



20²⁵₂₆
SEASON

JOSE FRANCH-BALLESTER, clarinet
DAVID FUNG, piano
Sunday, April 12, 2026
VANCOUVER PLAYHOUSE

From the Artistic Director

Dear Friends:

Clarinetist Jose Franch-Ballester and pianist David Fung are no strangers to the Vancouver music scene. Both are on the Faculty of Music at UBC, and have played many concerts there and on the Sunshine Coast. Perhaps, however, I can get away with saying that this performance marks their Vancouver Playhouse debut! And, even more interestingly, this is only the fourth time in our 46 years of presenting that we have featured a clarinetist in our main series, so this is a rare offering.

We are thrilled to present these two consummate musicians who, as you will hear (and see), love to play together. Their program is an interesting mix of works from the Romantic masters Schumann and Brahms to the contemporary Jörg Widmann and Dorothy Chang.

As always, I would like to thank our Series Sponsor, the Peak Group of Companies, and today's concert sponsor, the VRS Board of Directors, for making this performance possible.

We are grateful to the City of Vancouver for its support through its grants-in-lieu-of-rent program.

Have a wonderful afternoon.

Sincerely



Leila Getz



CELLPHONES

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

Jose Franch-Ballester, clarinet
David Fung, piano

Sunday, April 12, 2026
Vancouver Playhouse

DOROTHY CHANG (b. 1970)
Afterlight for Clarinet and Piano

(approx. 8 minutes)

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)
Sonata in F minor for Clarinet and Piano Op. 120 No. 1

Allegro appassionato
Andante un poco adagio
Allegretto grazioso
Vivace

(approx. 24 minutes)

INTERMISSION

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–1856)
Fantasiestücke Op. 73

Zart und mit Ausdruck
Lebhaft, leicht
Rasch und mit Feuer

(approx. 11 minutes)

JÖRG WIDMANN (b. 1973)
Five Fragments for Clarinet and Piano

- I. Äussert langsam
- II. Presto possibile
- III. Sehr langsam, frei
- IV. Energiegeladen, sehr schnell
- V. Langsam beginnen

(approx. 8 minutes)

FRANCIS POULENC (1899–1963)
Sonata for Clarinet and Piano

Allegro trisamente
Romanza
Allegro con fuoco

(approx. 14 minutes)

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Jose Franch-Ballester, clarinet

Early Life & Education: Born in Moncofa, Spain into a family of clarinetists and Zarzuela singers, Jose began clarinet lessons at the age of nine with Venancio Rius and graduated from the Joaquin Rodrigo Music Conservatory in Valencia. In 2005 he earned a bachelor's degree from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where he studied with Donald Montanaro. Jose's mentors also include Ricardo Morales, principal clarinet in the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Performances: Jose is the artistic director of miXt, an ensemble of award-winning soloists from the Young Concert Artists roster that he founded in the 2012-13 season. Performing in a variety of configurations, miXt made its New York and Washington debuts in YCA's series at Merkin Hall and the Kennedy Center. His instrumental collaborators have also included the American, St. Lawrence, Jupiter and Modigliani string quartets.

Jose's commitment to new music has led him to commission and work with such contemporary composers as Kenji Bunch, Paul Schoenfield, Edgar Meyer, William Bolcom, George Tsontakis, Andrés Valero-Castells, Óscar Navarro and Huang Ruo. He has also been a dedicated music educator, developing new audiences through countless educational concerts and workshops for young people and community audiences.

Recordings: Jose's recordings include a Deutsche Grammophon CD of Bartók's *Contrasts* with members of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. *Jose Franch-Ballester & Friends*, a CD of chamber music released by iTinerant Classics in 2011, includes the premiere recording of Óscar Navarro's *Creation* and works by Brahms, Stravinsky and Paul Schoenfield. Jose can also be heard on *Piazzolla Masterworks*, a CD recorded with cellist Young Song and pianist Pablo Zinger that contains works by Astor Piazzolla.

