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WAVES!

SPRING CONCERTS 2022

Daniel Hsu piano  
Sunday May 15 2022

# From the Artistic Director

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Dear Friends:

Believe it or not, I initially discovered Daniel Hsu on YouTube. I stumbled upon a video of a recital he gave whilst still at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia and felt right away that he was a special talent.

Imagine my delight when I discovered that he had entered the 2017 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, and that I would have the opportunity to hear him live in front of an audience! He ended up with the Bronze Medal (he was only 19 at the time) and also took the prizes for the best performance of chamber music and the commissioned work.

I booked him soon after, and now finally, five years later, he makes his Canadian debut on the VRS stage.

We are most grateful to Victor for sponsoring Daniel's concert, and to our Season Sponsor, the Peak Group of Companies.

I would also like to acknowledge the tremendous support of our Next Generation Series Sponsor, the Estate of Edwina and Paul Heller, as well as RBC Foundation, the City of Vancouver, and our accommodation partner, the Westin Bayshore.

Enjoy the concert.

Sincerely,



Leila



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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

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THE EDWINA AND PAUL HELLER  
NEXT GENERATION SERIES

**Daniel Hsu**, piano

Sunday, May 15, 2022 3:00 pm  
Vancouver Playhouse

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ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

## **Kinderszenen Op. 15**

Von fremden Ländern und Menschen  
Curiose Geschichte  
Hasche-Mann  
Bittendes Kind  
Glückes genug  
Wichtige Begebenheit  
Träumerei  
Am Camin  
Ritter von Steckenpferd  
Fast zu ernst  
Fürchtenmachen  
Kind im Einschlummern  
Der Dichter spricht

[approx. 19 minutes]

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

## **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. 22 minutes]

INTERMISSION

FRANZ LISZT (1811-1886)

## **Sonata in B minor S. 178**

Lento assai - Allegro energico

[approx. 30 minutes]

# Daniel Hsu piano

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**Early Life & Education:** Daniel began taking piano lessons at age 6 with Larisa Kagan. He made his concerto debut with the Fremont Symphony Orchestra at age 8 and his recital debut at the Steinway Society of the Bay Area at age 9 before being accepted into the Curtis Institute of Music at the age of 10 along with his two older siblings. At Curtis, Daniel studied with Gary Graffman, Robert McDonald, and Eleanor Sokoloff, and graduated in spring 2019.

**Performances:** Recent and upcoming highlights include debuts with the Taiwan Symphony Orchestra with Hannu Lintu, Eugene Symphony with Francesco Lecce-Chong, and Jacksonville Symphony with Courtney Lewis, chamber tours with Curtis-on-Tour (Europe) and the Verona Quartet (United States), and recitals across the United States and Japan.

**Awards & Prizes:** Daniel captured the bronze medal and prizes for best performance of both the commissioned work and chamber music at the 2017 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. He is also a 2016 Gilmore Young Artist, first prize winner of the 2015 CAG Victor Elmaleh Competition, and bronze medallist of the 2015 Hamamatsu International Piano Competition.

**Recordings:** Decca Gold released Daniel's first album featuring live recordings from the Cliburn Competition of Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* and Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 31, Op. 110, as well as his award-winning performance of Marc-André Hamelin's Toccata on "L'homme armé".

**Did you know:** Daniel is a Marvel film buff and enjoys computer programming. He contributed to the creation of Workflow (now known as Siri Shortcuts), which won the 2015 Apple Design Award and was acquired by the tech giant in 2017.



Photo credit: Jeremy Enlow - The Cliburn

Daniel Hsu is represented by The Cliburn, Fort Worth, Texas

# Program Notes

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## Robert Schumann Kinderszenen Op. 15

The *character piece*, a short work expressing a single mood or illustrating an idea suggested by its titling, was a typical product of the Romantic era, and Robert Schumann was a major contributor to the genre. In 1838 he composed 30 such works, publishing 13 of them in a collection that he called *Kinderszenen* (Scenes from Childhood).

