome back pianist Kevin Chen, silver medalist from the 19th edition of the competition, and we congratulate him on this latest triumph.

We are excited that Kevin will be performing today on our newly acquired Steinway & Sons concert grand piano. We are certain that this investment will provide all our artists with the best possible piano experience for the coming decades.

For our 2026-2027 season, we again strive to present performances by seasoned concert artists as well as outstanding musicians 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 are 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

24 Préludes, Op. 28

CHOPIN

Intermission

Prélude in B Major, Op. 11, No. 11

Fantasy in B minor, Op. 28

Vers la flamme, Op. 72

Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este,

from *Années de pèlerinage III*, S. 163, No. 4

Les préludes (Symphonic poem), S. 97

(solo piano transcription by Kevin Chen)

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*We acknowledge the financial support of
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Chopin, 24 *Préludes*, Op. 28

Preludes have been a part of keyboard repertoire since at least the fifteenth century, but in this set of preludes, Chopin developed a new concept of expressive miniatures which was a model for future composers of piano preludes such as Rachmaninoff, Scriabin, Debussy and Shostakovich. It also shows the composer's connection to the past, referencing the masterful preludes and fugues of J.S. Bach written some hundred years earlier. The Preludes run through all twenty-four keys in circle-of-fifths order, starting with C major and its relative A minor, then moving up a fifth to G major and E minor and so on. Some of them show Bach's influence with respect to figuration and counterpoint; most are based on a single idea, establishing one mood and brought to a close with a striking cadence.

Chopin started working on them in Paris in 1836 when he was 26 years old, completing the set two years later during a vacation on the usually sunny island of Majorca, as the rain bucketed down outside his window. He dedicated the publication to Camille Pleyel, his friend and ally who shipped a piano out to the island so he could compose. As far as we know, Chopin never performed his Preludes as a set, the way modern performers usually do, nor did he use them as introductions to longer pieces in the same key, as pianists of his day often did. Typically, he would choose a small group of them or mix up a few with things like etudes and nocturnes.

The variety of expression is striking when they are heard as a set. The cycle starts with a quick *Agitato* in duple time, based on broken chord patterns reminiscent of Bach's first prelude in the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. The second Prelude is desolate and grim, winding its way through several keys to end in icy A minor. In D major, Chopin writes a flurry of sixteenth notes in *Allegro molto*, while its companion piece in B minor has a soulful left-hand melody like a cello solo. The A major Prelude is just sixteen measures long but is one of the most familiar. Brilliant *leggiero* runs sparkle down in the tenth Prelude in C-sharp minor. The Prelude in F-sharp major is a thoughtful *Lento* with sustained right-hand chords over a rolling barcarolle bass. Chopin's girlfriend George Sand wrote that No. 15, the "Raindrop" Prelude in D-flat major, was composed during a torrential storm and "was full of the raindrops resonating on the tiles of the monastery" where they were staying on Majorca (Chopin himself denied this). Next comes a fiery *Presto*, the right-hand figuration driven by leaping left hand broken chords. No. 17 is lyrical, in A-flat major, but by the end, its serene melody is overshadowed by the tolling of a low bass bell. The cycle ends passionately in D minor,

with spectacular flourishes rising and falling, resolving with a five-and-a-half octave plunge down the keyboard to three fateful low Ds.

Scriabin, Prélude in B Major, Op. 11, No. 11

Throughout his career Scriabin wrote preludes for the piano, producing about eighty-five of these short, poetic works in many styles and moods. Op. 11 was among his first published compositions, a set of twenty-four preludes with one in each key, written between 1888 and 1896, the time period in which he was first married and became a teacher at the Moscow Conservatory. The B major Prelude shows the influence of Chopin in its romantic sensibility, rolling left hand, singing right hand, middle-voice countermelodies and firm grasp of tonal harmony.

Scriabin, Fantasy in B minor, Op. 28

This is considered a middle-period work of Scriabin, written in 1900, a single movement in clear sonata form. Dramatic and technically challenging, the influences of Liszt and Wagner can be heard. The opening is brooding and unsettled, avoiding the tonic chord, dense with counterpoint, the left hand always dragging down. The second theme then sings out in D major, a beautiful melody, pure and high. The closing themes reinforce this key, becoming more passionate with thicker chords and faster tempo.

The development is based on sequences building up to great intensity and leading into the return of the tonic key and the main themes, now transformed with new figurations. The secondary themes return in heroic guise in B major, with hands sweeping swiftly over the keyboard in triumph. A coda follows this, falling back into B minor, combining the themes in fantasy style and ending with a grand apotheosis.

Scriabin, Vers la flamme, Op. 72

“Toward the Flame” (1914) is among the last pieces Scriabin wrote for piano; he played its premiere performance the month before his early death. He called it a tone poem for piano, borrowing Liszt’s term for his one-movement, programmatic orchestral pieces. The title suggests a mystical journey towards ecstasy or communion with the divine. Rather than being grounded in tonality, the harmonies circle around a source chord with two dissonant tritones, heard clearly at the beginning. Some of the chords are based on fourths, not just traditional stacked thirds. The piece builds by careful increments, starting with a few slow notes in quiet dynamics in the middle of the keyboard and gradually expanding outwards in range and louder in dynamics while densifying in texture until it reaches its transcendent climax.

