

7 April 2025

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IN RECITAL



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2025 CONCERT SEASON

INTERNATIONAL PIANISTS IN RECITAL

Monday 7 April, 7pm

City Recital Hall,

Angel Place

LISE DE LA SALLE IN RECITAL

THRILLING AND VIRTUOSIC

LISE DE LA SALLE piano

CHOPIN

Ballade No.4 in F minor, Op.52 (1842)

LISZT

Harmonies poétiques et religieuses, S173

x. *Cantique d'amour* (Hymn of Love) (1847)

LISZT

Reminiscences of 'Don Juan', S418 (1841)

INTERVAL

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849)

Ballade No.1 in G minor, Op.23 (1835)

FRANZ LISZT (1811–1886)

Sonata in B minor, S178 (1853)

Pre-concert talk

By Gordon Kalton Williams
in the Function Room Level 1
at 6.15pm

Estimated durations

Ballade No.4 – 12 minutes
Cantique d'amour – 6 minutes
Don Juan – 20 minutes
Interval – 20 minutes
Ballade No.1 – 10 minutes
Sonata – 30 minutes

The concert will run for
approximately one hour
and 45 minutes

Cover image

Lise de la Salle
Photo by Stéphane Gallois

Principal Partner





Photo by Philippe Porter

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

LISE DE LA SALLE piano

A career of already over 20 years, award-winning Naïve recordings, international concert appearances – Lise de la Salle has established herself as one of today's exciting young artists and as a musician of real sensibility and maturity. Her playing inspired a *Washington Post* critic to write, 'For much of the concert, the audience had to remember to breathe... the exhilaration didn't let up for a second until her hands came off the keyboard.'

The 2024/25 season sees her debut with Sydney Symphony Orchestra and returns to Philharmonia Orchestra and NHK Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Fabio Luisi.

Other recent highlights include major performances at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées with Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, a return to RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, Stuttgarter Philharmoniker and Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra. She performs recitals in prestigious concert halls such as Shanghai Concert Hall, Sydney City Recital Hall and Paris Seine Musicale.

She has played with many leading orchestras across the globe: Chicago, Boston and Washington Symphony Orchestras, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Philharmonia, BBC Symphony and London Symphony Orchestras, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Münchner Philharmoniker, Dresden Staatskapelle, hr-Sinfonieorchester, Orchestre de Paris, Orchestre National de France, Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Filarmonica della Scala, Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI, Rotterdam Philharmonic, St Petersburg Philharmonic, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic and NHK Symphony Orchestras, Singapore Symphony Orchestra and Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra among many others.

She collaborated with conductors such as Herbert Blomstedt, Fabio Luisi, James Conlon, Gianandrea Noseda, Krzysztof Urbanski, Antonio Pappano, Rafael Payare, Karina Kanellakis, Lioner Bringuier, Thomas Søndergård, Fabien Gabel, Marek Janowski, Robin Ticciati, Osmo Vanska, James Gaffigan, Semyon Bychkov, and Dennis Russell Davies.

She performs in the world's most esteemed concert halls – Vienna Musikverein, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Herkulessaal in Munich, Berlin Philharmonie, Tonhalle Zürich, Lucerne KKL, Bozar in Brussels, Wigmore and Royal Festival Halls, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Hollywood Bowl, and festivals – Klavier Festival Ruhr and Bad Kissingen, Verbier, La Roque d'Anthéron, Bucharest Enescu Festival, San Francisco Performances, Chicago Symphony recital series, Aspen and Ravinia Festivals.

She also takes pleasure in educational outreach and conducts master classes in many of the cities in which she performs.

Among her critically acclaimed Naïve CDs features an all-Chopin disc with a live recording of the Piano Concerto No.2 with Fabio Luisi conducting Staatskapelle Dresden. In 2011, her Liszt album received *Diapason Magazine's* Diapason d'Or and *Gramophone's* Editor's Choice. Her latest album *When do we Dance?* (2021) presents an odyssey of dances through a whole century.

In 2004, Lise de la Salle won the Young Concert Artists International Auditions in New York. She started the piano at age four and gave her first concert five years later in a live broadcast on Radio France. She studied at the Paris Conservatoire. She has worked closely with Pascal Nemirovski and was long-term advisee of Geneviève Joy-Dutilleux.

