

EASTMAN SUMMER SERIES

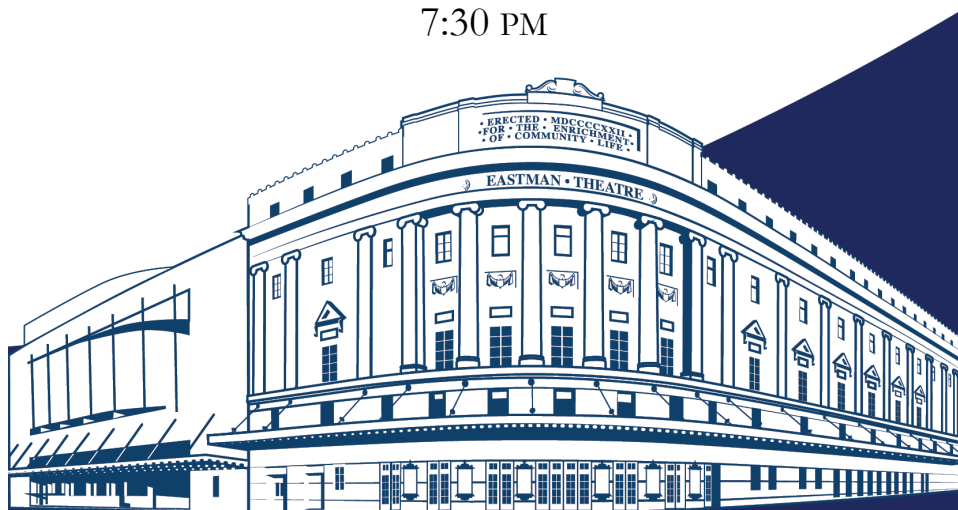
HORN INSTITUTE FACULTY RECITAL

ELIZABETH FREIMUTH,
MARK HOUGHTON, PETER KURAU,
NIKOLETTE LABONTE, HORN
CHIAO-WEN CHENG, PIANO

Wednesday, July 1, 2026

Kilbourn Hall

7:30 PM



Eastman School of Music

PROGRAM

Short Suite for Horn Quartet

I. Toccata

III. Ricercata

Verne Reynolds
(1926-2011)

Elizabeth Freimuth, Mark Houghton,
Nikolette LaBonte, Peter Kurau, horn

Sonata for Horn and Piano (2009)

Hills

Fields of Heather

Chip off the Old Mound

Barbara York
(1949-2020)

Mark Houghton, horn
Chiao-Wen Cheng, piano

Three Brilliant Fantasies on Themes of Schubert, Op. 339

Carl Czerny
(1791-1857)
arr. Hans Pizka

Peter Kurau, horn
Chiao-Wen Cheng, piano

Time and Space (2001)

Richard Bissill
(b. 1960)

Elizabeth Freimuth and Nikolette LaBonte, horn
Chiao-Wen Cheng, piano

Myths and Legends (2000)

I. Allegro ritmico

Eric Ewazen
(b. 1954)

Elizabeth Freimuth, Mark Houghton,
Nikolette LaBonte, Peter Kurau, horn

PROGRAM NOTES

Sonata for Horn and Piano (2009)

Barbara York

Barbara York's Sonata for Horn and Piano showcases the horn's wide expressive range, from intimate lyricism to brilliant virtuosity. Written with a deep understanding of both instruments, the work features a true partnership between horn and piano, unfolding through a series of contrasting moods, colors, and characters. York's accessible musical language and gift for memorable melody create a work that is both emotionally engaging and technically demanding, inviting listeners on a journey that is reflective, energetic, and ultimately uplifting.

