



OREGON PIANO
— INSTITUTE —

JAMES AND MARILYN MURDOCK INTERNATIONAL PIANO SERIES

presents

Valery Kuleshov

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Beall Concert Hall



UNIVERSITY OF
OREGON

**School of Music
and Dance**



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Murdock International Piano Series Season 1 – 2024/2025

featuring
Van Cliburn Competition Medalists

presented by
Oregon Piano Institute
University of Oregon School of Music and Dance

Welcome to the inaugural season of the Oregon Piano Institute, the newest non-profit arts organization in Oregon! OPI will enhance the cultural life of our community by inviting world-class pianists to perform and teach in Eugene. It will also create Oregon's first international piano competition and support University of Oregon students through piano competition grants. Our community needed such an organization for quite a while, and it now became a reality thanks to the generous support of James and Marilyn Murdock. I am very fortunate to work together with a dedicated Board of Directors: Maria Dossin, Andrew Verner, Ruth Seeger, and Amy Bunker. My special thanks to Dean Sabrina Madison-Cannon for her vision and support for this educational and cultural initiative.

If you would like to receive more information about the Oregon Piano Institute, please look for the sign-up sheets available by the doors, or visit our website and sign up online: <https://oregonpianoinstitute.org>

The Oregon Piano Institute was created to share great piano music with a large audience. Thank you for your presence! If you would like to receive information about the Season 2 (2025/2026) of the Murdock International Piano Series, please sign up for our newsletter in person during this performance or visit our website.

Alexandre Dossin, OPI Artistic Director

The Olympics of Piano

Nikita Istratov

Winning the first International Tchaikovsky Competition in the Soviet Union in 1958 brought American pianist Van Cliburn extraordinary fame. He became a symbol of American artistry and cultural diplomacy above political borders. The Van Cliburn Foundation was formed in 1961 with the mission of creating a world-class classical piano competition in his name. The Van Cliburn International Piano Competition (“the Cliburn”) was inaugurated in Fort Worth, Texas in 1962 and has been held every four years since then. It has become one of the world’s foremost piano competitions, having recognized and supported artists including Olga Kern, Alexei Sultanov, and Radu Lupu. The competition is a launchpad for the future stars of classical music.

Over the years, the Cliburn strengthened its position as a beacon of musical excellence. Above all, the Cliburn — now requiring competitors to prepare three solo recitals and three concerti to be considered for a medal — is an endurance contest. Competitors undergo intense rounds of competition, inspired by the desire to advance further. They must demonstrate not only technical prowess, but also the ability to interpret music with depth and originality. In many ways, a medal at the Cliburn signifies that a pianist has reached the highest ranks of their craft.

The 2024/25 Murdock International Piano Series brings together a select group of pianists who have won medals at the prestigious Competition. This prize serves as a badge of honor conveying their strength at the highest levels of performance. These artists proved their abilities in an extremely demanding environment and now they have the chance to share their artistry in concerts.

Cliburn CEO Jacques Marquis has described the competition as “the Olympics of piano.” The musicians playing at the Murdock series this year can surely be described as Olympians. Hearing a Cliburn laureate perform live is not just an evening of music; it is an experience that connects the audience to the legacy of musical excellence that the Competition represents. These pianists are ambassadors of the competition’s strength and ambassadors of the international piano community. Join us for an unforgettable series of performances and experience firsthand why a medal at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition is one of the highest honors a pianist can achieve.

Program

Chaconne from Violin Partita No. 2, BWV 1004 Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)
arr. Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924)

Carnaval (Scènes mignonnes sur quatre notes), Op. 9 Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

Préambule

Pierrot

Arlequin

Valse noble

Eusebius

Florestan

Coquette

Réplique

Sphinxes

Papillons

A.S.C.H. – S.C.H.A. (Lettres dansantes)

Chiarina

Chopin

Estrella

Reconnaissance

Pantalon et Colombine

Valse allemande

Paganini. Intermezzo

Aveu

Promenade

Pause

Marche des “Davidsbündler” contre les Philistins

INTERMISSION

Program

Six Etudes, Op. 19 (1933)

Nocturne

Waltz

Reminiscence

Dance

Recitative

Toccata

Valery Zhelobinsky (1912–1946)

Six Romances

O, Cease Thy Singing, Op. 4 No. 4

Where Beauty Dwells, Op. 21 No. 7

In the Silent Night, Op. 4 No. 3

Dream, Op. 38 No. 5

Do Not Grieve, Op. 14 No. 8

Floods of Spring, Op. 14 No. 11

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873–1943)

arr. Earl Wild (1915–2010)

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J.S. Bach (arr. Ferruccio Busoni) - Chaconne from Violin Partita No. 2, BWV 1004

Johannes Brahms, describing the Bach D minor Chaconne in a letter to Clara Schumann: "On one staff, for a small instrument, the man writes a whole world of the deepest thoughts and most powerful feelings. If I imagined that I could have created, even conceived the piece, I am quite certain that the excess of excitement and earth-shattering experience would have driven me out of my mind."

