

Hilary Hahn with Tom Poster

Thursday, May 21, 2026 at 7pm

This is the 1,530th concert in Koerner Hall

Hilary Hahn, violin

Tom Poster, piano

PROGRAM

Maurice Ravel: Violin Sonata No. 2 in G Major, M. 77

I. Allegretto

II. Blues: Moderato

III. Perpetuum mobile: Allegro

Scott Tixier: *Ressemblance*, Duo for Violin and Piano (North American premiere)

Bun-Ching Lam: *Solitude d'automne*

Claude Debussy: Sonata for Violin and Piano in G Minor. L 140

I. Allegro vivo

II. Intermède: Fantasque et léger

III. Finale: Très animé

INTERMISSION

Claude Debussy: "La fille aux cheveux de lin" from *Préludes, Book 1*, L.117 (arr. Hahn & Poster)

Lili Boulanger: Nocturne

Gabriel Fauré: Violin Sonata No. 1 in A Major, op. 13

I. Allegro molto

II. Andante

III. Allegro vivo

IV. Allegro quasi presto

THE MICHAEL AND SONJA KOERNER FUND FOR CLASSICAL PROGRAMMING

The Royal Conservatory's mission to develop future generations of musicians and to bring the world's greatest performers to Toronto has been made possible, in large part, due to the generosity of Michael and Sonja Koerner. In 2022, the Koerners invested \$10 million to create The Michael and Sonja Koerner Fund for Classical Programming, securing the future of the finest classical music concerts at Koerner Hall and our other performance venues. This latest investment, along with the naming of Michael and Sonja Koerner Hall, support of Glenn Gould School students through The Michael & Sonja Koerner Scholarships, the donation of The Michael and Sonja Koerner Early Instrument Collection, the naming of The Alexandra Koerner Yeo Cello Program and The Alexandra Koerner Yeo Chair in Cello, and support of the annual 21C Music Festival, underscores the Koerner family's dedication to music and to the RCM.

A movement titled Blues is the centrepiece of the **Second Violin Sonata** by **Maurice Ravel** (b. Ciboure, France, March 7, 1875; d. Paris, France, December 28, 1937). In it, the violin frequently echoes the wailing saxophone and both instruments recreate the sounds of the strummed banjo. One critic has even found echoes and borrowings from Jelly Roll Morton's "Black Bottom Stomp." Ravel admitted to having been impressed by the "nerve-wracking virtuosity" of the African American jazz musicians in 1920s Paris. Nevertheless, he insisted that the spirit of the music is Gallic to the core. "It is French music – Ravel's music – that I have written," he told a reporter while touring the piece in the United States and Canada.

The Violin Sonata is his final chamber work. Ravel joked that it took him four years (1923-27) to get rid of all the unnecessary notes. "In writing my Sonata, two fundamentally incompatible instruments, I assumed the task ... of emphasizing their irreconcilability," he said. Still, like Debussy 20 years earlier, Ravel must have sensed deep down that opposites can attract. The opening Allegretto main theme is graceful and lyrical when heard on violin, more angular on the piano. It is contrasted with a persistent quirky 'tapping' figure which assumes more importance as this pastoral opening movement progresses. The musical material is shared between the instruments equally and fluently, with never an extraneous note. After the Blues movement, the finale is a driving perpetuum mobile, led by the violin, bringing back themes from the two earlier movements.

Six-time Grammy Award-winning French jazz violinist and Professor of Jazz Violin & Director of Jazz String Lab at the University of North Texas, **Scott Tixier** (b. Montreuil, France, February 26, 1986) writes: "**Ressemblance** is a single, continuous movement that unfolds through a series of contrasting yet connected states. The title comes from the French ressembler, meaning "to be like" or "to mirror," suggesting both proximity and instability, similarity that can shift, fracture, or reappear transformed.

The work is organized as a progression through distinct musical spaces. An opening section unfolds in suspension and uncertainty before giving way to a more forward, reflective developmental passage. A brief rupture acts as a threshold, leading into a contrasting environment shaped by jazz harmonic and formal structures. Here, repetition and variation function as engines alongside improvisational lines. In the final section, earlier material returns, not as a reset, but as a recontextualization, inviting the listener to hear the opening question from a changed perspective.

Conceived as a duo, *Ressemblance* treats violin and piano as equal partners. Their interaction, sometimes closely aligned, sometimes resistant or divergent, shapes the form itself as it moves through different environments. The work was composed through improvisation in one sitting and later notated, drawing on harmonic and coloristic influences from French repertoire alongside jazz-derived approaches to form."