Awards & Prizes: Jose was the recipient of a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant in 2008 and winner of both the Young Concert Artists and Astral Artists auditions. In 2010 he was awarded the Midem Prize for "Outstanding Young Artist."

Did you know: Jose is the founder of Jose Franch-Ballester & i amics (and friends), a series of concerts in which young musicians from all over the world are presented in his hometown of Moncofa and throughout the Valencia area.



Photo credit: May Circus

David Fung, piano

Early Life & Education: The first piano graduate of the prestigious Colburn Conservatory in Los Angeles, David also studied at the Hannover Hochschule für Musik and the Yale School of Music. His teachers include Claude Frank, Peter Frankl, Margaret Hair, John Perry and Arie Vardi. David is on faculty at the University of British Columbia and curates the Spirio Piano Series at the Chan Centre in Vancouver. He has previously taught piano and chamber music at Yale University and served as associate professor at the University of Georgia.

Performances: In 2025, David gave the first major United States performance of Grażyna Bacewicz's Piano Concerto (1949) with the California Symphony and Donato Cabrera. Highlights of the current season include the world premiere of Patrick Carrabré's Piano Concerto: *A Guest on These Lands* (2024) and Beethoven's *Choral Fantasy* with the Kamloops Symphony alongside engagements with Baltimore Chamber Orchestra, Fort Wayne Philharmonic, Orchestra Wellington and the OK Mozart Festival. He returns to the Northern Lights Festival as soloist and conductor in performances of Bach's complete *Brandenburg Concertos*. Festival and recital appearances this season include performances at the Anchorage, Arizona Friends of Chamber Music, Asheville, Bridgehampton, Borromeo, Calgary Pro Musica, Chamber Music Hawaii, Grand Canyon, and Savannah Music Festivals, as well as at Lee University, Northern Arizona University, UCLA and Wofford College.

Recordings: In August 2020, the Steinway and Sons Label released David's *Transcendent Beethoven*, which was featured on Apple Music's *Best of Beethoven*, a list of outstanding releases of the composer during the 250th anniversary of his birth. The album follows the label's acclaimed 2019 release of David's first installment of the complete Mozart sonatas.

Awards & Prizes: David garnered international attention as a laureate of the Queen Elisabeth International Music Competition in Brussels and the Arthur Rubinstein Piano International Master Competition in Tel Aviv. In Tel Aviv, he was further distinguished by the Chamber Music and Mozart Prizes.



Photo credit: Jose Franch-Ballester

Program Notes

Dorothy Chang Afterlight

Dorothy Chang was born in Winfield, Illinois in 1970, and after being educated in the United States, she joined the faculty of the UBC School of Music where she has taught and composed since 2003. Her catalogue of over 80 compositions features chamber and orchestral works as well as stage music for theatre and dance ensembles, often scored for a mix of Chinese and Western instruments.

Afterlight was composed in 2018, originally for soprano saxophone and piano and then adapted for clarinet. The compositional impulse for the work is encapsulated in the title, which she says refers

... to my own interpretation of the word *afterlight*: that of the “light” that remains when someone passes, in the form of memories, shared experiences, a sense of presence even when someone is gone.

This feeling of “lingering memory” is evoked in the evanescent sparkle of the piano’s atonal arpeggiations in the high register that open the work.

AFTERLIGHT

Dorothy Chang

Delicate and Shimmering ♩ = 60

The image shows the first system of a musical score for 'Afterlight'. It consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. It features a melodic line with a long, sweeping slur over several measures. The middle staff is a treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a 4/4 time signature, containing arpeggiated chords. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of two flats and a 4/4 time signature, also containing arpeggiated chords. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 60. The dynamic is marked *p* *rubato*. There is a *scia* marking with an arrow pointing to the right.