Three Brilliant Fantasies on Themes of Schubert, Op. 339

Carl Czerny's fame as a composer of countless piano studies has largely obscured the other aspects of his extraordinary career. At three he could play "a few little pieces on the piano" and by the time he was ten he had committed to memory "nearly everything by Mozart, Clementi and the other piano composers of his time." His "uncommonly fiery" playing soon earned him a place among Vienna's most important native pianists, and his future as a soloist seemed assured when Beethoven took him on as a pupil. Czerny promptly learned all of his new teacher's piano works, and arranged the score of Beethoven's opera Leonora for piano, but felt that his own playing "lacked the brilliant, calculated mannerisms that are usually part of a travelling virtuoso's equipment." These doubts were reinforced by the weakening effects of smallpox and measles, and when he was fifteen the prodigy decided that his own preference was for teaching. The extraordinary energy which had characterized Czerny's childhood remained conspicuous throughout the remainder of his life. His reputation as a disciplined teacher grew rapidly and, although he could command high enough fees to keep both himself and his parents in some luxury, he continued to teach from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m. daily for the next 20 years. At the same time he took up composition as a sideline, only to find his interest developing to such an extent that he wrote music "in every free moment, especially in the evenings." The result was a total output of 861 numbered compositions, but also a similar number of arrangements of other composer's pieces. He also found time to write a lengthy history of music and a number of plays, but not for an active social life: although he knew the leading Viennese musicians, he lived alone after the death of his parents with only a family of cats and kittens for company.

PROGRAM NOTES

The Three Brilliant Fantasies on Favourite Themes from Franz Schubert's Works, op.339, date from about 1836, when Czerny felt sufficiently secure as a composer to give up teaching. In many respects they are characteristic of his style: over 60 of his works use popular themes by other composers as a basis for variation and development, typically accompanying the unornamented original with a glittering cascade of notes. This loyalty to the original composer's ideas disintegrates in the third Fantasy. Where Czerny's up-tempo treatment of Schubert's Piano Fantasy is almost cavalier, but by and large the themes are used with some respect for their original character. The results, as Czerny himself admitted, were fashionable and attractive rather than profound, but today they can also be used to provide a fascinating insight into musical tastes in the 1830s.

Much of Schubert's music had not been published a decade after his death and that which was available had a relatively small circulation. Czerny's choice of themes therefore reveals which of Schubert's works had become popular by 1836, and his rapid succession of well-known tunes would have brought the same smile of recognition to contemporary audiences as they do today. His brilliant piano parts probably originated as improvisation and therefore provide concrete evidence of Czerny's pianistic ability as well as demonstrating the extent of his imagination. They may also have influenced his most notable piano pupil Franz List, whose own compositions include a number of far more serious elaborations on other composers' themes and who dedicated his own extremely demanding Transcendental Studies to Czerny.

The most surprising aspect of the Three Fantasies is Czerny's choice of the horn as soloist, for apart from some trios in which he used it alongside a violin and piano, he had not previously used the instrument extensively. In these circumstances, he might therefore have felt most comfortable writing for the established "natural" horn, but the flexibility of the writing suggests that the Fantasies were composed instead for the newly invented valved instrument. This provides a clue to their possible provenance, for during the mid- 1830s Viennese audiences were being delighted by the "taste and science, sweetness and power" of the valve horn in the hands of Joseph Rudolph Lewy. Lewy's reputation as Vienna's leading exponent of the new instrument had spread far and wide, impressing Berlioz with his "exceptional" qualities and Wagner with his "discretion". Schubert too had found his playing irresistible and had written the horn lines in the songs *Auf dem Strom* and *Nachtgesang im Walde* for him to play. Could it, therefore, have been Lewy who, consciously or unconsciously, prompted

MEET THE ARTISTS

Czemy to use the horn as a foil for the dazzling piano lines of the Three Fantasies?

Note (c. 1991) by John Humphries

Elizabeth Freimuth, a distinguished horn player and educator, joined the faculty of the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University as Professor of Horn in the fall of 2025 after serving as a guest teaching artist during the 2024–25 academic year. An alumna of both the Eastman School of Music and Rice University's Shepherd School of Music, she has built an acclaimed career as both a performer and teacher.

Freimuth has served as Principal Horn of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra since 2006, holding a chair endowed by the late Charles and Mary Yeiser. Prior to joining the Cincinnati Symphony, she was Principal Horn of the San Francisco Ballet Orchestra from 2005 to 2006 and the Kansas City Symphony from 2000 to 2005. Earlier in her career, she served as Assistant Principal and Utility Horn with the Colorado Symphony from 1998 to 2000.

