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The 19th International Chopin Piano Competition Gold & Silver Medalist — Eric LU & Kevin CHEN Piano Recital

2025.12.17 Wed. 19:30

Weiwuying Concert Hall

Duration is 120 minutes with a 20-minute intermission.



National Kaohsiung
CENTER FOR THE ARTS

WEI WUYING

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國家表演藝術中心 National Performing Arts Center

Program

Piano | Kevin CHEN

F. CHOPIN: Grande Valse Brillante in E-flat Major, Op. 18

F. CHOPIN: 12 Études, Op. 10

F. CHOPIN: Polonaise héroïque in A-flat Major, Op. 53

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Piano | Eric LU

F. CHOPIN: Nocturne in c-sharp minor, Op. 27 No. 1

F. CHOPIN: Barcarolle in F-sharp Major, Op. 60

F. CHOPIN: Polonaise in B-flat Major, Op. 71 No. 2

F. CHOPIN: Sonata No. 2 in b-flat minor, Op. 35

- I. Grave – Doppio movimento
- II. Scherzo
- III. Marche funèbre: Lento
- IV. Finale: Presto

About the Artists

Piano |

Kevin CHEN

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"An authentic artist with beautiful sensitivity and remarkable mastery."

— Bertrand Boissard, Diapason

"In Kevin's hands, the genius of Chopin was at last revealed."

— Christopher Axworthy

Canadian pianist Kevin CHEN has quickly established himself as one of the most distinctive voices of his generation, praised for his poetic sensitivity, natural eloquence, and remarkable technical command.

Most recently, in October 2025, Kevin won the Second Prize at the 19th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw. His decision to perform the complete set

of Chopin Études Op. 10 in the second stage drew wide attention and praise, with Polish critics calling his interpretation “a complete musical story, not a show of virtuosity.”

He is also the First Prize winner of the Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition (Tel Aviv, 2023), the Concours de Genève (2022), the Liszt International Piano Competition (Budapest, 2021), the Hilton Head International Piano Competition (2020), and the International Piano-e-Competition (Minneapolis, 2019). His artistic maturity and individuality have been widely recognized by audiences and juries alike.

Kevin has appeared with major orchestras including the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Taipei Symphony Orchestra, Hungarian National Orchestra, Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, and Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra. He has been featured at international festivals such as La Roque d'Anthéron, Chopin and His Europe (Warsaw), and Duszyni-Zdrój, and has performed in leading venues including Carnegie Hall, Berlin Philharmonie, Munich Prinzregententheater, St. John's Smith Square (London), and the National Concert Hall (Taipei).

Born in Edmonton, Canada, Kevin began piano studies at the age of five and soon attracted national attention, winning first place at the Canadian Music Competition at eight. He was later named one of the CBC's “Top 30 Hot Canadian Classical Musicians Under 30” and one of Maclean's magazine's “100 Remarkable Canadians.”

He currently studies at the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover with Professor Arie VARDI.

Program Notes

Written by CHANG Hao-min
Lecturer, Nightingale Foundation;
M.A. in Musicology, National Taiwan Normal University
Translated by HSIEH Lin

F. CHOPIN: Grande Valse Brillante in E-flat Major, Op. 18

Composed in 1833, the Grande valse brillante in E-flat Major radiates a rich Parisian flair rather than Viennese melancholy. Gleaming with the joyful brilliance of elegant social gatherings, it is a dazzling waltz that is danceable while retaining remarkable artistry. The work comprises seven dance themes, each with a distinct character and gesture, and their seamless alternation and connection create a dramatic grandiosity.

Themes A and B form a binary structure: the former establishes a rotational dance pattern, while the latter introduces a lighthearted, humorous character. Themes C and D constitute another binary unit. Theme C offers a moment of respite, replacing rotation with gentle swaying, replacing leaping with cantabile lines; the spirited Theme D then brings vivid contrast to the preceding lyrical theme. Theme E proceeds with a noble, measured pace, while its counterpart, Theme F, tiptoes forward with an abundance of ornamental figures. The flowing, undulating Theme G brings a fleeting haze of melancholy, after which the return of Themes A and B restores the work's buoyant spirit. The waltz concludes with a brilliant and majestic coda.

