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SPRING CONCERTS 2022

Evgeny Kissin piano
Thursday April 28 2022

From the Artistic Director

Dear Friends:

We are thrilled to welcome Evgeny Kissin back to Vancouver for his fourth visit since his first appearance here at the Orpheum in September 1996.

Each and every one of his performances in Vancouver has been memorable. Aside from the undeniable fact that he is one of THE greatest pianists in the world, I remember incidents such as the gentleman who went backstage after Evgeny's first performance to enquire what his first encore was and where he could purchase the music. The answer was, "I don't know of any music. I just heard a pianist play this piece a while ago and I memorized it!"

We have so many people to thank for Evgeny's performance this evening: our season sponsor, the Peak Group of Companies; the Martha Lou Henley Charitable Foundation for sponsoring this evening's performance; as well as the City of Vancouver for its ongoing assistance.

And finally, we are grateful to all of our loyal donors and ticket buyers whose encouragement and support over the years has sustained us and enabled us to grow into an organization known and respected around the world.

Enjoy the concert.

Most sincerely,



Leila Getz, C.M., O.B.C., DFA



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The use of cellphones and recording devices is prohibited in the concert hall. Please take this opportunity to turn off all electronic devices.

音乐厅内禁止使用手机，禁止拍照，录音，录像。请观众关闭所有电子器材，感谢您的合作。

Program

Evgeny Kissin piano

Thursday, April 28, 2022 8:00 pm
Orpheum Theatre

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

**Tocatta and Fugue in D minor BWV 565
(arr. Tausig)**

[approx. 9 minutes]

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756-1791)

Adagio in B minor K. 540

[approx. 13 minutes]

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 31 in A-flat major Op. 110

Moderato cantabile molto espressivo

Allegro molto

Adagio ma non troppo

Fuga. Allegro ma non troppo

[approx. 23 minutes]

INTERMISSION

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)

Mazurka in B-flat major Op. 7 No. 1

Mazurka in G minor Op. 24 No. 1

Mazurka in C major Op. 24 No. 2

Mazurka in C minor Op. 30 No. 1

Mazurka in B minor Op. 30 No. 2

Mazurka in C major Op. 33 No. 3

Mazurka in B minor Op. 33 No. 4

[approx. 21 minutes]

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)

**Andante spianato and
Grande polonaise brillante Op. 22**

[approx. 14 minutes]

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Evgeny Kissin

Early Life & Education: Evgeny Kissin was born in Moscow in October 1971. He began to play by ear and improvise on the piano at the age of two. When he was six years old, he entered a special school for gifted children (the Moscow Gnessin School of Music) where he was a student of Anna Pavlovna Kantor, who has remained his only teacher. At the age of ten, he made his concerto debut playing Mozart's Piano Concerto K. 466 and gave his first solo recital in Moscow one year later. He came to international attention in March 1984 when, at the age of twelve, he performed Chopin's Piano Concertos 1 and 2 in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory.

This Season: During the 2021-2022 season, Evgeny Kissin has solo recital engagements in Paris, Vienna, Berlin, Basel, Madrid, and other European cities with a program featuring the music of Bach, Beethoven, and Chopin. He also returns to Asia for solo recitals in Japan and South Korea, as well as North America. Finally, Evgeny joins fellow pianist Sir András Schiff for a duo piano program comprising music by Mozart, Schumann, Smetana, and Dvořák.



Photo credit: Bette Marshall

Awards and Prizes: Evgeny Kissin received the Crystal Prize of the Osaka Symphony Hall for the Best Performance of the Year in 1986 (his first performance in Japan). In 1991, he received the Musician of the Year Prize from the Chigiana Academy of Music in Siena, Italy. He was a special guest at the 1992 Grammy Awards Ceremony, broadcast live to an audience estimated at over one billion, and three years later became Musical America's youngest Instrumentalist of the Year. Evgeny Kissin has been awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Music by the Manhattan School of Music, the Shostakovich Award (one of Russia's highest musical honours), an Honorary Membership of the Royal Academy of Music in London, and, most recently, an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of Hong Kong.

