22 June 2025

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2025 CONCERT SEASON

Sunday 22 June, 2pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

LANG LANG IN RECITAL

AT THE SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

GABRIEL FAURÉ (1845–1924)
Pavane, Op.50 (1887)

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810 –1856)
***Kreisleriana*, Op.16** (1838)
i. Extremely animated
ii. Very inwardly and not too quickly
iii. Very agitated
iv. Very slowly
v. Very lively
vi. Very slowly
vii. Very fast
viii. Fast and playful

INTERVAL

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810 –1849)
Mazurkas
1. Op.7, No.3 in F minor (1830–32)
2. Op.17, No.1 in B flat (1833)
3. Op.17, No.2 E minor
4. Op.17, No.4 in A minor
5. Op.24, No.2 in C major (1835)
6. Op.24, No.4 in B flat
7. Op.30, No.3 in D flat (1837)
8. Op.30, No.4 in C sharp minor
9. Op.33, No.3 in C (1838)
10. Op.33, No.4 in 4 B minor
11. Op. 33, No.2 in D major
12. Op.59, No.3 F sharp minor (1845–46)

CHOPIN
Polonaise No.5 in F sharp minor, Op.44, *Tragic* (1840–41)

Pre-concert talk
By Gordon Kalton Williams in the Northern Foyer at 1.15pm

Estimated durations
Fauré – 7 minutes
Schumann – 33 minutes
Interval – 20 minutes
Mazurkas – 34 minutes
Polonaise – 11 minutes

The concert will run for approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes

Cover image
Photo by Olaf Heine

WELCOME

Welcome to **Lang Lang in Recital**, an electrifying and richly diverse concert that highlights the artistry of one of the world's most renowned and beloved pianists.

This is a milestone year for our Australian operations as we've just celebrated 25 years of service to Sydney. Together with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, we have created one of the most significant and enduring relationships in Australia's performing arts, one we all continue to be immensely proud of.

An international sensation, Lang Lang has always been a musician of great passion and flare. In this solo performance of some of the most intimate and personal works of the Romantic period, his uniquely entertaining yet highly serious approach is on full display.

As the Presenter of this Master Series, Emirates proudly champions exceptional local and international talent such as Lang Lang, with a special focus on the Sydney Symphony's celebrated Chief Conductor, Simone Young AM.

Never afraid of innovation, Lang Lang brings a bright spirit to every performance of this wonderful music. He creates uniquely brilliant concerts for global audiences, and it is a delight to welcome him to the Concert Hall of the Sydney Opera House.

For over 22 years, our partnership with the Orchestra has been underpinned by a shared vision: to create unforgettable journeys and elevated experiences like this concert.

I do hope you enjoy it.

Barry Brown
Divisional Vice President for Australasia
Emirates

Emirates

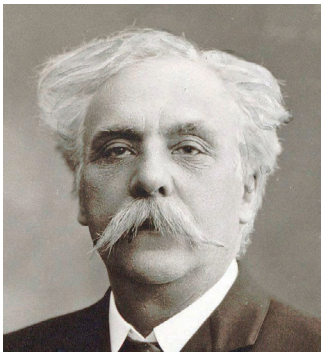
YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

GABRIEL FAURÉ (1845–1924)
Pavane, Op.50 (1887)

Fauré's much-loved (and much-arranged) Pavane is his take on a popular and gracious processional dance from the 16th century.

It was first performed (as an orchestral piece) in 1888, the year that saw Hong Kong's Peak Tram open for business, Carl Benz issued with the first ever driver's license, the opening of Sydney's Centennial Park.

Contemporary music included Richard Strauss' *Death and Transfiguration*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sheherazade* and Brahms' Violin Sonata in D minor, Op.108.



Gabriel Fauré photographed in 1905 by Pierre Petit

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810 –1856)
***Kreisleriana*, Op.16** (1838)

Kreisleriana is a suite of eight pieces, each wildly different from the ones adjacent, and each containing some thrilling sudden changes of mood, inspired by stories of the fictional eccentric Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler invented by the Romantic writer ETA Hoffmann.

Revised in 1850, it first appeared in 1838, the year that saw the Pastry War between France and Mexico, the coronation of Queen Victoria, and the arrival of the first German vine-dressers in Australia.

Contemporary music included Mendelssohn's Op.44 String Quartets, Spohr's String Quintet No.5 and Berlioz's *Benvenuto Cellini*.

1839 portrait of Robert Schumann by Austrian painter Josef Kriehuber (1800–1876).

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810 –1849)
Mazurkas

Chopin wrote mazurkas – based on the Polish folkdance with its distinctively offbeat rhythms and decidedly non-classical scales – throughout his life. Those we hear today generally consist of contrasting material, including a central 'trio', and were composed mostly during the 1830s.

That decade didn't begin well for those parts of eastern Poland under Russian rule, when the November Uprising of young officers failed to oust the overlords and brought down more repression. Schumann realised his friend's political activism in these works, calling them 'cannons buried in flowers.'

1838 portrait of Chopin by Eugène Delacroix

Polonaise No.5 in F sharp minor, Op.44 *Tragic* (1840–41)

Chopin's Op.44 Polonaise, also based on a traditional Polish dance, also reflects his deep nationalistic feelings, though he had now lived in France for many years. The Polonaise has an urgent rhythmic character, softened here by Chopin placing a much more childlike mazurka in the centre of the piece.

Photo by Olaf Heine

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

LANG LANG piano

Lang Lang is a leading figure in classical music today – as a pianist, educator, and philanthropist, he has become one of the world's most influential and committed ambassadors for the arts in the 21st century. Equally happy playing for billions of viewers at the 2008 Olympic Opening Ceremony in Beijing, the 2020 Dubai EXPO Opening Ceremony, the 2024 Reopening of Notre Dame in Paris or just for a few hundred children in public schools, he is a master of communicating through music.

Heralded by *The New York Times* as 'the hottest artist on the classical music planet,' Lang Lang plays sold-out concerts all over the world. He has formed ongoing collaborations with conductors including Sir Simon Rattle, Gustavo Dudamel, Daniel Barenboim, and Christoph Eschenbach, and performs with all the world's top orchestras. Lang Lang is known for thinking outside the box and frequently steps into different musical worlds. Millions of viewers watched his performances at the Grammy Awards with Metallica, Pharrell Williams and jazz legend Herbie Hancock.

Lang Lang's passion for innovation has led him to exciting collaborations beyond classical music. He has worked with global pop icons such as Ed Sheeran, John Legend, Rose from BLACKPINK, J Balvin and Jay Chou, bringing classical music to new and diverse audiences. He also collaborated with Disney, blending his classical artistry with the magic of Disney, further expanding his reach.

For about a decade, Lang Lang has contributed to musical education worldwide. In 2008, he founded the Lang Lang International Music Foundation, aimed at cultivating tomorrow's top pianists, championing music education at the forefront of technology, and building a young audience through live music experiences. In 2013, Lang Lang was designated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations as a Messenger of Peace, focusing on global education.

Lang Lang's influence extends into the luxury world, where he is a Global Ambassador for Allianz, Dior, Hublot and Hennessy, and has partnered with Alicia Keys for a high-profile campaign with Hennessy. His unique blend of artistry and creativity also led him to design his limited-edition Steinway Black Diamond piano, debut the Steinway Spirio Cast to the world, create his Hublot limited-edition watch and design the interior of a Bugatti car. These ventures showcase his diverse talents beyond music.

Lang Lang started playing the piano at age three and gave his first public recital before the age of five. At age nine, he entered Beijing's Central Music Conservatory and won First Prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition for Young Musicians at 13. He subsequently went to Philadelphia to study with legendary pianist Gary Graffman at the Curtis Institute of Music. He was seventeen when his big break came, substituting for André Watts at the Gala of the Century, playing Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Christoph Eschenbach; he became an overnight sensation, and the invitations started to pour in.

Lang Lang's boundless drive to attract new audiences to classical music has brought him tremendous recognition: he was presented with the 2010 Crystal Award in Davos and was picked as one of the 250 Young Global Leaders by the World Economic Forum. He is also the recipient of honorary doctorates from the Royal College of Music, the Manhattan School of Music and New York University. In December 2011, he was honoured with the highest prize awarded by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of China and received the highest civilian honours in Germany (Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany) and France (Medal of the Order of Arts and Letters). In 2016, Lang Lang was invited to the Vatican to perform for Pope Francis. He has also performed for numerous other international dignitaries, including four US presidents and monarchs from many nations.

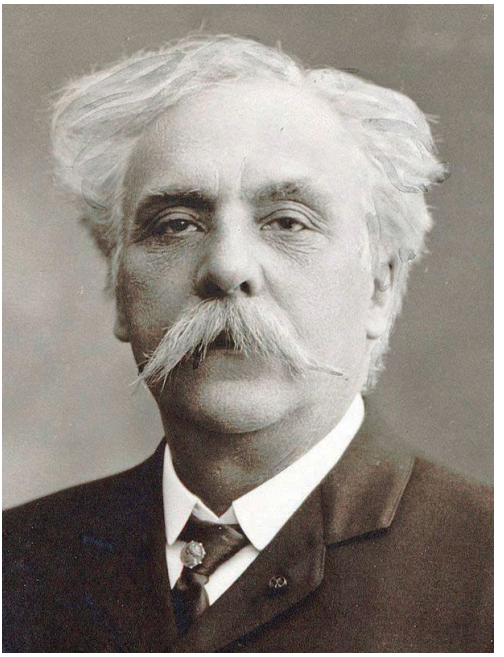
ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT FAURÉ

When Gabriel Fauré died in 1924 at the age of 79 his funeral was held at the Madeleine church in Paris, with a ceremonial guard, thousands of mourners and a performance of perhaps his best known work, the Requiem. It was a long way from the Pyrenean foothills where he was born.

Fauré's father became the head of a school near the city of Foix in 1849. Gabriel's musical talent emerged soon after. He would improvise for hours on the harmonium in the school's chapel and in 1853 the family was persuaded by well-meaning friends that the boy should be sent to Paris to the Ecole de Musique Classique et Religieuse. This school soon became known as the Ecole Niedermeyer, after its founder and principal Louis Niedermeyer, who was inspired to teach how 'modern harmony is submitted to the form of the ancient modes'. Fauré remained at the Niedermeyer School for 11 years, absorbing the gentle contours of Gregorian chant and learning how to clothe those ancient melodies in appropriate, but modern, arrangements. This is a crucial aspect of Fauré's style.

Fauré, with Camille Saint-Saëns, was a prime mover in founding the Société Nationale de Musique in 1871; even as a young man, Fauré helped provide a platform for French music from Franck to Debussy and beyond.



Gabriel Fauré in 1905, photograph, Pierre Petit

ABOUT THE PAVANE

Fauré's most famous orchestral work, the Pavane (in F sharp minor), is a *fin-de-siècle* rendering of the stately 16th-century processional dance. It was composed in 1887 and premiered the following year; in 1891 it was featured entertainment at a garden party held in the Bois de Boulogne, with dancers in Renaissance period costume, orchestra, and a hidden chorus singing cod-galante verses of love and coquettishness by Robert de Montesquiou. Now most often played by orchestra alone, though Fauré published his piano version of it in 1891.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT ROBERT SCHUMANN

Schumann was born in the Saxon city of Zwickau, where his father was a successful writer, translator (notably of English Romantic writers like Byron into German) and book-seller. Child Robert had access to a huge library, and began writing his own plays and poetry, as well as composing, in his teens. At 18 he went to Leipzig to study law, where he also began piano lessons with renowned pedagogue Friedrich Wieck, father of the then nine-year old virtuoso, Clara.

After a year the University of Heidelberg, Schumann returned to Leipzig in 1830, bent on becoming a musician. His first mature compositions include the *Abegg Variations*, with their theme that 'spells' the name of the work's fictional dedicatee, and *Papillons*, the first of many collections of musical miniatures grouped around a poetic theme. It is at this time, too, that Schumann came under the influence of two arch-Romantic writers: Jean Paul Richter and ETA Hoffmann. In his diaries he creates fictional pseudonyms for Wieck, Clara and himself, included the characters of Florestan (representing Schumann's virtuosic side) and Eusebius (his more introverted side). These characters would assume great importance in his music, particularly *Carneval*, which dramatises Schumann's (and that of his fellow *Davidsbündler* – 'members of the league of David') battle against philistinism in the arts. He prosecuted this also in the serious music criticism which he practically invented, founding *Die Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* which began publication in 1835.

Robert had fallen in love with Clara when she was 15, and the years 1839-40 were dominated by a series of court battles between the composer and Wieck. Schumann prevailed, and the couple married in 1840, when Clara was 21.

Robert Schumann in 1839

The next years saw Clara consolidate her fame as a pianist; Robert, owing to repetitive strain injury (not, as Wieck asserted, caused by using a device to increase his stretch) incurred in the mid-1830s, had given up hope of coming a virtuoso. From 1840, determined to 'master all the forms of music' he composed in various genres, spending roughly a year on each: song (1840), orchestral music (1841), chamber music (1842), the oratorio (1843), producing several works in each genre in concentrated bursts. In 1844 he suffered a bad episode of the depression which had affected him since 1833, but emerged with new confidence in his craft.

This period saw the Schumanns' move to Dresden where Robert turned his attention to the stage. In 1850 they moved to the Rhineland city of Düsseldorf where Robert became municipal music director. Musical standards were low, and Schumann's health poor. One bright spot was the arrival, in 1853, of young Johannes Brahms, whom Schumann immediately realised was a genius and welcomed into his home.

Sadly, Schumann's illness returned in 1854 with aural hallucinations, delusions and memory loss, and he attempted suicide by throwing himself into the Rhine. He lived out his last two years in a strikingly benign asylum near Bonn; but on doctor's orders was forbidden to see Clara until two days before he died.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT KREISLERIANA

In 1834 Schumann met the composer Johann Ludwig Böhner (1787–1860), who, Schumann said, had been as famous as Beethoven in his day, and who on this occasion improvised for Schumann for a couple of hours. 'Flashes of the old lightning were there,' Schumann wrote, 'but otherwise all is dark and desolate. If I had time I would write a Böhneriana, using the themes he gave me.'

This was perhaps the seed of *Kreisleriana,* which appeared four years later, for while it likely contains no material of Böhner's, Schumann was sure that Böhner had been the model for the somewhat crazed Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler, who appears in several tales of ETA Hoffmann. Hoffmann, a major figure in early German Romanticism, writes that:

> Poor Johannes had been generally regarded as insane for some time, and to be sure, his doing and dealings, particularly his artistic activities, contrasted so sharply with all that is held to be reasonable and proper, that his mental disintegration could hardly be doubted. His thought-processes became increasingly eccentric and disjointed.

One of the Kreisler tales is *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr,* in which Murr, who has learned to enjoy self-satisfied bourgeois life, write his autobiography on manuscript paper that also contains the biography of Kreisler, thus setting up the kind of intense contrast of personalities (as with his Florestan and Eusebius 'masks') that appealed to Schumann.

ETA Hoffmann, author of the Kreisler stories.

Contemporary German musicians and writer Karl Böhmer has suggested another moment in the Kreisler stories that might bear on Schumann. Kreisler has been engaged to perform at a soiree held by Privy Councillor Röderlein. Someone sees that he has the score of 'the Bachian Variations', and request them, imagining some light short variations such as produced by composers like Paisiello. Kreisler duly launches into Bach's 'Goldberg' Variations during which the assembled worthies gradually drift out to the refreshment table leaving him alone at the keyboard. As he completed the final statement of the aria, the music's pages seemed inscribed with a thousand 'elaborations of the theme...the notes came alive, shimmering and leaping about me – electric fire charged through my fingers to the keyboard – the spirit from which it flowed out stripped my thoughts.'

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Many, like composer Carl Reinicke, see the eight pieces of Schumann's cycle as suggesting improvisations on Bach, and writers like Karl Böhmer have noted similarities to specific moments in Bach's music. Schumann put it about that the cycle was written in four days (unlikely). He wished to dedicate it to his beloved Clara (who worried that her future husband was writing music like this, but ended up dedicating it to Chopin, who admired the design of the front cover. The piece underwent some revision in 1850.

The 'electric fire' of the first movement is driven by fast triplet figures (whose pulse Schumann takes pains to offset rhythmically) that Böhmer compares to the 19th of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. In the second movement, slow lyrical music is interrupted by two energetic *intermezzi*, the second of which has certain gestural and rhythmic echoes of the 17th variation. Böhmer also hears echoes of the Chromatic Fantasy, two movements of *The Art of Fugue*, and the C major Fugue from the Second Book of the '48'.

More importantly, perhaps, is the extraordinary dramatic effect of the cycle as a whole, powered by sharp contrasts of extreme emotional states. The tempo markings of the six inner movements all begin with *sehr* – 'very' – and each movement is very different from those that flank it. (Notice, too, that these pieces are considerably longer than the constituent movements of, say, *Carneval*.) But even this apparent alternation of fast and slow is further heightened by the contrasting sections within in each movement. The second, as mentioned, is one case, but in even the more conventionally shaped movements, like the Sixth changes of speed and figuration threaten the gracious equilibrium. The seventh is explosively energetic, but find time for adagio chords at the end. Throughout, too, Schumann cultivates richly chromatic harmony (despite the pieces, as a whole, hewing closer to B-flat major/G minor and related keys) and develops that rhythmic idea from the first piece, where cross rhythms constantly undermine the pulse of the music.

This is hugely evident in the finale, a fast but somewhat awkward dance. Böhmer regards its enigmatic close as reflecting Kreisler's final disappearance, when 'someone saw him bounding out of the gate, singing merrily, with two hats turned one over the other and two rastra [for drawing five-line staves on paper] tucked into his red belt like daggers..."

Hoffmann's drawing of Kapellmeister Kreisler in his 'mad dance'.

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ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT CHOPIN

Chopin knew from very early in adult life that the career of piano virtuoso was not for him. According to his friend, colleague and rival Franz Liszt, Chopin was 'repelled by the furious and frenzied face of Romanticism'. Where Liszt's career traces a magnificent arc from prodigy through virtuoso to distinguished composer of large-scale works, Chopin's seems a story of withdrawal from the concert platform and even from metropolitan society. But the cliché of him retreating into miniatures is inaccurate. Not only do the solo works in the genres that he made his own, such as the nocturne, ballade, polonaise or mazurka, often take on a substantial scale and an amazing intricacy, Chopin remained interested enough in 'classical' forms to complete his Third Sonata as late as 1844.

It is true, though, that after he left Poland in 1830, his piano music became ever more subtle – more suited to the salon than the concert hall – and that he wrote virtually no music involving any other instruments. The pieces for piano and orchestra, including the two concertos, were, with one exception, the work of the late-teenaged composer in his native Warsaw.

Based in Paris, Chopin met the Romantic novelist known as George Sand (Aurore Dupin) in late 1836, and was put off by the writer's assumption of masculine manners and clothing. Meeting Sand again in April 1838, Chopin's attitude changed, and he embarked on the major love affair of his life. Towards the end of that year Chopin, Sand and her two children fled to Majorca where they lived in uncomfortable lodgings and faced open hostility from the puritanical islanders, but he wrote his Preludes. They returned to France but Chopin's increasing ill-health strained the relationship, which ended in 1843.

Chopin's innovation, in his solo music especially, was to introduce a polyphonic complexity to this simple texture without destroying its effect. He famously criticised the music of Beethoven, saying it is occasionally 'obscure and seems lacking in unity … the reason is that he turns his back on eternal principles; Mozart never.'

Chopin, painted by Delacroix in 1838

ABOUT THE MAZURKAS…

While Chopin was puzzled by Schumann's *Kreisleriana*, the German composer was in no doubt of Chopin's genius, and when it came to the mazurkas Schumann straightaway understood the nationalist and political implications of this ostensibly rustic music. The mazurkas, he famously declared, were 'cannons buried in flowers.'

The mazurka is native to the region of Mazovia, which the 1815 Congress of Vienna had handed to Russia; the November Uprising of 1830 was a doomed attempt by young Polish officers to throw off Russian rule. With the exception of Op.59, the selection of mazurkas we hear today date from the 1830s and are often seen in part as Chopin's reaction to these events and their consequences.

The dance, originally 'punctuated by the stamping of heels' (as Camille Bourniquel puts it) is formally flexible and capable of a huge variety of speeds and moods. Franz Liszt said that Chopin 'ennobled their melody, enlarged their proportions, and introduced into them harmonic light and shade.'

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The mazurka is in 3/4 time, but with the main stress of the bar on either the second or third beat. Chopin was teased by several people, including Sir Charles Hallé and Giacomo Meyerbeer, for playing certain mazurkas as if they were in 4, such was his use of rubato to emphasise the second beat.

Beyond this, Chopin also writes rubato – that is the stretching of tempo by delaying or anticipating the beat – in detail in some of the pieces, notably **Op.7**, **No.3**, which also features a long, contrasting trio section.

The **Opus 17** set appeared in 1834 and the three examples here show Chopin in various guises: pianist Joanna MacGregor describes the 'elegant nonchalance and corps de ballet middle section' of No.1, and the contrasting 'regretful Parisian chanson' of No.2. The fourth is a world away, described by one of Chopin's students as 'the mourner's face'.

Op.24 appeared two years later, containing of the short C-major piece with its use of the ancient Lydian mode. In No.4. as Charles Rosen notes, Chopin 'transforms the mazurka from a miniature salon piece into something more ambitious', not least by beginning with an introduction.

Chopin becomes even more experimental in **Op.30** (1837). His harmony in both the D-flat major and C-sharp minor pieces breaks many a text-book rule – consecutive fifths! – such that Schumann thought 'the professors will throw up their hands at this!'

Drawing of Chopin at the piano in 1838.

The diaphanous C major mazurka in **Op.33** (1838) is one that Chopin was accused of playing in 4/4. In sharp contrast he alluded to No.4 as a 'depiction of the tavern.' In No.2 he experiments with the hypnotic use of a rhythmic cell.

MacGregor thinks of **Op.59** No.3 (1846) as 'klezmer music from Eastern Europe: ironic and wonderfully cultured, with a dash of counterpoint at the end.' As Rosen notes, in the late mazurkas Chopin's experience of Bach 'is fully transformed into something completely individual.'

...AND THE POLONAISE

Chopin's first composition (when he was eight years old) was a polonaise, evidence perhaps of the nationalism which was gathering strength in Russian-dominated Poland. The national dance, traditionally slower than the mazurka, had been revived by those nationalist sentiments – 'peasant' music had been largely ignored by Poland's cultivated classes for a century of more before that, though the polonaise was cultivated in other countries for its exotic value. It remained close to Chopin's heart throughout his life. Here, as in the mazurkas, Chopin could explore some of the traditional modes, harmonies and rhythms not acceptable in 'classical' music; as time went on, the polonaise became a political statement by the émigré composer, or, as Rosen says, 'an image of heroism'.

In the Op.44 Polonaise of 1841, the dance's distinctive rhythm lends it to what Bourniquel describes as the 'best balance between rhythmic violence and solemnity, anger and nostalgia...all the iridescent pathos, sometimes despairing, often prophetic and revolutionary'. And of the piece's central section – a mazurka – he hears, 'at the very moment of bitterness and hate, a conciliatory note which calls out to the eternal childhood of all peoples'.

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