

Royal Conservatory Orchestra with conductor Peter Oundjian

Friday, February 6, 2026 at 8pm

This is the 1,498th concert in Koerner Hall

Peter Oundjian, conductor

Eric Guo, piano

Royal Conservatory Orchestra

PROGRAM

Vivian Fung: *Dust Devils*

Fryderyk Chopin: Piano Concerto No. 2 in F Minor, op. 21

- I. Maestoso
- II. Larghetto
- III. Allegro vivace

INTERMISSION

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky: Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, op. 74 ("Pathétique")

- I. Adagio – Allegro non troppo
- II. Allegro con grazia
- III. Allegro molto vivace
- IV. Finale: Adagio lamentoso

Eric Guo is the Grand Prize winner of the 2025 Robert W. and G Ann Corcoran Concerto Competition.

Vivian Fung

Born in Edmonton, AB, February 6, 1975

Dust Devils (2011, rev. 2014)

Juno Award-winning Canadian composer Vivian Fung, now based in California, wrote this virtuoso showpiece for full orchestra in 2011. “*Dust Devils* is the journey of emotional swirls in my mind,” Fung writes, “sometimes calm, but more often than not, full of raw and intense energy.” The 10-minute piece with its constantly shifting textures, imaginatively and precisely drawn, opens the first of three sections under the heading Turbulent. “The opening starts quite forcefully and darts back and forth,” Fung continues. “It culminates in a fiery pounding of the timpani, which wanes and brings this section to mere silent breaths in the brass. A slow section [marked Ethereal, with increasing interruptions] ensues, filled with upward cascades of arpeggios that interrupt the ethereal atmosphere. An ominous eerie string section follows [Powerful, with energy] leading to a powerful chorale in the brass, which overtakes the music and brings the work to an emphatic close.”

Fryderyk Chopin

Born in Żelazowa Wola, nr. Warsaw, Poland, March 1, 1810; died in Paris, France, October 17, 1849

Piano Concerto in F Minor, op. 21 (1829)

Completed in the year that he graduated from the Warsaw High School and studies with Józef Elsner, the F Minor Concerto was, chronologically, the first of Chopin’s two piano concertos. It became known as No. 2 following a delay in publishing, due to the orchestral parts being lost when Chopin travelled across Europe. From the outset, it is clear that Chopin is not interested in writing a large-scale symphonic concerto in the heroic tradition of Beethoven’s “Emperor,” or in the luminous, pianistically dazzling *stile brillante* which many associated with his earliest music. Melancholy and nostalgia are distinctive thumbprints in the concerto that the 20-year-old composer introduced to a sold-out audience of 800 at Warsaw’s National Theatre on March 17, 1830. A semi-private rehearsal already had the Warsaw press extolling him as “the Paganini of the Piano.” They then declared him comparable with Mozart alone following a repeat public performance five days after the premiere.

A sense of longing permeates Chopin’s melodies. Later that year, when he was to leave his homeland for good, this longing would begin to turn into nostalgia for Poland and he would further explore this lyrical, more immediately subjective side of his personality in the Nocturnes. In the earlier F Minor Concerto, however, he is more interested in putting the soloist front and centre, more like the prima donna in Italian opera, with the orchestra providing the foil for solo display. We do not listen to Chopin for brilliant orchestration or for structural innovation. What we do listen for is his spontaneous melodic inspiration and his genius for creating expressive ornamentation that is the essence of the melody and harmony itself.

The slow movement was inspired by his love for a young singer, a fellow Warsaw student with a fine mezzo-soprano voice and the desire to find success in the opera house. Her name was Konstancja Gladkowska, and she had the dark good looks and melancholy air that appealed to romantic sensibilities. “I have already found my ideal, whom I have served faithfully, though I haven’t said a word to her for six months,” the then chronically shy Chopin wrote to a friend. “I dream of her and have written the Adagio of my concerto in her memory...” While Chopin may appear to be as much in love with the idea of love itself, his sublimated love produced music of profound emotional depth, in a movement with muted strings, later admired and modelled by both Schumann and Grieg. The sparkling finale is an idealised mazurka – several distinctively contrasting mazurka melodies really – in a youthful exploration of a keyboard dance that Chopin was soon to own. During the second theme, violins play *col legno* (tapping the strings with the back of the bow), while the lower strings strum syncopated drone fifths – rustic effects derived from the folk mazurka – with the piano in playful mood. A horn call heralds a brilliant, dramatic coda.

Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky

Born in Kamsko-Votkinsk, Russia, April 25/May 7, 1840; died in St. Petersburg, Russia, October 25/November 6, 1893

Symphony No. 6 in B Minor, op. 74 (“Pathétique”) (1893)

Nine days after conducting the premiere of his Sixth Symphony, Tchaikovsky was dead. The “Pathétique” quickly gained the reputation of being a conscious epitaph to a life shadowed by nervous instability and depression. Its

subtitle came about only after Tchaikovsky rejected his working title, Program Symphony, having decided not to reveal any underlying ideas linking its four movements. His brother Modest first suggested Tragic, but Tchaikovsky was unconvinced. "Suddenly," Modest recalled, "the word Patetichesky came into my head. I went back – I stood in the doorway and uttered the word. 'Excellent, Modya! Bravo! – Patetichesky!' And he wrote this on the score and sent it the same day to his publisher." The word Patetichesky conveys far more than the English 'pathetic', suggesting pathos, emotional intensity, and suffering. It fits the deeply personal nature of the symphony and the restless temperament of its composer. It gets closer to the soul of the tortured composer whose reported death after drinking unboiled water during a cholera outbreak would soon be interpreted as suicide by negligence, and later by more elaborate conspiracy theories. The "Pathétique" describes inward, not outward events, and few symphonic works have been so closely associated with a composer's inner life. In a letter to his nephew, Tchaikovsky wrote that "while thinking it out I frequently wept," and that parts of it were written "at feverish speed." By the end, he was to declare several times: "This is the best thing I have composed or ever shall compose." Tchaikovsky had found a way beyond a symphonic impasse in creating what many consider to be his finest symphony.

The symphony's principal innovation lies in its structure, ending not with triumph but with a lamenting Adagio. The work also opens quietly with a sombre bassoon, barely above a whisper, hinting at what lies ahead. The increasing animation of the melody, in various rhythmic guises, gives way as Tchaikovsky prepares the way for a glowing, expansive second melody on muted violins and cellos in octaves. This is one of the composer's finest melodies and it soon returns even more richly orchestrated, eventually leaving the clarinet alone to trace and reflect upon its outline. The orchestra then explodes into a fantasia type of development of ferocious power, which includes a section where trombones introduce a brief quotation from the Russian Orthodox funeral service – no doubt some part of Tchaikovsky's unrevealed program. The main theme crashes its way back into full prominence with the help of the heavy brass, but its contours gradually fragment in a quiet, processional coda.

Tchaikovsky could pen some of the most haunting waltzes outside Vienna. But in the second movement, he seeks contrast rather than balletic fluency with an undanceable yet elegant five beats to a bar. This distinctively Russian rhythm here produces a gentle and wistful effect. Then comes a march, a scherzo-march of great strength, with a striding main subject that rises to a grand climax. Its defiance and optimism bring a complete contrast with the pain found elsewhere in the symphony, but also a feeling of foreboding. The finale opens with an anguished cry which rises in intensity, notwithstanding consoling string melodies – building on descending scale melodic patterns which have been a hallmark of the symphony throughout ... until cut off by a single soft stroke of the tam-tam, and the point of no return.

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Peter Oundjian

Conductor

Peter Oundjian is a dynamic presence in the conducting world with an international career leading preeminent orchestras in many of the world's major musical centers, from New York and Seattle to Amsterdam and Berlin. In his debut season as Music Director of the Colorado Symphony, where he served previously as Principal Conductor, Oundjian conducts six programs including a one-night-only performance featuring Lang Lang, Mahler's Symphony No. 2 "Resurrection," and a world premiere by Christopher Theofanidis. He also brings the orchestra to Carnegie Hall for the New York premiere of John Adams's *Frenzy*. As Music Director of the Colorado Music Festival (CMF), he continues to program and conduct concerts each summer that delight audiences with beloved masterpieces alongside music written by living composers.

Elsewhere in 2025-26, Oundjian leads the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra (where he is Conductor Emeritus), Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra, Kansas City Symphony, and Sarasota Orchestra, and makes international visits to the KBS Symphony Orchestra (Seoul, South Korea) and the Armenian National Philharmonic Orchestra (Yerevan, Armenia).

