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WINTER CONCERTS 2024

Ariel Lanyi piano  
Sunday March 3 2024

# From the Artistic Director

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Dear Friends:

We are delighted to welcome Ariel Lanyi in his Canadian debut.

In the time since we booked this engagement, this gifted young pianist has been awarded an Associateship of the Royal Academy of Music for his “significant contributions to the musical landscape”, and the Prix Serdang for his musical integrity and his probing mind.

Over the years, as Artistic Director of the VRS, I have learned two things:

1. Never try to persuade a musician to play something they don't want to play, and
2. When a musician I trust comes up with a program proposal, no matter how unusual, I never say “no”, which is why Ariel's program contains Max Reger's *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Bach*, Op. 81. It is a fascinating work, complex but not discordant, and I'm sure that in this pianist's hands it will be a remarkable experience.

The first half of Ariel's program includes Beethoven's remarkable Op. 109 Sonata and a group of Chopin Mazurkas and the Polonaise-Fantaisie.

I would like to thank our Season Sponsor, the Peak Group of Companies, The Martha Lou Henley Charitable Foundation, the Edwina and Paul Heller Fund at the Vancouver Foundation, and The RBC Emerging Artists Foundation.

We are also grateful to the City of Vancouver and the Government of British Columbia for their support.

Enjoy the performance.

Sincerely



Leila



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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

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**Ariel Lanyi, piano**

**Sunday, March 3, 2024 3:00 pm**

**Vancouver Playhouse**

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

**Sonata No. 30 in E major Op. 109**

Vivace

Prestissimo

Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo

(approx. 22 minutes)

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)

**Mazurkas Op. 59**

No. 1 in A minor

No. 2 in A-flat major

No. 3 in F# minor

(approx. 12 minutes)

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)

**Polonaise-Fantaisie in A-flat major Op. 61**

Allegro maestoso

(approx. 13 minutes)

INTERMISSION

MAX REGER (1873-1916)

**Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Bach Op. 81**

Andante - L'istesso tempo - Sempre espressivo  
ed assai legato - Grave assai - Vivace - Vivace -  
Allegro moderato - Adagio - Vivace - Grave e  
sempre molto espressivo - Poco vivace - Allegro  
agitato - Andante sostenuto - Vivace - Con moto -  
Fuge. Sostenuto

(approx. 32 minutes)

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# Ariel Lanyi piano

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**Early life & Education:** Born in Jerusalem in 1997, Ariel studied with Lea Agmon and Yuval Cohen. Based in London, he recently completed his studies at the Royal Academy of Music with Hamish Milne and Ian Fountain. He has received extensive tuition from eminent artists such as Robert Levin, Murray Perahia, Imogen Cooper, Leif Ove Andsnes, Steven Osborne and the late Leon Fleisher and Ivan Moravec.

**Performances:** As a soloist Ariel has appeared with orchestras in Israel, the UK, Argentina and the United States, with highlights including the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. Recital highlights include the deSingel Arts Centre in Antwerp (stepping in for Till Fellner) and Salle Cortot in Paris.



Photo credit: Kaupo Kikkas

An avid chamber musician, Ariel has collaborated with leading members of the Berlin Philharmonic and the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, as well as with eminent musicians such as Maria João Pires, Marina Piccinini, Charles Neidich and Torleif Thedéen. Ariel regularly appears in concert broadcasts on Israeli radio and television, as well as on Radio France, and has recorded live concerts for the Vancouver Recital Society and Banco de la República Colombia.

**This Season:** Recent highlights include a recording with the Mozarteumorchester Salzburg under the auspices of the Orpheum Stiftung as part of their Next Generation Mozart Soloist series. He gives recitals at the Kissinger Sommer, Fundação Juan March in Madrid, Wigmore Hall and Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Further afield, Ariel will take part in the Bendigo Chamber Music Festival in Australia, give concerts in the United States and undertake a tour of Colombia. In 2023 he was nominated as a Rising Star artist by Classic FM.

**Awards & Prizes:** In March 2023, Ariel Lanyi was honoured to receive the Prix Serdang, a Swiss prize awarded by the distinguished Austrian pianist Rudolf Buchbinder. Ariel won Third Prize (The Roslyn Lyons Bronze Medal) at the 2021 Leeds International Piano Competition, performing Brahms' Concerto No. 2 with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Andrew Manze in the finals. In the same year he was a grand prizewinner in the inaugural Young Classical Artists Trust (London) and Concert Artists Guild (New York) International Auditions. Other awards include First Prize at the 2018 Grand Prix Animato Competition in Paris and in the Dudley International Piano Competition, as well as a finalist award at the Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition.

