7 July 2025

EVA GEVORGYAN

IN RECITAL

Presenting Partner

THEME & VARIATIONS PIANO SERVICES

SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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WELCOME

Welcome to the *International Pianists in Recital* series for 2025, and to this concert, **Eva Gevorgyan in Recital**.

At just 21 years old, Eva Gevorgyan's virtuosity has captivated audiences worldwide. Having secured prizes at over 50 international piano competitions, she became the youngest ever female finalist at the prestigious Chopin International Piano Competition.

Gevorgyan now makes her Sydney début with a luminous program of Romantic masterpieces by Beethoven, Brahms, Ravel and Schumann, a showcase of emotional depth and flair.

As Presenting Partner of the *International Pianists in Recital* series, we are honoured to support the Orchestra in bringing world-class artists to Sydney audiences. Theme & Variations is proud to continue its longstanding commitment to exceptional pianists, both international and Australian. For over two decades, our partnership has introduced some of the world's most celebrated pianists to the city's concert halls.

The works in this evening's recital are rich with emotional expression and demanding in technical scope, and Eva Gevorgyan brings to them a remarkable balance of warmth, precision, and artistry.

We hope you enjoy this unforgettable concert.

Nyree Vartoukian
Co-Founder and Director,
Theme & Variations Piano Services

THEME & VARIATIONS
PIANO SERVICES

2025 CONCERT SEASON

INTERNATIONAL PIANISTS IN RECITAL
Monday 7 July, 7pm

City Recital Hall,
Angel Place

EVA GEVORGYAN IN RECITAL

A DAZZLING DEBUT

EVA GEVORGYAN piano

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)
Sonata No.27 in E minor, Op.90 (1814)
i. With liveliness and with feeling and expression throughout
ii. Not too swiftly and conveyed in a singing manner

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)
Four Pieces for Piano, Op.119 (1892–93)
1. Intermezzo in B minor
2. Intermezzo in E minor
3. Intermezzo in C major
4. Rhapsody in E flat major

MAURICE RAVEL (1875-1937)
La valse, a choreographic poem (1920)

INTERVAL

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–1856)
***Carnaval*, Op.9** (1834–1835)
i. *Préambule*
ii. *Pierrot*
iii. *Arlequin*
iv. *Valse noble*
v. *Eusebius*
vi. *Florestan*
vii. *Coquette*
viii. *Réplique*
ix. *Papillons*
x. *Lettres dansantes*
xi. *Chiarina*
xii. *Chopin*
xiii. *Estrella*
xiv. *Reconnaissance*
xv. *Pantalon et Colombine*
xvi. *Valse allemande –*
xvii. *Paganini*
xviii. *Aveu*
xix. *Promenade*
xx. *Pause –*
xxi. *Marche des Davidsbündler contre les Philistins*

Pre-concert talk
By Paige Gullifer in the Function Room Level 1 at 6.15pm

Estimated durations
Beethoven – 13 minutes
Brahms – 15 minutes
Ravel – 12 minutes
Interval – 20 minutes
Schumann – 32 minutes

The concert will run for approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes

Cover image
Eva Gevorgyan
Photo by Evgeny Evtyukhov

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

EVA GEVORGYAN piano

Yamaha Young Artist, Eva Gevorgyan, is a laureate in more than forty piano competitions, including top prizes at the 2018 Cleveland International Piano Competition for Young Artists and the 2019 Van Cliburn Young Artist Competition.

More recently she has won the Prix du Bern in Switzerland in 2023, Discovery Award at the 2019 International Classical Music Awards, the Great Prize at the Russia National Orchestra Competition in 2021, in addition to being finalist and winner of the Special Prize at the Chopin International Piano Competition in Warsaw, Poland.

She has performed as soloist with the Dallas Symphony, Lucerne Symphony, Warsaw Philharmonic, Prague Symphony Orchestra, Filarmonica de Bologna, Mariinsky Orchestra, Russia National Philharmonic, Russian National Orchestra, Evgeny Svetlanov Academic State Symphony, Stuttgart Philharmonic, Leipzig Symphony, Mexico National Symphony, Armenia National Philharmonic and the Malta Philharmonic.

Eva is also frequently invited to international festivals, such as Verbier, Festival Internacional Cervantino, White Nights Festival, Brescia and Bergamo Piano Festival, Bach Montreal Festival and La Roque d'Antheron.