F. CHOPIN: 12 Études, Op. 10

Étude in C Major, Op. 10 No. 1

Étude in a minor, Op. 10 No. 2

Étude in E Major, Op. 10 No. 3

Étude in c-sharp minor, Op. 10 No. 4

Étude in G-flat Major, Op. 10 No. 5

Étude in e-flat minor, Op. 10 No. 6

Étude in C Major, Op. 10 No. 7

Étude in F Major, Op. 10 No. 8

Étude in f minor, Op. 10 No. 9

Étude in A-flat Major, Op. 10 No. 10

Étude in E-flat Major, Op. 10 No. 11

Étude in c minor, Op. 10 No. 12

Hector BERLIOZ once said of CHOPIN with admiration: “His piano works have created a new genre.” This remark undoubtedly applies to the études. Before CHOPIN, most études were intended solely for teaching, written primarily to develop technical skills. CHOPIN’s études truly “created a new genre”: they demand from the performer not only a comprehensive technical foundation but also a mature artistic sensibility to express the emotional content of the music. Even in CHOPIN’s own lifetime, he and other great pianists such as LISZT performed these études in salons and concert halls, rather than merely using them as private study pieces.

CHOPIN composed twenty-seven études in total: twelve published in 1833 (Op. 10, dedicated to LISZT), twelve in 1837 (Op. 25), and three additional works published in 1840 (Trois nouvelles études). These compositions reveal CHOPIN’s groundbreaking discoveries in piano texture, technique, sonority, dynamics, and compositional invention. The two sets (Op. 10 and Op. 25) are especially important, with each étude focusing on a specific technical challenge. A few examples from Op. 10 include: broken-chord figuration in the

right hand (No. 1, the "Waterfall"); rapid chromatic patterns using the right hand's weak fingers (3–4–5) (No. 2, "Chromatic"); lyrical melody (No. 3, "Tristesse" or "Farewell"); black-key technique (No. 5, "Black Key"); double-hand arpeggios (No. 11, "Harp"); and propulsive left-hand figurations (No. 12, "Revolutionary").

For CHOPIN, études were more than explorations of technical difficulties; they served as a catalyst for creating distinctive works. The greatest challenges sublimated into beauty, and each étude is like a poem. Listeners are struck by the rich sonorities, unstoppable forward momentum, and lyrical lines found throughout the études. These works defined CHOPIN's innovative pianistic language. Polish music historian Zdzisław JACHIMECKI called them "the true gospel of piano music." Only the most accomplished pianists dare to record both complete sets. These études also paved the way for later composers — including LISZT, SCRIBIN, RACHMANINOV, DEBUSSY, and LIGETI — in their own étude compositions.

F. CHOPIN: Polonaise *héroïque* in A-flat Major, Op. 53

Rather than a dance accompaniment in the traditional sense, the Polonaise in A-flat major (1842) approaches the character of a ballad, even as it clearly projects the pulse, vitality, and solemn grandeur of the polonaise. It is a monumental work with poème chorégraphique qualities and a distinctly heroic tone. The German musicologist Hugo LEICHTENTRITT once praised it: "Everything that the polonaise contains in terms of sparkle, distinction, strength, and enthusiasm is expressed in this masterpiece in the most exhilarating way possible."

The work opens with a bold yet dignified introduction. The stately polonaise theme exudes strength, perseverance, and a desire to rise: its power stems largely from the left hand's octaves, while the repeated opening phrases convey a sense of resolve. This upward drive gradually pushes the piano's sonority toward its fullest, most resplendent limits. The lyrical middle section, introduced by seven consecutive fortissimo chords, begins in the unexpectedly distant key of E major. Rapid, continuous octaves in the left hand contrast sharply with a lyrical right-hand line. After reaching its climax, the music modulates ingeniously back to the home key of A-flat major, followed by a dreamlike, hushed passage. The polonaise theme then returns with a proud, heroic bearing, leading to a triumphant conclusion.

About the Artists

Piano |

Eric LU

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"Leeds winner Eric LU showed an astonishing command of keyboard tone and color... the sign he is already a true artist. It was a spellbinding experience."

– *The Guardian*

"LU's playing is in a rare class - sensitive and emotionally intuitive."

– *BBC Music Magazine*

Eric LU won the First Prize and coveted Gold Medal at the 2025 Chopin International Competition in Warsaw. He is also the winner of the Leeds International Piano Competition in England.

Recent and forthcoming orchestral collaborations include the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles

Philharmonic, Oslo Philharmonic, Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg, Stockholm Philharmonic, Scottish Chamber, Finnish Radio Symphony, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony, Seattle Symphony, Helsinki Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic, Tokyo Symphony, Orchestre National de Lille, Shanghai Symphony at the BBC Proms, amongst others. Conductors he collaborates with include Riccardo MUTI, Mirga GRAŽINYTĖ-TYLA, Ryan BANCROFT, Marin ALSOP, Duncan WARD, Vasily PETRENKO, Edward GARDNER, Sir Mark ELDER, Thomas DAUSGAARD, Ruth REINHARDT, Earl LEE, Kerem HASAN, Nuno COELHO, Dinis SOUSA, and Martin FRÖST.

Active as a recitalist, he is presented on stages including the Köln Philharmonie, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Leipzig Gewandhaus, San Francisco Davies Hall, BOZAR Brussels, Fondation Louis Vuitton Paris, 92nd St Y, Aspen Music Festival, Seoul Arts Center, Warsaw Philharmonic Hall, and Sala São Paulo. In 2025, he appeared for the 7th consecutive year in recital at Wigmore Hall, London. He has also been invited for the 7th time to the International Chopin and his Europe Festival in Warsaw, and made his debut at La Roque-d'Anthéron Festival.

Eric's third album on Warner Classics was released in December 2022, featuring Schubert Sonatas D. 959 and 784. It was met with worldwide critical acclaim, receiving BBC Music Magazine's Instrumental Choice, writing, "LU's place among today's Schubertians is confirmed". His previous album of the Chopin 24 Preludes, and Schumann's Geistervariationen was hailed as "truly magical" by International Piano. He will release a new album of the complete Schubert Impromptus on Warner Classics in early 2026.

Born in Massachusetts in 1997, Eric LU first came to international attention as a Laureate of the 2015 Chopin International Competition in Warsaw, aged just 17. He was also awarded the International German Piano Award in 2017, and Avery Fisher Career Grant in 2021. Eric was a BBC New Generation Artist from 2019-22. He is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, studying with Robert MCDONALD and Jonathan BISS. He was also a pupil of DANG Thai-son.

Program Notes

Written by CHANG Hao-min
Lecturer, Nightingale Foundation;
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F. CHOPIN: Nocturne in c-sharp minor, Op. 27 No. 1

Op. 27 consists of two contrasting nocturnes, one in c-sharp minor and the other in D-flat Major. The deeply elegiac Nocturne in c-sharp minor, No. 1, is cast in ternary form. The CHOPIN biographer Arthur HEDLEY observed that the broad, undulating accompaniment creates a mysterious nocturnal atmosphere, while the seemingly calm melody conceals hesitation and anxiety. In the middle section, the tempo quickens and the meter shifts from four beats to three, generating passion and a series of climaxes, as if in protest or lament. Whether intentional or coincidental, the B section returns to A using the same opening motivic figuration as BEETHOVEN's *Für Elise*.

As for the meaning of this nocturne, the Polish pianist Jan KLECZYŃSKI imagined it as a dark tale set against the scenery and ambiance of Venice, while the Polish poet Jarosław IWASZKIEWICZ believed that CHOPIN's nocturnes are "nightly reflections on fidelity or love, combined with nightly reflections on the homeland."

F. CHOPIN: *Barcarolle* in F-sharp Major, Op. 60

CHOPIN never visited Venice, but operas of the time frequently featured "barcarolles," boating songs, which were likely his chief source of inspiration. Yet CHOPIN's *Barcarolle* is far richer and more profound than most operatic examples and ranks among his most mature compositions.

