

Ray Chen with Chelsea Wong

Wednesday, November 19, 2025 at 7pm

This is the 1,462nd concert in Koerner Hall

Ray Chen, violin

Chelsea Wong, piano

PROGRAM

Giuseppe Tartini: Violin Sonata in G Minor, B.g5 ("The Devil's Trill") (arr. Fritz Kreisler)

Larghetto affettuoso – Allegro energico

Grave – Allegro assai – cadenza – Adagio

Camille Saint-Saëns: Violin Sonata No. 1 in D Minor, op. 75

I. Allegro agitato – Adagio

II. Allegro moderato – Allegro molto

INTERMISSION

Johann Sebastian Bach: Chaconne from Partita No. 2 in D Minor for Solo Violin, BWV 1004

Antonio Bazzini: *La Ronde des Lutins*, op. 25

Antonín Dvořák: Slavonic Dance No. 2 in E Minor, op. 72, no. 2 (arr. Fritz Kreisler)

Pablo de Sarasate: *Zigeunerweisen*, op. 20, no. 1

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.

Giuseppe Tartini (arr. Fritz Kreisler)

Born in Pirano, Istria [now Piran, Istra, Slovenia], April 8, 1692; died in Padua, Italy, February 26, 1770

Violin Sonata in G Minor, B.g5 ("The Devil's Trill") (c1745/1905)

Attributing demonic powers to violinists did not begin with Paganini. Around the middle of the 18th century, Italian virtuoso violinist Giuseppe Tartini was gripped by the stereotype of the demonic fiddler in what turned out to be a brilliant stroke of self-publicity. "One night I dreamt that I had made a pact with the Devil; he was my servant and anticipated my every wish," Tartini told the French astronomer Joseph-Jérôme Lalande shortly before his death. In Tartini's dream, the Devil played a sonata that left the composer gasping for breath. "The piece I then composed is without doubt my best, and I still call it The Devil's Sonata, but it falls so short of the one that stunned me that I would have smashed my violin and given up music forever if I could but have possessed it."

The version most audiences know today is not the first edition published 30 years after Tartini's death, but Fritz Kreisler's edition first published 1905. Kreisler, himself one of the greatest violinists of his age, took liberties with the text, adding Romantic harmonies, virtuosic embellishments, an expansive piano part (colla parte throughout), and a glorious, over-the-top cadenza. His aim was not scholarly authenticity but effective theatre: to present Tartini's inspiration through the lens of contemporary concert life. The result is less an 18th century sonata than a late 19th century homage, fusing Tartini's melodic genius with Kreisler's own flair for drama and display.

Camille Saint-Saëns

Born in Paris, France, October 9, 1835; died in Algiers, Algeria, December 16, 1921

Violin Sonata No. 1 in D Minor, op. 75 (1885)

Camille Saint-Saëns, it seems, resisted the idea of limiting genius, as he composed in almost every form and medium then conceivable throughout his long career. His virtuosity at the organ was particularly celebrated, most notably by a certain Franz Liszt, who dubbed him "the greatest organist in the world." Going beyond music, he was also a talented Latinist and mathematician, with interests in archaeology and astronomy. It is no wonder then that this Renaissance man would excel at creating virtuosic pieces for an instrument as far out of his direct line of expertise as the violin. Saint-Saëns's First Violin Sonata, composed in 1885, predates his impressive three violin concertos, and was released the year before his popular "Organ" Symphony in C Minor. Like the "Organ" Symphony, the Sonata reorganizes the standard four movements into two pairs and unites the entire piece through cyclic thematic recurrences. From the very start of the Allegro agitato, one strangely gets the sense of an organ letting out a baited breath through two much smaller instruments.

The opening Allegro half of the first movement is in poised sonata form, the second theme of which – first heard in the violin against a hard-working piano – is the one that recurs most frequently. While this recurring theme keeps us on familiar ground, the talented organist/pianist makes sure to keep his instrument adjacent to the spotlight with mesmerizing chromatic scales and arpeggios; textures that almost mimic bubbles blown for the violinist to float on. A quiet and dreamlike interlude soothes and serves as the Sonata's slow movement before taking our hand into the humorous dance of the two-part second movement, which forms the scherzo and a soaring rondo finale. Rapid, nearly at cartoonish pace, the piano sprints without chasing the violin melody that runs before flying. We are eventually taken high above the seats of the concert hall to somewhere Saint-Saëns dared to go, bringing us along with him.

Johann Sebastian Bach

Born in Eisenach, Germany, March 21, 1685; died in Leipzig, Germany, July 28, 1750

Chaconne from Partita No. 2 in D Minor for Solo Violin, BWV 1004 (1720)

Calling Bach's Chaconne in D Minor "one of the most wonderful, incomprehensible pieces of music," Brahms spoke of its awe-inspiring power in a letter to Clara Schumann, in June 1877: "On a single staff, on a small instrument the man writes a whole world of the deepest thoughts and the most powerful feelings."

The spiritual grandeur of the Chaconne has stirred violinists and listeners alike since its first publication in the early 19th century. Bach wrote it a century earlier as the crowning movement of his D Minor Partita for solo violin, the second of a collection of six Partitas and Sonatas, representing the culmination of Baroque polyphonic writing for a string instrument. Of the two surviving chaconnes by Bach, this one towers in scope and invention: a sequence of expansive, technically demanding variations built on a four-bar ground bass. Its shifting textures, contrapuntal

layering, and expressive breadth evoke both Italian lyricism and French grandeur, transforming the dance form into a profound musical meditation.

Antonio Bazzini

Born in Brescia, Italy, March 11, 1818; died in Milan, Italy, February 10, 1897

Scherzo fantastique: *La ronde des lutins*, op. 25 (1852)

Antonio Bazzini is remembered today for a single work – *La ronde des lutins* (*Dance of the Goblins*) – a dazzling encore favourite that few can name but many recognise. Written in 1852, it offers violinists a playground of virtuosic display with daredevil ricochet bowing, glistening harmonics, left-hand pizzicatos, double-stopped trills, and even double harmonics.

Bazzini earned his virtuosity honestly. Born in Brescia, he toured Europe from a young age after encouragement from Paganini. His programs featured short character pieces and operatic fantasias, but his playing made an impression far beyond its showmanship. “He seems to come not from a land on this earth, but from a land of song,” wrote Robert Schumann after hearing him in 1843.

After retiring from touring in 1864, Bazzini returned home to teach and compose. He taught Puccini, Mascagni, and Catalani, and composed violin concertos, sacred works, string quartets, and many violin pieces – though it is his goblins who continue to dance.

Antonín Dvořák (arr. Fritz Kreisler)

Born in Nelahozeves, Bohemia, September 8, 1841; died in Prague, Czech Republic, May 1, 1904

Slavonic Dance No. 2 in E Minor, op. 72, no. 2 (1886/publ. 1914)

The spirit of Bohemian folk music and national tendencies were already in Dvořák’s blood when he came to write the first set of eight Slavonic Dances on March 18, 1878. By August, an eager publisher, still reaping the rewards of Brahms’s Hungarian Dances, had all eight in print in both piano duet and orchestral versions. Dvořák received 300 marks. “A heavenly naturalness flows through this music,” proclaimed a respected German critic. With considerable works in many genres about to be published, Dvořák’s name would soon be known throughout Europe and in leading North American cities. By 1886, a second set of *Slavonic Dances*, op. 72 brought Dvořák a more princely 3,000 marks.

Fritz Kreisler’s transcription of the E Minor, op. 72, no. 2 dance for violin and piano turns Dvořák’s dumka-inspired original into a salon gem, adapting the composer’s original Allegretto grazioso to a more measured Andante grazioso quasi Allegretto. The Vienna-born Kreisler emphasises Dvořák’s melancholy *starodávny* idiom with expressive portamentos, subtle rubato, and the overall feeling of an untroubled pre-war Vienna – wistful but never sentimental, simple but never slight. It is a reminder of Dvořák’s deep feeling for his homeland and Kreisler’s gift for poetic reinvention.

Pablo de Sarasate

Born in Pamplona, Spain, March 10, 1844; died in Biarritz, France, September 20, 1908

***Zigeunerweisen* (Gypsy Airs), op. 20, no. 1 (1878)**

Sarasate, next to Paganini, the best-known violin virtuoso of the 19th century, was a great showman, renowned for his sweet, singing tone and sensuous sound. The Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick, whose pen could be as sharp as a wasp’s sting, took to the Spaniard and wrote: “His tone is incomparable – not powerful or deeply affecting, but of enchanting sweetness.” For Sarasate, this beauty of sound became a double-edged sword. He basked in the praise heaped on his playing of Mendelssohn but grew angry when his Beethoven was described as shallow against that of Joachim. Sarasate smiled all the way to the bank, though – at 3,000 marks, his concert fee in Germany was three times that of Joachim.