Ariel Lanyi is represented by Concert Artists Guild, New York.

# Program Notes

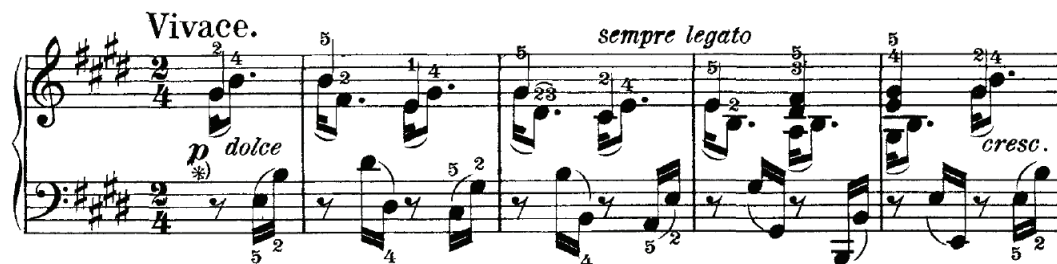
## Ludwig van Beethoven

### Sonata No. 30 in E major Op. 109

The Sonata in E major, Op. 109 is a product of Beethoven's last years. It is one of three sonatas composed between 1820 and 1822. Despite its three-movement structure, this sonata may be thought of in two halves. First comes a complementary pair of emotionally contrasting movements, both in sonata form, played together without a pause: the first a dreamy star-gazing fantasy in moderate tempo, the second a frighteningly focussed *agitato* of nightmarish intensity.

The emotional volatility of these two movements is balanced and resolved by the poised and serene set of variations which serves as the sonata's finale. These variations are based on a melody of such quiet dignity that they virtually erase all memory of the emotional wanderings of the previous movements.

The compression of form of which Beethoven is capable in his late works is evident in the first movement, the exposition of which is complete in a mere 16 bars. It opens with a melody buried within a delicate tracery of broken chord figuration that flutters innocently, as if floating suspended in the air.



It has barely breathed out its first two phrases and is moving to cadence when it is interrupted by a disorienting diminished seventh chord that leads nonetheless to a lovingly lyrical duet, *adagio espressivo*, between left and right hand.

But this second theme has time only to sing out a few bars itself before breaking out, cadenza-like, into a keyboard-spanning series of rapturous arpeggios and scale figures.



And then, the exposition is over...on the first page of the score.

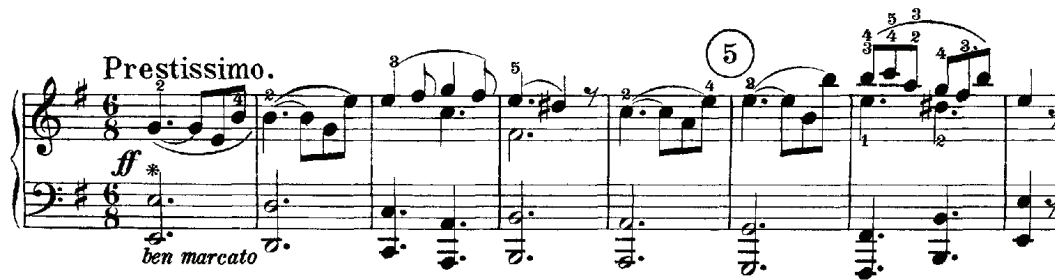
These three contrasting elements — fluttering broken-chord harmonies, lyric duet and keyboard-sprawling figuration — form the entire content of the movement, dominating its development, recapitulation and coda.

But it is the first element, the fluttering broken-chord harmonies, that Beethoven is obviously in love with. It pulses through the entire development, building to a climax for the return of the opening material, presented this time with the hands at the extreme ends of the keyboard. A coda then seems to merely drift to its conclusion, ebbing away rather than emphatically ending.

\* \* \*



All the more shocking, then, is the contrast between this improvisatory first movement in E major and the arrival of its evil twin, E minor, in the turbulent second movement that follows on without a pause.



