



Yunchan Lim, piano

Gold Medalist, Sixteenth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition

7:30 p.m., Monday, Sept. 26, 2022

Macky Auditorium

Program

Four Ballades, Op. 10

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Andante

Andante

Intermezzo. Allegro

Andante con moto

Fantasy in F-sharp minor, Op. 28 (“Scottish Sonata”)

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Con moto agitato

Allegro con moto

Presto

— Intermission —

Deux légendes

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

St. François d’Assise: la prédication aux oiseaux

St. François de Paule: marchant sur les flots

Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata

Franz Liszt

Yunchan Lim appears by arrangement with the Cliburn.

Tonight’s performance is generously sponsored by:



PLEASE NOTE

- Masks are optional in public indoor spaces on the CU Boulder campus as of March 7, 2022.
- Latecomers will be seated at the discretion of the house manager.
- Photography and video recordings of any type are strictly prohibited during the performance.
- Smoking is not permitted anywhere. CU Boulder is a smoke-free campus.

Program Notes

By Henry Michaels

Four Ballades, Op. 10

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

In September of 1853, Johannes Brahms, then only 21 years old, was introduced to two important members of the German musical elite: Robert and Clara Schumann. To say it went well would be a *bit* of an understatement. Robert Schumann publicly wrote that after years of looking for a great composer to “like Minerva ... spring from the head of Zeus fully formed,” he had finally found his “champion.” “And he has come,” Robert Schumann wrote in the most flattering of prose, “a young blood, at whose cradle Graces and Heroes stood guard. His name is Johannes Brahms ... His appearance announced to us: this is an anointed one.”

It was an auspicious, if daunting, introduction to the broader musical world. Although the very public support of both Schumanns certainly opened many doors for the young Brahms, it also placed an immense amount of pressure upon him, pressure that was only increased by the events of the next few years. Robert Schumann was institutionalized following a mental breakdown and suicide attempt in early 1854, at which point Brahms temporarily moved in with Clara and her children. Even after Robert Schumann’s death in the sanatorium two years later, Brahms continued his relationship with Clara, who remained one of his closest confidants.

Throughout this time and into the late 1850s, Brahms began to lean into his status as an “anointed one.” According to one of his closest friends, Brahms was both an “artist-genius” and “egoism incarnate.” He developed a distaste for the public, performing less and less and publishing no works over a period of more than four years between early 1856 and late 1860. He took advantage of this time to study, hone his skills as a composer and ponder heavy questions like the connection between creativity and mental health issues, a topic no doubt influenced by the fate of Robert Schumann.

Written in 1854 and published in 1856, the Four Ballades, Op. 10, the final works released before Brahms’s four-year publishing hiatus,

are emblematic of this emotionally volatile time in the young composer’s life. The influence of the great composer of songs Robert Schumann seems evident in Brahms’ general approach to the ballade, which has less to do with the purely instrumental ballades of Frederic Chopin and more in common song settings of narrative poetry. In fact, he even indicates that the first ballade is based on “the old Scottish ballad, *Edward*.” Although it contains no lyrics, Brahms’s “setting” of the Scottish song is still song-like in quality.

Throughout all four of the pieces, Brahms vacillates between moments of lyrical serenity and moments of agitation. In this way, the Ballades show some similarities with another of his works written in the same year: the *Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann*, wherein Brahms marked the intense and agitated music with the label “Kreisler”—after E.T.A. Hoffmann’s fictional manic-depressive musician who featured in one of Robert Schumann’s most well-known compositions—and the serene and moody music with the label “Brahms.” If there is indeed a Kreisler (or a Schumann) in these pieces, then he is most evident in portions of the second Ballade and in the wild third Ballade, while the introspective Brahms comes through in the fourth and final one.

Fantasy in F-sharp minor, Op. 28 (“Scottish Sonata”)

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

When a composer gives a piece of music an evocative title, we take notice. But what about when a composer *doesn’t* give a work an evocative title? Well, normally, it doesn’t even register. After all, the classical music landscape is dotted with countless works whose names are based solely on their generic definition—names like symphony, sonata, prelude and toccata. In the case of Felix Mendelssohn’s *Fantasia in F-sharp minor*, Op. 28, though, the composer’s choice of title tells a fascinating story of dual inspirations and the slowly unfolding creative process.