Highlights of the 24/25 season include her recital debut at Amsterdam Concertgebouw, featuring works by Brahms, Chopin, Scriabin and Ravel, and collaborations with the Yomiuri Symphony, Sapporo Symphony, Sydney Symphony, Kammeracademie Potsdam, George Enescu Philharmonic, Kristiansand Symphony, Gavle Symphony, Filarmonica de Malaga, Orquesta de les Illes Balears and Orchestra Filarmonica di Torino, as well as at the Bemus and Nomus Festival in Serbia.

In recital Eva will appear on tour in Japan, China, as well as in Zurich, Basel, Baden, Polling, Milano, Palermo, Savona, Imola and Sydney.

Eva pursues studies at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory's Central School of Music in Moscow with Natalia Trull and at the EscuelaSuperior de Música Reina Sofía in Madrid, under the guidance of Stanislav Ioudenitch. She has also been granted the prestigiousscholarship at the 2020 Klavier-Festival Ruhr by Evgeny Kissin.

Her first CD, featuring works by Chopin and Scriabin was released on the Melodiya label in 2022, receiving great acclaim.

Scan the QR code to read an interview with Eva, where she discusses her early musical inspirations, lessons learned from dozens of piano competitions, and what she connects with in the music of Falla, Beethoven, Brahms, Ravel and Schumann.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT BEETHOVEN'S SONATA

Stephen McIntyre writes:

There is an often-quoted comment of Beethoven that 'the piano is and always will be an unsatisfactory instrument'. Yet the works he wrote for it in the latter part of his life are some of the most profound and remarkable pieces in the entire literature for this instrument.

Perhaps there is no perfect instrument for them. Beethoven in his last years was freeing himself from the constraints of instrumental writing to compose music that may be realisable on an instrument – or several instruments – but does not depend on it. The great challenge for the performer, in our time as much as in Beethoven's day, is how to recreate successfully this difficult musical structure and its equally complex musical content. The music itself is always greater than any single performance of it.

Each of the late Piano Sonatas is strikingly original, in form and structure. In each of them, Beethoven strives mightily to invent a new idea of what makes up a Sonata, and it is remarkable how different the solution is in each case. The various movements – only two in Op.90, four in the case of Op.101 – are intimately related in theme and content in ways that had rarely been tried before. Both of these Sonatas contain some of the most moving and personal music he wrote. The musical language is dense and the emotions are heightened, in ways that find echoes in the last string quartets. In a nationalistic gesture, he specifically used German titles for each of the movements, in addition to the more usual Italian ones.

The public greeted the Sonata Op.90 with enthusiasm at its first appearance in 1816: one reviewer suggested it was the most melodious and gentle amongst the Sonatas to appear up to that time. There are only two movements and they fit together in a particularly close synthesis.

The first movement has the indication 'lively but with great expression' and is far from being 'gentle'. Its first section has an atmosphere of turbulence, after a commanding opening gesture. The motives in the first section seem simple enough, but as always with Beethoven, the apparent simplicity of the basic musical material gives scope for original development. The movement also contains a second series

Portrait of Ludwig van Beethoven (1815) by German painter Joseph Willibrord Mähler (1778–1860). Source: Vienna Museum/ Wikimedia Commons.

of musical ideas that are nicely symmetrical and strongly emphatic on the way up, and more placatory on the way down.

In the second movement, the pianist is instructed not to play too fast – and indeed the tempo is a moderate one. The contrast in emotional level with the first movement is extreme: here are long melodies, a leisurely development and calm waters. Perhaps this particular tempo and the unhurried scale of the movement have something in common with the piano writing of the later Sonatas of Beethoven's contemporary, Schubert.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT BRAHMS' OP.119

Anna Goldsworthy writes:

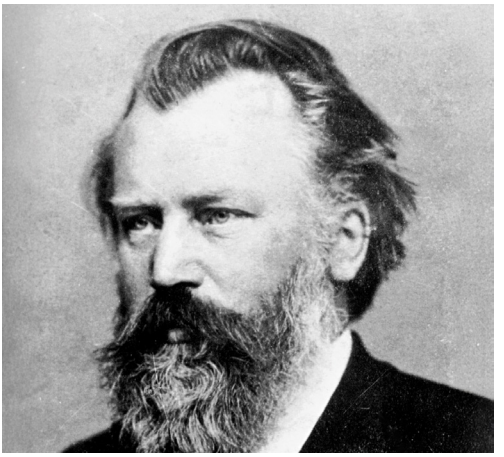
In May 1893, Brahms wrote to his friend and muse, the pianist Clara Schumann:

