

FACULTY ARTIST SERIES

RAN DANK, PIANO

Sunday, September 21, 2025

Kilbourn Hall

3:30 PM



EASTMAN
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
UNIVERSITY of ROCHESTER

PROGRAM

Menuet sur le nom d'Haydn, M. 58

Maurice Ravel
(1875-1937)

Piano Sonata in E Minor, Hob. XVI:34

Presto

Adagio

Finale. Molto vivace

Franz Joseph Haydn
(1732-1809)

La lugubre gondola, S. 200

Franz Liszt
(1811-1886)

La valse, M. 72

Maurice Ravel

BRIEF INTERMISSION

Nocturne in E-flat Major, Op. 55, No. 2

Frédéric Chopin
(1810-1849)

PROGRAM

Carnaval, Op. 9

Robert Schumann
(1810-1856)

Préambule

Pierrot

Arlequin

Valse noble

Eusebius

Florestan

Coquette

Réplique

Papillons

Lettres dansantes

Chiarina

Chopin

Estrella

Reconnaissance

Pantalon et Colombine

Valse allemande

Paganini

Aveu

Promenade

Pause

Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins

PROGRAM NOTES

Menuet sur le nom d'Haydn, M. 58

Maurice Ravel

In 1909, the *Revue musicale* commissioned several composers to contribute homages to Joseph Haydn on the centenary of his death. Each composer was asked to base a short work on a musical cryptogram derived from the letters of Haydn's name. Ravel responded with a minuet, a choice at once historically resonant and subtly ironic: the minuet was a central dance form of the eighteenth century, cultivated by Haydn himself, but here it is refracted through Ravel's early twentieth-century lens.

The work demonstrates Ravel's characteristic precision of texture and elegance of phrase. While the dance rhythm remains unmistakable, the harmonic palette is enriched with modal inflections, chromatic colorations, and a refined pianistic sonority. The miniature thus functions not only as a tribute to Haydn's Classical clarity but also as an assertion of Ravel's own aesthetic—classicism filtered through modernism.

Piano Sonata in E Minor, Hob. XVI:34

Franz Joseph Haydn

Haydn's keyboard sonatas, written across nearly four decades, trace the transformation of the fortepiano from a peripheral instrument into the medium of choice for expressive and structural experimentation. The *E Minor Sonata, Hob. XVI:34*, belongs to a group of three works published in 1784 and is one of his most technically demanding and emotionally concentrated sonatas.

The Presto is notable for its stormy character, built upon sharply etched motives, syncopations, and dramatic contrasts that anticipate the turbulence of Beethoven's early piano writing. The central Adagio, in G major, adopts the rhetorical style of an operatic aria, with ornate embellishments and an improvisatory quality that invites interpretive freedom. The closing Molto vivace returns to the home key with wit and exuberance, deploying syncopations and rhythmic displacements that destabilize the expected minuet-like symmetry. Taken as a whole, the sonata exemplifies Haydn's capacity to marry formal clarity with an almost proto-Romantic intensity.

PROGRAM NOTES

La lugubre gondola, S. 200

Franz Liszt

Composed during Liszt's final years in Venice, *La lugubre gondola* epitomizes the composer's late style: austere, harmonically ambiguous, and radically economical in texture. The work is bound up with Liszt's premonitions of Wagner's death—indeed, Wagner died in Venice in 1883, and Liszt himself reported a vision of a funeral gondola gliding across the lagoon.

The piece unfolds in a sparse, fragmented idiom. Static harmonies give way to chromatic descent, and the rhythm suggests the inexorable rocking of waterborne procession. Tonality is destabilized: diminished and augmented chords replace traditional cadential anchors, prefiguring twentieth-century harmonic language. In its stark concentration, *La lugubre gondola* represents Liszt's renunciation of virtuosic display in favor of existential meditation. It is music of premonition and mourning, embodying the late nineteenth century's confrontation with mortality and dissolution.

La valse, M. 72

Maurice Ravel

Conceived initially in 1906 as a “Wien,” an idealized homage to Johann Strauss II, *La valse* underwent a radical transformation in the aftermath of World War I. By the time Ravel completed the work in 1920, it had become not merely a celebration of the Viennese waltz but a deconstruction of it—an apotheosis and a catastrophe simultaneously.

The work opens with a primordial haze, out of which the waltz rhythm gradually emerges. As the piece progresses, the dance is magnified, distorted, and propelled with increasingly violent momentum. Harmonic instability and orchestral sonority (retained even in the piano transcription) undermine the surface gaiety. By its cataclysmic conclusion, the waltz has disintegrated into a whirling vortex, often read as a metaphor for the collapse of European civilization after the war. Yet Ravel resisted overt programmatic readings, insisting that *La valse* remained a tribute to the waltz itself. The tension between nostalgia and annihilation is what lends the work its enduring ambiguity.

PROGRAM NOTES

Nocturne in E-flat Major, Op. 55, No. 2

Frédéric Chopin

Chopin's nocturnes, often associated with lyrical intimacy, evolve in his later works into increasingly contrapuntal and structurally complex compositions. The *E-flat Major Nocturne*, composed in Paris in the mid-1840s, exemplifies this transformation.

The piece unfolds as a polyphonic dialogue: the opening melody, poised and songlike, is soon joined by an active inner voice that generates tension and complexity. This conversational interplay intensifies, giving the music an almost dramatic quality before it subsides into the nocturne's characteristic repose. Harmonically, the work ventures into remote regions, with chromatic progressions and enharmonic shifts that foreshadow late Romantic harmony. Unlike Chopin's early nocturnes, this is not merely music of reverie but of interior drama, balancing lyricism with intellectual rigor.

Carnaval, Op. 9

Robert Schumann

Carnaval occupies a central place in Schumann's early piano oeuvre, alongside *Papillons* (Op. 2) and *Dauidsbündlertänze* (Op. 6), as part of his fascination with the miniature cycle. Composed between 1834 and 1835, it consists of twenty-one character pieces grouped under the subtitle *Scènes mignonnes sur quatre notes*—"Little Scenes on Four Notes." Those four notes (A–Eb–C–B, notated in German as A–S–C–H) form a musical cryptogram. They derive both from the town of Asch, birthplace of Schumann's then-fiancée Ernestine von Fricken, and from the letters in Schumann's own surname. The cipher thus becomes both personal and structural, appearing in various guises throughout the cycle.

The work is cast as a carnival masquerade, a cultural phenomenon Schumann knew from German Fasching tradition but which also resonated with his literary imagination. Within this framework, he introduces a gallery of characters. Some belong to the *commedia dell'arte*—Harlequin, Pierrot, Pantalón, Columbine—whose masks allow for comic and grotesque exaggeration. Others are musical portraits of friends and contemporaries: Chopin is evoked with refined *bel canto* figuration, Paganini with virtuosic flair. At the heart of the work stand Schumann's own alter egos: Florestan, the impetuous, extroverted side of

PROGRAM NOTES

his personality, and Eusebius, contemplative and poetic. These figures had already appeared in his critical writings and would recur throughout his music.

Despite its kaleidoscopic surface, *Carnaval* is not a disconnected suite but a tightly interwoven composition. Motivic relationships bind the pieces together: the A–S–C–H motive appears in both obvious and hidden forms, while rhythmic and thematic cross-references create continuity. The sequence of moods—from sparkling brilliance (Préambule, Valse noble) to lyrical inwardness (Chiarina, Eusebius) to grotesquerie (Papillons, Sphinxes)—is carefully balanced, culminating in the triumphant “March of the Davidsbündler.” Here Schumann imagines his invented brotherhood of progressive artists defeating the “Philistines” of musical conservatism, a manifesto-like gesture that invests the cycle with cultural as well as personal meaning.

Pianistically, *Carnaval* is both a showcase and an experiment. Its demands range from delicate lyricism to extroverted bravura, but its virtuosity always serves characterization rather than display. Stylistically, it reveals Schumann’s synthesis of influences: the dance rhythms of Schubert, the contrapuntal rigor of Bach, the miniature as cultivated by Jean Paul (a favorite writer), and the pianistic idiom shaped by Chopin. Yet the result is distinctly his own—a mosaic of masks and voices that anticipates modern notions of fragmented identity and self-portraiture.

Ultimately, *Carnaval* is more than a sequence of salon pieces. It is an allegory of art itself, where personal narrative, social circle, and cultural tradition intersect within the frame of a masquerade. Its mixture of public festivity and private symbolism epitomizes the Romantic conviction that music can serve simultaneously as autobiography, literature, and philosophy.

We acknowledge with respect the Seneca Nation, known as the “Great Hill People” and “Keepers of the Western Door” of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. We take this opportunity to thank the people whose ancestral lands the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester currently occupies in Rochester, New York.

MEET THE ARTIST

A rare blend of virtuosity and intellectual prowess, pianist **Ran Dank** has proven himself as one of the most thoughtful, and engaging pianists of our time.



Mr. Dank's past seasons performances have included recitals at the San Francisco Performances Series, Gilmore, Ravinia, Carnegie Hall's Zankel and Weill Halls, Steinway Hall, Gardner Museum, Kennedy Center, Town Hall, Yale School of Music, Philips Collection, Morgan Library, Pro Musica in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, Portland Ovarions, and have garnered critical acclaim from the New York Times and The Washington Post. Mr. Dank has performed as a soloist with the orchestras of Cleveland, Sydney, St. Luke's, Portland, Eugene, Toledo, Hawaii, Kansas City, Vermont, Charleston, Jerusalem, Valencia, Phoenix, Hilton Head, among others, working under the batons such as Michael Stern, Jahja Ling, Michael Christie, Kirill Karabits, Jun Märkl, Pinchas Zukerman, Jorge Mester, Jaime Laredo, and Ken-David Masur. Mr. Dank's recent performance of the monumental set of variations *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* at the University of Chicago has been selected as one of the top ten performances of 2017 by the *Chicago Classical Review*.

Mr. Dank is also an ardent advocate for contemporary music, and has performed in recent seasons Kevin Puts' piano concerto *Night*, the Tobias Picker concerto, *Keys to the City*, Frederic Rzewski's *The People United Will Never Be Defeated*, William Bolcom's Pulitzer-winning set of *Twelve New Etudes*, and has given, alongside pianist and wife, Soyeon Kate Lee, the world premieres of Frederic Rzewski's *Four Hands*, and Alexander Goehr's *Seven Improptus*. Mr. Dank and Soyeon Kate lee have also featured the world premiere of multiple Grammy-nominated pianist and composer's Marc-André Hamelin's *Tango* for piano four-hands.

The recipient of numerous honors, Ran Dank won a coveted place on the Young Concert Artists roster in 2009 and subsequently made his New York recital and Kennedy Center debuts. He has also won top prizes at the the Cleveland International Competition, the Naumburg International Piano Competition, the Sydney International Piano Competition, and the Hilton Head International Piano Competition.

UPCOMING EASTMAN SERIES CONCERTS

Tickets for all series concerts can be purchased at EastmanTheatre.org

FACULTY ARTIST SERIES

Alexander Kobrin, piano

Tuesday, September 23, 2025 at 7:30 PM

Kilbourn Hall

FACULTY ARTIST SERIES

Mikhail Kopelman, violin

Thursday, September 25, 2025 at 7:30 PM

Kilbourn Hall

EASTMAN PRESENTS - THE BARBARA B. SMITH WORLD MUSIC SERIES

Vieux Farke Toure

Friday, September 26, 2025 at 7:30 PM

Kilbourn Hall

FACULTY ARTIST SERIES

Chelsea Whitaker, piano

Friday, September 26, 2025 at 7:30 PM

Hatch Recital Hall

UPCOMING STUDENT ENSEMBLE CONCERTS

All student performances are free unless otherwise noted.

Eastman School Symphony Orchestra

Wednesday, September 24, 2025 at 7:30 PM

Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre

EMuSE

Thursday, September 25, 2025 at 7:30 PM

Hatch Recital Hall

Eastman Chorale

Tuesday, October 5, 2025 at 7:30 PM

Kilbourn Hall



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