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), perhaps the most well-known composer of the Baroque period, composed many works for organ that served religious purposes. He composed many of these during his time serving as the Thomaskantor (music director) of the St. Thomas Church in Leipzig, Germany. Most of Bach's sacred music (hundreds of compositions from cantatas to motets, oratorios, and four-part chorales), is set to German text, often from a Lutheran hymn. Bach made huge contributions to the chorale prelude repertory, most notably with *Das Orgelbüchlein*, the *Eighteen Chorales*, and the six *Schübler Chorales*. This music reflects not just the musical but also the scriptural traditions of Bach's time.

Pianist-composer Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924) transcribed a fairly large number of Bach works for the modern grand piano. For example, Busoni transcribed 10 of the 46 Chorale Preludes from Bach's *Das Orgelbüchlein* as part of his *Übertragungen* (transcriptions, not just adaptations) of organ works. Busoni explained that his arrangements "[are] not so much to furnish a sample of [my] capabilities as an arranger as the desire to interest a larger section of the public in these compositions, which are so rich in art, feeling, and fantasy."

This transcription of Bach's famous violin piece is more of a re-imagination than an attempt to be most faithful to Bach's original manuscript. The space this Chaconne resides in is closer to that of a work for organ or orchestra than for solo violin.

The *Chaconne* is a series of variations (in this case, over sixty, although they are not discretely labeled), built over a repeated bassline pattern that is, on its own, four measures long. This Chaconne opens with a stern chordal passage which is, with its triple time and emphasis on second beats, somewhat of a sarabande. It is clear that Busoni can truly transform the texture and mood conveyed in each repetition of the bassline – from austere passages to chorales, breathtaking lyricism, and drama. The Bach scholar Philipp Spitta wrote the following about Bach's violin Chaconne: "What scenes the small instrument opens to our view!... From the grave majesty of the beginning to the 32nd notes which rush up and down like very demons; from the tremulous arpeggios that hang almost motionless, like veiling clouds above a gloomy ravine, till a strong wind drives them to the tree tops,

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which groan and toss as they whirl their leaves into the air; to the devotional beauty of the movement in D major, where the evening sun sets in the peaceful valley. The spirit of the master urges the instrument to incredible utterances; at the end of the major section, it sounds like an organ, and sometimes a whole band of violins seems to be playing.”

Busoni’s reimagined version takes full advantage of the power of the grand piano to realize what Bach conveyed with the maximum potentials of the “small violin.” This work comes roughly in three parts: a large set of minor statements of the bassline, then a smaller set in major, and then another smaller set in minor. It seems Busoni considered the orchestra in many of his variations. He includes imitation of brass instruments, timpani and tubular bells within the first set. The conclusion of the work includes the sound of tolling church bells and a powerful organ.

R. Schumann - Carnival Op. 9

“The laws of morality are also those of art” - Robert Schumann

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) was a particularly imaginative, intellectual composer of the Romantic period. Within his solo piano output he is most recognized for his large sets of character miniatures (of which *Carnaval* is a prime example), as well as a few sonatas. He composed more for intellectuals than the average public, and his pieces were not performed often during his life (in part because they were considered very difficult). Jon Nakamatsu, the first performer in this year’s OPI concert series, has said that Schumann writes “without any regard to the human hand.” Schumann had a tumultuous life, often struggling with mental crises and financial troubles, building up to a suicide attempt. His life ended early in syphilis and insanity. His bipolar-induced periods of mania and depression were mirrored in his composing output. *Carnaval* was written during a particularly prolific part of his life, when he was in his mid-twenties. He is often described as an introspective, knowledgeable, and literature-informed person. I believe his imagination, internal personalities (which often contradict each other), and his observation of the world around him is what formed the foundation of his musical style.

Carnaval, composed between 1834 and 1835, is a musical masquerade – a parade of characters, dances, and emotions. Each short piece represents a real person or an imaginary person created by Schumann (perhaps an internal “alter ego”). The variety of scenes is grand: from the brilliance of “Florestan” to the melancholy of “Eusebius” and the charm of “Coquette.” There is a formidable presence of characters from commedia dell’arte, an early form of professional theater that emerged in Italy. That artform includes the use of stock characters like Pierrot (the sad clown) and Arlequin (the nimble and comedic servant who dons a checkered outfit). The masks most characters wear are often also represented

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in the music. Perhaps Schumann suggests the presence of masks even in his movements based on real individuals.

The subtitle of the work is “Scènes mignonnes sur quatre notes,” which means “Little scenes on four notes.” These four notes are: A/A flat (written as A/As in German notation respectively), E flat (Es), C (C), and B (which you may be surprised to find is notated in German as H). These combinations are used to signal different messages. For example, A-Es-C-H can refer to the town of Asch, where Schumann’s then-fiancée was born. As-C-H refers to Ash Wednesday (the first day of Lent), or perhaps Schumann himself (his middle name was Alexander). With some analysis it can be seen that all of the miniatures’ themes are derived from these letters, with the exceptions of Prélude and Paganini. How clever! The score even has a section (“Sphinxes”) that performers are instructed to skip, that gives the “key” to Schumann’s cipher. The webs Schumann spins give me a lot to write about.

Some of *Carnaval’s* miniatures are based on personalities, like the thoughtful Eusebius and the capricious Florestan. Some are references to people such as Chiarina (Clara Wieck, his future wife), Estrella (Ernestine, his fiancée), or Chopin (I’ll leave you to guess this one). Some are the commedia dell’arte characters. The finale, however, is quite special, as it describes an idea.

To understand this finale and its esoteric title (“March of the Davidsbündler against the Philistines”), we must learn a bit about Schumann’s artistic beliefs. Schumann edited a journal of music criticism called the *Neue Zeitschrift [journal] für Musik*. In it he described his beliefs and battled a type of popular music of the time which he deemed empty virtuoso showmanship. He wrote: “Our purpose... is to remind our readers emphatically of the distant past and its works. Then, to emphasize the fact that the contemporary artist can secure strength for the creation of new beauty only by drinking from such pure fountains. Then, to attack as inartistic the immediate past, which is concerned merely with encouraging superficial virtuosity. Lastly, to help prepare and hasten the coming of a new poetic era.” His journal contained a cast of characters called the “Davidsbündler,” named after the biblical King David. Most characters were fictitious and contributed columns and sayings to the pages of his journal articles in their “style”. The “Philistines”, then, were the blunt, brute-force-wielding antagonists. The march against them is hence the march of the progressive “real art” against the old-fashioned.

You can create a story from this music. The Papillons (butterflies) speed around the busy ballroom. Chopin tries to restore calm with a poetic melody, but Estrella interrupts. A seductive valse allemande draws everyone to the dance floor, and Paganini sees his opportunity to draw the crowd’s attention to his alluring virtuosic pizzicato. Simultaneously,

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a suitor whispers his Aveu (confession of love) to a young woman, who reciprocates. The music ends with some restatement of how it began, at the beginning of the night.

V. Zhelobinsky - Six Etudes Op. 19

Valery Zhelobinsky (1913–1946) was a unique Soviet composer. Before his life was tragically cut short by World War II, he was a composition student of Reinhold Glière. Zhelobinsky also spent four years at the Leningrad Conservator studying with Vladimir Shcherbakov. He performed across the Soviet Union as a soloist and returned to his hometown of Tambov in 1942 to teach.

He wrote four operas in his life. He also wrote orchestral music including six symphonies. His Romantic Poem for violin and orchestra was premiered in Leningrad alongside Shostakovich's Sixth Symphony. Shostakovich thought highly of Zhelobinsky. In a letter, he stated his belief that Zhelobinsky should be included in a proposed list of "top 100 Russian composers."

His *Six Etudes, Op. 19*, each portray their own landscape of colors and moods. Zhelobinsky fuses elements of Russian folk music with more cinematic elements which can create contrasts between vast natural scenes and quiet, intimate ones. As far as I can tell, this set was introduced to the United States by Vladimir Horowitz before they were published here. To this day they are rarely performed.

S. Rachmaninov (arr. Earl Wild) - Six Romances

While many know him as a composer of sweeping romantic piano concertos and orchestral symphonies, Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) was also a great songwriter. Starting at the age of seventeen, he wrote a total of about eighty songs, and the development of his songwriting mirrors his development as an instrumental composer in many ways. Rachmaninoff cultivated the Russian stylistic traditions championed by the likes of Glinka and Tchaikovsky. He usually used texts by poets like Pushkin and Lermontov that explore loss, tragedy, and spirituality. He often included folk elements from his culture and the cultures he interacted with most. For example, "Oh, Cease Thy Singing" from Op. 4 evokes the melismatic folk music of Georgia.

When Rachmaninoff found himself in exile in 1917, he was too hurt to ever approach the genre of song again. I believe songs are the way to look deepest into his connection with his homeland.

