ANN ARBOR SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Earl Lee, Music Director

BEETHOVEN

PIANO CONCERTO NO. 4



Program book

Beethoven Piano Concerto No. 4

Friday, February 16, 2024 at 8 PM | Hill Auditorium

Eric Lu piano
Earl Lee conductor

Johannes Brahms — Hungarian Dance No. 1 in G minor, WoO 1

Ludwig van Beethoven — Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, Op. 58
I. Allegro Moderato
II. Andante con moto
III. Rondo (Vivace)

Eric Lu's appearance is sponsored by Richard Caldarazzo & Eileen Lappin Weiser.

Tonight's performance of the concerto is sponsored by the Lori Zupan Fund.

Intermission

Zhou Tian — *Transcend*
I. Pulse
II. Promise
III. D-O-N-E

Maurice Ravel — *La valse*

Tonight's performance of La valse is sponsored by A. Michael & Remedios Montalbo Young.

Tonight's concert is supported by the Michigan Arts & Culture Council and the National Endowment for the Arts

Photography and video/audio recording are prohibited

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Program notes

Johannes Brahms
Hungarian Dance No. 1 in G minor, WoO 1

Duration: About 3 minutes

Published: 1869

Instrumentation: Two flutes and piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, timpani, triangle, bass drum, cymbals, and strings

"The idea comes to me from outside of me – and is like a gift. I then take the idea and make it my own – that is where the skill lies."

— Johannes Brahms
(Born 1833, Germany; died 1897)

Piano Four Hands: A duet for two players seated side-by-side at the same piano.

The political upheavals of 1848 had a number of profound and wide-ranging effects. Born of rising nationalism and the celebration of evolving conceptions of statehood, the uprisings and revolutions that swept Europe brought together new artistic styles and genres. As an impassioned participant in the Hungarian Revolution against the Habsburgs, violinist Ede Reményi was on the run when he made the acquaintance of the 15-year-old Johannes Brahms. Although alert to the closing authorities, Reményi still made time to introduce the young composer to Hungarian folk melodies, and these influences would have lasting effects on Brahms as he sought to make his mark as a creative artist.

By 1850, Brahms had adopted a proactive approach to self-promotion. His strategy was two-pronged: impress the likes of Robert Schumann and other established composers, and simultaneously make himself a household name through composing in the popular styles of the time. The first angle of attack was met with setbacks, as the composer's carefully curated packets for Schumann were returned to Brahms unopened. His popular music compositions by contrast would prove to be far more successful; and it was around this time that he began work on his two sets of Hungarian Dances (Nos. 1-10 published in 1869; Nos. 11-21 published in 1880).

Originally composed for piano four hands, these dances were designed to capitalize on the "tavern duet" setup, and reflect the sounds and styles of new émigrés and their communities – a much-needed infusion in the eyes of many artists at the time. The recipients of eventual orchestration at the hands of the composer, these dances continue to be some of Brahms' most popular and endearing works, sampling the energy and enthusiasm of traditional folk dances like the csárdás with its whirling tempos, exuberant rhythms and virtuosic pyrotechnics. This first dance of the set exemplifies many of these features, with thrusting strings in their lower registers propelling the work forward, and scintillating passages of technical brilliance evoking a masterful fiddler at work. The thudding rhythms of heavy boots bring a syncopated emphasis to the tavern-like feel, sweeping the listener through the doors to boisterous cheer and waiting pints.

Furthering listening: Brahms: Hungarian Dances, Nos. 2-21 (WoO 1) | Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68 | Franz Liszt: Hungarian Rhapsodies, S.244, R.106

Ludwig van Beethoven
Piano Concerto No. 4 in G major, Op. 58

Duration: About 33 minutes

Premiered: Vienna, 1808

Instrumentation: Flute, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, solo piano, and strings

"Music is the one incorporeal entrance into the higher world of knowledge which comprehends mankind but which mankind cannot comprehend." | "This is the mark of a really admirable man: steadfastness in the face of trouble."

— Ludwig van Beethoven
(Born 1770, Germany; died 1827)

Concerto: A composition that features one or more "solo" instruments with orchestral accompaniment. The form of the concerto has developed and evolved over the course of music history.

Recitative: An operatic passage in which the singer adopts rhythms of more natural speech, with interjections by the orchestra interspersed among the phrases.

