



2024/2025 Murdock International Piano Series

featuring
Van Cliburn Competition Medalists

Welcome to the inaugural event 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. I had these dreams for many years, and they 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 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, and please mark your calendars for the next Murdock Series recitals, always at 7:30PM in Beall Concert Hall:

- March 15, 2025: Antonio Pompa-Baldi (Van Cliburn International Piano Competition Silver Medalist, 2001)
- May 28, 2025: Valery Kuleshov (Van Cliburn International Piano Competition Silver Medalist, 1993)

Alexandre Dossin, OPI Artistic Director

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

Jon Nakamatsu
Van Cliburn Competition Gold Medalist, 1997
November 14th, 2024

The Olympics of Piano

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 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 Notes

J.S. Bach (arr. F. Busoni): Two Chorale Preludes for Organ

*Ich ruf zu dir, Herr
Nun komm’ der Heiden Heiland*

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 transcribed a fairly large number of Bach works for the modern grand piano. Busoni decided to transcribe 10 out of the 46 Chorale Preludes from Bach's *Das Orgelbüchlein* as part of his *Übertragungen* (transcriptions, not just adaptations) of organ pieces by Bach. Busoni explained that his intimate chorale 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.”

The first prelude, *Ich ruf zu dir, Herr*, (I call to thee, Lord) is a meditative piece based on a hymn by Paul Eber. Bach's emphasizes the sanguine character of the text while maintaining its somber undertones. In a chorale prelude the cantus firmus of the hymn is heard in long notes against a backdrop of imitative counterpoint in shorter note values. This balance of note values could be interpreted as a theological statement – a hierarchy. The long notes symbolizing the eternal presence of God while the moving accompaniment lines representing human on Earth below.

The second prelude, *Nun komm’ der Heiden Heiland*, (Now come, the Gentiles’ Savior), is based on a hymn that Martin Luther himself was involved in creating. It is more dynamic, celebrating the anticipated arrival of the Savior, bringing divine promise. This chorale also served as the basis for two Advent cantatas that Bach composed in 1714 and 1724.

L. Beethoven: Sonata in D major, op. 28 “Pastorale”

Allegro

Andante

Scherzo – Allegro vivace – Trio

Rondo – Allegro ma non troppo

The term “pastoral” refers to “an idealized form of the shepherd's lifestyle – herding livestock around open areas of land according to the seasons and the changing availability of water and pasture.” This theme exists in many forms of art and literature, broadly featuring an author employing techniques to describe a complex life as a simple one. Many Christian denominations also use the title “Pastor,” a word rooted in the Biblical metaphor (Pastor in Latin means “shepherd”). A pastoral economic system had great cultural significance for the Jewish people from earliest recorded times. When listening to a piece known as “Pastorale,” it is important to keep these themes of nature and divinity in mind.

Like the Sixth Symphony (1808) of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), this Sonata carries the nickname Pastorale and the symbolism of country life is especially clear in the first and fourth movements, with classic open 5ths and bagpipe-like tones in the bass.

The Sonata’s opening melody (played over a murmuring left hand D) features many gentle sigh motives and rises a short distance towards its end with a melodic flick. The end of this phrase is insignificant at first but grows and eventually not only motivates the stormiest section of the piece but serves as a close to the movement. The exposition of the movement is like a set of daydreams, each of which inhabit a certain tonal space. This feeling returns in the development after the turmoil of the development section.

Notably, Beethoven waives a lyrical slow second movement in favor of a stately Andante. Attentive listeners will feel a sense of mystery within the opening section, reinforced by offbeat accents. The inching chromatic lines create an air of concern. There is a great contrast with the B section of the movement that never really seems to be explained.

The third movement deals with contrasts between long and short notes. It opens with a succession of four long notes, drawing up images of an orchestra tuning. This is followed by its contrast: four small cadencing gestures. The middle section trio features some subtle transformations of a melody. In fact, it is just the same melody eight times! This is an example of Beethoven’s ability to transform and envision endless variations of a given melody.

The *Allegro ma non troppo* finale is the most rustic: gently rolling and almost naïve. It opens with the bass note D and contains an exciting development followed by contrapuntal conflict, just like the first movement. The rhythmic drive of the piece culminates at the end, showing off guile right hand figuration.

F. Mendelssohn: Fantasy in F-sharp Minor, op. 28

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847) wrote his Fantasie Op. 28 in 1833. It was first titled *Sonata écossaise* (Scottish sonata). Mendelssohn did indeed visit Scotland in 1829. At the age of twenty he found inspiration there for his Scottish Symphony (at Holyrood Chapel in Edinburgh) and for the Hebrides Overture (on the island of Staffa off the coast of Mull in the Hebrides). Even before that, Mendelssohn was reading the poetry and novels of Sir Walter Scott and was acquainted with the “Ossianic” poems. The fantasy is a work in three “movements” in the key of F sharp minor, although it does not adhere strictly to any rigid form, making it a sort of “Sonata-Fantasy”. Each of the three movements is faster than the last, similar to Beethoven’s “Moonlight” sonata (“*Sonata quasi una fantasia*”!). It displays the composer’s prototypical lyricism and virtuosity, blending elements of classical and romantic traditions. The work was first performed in 1837 and was praised for originality, although it was not as widely recognized during his lifetime as pieces like the *Lieder ohne Worte*. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote about thirteen year-old Mendelssohn in 1821: “As far as mere technical execution goes, musical prodigies are probably not so rare anymore, but what this young fellow can improvise and play at sight borders on the miraculous.”

