

The Ph.D./D.M.A. Programs in Music

March 12, 2021 1:00 p.m.

*Baisley Powell Elebash Recital Hall*



Han Chen, piano

Piano Sonata in E-flat Major, Hob. XVI: 52 (1794)

*Allegro moderato*

*Adagio*

*Finale: Presto*

Joseph Haydn  
(1732–1809)

Piano Etude No. 13 “L’escalier du diable” (1993)

György Ligeti  
(1923–2006)

Variations on “Là ci darem la mano”, Op. 2 (1827)

*Introduction: Largo*

*Theme: Allegretto*

*Variation 1: Brillante*

*Variation 2: Veloce ma accuratamente*

*Variation 3*

*Variation 4: Con bravura*

*Variation 5: Adagio*

*Alla Polacca*

Frédéric Chopin  
(1810–1849)

Piano Sonata No. 8 in B-flat Major, Op. 84 (1939–44)

*Andante dolce*

*Andante sognando*

*Vivace*

Sergei Prokofiev  
(1891–1953)

## Notes on the Program

### **Joseph Haydn: Piano Sonata in E-flat Major, Hob. XVI: 52**

The last composition in the genre, Piano Sonata in E-flat Major is both meticulously designed and surprisingly creative. The first movement starts majestically with rolling chords, insinuating the improvisatory property of the theme. Quickly afterward, the theme is answered by the stuttering of its softer counterpart, which leads us to meander down with chromatic scales. The sonata form in the movement is recreated to express Haydn's more adventurous harmonies and melodies made of half steps, often with sudden turns in the music. The second movement momentarily lifts us to E major, and the effect is dreamy and aerial. The dulcet opening theme is turned into the eloquent statement in the middle section, while the return of the theme is embellished and concluded in a contemplative ending. The last movement is a theatrical play of repeating notes: from its tentative theme to the climactic repeating chords, Haydn uses repetition to express very different personalities in the flourishing finale.

### **György Ligeti: Piano Etude No. 13 "L'escalier du diable"**

"L'escalier du diable" (translated as "devil's staircase") is included in Ligeti's Piano Etudes Book 2. Ligeti composed a total of 18 etudes between 1985 and 2001, and they have expanded the pianistic techniques even further than before, making them the cornerstone of the 20th-century piano repertoire. The title was inspired by the Cantor-Vitali function in mathematics, a function that is also called the devil's staircase. The graph of the function is similar to a staircase climbing upwards, which also approximates the structure of the etude. The feeling of continuous upward motion also alludes to the endless staircase, especially the lithograph print "Ascending and Descending" by M. C. Escher. From a single note at the beginning, the etude "climbs" to cover the entire range of the keyboard with the dynamic marking of *ffffffffff* at the end.

### **Frédéric Chopin: Variations on "Là ci darem la mano", Op. 2**

Inspired by the duet in Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, the Variations on "Là ci darem la mano", Op. 2 is Chopin's earliest attempt at the genre of works for piano and orchestra. Although he later became inclined to perform less in the public, teenage Chopin followed the trend and wrote for piano and orchestra, a genre that appealed to the public and showcased the soloist's virtuosity. The work was critically acclaimed, famously from Robert Schumann, who wrote "Hats off, gentlemen, a genius" in the December 7, 1831 edition of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* (*General music newspaper*). Later in his life, Chopin often played the Variations without the orchestra, as we can find both versions equally common nowadays.

### **Sergei Prokofiev: Piano Sonata No. 8 in B-flat Major, Op. 84**

Prokofiev wrote three "war sonatas" during WWII, using the piano to express his true feelings under Stalin's regime in the Soviet Union. The third and the longest of the three, Piano Sonata No. 8 creates a world of nostalgia and destruction, dreaming between reality and illusion, accompanied by the darkest and the most dissonant harmonies in his music. The first movement is an expansive account of the massive landscape of Russia, with the sound of bombing and rhythm of morse code in the middle section, recapitulated with a fleeting sense of reality. The second movement is a memoir of the

old-time, however, the account is unreliable and often slips to a remote key. No matter how beautiful the melody is, the background of the music is always dubious and slightly off. The third movement gives hope for the whole sonata. With a grandeur of major triads at the end, Prokofiev once again managed to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

## About the Artist

Hailed by the New York Times as a pianist with "a graceful touch... rhythmic precision... hypnotic charm" and "sure, subtle touch," **Han Chen** is a distinctive artist whose credentials at a young age already include important prizes in competitions of traditional music as well as increasing respect in the avant-garde.

Since winning the Gold Medal at the 6th China International Piano Competition in 2013, Chen has released three solo albums under the Naxos label (music by Liszt, Rubinstein, and Thomas Adès, respectively). *Gramophone* complimented Chen's "brilliant performance" as "impressively commanding and authoritative." *ClassicsToday.com* also praised for his "assured, elegant and totally effortless technique." *American Record Guide* remarked that "the utmost of musicality and, of course, the requisite virtuosity is superb."

As a soloist, Chen has appeared with orchestras across the globe, including the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, Lexington Philharmonic Orchestra, Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, Macao Orchestra, National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra, China Symphony Orchestra, Xiamen Philharmonic Orchestra, Sendai Philharmonic Orchestra, among others. Chen has worked with renowned conductors such as Maestro Simon Rattle, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Nicholas McGegan, and Karina Canellakis.

An advocate for new music, Chen actively performs music of our time. He has given world premieres of music by Unsuk Chin, Molly Joyce, and Reinaldo Moya. He has also worked with many composers, such as Thomas Adès, Unsuk Chin, Helmut Lachenmann, Lei Liang, and Nina Young. In 2021, Chen launched an online series of interviews and performances featuring contemporary immigrant composers, called *Migration Music*. The project is an exploration of the relationship between immigration and their music. Chen is the founding member of the New York-based contemporary music group Ensemble Échappé.

Born in Taiwan, Chen moved to Shanghai at the age of nine. He attended the Shanghai Conservatory Elementary and Middle Schools, studying with Christopher Zhong and Kuan-wen Wang. He then received his Bachelor's and Master's of Music from The Juilliard School, as well as the Graduate Diploma from the New England Conservatory. He studied with Prof. Yoheved Kaplinsky and Prof. Wha Kyung Byun. Chen is now a doctoral candidate at the CUNY Graduate Center, studying with Prof. Kaplinsky and Prof. Ursula Oppens.

## Spring 2021 Events

### March

- 8 Ari Livne, piano
- 12 Han Chen, piano

### April

- 7 Kirsten Jermé, cello
- 9 GC Composers
- 16 Audrey Chen, cello
- 23 Carrie Frey, viola
- 26 Federico Diaz, guitar
- 28 Antonio Valentin, piano
- 30 Austin Lewellen, double bass

### May

- 3 Thapelo Masita, cello
- 5 Clare Monfredo, cello
- 7 GC Composers
- 12 Julia Danitz, violin
- 14 Johnna Wu, violin
- 17 Isabel Fairbanks, cello
- 19 Jeremy Kienbaum, viola
- 21 Fifi Zhang, piano

All events begin at 1:00pm and will be live-streamed free of charge at this link:

<https://gc-cuny.zoom.us/j/95813229159>

For detailed concert information, please visit our website at: <http://gcmusic.commonsgc.cuny.edu>