That Mendelssohn was fascinated by the subject of Scotland is no secret. After developing an interest in Scottish poetry and literature, he took a walking tour of the country in 1829. Waxing poetic about a visit to the Iona Nunnery in the Hebrides, Mendelssohn wrote:

Iona ... there is truly a very Ossianic and sweetly sad sound about that name—when in some future time I shall sit in a madly crowded assembly with music and dancing all around me, and the wish arises to retire into the loneliest loneliness, I shall think of Iona, with its ruins of a once magnificent cathedral, the remains of a convent, the graves of ancient Scotch kings.

Mendelssohn did more than wax poetic, though; he also waxed musical. His Symphony No. 3, widely known as the *Scottish Symphony*, was inspired by a trip to Edinburgh's Holyrood Chapel, while a concert overture titled, *The Hebrides*, resulted from his visit to the titular Scottish archipelago.

Although the Fantasia in F-sharp minor is likewise one of Mendelssohn's Scottish-inspired compositions, it differs in that he began it *before* his visit to Scotland. In 1828, the year he began the work, Mendelssohn's Scotland existed only on the page. It was the Scotland of the novels of Sir Walter Scott and the Ossianic poems, a set of supposedly ancient Gaelic poems that were mostly likely the forgeries of a contemporary Scottish poet. Scotland had clearly captivated Mendelssohn's imagination, as by early 1829—and still before his trip abroad—he was referring to the work as his *Sonate ecossaise*, or Scottish Sonata.

Curiously, though, when it came time to publish the work in 1834, Mendelssohn removed the Scottish reference from the title entirely. (This is something of a pattern for Mendelssohn, who despite repeated reference amongst family to his “Scottish Symphony” nonetheless released that work sans Scottish-title as simply Symphony No. 3.) But why? It seems a strange decision, especially considering the fact that he was still calling it his “Scottish Sonata” as late as 1833. And the music certainly bears the hallmarks of his Scottish style, with an open-pedal, arpeggiated opening reminiscent of *The Hebrides* overture and, at times, the use of a drone (like the sustained note of a bagpipe).

Maybe Mendelssohn's evocative titles were never meant for public consumption, but rather as personal tidbits to share with family and friends. Who knows? But maybe in this case the clue to the “Scottish Sonata” lies in another reconsidered part of the title. Mendelssohn's eventual choice to classify the work not as a *sonata* but rather as a *fantasia* points to another inspiration: Beethoven. With its three-movement form, slow first movement and fast final movement, the construction of the Fantasia in F-sharp minor is rather unique. Not unheard of, though, as Mendelssohn was inspired by Beethoven's similarly constructed Piano Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp minor. Although *that* piece is most widely known today as the famous “Moonlight Sonata,” Beethoven christened the work with a different title: *Sonata quasi una fantasia*.

Deux légendes

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

The early 1860s was a time of profound difficulty for Franz Liszt, marked by the death of both his son, Daniel, in 1859 and his daughter, Blandine, in 1860, as well as his contentious (basically nonexistent) relationship with his other daughter, Cosima. During these times of sorrow, Liszt turned to his religion for peace and guidance.

It was not the first time. When Liszt was just a boy, he had developed an intense interest in Christianity. He prayed regularly and fervently, read books about various saints, even expressed a desire to become a priest. (In the latter of these endeavors he was discouraged by his father, who, perhaps ironically, had once-upon-a-time been himself destined for the priesthood). Now in his fifties, he spent two years with Dominican monks in a solitary retreat near Rome, during which time he met and became close with Pope Pius IX. He received tonsure—when the hair of the scalp is shaved off à la Friar Tuck—and entered what are known as the minor orders in 1865. Although he never expressed a desire to join the priesthood, he would be known as *Abbé* Liszt for the rest of his life.

Liszt's *Deux légendes* date from this period of grief and religiosity. In each of the two pieces, he deftly sets a story from the life of two different Saints Francis: St. Francis of Assisi and St. Francis of Paola. The first piece, *St. François d'Assise: la prédication aux oiseaux*, depicts St. Francis

of Assisi's sermon to the birds, an episode in the life of the patron saint of animals wherein he preaches to flocks of enthralled birds. Liszt's musical representation of this scene is marked by the unmistakable sound of birdsong. The second piece, *St. François de Paule: marchant sur les flots*, tells the story of St. Francis of Paola's crossing of the Strait of Messina. In it the saint, represented musically by the stately melody, is refused passage and must sail on his cloak across the turbulent waters, represented throughout the piece by the faster rolling notes.

There is, perhaps, a certain inevitability in Liszt's setting of the legends of two saints both named Francis; at the very least there is an element of poetic circularity in it. Although his father, Adam, never joined the priesthood, he did hold a lifelong affinity for the Franciscans with whom he had studied. He even named his only son in their honor: Franciscus, or, in his native German, Franz.

Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata

Franz Liszt

It would be nearly impossible to overstate the profound impact that Franz Liszt had upon solo piano music and piano-playing, in general. Inspired by Niccolò Paganini, who did things with the violin that people at the time could scarcely believe were possible, Liszt sought to test the boundaries of pianistic technique, to push the limits of what musician and instrument could handle. He also pioneered the piano recital and is responsible for bringing the piano into the concert hall as a solo instrument.

Liszt didn't do this without help, though, and one of his biggest aids was a technological one: the piano itself. During the 19th century, piano makers began introducing a variety of mechanical improvements to the instrument, allowing pianos to play louder and opening the door for an expansion in performers' technique. These new instruments, paired with Liszt's incredible technical skills and boundary-pushing efforts, forever changed the piano repertoire.

Often referred to as the "Dante Sonata", Liszt began work on *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata* in 1838 while traveling in Italy and later extensively revised it in 1849. It

was published in 1856 as part of his multi-volume *Années de pèlerinage*, or *Years of Pilgrimage*. While the "Dante Sonata" isn't an example of Liszt's most over-the-top exercises in virtuosity and spectacle, it is nonetheless *very much* a work designed for the concert hall. This musical setting of Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* is dramatic in scope, beginning with a dissonant-sounding chromatic melody to represent the eternal suffering of those souls trapped in Hell. That this hellish music is in the key of D minor, a key some composers frequently associated with death, was certainly no accident. If Hell for Liszt was the key of D minor, then Heaven was F-sharp major, which arrives to completely change the character of the "Dante Sonata". Interestingly, though, there is melodic material that appears in both sections of the work, albeit transformed appropriately. This unifying compositional technique of thematic transformation was a favorite of Liszt's.

Even though Liszt composed this piece more for the purpose of musical storytelling than for overt virtuosic display, the "Dante Sonata" does contain a wonderful example of one his pianistic calling cards, one that was enabled by a bit of new technology. Invented by Sébastien Erard, the double escapement action allowed the piano keys, which are pressed by the pianist, to operate independently of the hammers, which strike the strings inside the instrument. Simply put, this allowed the hammer to return to the ready position while the piano key was still depressed, meaning that pianists could repeatedly press keys without having to fully release them. This in turn allowed for the *very fast* repetition of notes. Liszt used Erard's double escapement action to great effect, using the smallest of hand movements to rapidly repeat notes and create the effect of sustained sound. This technique, the *tremolando*, features prominently near the end of the "Dante Sonata."

About the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition

Widely considered one of the preeminent international music contests, the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition exists to share excellent classical music with the largest international audience possible and to launch the careers of its winners every four years. Building on a rich tradition that began with its 1962 origins in honor of Van Cliburn and his vision for using music to serve audiences and break down boundaries, the Cliburn seeks, with each edition, to achieve the highest artistic standards while utilizing contemporary tools to advance its reach. The world's top 18- to 30-year-old pianists compete for gold in front of a live audience in Fort Worth, Texas, as well as a global online viewership of over 10 million. Beyond cash prizes, winning a Cliburn medal means comprehensive career management, artistic support and bolstered publicity efforts for the three years following.

The sixteenth edition of the Cliburn Competition took place June 2-18, 2022 in Fort Worth, Texas at Van Cliburn Concert Hall at TCU (Preliminary and Quarterfinal Rounds) and Bass Performance Hall (Semifinal and Final Rounds). By all standards, this was a record-breaking edition for the 60-year-old institution. The global webcast amassed more than 25 million views across 170 countries, for over 3 million hours of music watched. More than 70 journalists covered the Competition in person, with hundreds more following online; the result: 2000+ articles written in 50 countries, with another 3000+ written about Gold Medalist Yunchan Lim in Korea alone.

Competition History

Winning the first Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow at the height of the Cold War in 1958 brought **Van Cliburn** unprecedented celebrity for an American concert pianist. Cliburn's international victory instilled a fresh sense of artistic pride in many Americans, while opening the door to a new era of cultural relations between East and West. The Van Cliburn International Piano Competition was established shortly thereafter to perpetuate Van Cliburn's unique legacy of demonstrating how classical music, in the hands of a master, has the appeal to reach across all borders.

