

Seong-Jin Cho

Saturday, November 29, 2025 at 8pm

This is the 1,467th concert in Koerner Hall

Seong-Jin Cho, piano

PROGRAM

Franz Liszt: "Les jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este" from *Années de pèlerinage III*, S. 163

Ludwig van Beethoven: Piano Sonata No. 15 in D Major, op. 28 ("Pastoral")

- I. Allegro
- II. Andante
- III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace
- IV. Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

Béla Bartók: *Out of Doors*, Sz. 81, BB 89

- Sippal, dobbal (With drums and pipes)
- Barcarolla
- Musettes
- Az észak zenejé (The night's music)
- Hajsza (The chase)

INTERMISSION

Fryderyk Chopin: 14 Waltzes

- Waltz in E Minor, WN 29
- Waltz in F Major, op. 34, no. 3 ("Grande Valse Brillante")
- Waltz in D flat Major, op. 64, no. 1
- Waltz in A flat Major, op. 69, no. 1 (WN 47)
- Waltz in C sharp Minor, op. 64, no. 2
- Waltz in G flat Major, op. 70, no. 1 (WN 42)
- Waltz in B Minor, op. 69, no. 2 (WN 19)
- Waltz in A Minor, op. 34, no. 2 ("Grande Valse Brillante")
- Waltz in A flat Major, op. 64, no. 3
- Waltz in F Minor, op. 70, no. 2 (WN 55)
- Waltz in D flat Major, op. 70, no. 3 (WN 20)
- Waltz in A flat Major, op. 42
- Waltz in A flat Major, op. 34, no. 1 ("Grande Valse Brillante")
- Waltz in E flat Major, op. 18 ("Grande Valse Brillante")

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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.

Franz Liszt

Born in Doborján (Raasdorf), Hungary, October 22, 1811; died in Bayreuth, Germany, July 31, 1886

“Les jeux d’eaux à la Villa d’Este” from *Années de pèlerinage III*, S. 163 (1877-82)

Liszt’s “Les jeux d’eau à la Villa d’Este” – inspired by the fountains at Tivoli’s Villa d’Este near Rome (then owned and restored by Cardinal Gustav von Hohenlohe) – shimmers with light, colour, and movement. At the heart of this evocative sequence of variations and play of light on water lies a radiant F sharp major, a key Liszt often associated with music of spiritual elevation. Having taken minor orders in the Catholic Church, he linked “Les jeux d’eau” to Christ’s words in St. John’s Gospel: “Whoever drinks the water that I shall give will never thirst.” This fusion of virtuosic brilliance, impressionistic sonority, and devotional symbolism was unmatched until Ravel and Debussy carried Liszt’s water imagery into a new century.

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born in Bonn, Germany, baptised December 17, 1770; died in Vienna, Austria, March 26, 1827

Piano Sonata No. 15 in D Major, op. 28 (“Pastoral”) (1801)

In 1801 Beethoven wrote four piano sonatas – a prolific year that, though he could not have known it, marked the beginning of his so-called “middle period.” What he did know was grim: his hearing was failing, and he was in deep despair. A year later, in the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, he confessed to thoughts of suicide. Three of the sonatas from 1801 are strikingly innovative. The A flat, op. 26, has an unusual sequence of movements and dispenses with sonata form entirely, while the two op. 27 “Sonata quasi una fantasia” sonatas (including the “Moonlight”) venture into uncharted territory.

By contrast, the D Major Sonata, op. 28 – the last to follow the traditional fast–slow–scherzo–finale pattern – is understated, pastoral, and rooted in a mood of calm contemplation. Its opening low D, repeated around 60 times, sets a rustic tone that carries through the horn-calls of the scherzo and the carefree finale. The slow movement, in elegiac D minor, touches on whimsy before returning to introspection. Beethoven himself enjoyed playing it, and its nickname “Pastoral” – given by the first publisher – remains apt.

Béla Bartók

Born in Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary [now Sînnicolau Mare, Romania], March 25, 1881; died in New York, NY, September 26, 1945

***Szabadban (Out of Doors)* Sz. 81, BB 89 (1926)**

In 1926 Bartók channelled much of his creative energy into piano music, working on his five-movement suite *Out of Doors* alongside his only Piano Sonata. At one stage, the Musettes movement was part of the Sonata’s finale. *Out of Doors* is a set of five contrasted character pieces, which Bartók rarely performed complete, yet regarded as interrelated. They form the arch-like structure he favoured and would soon perfect in the Fourth and Fifth String Quartets. The musical language is distinctively Bartókian, from the percussive, pounding rhythms of the opening to the enigmatic Barcarolla, a sombre boating song. Musettes delivers an earthy evocation of the peasant bagpipe – an instrument Bartók returned to many times, including the finale of the Concerto for Orchestra. The Night’s Music hovers around a recurring cluster in the piano’s middle register, conjuring frogs, crickets, and other nocturnal voices. This ‘night music’ became a hallmark of Bartók’s musical language from 1926 onwards. The final Chase, driven by a brittle, spiky motif, hurtles forward with ferocious, unrelenting energy.

