

presents...

The Robert and Ruth Dell Piano Series

SIR STEPHEN HOUGH | Piano

Tuesday, February 4, 2025 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

CHAMINADE

**Automne
Autre fois
Les sylvains**

LISZT

Piano Sonata in B Minor, S.178
Lento assai; Andante sostenuto; Allegro energico

INTERMISSION

HOUGH

Sonatina Nostalgica
*The road from Danebank
The bench by the Dam
A gathering at the Cross*

CHOPIN

Piano Sonata No. 3 in B Minor, Opus 58
*Allegro maestoso
Scherzo: Molto vivace
Largo
Finale: Presto non tanto*

The Robert and Ruth Dell Piano Series is made possible by a gift from Robert and Ruth Dell.

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ARTIST PROFILE

San Francisco Performances presents Sir Stephen Hough for the eighth time. He made his SF Performances recital debut in February 1991.

Named by *The Economist* as one of Twenty Living Polymaths, **Sir Stephen Hough** combines a distinguished career of a concert pianist with those of a composer and writer. In recognition of his contribution to cultural life, he became the first classical performer to be given a MacArthur Fellowship and was awarded a Knighthood for Services to Music in the Queen's Birthday Honours 2022.

In a career spanning over 40 years, Stephen Hough has played regularly with most of the world's leading orchestras, including televised and filmed appearances with the Berlin, London, China, Seoul and New York Philharmonic Orchestras, and the Concertgebouw, Budapest Festival and the NHK Symphony Orchestras. He has been a regular guest of recital series and festivals including Carnegie Hall's Stern Auditorium, London's Royal Festival Hall, Salzburg, Verbier, La Roque-d'Anthéron, Aspen, Tanglewood, Aldeburgh and Edinburgh.

He begins his 2024–25 concert season with his 30th appearance at the BBC Proms, performing at Last Night of the Proms to a live audience of 6,000 and televised audience of 3.5 million. Over the course of the following 12 months Hough performs over 80 concerts on four continents, opening Philharmonia Orchestra's season at the

Royal Festival Hall, performing a solo recital at Barbican Centre and giving the world premiere of his Willa Cather-inspired Piano Quintet at Lincoln Center's David Geffen Hall. Following the 2023 world premiere of his own Piano Concerto (*The World of Yesterday*), named after Stefan Zweig's memoir, Hough brings the work to Adelaide, Bournemouth, Oregon, Singapore and Vermont Symphony Orchestras.

Hough's discography of 70 recordings has garnered awards including the Diapason d'Or de l'Année, several Grammy nominations, and eight Gramophone Awards including Record of the Year and the Gold Disc. For Hyperion he has recorded the complete piano concertos of Beethoven, Brahms, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Rachmaninov, Saint-Saëns, and Tchaikovsky as well as celebrated solo recordings of the *Final Piano Pieces of Brahms*, Chopin's complete nocturnes, waltzes, ballades and scherzi, as well as recitals of Schumann, Schubert, Franck, Debussy and Mompou. Upcoming releases include a Liszt Album, a recital of encores, including arrangements made for Lang Lang's Disney project, and Hough's own Piano Concerto.

As a composer, Hough's *Fanfare Toccata* was commissioned for the 2022 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition and performed by all 30 competitors. His 2021 String Quartet No.1 *Les Six Rencontres*, was written for and recorded by the Takács Quartet for Hyperion Records. Hough's body of songs, choral and instrumental works have been commissioned by Musée du Louvre, National Gallery of London, Westminster Abbey, Westminster Cathedral, the Wigmore Hall, the Genesis Foundation, Gilmore International Keyboard Festival, the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation, BBC Sounds, and the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet. His music is published by Josef Weinberger Ltd.

As an author, Hough's memoir *Enough: Scenes from Childhood*, was published by Faber & Faber in Spring 2023. It follows his 2019 collection of essays *Rough Ideas: Reflections on Music and More* which received a Royal Philharmonic Society Award and was named one of the *Financial Times'* Books of the Year. His novel *The Final Retreat* was published in 2018 (Sylph Editions). He has also written for *The New York Times*, *The Telegraph*, *The Times*, *The Guardian* and the *Evening Standard*.

A resident of London, Hough is an Honorary Bencher of the Middle Temple, an Honorary Member of the Royal Philharmonic Society, an Honorary Fellow of Cambridge

University's Girton College, and holds the International Chair of Piano Studies at his alma mater, the Royal Northern College in Manchester. He is also on the faculty of The Juilliard School in New York.

