

41st Season 2024-25

## Romantic Masterworks

Foellinger Great Hall | Krannert Center for the Performing Arts  
Friday, February 14, 2025 | 7:30p.m.

Ian Hobson, music director, conductor, & piano  
Muen Wei, piano

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### Romeo and Juliet Overture-Fantasia

PYOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY  
(1840-1893)

### Concerto in D Minor for Two Pianos and Orchestra

FRANCIS POULENC  
(1899-1963)

- I. Allegro ma non troppo*
- II. Larghetto*
- III. Allegro molto*

Ian Hobson & Muen Wei, *pianos*

*Intermission*

### Symphony No. 2 in E Minor, Op. 27

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF  
(1873-1943)

- I. Largo – Allegro moderato*
- II. Allegro molto*
- III. Adagio*
- IV. Allegro vivace*

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# Meet the Music Director

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Pianist and conductor **Ian Hobson** (Music Director) - called “powerful and persuasive” by The New York Times - is internationally recognized for his command of an extraordinarily comprehensive repertoire, his consummate performances of the Romantic masters, his deft and idiomatic readings of neglected piano music old and new, and his assured conducting from both the piano and the podium.

In addition to being a celebrated performer, Mr. Hobson is a dedicated scholar and educator who has pioneered renewed

interest in music of such lesser-known masters as Ignaz Moscheles and Johann Hummel. He has also been an effective advocate of works written expressly for him by a number of today’s noted composers, including Benjamin Lees, John Gardner, David Liptak, Alan Ridout, and Yehudi Wyner.

In addition to his work with Sinfonia and at the University of Illinois (Swanlund Emeritus Professor), recital and teaching engagements this season take Mr. Hobson throughout the United States and several times to South Korea. Mr. Hobson conducted at Carnegie Mellon University in January 2018.

As guest soloist, Dr. Hobson has appeared with many of the world’s major orchestras; in the United States these include the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and The Philadelphia Orchestra, the symphony orchestras of Baltimore, Florida, Houston, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, St. Louis and the American Symphony Orchestra, the Orquestra Sinfónica de Puerto Rico. Abroad, he has been heard with Great Britain’s Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, The London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra, ORF-Vienna, Orchester de Beethovenhalle, Moscow Chopin Orchestra, Israeli Sinfonieta, and New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. Since his debut in the double role of Conductor and soloist with the Stuttgart

Chamber Orchestra in 1996, Maestro Hobson has been invited to lead the English Chamber Orchestra, the Sinfonia Varsovia (including an appearance at Carnegie Hall), the Pomeranian Philharmonic (Poland), the Fort Worth Chamber Orchestra (Bass Hall), and the Kibbutz Chamber Orchestra of Israel, among others.

Mr. Hobson is also a much sought-after judge for national and international competitions and has been invited to join numerous juries, among them the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition (at the specific request of Mr. Cliburn), the Arthur Rubinstein Competition in Poland, the Chopin Competition in Florida, the Leeds Piano Competition in the U.K., and the Schumann International Competition in Germany. In 2005 Hobson served as Chairman of the Jury for the Cleveland International Competition and the Kosciuzsko Competition in New York; in 2008 he was Chairman of Jury of the New York Piano Competition; and in 2010 he again served in that capacity of the newly renamed New York International Piano Competition.

One of the youngest ever graduates of the Royal Academy of Music, Mr. Hobson began his international career in 1981 when he won First Prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition, after having earned silver medals at both the Arthur Rubinstein and Vienna-Beethoven competitions. Born in Wolverhampton, England, he studied at Cambridge University (England), and at Yale University, in addition to his earlier studies at the Royal Academy of Music. A professor in the Center for Advanced Study at the University of Illinois, Hobson received the endowed chair of Swanlund Professor of Music in 2000.



# Meet the Soloist

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**Muen Vanessa Wei**, a native of China, has performed internationally as a soloist and chamber musician. She has been applauded by critics for her “delicate playing” and “admirable virtuosic skills” (The News-Gazette). She has appeared as a guest soloist under the baton of Ian Hobson, Donald Schleicher, and Xiaoying Zheng. As a chamber musician, Wei has collaborated with great musicians, such as Lynn Harrell, Henry Gronnior, Henry Hutchinson, Peter Lloyd, Ko Iwasaki and Joel Smirnoff, among others. She joined the Astralis Ensemble in 2018 and performed with them across the United States. Wei also performed in many prestigious festivals, such as the Gilmore Keyboard Festival and the Montecito International Music Festival. In July 2017, she was

invited to give a solo recital at the Dean Acheson Auditorium of the US State Department.