Did you know? Evgeny Kissin holds British and Israeli citizenship and resides in Prague. Kissin's extraordinary talent inspired Christopher Nupen's documentary film, *Evgeny Kissin: The Gift of Music*, which was released in 2000 on video and DVD by RCA Red Seal.

Evgeny Kissin appears by arrangement with IMG Artists New York.
Mr. Kissin records for Deutsche Grammophon.

Program Notes

Johann Sebastian Bach

Toccatà and Fugue in D minor BWV 565 (arr. Tausig)

While keyboard transcription and political debate might at first blush seem to be radically different fields of endeavour, one justly famous incident on American television stands emblematic of the risks run, in both disciplines, for those who would engage in rhetorical posturing.

In the vice-presidential debate of 1988, the Republican candidate, linguistically accident-prone Sen. Dan Quayle, in attempting to wrap himself in the glory of a martyred former president, made so bold as to cite John F. Kennedy as a model for his own political outlook, only to receive his comeuppance in a stinging riposte from his debate opponent, Sen. Lloyd Bentsen.

One might well imagine a similar exchange taking place across the centuries between Johann Sebastian Bach and those 19th-century virtuoso pianists daring to claim their own instrument as being in a direct line of succession from the 18th-century church organ and thus a worthy instrument on which to perform his mighty Toccata and Fugue in D minor BWV 565. To such pretenders to the throne of musical majesty Bach might well have replied: "I know the organ. The organ is my friend. The piano is no organ."

Whether they intuited such a rebuke or not, those attempting this feat of transcription have been legion. IMSLP, the International Music Score Library Project, lists no fewer than 11 transcriptions for piano solo, as well as arrangements for the wildest assortment of other instruments. Supporters of the underdog Jamaican bobsled team will no doubt have adopted the version for solo harmonica – seriously, there *is* one – as their sentimental favourite.

* * *

The appeal of this work is not hard to see. In its pairing of the two contrasting genres of *toccatà* and *fugue* it offers an opportunity to showcase both *brawn* and *brain*: brawn in the toccata's flashy passages of digital dexterity, and brain in the intellectual rigour of the fugue's contrapuntal complexity.

The work gained a popular 20th-century audience following its appearance in Walt Disney's *Fantasia* in 1940, and its reputation was further enhanced in the 1970s by its starring role in the Dionysian sonic orgies of superstar 20th-century organist Virgil Fox (1912-1980) celebrated in mega-venues with rock concert lighting under the heading "Heavy Organ".

Its arresting opening gesture, an inverted mordent followed by a dramatic scalar plunge down the space of a diminished 7th, is by now instantly recognizable, even by popular audiences with little knowledge of classical music. As is its fugue theme, a tick-tock *moto perpetuo* of 16ths outlining the notes of the D minor scale in alternation with a repeated drone tone on the dominant.

On the contemporary recital stage this work is performed by pianists in two well-known versions. The most popular is that of Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924), an adaptation that attempts to reproduce the architectural acoustic of an organ resounding within the vast echoing interior of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig where Bach worked.

The less-frequently-heard version that Mr. Kissin has chosen to play is by Carl Tausig (1841-1871), a student of Franz Liszt. Tausig, a leading proponent of the 'juggling chainsaws' school of pianism, created a much heftier, more note-heavy transcription, substantially thicker in sound than that of Busoni. Seeming to believe there was little point in writing one note where four notes would do, his version of the Bach score is more muscularly pianistic in conception. But his ear for the timbral possibilities of the piano is truly impressive. He paints the various sections of the score in a wide range of tone colours unique to his instrument, with their alternation imitating changes in timbral stops on the organ.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Adagio in B minor K. 540

Mozart's eerie *Adagio in B minor* (1788) is as remarkable for its choice of key as for its daring use of chromatic harmony. B minor was a key quite sparingly used by composers of the 18th and 19th centuries, and likely for very *practical* reasons. The simple act of modulating to the dominant – the key of F# major, with six sharps – would instantly turn the score into a furry forest of accidentals, eyebrow-knittingly difficult for performers to read, and tricky for orchestral players to tune.