PROGRAM NOTES

Automne Autre fois Les sylvains

CÉCILE CHAMINADE
(1857–1944)

Although her music is largely forgotten today, Cécile Chaminade was one of the first women to achieve fame as a composer. Chaminade showed her musical talent very early: she began composing at age eight and made her first tour as a pianist at 18. Her tours, which took her to the United States and repeatedly to England, and her compositions (hundreds of them) made her vastly popular in the years before World War I—in fact, Chaminade was the first woman composer to be awarded the Legion of Honor, in 1913. But music in the twentieth century passed Chaminade by, and most of her compositions, which include about 200 short pieces for piano, have suffered the faint praise of being labeled “salon music”: tuneful, agreeable, and intended for domestic performance. By the time of her death at age 86, Chaminade's music had virtually disappeared from concert life. Her one work to achieve a measure of lasting popularity is her suavely melodic *Concertino for Flute and Orchestra*, composed in 1902 and currently available in a number of recordings. Those interested in Chaminade should know that early in the twentieth century she made a number of recordings, and these make clear how good a pianist she was.

This recital opens with three of her pieces for piano, all composed in the 1880s and 1890s. These may all be categorized as salon music, but it should be noted immediately that they are very good salon music. Beautifully written for the piano, they show Chaminade's wonderful melodic gift and her instinctive sense of form, even in short pieces. These pieces hardly need detailed introduction, but we might note that *Automne* is one of Chaminade's *Études de Concert* (1893); its *Lento* opening section gives way to an animated *Con fuoco*. The fancifully titled *Autrefois* (“Another Time”) is from Chaminade's *Six pieces humoris-*

tiques (1887); she marks it both *delicatement* and *Allegro vivo*. *Les Sylvains* (1892) is subtitled *Les Fauns*; its languid opening gives way to more animated material high in the piano's register: often both hands are set in treble clef.

Piano Sonata in B Minor, S.178

FRANZ LISZT
(1811–1886)

Liszt wrote his *Sonata in B Minor* in 1852–3 and dedicated it to Robert Schumann. The first public performance took place four years later in Berlin in 1857, when it was played by Liszt's son-in-law Hans von Bülow. The *Sonata in B Minor* is in all senses of the word a revolutionary work, for Liszt sets aside previous notions of sonata form and looks ahead to a new vision of what such a form might be. Schumann himself, then in serious mental decline, reportedly never heard the piece but could not have been especially comfortable with the dedication of a piece of music that flew so directly in the face of his own sense of what a sonata should be. Another figure in nineteenth-century music, however, reacted rapturously: Wagner wrote to Liszt to say, "The Sonata is beautiful beyond any conception, great, pleasing, profound and noble—it is sublime, just as you are yourself."

The most immediately distinctive feature of the sonata is that it is in one continuous span rather than being divided into separate, discrete movements. Despite the single-span structure, Liszt achieves something of the effect of traditional three-movement sonata form by giving the work a general fast-slow-fast shape. The entire sonata is built on just four themes, all introduced in the opening moments: the slowly-descending scale heard at the very beginning, marked *Lento assai*; the jagged, leaping theme in octaves that follows immediately—this is marked *Allegro energico*; dove-tailed into this is a propulsive figure of repeated eighth-notes, played first deep in the left hand; and a powerful hymn-like theme marked *Grandioso* and stamped out over steady accompaniment. These themes undergo a gradual but extensive development—a process Liszt called "the transformation of themes"—and are often made to perform quite varied functions as they undergo these transformations. For example, the propulsive left-hand figure, which sounds so ominous on its first appearance, is later made to sing in unexpected ways, while the jagged *Allegro ener-*

gico theme becomes the subject for a fugue at the opening of the third "movement." At the end, Liszt winds all this energy down, and the sonata concludes on a quiet recall of the slowly-descending *Lento assai* from the very beginning. After so much energy, the sonata vanishes on a very quiet B deep in the pianist's left hand.

