



MAHANEY
ARTS
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PRESENT

DIANA FANNING, PIANO

50TH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2025

7:30 PM

MAHANEY ARTS CENTER, ROBISON HALL



Diana Fanning, Piano

Program

Six Variations in F Major, Op. 34

Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770–1827)

Po zarostlém chodníčku (*On an Overgrown Path*)

Leoš Janáček
(1854–1928)

- I. Naše večery (*Our evenings*)
- II. Lístek odvanutý (*A blown-away leaf*)
- III. Pojd'te s námi! (*Come with us!*)
- IV. Frydecká Panna Maria (*The Madonna of Frydýk*)
- V. Štebetaly jak laštovičky (*They chattered like swallows*)
- VI. Nelze domluvit! (*Words fail!*)
- VII. Dobrou noc! (*Good night!*)
- VIII. Tak neskonale úzko (*Indescribable anguish*)
- IX. V pláči (*In tears*)
- X. Syček neodletel! (*The little owl has not flown away!*)

Intermission

Brouillards (*Fog*)

Claude Debussy
(1862–1918)

Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses (*The fairies are exquisite dancers*)

Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir (*Sounds and perfumes swirl in the evening air*)

Minstrels

Sonata in B Minor, Op. 58

Frédéric Chopin
(1810–1849)

- I. Allegro maestoso
- II. Scherzo – Molto vivace
- III. Largo
- IV. Finale – Presto non tanto



This performance is sponsored by the Mahaney Arts Center and the Department of Music.

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Photography and the use of audio or video equipment are prohibited.*

Program Notes

BEETHOVEN Six Variations in F Major, Op. 34

Notes courtesy of the LA Philharmonic

On 18 October 1802, barely a fortnight after he had penned his famous “Heiligenstadt Testament,” in which he confessed that his deafness had brought him to the brink of suicide, Beethoven wrote to the publishers Breitkopf & Härtel offering them two newly-composed sets of variations which were, he assured them, quite unlike any he had ever composed before. Both, he claimed, were written “in a quite new style and each in an entirely different way. Each theme in them is treated independently and in a wholly different manner. As a rule I only hear of it from others when I have new ideas, since I never know it myself; but this time—I myself can assure you that in both works the style is quite new for me.”

Beethoven’s insistence on the novelty value of the two variation sets was no mere piece of salesmanship: both show a willful determination to be original from the very outset. In the “Eroica” set Op. 35, three variations on the skeletal bassline of the theme run their course before the melody itself is heard at all, while the Op. 34 companion-piece throws most of the basic tenets of variation writing out of the window altogether: rather than maintain the same key and tempo for the successive variations, which is the normal procedure in works of the kind, Beethoven presents a series of character pieces, each of which unfolds in a different key, meter, and tempo.

The overall plan of the Op. 34 variations is highly schematic, with their keys describing a descending circle of thirds, from the F major theme itself, through the D major, G major, E flat major and C minor of the following variations. The last of these has a miniature coda which prepares the return of the home key for the concluding variation, before the work comes to an end with an intricately ornamented and slower reprise of the theme itself.

While the first variation is an Adagio of the kind we might have expected to hear only towards the end of a set of variations, variation 2 presents the type of rhythmic transformation traditionally invoked for the coda of a work of the kind. The third variation, with its gently flowing quaver motion, presents a strong contrast to the sharply articulated rhythm of its predecessor; while variation 4 is a gracious minuet. Variation 5 is a C minor funeral march, complete with explosive outbursts in orchestral style—a hint, perhaps, that the “Eroica” Symphony was on the horizon; while the final variation transforms the theme into a good-natured melody of folk-like simplicity. The full scale reprise of the theme that follows reaches a climax with a hint of a cadenza, before the elaborate flights of fancy are shrugged off with the simplest of conclusions.

JANÁČEK Po zarostlém chodníčku (*On an Overgrown Path*)

Notes courtesy of Diana Fanning

On an Overgrown Path is Leoš Janáček’s most autobiographical work: the “path” is his life, crowded with memories dating back to his childhood in a small Czech village. *Our evenings* is a nostalgic look back at Janáček’s home and incorporates his memory of being carried out of a burning house, crying bitterly, at age

four. *A blown-away leaf* is a song about lost love. In *Come with us!*, imagine a passel of children coming to the door, inviting a friend out to play. Only a minute long, this piece contains a four-note fragment from a Czech folk tune which is repeated over 20 times. *The Madonna of Frydyka* recalls religious processions to a church in the town of Frydyka, as well as a young shepherd playing a wistful tune on his flute. Janáček called the contrasting middle section an “impassioned organ improvisation.” Since he was an organist, perhaps he remembers himself in the organ loft, playing this improvisation as the pilgrims approached. *They chattered like swallows* recalls the chatter of schoolgirls. *Words fail!* represents an unspeakable disappointment. The quick, rushing sections suggest stuttering or sobbing when trying to speak. Two lovers part company in *Good night!* The last three pieces depict Janáček’s grief and despair during the illness and death of his only child, Olga, at the age of 20 from tuberculosis. *Indescribable anguish* is a psychological portrait of despair, full of wild outbursts alternating with eerily quiet music. *In tears* suggests keeping up a hopeful appearance, while dissolved in tears on the inside. According to a Czech legend, if an owl lingers outside the home of a sick person and cannot be chased away, that person will never recover. In *The little owl has not flown away!*, the first impression is of efforts to shoo the owl away, followed by the owl’s mournful song. Despite contrasting chorale sections, which suggest fervent prayers for Olga’s return to health, the entire suite ends quietly, and tragically, with the haunting call of the owl.