Against this scintillating sonic backdrop, the clarinet enters in a mood of pensive reflection, sometimes lost in thought over a single long tone, at other times seeming to imitate the arpeggio-like “gapped” melodic lines heard in the piano.

♩ = 72 *poco rit.* ♩ = 66

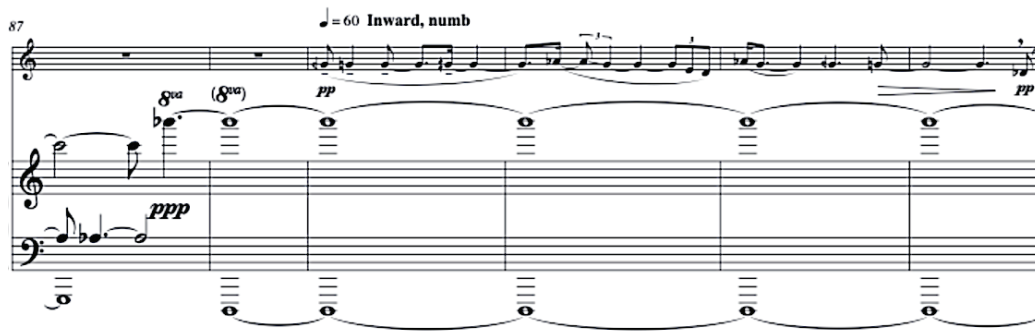
The image shows a second system of a musical score. It consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a 4/4 time signature. It features a melodic line with a long, sweeping slur over several measures. The middle staff is a treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a 4/4 time signature, containing arpeggiated chords. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of two flats and a 4/4 time signature, also containing arpeggiated chords. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 72, then *poco rit.*, and finally ♩ = 66. The dynamic is marked *p* *mp*. There is a *Ped. ad lib.* marking and a *scia* marking.

The “scattered” intervallic nature of both melody and accompaniment could be thought of as representing the scattered memories of a person no longer with us.

A solo clarinet cadenza leads into a more intense discussion of musical ideas, culminating in the work's grand climax.



This then issues into its diametrically opposed mood state: stunned disbelief.



There follows a return to the opening material and a slow fade into the unreachable realms of memory.

This work is a brilliant portrayal of the misty world of remembering. The two instruments generally stay out of each other's registers, and yet you have the feeling throughout that both are talking about the same thing, but at a remove that represents the distance between our thoughts and our past lives.

Johannes Brahms Sonata in F minor for Clarinet and Piano Op. 120 No. 1

At a time when European music was turning towards large programmatic orchestral works performed in grandiose public concerts, Brahms continued to write music created from just the basic building blocks of the tonal system, music intended for private performance by small ensembles in front of an audience of connoisseurs. In so doing, he stimulated the growth of a rich new literature of chamber works that featured hitherto neglected instruments such as the clarinet and viola in a leading role.

His special interest in the clarinet came late in life when, in 1891, he encountered the playing of Richard Mühlfeld, principal clarinetist in the court orchestra of Meiningen (Thuringia), noted for his warm tone and expressive playing. Brahms' last published chamber works were two sonatas Op. 120 composed in 1894 for clarinet and piano (dedicated to Mühlfeld) and then re-issued by the composer in a version for viola.

* * *

The Sonata in F minor Op. 120 No. 1 is in the four canonical movements of the classical tradition: a sonata-form first movement, a serene and poetic slow movement, a gentle, dance-like intermezzo (Brahms' stand-in for the Beethovenian scherzo) and, to conclude, a wonderfully upbeat rondo.

Despite being in F minor – the key of Beethoven's stormy *Appassionata* Sonata Op. 57 and Brahms' own darkly passionate Quintet Op. 34 – the overall aesthetic direction of this work bends towards more optimistic emotions, in the major mode. The first movement, though turbulent in parts, resolves its fury by the end in a placid F-major final cadence. The two middle movements are in the relative major of A flat. And the finale has no allegiance to the minor mode whatsoever, being centred in a cheerful and chipper F major from its opening bars. This is Brahms in the full "mellowness" of his last years.