B minor, then, became something of a 'spooky' key, evoking abnormal psychological states and foretelling dramatic, perhaps even tragic musical events to come. One has only to think of the Bach *B minor Mass*, the Liszt *Sonata in B minor*, the Chopin *B minor Scherzo* or Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6 (*Pathétique*) to get the idea. And in his *Adagio in B minor* K. 540 Mozart in no way shies away from these associations, but rather leans into them with a will.

A sense of drama is evident right from the start. After a solo melodic line in the right hand outlining the B minor triad, the first harmony chord we hear is a startling diminished 7th, one of many that will occur in the course of the work. What follows is a virtual compendium of the most emotionally expressive rhetorical devices used in the Classical era: plangent appoggiaturas, yearning suspensions, dramatic silences and sudden rapid contrasts of *forte* and *piano* dynamic levels.

Although composed in unimpeachably orthodox sonata form, with balanced symmetrical phrases and a motivically concentrated development section, the work seems to 'lurch' forward in short quasi-improvised bursts of jagged, instrumentally-conceived melody, as in a fantasia. The lovely operatic-style melodies that often grace the piano sonatas are nowhere to be found.

But most arresting to the ear are the chromatic harmonies used, especially in the development section, which seems to roam mysteriously around in tonal space. Pianist Vladimir Horowitz believed that in this work Mozart pointed the way to the harmonic language later used by Chopin, Wagner and Verdi. He points out how the opening of Mozart's *Adagio* parallels the mood, texture and simplicity of the *Prelude to La Traviata* and this fully justifies a Romantic style of performance for the work.

It will be most interesting to see if Evgeny Kissin agrees.

Ludwig van Beethoven

Piano Sonata No. 31 in A-flat major Op. 110

Beethoven's penultimate piano sonata is remarkable for the utter simplicity of its musical ideas and the directness with which they are expressed. The most obvious late-period features of this work are an extremely wide keyboard range and a melding of slow movement and finale into a continuous musico-dramatic unit.

The first movement, marked *con amabilità* (likably), opens with a tune one could well imagine accompanying a thoughtful walk in the forest. Simple as it is, it moves to become simpler still, passing into a songful melody-and-accompaniment texture before evaporating into a delicate pattern of harmonic lacework luxuriantly caressing the keyboard over a space of four octaves. It is this gracious pattern of figuration, almost Romantic in its warmth of tone and celebration of keyboard colouring, that most attracts the ear in this movement. Its complete absence from the central development section is amply compensated for when it rises richly up from the bass to inaugurate the return of the main theme in the recapitulation.

The second movement is one of Beethoven's most jocular scherzi. Its main section is based on two popular tunes of the time: the feline nativity ode *Unsa Kätz häd Katz'ln g'habt* (Our cat has had kittens) and the anti-hygienic anthem *Ich bin liederlich, du bist liederlich* (I'm so slovenly, you're so slovenly). Inspired thus in equal measure by the reproductive capacity of household pets and the haphazard grooming habits of the Austrian male, Beethoven lards his first section with rhythmic irregularities, dynamic surprises, dramatic pauses and other raw signifiers of loutish humour. The central section continues the mayhem with a series of tumble-down passages high in the register, rudely poked from time to time by off-beat accents.

The sonata concludes with a wonderfully vivid piece of musical theatre, rife with dramatic contrasts and unusual turning points in the musical action. Combining the traditional lyrical slow movement and triumphant finale, it opens with an evocation of the opera stage: a lonely solo voice pleads its case in a

halting recitative and then in an affecting lament of considerable intimacy over soothing and sympathetic triplet pulsations, set in the troubled key of A-flat minor.

But then, like a ray of Enlightenment sunshine announcing the triumph of Reason over Emotion, a three-voice fugue steps onto the stage, replacing the little sigh motives and rhythmic hesitations of the previous section with quietly confident, evenly spaced 4ths and 3rds, the same intervals used in the opening bars of the first movement.

