University of British Columbia School of Music
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Fourth-year Graduation Student Recital at Barnett Hall
April 5th, 2026
7:30 p.m.

Adam Sun, Piano

Forgotten Melodies, Op. 39 — Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951)
- iv. Canzona Matinata
- v. Sonata Tragica

Piano Sonata No. 7, Op. 64 — Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915)

~ Intermission (10 min) ~

Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin — Qigang Chen (b. 1951)

Piano Sonata No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111 — Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
- i. Maestoso – Allegro con brio ed appassionato
- ii. Arietta: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile

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This recital is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Bachelor of Music degree with a major in Piano.

We gratefully acknowledge that we are gathered together for this performance on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people.

Program Notes

Nikolai Medtner: Forgotten Melodies, Op. 39, Nos. 4 and 5 (Canzona Matinata and Sonata Tragica)

From forgotten melodies to fairy tales, Medtner's works always seem to draw from the eternal source that is history. His faith in the "eternal ideals" espoused by one of his philosophical heroes, Plato, meant that he remained skeptical of the innovations spurred by 20th–century composers throughout his whole compositional career. In this pair of complimentary works, Medtner's philosophical underpinnings are revealed to reflect his own implicit struggles to live within the present. To him, the canzona represents the gentle innocence of youth, whereas the Sonata reflects the tragedy upon confronting the reality of existence.

The Canzona Matinata, while mildly elegiac and ponderous, begins with a lightness that is perturbed by a ruminating middle section. A gentle note hangs curiously by the work's end, only to be interrupted by the introduction of the sonata. The sonata develops small kernels of motivic material with a neurotic obsessiveness only matched by compositional figures such as Beethoven, contributing to its turbulent and despairing qualities. Respite returns briefly in the form of a mysterious theme introduced within the canzona, but its tenderness does not last. This is music that simmers insidiously beneath the surface, and does not let up once it has unleashed its wrath.

Alexander Scriabin: Piano Sonata No. 7, Op. 64 (White Mass)

The obsessive rigour of Medtner's counterpoint may appear to loosen up in this phantasmagoric and white–hot sonata, but any close examination of its formal structure would reveal this not to be the case. Here we have a work that only bears a handful of melodic tunes and a few motifs, assembled in strict sonata form through a seemingly endless array of variations on one set of notes. This set (E, F#, G, A, B Flat, C, D Flat) produces a surprisingly diverse range of colours. Though seemingly elusive, the work proves to be intelligible once these secrets have been unpacked.

The conciseness of this work can be understood as a product of Scriabin's intentions, which are unveiled in the sonata's misleadingly innocuous surname of "White Mass/Messe Blanche". The seventh sonata is an obsessive exorcism, an attempt to eradicate what Scriabin had penned in his wicked sixth. But make no mistake – this sonata is not ascetic music. For Scriabin, the cure to any illness seems to always be the Dionysian force of sensuality, which makes its presence known here in subliminal convulsions and eruptions; witness, for instance, how the work's trills flicker erratically like candle flames.

Intermission *(Program notes continue on the backside)*

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Qigang Chen: Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin

If Scriabin's 7th sonata exalted through desperate sensuality, Chen's Instants d'un Opéra de Pékin does so through the invocation of homecoming. This work, grounded on the theme and variations form, employs traditional Chinese opera tunes as its predominant material. A pensive statement of the main themes begins the work, tinted with colourful gentle dissonances and quartal harmonies. A light jovial drama then proceeds, featuring some delightful interplay between the two hands and theatrical effects. Romantic melodies and textures eventually interrupt the action, leading to a lofty and yearning climax that dissipates into the opening material.

Being swept up in the drama of the Cultural Revolution in China, which sought to restrict the study of Western instruments, Chen was forced to move to France as a young composer and clarinetist, where he was brought under the tutelage of Olivier Messiaen; Chen described Messiaen as teaching him how to be free. In contrast to the hypercontrolled angst of the Medtner and the intense neuroticism of the Scriabin, Chen cultivates a reparative language that seeks neither to eradicate the past nor eulogize it. His personal history with Chinese traditions is embedded within his oeuvre (Er Huang; Iris Dévoilée), but they are always recontextualized in the present.

Ludwig van Beethoven: Piano Sonata No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111

This sonata is framed by two movements that could not be more disparate. One presents itself in minor, the other in major. One is fraught with anxious energy, while the other is resolved and intimate. The first movement is presented in a truncated sonata form, whereas the second unveils itself through a theme and variations. Although the first movement seems always to unfold in motion, it is the second that embodies transformation.

Any further concreteness to a description of this work seems inevitable to fall short, and perhaps such attempts are unnecessary; as most pianists would attest, words often fail to elucidate better than the music itself. I know that any words beyond this will sound somewhat trite, but I'll indulge very briefly regardless:

There was a time when self-understanding was the kind of endeavour that intimidated me. The lack of certainty that came with learning something about yourself that was unexpected struck me not unlike the way it does the protagonist of a bildungsroman (coming-of-age novel). I was not happy to unveil aspects of my personal identity, rather, I felt paralyzed, and consequently, alienated from who I am. But as my program has hopefully unveiled, these inhibitions have loosened. I find myself willing to embrace the contingencies that come with learning about myself and what surrounds me.

The same can be said for this sonata. Though learning it may be a complex journey full of contradictions that never quite completes itself, I have found that few endeavours prove quite as rewarding. I look forward to programming this work again in a few years.

- Adam Sun

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