Bun-Ching Lam (b. Macau, June 6, 1954) is a Chinese-American composer whose career spans Asia, Europe, and North America. Raised in a culturally hybrid Portuguese-Chinese environment, Lam earned her undergraduate degree at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, beginning her earliest compositions at the University of California, San Diego – where she completed her doctorate in 1981. Academic appointments followed, including visiting appointments at the Yale School of Music and Bennington College. From 2008-16 she served as composer-in-residence with the Macao Orchestra, maintaining close artistic ties to her birthplace. Her music is widely performed and supported by major commissions, fellowships, and residencies. She now divides her time between Paris and New York.

"I was thinking about your life as a virtuoso performer," Lam told Hilary Hahn when writing her **Solitude d'automne** for *27 Pieces: the Hilary Hahn Encores*. "What virtuosity means ... something very simple, where the virtuosity is in the interpretation and the sound. It can happen when nothing happens." Playing Beethoven's "Spring" Sonata led her to imagine an Autumn counterpart – with *Solitude d'automne* as its middle movement.

In 1915, with Europe engulfed by war, **Claude Debussy** (b. St. Germain-en-Laye, France, August 22, 1862; d. Paris, France, March 25, 1918) announced an audacious plan – a cycle of six sonatas that would mark a decisive break with Austro-German Romanticism. Only three were completed, but they signal a clear aesthetic turn. Rejecting what he saw as the suffocating weight of German symphonic tradition, Debussy aligned himself with the clarity, restraint, and elegance of French Baroque models such as Rameau and Couperin. He signed each score "Claude Debussy, Musicien Français" – a pointed declaration of artistic and cultural allegiance.

The Cello Sonata and Sonata for Flute, Viola, and Harp were completed before illness intervened. Soon after, a cancer diagnosis led to surgery and radiation, leaving Debussy physically weakened and creatively stalled. The **Violin Sonata** – the third and final completed work – proved especially difficult. Only during a recuperative stay

at Cap Ferret in October 1916 did momentum return. By February 1917, the first two movements were complete: an opening movement anchored by the violin's initial theme – shaped by the interval of a falling third – a second marked “fanciful and light,” dances with airy elegance. The finale followed with difficulty, wrestled into being.

The result is music rooted in French tradition yet unmistakably modern – elusive, compressed, and forward-looking. “By one of those very human contradictions, it is full of happiness and uproar,” Debussy wrote. Gravely ill, depressed, and worn down by wartime privations – “fighting for a lump of sugar or for manuscript paper, not to mention my daily bread” – he nonetheless gave the premiere himself on May 5, 1917. It was his final public appearance. Less than a year later, with Paris under bombardment, Debussy was dead. The Violin Sonata stands as his last completed work – vibrant and defiant to the end.

Lili Boulanger (b. Paris, France, August 21, 1893; d. Mézy, France, March 15, 1918) jolted the French musical establishment in 1913 when she became the first woman to win the Prix de Rome, following in the footsteps of her father. Chronically ill from early childhood, her fragile health curtailed a promising career; she died aged just 24. Her sister, the famed pedagogue Nadia Boulanger, later observed: “Though there are no technical novelties in Lili's writing ... she was able to find the necessary elements for expressing her own very personal message, leaving a short but lasting mark on musical history.”

Boulanger was only 18 when she wrote the **Nocturne** on October 23-27, 1911. Conceived for violin or flute with piano and also alternatively titled *Pièce courte* (Short Piece), it is a perfectly judged miniature. It is built around a sustained piano pedal point which helps sustain a mood of calm, nocturnal concentration, allowing subtle colour and melodic nuance to emerge without harmonic agitation. Boulanger later orchestrated the *Nocturne*. Swiss composer Arthur Honegger prepared a transcription for string quartet, harp, and organ the day before Lili's funeral, where it is believed to have been played alongside her *Pie Jesu*, accompanied by the same instruments.