At a dinner banquet in November 1958, Dr. Irl Allison, founder of the National Guild of Piano Teachers, passed a note to Grace Ward Lankford, co-founder of the Fort Worth Piano Teachers Forum. The note read, "Hold onto your seat, I have a startling announcement!" Standing before a crowd of 500, including Van Cliburn and his mother, Rildia Bee O'Bryan Cliburn, Dr. Allison announced his intention to offer a \$10,000 first prize to be awarded by an international piano competition named in Cliburn's honor. The idea caught everyone (especially Van Cliburn) by surprise, and immediately ignited the imagination and enthusiasm of music lovers and civic leaders throughout Fort Worth.

A small corps of volunteers began to raise funds, type labels and lick envelopes as Ms. Lankford enlisted the support of an astonishing range of politicians, internationally-renowned composers, conductors, musicians, business leaders and professional educators, in pursuit of what must have seemed an impossible goal: to create a world-class international piano competition in a city still affectionately known as "Cowtown." By 1961, the pieces were falling into place, and the Van Cliburn Foundation was officially chartered.

First held in 1962, the quadrennial Van Cliburn International Piano Competition quickly established itself as an event that inspires and engages the local community, while gracing the international stage. The Cliburn Competition is one of the few musical events in the world to arrange for competitors to stay with host families, often resulting in close, long-term relationships: this has resulted in southern hospitality becoming a singular trademark of the Cliburn Competition.

About Yunchan Lim

“Lim got to the soul of the piece.” — La Scena

“Lim is a one-in-a-million talent.” — Dallas Morning News

In June 2022, Yunchan Lim became the youngest person ever to win gold at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition; his performances throughout showcased a “magical ability” and a “natural, instinctive quality” (La Scena) that astounded listeners around the world. As Jury Chair Marin Alsop expressed: “Yunchan is that rare artist who brings profound musicality and prodigious technique organically together.” The depth of his artistry and connection to listeners also secured him the Audience Award and Best Performance of a New Work (for Sir Stephen Hough’s *Fanfare Toccata*).

Just 18 years old, Lim’s ascent to international stardom has been meteoric. His audacious Cliburn Semifinal Round performance of Liszt’s *Transcendental Etudes* “created a buzz throughout the international piano community”—his “intelligent virtuosity and total immersion into Liszt’s idiom truly defined transcendental” (Gramophone). And his final Cliburn Competition appearance with Rachmaninov’s *Piano Concerto No. 3* delivered the defining moment of the three-week event; as one critic noted: “The applause that followed was endless: a star had emerged before our eyes” (Seen and Heard International). The video of that performance trended globally on YouTube in the days after, reaching #24, and has now become the most-watched version of that piece on the platform, amassing more than 5.5 million views in just one month.

Born in Siheung, Korea, Lim began piano lessons at age 7, when it was time to choose an after-school activity; he entered the Music Academy of the Seoul Arts Center the next year and quickly became immersed in his musical studies. He auditioned for and was accepted into the Korea National Institute for the Gifted in Arts at age 13, where he met his teacher and mentor, Minsoo Sohn. Lim entered the international music stage a year later, in 2018, winning second prize and the Chopin Special Award in his first-ever competition, the Cleveland International Piano Competition for Young Artists. Also that year, he stood out as the youngest participant in the Cooper International Competition, where he won both third prize and the audience prize, and was provided the opportunity to perform with the Cleveland Orchestra. The next year, 2019, brought more accolades, when, at the age of 15, he was the youngest to win Korea’s IsangYun International Competition, also taking home two special prizes.

Lim has since performed across South Korea—including with the Korean Orchestra Festival, Korea Symphony, Suwon Philharmonic and Busan Philharmonic Orchestras, among others—as well as in Madrid, at the invitation of the Korea Cultural Center in Spain. He also participated in the recording of “2020 Young Musicians of Korea,” organized by the Korean Broadcasting System and released that November. His 2022-2023 inaugural tour as Cliburn winner will take him across four continents, with highlights including the Aspen Music Festival, La Jolla Music Society and Performing Arts Houston in the United States; Seoul Arts Center, National Concert Hall in Taipei and the KBS and Korean National Symphony Orchestras in Asia; Wigmore Hall and Fondation Louis Vuitton in Europe; and a recital tour in South America. Also coming soon: the release of his debut studio recording on the Steinway label.

Speaking at a press conference after the Competition, Lim said, “I made up my mind that I will live my life only for the sake of music, and I decided that I will give up everything for music ... I wanted my music to become deeper, and if that desire reached the audience, I’m satisfied.”

He is currently in his second year at the Korea National University of Arts, where he continues to study with Sohn.



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The Ivalas Quartet features violinists Reuben Kebede and Tiani Butts, violist Aimée McAnulty and cellist Pedro Sánchez.