As a soloist, Freimuth has appeared with numerous orchestras, including the Cincinnati Symphony, Kansas City Symphony, Butler County Symphony, Johnson City Symphony Orchestra, Overland Park Symphony, and Lakewood Symphony. She has also performed as a guest principal horn with many of the world's leading ensembles, including the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, KBS Symphony Orchestra of Korea, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra, and St. Louis Symphony Orchestra. Her prominence in the horn community has led to featured artist appearances at the International Horn Symposiums in Memphis (2013) and at Ball State University (2018), as well as the International Women's Brass Conference at Northern Kentucky University in 2014.

A dedicated educator, Freimuth has served as an adjunct instructor at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM) since 2011. From 2002 to 2005, she taught horn at the University of Missouri–Kansas City Conservatory of Music. Throughout her career, she has presented master classes and guest teaching residencies at numerous

MEET THE ARTISTS

institutions, including the New World Symphony, Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music, the Eastman School of Music, Rice University, the Beijing Conservatory of China, the University of Evansville, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Carnegie Mellon University, the University of Dayton, West Virginia University, Ohio State University, the University of Northern Colorado, the University of Northern Iowa, and Interlochen Arts Academy. In 2011, she was the featured artist and clinician at Blast of Brass, a summer brass intensive program in Dallas, Texas.

During the summer months, Freimuth performs at the Sun Valley Music Festival and has served since 2015 as Principal Horn and a member of the teaching faculty at the Brevard Music Center in North Carolina. Since 2019, she has co-hosted an annual Summer Horn Intensive at the Eastman School of Music for high school and pre-professional students. In 2022, she was appointed to the Board of Directors of the International Horn Competition of America, where she currently serves as Co-Director.

Freimuth earned both a Bachelor of Music in Horn Performance and a Bachelor of Music in Instrumental Music Education from the Eastman School of Music, where she studied with Verne Reynolds and W. Peter Kurau and received the school's prestigious Performer's Certificate. She later completed a Master of Music degree at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music, further establishing the foundation for her successful career as a performer, educator, and leader in the horn profession.

Mark Houghton has been a member of the horn section of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra since 2014. Previously, he held principal horn posts in the Harrisburg Symphony Orchestra, the Phoenix Symphony and the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra. Houghton is a prizewinner of national solo horn competitions, and has appeared as a guest artist or soloist with many notable orchestras and music festivals.

Raised in a musical family with horn-playing parents, Houghton began on piano, and started horn at age 11. He attended the Eastman School of Music, earning a bachelor's degree with a performer's certificate as a student of W. Peter Kurau. Further training included professional studies with William VerMeulen. A passionate educator, Houghton has presented

MEET THE ARTISTS

numerous clinics and masterclasses across the nation, and currently serves as Adjunct Professor of Horn at Duquesne University.

Houghton is part-owner of Houghton Horns, a family business whose mission is to spread the joy of music through providing the highest level of products, services, and resources to the brass playing community.

Nikollette LaBonte is the newly appointed Principal Horn of the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra and is an accomplished orchestral player having had the opportunity to perform with orchestras across North America including guest principal engagements with the New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Vancouver Symphony, Tucson Symphony, and an extended engagement with the Baltimore Symphony as Visiting Guest Principal Horn. In addition to her regular performances in Calgary, she also serves as principal horn of the Music in the Mountains summer festival and comes to Calgary from the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra where she served as Associate Principal Horn. Nikollette has also held positions with the Fort Worth Symphony as Acting Principal Horn and the Hawaii Symphony as Acting Assistant Principal Horn.

Active as an educator, Ms. LaBonte was the Instructor of Natural Horn at the Eastman School of Music, served on the faculties of the Eastman Horn Institute and Carnegie Hall's NYO-USA, and has been a guest lecturer at institutions including Oberlin Conservatory, SUNY Potsdam, the University of Maryland, and the University of Texas at Austin. Nikollette is also an award-winning soloist and was a participant in the prestigious ARD International Competition in 2021, the only American horn player invited. Originally from South Florida, Ms. LaBonte received both her bachelor's and master's degrees from the Eastman School of Music under the tutelage of W. Peter Kurau. Originally from South Florida, Ms. LaBonte received both her bachelor's and master's degrees from the Eastman School of Music under the tutelage of W. Peter Kurau.