The musical drama of this movement comes from the struggle between a frantically rising right-hand figure and a sternly descending passacaglia-like bass line. This is no scherzo: there is no peaceful, contrasting “trio” middle section. Rather, it is another sonata-form movement, and a highly unorthodox one at that, more concerned with continuous contrapuntal development than with the contrast between first and second subjects and their respective key centres.

Despite the breakneck pace, pervasive chromaticism serves to give a sharp edge of pathos to this movement’s sometimes-mysterious murmurings and frequent violent outbursts. Remarkable in this movement is the way in which Beethoven manages to express such extremes of emotional violence within a texture so starkly ruled by the strictures of imitative counterpoint.

\* \* \*

The last movement theme and variations ends this sonata in a spirit of peace and reconciliation, flecked at times with a tinge of religious ecstasy. And how could it not, given that the musical spirit of Johann Sebastian Bach has hovered over the sonata from its opening bars?

The broken-chord figuration of the opening movement looks back to similar homogeneously “patterned” textures in the preludes of Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*, and the movement’s cadenza-like exaltations of arpeggios find their correlative in similar outbursts of spiritual bravura in Bach’s organ toccatas. More explicit reference is made in the second movement, which is shot through with canons and passages in double counterpoint.

And now, in the concluding movement, we encounter a variation melody characterized by an almost religious serenity, with the rhythmic imprint of the sarabande (emphasizing the second beat of the bar) and harmonized with the melodically conceived bass line of a four-part Lutheran chorale.



The first variation is an Italian opera aria for keyboard, marked *Molto espressivo*, with an elegantly expressive melody and a clear bass-and-chord left-hand accompaniment.

Variation 2 lightens the texture with a hocket-style alternation of the hands that presents the harmonic and melodic outlines of the theme in interlocking stroboscopic flashes of melody.

Baroque instincts come to the surface in Variation 3, a vigorous exercise in two-voice double counterpoint, with the right and left hands regularly swapping melodies in the course of presenting the theme.

Variation 4 moves the time signature to 9/8 for a change of pace and thickens the texture to a full four imitative voices.

Beethoven’s own synthesis of old and new emerges in the final variation, which moves from a simple chordal statement of the theme to a gradual accumulation of rhythmic energy that finally emerges into a texture of whirling trills and flecks of melody flickering in the high register before a simple restatement of the original theme ends the sonata in a mood of spiritual peace.

## Frédéric Chopin

### Mazurkas Op. 59 Nos. 1-3

Chopin's mazurkas are stylized imitations of the folk dances of his native Poland, specifically those of the province of Mazovia near Warsaw. They come in a wide variety of moods and tempi, from the melancholy to the exuberant, with contrasting emotional states often boldly juxtaposed in the same work.

The mazurka is in triple metre but with rhythmic emphasis “fleeing” the downbeat to land instead on the second or third beat 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, richly bejewelled with ornamentation. 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 composes pieces of considerable elegance, especially in the way that he alternates between personal expression, tailored to the intimate setting of the salon, and rousing choruses with thumping rhythms that evoke the communal spirit of village dancing — all glued together harmonically by his abundant use of chromatic harmony.

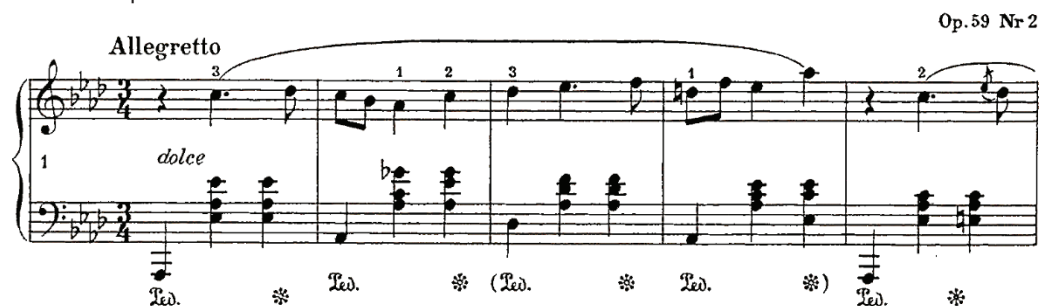
\* \* \*

The *Mazurka in A minor* features a restless, wandering theme with many leaps in the melody line.



A regular alternation of tone colours between minor and major creates quicksilver changes in mood between the forlorn and the hopeful. Its middle section in A major is gracious and youthfully buoyant, untroubled by the chromatic wanderings of the opening, and its mysterious ending is utterly delicious.