Don't miss Lise de la Salle performing Mozart's glittering Piano Concerto No.19 with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra later this week, Wednesday 9 - Saturday 12 April, at the Sydney Opera House.



Scan this code to read and watch an interview with Lise de la Salle, where she talks about being surrounded by music from birth, and her deep love of Liszt, Chopin and Mozart.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT FRÉDÉRIC 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.



Frederic Chopin, painted by Eugene Delacroix in 1838

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.

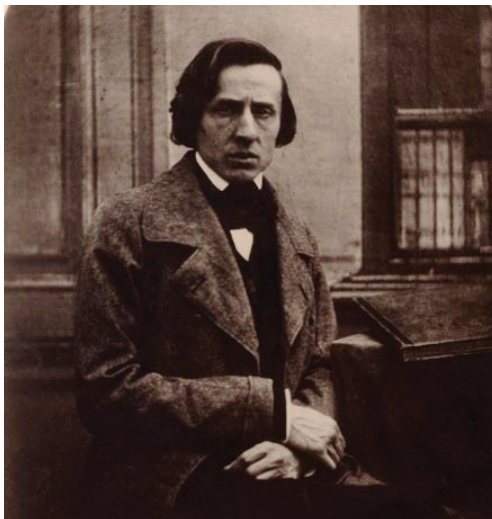
Chopin's innovation, in his solo music especially, was to introduce a polyphonic complexity to this simple texture without destroying its effect. He famously criticised the music of Beethoven, saying it is occasionally 'obscure and seems lacking in unity ... the reason is that he turns his back on eternal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

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT THE BALLADES

If Chopin was looking to the Baroque in his Preludes, his four Ballades are quintessentially Romantic in spirit. The mid-19th century saw the rise of program music, notably in the work of Chopin's friends Schumann and Liszt who pioneered the illustrative miniature and, in Liszt's case, the full-scale symphonic poem in the spirit of Berlioz. This shift from the abstract forms of classicism has to do with the increasing use of chromatic harmony, which provides localised moments of emotive intensity, but can blur the structural sign-posts that give form to many classical pieces. In this instance having a story, or the idea of a story, can help the composer plan the form, and the listener negotiate its trajectory.

The poetic genre of the ballad – enormously popular in the border regions of England and Scotland – appealed to the Romantic poets in Britain and Germany, especially, at the turn of the 19th century. Ballads traditionally told a story (unlike the lyric, which explored a moment of feeling), and the story was inevitably set in the non-urban landscape of the past, often involving the supernatural, and almost always ending badly for someone. Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz, who like Chopin had settled in Paris, described the ballad as 'a tale based on the events of common life or out of the annals of chivalry' and introduced the genre into Polish in 1822. In 1841 Chopin would tell Schumann that his ballades were based on 'certain poems of Mickiewicz' but if that is the case we know not which.



One of only two known photographs of Chopin, taken by Louis-Auguste Bisson in 1849.

Composed in 1835, Chopin's G minor Ballade, Op.23, is one of his first larger scale pieces, and clearly the idea of an implicit 'narrative' solved the problem of how to generate substantial form. In other words, while the music events are in no way illustrative, and while Chopin was not writing 'classical' sonata-form pieces, the Ballades do derive their energy from the dramatic interaction, and development, of contrasting thematic materials.

In both the first and fourth Ballades (Op.23 and Op.52, which was composed in 1842-3) the first theme is highly inflected by waltz rhythms. (Both in minor keys, the first Ballade has an extended introductory gesture, where the fourth, in F minor, has a much shorter introduction.) In both cases, as scholar Jim Samson has noted, the second theme, which offers 'resolution of the tension generated in the first', has the calmer character of a barcarolle. In both works the material is developed in a classical sense, in that elements are extracted and contrasted, the music moves into new key areas to heighten excitement, and on reaching a climax the music represents its themes in the light of the experience of the work's 'narrative'. In the fourth Ballade Chopin maintains the excitement by inserting a quiet chorale that breaks the momentum and has the listener wondering what will come next.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT FRANZ LISZT