Explaining the title in a letter to his future wife Clara he wrote:

*Perhaps it was an echo of what you once said to me, that 'Sometimes I seemed like a child' ... You will enjoy them – though you will have to forget you are a virtuoso.*

And indeed the childlike simplicity and artlessness of these pieces is their main alluring feature. Schumann's *Kinderszenen* were not written *for* children, but rather for adults *about* children. They are imbued with a nostalgia for a time of life that in many ways represents the Romantic imagination itself, with its wide-eyed sense of wonder, its lack of preconceptions and acceptance of new experiences, its intuitive affinity with an inborn human nature lying beneath the acquired behaviours of 'civilized' adult life.

Here we find the poetic spirit of Schumann's compositional style in its purest unmediated form, without the framing artifice of literary devices such as the masked balls of the *Papillons* Op. 2 and *Carnaval* Op. 9 or the fictional League of David of the *Davidsbündlertänze* Op. 6. Schumann here is speaking through the voice of the universal childhood of every listener – which perhaps may explain why this was the first of his keyboard cycles to enjoy popular success.

Most of the pieces in this collection are in a kind of miniature three-part (ABA) form. Their melodies sit in the mid-range of the keyboard – the range of the human voice – and very few rise above a *piano* dynamic level, giving them a special kind of intimacy.

\* \* \*

Anyone who has entertained the pleasant thought of getting on a plane and travelling somewhere far away will identify with the daydreaming mood of *Von fremden Ländern und Menschen* (Of foreign lands and peoples). The melodic profile of its opening notes, a rising 6th and a four-note falling figure (B-G-F#-E-D), appears in several subsequent pieces as well, acting as a unifying motive for the cycle as a whole. Schumann's rippling arpeggiations in the mid-register and wide chord spacings in the left-hand accompaniment create an understated but quietly sonorous backdrop for this piece's carefree and eminently hummable melody.

In the perky dotted rhythms of *Curiose Gedichte* (A curious story) we hear Schumann's eternal fascination with turning every stirring emotion into some kind of a march. But into the bargain we also get pleasing little snatches of imitation and a multi-layered texture with many moving parts, especially active in the middle and lower voices.

The scene illustrated in *Hasche-Mann* (Catch me if you can) is as pictorial as keyboard music gets, with children musically portrayed as racing around in a game of Blind Man's Bluff, each 'tag' being indicated by a sudden *sforzando* on the keyboard.

*Bittendes Kind* (The pleading child) is full of coy questions and many a phrase that ends with a rising, questioning intonation. But are the questions answered? The last chord, a dominant 7th (with the 7th on top), leaves the issue hanging in the air.

*Glückes genug* (Happy enough) is a charming duet between left- and right-hand voices in close imitation – making the point that 'chumminess' is indistinguishable from happiness for a young child.

More march-like dotted rhythms greet us in *Wichtige Begebenheit* (An important event). But the repetition of the same phrase over and over again in various transpositions evokes the naïveté of a mock-serious parade of toddler soldiers with wooden swords and moustaches painted on with Magic Marker.

*Träumerei* (Reverie) is arguably Schumann's best-known composition, made justly famous as an encore piece by pianist Vladimir Horowitz and even sung in a choral version at the annual May 9th Victory Day commemoration of Russia's war dead. Its sequence of introspective moments is carried forward from thought to daydreaming thought by repeated re-harmonizations of the opening melodic phrase that never seem to tire in the ear.

Biedermeier coziness and contentment is the theme of *Am Camin* (At the fireplace), conveyed by its unpretentious melody and the gentle, cushiony off-beat pulses of its accompaniment.

The accenting of the last beat of every bar in the *Ritter von Steckenpferd* (Hobbyhorse knight) marks the hoof-fall and play-gallop of a young would-be warrior charging about his playroom.

The title of the following piece, *Fast zu ernst* (Almost too serious) is curiously vague. Every note of its serene right-hand melody, from start to finish, sings out on the off-beats, a 16th note out of phase with a metrically regular left-hand accompaniment of widely-spaced chordal arpeggiations.