> I am tempted to copy out a small piano piece for you, because I would like to know how you agree with it. It is teeming with dissonances! ... Maybe they won't please your palate, and now I wished they would be less correct, but more appetising and agreeable to your taste. The little piece is exceptionally melancholic and 'to be played very slowly' is not an understatement. Every bar and every note must sound like a ritard, as if one wanted to suck melancholy out of each and every one, lustily and with pleasure out of these very dissonances!

This small, dissonant piano piece was the first Intermezzo of his final set of solo piano music, the *Klavierstücke,* Op.119. Fortunately, it did please Clara Schumann's palate. She described it, memorably, as a 'grey pearl ... veiled and very precious', and found it 'sadly sweet in spite of all its dissonances'.

This paradoxical description speaks to the mood of these late pieces; Brahms described them as 'lullabies of my pain'. He began work on the Op.119 set in 1892 – two years after his supposed retirement from composition – and completed it while on summer holiday in Ischl, Upper Austria, in 1893. Apart from a brief flurry in the 1870s, it had been three decades since he had composed significantly for piano. Like its companion sets of Op.117 and Op.118, Op.119 marks a significant departure from his early style.

Three of the four pieces are 'intermezzos'. Brahms' friend, the musicologist Philipp Spitta, suggested this meant that 'they are both preceded and followed by other things, and in this case musicians and listeners alike must imagine for themselves what they are'. These intermezzos were preceded by a lifetime of composing, and followed by a leave-taking of the piano. The musicologist and philosopher Theodor Adorno famously remarked, apropos of Beethoven, that 'in the history of art, late works are the catastrophes'. Late style in Brahms takes a different form, and yet there are resonances with Beethoven: that Janus-like gaze both to the Baroque and the future; a distillation of serious musical thought into the miniature; an approach to form that is both rigorous and organic; and the juxtaposition –



Brahms in the 1880s

if not reconciliation – of opposites. In her diary, Clara Schumann wrote of these late pieces: 'It really is marvellous how things pour from him; it is wonderful how he combines passion and tenderness in the smallest of spaces.'

Intermezzo No.1 unfolds in the key of B minor, although it takes some time to make this clear. This tiny two-page piece is the most forward-looking of the set, with its ambiguous tonality, and proto-impressionistic textures. It begins with stacks of thirds – a favourite interval of Brahms' – in an apparently homophonic texture that is densely infused with polyphony. A middle section in D major offers greater tonal certainty, before a seamless transition back to the world of the opening.

Intermezzo No.2, in the key of E minor, is essentially monothematic. Its agitated opening motif is transformed in a waltz-like episode of more straightforward lyricism, in E major, except that it is coloured by the agitation that surrounds it, which casts it as memory, perhaps, or dream.

Intermezzo No.3, in clear C major, affords some respite and, unlike its two ternary-form predecessors, operates in a version of binary.

The set concludes with a Rhapsody in the heroic key of E flat, which was a signature key of Brahms' late piano pieces. It was also, significantly, the key of Brahms' first solo piano piece, his Scherzo Op.4, and in this sense marks a homecoming. Indeed, the Rhapsody recalls an earlier Brahms in its virility, as it casts aside the introversion of the previous works. And yet Brahms subverts this heroism by concluding in the minor: an appropriately tragic ending for a set of 'lullabies of pain'.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT *LA VALSE*

Angela Turner writes:

Maurice Ravel sketched his own surreal scenario on the manuscript of *La Valse*: 'Swirling clouds afford glimpses, through rifts, of waltzing couples. The clouds scatter little by little; one can distinguish an immense hall with a whirling crowd. The scene grows progressively brighter. The light of the chandeliers bursts forth at the fortissimo. An imperial court, about 1855.'