The work’s three rough movements/sections are the introduction, exposition/development, and the coda. The introductory theme is brooding and serves as a prelude, previewing the tension of contrasts between textures and emotions that pervade the work. The second section introduces a lively, contrasting theme where Mendelssohn’s signature lightness of touch is evident. Mendelssohn writes quick figurations and dynamic changes. Whether this section contains Scottish elements is up for debate. The third section sees Mendelssohn transforming motifs from the first two, displaying them in new contexts. Mendelssohn avoids repeating motifs in a strict sonata-like “development,” opting for a more improvisatory approach. The conclusion of the third section is dynamic and restless, as is the finale of his Scottish Symphony.

F. Liszt: Three Petrarch Sonnets from *Années del pèlerinage*, II – Italie

Sonetto 47 del Petrarca

Sonetto 104 del Petrarca

Sonetto 123 del Petrarca

The Italian Renaissance poet Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) was a scholar and writer. He was responsible for the basis of Renaissance humanism. At one point in his life, he wrote and compiled (in a book called *Canzoniere*) nearly four hundred poems about his unrequited love for a woman called "Laura" who he saw outside a church and evidently never talked to. In 1838 Franz Liszt (1811-1886) chose three of these for his *Sonetti*, composing first for piano and voice and then transcribing to piano solo. At this time Liszt had been involved in transcribing some Schubert songs. These *Sonetti* are Liszt's attempts at songwriting, and they have influences from Italian opera as well. The pieces were edited and re-transcribed numerous times, but in their most mature 1858 versions, they are intensely lyrical and innovative.

The first of the three, *pace non trovo* ("I find no peace"), reflects on the torment of love. It expresses inner contradiction between love and torment. Liszt captures this sense of inner turmoil in the music. From the restless accompaniment to the chromatic, sharp right-hand melody, Liszt conveys the emotional instability of the poem. The overall mood is one of anguish but also one of beauty, where a gentle melodic phrase can be interrupted by growing passionate outbursts, reflecting the interplay between love and pain. The piece ends on a note of unresolved melancholy.

Liszt's Sonetto 104 del Petrarca, the most well-known of the three, is based on the following conflicting, dark sonnet (in translation by Nathaniel Baker):

"I don't find peace, and I cannot make war;
And I fear, and hope; and burn, and am like ice;
And fly above the sky, and lay on the floor;
And hold nothing, and embrace all life.
They have me in jail, and won't open or bar the door,
Neither to keep me, nor free me from my ties;
And Love won't kill me, and won't send me forth,
Neither wants me to live, nor will let me die.
I see without eyes, and don't have a tongue and sing;
And I long to die, and beg for aid;
And I hate myself, and love anew.
I feed on sadness, weeping grin;
Death and life disgust me both the same:
I am in this state, lady, for you."

The work opens in agitation, quickly spilling into lyrical recitative. Liszt later wrote positively about his use of augmented harmonies here. As the music builds, melodies conjure ideas of obsession, hope, sorrow, and finally resignation.

Sonetto 123 *I' vidi in terra angelici costumi* (I Beheld on Earth Angelic Grace), is one of Petrarca's most serene sonnets. The poet expresses the vision of

Laura as a divine, ethereal being. In this way she represents unattainable beauty and the things in life that cannot be reached. Liszt's music captures this transcendent vision. The opening of the piece features a delicate, celestial accompaniment. The melody is radiant and occasionally reaches euphoric heights. The music of Sonetto 123 conveys less longing than the others and more peaceful dedication. The harmonies are soaring and elevated and the piece culminates in a rich outpouring, gently fading away in calm and exquisite reflection that fades to the heavens.

F. Chopin - Andante Spianato et Grande Polonaise Brillante, Opus 22

Much has been written and studied about this piece and its place within Chopin's output as a whole. The op. 22 of Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849) is a landmark work, combining two contrasting sections into a grand, virtuosic, and expressive piece. It was completed in 1834 but the *Grande polonaise brillante* was written first, in 1831. In 1834 Chopin added a new *Andante spianato* to the beginning as a bel canto style introduction, joining the two with a fanfare. These pieces were originally written for piano and orchestra, but the work is now often played with the piano alone. This piece contains Chopin's characteristic poeticism and innovative harmonies, showing off the "brilliant" technique of his earlier works.

"Spianato" means "smooth" or "even," and the Andante Spianato opens with an apt flowing theme. The soft accompaniment allows the right hand's melodies to sing in long stretches. The G major middle section is a contrasting episode that complements the texture. Throughout the piece, Chopin enriches the harmonic language and intensifies the texture through chromaticism and harmonic modulations.

While many of his works are more introspective, Chopin's Polonaises are always associated with his patriotic feelings towards Poland. They are usually more heroic and nationalistic. Many elements of the *Grande Polonaise Brillante* are also in the style of a showpiece, displaying virtuosity and technical skill. The original orchestra part was always small, never coming close to overpowering the leadership of the piano. This Polonaise explodes with drama and is an incredible contrast to the Andante. It is marked *Allegro con spirito* and has many festive, heroic elements. After the orchestral introduction the piano "enters" and exposes the primary melody - marked by wide leaps, arpeggios, and figurations. The work is bold and brilliant, demanding both precision and depth from the performer. Elaborate trills, double notes, and arpeggios must be performed with fluidity and expertise.

Program notes and Van Cliburn competition history by Nikita Istratov