All this Baroque counterpoint fails, however, to ward off a relapse into pathos as the heart-rending *arioso* returns, even more plangently whimpering than before, until Beethoven astonishes us with the ultimate *coup de théâtre*. In what could only be construed as a musical representation of strengthening psychological resolve, we hear the same major chord, repeated over and over, getting louder and louder, leading back to the fugue theme, now presented in inversion. A new mood of quiet triumph and victorious liberation spills over into increasingly elaborate fugal lacework until even the fugal pretence is dropped and the sonata concludes in a glorious songful strain of rejoicing expressed over five octaves of the keyboard.

Frédéric Chopin

Mazurkas Opp. 7, 24, 30 & 33

Chopin's mazurkas are stylized imitations of the folk dances of his native Poland and come in a wide variety of moods and tempi from the melancholy to the exuberant, moods and tempi often boldly juxtaposed in the same piece. They contain no actual folk tunes but rather use traditional melodic and rhythmic formulas to evoke the spirit of village life in the Polish countryside.

The mazurka is in triple metre with rhythmic emphasis 'fleeing' the downbeat in short notes to land instead on the second or third beats of the bar, where stomping or heel-clicking gestures often occurred in performance. Drone tones in the bass are sometimes used to imitate the bagpipes and melodies might be written in exotic scales using a raised fourth scale degree (e.g., F# in C major).

The melodies themselves tend to be "modular", constructed out of repeated one- and two-bar units of rhythm with recurring melodic motives. Repetition is a prominent feature of the genre, especially at the bar and phrase level.

Using these simple 'rustic' features of compositional design, however, Chopin manages to compose salon pieces of considerable elegance by creating melodies richly bejewelled with ornamentation, by subtly playing up ambiguity between duple and triple metrical groupings, and by his use of chromatic harmony.

The boisterous *Mazurka in B-flat major* Op. 7 No. 1 opens with the 'dotted downbeat' typical of many mazurkas. The wide leaps in its melody line seem at times to land on the 'wrong note', giving the impression of a drinking song sung by a tipsy reveller. The contrasting middle section, with its drone 5ths in the bass and oriental-sounding scale patterns in the treble, seems to come from another world.

Polish soulfulness is at the centre of the *Mazurka in G minor* Op. 24 No. 1, which unfolds in the manner of a daydream. Its reflective tone is given an Eastern European flavour by the augmented 2nds in its minor-mode melody line. Intimations of the dance do occur in passages in the major mode, but they are more nostalgic than joyous.

The *Mazurka in C major* Op. 24 No. 2 is a village celebration with many characters. First, we hear the band warming up in a series of I-V chords, with open 5ths in the bass, rocking back and forth to establish the key. Then a high whistling flute or fife chirps out a bird-call kind of tune answered by the band in four-part harmony. Lilted dance melodies sprout up in abundance, some in the Lydian mode (with a sharpened 4th note of the scale) until a radical change of key introduces a call-and-answer dance, in which phrases of delicate *piano* melody and *forte* stomping chords alternate in quick succession. Notable is how the left hand takes over the melody to lead back to the opening bird-call. This mazurka ends poetically in a long fade out, with the opening I-V chords rocking quietly into the distance.

The *Mazurka in C minor* Op. 30 No. 1 is another sadly reflective piece, one of the shortest of the group and perhaps the most enigmatic. The lack of strong downbeats in the opening section gives a kind of 'lost' feeling to this mazurka. Its alternation of *piano* and *forte* phrases bespeaks a kind of wavering indecision while the buzzing of bass drone tones throughout evokes the sound of village music-making. Remembered joy arrives in the middle section, but it is short-lived.

In a sign of how teasingly ambiguous is the rhythmic structure of these mazurkas, the French opera composer Giacomo Meyerbeer once got into a heated argument with Chopin over the metre of his *Mazurka in C major* Op. 30 No. 3. Meyerbeer said that it was in duple time, while Chopin insisted that it was in triple. However you hear it, this mazurka lives up to its performance indication, *Semplice* (simply). Innocent and unpretentious in mood, it sways throughout, but coloured with a faint tinge of melancholy. Its middle section features an amiable duet in 3rds and 6ths.