MEET THE ARTISTS

Outside the concert hall, Ms. LaBonte is active in promoting classical music throughout the community. She serves as the Assistant Artistic Director of the Kendall Betts Horn Camp, is on the Horn Call Editorial Board of the International Horn Society, and has presented performances and lectures as a member of the International Horn Society and the International Women's Brass Conference. Away from the horn, she enjoys hiking, bicycling, and scuba diving, although she must reserve the latter for her visits to more tropical destinations.

Peter Kurau is Professor of Horn at the Eastman School of Music, and performed for 30 years a member of the horn section of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra— 11 years as Assistant/Associate/Utility horn, and the last 19 as principal horn, retiring from the latter position in September 2023. He has been honored by the International Horn Society as a recipient of the Punto Award, and has served on the IHS Advisory Council, and as Secretary/Treasurer, and Vice-President of the Society. He was the host of the 1997 symposium, held at the Eastman School.

His alumni hold positions in major orchestras, military ensembles through-out the United States, including the US Army Field Band, the US Army Band ["Pershing's Own"], the Marine Band ["President's Own"], the US Navy Band, and the orchestras/symphonies of Utah, Calgary, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Pacific, Syracuse, Rochester, Charlotte, and Tulsa, among others, and at major universities, including the Eastman School and Colburn School.

In 1997, he was selected by the United States Information Agency to serve as an Artistic Ambassador, presenting concerts and classes in Kazakhstan, Serbia-Montenegro, Macedonia, and Syria. He has performed and taught at numerous music festivals brought the US, Europe, and Asia, and has served as an adjudicator for the Jeju International Horn Competition, the Fischhoff Chamber Music Competition, the IHCA, and the competitions sponsored by the IHS.

He resides with his wife of 45 years, soprano Pamela Kurau, in Honeoye Falls, NY, along with "several" feline companions.

MEET THE ARTISTS

Taiwanese pianist **Chiao-Wen Cheng** has performed as soloist, recitalist, and chamber musician throughout the United States and Asia. Her solo engagements include the Fort Worth Symphony, Greece Symphony, and Taiwan Shin-Min Orchestra. Cheng has won numerous piano competitions and awards, including First Prizes at the Schubert Club Competition (2012); the Piano Texas International Academy and Festival Concerto Competition (2010); the Excellence in Accompanying Award at the Eastman School of Music; and the Clara Ascherfeld Award in Excellence in Accompanying at the Peabody Institute (2009).

A vibrant and dedicated chamber musician, Cheng has become a sought after collaborative partner. She performs with the Argos Trio and has appeared numerous times on the Society for Chamber Music in Rochester concert series. A particularly rewarding facet of her career has involved chamber music concerts with musicians from all of the world, including Juliana Athayde (concertmaster, Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra); Ian Bousfield (former principal trombone, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra); Astrid Schween (cellist, Juilliard String Quartet); and Ko-ichiro Yamamoto (principal trombone, Seattle Symphony Orchestra). Cheng has also enjoyed presenting solo piano recitals in major venues around the world.

Cheng began piano lessons with her aunt at the age of four. She completed her bachelor's degree at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music as a student of Frank Weinstock, where she received a Van Cliburn Scholarship. She completed her master's degree at the Peabody Institute, Johns Hopkins University as a student of Benjamin Pasternack, where she received a full scholarship.

Cheng holds a doctoral degree from the Eastman School of Music, where she was a student and teaching assistant of Barry Snyder. At Eastman, Cheng was also the recipient of a graduate assistantship as a collaborative pianist and large ensemble pianist. Currently, Cheng is an Assistant Professor of Accompanying at the Eastman School of Music and an Adjunct Professor of Piano/Vocal Coach/Collaborative Pianist at SUNY Geneseo.



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