The first movement *Allegro appassionato* contains a wealth of thematic material. It opens with an enigmatic passage in piano octaves that will feed motivic developments throughout the movement – because with Brahms the Classicist, *everything is motivic*.

Allegro appassionato



This leads directly into the first theme, an expansively broad, yearning melody presented by the clarinet in deep-breathing phrases constructed, like those in the opening bars of the composer's Fourth Symphony, from a series of wide melodic intervals.



The second theme, also in the minor mode, could not be more different. Comprised of gruff little utterances in the low register, it introduces an element of irascible punchiness – a staple of the youthful Brahms – to what has been, so far, a fairly rhapsodic flow of musical ideas.

51

pp
p ma ben marc.
p ma ben marc.

The development section is a further study in contrasts. Beginning in a wistful mood of innocent reverie, it erupts halfway through into volcanic passion, with the second theme made sonorously grand in the scoring of the piano part animating the lava flow. The eruption continues until the clarinet smooths out the waves of emotion with its re-introduction of the sweeping first theme to begin the recapitulation.

Brahms loved to create textures bristling with cross-rhythms, but this final section features a rippling four-against-three passage that is remarkable even for Brahms.

183

f
f
f

This rocky ride completed, the remainder of the sonata guides us hand-in-hand through gentler emotional terrain, beginning with a serene and evocative **Andante un poco adagio** slow movement.

Andante un poco Adagio

poco f
poco f

This exquisitely delicate movement is pervaded by a sense of longing created by its appoggiatura-laden birdsong melody perched atop slow to resolve, widely spaced harmonies that float like sonic lacework in tonal space.

The **Allegretto grazioso** movement that follows evokes the gentle swaying of the Ländler, the Austrian rural equivalent of the Viennese waltz.

Allegretto grazioso

p
p

Brahms subtly promotes this swaying sensation by regularly switching between bars with the long note on the first beat and those with the long note on the second beat.

Country dancing is even more explicitly evoked in passages featuring a bass drone and a hefty “stomping” rhythm.

Musical score for measures 15-20. The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano accompaniment with a bass drone and a melody with syncopations. The melody is marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The piano part has a steady eighth-note bass line.

A “raindrop” middle section of soft syncopations tumbling down from the upper reaches of the piano register provides a brief repose from all this dancing activity.

The finale is a congenial rondo that opens with a three-note “knock-on-the-door” and accompanying 8th-note chatter, a motive that will ring in your ears in many guises before this movement is through.

Musical score for the **Vivace** section. The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano accompaniment with a three-note “knock-on-the-door” motive and accompanying 8th-note chatter. The melody is marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The piano part has a steady eighth-note bass line. The tempo is marked *Vivace* and the performance instruction is *non legato e ben marc.*

This “motto” opening is of course just a fanfare to introduce the rondo refrain melody that will alternate with intervening episodes in the course of the movement. And what a carefree, tripping little melody it is, eminently suitable for humming in the shower or whistling to oneself while gardening.

Musical score for the “motto” opening. The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano accompaniment with a three-note “motto” motive in the bass line. The melody is marked with a *grazioso* and *leggiere* performance instruction.

Notice how craftily Brahms incorporates the three-knock “motto” motive into the bass line, as if it were the underlying topic in every musical conversation. And indeed, while the movement unfolds in an alternating series of refrains and contrasting episodes in an A-B-A-C-B-A pattern, this three-note motto motive is so pervasive, in so many guises, that virtually every three long notes in the score – no matter what the pitch and wherever they occur – seem to remind us of it, even in the closing measures.

Robert Schumann Fantasiestücke Op. 73

Schumann's *Fantasiestücke* (Fantasy Pieces) were written in a spurt of inspiration over just two days in February of 1949. They were intended for the home entertainment market, to be performed by professional musicians or talented amateurs in a private setting before family and friends.