The piece opens with a brief, forceful introduction, then moves into a lilting 6/8 ostinato in the left hand while the right hand gently sings the barcarolle melody, often harmonized in thirds or sixths. In the main section, a passage of repeated tremolos suggests the undulation of waves. The middle section moves to A Major: the left-hand accompaniment becomes more urgent, and the right hand abandons lyrical song for more rhythmic wave motion. Near the end of this section, the tempo relaxes and a subdued interlude leads to the work's most dreamlike moment — a cadenza passage marked *dolce sfogato* ("sweet and unrestrained"). This passage quickly blossoms and guides us back to the main material, now more passionate in its return. The coda grows increasingly ornate and mysterious, ultimately brought to a decisive close by four fortissimo chords.

F. CHOPIN: Polonaise in B-flat Major, Op. 71 No. 2

During his lifetime CHOPIN published seven polonaises for solo piano, all written after he left Poland in 1830. Three additional polonaises (Op. 71) which he had composed in his youth between 1825 and 1829 were published posthumously by his friend Julian FONTANA.

Composed in 1828, the Polonaise in B-flat Major, Op. 71 No. 2, is brilliant and virtuosic in style, though likely intended more for the salon than the concert hall. The CHOPIN biographer Frederick NIECKS noted that in the composer's early works, "the bravura character is still prominent, but, instead of ruling supreme, it becomes in every successive work more and more subordinate to thought and emotion." This polonaise is both traditional and forward-looking: its form is conventional and simple, yet the music already reveals dramatic expressive exchanges, a hallmark of CHOPIN's mature style. In the middle section, contrasting textures and registers create especially vivid dialogue.

F. CHOPIN: Sonata No. 2 in b-flat minor, Op. 35

- I. Grave – Doppio movimento**
- II. Scherzo**
- III. Marche funèbre: Lento**
- IV. Finale: Presto**

The Sonata No. 2 in b-flat minor centers on its third movement. The famous funeral march was composed in 1837, while the other three movements were written around it two years later (1839): the first two movements contain a clear sense of direction, preparing for the funeral procession, and the fourth movement serves as a whispering post-funeral epilogue.

The first movement is in sonata form. It opens with an unusually brief (only four measures) yet striking Grave introduction, which swiftly establishes the work's tragic character. Beginning in measure five, the 'doppio movimento' launches the restless first theme, driving forward continuously. A few simple chords dispel the turbulence, and the second theme in D-flat Major leads us into a peaceful, warm world, gradually rising toward rapture and passion. Both the development section and coda are highly dramatic. Although the movement ends at fortississimo in B-flat Major, it does not offer a true sense of resolution.

The Scherzo continues the tension of the previous movement, opening with a forceful, aggressive main section. The middle section presents an extremely stark contrast: over a simple, regular accompaniment emerges a heartbreakingly beautiful melody. Instead of ending with a strong statement or a reprise of the main theme, the movement concludes quietly with the opening phrase of the middle-section melody, leaving a sense of suspension.

The third movement is an austere, solemn, and profoundly moving funeral march. Its

emotional intensity grows with the heavy tread. The main section contains two themes, first of denunciation and lament, then of outcry and anger. The force of fate propels the funeral procession forward with unwavering, merciless determination. The middle section in D-flat Major provides a stunning contrast to the main section, with a guileless, unguarded melody, tinged with irony yet deeply affecting.

The Finale, Presto, consists of continuous rapid triplets in both hands and resembles ceaseless chatter, lasting barely more than a minute. Its brevity resists conventional formal analysis; rather than a sonata movement, it resembles an *étude*.

The sonata's "peculiarity" sparked considerable criticism. SCHUMANN felt that placing four such stylistically incompatible movements together was practically a mockery of the sonata as a genre, though he admitted that he listened to the work with bated breath. LISZT could never fully accept the piece, concluding that CHOPIN might be a master of piano miniatures, but not of large-scale forms. Twentieth-century scholarship has helped secure a more balanced assessment. Today, the b-flat minor Sonata is universally regarded as a masterpiece of piano literature, embodying the essence of Romantic music.

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