SAN FRANCISCO
**PERFORMANCES**

**presents...**

*The Robert and Ruth Dell Piano Series*

# JOYCE YANG | Piano

## Tuesday, April 1, 2025 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

**BEETHOVEN** **Piano Sonata in E-flat Major, Opus 31, No. 3**

*Allegro*
*Scherzo: Allegretto vivace*
*Menuetto: Moderato e grazioso*
*Presto con fuoco*

**RACHMANINOFF** **Six Preludes**

*Opus 32, No. 10 in B Minor: Lento*
*Opus 32, No. 12 in G-sharp Minor: Allegro*
*Opus 32, No. 1 in C Major: Allegro vivace*
*Opus 23, No. 4 in D Major: Andante cantabile*
*Opus 32, No. 5 in G Major: Moderato*
*Opus 32, No. 13 in D-flat Major: Grave*

INTERMISSION

**SCHUMANN** **Kreisleriana, Opus 16**

*Ausserst bewegt*
*Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch*
*Sehr aufgeregt*
*Sehr langsam*
*Sehr lebhaft*
*Sehr langsam*
*Sehr rasch*
*Schnell und spielend*

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

**This performance is dedicated to the memory of Herbert Smith.**

**Joyce Yang** is represented by Arts Management Group
130 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10019 artsmg.com

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## ARTIST PROFILE

*San Francisco Performances presents Joyce Yang for the fourth time. She made her solo debut in November 2021 and appeared with the Alexander String Quartet in 2015 and 2019.*

**Joyce Yang** first came to international attention in 2005 when, as the youngest contestant at 19 years old, she won the silver medal at the 12th Van Cliburn International Piano Competition and a year later made her New York Philharmonic debut.

Joyce Yang received the 2010 Avery Fisher Career Grant and earned her first Grammy® nomination for her recording of Franck, Kurtág, Previn & Schumann with violinist Augustin Hadelich.

Notable orchestral engagements have included the Chicago Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Hong Kong Philharmonic, and BBC Philharmonic, among others.

As a recitalist, Joyce Yang has performed at New York City's Lincoln Center and Metropolitan Museum, the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., Chicago's Symphony Hall, Zurich's Tonhalle, and all throughout Australia.

In the 2024–25 season, Yang shares her versatile repertoire performing with the orchestras of Indianapolis, Portland (OR), Buffalo, Nashville, Omaha, Rochester, Wichita, Quebec City, among others. She will be heard in recital in several cities including San Francisco, Dallas, Fort Worth, and Durham (Duke University).

Yang appears in the film *In the Heart of Music*, a documentary about the 2005 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. She is a Steinway artist.

## PROGRAM NOTES

### Piano Sonata in E-flat Major, Opus 31, No. 3

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN**
(1770–1827)

Beethoven spent the summer of 1802 in the small town of Heiligenstadt outside Vienna. It was a miserable time for Beethoven the man. At age 31, he had to face the fact that he was going deaf, and evidence suggests that his despair had him near suicide that summer. Yet this was a fertile time for Beethoven the composer. At Heiligenstadt he wrote his *Second Symphony* and six sonatas (three for violin and three for piano), and this is for the most part quite genial music: Beethoven was too great an artist to let the details of his personal life intrude on his music.

The three violin sonatas of Opus 30 broke new ground for the composer, particularly in his evolution toward a more dramatic style. The pattern of those three violin sonatas—a straightforward first, a stormy second, and a genial third—is repeated in the three piano sonatas of Opus 31. The first of these is somewhat conservative, the second (nicknamed *"The Tempest"*) is dramatic, and the third is relaxed after the stress of the second. Yet the *Piano Sonata in E-flat Major* shows some interesting features of its own, particularly in its classical poise and the structuring of the inner movements.

Beethoven keeps listeners off-balance at the opening of the *Allegro* with music of uncertain tonality and ambiguous pulse. The frequent ritards seem to imply several different tempos, and Beethoven contrasts the solemnity of these slow chords with the flowing high spirits of his main theme once it is launched. The falling dotted figures from the beginning will reappear in many forms across the span of this movement.

One normally expects a slow middle movement at this point, but this four-movement sonata lacks a true slow movement. The second movement is a scherzo marked *Allegretto vivace* and full of rustic energy. In sonata form rather than the expected ternary form, this scherzo moves along fluidly and with rhythmic point; the quiet ending—full of good humor—is particularly effective. The third movement is the minuet-and-trio of the classical sonata; here the minuet is a graceful slow waltz, and the chordal trio shows some relation to the minuet. Beethoven writes out the return of the opening material, specifying that all repeats must be taken the second time, and appends a brief coda that trails into silence.

The final movement, *Presto con fuoco*, sails easily along its galloping 6/8 meter. Beethoven's *con fuoco* marking might seems a little fierce for this essentially relaxed music—one feels not so much fire here as amiable spirits rolling along happily. In sonata form, this movement is—like the scherzo—particularly effective for its controlled dynamic.

### Six Preludes

**SERGE RACHMANINOFF**
(1873–1943)

The 24 preludes and fugues of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* have haunted subsequent composers. Two decades later Bach himself wrote another cycle of 24 preludes

and fugues in all the keys, a century later Chopin wrote precisely 24 piano preludes, and early in the 20th century Debussy composed two books of 12 preludes each. At mid-20th-century, Dmitri Shostakovich—just as haunted as his distinguished predecessors—also wrote a set of 24 preludes and fugues.