The public premiere of Beethoven's fourth piano concerto was, in a word, remarkable. First, an audience of nobility would have come to expect the typical concerto form, with an orchestral introduction before the soloist enters with the opening tune. Not so here. In this concerto, the composer himself set the pace and tone, a sweet, sighing tune before the orchestra slips into the texture in a different key that would have shocked the ears at the time.

Additionally, it was the composer's last appearance as a soloist with orchestra, it introduced the world to his legendary fifth and sixth symphonies, and it nearly burned the concert hall to the ground. Literally. Composer Louis Spohr, largely forgotten, attended the premiere and recounted in his autobiography how Beethoven himself derailed the concert by conducting too vigorously during the orchestral introduction of the fourth concerto and knocking the candles off the piano at the first loud moment, cracking the audience up. Furious, he restarted the concerto, but then smacked a chorus boy in the face at the same moment by accident. No one could hear the introduction for several minutes as listeners burst a collective gut, and Beethoven reportedly snapped half a dozen strings on the piano with some truly rageful playing, at odds with the generally pleasant affect of the concerto.

(The real reason this was his final appearance with orchestra: he was nearly completely deaf at by this time.)

Who can say what the premiere actually sounded like? At any rate, the concerto was cast aside after until pianist and composer Felix Mendelssohn revived the work in 1836. (Mendelssohn would employ a similar form in his Violin Concerto in E minor, which launches with the soloist introducing the tune instead of the orchestra.) After the fourth piano concerto's unusual opening, it unfolds more conventionally, with soloist and orchestra trading melodies in dialogue.

The second movement, for piano and strings only, begins severely, powerful strings alternating with beseeching piano lines, suggestive of an operatic recitative. The movement transitions almost without break into the finale movement, which begins in entirely the wrong key. Typically the final movement begins in the same key as the opening, but here the orchestra launches the gallop in C major instead of major, quickly resolving back to the appropriate tonality. This happens each time the tune repeats. Trumpets and timpani join for the first time in this final movement, distinguishing it even more completely from the slower middle movement and helping punctuate the finale's sweeping sense of charisma and wit.

Beethoven's fourth concerto is the second-most-performed work in Carnegie Hall, at 192 performances over the years. The first is his fifth concerto, "Emperor," which sits at 215, as of January 2022.

Further Listening: Beethoven: Symphony No. 3 in E-Flat Major ("Eroica"), Op. 55 | Symphony No. 4 in B-Flat Major, Op. 60 | Piano Sonata No. 23 in F Minor ("Appassionata"), Op. 57

Zhou Tian

Transcend

Duration: About 21 minutes

Premiered: Reno, 2019

Instrumentation: Three flutes and piccolo, three oboes and English horn, three clarinets and bass clarinet, three bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, xylophone, glockenspiel, vibraphone, crotale, tam-tam, snare drum, suspended cymbal, crash cymbal, bass drum, harp, piano, and strings

"I'm a firm believer that innovation and thorough understanding and respect for the tradition go hand-in-hand in creating a satisfying symphonic work. As a composer, I am empowered by the tradition, from medieval chants and Chinese folk music to Brahms and Stravinsky."

— Zhou Tian
(Born 1981, China)

Symphonic Poem: A piece of orchestral music, typically one movement, based on an idea or story.

To complete the first transcontinental railroad across the United States, Governor of California Leland Stanford drove a 17.6-karat gold spike to join the final two rails in a grand ceremony in 1869. (The spike was actually immediately removed for fear of it being stolen; it is now on display at Stanford University.) Fast forward 150 years: A consortium of 13 American orchestras in cities along the rail route commissioned Chinese-American composer Zhou Tian to write a score commemorating the anniversary with gilded music.

The work premiered in Reno in 2019. The composer himself describes the music as follows:

> "Begun in 1862 and completed in 1869, the Transcontinental Railroad effectively linked the US from east to west for the first time. Its cultural heritage includes the contribution of a thousands-strong Chinese and Irish workforce who toiled in severe weather and cruel working conditions. Numerous 'hell on wheels' towns, as described by the Linda Hall Library, 'proliferated along the construction route and became famous for rapid growth and infamous for lawlessness.' As the settlements pushed westward, there was a mixing of ethnic groups and cultures. Unfortunately, as the daunting task of laying tracks over difficult terrain increased, many workers perished, and many of the rest were denied the American dream by the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. But those who stayed brought traditional art and music into the fabric of American culture. [...]
>
> "*Transcend* is composed of 3 movements. It begins with 'Pulse,' in which rich and expansive strings develop into an exciting pulse of 152 BPM. The violent, percussive poundings that occur from time to time are like blasts of dynamite, evoking the tension and suspense of man versus nature.
>
> "'Promise,' a meditative second movement, is a vocalise for those who sought a better future. Lyrical woodwind solos, dashing flute and harp, and plush strings are met with traditional Chinese folk music-inspired melodies.
>
> "The finale, 'D-O-N-E,' is based on the rhythm of the word 'done' in Morse code. This single word was sent across the US via one of the first nationwide telegraphs when the Railroad was completed on May 10, 1869. Throughout the movement, the "done" motif is passed back and forth by numerous instruments in the orchestra. An accumulation of materials sends the piece to a climax at the end."