In 2025, she released a new premier album feature Jean Louis Nicodé’s solo piano music by Toccata Classics. Her 2019 album “Im 3/4 Takt” was considered “one of Centaur’s finest releases to date” (Fanfare). American Record Guide described her playing in the recording: “her technique is remarkable, some of the playing is almost demonic, and everything is superb.”

Wei’s musicianship has been recognized in many competitions, including the Anton Rubinstein International Competition, Seattle International Competition, International Music Competition Paris Grand Prize Virtuoso, Artist Presentation Society Competition, Bradshaw and Buono International Piano Competition in New York, China Chopin Competition for Young Pianists in Beijing, the UI Symphony Concerto Competition and Sinfonia da Camera Concerto Competition. She was the recipient of University Fellowship from

University of Illinois in 2012, and the Montecito International Music Festival Fellowship from 2013-2015.

Wei received her Bachelor of Music Degree from the China Conservatory. In 2012, she received her Masters of Music Degree from the Cleveland Institute of Music, where she studied with Daniel Shapiro, with the honor of the Dr. Joseph and Bess Scharff Leven Prize in Piano. She earned her DMA (Doctor of Musical Arts) degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, under the instruction of Ian Hobson. Dr. Wei joined the faculty at Lee University as Assistant Professor in Piano in 2021.

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Ian Hobson, *Music Director and Conductor*

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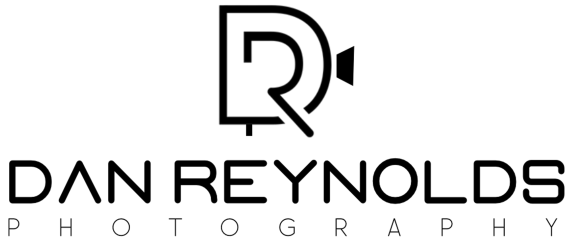
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# Notes on the Program

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## Romeo and Juliet, Fantasie-Overture

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

(Born May 7, 1840, in Votkinsk, Russia; died November 6, 1893, in Saint Petersburg)

Tchaikovsky was a young man and an inexperienced composer when he started to write a descriptive overture for orchestra based on Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. The composer worked over the idea thoroughly with his friend Mily Balakirev, a self-taught composer of extraordinary natural gifts. None of Balakirev's compositions would earn him a career or a place in history like Tchaikovsky's, but he possessed one quality that Tchaikovsky completely lacked: self-confidence. Almost every step in Tchaikovsky's work on the score for his overture was taken under his friend's scrutiny. Balakirev suggested the subject, the musical style, and form. While the work was in progress, Balakirev criticized the themes and their organization, and when Tchaikovsky tired of the piece and allowed his attention to wander elsewhere, Balakirev steered him back to *Romeo*.

In November 1869, Tchaikovsky completed the score, and in March 1870, the piece was given its first performance by the Orchestra of the Imperial Russian Music Society of Moscow, conducted by Nikolai Rubinstein. Unfortunately, the debut was a sad failure, and Tchaikovsky (and Balakirev) set to work on a revised version. The new version was performed in St. Petersburg in 1872, but it was still unsatisfactory. Later on, Tchaikovsky briefly considered composing an opera based on *Romeo and Juliet*, but then he turned back to the fantasy-overture and in 1880 completed the popular third version.

The score of the first version was not published for the first time until the 20th century, and many modern musicians who had at first thought it would be interesting only as part of the history of a popular masterpiece, decided it deserved to be heard for its own sake. Music lovers will note that there is a different beginning and that the original version may seem to be more Russian in character. Familiar melodies are heard, but at different points in the time structure and with different weights. A brief suggestion of a march has no counterpoint in the final score and the ending, too, is changed. The original *Romeo*, in sum, can stand on its own and can give the attentive listener some new insights into a great composer's creative process.

The overture follows the structure of sonata form, but the plot of Shakespeare's play does not dictate a specific program for the music. Some

of the themes do, however, represent specific character or plot developments in the play. According to Jonathan Kramer, the *Andante* introduction with chorale-type harmonies represents Friar Laurence. The *Allegro* that follows, consisting of quick scales and rhythms, represents the feud of the Capulet and Montague families. The love theme, which, of course, refers to Romeo and Juliet's love, is a quintessential romantic melody. In the coda, all the main ideas of the composition recur and gain intensity. The death of the two young lovers ends the work.

The score calls for two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, bass drum, harp, and strings. Tchaikovsky attached no opus number to this work.

## **Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra in D minor** Francis Poulenc

(Born January 7, 1899, in Paris; died there January 30, 1963)

Francis Poulenc was the youngest of the French composers who, in 1920, were dubbed *Les Six* ("The Six"). This group was pivotal in turning French music away from formality and pomp. Poulenc, Milhaud, and Honegger, of this gifted sextet, went on to significant careers, but the other three are now mostly remembered only for their association with them. Poulenc composed songs, chamber music, concertos, and short pieces in which he combined buffoonery and banality to greatly amusing effect. He wrote a Mass, motets, litanies, a religious opera, *Stabat Mater*, and this *Gloria*.

Poulenc used to describe himself as "half monk and half bounder." When he died, one critic eulogized him by writing the following, "The 'monk' was dismayed by the 'bounder's' excesses, but the 'bounder' would not be tamed. And so they struggled through the years, the man and the boy, the sacred and the profane, the bourgeois and the rebel. And it was out of their struggle came inimitable music -- some of it good, some of it bad, all of it Poulenc."

Princess Edmond de Polignac, an American, whose maiden name was Singer (of the Singer Sewing Machine family), commissioned this *Concerto for Two Pianos*. She was the benefactress of many composers of the early 20th century including Satie, Weill, Milhaud, DeFalla, and Stravinsky. Poulenc composed his two solo *Piano Concerti* earlier in the same year that he completed the score. On September 5, 1932, the *Concerto for Two Pianos* was premiered at the International Music Festival in Venice, with the composer and his lifelong friend and keyboard colleague, Jacques Fevrier, as the piano soloists, and Desiré Defauw conducting the Orchestra of La Scala, Milan.

The exotic and elegant *Concerto for Two Pianos* is in three movements. The first, *Allegro ma non troppo*, with its angular rhythms and concise thematic phrases, is rich in quotations from what Poulenc called "Parisian folklore," music from forgotten popular songs, street tunes, and cafe-concerts. The melody, when it appears accompanied by castanets, is very evocative of French music halls. Poulenc said that he also put gamelan effects in the coda as a result of being influenced by Balinese music he heard at the Colonial Exposition. The pensive second movement, *Larghetto*, has as its principal subject a classical melody to which the composer adds a touch of twentieth-century piquancy. Critics have mentioned that this movement also seems to have been influenced by Mozart's piano concerti. The concerto closes with an extroverted and exuberant finale, *Allegro molto*, that recalls the high spirits of the first movement. In this movement, as in the whole concerto, Poulenc has written for the soloist very pianistically and for the orchestra with wit and imagination.

The score calls for piccolo, flute, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, two trombones, percussion, and strings.

## **Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27**

Sergei Rachmaninoff

(Born April 1, 1873, in Oneg, Novgorod, Russia; died March 28, 1943, in Beverly Hills, California)

Rachmaninoff composed four symphonies during his lifetime. *Symphony No. 1*, written in 1895, had a single, unsuccessful performance in St. Petersburg in 1897, and was not performed again for another fifty years. Both Rachmaninoff's friends and enemies joined in expressing their dissatisfaction with the work, and the composer-critic César Cui expressed the opinion: "If there were a conservatory in Hell, Rachmaninoff would get the first prize for his symphony." Rachmaninoff was dissatisfied too, but even more, he was extremely discouraged and depressed by this experience. Although Tchaikovsky had praised his opera *Aleko* in 1893, Rachmaninoff resolved to give up composition completely after the experience he had with his first symphony. However, although he did have a period of serious depression, his friend Count Tolstoy persuaded him not to forsake music, and after hypnosis and lessons in self-assertion, Rachmaninoff returned to musical life with renewed confidence and vigor.

In 1901, his new *Second Piano Concerto* was a success, and by 1906, when he was thirty-three, Rachmaninoff's career had become solid. He had become conductor of the Imperial Grand Opera in Moscow, was also a greatly admired pianist, and was much sought after socially. These achievements gave him the confidence to resign from his position at the opera and devote himself to composing. For the next two years, he and his

family lived in Dresden, where he wrote several pieces, among them *Symphony No. 2*. He then returned to St. Petersburg where he conducted the symphony's premiere on February 8, 1908. Dedicated to his teacher, Sergei Taneieff, it was an immediate success; in fact, it was exactly as much a success as his first symphony had been a failure. It was first performed in Philadelphia on November 26, 1909, with the composer conducting.

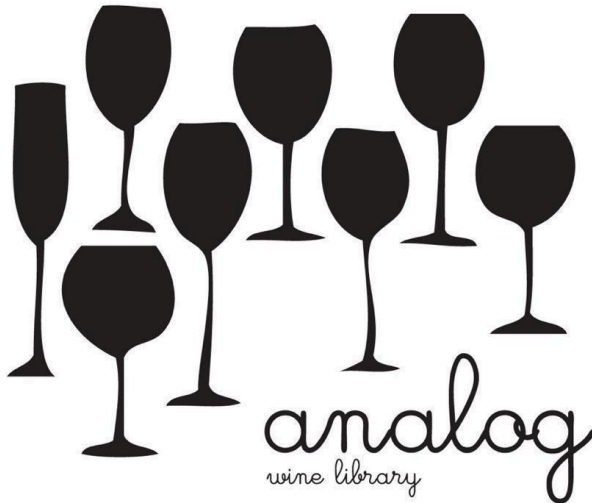
In this symphony, Rachmaninoff creates an unending flow of melody. Although often in the background, dominating the entire work is a melodic motto that is first articulated in the cellos and basses in the opening bars of the slow, somber introduction, *Largo*. Then the violins articulate this idea in a smoothly flowing theme. The main section of the first movement is a fluid, melodic *Allegro moderato*. The second movement, a scherzo, *Allegro molto*, has three lengthy sections. Its opening has two subjects. The horns play the first, a melody based on the motto of the first movement and hinting at the *Dies irae (Day of Wrath)* from the Gregorian Mass for the Dead, which is repeated again in a more direct way in the coda of this movement. The mid-section, a contrasting trio, starts off as a little agitated fugue. Rachmaninoff combines this part with a brass chorale-style subject. When the music of the opening section returns, chant-like passages in the wind instruments interrupt it; the carefree feeling becomes dispersed, and the movement ends quietly.

The third movement, *Adagio*, is slow and serene and very Romantic. The strings have a luxuriant subject that is one of the most recognizable of all of Rachmaninoff's mellifluous themes. The middle section is built around the motto from the first movement in the strings, while the oboe and English horn introduce a new theme around it. In the last part of the movement, the opening theme recurs.

The finale, *Allegro vivace*, is restless, energetic, and vivacious. In sonata form, it opens with a boisterous theme for full orchestra that eventually subsides into a little march-like passage for woodwinds. A second subject, sung by the strings, is one of the most beautiful melodies Rachmaninoff ever wrote. In the middle section, the first movement motto reappears, the boisterous main theme returns, and it is followed by an extended coda that brings together the melodic fragments from the earlier part of the piece. The symphony closes with a grand rendition for full orchestra of the lyrical second theme.

The score calls for three flutes, piccolo, three oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass and snare drums, cymbals, tambourine, glockenspiel, and strings.

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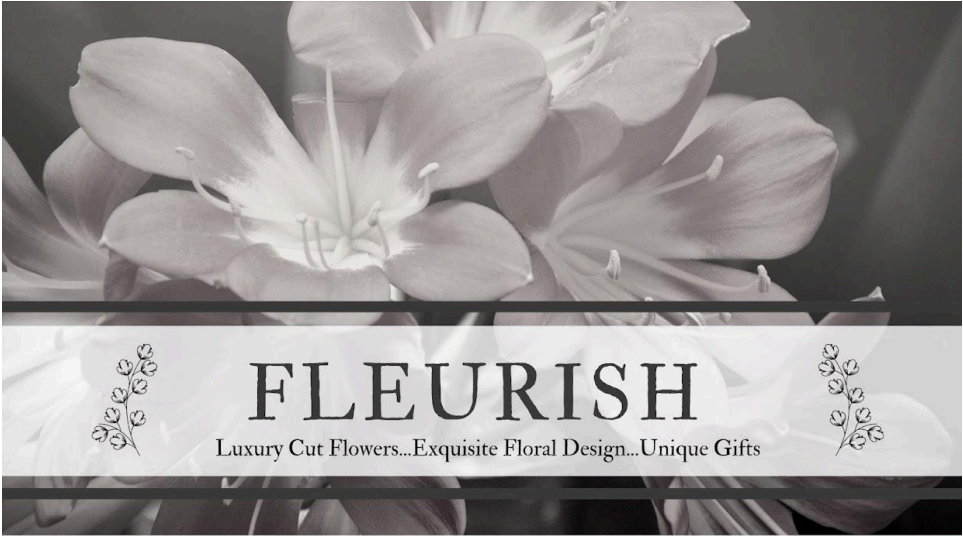
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In residence at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, this professional chamber orchestra is led by world-renowned pianist, conductor, and educator, Maestro Ian Hobson. Sinfonia da Camera is comprised of University of Illinois faculty, staff, and students, as well as distinguished regional and national freelance musicians. Founded in 1984, Sinfonia has welcomed world-class soloists, commissioned new works, and presented beloved orchestra favorites and hidden gems to local audiences for 40 years.