Rachmaninoff wrote a total of 24 piano preludes in all the major and minor keys as well, but—rather than writing them all at once—he spread their composition out over his career. His *Prelude in C-sharp Minor* (1892) quickly became so popular that audiences wanted to hear nothing else, and Rachmaninoff waited 11 years before completing the ten preludes of his Opus 23 in 1903. He then waited another seven before composing the final 13 as his Opus 32 during the summer of 1910, carefully completing the cycle of keys in the process.

Rachmaninoff spent that summer at the family retreat at Ivanovka. The previous season had seen an exhausting tour of America, during which he had played the premiere of his *Third Piano Concerto*, toured with the Boston Symphony, conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra, given recitals in numerous cities, and repeated the *Third Concerto* with Mahler conducting the New York Philharmonic. Now at Ivanovka he was content to relax amid familiar and quiet surroundings—that summer he rode, fished, and planted willow trees. He also composed, and the preludes came so quickly in fact, that Rachmaninoff composed three of them (*Nos. 5, 11,* and *12*) in one day, two more (*Nos. 7* and *8*) the next.

Rachmaninoff's preludes are brief and are often carefully unified around a melodic or rhythmic cell; many are in ternary form, with a modified return of the opening material. These preludes can also be extremely difficult to perform, with the music ranging from the brilliant and exuberant to the dark and introspective. Rachmaninoff did not intend that these preludes should always be performed as a set, and pianists usually perform only a selection. This recital offers five preludes from Opus 32 and one from Opus 23.

Longest of the preludes in Opus 32, *No. 10 in B Minor* is regarded by some as the finest of the set. Rachmaninoff said that this music was inspired by Arnold Böcklin's darkly-evocative painting *The Homecoming*. Dramatic and full-throated, this prelude drives to its climax on chords built of pounding triplets.

The haunting *No. 12 in G-sharp Minor* opens very quietly, with the pianist's right hand laying out a steady sequence of rippling, dark arpeggios, and beneath these the left hand has the spare and halting main idea. The rippling sound of the beginning continues virtually throughout; Rachmaninoff builds the middle section into music of intensity and force, then allows it to fade away, and the prelude vanishes, almost like smoke.

The brief but ebullient *No. 1 in C Major* rides along great washes of sound—the marking is *Allegro vivace*, but it comes to a surprisingly restrained close. The *Prelude No. 4 in D Major* is the only prelude in this selection from Opus 23. Rachmaninoff marks it *Andante cantabile*, and it does indeed sing, with the grand right-hand melody flowing along above triplet accompaniment. The music grows more complex, and soon Rachmaninoff is developing three separate strands: accompaniment lines frame a melody in the piano's middle register. The prelude drives to a great climax on a shower of massive chords, then falls away to a quiet close.

*No. 5 in G Major* is all delicacy—here a limpid melody floats above rippling accompaniment, grows capricious, and finally comes to a shimmering close. Though Rachmaninoff is reported to have disliked Debussy's music, there are moments here that evoke the music of that composer. The concluding *No. 13 in D-flat Major*, marked *Grave*, begins with a simple but noble rising melody. This grows more animated, and the simple opening soars up to a titanic restatement at the climax.

## Kreisleriana, Opus 16

**ROBERT SCHUMANN**
(1810–1856)

Few composers have been as well-read as Robert Schumann, who found inspiration in a range of writers, from Shakespeare to Goethe to Jean Paul to Byron. One of the strongest literary influences on Schumann was the work of the German writer E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776—1822), author of novels and fantastic tales. Hoffmann named one of his sets of fantastic stories *Fantasiestücke*, and Schumann borrowed that title for several of his own works, but it was Hoffmann's fictional character Johannes Kreisler who seems to have struck Schumann most strongly. A musician and critic (like Schumann himself), Kreisler was a perfect example of the literary concept known as *Zerrisenheit*: the artist-hero who is torn apart by the conflict between his idealized sense of order and the claims of the world he must live in; one of Hoffman's original working titles, in fact, appears to have been *Lucid Intervals of an Insane Musician*. Schumann, one of the most mentally tormented of all composers, saw in Johannes Kreisler a spiritual brother, and he borrowed that name for this collection of eight piano pieces, which he specifically called "fantasies."

Schumann wrote *Kreisleriana* in the spring of 1838. He was 27 years old, his efforts to marry Clara Wieck were being thwarted by the opposition of her father, and music seemed to pour out of the young composer. From January 1838 came his *Novelletten*, followed by the *Kinderszenen* in February; in March Schumann composed the *Fantasy in C Major*, and in April—in the space of four days—he wrote *Kreisleriana*. Schumann may have called these pieces "fantasies," which implies formlessness, but they are in fact quite disciplined works. They do, however, defy easy classification: some are in ABA form, some are in simple binary form, and several have forms all their own. As a very general rule, it might be observed that the odd-numbered movements are fast and dramatic, the even slow and expressive, but even this observation is undercut by the frequent internal episodes at contrasting tempos. Particularly striking is the variety of mood and expression in this music—one moment it can be simple and lyric, the next it turns mercurial, and suddenly it is violent and extroverted. Yet this music tells no tales, paints no pictures, nor does it try to translate Hoffmann's magical stories into music—these eight pieces are abstract music, complete in themselves. Throughout, one feels Schumann's instinctive and idiomatic understanding of the piano, and the end of Kreisleriana is stunning: after the galloping, hammering energy of the final piece, the music grows quiet and suddenly vanishes like smoke on two barely-audible strokes of sound.

The apparent inspiration for this music was Hoffmann's character, but Schumann chose to dedicate *Kreisleriana* "To His Friend Frederic Chopin." His letters, however, make clear that the real inspiration for this music was his love for Clara Wieck—he wrote to tell her: "Play my *Kreisleriana* occasionally. In some passages there is to be found an utterly wild love, and your life and mine."

*— Program notes by Eric Bromberger*