Born in the Hangzhou province of China, Zhou is one of the only Chinese-born composers ever to receive a Grammy nomination, and his music has been premiered and performed by many of the world's leading orchestras. After moving to the U.S. at 19, he studied at the prestigious Curtis Institute and at the Juilliard School. He is currently an associate professor of composition at Michigan State University.

Further Listening: Zhou: *Gift* | *Rise* | *Trace* | *Broken Ink* | *The Grand Canal*

Maurice Ravel
La valse

Duration: Around 14 minutes

Premiered: Paris, 1920

Instrumentation: Three flutes and piccolo, three oboes (one doubling English horn), two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, tambourine, snare drum, antique cymbal, cymbals, bass drum, castanets, tam-tam, orchestra bells, two harps, and strings

Program notes (cont).

"I did my work slowly, drop by drop. I tore it out of me by pieces."

— Maurice Ravel
(Born 1875, France; died 1937)

Viennese Waltz: A classic, original form of waltz and the oldest of the ballroom dances still practiced today. It is a quick rotating dance done to fast 3/4 time waltz music. A true Viennese waltz consists only of turns, giving it the nickname of the Rotary Waltz.

Ravel, a short, slender fellow, dreamed of being a pilot. When World War I swept through Europe, he enlisted in the military, but the French Airforce rejected Ravel's application on account of his age (he was nearly 40 when he applied) and a minor heart condition. Attempts to bribe enlistment officers with pieces dedicated to their names were unsuccessful, and eventually Ravel became an artillery truck driver.

He named his truck "Adelaide."

The disillusionment he felt from remaining grounded was nothing compared to the existential horror of the war itself, which deeply impacted European artists. That impact can be felt viscerally in *La valse*, a tone poem and tribute to the great Viennese waltzes of yesteryear. Ravel began jotting down ideas and notes in 1906 for the piece, but it didn't come to fruition until 1920. By then, it had transformed from a pure homage to a darker take on his subject, a "fatal whirling" as he called it.

The music begins with snarling grumbles deep in the orchestra, bubbling up in the bassoons and strings. Soon, it builds to a more elegant waltz, making liberal use of popular rhythms from the Viennese style. As the music progresses, it becomes wilder and more macabre, spinning off the rails in a sinister self-parody by its conclusion.

After the First World War, there was less reason to dance.

(Ravel rejected the idea that the work addressed the post-war landscape explicitly, but the finished score undeniably shifted in tone and tenor after the war compared to his earlier drafts.)

Ravel composed the music for a ballet for the great impresario Diaghilev, who commissioned many of the 20th century's most famous theatrical works. Diaghilev rejected the score, however, praising its merit but proclaiming that it wasn't a ballet. The ensuing rift between the two artists, who had previously collaborated quite successfully, bit deep. Ravel never spoke to Diaghilev again, and when the composer refused to shake the impresario's hand after a performance in 1925, Diaghilev challenged him to a duel. He recanted, and later, other choreographers set dance to the work. Today, it is most commonly heard as a concert work.

Ravel's own program note is as follows: "Swirling clouds afford glimpses, through rifts, of waltzing couples. The clouds scatter little by little; one can distinguish an immense hall with a whirling crowd. The scene grows progressively brighter. The light of the chandeliers bursts forth at the fortissimo. An imperial court, about 1855."

Further Listening: Ravel: *Valses nobles et sentimentales* | *Ma Mère l'Oye ("Mother Goose")* | *Boléro* | Chabrier: *Le roi malgré lui (The King in Spite of Himself")*

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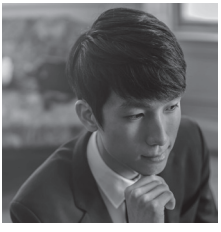
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Profile

Eric Lu piano



Eric Lu won First Prize at The Leeds International Piano Competition in 2018, the first American to win the prestigious prize since Murray Perahia. He made his BBC Proms debut the following summer, and is currently a member of the BBC New Generation Artist scheme. Eric is a recipient of the 2021 Avery Fisher Career Grant and an exclusive Warner Classics recording artist.