The music of French composer **Gabriel Fauré** (b. Pamiers, Ariège, France, May 12, 1845; d. Paris, France, November 4, 1924) bears the classic hallmarks of his tradition – clarity, grace, precision, and taste – yet it does not lack quiet innovation. He wrote two accomplished violin sonatas, while a projected violin concerto was left incomplete. Since its triumphant premiere, the **Violin Sonata No.1 in A Major, op. 13**, his earliest chamber work, has remained among his most popular pieces. By the time he composed it in the 1870s, the 30-year-old Fauré was fully alert to the musical currents of his time. He had met Franz Liszt and made pilgrimages to Bayreuth to hear the music of Richard Wagner. Unlike many contemporaries, however, Fauré absorbed what was new in Wagner without surrendering his own musical instincts, enriching his language with restraint and discernment.

The sonata opens with a strikingly long, sustained first phrase, immediately establishing the controlled passion that defines Fauré's early style. The music surges continuously, shared fluently between violin and piano, often unfolding through seamless chains of sequence. The slow movement sustains this intimate, ebbing dialogue, its lyricism unfolding with quiet inevitability. A light-footed third movement follows – scampering, elegant, and touched with the charm of a scherzo by Felix Mendelssohn. It was encored at the premiere and remains one of Fauré's most winning inspirations. Throughout the finale, Fauré avoids rhetorical display or four-square gestures, driving instead toward an exultant, dazzling close.

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Hilary Hahn

Violin

Three-time Grammy Award-winning violinist Hilary Hahn melds expressive musicality and technical expertise with a diverse repertoire guided by artistic curiosity. She is known for performing music ranging from solo Bach and the classical repertoire to today's major composers; she has personally championed works by more than 40 living composers. Hahn's wide repertoire is reflected in her 23 feature recordings, which have all opened in the top 10 of the *Billboard* charts. Recent releases include *Night After Night*, a collection of James Newton Howard's scores for the films of M. Night Shyamalan, and a *Gramophone* Award-winning recording of Ysaye's six sonatas for solo violin.

Hahn was named a member of The Juilliard School's string faculty in 2025. She has previously served as visiting professor at the Royal Academy of Music and artist-in-residence at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic. Beyond the classroom and the concert hall, Hahn's #100daysofpractice, launched in 2017, has transformed practice into a community-building celebration of artistic development with nearly one million posts

across platforms, while her BYOBaby concerts create a welcoming space for families of infant children to enjoy classical music together.

Hahn studied at the Curtis Institute of Music, and holds honorary doctorates from Curtis, Middlebury College, and Ball State University. In recent seasons, Hahn has received the Avery Fisher Prize, was named *Musical America's* Artist of the Year, and received the Herbert von Karajan and Glasshütte Original Music Festival awards, the latter of which she donated to the Philadelphia music education nonprofit Project 440.

Tom Poster

Piano

Tom Poster is a musician whose skills and passions extend well beyond the conventional role of the concert pianist. He has performed over 40 concertos from Mozart to Ligeti with Aurora Orchestra, BBC Philharmonic, BBC Scottish Symphony, China National Symphony, Hallé, London Philharmonic, Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic, and Scottish Chamber Orchestra, collaborating with conductors such as Vladimir Ashkenazy, Nicholas Collon, Robin Ticciati, and Yan Pascal Tortelier, or sometimes directing from the piano. He has premiered solo, chamber, and concertante works by many leading composers, made multiple appearances at the BBC Proms, and his exceptional versatility has put him in great demand at festivals internationally.

Tom is co-founder and artistic director of Kaleidoscope Chamber Collective, appointed Associate Ensemble at Wigmore Hall in 2020. With a flexible line-up featuring many of today's most inspirational musicians, and an ardent commitment to diversity through its creative programming, Kaleidoscope broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio 3 and has enjoyed residencies at Aldeburgh, Cheltenham, and Ischia festivals. Its debut album for Chandos Records, *American Quintets*, was awarded Editor's Choice in *Gramophone*, and immediately led to an invitation to record a series of albums for the label.

Tom has recorded albums for BIS, Champs Hill, Chandos, Decca, NMC, Orchid, and Warner Classics, appearing as soloist and in collaboration with Elena Urioste, Alison Balsom, Guy Johnston, the Aronowitz Ensemble, Aurora Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, and London Symphony Orchestra. He regularly features as soloist on film soundtracks, including the Oscar-nominated score for *The Theory of Everything*. He studied with Joan Havill at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and at King's College, Cambridge. He won First Prize at the Scottish International Piano Competition 2007 and the keyboard section of the BBC Young Musician of the Year Competition in 2000.

Hilary Hahn made her Royal Conservatory debut on March 1, 2011, and tonight marks her fourth appearance in Koerner Hall. Tom Poster is making his Conservatory debut tonight.