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Earl Wild (1915–2010) was a renowned 20th-century pianist, known in part for his powerful transcriptions. He made transcriptions of many works, from Gershwin to Tchaikovsky, and showcased passages ranging from the most lush and melodious to the most virtuosic and truly “wild.” His arrangements of Rachmaninoff’s songs are especially great: they are always faithful to the original text but expand the texture and musical content to create pianistic, expressive, complete poems. While he occasionally includes new virtuosic elements, these are never in bad taste. They complement a consistent expression of the emotion (often that of yearning and pain) included in Rachmaninoff’s original works.

Each piece creates its own atmosphere. *O, Cease Thy Singing* (Op. 4 No. 4), drawn from a Pushkin text, unfolds with an undulating accompaniment under a nostalgic melody. *Where Beauty Dwells* (Op. 21 No. 7) offers a delicate, intimate portrait. *In the Silent Night* (Op. 4 No. 3), suggests a quiet nocturnal landscape. *Dream* (Op. 38 No. 5) is one of the most striking. It deals with its subject matter using flowing lines and atmospheric harmonies, evoking sleep and the imagination of a brain free from the constraints of reality. *Do Not Grieve* (Op. 14 No. 8) transforms personal sorrow into a hymnal outpouring, while *Floods of Spring* (Op. 14 No. 11) (one of the most famous songs), bursts with life. *Floods of Spring* is one example of Wild using virtuosity to emphasize the intentions of the original music.

*Oh, don't be sad for me! I am where there is no suffering
Forget the painful dreams of past sorrows...
Let your memories of me be
Brighter than the first day of spring.
Oh, don't yearn for me! There is no separation between us:
I am as close to your soul as before,
Your torments still excite me,
Your melancholy oppresses me.
Live! You must live. And if by the power of a miracle
You ... find joy and peace here,
Then know that it was I who responded from there
To the call of your sick soul.*

-Translation of the poem set in “Do Not Grieve”, Op. 14 No. 8

-Program notes by Nikita Istratov

About the Artist

Russian pianist Valery Kuleshov is among the most brilliant virtuosos of his generation. At the age of nine, as a student at the Central Music School of the Moscow Conservatory, Valery Kuleshov made his concert debut with orchestra on stage of the Moscow Conservatory Great Hall. In 1995 he made his first appearance at Isaac Stern Auditorium of Carnegie Hall in New York.

Years of studies with the world's most acclaimed musicians, including Dmitri Bashkirov, Vladimir Tropp, Stanislav Pocheikin, Karl Ulrich Schnabel, Leon Fleischer, Fou Ts'ong, Byron Janis, and Earl Wild have created the foundation for a spectacular international performance career with has included appearances at the best concert halls in Russia, North and South America, Canada, Italy, Spain, Germany, France, Switzerland, England, Finland, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, China, Singapore, Mexico and Dominican Republic.

Major music festivals such as Radio France et Montpellier, Colmar, La rogue d'Anthéron, Schleswig-Holstein, Russian Winter, Stars on Baikal, Ravinia, Rimini and Davos are also on his list of appearances.

In addition to maintaining his international performing schedule, Valery Kuleshov has been, since 1997, serving as Artist-in-Residence at the University of Central Oklahoma, USA. In 2016 The Kuleshov International Piano Festival & Competition was established by UCO College of Fine Arts and Design. www.TheKuleshov.com

Mr. Kuleshov's recordings have been released on BIS, Philips, VAI Audio, JVC Victor, MCA, Mezhdunarodnaya Kniga, Melody, Bel Air Music, Vista Vera and Piano Classics.

Kuleshov's name is linked to that of Vladimir Horowitz. As an homage, Kuleshov accomplished the extraordinary task of writing out, by ear, the legendary master's unpublished piano arrangements, and then trumped his own feat by learning to play and perform these super virtuosic pieces. After listening to Kuleshov's recordings of his own arrangements, Horowitz has shown his appreciation by writing to the young musician: *"I was not only delighted by your fantastic performances, but I congratulate you on your keen ear and great patience that were required to write out, note by note, the scores of these unpublished transcriptions, by listening to my recordings."* (October 6, 1987)

Documented by historic photographs, their meeting in 1989 at Horowitz's apartment in New York was touching and intimate. The maestro not only listened to the young virtuoso play, but also gave him the most valuable advice and offered to give him consultations free of charge. The great pianist's death left these plans unrealized.

About the Artist

Valery Kuleshov's performing art is based on the best Russian piano traditions. One can find in his playing emotional sincerity, rich colors, brilliant virtuosity, profound understanding of composer's styles and freshness of interpretation.

"What sound! What allure! What a musician"

– LE MONDE, FRANCE

"He has everything: the fingers to negotiate the virtuoso repertory, the musicality and imagination to make the most familiar music sound fresh and compelling."

– THE NEW YORK TIMES

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