
The Timeless Genius of Chopin, Jiayan Sun,
piano

Music: Faculty Performances

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Recital 3: Program

Peter Bloom
Smith College, pbloom@smith.edu

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Sage Chamber Music Society presents

The Timeless Genius of Chopin

III. The Complete Scherzos, Selected Nocturnes, and the Third Sonata

Jiayan Sun, piano

Thursday, April 8, 2021

8:00 PM

Sweeney Concert Hall, Smith College



SMITH COLLEGE

Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)

Scherzo no. 1 in B Minor, op. 20 (1831–32)

Nocturne in F-sharp Major, op. 15, no. 2 (1833)

Scherzo no. 2 in B-flat Minor, op. 31 (1837)

Nocturne in F-sharp Minor, op. 48, no. 2 (1841)

Scherzo no. 3 in C-sharp Minor, op. 39 (1839)

Nocturne in B Major, op. 62, no. 1 (1846)

Scherzo no. 4 in E Major, op. 54 (1842)

Pause

Sonata no. 3 in B Minor, op. 58 (1844)

Allegro maestoso

Scherzo. Molto vivace

Largo

Finale. Presto non tanto

The Josten Performing Arts Library has created a LibGuide to facilitate access to literature and resources on Chopin's life and work.

<https://libguides.smith.edu/geniuschopin>

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The recorded performances from
A Beethoven Cycle: The Complete Piano Sonatas and Schubertiade
are available on Smith ScholarWorks.

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NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

The Italian word for “joke”—“scherzo”—was first used in music used for movements in triple time, in the tripartite form of scherzo-trio-scherzo, that are jovial or, as is the scherzo of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, witty. In his four *Scherzos*, written between 1835 and 1843, Chopin made of the genre something rather more fantastical, like Berlioz’s “Queen Mab Scherzo” in his dramatic symphony *Roméo et Juliette* (1839), or even Paul Dukas’s “scherzo fantastique,” *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* (1897). The First *Scherzo*, in B Minor, has fantastical outer sections that surround a contrasting middle section, in B Major, that is as gentle a lullaby as you can imagine. The outer sections of the Second *Scherzo*, in B-flat Minor, offer one of those Chopinesque melodies that you probably feel that you have heard forever. The complex middle section seems hymn-like, then becomes suddenly virtuosic, as is the return of the scherzo, with its brilliant close in D-flat Major. In its first section, the Third *Scherzo*, opening in C-sharp Minor and closing in C-sharp Major, embodies a noble hymn, a spiritual chorale, which is decorated with filigrees of the sort that Chopin used frequently and miraculously to festoon his tunes. The Fourth *Scherzo*, tentative, elfin, improvisatory, offers, in the middle section, a heartfelt operatic aria. We know not of what the singer sings, but in her harmonic modulations astonishing for their daring and freedom from convention, we hear her private and ever-changing emotions.

Jiayan Sun has arranged the first half of this program symmetrically: the four *Scherzos* are separated by three *Nocturnes*, the latter from three different periods of Chopin’s life. In 1833, when he composed the *Nocturne* in F-sharp Major, he was enjoying his freshly established reputation as a star of the piano in the pianistically star-studded city of Paris. In 1841, when he composed the *Nocturne* in F-sharp Minor, he was living happily on George Sand’s estate at Nohant, a village near the geographical center of the country, one hundred eighty miles south of Paris. In 1846, when he composed the *Nocturne* in B-Major, he was nearing the end of his intimate relationship with the famous writer, with whom he had been living for nearly ten years, and nearing the end of his compositional career. As a genre, the *nocturne*, or *notturmo*, was known to Mozart and his late eighteenth-century contemporaries, but it is Chopin whose *Nocturnes* represent, as the distinguished French musicologist Joël-Marie Fauquet has written, the very essence of that inventive and refined art which subtly converts the lyricism of Italian opera into a something gently appropriate to “pianistic digitation.”

The *Nocturne* in F-sharp Major is one of the most familiar ones, perhaps because it seems to require less technical virtuosity than others. But the renewed ornamentation of the principal melody, on its reappearance after the middle section, is of a kind reminiscent of the inspired the ornamental flights of fancy of the great jazz pianists Art Tatum and Oscar Peterson (both of whom played Chopin). In the *Nocturne* in F-sharp Minor, less frequently played, we seem to hear Chopin himself seated at the keyboard, improvising peacefully in the twilight of his campestrial setting. The same may be said for the *Nocturne* in B Major, although the latter, Chopin's penultimate work in the category, seems from the outset be something more introverted and personal. The opening chord itself, a beautifully spaced seventh chord on the second degree of the scale, seems to say not "listen here!" but rather "let me think; let us reflect."

On Jiayan Sun's previous recital, pride of place—the work that brought the evening to an end—was given to the Second Sonata, from 1840. Tonight, pride of place is given to the Third Sonata, from 1845. Here, as elsewhere, Chopin pays homage to the structural principle known as the "sonata form," which undergirds music from the middle of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth. The establishment of a home key, the excursion to a series of related and contrasting keys, the return home: these are procedures understood by the classic masters as constituting "music" for instrumental movements with pretensions to seriousness. For Chopin, however, by whose day the original procedures had become the theorists' rules, following the scheme meant paying respect to the past masters whom he admired. The first movement of the Third Sonata, which could have gone anywhere, remains respectfully centered around B Minor, its relative D Major, and its parallel B Major.

The second movement, a brilliant whirlwind of a scherzo in E-flat, with a meditative trio in B (the tonality salutes that of the surrounding movements), offers contrapuntal intricacies that match those of the first movement. The third, after an angry opening salvo, settles into a simple and sorrowful song, A-B-A, in B and E Major, although saying as much hides harmonic complexities as advanced as anything known to Wagner and Liszt. The finale, at first *furioso*, in B Minor, is a kind of rondo, with two intervening sections separating the reiterations of the opening. In earlier times, rondos were used by Haydn and Mozart to send listeners home in comfort. In this case, Chopin, and Jiayan Sun, will send you home... in amazement.

— Peter Bloom

Grace Jarcho Ross 1933 Professor of Humanities, Emeritus

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Praised by the *New York Times* for his “revelatory” performances, and by the *Toronto Star* for his “technically flawless, poetically inspired and immensely assured playing,” pianist **Jiayan Sun** has performed with the Cleveland Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra, the Chinese and RTÉ (Ireland) National Symphony Orchestras, the Fort Worth and Toledo Symphony Orchestras, the Toronto and Aspen Concert Orchestras, the Suwon Philharmonic Orchestra, and he has conducted from the keyboard the Meiningen Court Orchestra. His performances have been broadcast by the BBC, the RTÉ, China Central Television, and classical music radio stations in North America. He has performed at and participated in the Verbier Festival, the Gstaad Menuhin Festival, the Klavier-Festival Ruhr, the Aspen Music Festival, the Sarasota Music Festival, and PianoTexas. Under the mentorship of Sir Andrés Schiff, he was invited to give a number of solo recitals in Europe as part of Schiff’s “Building Bridges” project for the 2017–2018 season.

Jiayan Sun has been awarded prizes at major international piano competitions, including third prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition, second prize at the Dublin International Piano Competition, fourth prize and the audience prize at the Cleveland International Piano Competition, first prize at the inaugural CCC Toronto International Piano Competition, and others. Playing early keyboard instruments and studying historical performance practice have played a significant role in his musical activities, with critically acclaimed appearances with the American Classical Orchestra in Alice Tully Hall.

Hailing from Yantai, China, he received Bachelor’s, Master’s and the Doctor of Musical Arts degrees from The Juilliard School under the tutelage of Yoheved Kaplinsky and Stephen Hough. His other mentors include pianists Malcolm Bilson, Richard Goode, Robert Levin, and harpsichordist Lionel Party. His devotion to the art of composition led him to study with the composer Philip Lasser. As the Iva Dee Hiatt Visiting Artist in Piano at Smith College, he presented Beethoven’s complete piano sonatas in chronological order in the 2018–2019 season. In the last season, he presented the project “Schubertiade” in a series of eight recitals at Smith College, exploring Schubert’s major piano, chamber, and vocal works.

For more information, please visit www.jiayansunpianist.com.



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