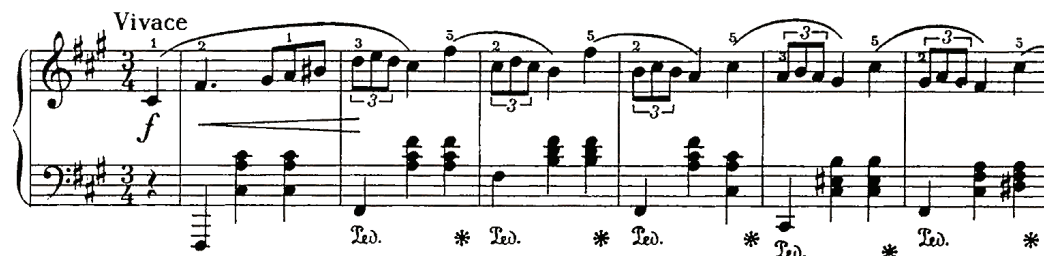
The *Mazurka in A-flat major* appears to have been composed in response to a request from Felix Mendelssohn for a short piece for his wife.



As such, it avoids any form of melancholic brooding in favour of a waltz-like tone throughout, with a near-constant oom-pah-pah left-hand accompaniment cheering on the ballroom atmosphere.

The final *Mazurka in F# minor* opens with a stern and dignified call to arms and a polonaise-like ceremonial tone that simply melts away at the arrival of the coy and coquettish middle section in F# major.

Op. 59 Nr 3



Not even the return of the F# minor opening can resist the trio's charms, and this mazurka ends with a polite curtsy in F# major.

## Frédéric Chopin

### Polonaise-Fantaisie in A-flat major Op. 61

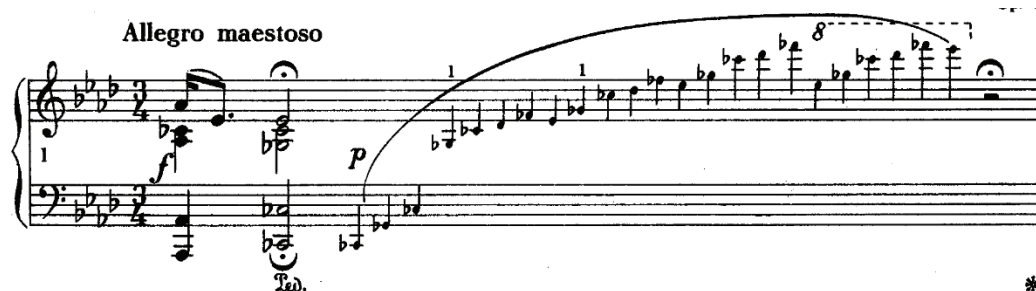
Chopin's *Polonaise-Fantaisie*, written in 1846, was the composer's last extended work. It is indebted to the *polonaise* for its metre, its large-scale ternary (A-B-A) form and for the characteristic polonaise rhythm that frequently animates its accompaniments.



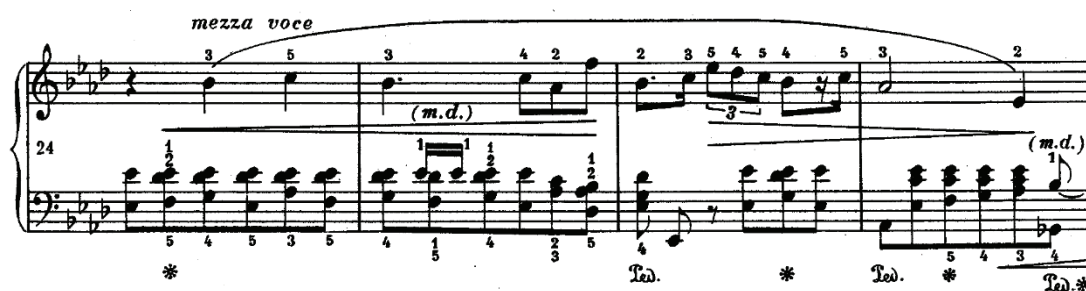
Its basic operating principle, however, is that of rhapsodic improvisation and continuous variation — i.e., *fantaisie*. As such, it lacks the fixity of phrase lengths and literal repetition of material in sections that normally characterize dance genres like the polonaise.