Each piece is in ternary (A-B-A) form, and each features a gentle mood of domestic dreaminess, with nary a note of real anger in any bar, just a gentle progression from inner reverie to joyous uplift.

The first piece, labelled *Zart und mit Ausdruck* (Tenderly with expression), establishes a pattern of gentle, rippling triplets in the piano part that will be a major feature of all three movements.

herausgegeben v. H. Bading

Zart und mit Ausdruck

Zart und mit Ausdruck ♩ = 80.

While in a minor key, this first movement is anything but forlorn, largely because of extraordinarily chummy relations between piano and clarinet, which often echo each other's melodic musings in passages such as this.

Lebhaft, leicht ♩ = 138

The second movement, marked *Lebhaft leicht* (Lively, light) differs little in mood, with piano and clarinet singing out vocally inspired melodies cheek-to-cheek in a spirit of rapturous unanimity.

Lebhaft, leicht

Lebhaft, leicht ♩ = 138

And the way they complete each other's thoughts, like an old married couple, is if anything even cuter and more engaging in this movement.

What had been understated contentment in the first two movements breaks into outright unbuttoned optimism in the finale, the coy, sighing cadencing of the opening theme being merely a stimulus for onward melodic motion.

Even contrasting passages in the minor mode sound more wistful than sad, slipping in and out of the major mode frequently as they sweep rhapsodically on.

The movement ends with an accelerating coda, with the piano trading in its rippling triplets for frothing 16ths as the clarinet sings its little heart out in phrases of increasing joyous urgency.

* * *

It is worth noting that by ending this afternoon's recital with this work, our artists are honouring the memory of Brahms who, after performing his two Sonatas Op. 120 with clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld at a private concert, chose to end the event with Schumann's *Fantasiestücke* Op. 73.

Jörg Widmann Five Fragments for Clarinet and Piano

German clarinetist, conductor and composer Jörg Widmann is among the most frequently performed contemporary composers in the world today. And yet, as he confessed in an interview with the *Hamburger Abendblatt* (23 January 2021),

Mein Problem war immer: zu viele Ideen.
My problem has always been: too many ideas.

He is deeply immersed in the classical repertoire for his instrument, having recently recorded the Brahms Clarinet Sonatas Op. 120 with Sir Andrés Schiff. But early in his career his creative work as a composer was radically experimental, a tendency well represented by his *Five Fragments for Clarinet & Piano* (1997).

In speaking of this work, he confessed to having tired of large-scale forms in favour of the “reduction, abridgement and concentration” of impactful miniatures. Moreover, he wanted the clarinet and piano, his two favourite instruments, to “become strange to him once again.”

The attainment of this goal will be effortless for contemporary audiences as the score is spiked, from start to finish, with what are known as “extended techniques”, i.e., unusual ways of playing the instrument to produce surprising new sounds.

One of the extremes to which he drives his instrument is extremes of range and dynamics, as exemplified in *Fragment I*.

Fünf Bruchstücke

Jörg Widmann
* 1973

I

Äußerst langsam / extremely slow
lunguissimo *lunga*

vibrato ad lib. *vibr. ad lib.*

fff > *p* < *ffff* < *mf* > *ppp* < *ff* > *pp* < *f* > *pppp* < *ff ppp* < *molto*

extrem kurz / extremely short *(quasi niente)*

* *

Fragment II races up and down in exhilarating runs, mixed with clattering sounds from the clarinet’s keys.

II

Presto possibile
legato sempre
atmen ad lib. / breathe ad lib.

sempre „fff“ *ca. 13x*

ffz *al niente*

Griff, aber immer ohne linken Daumen (auf Unterseite) /
Fingering, but always without the left thumb (on the underside)

CD-Hüllen im angegebenen Bereich auf Saiten legen /
Put jewel cases (CD boxes) on the strings in the given area.