With its strong dance and visual associations, Ravel had always intended the work for the stage. When Diaghilev commissioned a score for the *Ballets Russes* in late 1919, Ravel saw the opportunity to complete sketches for a ballet he'd envisaged some 13 years prior. The composer had projected his work, then titled *Wien* [Vienna], as: 'a grand waltz, a kind of homage to the memory of the great Strauss, not Richard, the other – Johann…You know how much I like those wonderful rhythms!'

But the horrors of war changed Ravel's outlook: by 1919 it was 'inappropriate to the demands of the time' to name a work after the capital of Austria. Ravel resumed, but with the new title, *La Valse* (poème chorégraphique), and a darker, even menacing undercurrent. Ravel's pupil Manuel Rosenthal described the second half of the work as 'a kind of anguish, a very dramatic feeling of death', and Ravel would later confirm: 'It's tragic, but in the Greek sense; it is fatal spinning around, the expression of vertigo and of the voluptuousness of the dance to the point of paroxysm.'

Ravel completed the solo piano and two-piano versions before orchestrating the music. The two-piano score was first heard in April 1920 by a small audience including Diaghilev, the choreographer Leonide Massine, Stravinsky and a young Poulenc. Poulenc recalled: 'I had seen that [Diaghilev] didn't like it and that he was going to say "No". When Ravel had finished, Diaghilev said to him something which I thought was very true. He said, "Ravel, it's a masterpiece…but it's not a ballet…it's the portrait of a ballet… it's the painting of a ballet"'. Ravel is said to have walked out of the room humbly and quietly, music tucked under his arm, and from that point onwards ceased relations with the impresario.

Ravel at the piano

Ravel depicts the parting of clouds and glimpses of dancing with grumbles in the bass of the piano, fragments of themes poking through. *La Valse* throughout gives the impression of fragmentary form; thematic ideas emerge, sometimes bursting through the hazy textures, but just as often receding back into confused memory. Bitonality and the presence of two-beat rhythmic groupings within the three-beat feel of the waltz – described by composer George Benjamin as 'opposing forces of civilised order and destructive order' – all add considerably to the hallucinatory effect. Ravel gives the piano large chordal leaps, double-glissandi, fast passagework and an abundance of trills: this is a challenging but engaging work, even without the orchestra or dance spectacle. As the waltz threatens to whirl out of control, Ravel's score markings insist upon accelerating, animating, pressing forward, and a little more…until its imaginary dancers can bear no more, collapsing with a shriek.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT *CARNAVAL*

Gordon Kerry writes:

When Franz Liszt visited Leipzig in 1840 he diplomatically performed works by the city's three most prominent composers: Ferdinand Hiller, Felix Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann. Of Schumann's work he chose selections from *Carnaval* which proved a little too experimental for the Gewandhaus audience, and so, Liszt noted sadly, 'I did not obtain my customary applause.' Schumann took most of the blame himself, saying that *Carnaval's* 'musical moods change too rapidly to be easily followed by a general public that does not care to be roused anew at every moment.'

Schumann goes on to describe the work's genesis:

> The name of a city, in which a musical friend of mine lived, consisted of letters belonging to the scale which are also contained in my name; and this suggested one of those tricks that are no longer new, since Bach gave the example. One piece after another was completed during the carnival seasons of 1835.

Actually it's a bit more complicated than that. In 1830 the 20-year-old Schumann had abandoned his law degree, lodging and studying with Leipzig piano pedagogue Friedrich Wieck. Wieck's daughter Clara, ten years younger than Schumann, was a prodigy, and even at 11 years of age 'gives orders like a Leonore' (the heroine of Beethoven's *Fidelio*, who dresses as a man to save her imprisoned husband Florestan).

When Ernestine von Fricken, daughter of minor nobility in the city of Asch (Aš, in the present-day Czech Republic) came to Leipzig to study with Wieck, the young Clara encouraged her to 'get to know Schumann; to me he is the dearest of our acquaintance.' It went to the point of a rumoured engagement, but didn't last, and after many years and much litigation Schumann would, of course, marry Clara. But Schumann's fascination with musical ciphers and codes was piqued by the SCHA – ASCH coincidence; the letters SCHA are the German names for the notes E flat, C, B natural, and A. Out of these he derived

Robert Schumann, Wien 1839, an 1849 lithograph by Josef Kriehuber (1800–1876).

three distinct motifs that he called 'sphinxes', which generate much of the work's motivic material in all but the two outer movements.