DEBUSSY Brouillards (*Fog*)

Note courtesy of Hyperion Records

Debussy’s 24 Préludes may show a gallic deference to Chopin, a beloved arch-romantic predecessor, yet they differ decisively both in intention and accomplishment. Whereas Chopin aimed for summaries—whether terse or elaborate—of psychological states of mind, Debussy sought to evoke the very “inscape” or interior life of the natural and inhuman world. His way, too, of placing his titles after, rather than before, each Prélude was deliberate rather than whimsical: a way of suggesting uninhibited rather than narrow imaginative percussions or vibrations.

The Préludes Book 2 (1910–1912) commence with *Brouillards*, mists of eerily shifting mobility, their hypnotic fascination accentuated not only by a truly modernist, near bi-tonality, but by an ending where the music’s flickering half-lights and momentum are extinguished to leave both form and mood tantalizingly unresolved.

DEBUSSY Les fées sont d’exquises danseuses (*The fairies are exquisite dancers*)

Notes courtesy of Hyperion Records

[Also from Préludes Book 2,] *Les fées sont d’exquises danseuses* is a scherzo of suitably elusive, intangible rhythms and sonorities. Here, the fairies “dance their ringlets to the whistling wind” before a wry and witty memory of the horn call from Weber’s *Oberon*, a command by the King of the fairies himself.

DEBUSSY Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir (*Sounds and perfumes swirl in the evening air*)

Notes courtesy of Naxos Music Publishing

Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir is suggested by Baudelaire's poem *Harmonie du soir* (*Evening Harmony*):

*Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige
Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;
Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!*

*Here comes the time when, quivering on its stem,
every flower melts away to vapor like an incense burner;
sounds and scents turn in the evening air;
sad waltz and languorous dizziness!*

The poetic association with Baudelaire indicates something of the mood of the piece, with its the final suggestions of a distant horn-call.

DEBUSSY Minstrels

Notes courtesy of Hyperion Records

The First Book of *Préludes* ends with *Minstrels*. The protagonists are not inspired by medieval troubadors, but early jazz buskers Debussy is said to have encountered in the streets of Eastbourne when he was working on *La Mer* in 1905.

CHOPIN Sonata in B Minor, Op. 58

Notes courtesy of Hyperion Records

The Piano Sonata No. 3 in B Minor, Op. 58 was the last of Chopin's three piano sonatas, written in 1844 during the years of his full maturity as a composer, and in contrast to the Sonata No. 2 (*Marche funébre*), it moves closer to conformity with both the formal and the generic archetypes of what was already becoming recognized as German sonata-symphonic thought. It is as though having come to terms with the four-movement sonata in Op 35, approaching it obliquely by way of the familiar "Chopin genres" of the early 1830s, the composer now felt able to tackle this weighty genre on its own terms.

This is evident in the intricate, motivic development in the first movement, and the deliberate pace (like late Beethoven or Schubert) of the slow movement. There are some parallels with Op. 35, including the sequence of the inner movements where the scherzo precedes the slow movement, and again the inverted reprise of the first movement, but in most respects the two works are poles apart. The outer movements point up the contrast. There could be nothing further from the elliptical, understated finale of Op. 35 than the grandiloquent sonata rondo with which Op. 58 races, or rather gallops, to its bravura coda. This at least is a more conventional way to end a sonata! As for the first movement, this presents us with a much more closely argued thematicism than its counterpart in Op. 35. The principal theme is strong and distinctive, but it is quickly broken down into motivic-contrapuntal working in a process of continuous development and transformation that then characterizes much of the movement.

Considerable heads of tension are built up by this process, both in the exposition and in the development, and it is the function of the Nocturne-like second theme one of Chopin's happiest inspirations—to resolve them.

Biography

DIANA FANNING has toured extensively as a solo performer and chamber musician throughout the U.S. and in England, France, Austria, Switzerland, Holland, the Czech Republic, Canada, and Germany. In recent years she has performed at the Schloss Leopoldskron ("Sound of Music" castle) in Salzburg, and in Prague at the invitation of the International Dvořák Society.

After a solo recital in Munich, a critic wrote that "Diana Fanning stunned her listeners with the rich spectrum of subtle colors and tonal nuances she revealed. Her recital seized the audience with a veritable deep magic." Ms. Fanning has performed on numerous occasions as a concerto soloist with the Vermont Symphony Orchestra. She was featured as soloist in a performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 in the debut concert of the Champlain Philharmonic Orchestra and was invited back for performances of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Vermont Public Television featured her in a program of works by Scarlatti, Ravel, and Chopin. Radio audiences hear her frequently over Vermont Public Radio, and she was interviewed on Radio Prague. She also performed live on "Morning Pro Musica" (WGBH-FM) Boston and on WNYC, New York City.



As a chamber musician, Ms. Fanning has been a guest artist with the Takács, Schumann, Jupiter, and Alexander String Quartets, and with ensembles from Point Counterpoint Music Camp, which she owned and directed for ten years with her husband Emory Fanning. As a member of the Davydov-Fanning Duo with the outstanding cellist Dieuwke Davydov, she has performed widely in the U.S., completed eight concert tours of Europe, and recorded for Radio Netherlands. She is a founding faculty member of Pianos on the Point, a four-hand piano summer program for adults.

Ms. Fanning's CD of works by Janáček, Chopin, and Debussy received enthusiastic reviews in U.S. and England. She also released a recording of live concert performances with Dieuwke Davydov. Her principal teacher was Ruth Geiger of New York City; she also studied with Marcelle Heuclin at the Paris Conservatory. She is an Affiliate Artist at Middlebury College.

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