In its debut season, Sinfonia released an acclaimed recording of French Piano Concerti with music director Ian Hobson conducting from the keyboard; it was the subject of a 90-minute Public Television special. Since that time, Sinfonia has performed over 1,000 musical works featuring more than 150 local and guest artists. Through Maestro Hobson's commitment to excellence in all of the orchestra's endeavors - special projects, recordings, tours, and concerts for the hometown crowd at Krannert Center for the Performing Arts - Sinfonia has achieved national and international recognition.

Sinfonia has been featured on over a dozen recordings and has several projects in the works. In 2011, the Albany label released a Sinfonia recording on another American composer, Willian Schuman, during his centenary year. A live recording of Sinfonia da Camera's October 6, 2012 concert featuring music by Pulitzer Prize-Winning composer George Walker was recently released on Albany Records. The fourth and final volume of the Ignaz Moscheles cycle was released in 2012. The previous volumes were reviewed by American Record Guide: "Hobson, whose elegant phrasing, remarkable ear for color, and miraculous ability to evenly sustain the most difficult runs - each like a string of pearls - are simply a joy to hear" and "[The concerti] seem tailor-made for Hobson's great panache and free-wheeling style." Ten recordings by Sinfonia da Camera for the Zephyr label have been released to rave reviews at home and abroad.

To learn more about the orchestra, Maestro Hobson, the musicians, administration, and Advisory board visit our website at [www.sinfonia.illinois.edu](http://www.sinfonia.illinois.edu).



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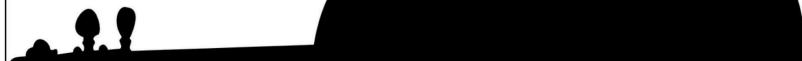
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Mrs. Tiffany McNeely and Mr. James  
McNeely  
Ms. Ruo-Jing Ho  
Mr. Kenneth Larvenz and Mrs.  
Casandra Larvenz  
Ms. Hannah Leung  
Mr. Shuyu Hua  
Mr. Yudong Li  
Dr. Ross J. Toedte and Mrs. Sharon  
Toedte  
Ms. Shuning Zhang  
Dr. Ross J. Toedte and Mrs. Sharon  
Toedte  
Mr. Fadi Mikhail  
Mr. Samuel G. Mencimer  
Mr. Andrew P. Gagliu  
Mr. Stephen Gobel  
Mr. Bruce R. Stoffel and Mr. Stanley  
P. Kerr  
Ms. Christa H. Knust  
Mr. Marc R. Alexander  
Prof. George H. Miley and Mrs.  
Elizabeth B. Miley  
Mrs. Beverly A. Friese and Mr.  
Michael L. Friese

*Contributors from July 2023 through January 17, 2025.  
Any concerns or corrections, please contact [sinfonia@illinois.edu](mailto:sinfonia@illinois.edu).*

# Administration

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<b>Management</b>	<i>Music Director</i>	Ian Hobson
	<i>Executive Director</i>	Elizabeth Churchya
	<i>Orchestra Librarian</i>	Teresa Strobel-Gagiu
	<i>Stage Manager</i>	Luke Brann

## **Advisory Board**

*Co-Chairs*

Nancy L. Johnson
Richard G. Murphy

### *Advisors*

Marc Alexander	Maria Grosse-Perdekamp
Nancy J. Casey	Edward Rath
Willis S. Colburn	Ralph Senn
Terri P. Dodson	Robert Steigmann
Seth Fein	Evan Tammen
Michael Folk	Stephen Taylor
Alan W. Haussermann	Mary Wraight
Claude Hobson	
Roberta Johnson Killeen	
Matthias Perdekamp	

### *Honorary Advisors*

Richard B. Cogdal (d)	Ann Carlson Khan
Judith Ikenberry	Anna J. Merritt

### *Ex-Officio Advisors*

Linda Moorhouse	Mike Ross
Jacob (Jake) Pinholster	Jon Salvani

*Cover design by Elizabeth Churchya.*