

Kyung Wha Chung with Kevin Kenner

Sunday, November 9, 2025 at 3pm

This is the 1,457th concert in Koerner Hall

Kyung Wha Chung, violin

Kevin Kenner, piano

PROGRAM

Robert Schumann: Violin Sonata No. 1 in A Minor, op. 105

- I. Mit leidenschaftlichem Ausdruck (With passionate expression)
- II. Allegretto
- III. Lebhaft (Lively)

Edvard Grieg: Violin Sonata No. 3 in C Minor, op. 45

- I. Allegro molto ed appassionato
- II. Allegretto espressivo alla romanza
- III. Allegro animato

INTERMISSION

César Franck: Sonata for Violin and Piano in A Major, M. 8

- I. Allegretto ben moderato
- II. Allegro
- III. Recitativo – Fantasia (Ben moderato)
- IV. Allegretto poco mosso

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.

Robert Schumann

Born in Zwickau, Saxony, June 8, 1810; died in Endenich, nr. Bonn, Germany, July 29, 1856

Violin Sonata No. 1 in A Minor, op. 105 (1851)

Robert Schumann's busy first season as music director of the municipal choir and orchestra in Düsseldorf, 1850-1, was also one of his most productive as a composer. His Rhenish symphony was such a success at its February 6 premiere that a repeat was added in the following month's subscription concert. Large scale works for the Rhenish city's chorus and orchestra consumed much of his creative time, and these were even interspersed with brand new, smaller scale chamber works, piano pieces, and songs. By the end of the season, however, arguments with officials and members began to foreshadow troubling relations that lay ahead. Nevertheless, at this difficult time, in the fall of 1851, the composer moved ahead with plans to enrich the music-making of the city by forming a private vocal group to explore Baroque and earlier choral music in weekly meetings, and with a similar society of amateur instrumentalists for chamber music readings. Then, his creative energies zeroed in on chamber music, producing two violin sonatas and the G Minor Piano Trio over a few weeks, from September through early November 1851.

The seed for the idea of a violin sonata, a medium that Schumann had not tackled before, had recently been planted by Ferdinand David, renowned soloist and concertmaster of Leipzig's Gewandhaus Orchestra. "I am tremendously fond of your Fantasy Pieces for clarinet and piano [op. 70]," David wrote to Schumann in January 1850. "Why do you not you write something for violin and piano? There is such a scarcity of good, new pieces at the moment, and I do not know anyone who could do it better than you. How wonderful it would be if you could write something that I could play for you with your wife [the well-known pianist Clara Wieck Schumann]." Schumann responded by September 16th the following year with the A Minor Violin Sonata, op. 105, and both performers gave private and public premieres in Leipzig a few weeks later. "In short, it delighted us," Clara wrote in her diary ... without commenting on the muted audience response. The work was published the following year. In May 1853, the brilliant young Hungarian violinist Joseph Joachim and Clara Schumann gave the sonata's premiere in Düsseldorf to a more enthusiastic response.

All three movements are compact and tautly drawn, with violin and piano working together in a true duo sonata, with no feeling of competition, or need for concert platform solo display, between the two instruments. From the outset, violin and piano share the gently melancholy main theme, which is the main generating theme of the monothematic opening movement. Moments of repose are infrequent, and an underlying feeling of tragic urgency prevails, compounded by the recurrent use of the mellow lower register of the violin. The central movement cunningly and effectively combines slow movement and scherzo. Schumann had successfully done the same thing in his Piano Concerto. With the intimacy of the violin sonata, however, the music (as English writer Joan Chissell so beautifully put it 75 years ago) "is full of delight in simple things and comes as near to human speech as music ever can." The busy, running sixteenths of the rondo finale are closely woven together in imitative counterpoint and bring a return of the first movement's urgency. They also combine with the lyrical first movement theme in an extended coda, adding subtle unity to a delightful sonata.

Edvard Grieg

Born in Bergen, Norway, June 15, 1843; died there, September 4, 1907

Violin Sonata No. 3 in C Minor, op. 45 (1886)

"I am furious at not being a string player," Edvard Grieg told violinist and composer Johann Halvorsen, a fellow Norwegian, in 1901. But, like both Brahms and Bruch turning to Joachim and other leading violinists of the day, Grieg made up for his lack of skill on the violin by seeking the counsel and friendship of professional violinists. He was aware of how far he had travelled over the course of his three violin sonatas: "They are representative of the three periods of my evolution – the first naive and full of melodic ideas, the second nationalistic, and the third turning to much vaster horizons." First performed in 1887 by the renowned Russian violinist Adolph Brodsky and the composer himself at the piano, the Third Sonata was an immediate success. Within three months he told a friend: "Just think, the new sonata has already sold about 1500 copies."

The opening movement blends drama and passion with Grieg's characteristic lyricism. It begins powerfully, with an urgent, passionate theme rising from the violin's lowest string, soon evolving into a more vulnerable secondary theme over tremolo piano chords. The two themes are related, reflecting the thematic unity that underpins

the sonata. The slow movement opens radiantly, high in the piano. Its outer sections convey gentle nostalgia enveloping a playful intermezzo. The finale revives the urgency of the first movement, mellowed by a noble, modal second theme. The contrast between these ideas drives the music to a triumphant coda.

César Franck

Born in Liège, Belgium, December 10, 1822; died in Paris, France, November 8, 1890

Sonata for Violin and Piano in A Major, M. 8 (1886)

Not wishing to repeat himself, Franck tended to write just one work in each of the major forms. He was 57 years old when his Piano Quintet heralded a remarkable series of compositions for which he is now best remembered. First came the *Prélude, Chorale et Fugue* of 1884. This majestic piano work was followed by the *Symphonic Variations* for piano and orchestra, the *D Minor Symphony*, the *String Quartet*, and the *Violin Sonata* we will be hearing this afternoon. As in much of his music, Franck does not pursue traditional sonata procedures in his *Violin Sonata*. He follows Franz Liszt's lead by transforming a thematic idea throughout the entire work, across movements, rather than developing different ideas movement by movement. There is a constant state of development in Franck's ideas, which often percolate beneath the surface as the sonata progresses. The expansively lyrical, gently undulating violin melody of the first movement is built out of a sequence of thirds – and this interval will feature prominently throughout.

In contrast to the serenity of the opening movement, the driving second has the momentum and scale of the opening movement of a more traditional sonata. The final two movements in Franck's innovative design contrast the rhapsodic freedom of a *Recitativo – Fantasia*, which replaces the traditional scherzo, with the discipline of a canonic finale, where the familiar theme is passed back and forth between the two instruments in a virtuoso way. Franck's heady, deeply emotional writing and piquant harmonic turns have their origins in the musical language of Wagner, particularly the harmonies of *Tristan*.

The music-making of Franck's fellow-countryman, Belgian violinist Eugène Ysaÿe, provided an incentive for the piece, which Franck wrote for his friend's wedding. Ysaÿe gave an unofficial premiere on a borrowed violin in concert with the hotel piano. He then gave the official premiere in December 1886 in the *Musée Moderne de Peinture* in Brussels, during a festival of Franck's music. The program was long, and, after the first movement, the late afternoon light began to dim. In the pre-electrical lighting era, artificial lighting was not allowed in the gallery. So, with a cry of *Allons! Allons!*, Ysaÿe and his pianist threw aside the music and performed the last three movements from memory. The sonata has never been out of the repertoire of violinists (and, by adoption, cellists, violists, and flutists) ever since its memorable premiere.

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Kyung Wha Chung

Violin

Kyung Wha Chung is recognized throughout the world as one of the finest violinists of her generation. From her debut at age nine, Chung's dazzling and probing artistry has made her a much-acclaimed performer and prolific recording artist throughout her career. Lauded for her passion, musicality, and intense excitement that she brings to her performances, Chung's uniquely expressive interpretations of the violin literature have established her as an artist of the very highest stature.

Upon winning the prestigious Edgar Leventritt Competition in 1967, Chung was immediately engaged by major American orchestras – including the Chicago Symphony and the New York Philharmonic – and made her European debut in 1970, performing the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto with Sir André Previn and the London Symphony, at London's Royal Festival Hall. Chung's debut album – of the Tchaikovsky and Sibelius concertos with that orchestra – brought her to international attention, and she performed with the world's greatest orchestras, including the Berlin Philharmonic, Vienna Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, and Boston Symphony. Chung has enjoyed working alongside the world's finest conductors, including Rattle, Barenboim, Dutoit, Muti, Abbado, Haitink, Previn, Solti, and Tennstedt. Her chamber music partnerships have included high calibre pianists such as Krystian Zimerman, Peter Frankl, Kevin Kenner, Stephen Kovacevich, and Radu Lupu.

When taking a rest from the stage, Chung joined the faculty of The Juilliard School and in addition, became Chair Professor for Music at Ewha University in Seoul, and Artistic Director of the Great Mountains Music Festival & School in South Korea. She returned to performing in 2017 with Bach Sonata and Partita concerts at Carnegie Hall, Barbican/London, and Tokyo's Suntory Hall.

Kyung Wha Chung has recorded numerous award-winning albums for London/Decca, RCA, EMI, Deutsche Grammophon, and Warner, and her extensive discography reflects the impressive breadth of her repertoire. She has received many prizes and honors, including the Medal of Civil Merit, the government of South Korea's highest honour.

Kevin Kenner

Piano

Recognized as one of the top Chopin interpreters of our time, Kevin Kenner was the top prize winner in the 1990 Chopin Competition in Warsaw, as well as top prize winner in the Tchaikovsky Competition and the Terence Judd Competition, among others.

Born in California, Kenner was introduced early to the classical music traditions of Poland and studied as a teenager with Poland's eminent professor Ludwik Stefański in Kraków. When he returned to the US, he continued his studies with Leon Fleisher at the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore and worked with Leonard Bernstein at the Tanglewood Music Center. Following a concert tour with conductor Stanisław Skrowaczewski, who frequently performed and recorded with Artur Rubinstein, the conductor described his collaborations with Kenner to be the most sensitive and beautiful he remembered.

He has performed and recorded with violinist Kyung-Wha Chung and concertized with the Tokyo, Escher, Belcea, Mosaïques, Apollon Musagète, Endellion, and Vogler quartets. In addition, he has frequently been invited to appear at the Verbier Festival and Warsaw's "Chopin and His Europe" Festival. A distinguished recording artist, Kenner's interpretations of works by Paderewski and Chopin were each picked as recordings of the month by *Gramophone* magazine. Other recordings were heralded by *Diapason*, *Fanfare*, and *Polish National Radio*.

After teaching for more than a decade as professor at London's Royal College of Music, Kenner accepted a post at the University of Miami's Frost School of Music, where he continues to prepare many young talented pianists for international performance careers. He has served as juror at the Busoni Competition in Bolzano and at the Chopin International Competition in Warsaw, among many others.

Kyung Wha Chung and Kevin Kenner made their Royal Conservatory debuts on March 6, 2020.