The *Sonata in B Minor* was to some extent shaped by Schubert's "Wanderer" Fantasy of 1822, a work Liszt knew and greatly admired—he performed it often and made an arrangement of it for piano and orchestra. In the "Wanderer" Fantasy Schubert built an extended work in several contrasted sections, all based on a theme from his song *Die Wanderer*. Liszt allows himself more themes, but his technique is exactly the same as Schubert's: a single span of music evolves out of the ingenious transformation of just a few thematic ideas. Over the succeeding generations that idea would attract composers as different as Schoenberg (*Chamber Symphony No. 1*) and Sibelius (*Seventh Symphony*).

The *Sonata in B Minor* is extremely dramatic music, so dramatic that many guessed that it must have a program, as so much of Liszt's music does. But Liszt insisted that this is not descriptive or programmatic music. He wanted his sonata accepted as a piece of "pure music," to be heard and understood for itself.

Sonatina Nostalgica

SIR STEPHEN HOUGH
(B. 1961)

The composer has provided a note for this work:

My little *Sonatina Nostalgica*, lasting under five minutes, was written for my friend (and fellow Gordon Green student) Philip Fowke in celebration of his 70th birthday. It is "nostalgic" on three levels: firstly, it was commissioned by my old school, Chetham's; secondly, it deliberately utilises a Romantic musical language of yesteryear; but most importantly it evokes literal homesickness for the places of our youth, in this case the little "sonatina" village of Lymm in Cheshire.

1. The road from Danebank: Danebank was a grand country house which gave its name to today's Dane Bank Road. Along and about this road are places resonant with memories for me, not least the nursing home where my mother spent her final years. By happy coincidence some of Philip

Fowke's forebears, the Watkin family, lived at...Danebank.

2. The bench by the Dam: Lymm Dam is the picturesque source of the village; a calm lake whose surface reflects mature trees and the handsome steeple of the parish church. I had a bench installed there commemorating my parents. Drive a few miles down the road and you'll find the birthplace of John Ireland whose musical shadow falls over this pastoral movement.

3. A gathering at the Cross: Lymm Cross is a monument at the heart of the village and this movement is an affectionate tribute to the countless friends and family members who have gathered over many years for parties and dinners and carol-singing within striking distance of its crumbling sandstone structure.

The first movement is in ABA form and is made up of two contrasting but equally lyrical motifs. A dotted rhythm gesture appears in the final bar and becomes the theme of the second movement. The finale plays with these three ideas, tossing them around in a spirit of celebration.

—Sir Stephen Hough

Piano Sonata No. 3 in B Minor, Opus 58

FREDERIC CHOPIN
(1810–1849)

Chopin wrote the *Piano Sonata in B Minor*, his last large-scale composition for piano, during the summer of 1844, when he was 34. He composed the sonata at Nohant, the summer estate in central France he shared with the novelist George Sand. That summer represented a last moment of stasis in the composer's life—over the next several years his relationship with Sand would deteriorate, and his health, long ravaged by tuberculosis, would begin to fail irretrievably. Dedicated to Madame la Comtesse Emilie de Perthuis, a friend and pupil, the *Sonata in B Minor* was published in 1845. Chopin himself never performed it in public.

Chopin's sonatas have come in for a hard time from some critics, and this criticism intensifies to the degree that they depart from the formal pattern of the classical piano sonata. But it is far better to take these sonatas on their own terms and recognize that Chopin—like Beethoven before him—was willing to adapt classical forms for his own expressive purposes. The *Sonata in B Minor* is a big work—its four movements stretch

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out to nearly half an hour. The opening *Allegro maestoso* does indeed have a majestic beginning with the first theme plunging downward out of the silence, followed moments later by the gorgeous second subject in D major, marked *sostenuto*. The movement treats both these ideas but dispenses with a complete recapitulation and closes with a restatement of the second theme. The brief *Molto vivace* is a scherzo, yet here that form

is without the violence it sometimes takes on in Beethoven. This scherzo has a distinctly light touch, with the music flickering and flashing across the keyboard (the right-hand part is particularly demanding). A quiet *legato* middle section offers a moment of repose before the returning of the opening rush.

Chopin launches the lengthy *Largo* with sharply-dotted rhythms, over which the main theme—itsself dotted and marked *cantabile*—rises quietly and gracefully. This movement is also in ternary form, with a

flowing middle section in E major. The finale—*Presto, non tanto*—leaps to life with a powerful eight-bar introduction built of octaves before the main theme, correctly marked *Agitato*, launches this rondo in B minor. Of unsurpassed difficulty, this final movement—one of the greatest in the Chopin sonatas—brings the work to a brilliant close.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger