

21C Music

Brad Mehldau & Kirill Gerstein: *In Dialogue*

Friday, May 8, 2026 at 8pm

This is the 1,528th concert in Koerner Hall

Brad Mehldau, piano

Kirill Gerstein, piano

Brad Mehldau and Kirill Gerstein's collaboration is rooted in mutual admiration and a shared fascination with the fluid boundary between composition and improvisation. As Gerstein recalls:

"I first encountered Brad's music through his album *Places* and felt an immediate, visceral pull to his musical language – its lyricism, introspection, and the unmistakable presence of classical sensibilities within his jazz phrasing. After receiving the Gilmore Award, I wrote to him to ask whether he might consider composing something for me. He answered that he would, though it might take some time. Yet only a few weeks later, he wrote again to say that he had begun – and simply could not stop. The result was the large-scale *Variations on a Melancholy Theme*. Since then, our friendship has deepened, as have our shared explorations of the porous border between written and improvised music, between what is called 'classical' and what is called 'jazz.' I am delighted to bring this ongoing dialogue to our audiences."

Mehldau offers his own perspective on their partnership:

"My musical friendship with Kirill has been gratifying. I am a great fan of Kirill and it is a thrill to collaborate with him. He is a virtuoso with an astoundingly large and varied repertoire, but he is much more than that. He is a deep musical thinker who thinks about the connections between music, politics, psychology, and other disciplines, with a historical perspective and wide knowledge that he draws from. As well, Kirill understands closely what jazz musicians are doing in the realm of improvised music, since he has a background in jazz as well. When you combine all this, it makes for an exciting musical exchange. Kirill and I have been exploring ways to combine written music and improvisation, and the program we put together will reflect that."

Together, Mehldau and Gerstein blur the boundaries between genres, eras, and traditions – offering audiences a dialogue that is both intellectually searching and deeply human.

Brad Mehldau

One of the most lyrical and intimate voices of contemporary jazz piano, Brad Mehldau has forged a unique path, which embodies the essence of jazz exploration, classical romanticism, and pop allure. From critical acclaim as a bandleader to major international exposure in collaborations with Pat Metheny, Renée Fleming, and Joshua Redman, Mehldau continues to garner numerous awards and admiration from both jazz purists and music enthusiasts alike. His forays into melding musical idioms, in both trio and solo settings, has seen brilliant re-workings of songs by contemporary songwriters like The Beatles, Cole Porter, Radiohead, Paul Simon, Gershwin, and Nick Drake; alongside the ever-evolving breadth of his own significant catalogue of original compositions. With his self-proclaimed affection for popular music and classical training, "Mehldau is the most influential jazz pianist of the last 20 years" (*The New York Times*).

Kirill Gerstein

Kirill Gerstein is a widely respected pianist whose work is defined by intellectual curiosity, stylistic breadth, and technical refinement. Active as a performer, curator, and educator, he engages repertoire ranging from Baroque and Classical works to contemporary music, jazz, and cabaret, fostering long-standing collaborations with leading orchestras, conductors, composers, and cultural institutions worldwide.

Recent highlights include appearances with the Berliner Philharmoniker, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Staatskapelle Dresden, and Wiener Symphoniker, as well as major performances at Carnegie Hall, Musikfest Berlin, and the Ruhr Piano Festival. He has served as Artist-in-Residence with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Spotlight Artist with the London Symphony Orchestra, and regularly appears as play-conductor with ensembles including the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and the Czech Philharmonic.

Gerstein's recordings have received Grammy nominations and a special Opus Klassik Award for exceptional curation. A committed advocate for contemporary music, he has premiered works by Thomas Adès, Chick Corea, and Brad Mehldau. He is Professor of Piano at Berlin's Hanns Eisler Hochschule and on the faculty of Kronberg Academy.

Brad Mehldau made his Royal Conservatory debut on February 25, 2011, and tonight is his fifth appearance in Koerner Hall. Kirill Gerstein made his Conservatory debut on December 8, 2013, and this is his third appearance in the Hall.