Liszt was born in 1811 in Doborján/Raiding, a village then in a German-speaking part of Hungary but since 1920 in Austria. He showed early musical promise, learning piano from the age of seven giving his first concerts in 1820. Aristocratic patronage allowed him to travel to Vienna in 1822 where he studied piano with Carl Czerny and composition with Antonio Salieri, and met Beethoven. He made concert tours to Hungary, France and England almost immediately, soon making Paris his base. There in the early 1830s he met Paganini, who perhaps offered a different model for the life of the touring virtuoso, and Chopin who became a friend and rival, and Berlioz. This period saw the composition of numerous transcriptions, where a work (a song by Schubert or a Beethoven symphony) is altered just enough to become playable at the piano, and 'paraphrases', where he took themes from a well-known opera and worked them into a kind of symphonic poem for the keyboard.

In 1838 he moved to Italy, and in 1839 gave the first modern 'recital' – a solo concert with an overarching plan to the programming.

Liszt's peripatetic career was partly driven by a reaction to what society regarded as a scandalous private life involving women such as author Countess Maire d'Agoult, Lola Montez and Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein; Liszt would enshrine these journeys in his *Années de pèlerinage*. Life as a 'rock-star' virtuoso lasted until 1847, after which time he never again accepted a fee for public performance.'

He settled in Weimar as music director to the court of the Grand Duke, where he helped to enlarge and improve the local orchestra, and wrote most of his music for piano and orchestra, developed his notion of the symphonic poem and began to write more 'sonata'-style works, including the Piano Sonata composed in 1853.



Liszt, painted by Henri Lehmann in around 1839.
Source: Wikimedia/Musée Carnavalet, Paris.

In the early 1860s he found himself in Rome, where his marriage to Sayn-Wittgenstein failed to take place. Always to some degree religious, Liszt explored notions of damnation in a new appreciation of the *Faust* story, and entered minor orders (known thereafter as the Abbé Liszt) in 1865.

Nevertheless he persisted in performing (as conductor and pianist) and composing, and in his last years produced works in which Liszt seems to push the boundaries of traditional harmony: one need look no further than his curious bitonal meditation on mutability, *Sunt lacrimae rerum* (the 'tears in all things') of 1872 or his last piano piece, the 'Bagatelle without tonality', written a year before his death in 1886.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT THE *CANTIQUE D'AMOUR*

French poet and politician Alphonse de Lamartine famously said that 'music is the literature of the heart; it begins where language is lost'. Romantic artists like Mendelssohn and Melville agreed, reflecting their sense that music could express intense spiritual and emotional states in ways that language could not.

The young Liszt responded enthusiastically to Lamartine's 1830 cycle of poems *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, whose preface praises 'meditative souls that solitude and contemplation raise inevitably towards ideas that are infinite, that is towards religion' and goes on to offer the comfort of art to those forced into solitude by sorrow: 'We pray with your words, we weep with your tears, we call on God with your songs!'

Liszt first produced a stand-alone piece, S154, and then a set of pieces (of which there are two versions) in the late 1840s; this includes the *Cantique d'amour*, another instance of blending the religious and the exotic, where gentle harp-like music gives way to a long melody surrounded by delicate chords before a more passionate outburst.

ABOUT REMINISCENCES OF 'DON JUAN'

A genre that Liszt invented was the paraphrase (or as in the case of this work 'reminiscence') where he took themes from a well-known opera and worked them into a kind of symphonic poem for the keyboard. His paraphrase of themes from *Rigoletto* is possibly the most famous, but Liszt also mined the works of Donizetti, Bellini and Mozart in this way.

Reminiscences of 'Don Juan' from 1841 is of course based on *Don Giovanni*, the opera of Mozart's most in tune with the sensibilities of Romanticism. (Interestingly it was Chopin's Variations on 'Là ci darem la mano' from Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Op.2, that prompted Robert Schumann's famous review, with its conclusion: 'Hats off, gentlemen. A genius!')

Don Giovanni, a serial seducer, kills the Commendatore in the process of trying to rape the latter's daughter, Donna Anna. She and her betrothed vow revenge, as does

Donna Elvira who has been spurned by him, and Masetto, the peasant whose bride, Zerlina, has been whisked away by the Don on their wedding day. Finally the statue of the Commendatore returns to offer Don Giovanni the choice of repentance or hell; the Don will not relent, and is dragged off by devils.