The *Mazurka in B minor* Op. 33 No. 4 is a dramatic work, full of bold contrasts of mood. Although marked *Mesto* (sadly), there is little sadness and considerable elegance in the catchy opening tune with its merrily twinkling mordents and Scotch snap phrase endings over a gently lilting oom-pah-pah accompaniment. This section is actually a duet in a call-and-response phrase structure with a baritone voice in the bass responding genially in the major mode to the treble's warbling call. But then, seemingly out of nowhere, comes a passionate outburst of pianistic bravura, until the opening duet returns. Another contrasting section occurs later in the form of an exquisitely charming and poised salon melody in the mazurka rhythm. Both of these contrasting episodes have a clearly defined mood and character. And yet the exact mood and character of the opening section, which acts as a refrain linking them together, remains till the end teasingly out of reach.

Frédéric Chopin

Andante spianato and Grande polonaise brillante Op. 22

In the early part of his career Chopin wrote a number of works for piano and orchestra designed to show off his skills as a pianist-composer. In addition to the two piano concertos these include the Variations on *La ci darem la mano* from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* Op. 2, a Fantasia on Polish Themes Op. 13 and a Rondo à la Krakowiak Op. 14. The last of these works, published in 1835, was his *Andante spianato and Grande polonaise brillante* Op. 22, now a staple of the repertoire most often performed in the version for solo piano.

The *Andante spianato* is a thing of rare beauty, entirely devoted to enchanting the ear with the soft glow of warm piano tone. The gently rippling accompaniment pattern laid down in the opening bars, an extended arpeggiation of the G major chord, makes clear the meaning of the unusual Italian indication *spianato* (smoothed out, level). Floating atop this smooth, level sonic surface comes a shy little melody yearning with appoggiaturas at the end of each phrase, a melody that is gradually enhanced with ever more elaborate forms of ornamentation and bathed in great washes of iridescent tone colour coming down from the highest reaches of the keyboard. A chordal 'trio' of sorts provides a brief pause for reflection before the smooth rippling texture of the opening returns, the right hand joining in now with the left, in the final section of the *Andante*.

The mood changes dramatically with the arrival of the Polonaise, which opens with a bombastic fanfare (originally played by the orchestra) leading to the entry of the proud and aristocratic polonaise theme. One could well imagine a *primo ballerino* leaping onto the stage to this music and doing any number of *grands jetés*. The theme is of course supported in the left-hand accompaniment by the polonaise's characteristic prancing rhythm: TUM tuh-tuh TUM-tum.

This is keyboard writing in the grand manner, meant to impress with its daring leaps, double trills, long 'fly-fishing-type' spun-out melodic extensions and its cascades of gazillions of notes chattering down from the high treble with every phrase response – a polonaise indeed both *grande* and *brillante*.

As he displayed so well in both of his piano concertos, Chopin is able to write melody lines spanning two and three octaves with no loss of musical coherence, and a considerable gain in *élan*. By dint of endless coy variations in the melodic line, he manages to project a musical personality in this polonaise both heroic and flirtatious – no mean feat.

And while the pose of bravado is generally maintained throughout, things do calm down a notch in the contrasting middle section in the minor mode, a smoky, brooding and soulful meditation on a new theme still pulsing with the polonaise rhythm. Unbridled joy returns with the reprise of the opening theme, leading to a spectacular coda in which ear-tickling piano figuration glitters up and down the keyboard like a birthday party of over-excited children running amok with sparklers in their hands, until finally a great swirling wave of arpeggios sweeps this *Grande polonaise brillante* to an equally grand and brilliant conclusion.

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COVID-19 has changed a great many things about the way in which we move through the world and interact with one another. Over the last couple of years, our supporters have sustained us in ways that we couldn't have imagined, and never have we been more grateful.

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There are many ways to support the VRS including making a philanthropic gift, sponsoring a concert and/or including us in your estate plans. If you would like more information, please contact us at 604.602.0363.

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