Over the course of his 14-year tenure as Music Director of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, which concluded in 2018, he reinvigorated the orchestra with acclaimed innovative programming, artistic collaborations, extensive audience growth, national and international tours, and several outstanding recordings, including Vaughan Williams's Orchestral Works, which garnered a Grammy nomination and a Juno Award. Under his leadership, the

Symphony underwent a transformation that significantly strengthened its presence in the world. He currently serves as Conductor Emeritus of the Symphony.

Eric Guo

Piano

Toronto native Eric Guo started piano at the age of four. An alumnus of The Phil and Eli Taylor Performance Academy for Young Artists, his former teachers included John Perry and James Anagnoson. After obtaining his Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance (Honours), he is currently studying in the Artist Diploma Program under Jonathan Biss and Anton Nel at The Glenn Gould School, where he is a recipient of The Renette & David Berman Scholarships.

Most recently, he was a semi finalist at 19th Chopin Competition in Warsaw. He won 1st prize and Mazurkas Prize in the Chopin Competition on Period Instruments in Warsaw and 5th prize in Marguerite Long-Thibaud Competition in Paris. Named one of CBC's "30 Under 30", he holds a Hnatyshyn Foundation Grant in Piano.

His debut album, with the Warsaw Philharmonic, was released by the Chopin Institute during his recitals in conjunction with Chopin's 214th birthday in Żelazowa Wola. It received a rave review in the *Gramophone* magazine and was broadcast on CBC and *Radio-Canada*.

At home, Eric Guo performed at Koerner Hall and Roy Thomson Hall, and internationally at the Rudolfinum (Prague), Bozar (Brussels), Ateneo de Madrid, Theatre du Chatelet, Opéra-Comique, Salle Cortot, Hamamatsu Act City, Hyogo Performing Arts Center, and Tokyo Opera City. He has also been invited by renowned orchestras such as Warsaw Philharmonic, {oh!} Orkiestra (Poland), Collegium 1704 (Czech Republic), Royal Philharmonic (UK), Bach Collegium Japan, Auer Academy Orchestra (Korea), and symphonies of Fort Worth, Minnesota, Toronto, and others. His prestigious international festival appearances include Chopin and his Europe (Poland), Duszniki (Poland), Nohant (France), Dvořák Prague (Czech), Bolzano Bozen (Italy), Frost Chopin (Miami), Rockport, Paderewski Festival (Raleigh), and others.

Royal Conservatory Orchestra

Joaquin Valdepeñas, Resident Conductor

The Royal Conservatory Orchestra (RCO), part of the Temerty Orchestral Program, is widely regarded as an outstanding ensemble and one of the best training orchestras in North America. Four renowned conductors work with the RCO each season, allowing Glenn Gould School students to gain experience through professional rehearsal and performance conditions. A full week of rehearsals culminates in a Koerner Hall performance under the batons of such distinguished guest conductors as Sir Roger Norrington, former Ihnatowycz Chair in Piano Leon Fleisher, Bramwell Tovey, Johannes Debus, Peter Oundjian, Gábor Takács-Nagy, Ivars Taurins, Tania Miller, Andrei Feher, Mario Bernardi, Richard Bradshaw, Nathan Brock, Julian Kuerti, Uri Mayer, Tito Muñoz, András Keller, Earl Lee, Naomi Woo, William Eddins, and Lior Shambadal. With four annual performances, participation in the RCO ensures that instrumental students in the Bachelor of Music and the Artist Diploma Program of The Glenn Gould School graduate with extensive orchestral performance experience. Additionally, winners of The Robert W. and G. Ann Corcoran Concerto Competition have the opportunity to appear each year as soloists with the RCO. Graduates of the RCO have joined the ranks of the greatest orchestras in the world, including the Cleveland Orchestra, the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the BBC Orchestra, the Israel Philharmonic, the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Tafelmusik, the Canadian Opera Company Orchestra, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the Calgary Philharmonic, the Quebec Symphony Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra of Manchester, the Hong Kong Philharmonic, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and Leipzig Gewandhaus. In addition to performances in Koerner Hall, the RCO has performed on numerous occasions at the Isabel Bader Performing Arts Centre in Kingston, has been heard repeatedly on the national broadcasts of the CBC Radio, and in May 2024 made its Carnegie Hall debut under Maestro Peter Oundjian.

The RCO's Resident Conductor, Joaquin Valdepeñas, is supported by a generous gift from Robert & Ann Corcoran.