Liszt, *Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este*, from *Années de pèlerinage III*, S. 163, No. 4

The spectacular renaissance water garden of the Villa d'Este in Tivoli, not far from Rome, is now a Unesco World Heritage site; it is built into a hillside and features hundreds of gravity-fed fountains, spouts, jets, falls and basins of water. Liszt was a guest at the villa a number of times in his later years and wrote this musical description of the water park in 1877, collecting it in the final volume of his Years of Travel series. About halfway through the shimmering splashes of the score, a quotation from the Gospel of John appears: *But the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up into eternal life*. At this point the music takes on a religious radiance with harp-like figuration and a more contemplative mood. The advanced harmonies and brilliant pictorial quality foreshadow later impressionist water portraits by composers such as Ravel and Debussy.

Liszt, *Les préludes*, S. 97 (solo piano transcription by Kevin Chen)

In the early 1850s, while he was working as a conductor in Weimar, Liszt developed a new orchestral genre, a piece in a single movement with references to a poem or painting that suggest its meaning. The title of this symphonic poem, *Les préludes*, refers to a long poem by Alphonse de Lamartine, but it was actually based on musical ideas from a choral piece Liszt had called *The Elements*; the poetic title was applied only after the orchestral score was complete.

"What else is life but a series of preludes to that unknown hymn, the first and solemn note of which is intoned by Death?" This line appears in a preface to the score, describing some poetic ideas that could be associated with the music. The main theme is transformed in four large sections to create a succession of moods. The first section describes the delights of love, which are interrupted by life's tempests. The calm serenity of nature provides temporary solace, before the call to combat leads to struggle and victory. Today we are privileged to hear Kevin Chen's original transcription of Liszt's symphonic poem.

Ruth Enns,
Douglas College
September 2026

KEVIN CHEN,
piano



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BIOGRAPHY

Canadian pianist Kevin Chen has quickly established himself as one of the most distinctive voices of his generation, praised for his poetic sensitivity, natural eloquence, and remarkable technical command.

Most recently, in October 2025, Kevin won the Second Prize at the 19th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw. His decision to perform the complete set of Chopin Études Op. 10 in the second stage drew wide attention and praise, with Polish critics calling his interpretation *"a complete musical story, not a show of virtuosity."*

He is also the First Prize winner of the Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition (Tel Aviv 2023), the Concours de Genève (2022), the Franz Liszt International Piano Competition (Budapest 2021), the Hilton Head International Piano Competition (2020), and the International Piano-e-Competition (Minneapolis 2019). His artistic maturity and individuality have been widely recognized by audiences and juries alike.

Kevin has appeared with major orchestras including the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Taipei Symphony Orchestra, Hungarian National Orchestra, Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, and Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra. He has been featured at international festivals such as La Roque d'Anthéron, Chopin and His Europe (Warsaw), and Duszynki-Zdrój, and has performed in leading venues including Carnegie Hall (New York), Berlin Philharmonie, Munich Prinzregententheater, St. John's Smith Square (London), and the Taipei National Concert Hall.

Born in Edmonton, Kevin began piano studies at the age of five and soon attracted national attention, winning first place at the Canadian Music Competition at eight. He was later named one of the CBC's "Top 30 Hot Canadian Classical Musicians Under 30" and one of Maclean's magazine's "100 Remarkable Canadians."

He currently studies at the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover with Professor Arie Vardi.

MESSAGE FROM OUR **PRESIDENT**

On Tuesday, July 7th, our contingent from Vancouver, along with pianist Charles Richard-Hamelin, our distinguished Artistic Director, and his very experienced piano technician, Marcel Lapointe, traveled to the Steinway & Sons factory in Queens, New York, to select a Model D concert grand piano.

Before the selection, a Steinway representative gave us a fascinating and detailed tour of the factory. One question we often get asked is, "Why does a Steinway piano cost so much?" Well, if you had seen the craftsmanship and meticulousness with which each piano is built, you would understand. As the tour progressed, we noticed how quiet the factory was. Other than the occasional sound of tools being wielded, there was no chitchat among workers. Everyone was a hundred percent focused on the task at hand, and every worker knew exactly what he or she was doing. Seeing the faces of the many skilled craftsman doing their work, we sense the evident pride that everyone obviously feels.

After the tour, we got down to the serious business of selecting the piano. Charles spent time playing on each of the five gleaming new Steinways that had been beautifully and meticulously prepared by their technician. When he got to the last of the five instruments, all of us heard something special in the sound. Charles spent a great deal of time playing on this instrument and, with a smile, declared that the search is over, that he had found the perfect instrument for us.

After lunch, Charles spent more time on the instrument, and treated us to a mini recital, including a complete performance of Schubert's Sonata in C minor. All of us were deeply moved to hear Charles' beautiful playing, and sensed that we had indeed found the right instrument for our Vancouver audience.

Please join us in welcoming this newest member of our family, Steinway & Sons Model D concert grand piano, serial number 630046.

We are able to acquire our own instrument only because of the generosity of individuals and foundations listed in this programme. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank you most sincerely.

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