Recent and upcoming highlights include performances with the London Symphony, Boston Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Oslo Philharmonic, Finnish Radio Symphony, and Singapore Symphony. Recitals include the 92nd Street Y, Rockport Music Festival, Cal Performances Berkeley, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Cologne Philharmonie, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, and the Seoul Arts Centre. Eric appears regularly in recital at London's Wigmore Hall. Released in 2020, Eric's first studio album on Warner Classics featured the Chopin 24 Preludes Op. 28, and Schumann's *Ghost Variations*. It was met with critical acclaim, including one of BBC Music Magazine's "Instrumental Records of the Year."

Born in Massachusetts in 1997, Eric Lu first came to international attention as a prize winner at the 2015 Chopin International Competition in Warsaw aged just 17. He previously won the 2015 US National Chopin Competition, and was awarded the International German Piano Award in 2017. He is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, studying with Robert McDonald and Jonathan Biss. He is also a pupil of Dang Thai Son. Eric is now based in Berlin and Boston.



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We'd like to thank the following donors who have recognized special people and events through a donation to the A2SO's Tribute Fund.

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In memory of my parents, Bernard R. and Elizabeth J. Balch
Jennifer E. Balch

In honor of my siblings, Russell, Nancy, and Beverly
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In honor of beloved and dedicated Jennie Balch
Greg & Beverly Bornschein

In honor of Aaron Berofsky for filling in as Music Director during challenging times
A. Michael & Remedios Montalbo Young

In memory of Mackinaw Blaske, a sweet soul who brought joy and love to his humans and their friends
Ann K. Guthrie

In memory of Eleanor Butkiewicz Boppel
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Congratulations to Sarah Calderini on her 2nd anniversry as the A2SO Executive Director
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In honor of Sarah Calderini's first full season as A2SO Executive Director
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In honor of Dr. James Froehlich of the A2SO Board of Directors
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Thank you for your work in bringing the art of Studio Ghibli to our community!
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In honor of Jackie Stearns Henkel and in memory of Larry Henkel
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In memory of Rebecca Horvath who found belonging in the quiet of nature and in the sound of music, making A2SO music accessible to the Ann Arbor community
Thomas H. & Mary Steffek Blaske
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In memory of Ericka Lynn Hubert, who loved KinderConcerts at the Ypsilanti Library
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In memory of my dad, Robert B. Ingling, who enjoyed the A2SO so much
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In memory of Robert B. Ingling
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In memory of Hermine C. Jensen, who attended concerts in her final years after having moved to Ann Arbor at age 86!
Erich & Ann Marie Jensen

in honor of Bill Knapp's 101st birthday
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In honor of my wonderful wife Robin on her 70th birthday
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In memory of Shirley Dorsey Martin, who was a wonderful supporter of the A2SO and its education programs
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In memory of my sister-in-law, Martha Ralish
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In honor of Carol Sewell for her outstanding stellar leadership as president through A2SO's turbulent times
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In memory of Jerry Smith for his endless dedication for touching people's lives through music.
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In memory of Charlotte Sundelson, who accomplished so much with courage, grace and kindness
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Lori & Jeff Zupan

In honor of Elisabeth Vanderpool, and wishing the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra a successful 2024
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In honor of Lori Zupan's retirement after 35 years with the A2SO, and for her tireless dedication to the business of the A2SO, its musicians, audience and staff
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Podium Promise Campaign

The Podium Promise Campaign is the A2SO's initiative to endow the Music Director's position. Once fully funded, this $3 million endowment will enable the A2SO to:

- Secure and cultivate artistic leadership of the highest caliber
- Expand programming to engage a growing, diverse audience of all ages
- Attract and retain the most talented orchestral musicians in the nation.

Earl Lee was appointed Music Director of the A2SO in 2022 and this season marks his second at the podium. As the Orchestra's 14th director since its founding in 1928, Maestro Lee opens a new era of visionary leadership in the arts, culture, and community of Southeast Michigan.

Now is the time to invest in the A2SO's mission of delivering the highest quality performances of the greatest music ever written to an ever-growing audience. The following donors have contributed or pledged endowed gifts that helped us reach $1.9 million toward the Campaign goal of $3 million.

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We invite you to join them. Contact Jennie Balch, Director of Development at jebalch@a2so.org for ways to give.