Mozart begins his overture with the music which will accompany the climactic event: the appearance of the statue of the Commendatore. Liszt's piece alludes to this moment at its beginning and end (where Mozart concludes with a gaily moralising chorus). The 'reminiscences' also include the duet 'La ci darem la mano', in which the Don attempts to seduce Zerlina; here Liszt can't resist adding glittering pianistic flourishes and two bravura variations. There follows music which describes Don Giovanni in his own words and music (namely, the 'champagne aria'), before a brief nod to the music of the statue's call to repentance and a noisy close. Incidentally, Charles Rosen suggests that the B minor Sonata with its mixture of 'brimstone and incense' and its tragic-seeming ending, might be modelled on the tragi-comic Don Giovanni story; the *Reminiscences*, however, are good clean fun.



Alexandre-Évariste Fragonard's image of the final scene of *Don Giovanni*, painted 1925-30.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT THE SONATA IN B MINOR

When Hans von Bülow gave the public premiere of Liszt's only Piano Sonata in January 1857 the critics were merciless. Anyone, declared the much-feared Eduard Hanslick, 'who finds this beautiful is beyond help', while the *Nationalzeitung's* Otto Gumprecht dismissed it as 'an invitation to hissing and stomping'. Some of Liszt's colleagues were no more enthusiastic. Despite a falling out with Robert Schumann, Liszt dedicated it to him but by that stage Robert was confined to an asylum; his wife, the pianist/composer Clara Schumann regarded it as 'noise', which didn't (according to a much-repeated anecdote) stop young the Johannes Brahms dozing off during the Andante section when Liszt played it to him. (They stayed friends.) On the other hand Wagner, who would later become Liszt's son-in-law, wrote to Liszt in 1855 that the sonata was 'beautiful beyond anything, grand and sweet, deep and noble, sublime as you are yourself. It moved me most deeply.'

The incomprehension of mid-19th century listeners is somewhat understandable in that the thirty-minute work is played without a break, and while vestiges of the traditional four-movement layout of sonata-allegro, slow movement, scherzo and finale are discernible, they are 'telescoped' to unfold within the accepted formal divisions of a single sonata-design movement which has its own overarching shape: the musical themes are laid out (exposition), developed and recapitulated (signalling the return of the home key and initial material). And to add yet another formal layer, the five basic cells of the sonata's thematic material are used from section to section and seen from wildly different perspectives: in a musical hall of mirrors they appear in different keys, at different speeds, different metres.

The first three are heard right at the start: two repeated bass notes and falling scale; a rhythmically angular motif based on a chromatic Hungarian mode; a short phrase whose core is four even repetitions of single note. After some development of these, there is a lofting hymnal tune, and, at the start of the Andante 'slow movement', a lyrical new theme in a gracious triple metre.

Musicologist Charles Rosen spoils the party in pointing out that Liszt didn't invent this technique of continuous transformation – Schubert, Schumann, Moscheles and others had used it. Moreover, the simple changes of speed or metre reach back to the variations form that had been perfected by Haydn and transformed by Beethoven (whose ghost may be heard in some of the low, emphatically repeated chords reminiscent of the Waldstein Sonata). What Rosen does applaud is the way in which Liszt's themes are able to 'turn into each other', imperceptibly altering and blending, and changing character to evoke 'the diabolical, the heroic, the religious and the erotic.'

Much of the music is bravura pianism, of course, recalling the Liszt of the 'rock-star' years with its hammering chords and cascades of notes, but one other ghost who floats through the music is Chopin, who Liszt himself revered for having transmuted the lyricism of *bel canto* opera into piano writing. There is also a fugato section after the Andante where the 'Hungarian' motif is treated in parody-Baroque style.

In a final modernist touch, Liszt eschews the triumphant conclusion in favour of music that Derek Watson calls some of 'the most haunting in all piano literature.' We do get a full-throated statement of the hymnal music in B-major, but a brief reminiscence of the Andante leads into a strangely bleak coda, where the three earliest motifs reemerge in the depths of the instrument before a series of quiet, hopeful rising chords.

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