8b

Francis Poulenc Sonata for Clarinet and Piano

Mozart meets Stravinsky – in a Paris cabaret. As unlikely as such a meeting might be in historical terms, it is about as good a description as you can find for the musical style of French composer Francis Poulenc. The directness of his writing, its exuberance of expression, bright sense of tonal colour and theatrical flair owe much to Stravinsky, while his love of balanced phrases, clear formal proportions and transparent textures point fondly back to Mozart. Like his fellow composers in the group known as Les Six, he steered clear of both the vaporous aesthetic refinement of Debussy's Impressionism and the weighty emotional rhetoric of German Romanticism, finding his inspiration instead in the naive sentimentality, carefree tunefulness and lively wit of the music hall, the circus and the cabaret.

Poulenc was first and foremost a melodist, one of the great melodists of the 20th century. His melodic lines are rhythmically square and full of wide intervals, giving them a light, breezy quality. His harmonies are conventional but often extended with added 9ths, 11ths and 13ths, which he treats as tonal colour rather than functional tones that need resolving. This pastel tonal palette of blurry overtone notes fits in perfectly with his love of a “wet” piano sound, drenched in pedal.

* * *

The *Sonata for Clarinet & Piano* (1962) was Poulenc's last completed work. It was premiered in 1963 at Carnegie Hall by Benny Goodman with Leonard Bernstein at the piano. The work displays the composer's trademark good humour, often devolving into impishness, interlarded with melodies simply perfumed with French charm.

The first movement, oxymoronically labelled *Allegro tristamente* (sadly gay), leaps and hops into the business at hand with an almost cartoonishly sassy introduction

I. ALLEGRO TRISTAMENTE

Allegretto ♩ = 138

before announcing its wandering first theme,

①

which soon adopts a dotted rhythm and continues to wander, over a complacent regular accompaniment in the piano.

②

p très doux

Rather than following the German model of sonata form, Poulenc prefers the pattern established by French Baroque composers whereby a contrasting middle section stands in for the “development”.

Poulenc’s middle section begins serenely but is soon animated by this antic arpeggio motif of a distinctly Prokofievian stamp:

8) surtout sans presser

doux et monotone

p

mf

A brief recap of the introduction and first theme then brings the movement to a whimsically mysterious close.

The second movement *Romanza* begins with a teasing recitative and introduction that hints at the gloriously nostalgic melody that will be the movement’s main concern.

1

pp très doux et mélancolique

p

pp

p

Effleurer (beaucoup de pédale)

mf

mf

Through a frequent exchange of melodic sighs between the clarinet and piano this melody imprints itself on the listener’s ear in the most relaxed way possible.

The *Allegro con fuoco* finale opens with the bustling energy and festive atmosphere of a big-tent circus.

III. ALLEGRO CON FUOCO

Très animé ♩ = 144

The first system of the musical score for the beginning of the movement. It consists of three staves: a top staff for the clarinet with a melodic line starting on a high note, a middle staff for the piano with a rhythmic accompaniment of chords, and a bottom staff for the bass line. The tempo is marked 'Très animé' with a quarter note equal to 144 beats per minute. The dynamic is 'ff' (fortissimo).

This movement is full of bright clarinet calls,

The second system of the musical score. It features a clarinet call in the top staff, marked with a circled '4' and an '8' indicating a rhythmic pattern. The piano accompaniment in the middle and bottom staves continues with rhythmic chords. The dynamic is 'f' (forte).

interrupted from time to time with patches of carefree melody shared between piano and clarinet.

The third system of the musical score. It shows a shared melodic line between the piano and clarinet. The top staff has a clarinet line with a circled '8' and a fermata. The middle and bottom staves have piano accompaniment. The dynamic is 'mf' (mezzo-forte).

And then a return to the hopscotch-y melodic acrobatics of the movement's opening wraps up this sonata with a wink and a smile.

Program notes by Donald G. Gíslason, 2026

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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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