Chopin's idiosyncratic way of writing for the keyboard is much in evidence in this work. The score features left-hand countermelodies in abundance, scintillating passagework in the high treble, shimmering multiple trills between the hands and a pervasive use of chromatic harmony that facilitates sudden harmonic shifts and modulations.

This work might best be thought of as a *dream* of a polonaise, and this dreamlike quality is established from the opening bars in a series of wide-ranging explorations of piano tone extending over five octaves.



This introduction then continues on with murmurs and motivic hints of the principal polonaise theme to come.





This theme, and others of a similar stamp, are worked and re-worked in improvisatory style until the arrival of the contrasting middle section.



The final section sees the return of the opening dreamlike arpeggios and builds to an apotheosis of the principal polonaise theme, very much like the coda of Chopin's Ballade No. 3 in A-flat, Op. 47, with pulsing chordal harmonies in the right hand singing out over a rumble of octaves in the left.



This is Chopin writing in the pianistic “grand style” to end this “dream” of a piece with the heroic resolve befitting a polonaise.

## Max Reger

### Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Bach Op. 81

The Bach revival of the 19<sup>th</sup> century began with a performance of the *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829 conducted by the 19-year-old Mendelssohn and was furthered by the editions published by the Bach-Gesellschaft, which was founded in 1850. By the end of the century, Bach had become more than merely an object of academic study but an inspiration for public performances before a contemporary audience — with a few “modifications,” of course, to “update” him to meet the expectations of the time.

Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924) dressed up Bach as a creature of the Romantic era, a lonely heroic figure sitting on his organ bench filling a vast cathedral with the booming sound of his creations. His transcriptions thickened Bach's scores to imitate that immense sound on the concert grand piano.

Max Reger (1873-1916) was both more conservative and more progressive than Busoni. Considered a forerunner of Schoenberg, he admired the Baroque forms and procedures of Bach but used them to create new works written with the more “modern” type of chromatic harmony being used by Liszt and Wagner.

His epic *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Bach*, Op. 81, was written in 1904. Its theme is taken from the instrumental introduction to a contralto-tenor duet from Bach's Cantata No. 128, *Auf Christi Himmelfahrt allein*.

#### 4. Aria



Reger finds the spare, two-voice texture of the original unsuitable for the keyboard, so in his version he fills in the harmonies implied by the figured bass.

**Andante** (♩ = 66)<sup>1)</sup> (*quasi Adagio*)  
*sempre assai legato, la melodia sempre dolce (quasi Oboe solo)*

Max Reger, op. 81

In his first two variations he does little but wrap the theme in comfy contrapuntal swaddling clothes, with the theme easily recognizable. But beginning with Variation 3, his chromatic leanings become clear, and from this point on he bases his variations on only certain elements of the theme rather than the theme as a whole.

And it is hair-raising passages such as this, from Variation 3, that explain why this work has been so seldom performed and, more seldom still, recorded:

Some have opined that Reger's training as an organist may well have accustomed him to a level of sound that the piano, even the concert grand, is unable to deliver.

While Reger takes care to alternate between solemn and virtuosic variations for the sake of variety, the burden on the pianist only increases as the work goes on, with some variations, such as Variation 6, sounding very much like concert études.

**Allegro moderato** (♩ = 100 - 108)

While his slower variations allow some rest for the ear volume-wise, their very harmonic complexity often makes them into a bewildering labyrinth of voice-leading that is difficult to follow, as in Variation 12:

There are 14 variations, after which comes a double fugue with a chromatic opening fugue subject that seems to bear little relation to the original theme:

Fuge  
(254) **Sostenuto** (♩ = 68)

*pp (una corda) sempre dolcissimo  
espressivo*

*sempre ben legato*

M. R. 10

About halfway through, a second, peppier fugue subject in 16<sup>th</sup> notes is introduced:

*a tempo* (♩ = 84-96)

*pp*

334

And of course, what aspiring contrapuntist worth his J.S. Bach coffee mug could resist combining these two themes:

*ben marcato  
il tema*

360

*ff*

*ben marcato  
il tema*

The *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* says that Max Reger's musical ideals were "architectonic beauty, melodic and imitative magic," buttressed by "intellectual content."

His *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Bach* appear to have fulfilled that aim.

Program notes by  
Donald G. Gíslason 2024

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