HOROWITZ PIANO SERIES

Boris Berman, artistic director

Melvin Chen

Wednesday, January 24, 2024 | 7:30 pm
Morse Recital Hall in Sprague Memorial Hall

Yale SCHOOL OF MUSIC
José García-León, Dean
Program

Nikolai Medtner
1880–1951


Zihan Wu, MM ’25
b. 2001

Rhapsody of Hmong (2021)

Robert Schumann
1810–1856

Gesänge der Frühe, Op. 133
I. Im ruhigen Tempo
II. Belebt, nicht zu rasch
III. Lebhaft
IV. Bewegt
V. Im Anfange ruhiges, im Verlauf bewegtes Tempo

INTERMISSION

Edvard Grieg
1843–1907

Selections from Lyric Pieces
Arietta, Op. 12, No. 1
Berceuse, Op. 38, No. 1
Album Leaf, Op. 47, No. 2
Melody, Op. 47, No. 3
Scherzo, Op. 54, No. 5
Homesickness, Op. 57, No. 6
Homeward, Op. 62, No. 6
Grandmother’s Minuet, Op. 68, No. 2
At the Cradle, Op. 68, No. 5
Once Upon a Time, Op. 71, No. 1
Puck, Op. 71, No. 3
Remembrances, Op. 71, No. 7

As a courtesy to others, please silence all devices. Photography and recording of any kind is strictly prohibited. Please do not leave the hall during musical selections. Thank you.
A native of Tennessee, Dr. Melvin Chen has received acclaim for solo and chamber performances throughout the United States, Canada, and Asia. Chen's performances have been featured on radio and television stations around the world, including KBS television and radio in Korea, NHK television in Japan, and NPR in the United States.

As a Professor in the Practice of Piano, Chen teaches a studio of graduate and undergraduate piano students. In addition, he serves as Director of the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival/Yale Summer School of Music, where he also performs. Previously, Chen was Associate Director and on the piano faculty at the Bard College Conservatory of Music and served as Artistic Director of the chamber music program at the Hotchkiss School Summer Portals.

Chen earned a doctorate in chemistry from Harvard University and holds a double master's degree from the Juilliard School in piano and violin. He received his bachelor of science degree in chemistry and physics from Yale University, where he studied with Boris Berman, Paul Kantor, and Ida Kavafian.

Chen's notable solo recordings include Beethoven's “Diabelli” Variations (Bridge Records), which the American Record Guide described as “a classic,” piano music by Joan Tower (Naxos Records), and sonatas and other pianos works by Shostakovich (Bridge Records), among others.

MEDTNER
Patrick Campbell Jankowski

The Russian composer and pianist Nikolai Medtner, like Sergei Rachmaninoff, was among those who kept at least one foot planted in the “Romantic” idiom while many contemporaries had shifted toward modernism in the first few decades of the twentieth century. His harmonic and stylistic vocabulary, as you can hear in this single-movement sonata, is expansive: he is discernibly unconcerned with fitting into any one tradition. Much of Medtner’s music is distinctly Russian in subject and style, but here he favors cosmopolitanism. At times, you might imagine you were hearing some lost music of J. S. Bach; at others, that of Liszt, Chopin, or Scriabin. The sonata is virtuosic, but showmanship never overshadows melody. It ends as it begins, and themes recur clearly, regardless of where the music wanders. The “Sonata Reminiscenza” is likely Medtner’s most frequently performed work today, and is a gateway into the expanse of his music: hundreds of works for piano solo, voice, and chamber ensembles.

Rhapsody of Hmong
wu
Note by the composer

Rhapsody of Hmong is inspired by the traditional music of Chinese ethnic Hmong, and it is specific to their instrument Qeej. I intended to convey the expressive and narrative features of Qeej music in a pianistic way. To be more
specific, the interaction between folk-like tunes with the free and rhythmic section represents the communication between Hmong people and nature since, as one of the most ancient ethnicities, they have a strong belief in nature. This piece presents my imagination of Hmong that is evoked by the tune of Qeej, which, with gradual structural and musical development, suggests the story of the long migration history of Hmong. The contrast of modern and primitive is also implied in the music, presenting my concept of the ancient Hmong as viewed from a twenty-first-century perspective.

Gesänge der Frühe, Op. 133

Schumann

Patrick Campbell Jankowski

Over the course of his life, Robert Schumann’s music transformed significantly. In his youth, his compositions, particularly for the piano, were overtly experimental, boisterous, and often provocative. He married Clara Wieck, started a family, and sadly began to experience detrimental effects of mental illness, spending his final years in an asylum. These Songs of Dawn were composed just a few months before his attempted suicide and hospitalization; the five miniatures would become his final compositions for piano. Some have asserted that Schumann’s music seems to have “mellowed out” in later life, but that is far from saying that his creativity declined to detrimental effect. If anything, there is a sense of reflection in these works, and a great deal of ambiguity. There is no explicit program, nor direct connection to dawn. There may well be a poetic influence, but it is not stated directly as in his earlier work. Clara wrote in her diary that they were “completely original as always, but difficult to grasp.” From the peaceful, chorale-like first piece to a lively centerpiece through its reflective and enigmatic close, they take the listener through a gradual unfolding: harmonically rich, explorative, and quietly unpredictable.

Lyric Pieces

Grieg

Patrick Campbell Jankowski

Edvard Grieg’s Lyric Pieces were published in ten books, and composed for “popular consumption,” so to speak. They reflect his interest in folk music and programmatic elements, and his gift for writing a memorable melody. The first book, from which the Arietta is derived, was written around 1866 when the composer was 23. The last, which includes Remembrances, came nearly forty years later in 1901, with the rest of the pieces spanning the decades between. You might imagine the many changes that come with age and experience, and even the titles become ever more nostalgic and evocative in later books. However, a throughline of Norwegian folk-inspired melodies, dances, and subjects is clear from start to finish. A sweet and poignant close arrives in Remembrances, which recollects the elegant melody of the very first piece of the set, the Arietta, decades later.
About the Horowitz Piano Series

The Horowitz Recital Series was established in 2000 to honor the artistry of the great Ukrainian-American pianist Vladimir Horowitz (1903–1989), who chose to leave his papers to Yale upon his death in 1989. Today, Yale honors his legacy through the Horowitz Piano Series, which brings many of the world’s great keyboard artists to Yale and presents the distinguished pianists of the Yale faculty.

Emanuel Ax, Yefim Bronfman, and Radu Lupu are among the guest pianists who have performed at Yale. The series also presents pianists who are less known in the United States, such as Paul Lewis, Pierre Réach, and Mikhaïl Rudy.
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Richard Sonder & Susan Monserud

Gustave J. Stoeckel Circle
$50–$124
Laura Berry & Bernard Hulin
Eduardo Groisman
Susan Holahan
Jon Resnik

List as of December 6, 2023
Upcoming Events at YSM

JAN 26  Rossen Milano, guest conductor
        Yale Philharmonia
        7:30 p.m. | Woolsey Hall
        Tickets start at $13, Yale faculty/staff start at $9, Students free

JAN 28  Wendy Sharp & Friends
        Faculty Artist Series
        3 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
        Free admission

JAN 28  Bine Bryndorf, organ
        Institute of Sacred Music
        7:30 p.m. | Marquand Chapel
        Free admission

JAN 31  Hélène Grimaud, piano
        Horowitz Piano Series
        7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
        Tickets start at $31, Yale faculty/staff start at $23, Students start at $12

FEB 2   Linda Oh, double bass
        Ellington Jazz Series
        7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
        Tickets start at $26, Yale faculty/staff start at $19, Students start at $11

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