He composed – maybe ‘arranged to existing tunes’ is a more accurate way of putting it – his single-movement *Zigeunerweisen* between Brahms’s initial publication of the first two and last two books of his Hungarian Dances. The introduction sternly commands attention while giving glimpses of the fireworks that lie ahead. The piece is structured along the lines of the csárdás with its slow lassú opening, emotionally balancing muted melancholy and teardrops with dazzling acrobatic display. Then it steps into a headlong rush of violin pyrotechnics in the climactic

friss. It is Sarasate's command of virtuoso ornamentation and violin bravura that wins through in this spectacular example of late 19th century showmanship.

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Ray Chen

Violin

Violinist and online personality, Ray Chen redefines what it means to be a classical musician in the 21st century. With a global reach that enhances and inspires a new classical audience, Ray Chen's remarkable musicianship transmits to millions around the world, reflected through his engagements both online and with the foremost orchestras and concert halls around the world. Beyond the performing arts, his work has also contributed to philanthropy, popular culture, and educational technology.

Initially coming to attention via the Yehudi Menuhin (2008) and Queen Elizabeth (2009) Competitions, of which he was First Prize winner, he has built a profile in Europe, Asia, and the USA as well as his native Australia both live and on disc. Profiled as "one to watch" by the *Strad* and *Gramophone* magazines, his profile has grown to encompass his featuring in the *Forbes* list of 30 most influential Asians under 30, appearing in major online TV series *Mozart in the Jungle*, a multi-year partnership with Giorgio Armani (who designed the cover of his Mozart album with Christoph Eschenbach), and performing at major media events such as France's Bastille Day, the Nobel Prize Concert in Stockholm, and the BBC Proms.

More recently, Ray Chen co-founded Tonic, an independent startup that aims to motivate musicians and learners around the world to practice their craft together. Although new, the innovative app has cultivated a highly engaged and supportive community and is available to download on iOS and Android today.

Born in Taiwan and raised in Australia, Ray was accepted to the Curtis Institute of Music at age 15, where he studied with Aaron Rosand and was supported by Young Concert Artists. He plays the 1714 "Dolphin" Stradivarius violin on loan from the Nippon Music Foundation. This instrument was once owned by the famed violinist, Jascha Heifetz.

Chelsea Wang

Piano

Praised by *The New York Times* as an "excellent young pianist," Chelsea Wang is an award-winning soloist, chamber musician, and educator who has performed extensively across North America, Europe, and Asia at venues including Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, Merkin Hall, Konzerthaus Berlin, Munich's Allerheiligen-Hofkirche, Chamber Hall of Warsaw Philharmonic, Taipei National Concert Hall, and Seoul Arts Center.

Ms. Wang made her orchestral debut at the age of six and has performed with many orchestras since then, including the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, Des Moines Symphony Orchestra, and musicians from the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. Chelsea has performed as a guest artist with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Buffalo Chamber Music Society, Manhattan Chamber Players, Hong Kong Intimacy of Creativity, and has collaborated with leading artists including David Shifrin, Ida Kavafian, Ani Kavafian, David Finckel, Roberto Díaz, Paul Neubauer, Peter Wiley, and Bright Sheng.

As a passionate educator, she serves on the faculty of the Music@Menlo Chamber Music Institute's Young Performers Program and has led numerous interactive performances in schools and community venues throughout New York City and across the United States.

A native of West Des Moines, Iowa, Ms. Wang is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music where she studied with Meng-Chieh Liu and Ignat Solzhenitsyn, and was awarded the prestigious Sergei Rachmaninov Award upon graduation. She received her Master of Music degree and Graduate Diploma at the Peabody Conservatory under the tutelage of Leon Fleisher and Yong-Hi Moon, and is currently pursuing her Doctor of Musical Arts degree at Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music with James Giles. Ms. Wang is also an alumna of the prestigious Ensemble Connect, a highly selective two-year fellowship program under the joint auspices of Carnegie Hall, The Weill Institute, and The Juilliard School. She currently lives in New York City.

Ray Chen made his Royal Conservatory debut on November 8, 2019, and Chelsea Wang is making her Conservatory debut tonight.