Carnival, that riotous period before the penitential season of Lent in Christian tradition, is noted for its subversion and fun, with mask-wearing an important tradition, especially on stage in the Italian *commedia dell'arte*. Many of the 21 short pieces that comprise Schumann's *Carnaval* claim to be portraits, masked or not, of real and imagined characters in the composer's creative universe, and in the spirit of carnival are often irreverent and funny. They also tend to sound 'not finished but abandoned'.

Charles Rosen has pointed out that the opening and closing pieces 'are derived from some variations on a Schubert waltz that Schumann had been working on'. The ***Préambule*** immediately establishes the sometime vertiginous changes of mood that characterise the set as a whole: after a *maestoso* gesture the piece changes speed – always faster – and character three times in a few minutes, issuing in a precariously glittering waltz.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Pierrot (one of the few movements not in 3/4) is a quiet angular march with a rebarbative three note figure that burst out between phrases; ***Arlequin***, like Pierrot a stock character of the *commedia* is represented by a light fast waltz; a high two-note motif punctuates the music. The ***Valse noble*** introduces a figure of two upbeats which pervade much of the work.

Eusebius and ***Florestan*** are masks for Schumann himself, which appear in other works and as by-lines in his criticism. Schumann adored the work of writer Jean Paul Richter, noting that Jean Paul 'projects his own personality, and each time it is in two contrasting characters.' *Eusebius* represents Schumann's introspective side, and here the music consists of a constantly repeated pattern that, far from sounding obsessive, is varied in terms of its volume, voicing, pedalling and harmony; the image flickers constantly. *Florestan*, by contrast is *passionato* (shades of Beethoven), and given to dramatic changes of tempo.

Coquette (from the *commedia*) and ***Replique*** are both fast skipping waltzes, and at this point in the score, though unplayed, we see the sphinxes notated in old-fashioned long notes: SCHA, As (A flat) CH, and ASCH.

Papillons is driven mainly by gyring semiquaver figures in the right hand, while ***Lettres dansantes*** is mainly chordal, playing off different articulations and accents.

Chiarina – little Clara – is a curiosity in that, despite her name being eminently 'translatable', her melody is derived from the AsCH sphinx. (In his own account of the work, Schumann did say, '... I afterwards gave titles to the numbers.')

Chopin is one of two 'unmasked' portraits; a stunning miniature piece of ventriloquism of a composer that Schumann, as Eusebius, had early pronounced a genius.

Estrella is a portrait of Ernestine, simple and expressive contrasting with the feverish ***Reconnaissance*** (again, a rarity in 2/4) where the pianist is obliged to play fast repeated notes in the alto register (with the right thumb) under the main melody.

Pantalon et Colombine are depicted in fast staccato semiquavers in both hands, working in contrary motion and interrupted by terse off-beat chords.

A ***Valse allemande*** is perversely dominated by a Lombard rhythm (or Scotch snap) of short-long patterns. Interpolated into the piece is ***Paganini*** – like Chopin, unmasked and not derived form a sphinx – which is extraordinary in its virtuoso phrasing and in Schumann's exquisitely-judged use of the pedal.

A sinuous and enigmatic ***Aveu*** (admission, though of what?), follows, introducing a solid ***Promenade***. Then ***Pause*** with the splendidly graphic marking *precipitandosi* rushes headlong into the finale.

Here we meet, *en masse*, more fictional inhabitants of Schumann's imagination: the *Davidsbund*, or 'league of David', whose members, like the psalmist-king, fight the 'Philistines' or hidebound resisters to artistic creativity and change. Schumann's 'March' is no such thing – it too is firmly in 3/4 time but with a triumphant tread. He introduces a folk-tune, identified in the score as 'a theme of the 17th century,' but which his listeners would have known as the *Großvatertanz*, (Grandfathers' Dance). Originally a wedding song, it became a tradition at such festivities that when the grandfathers danced it was a signal that the party was over. But not here – Schumann fights back, introducing and developing material from the *Préambule* until a final affirmation of A flat major.

Those early audiences who only 'heard' a series of semi-improvised miniatures miss the point: the intense focus of the implications of the 'sphinxes' – which also govern the key relationships from movement to movement – and the development, rather than mere recapitulation of the opening in the finale give the piece a unity of material and purpose that sits in creative tension with the superficial differences of mood and colour.

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