*Fürchtenmachen* (Catching a fright) alternates passages of innocent thoughtfulness with episodes of frenetic panic and confused anxiety, a cautionary warning to the wandering child in us all that "if you go out in the woods at night, you're in for a big surprise."

After all this excitement, it starts getting towards nap-time for our *Kind im Einschlummern* (Child falling asleep) lulled into slumber by the hypnotic drowsy-making repetition of the same small motive, over and over. In a brilliant poetic touch, Schumann allows us to witness the moment that deep sleep finally arrives, when this piece in E minor ends on an A minor chord, without a final cadence.

Finally, we withdraw from the poetic world of childhood, to enter the adult mind of the poet who has been imagining it for us. *Der Dichter spricht* (The poet speaks) is a soliloquy of tender reflections offered up in broken phrases and plaintive recitative, an elegy reminding us, as did Wordsworth, that "the child is father of the man."

## Ludwig van Beethoven

### 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 continues in an affecting lament of considerable intimacy over soothing & 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.

## Franz Liszt

### Sonata in B minor S. 178

“This is nothing but sheer racket ... it’s really awful,” wrote pianist Clara Schumann on first hearing Liszt’s B minor Sonata, dedicated to her husband Robert. The pre-eminent Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick couldn’t have agreed more. Blending high dudgeon with feigned condolence, he scornfully sneered: “whoever has heard that, and finds it beautiful, is beyond help.” Suffice it to say, Liszt’s piano sonata was not welcomed into the canon with open arms, but something more akin to raised pitchforks.

The problem may well have been that in writing this sonata, completed in 1853, Liszt was going ‘against brand’. Long known for his *programmatic* works – each with a story to tell, and thus a built-in framework for interpretation – Liszt had shocked many in the musical world by composing a piece of *absolute* music, a work based purely on the interplay of abstract musical ideas. His Sonata in B Minor came across as an impenetrably dense musical hairball of intertwined motives, in a single-movement format that seemed to combine the characteristics of both a sonata-form movement (exposition, development, recapitulation) and the four-movement layout of a complete sonata (sonata allegro, slow movement, scherzo, finale). In this he was undoubtedly influenced by Schubert, whose *Wanderer Fantasy* with a similar unified design he had recently arranged in a version for piano and orchestra.

Binding Liszt’s sonata together is the process of *thematic transformation*, i.e., changing the character of musical themes while retaining their essential identity, their melodic outline. The multiple personalities of the *idée fixe* theme in Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique* is an early example, and Wagner’s use of *leitmotif* is a later development of the same technique. So, to follow what Liszt is doing in this sonata, you need to follow the four major themes he is shape-shifting as it proceeds.

The first three are spelled out on the first page of the score. The work opens with a pair of slow, descending scales of an exotic stamp. Then comes a forthright theme hammered out in double octaves beginning with a bold downward leap and ending with a diminished 7th arpeggio. Finally, the bass gruffly growls out a rascally little motive down low, rife with repeated notes.

The transformations begin immediately as these three themes spawn passage after varied passage of keyboard textures, all motivically interlinked, until a solemn, chorale-like fourth theme of slowly rising melody notes arrives over a pulsing carpet of sonorous chordal harmonies to complete the line-up.

In the course of this sonata the list of ‘transformations’ seems limitless. The gruff growling theme of repeated notes is transformed, among other things, into a dreamily delicious, Liebestraum-like lyrical melody in the ‘slow movement’ section. The bold theme in double octaves is tamed and brought to heel as the subject of

an extended fugato in the following 'scherzo'. And the chorale-like theme abandons its dignified 'churchy' solemnity and acquires major rhetorical muscle, elbowing its way into your eardrums as an important protagonist in the piece. Meanwhile, the slow descending scales that opened the work recur as boundary markers delineating major sectional divisions.

Liszt's B minor Sonata is now recognized as one of the most important keyboard compositions of the 19th century, and the very complexity of its structuring – the quality that caused so much antipathy at its first publication – is now the chief reason it is so widely admired.

Donald G. Gíslason 2022



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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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