Fryderyk Chopin

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

A selection of 14 Waltzes

Chopin saw potential in the waltz beyond its traditional role as a popular dance and consciously moved away from social dance music, when it was increasingly becoming all the rage. Before leaving Warsaw at the age of 20, having already publicly performed his two piano concertos, he had also written six early waltzes. At this stage, he likely had an eye on domestic music making, rather than works he would wish to publish. Of the six, the **Waltz in E Minor, WN 29** is often viewed as the finest, opening with a flourish and closing with a brief dramatic coda. In between, all four

themes invite our curiosity, sidestepping any feeling of predictability. While the sum of the parts of the early Warsaw waltzes may not add up to the sophistication of those Chopin composed in Paris, the E Minor comes close.

He also gave copies of his Warsaw waltzes as gifts or keepsakes to friends. (Here, these bear WN catalogue numbers from the Polish National Edition). Most notable among them is the earliest draft of the **Waltz in A flat Major, WN 47** (posthumously published as op. 69, no. 1) which he gave to Maria Wodzinska, to whom he was briefly engaged. Two additional copies were given to other friends. There are five surviving presentation autographs of the **Waltz in F Minor, WN 55**, published posthumously as op. 70, no. 2. The **Waltz in D flat Major, op. 70, no. 3 (WN 20)** is from six years earlier, October 3, 1829, “a little waltz, inspired this morning by my ideal,” Chopin wrote to his friend Tytus Woyciechowski, speaking of the singer Konstancja Gładkowska with whom he was infatuated – she is also believed to have been in Chopin’s thoughts as he composed the slow movement Romance of his E Minor Piano Concerto.

Although less intricate than the waltzes composed in Paris, the Warsaw waltzes each have their own allure – the gentle **Waltz in B Minor, WN 19**, for example, sings with lyricism and hints of chromatic daring. Living temporarily in Vienna (1830-1), Chopin realised, even from the age of 21, that his goal was to refine and enrich the popular waltz by introducing elements from a more developed, polished musical language. “I do not even know how to dance a waltz properly,” he wrote from Vienna to his Warsaw composition teacher, Józef Elsner, in 1831.

After op. 18, the **Waltz in A flat Major, op. 34, no. 1** was chronologically the second published. It opens with fanfare-like heroics and a mazurka-like lift on the second beat – a trait Chopin would explore in later waltzes. The **A Minor Waltz, op. 34, no. 2**, his own favourite, tells a melancholy tale, growing incrementally to a brief, radiant episode before sinking back into shadow. The fleeting **Waltz in F Major, op. 34, no. 3**, nicknamed the “Cat Waltz,” introduces a mercurial, almost improvisatory element. The **Waltz in A flat Major, op. 42** presents a dazzling sequence of waltz themes, five in all, teasing the ear with cross-play between triple and duple time, driving to a brusquely compressed version of the theme that has unified the piece from the start.

The three **op. 64 waltzes** – polished over years but only published two years before Chopin’s death – are independent creations and a fastidiously refined high point in the collection. The first, the so-called “Minute” waltz, is in the early-1830s style brilliant: a perpetual-motion right-hand figure fuels its giddy pace, eased by the rubato Chopin’s grace invites. The **Waltz in C sharp Minor, op. 64, no. 2**, one of the gems of Chopin’s output, carefully wraps graceful, bittersweet outer sections around a nocturnal D flat centre. The less familiar **A flat Waltz, op. 64, no. 3**, shares the “Minute’s” three-part form but veers unpredictably, with daring modulations driving to a sparkling cascade of eighth-notes. Together, the three op 64 waltzes show Chopin at his most urbane, transforming a popular dance into something as sophisticated and detailed as Bach’s allemandes, courantes, sarabandes, and gigues – the social dances of *his* day.

The **E flat Waltz**, published in Paris as **op. 18**, is among Chopin’s longest and most spirited. He called it, in the fashion of the time, a valse brillante – brilliant, elegant, and tinged with coquettish charm. Structurally not far removed from Schubert’s waltzes, ländler and Deutsche, it won Schumann’s praise as music for the soul as well as the body. Virtuosity here serves the brilliance of the themes.

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Seong-Jin Cho

Piano

Seong-Jin Cho has established himself worldwide as one of the leading pianists of his generation and most distinctive artists on the current music scene. With an innate musicality and consummate artistry, his thoughtful and poetic, virtuosic, and colourful playing can combine panache with purity and is driven by an impressive natural sense of balance. He is celebrated unanimously across the globe for his expressive magic and illuminative insights.

Seong-Jin Cho was brought to the world’s attention in 2015 when he won First Prize at the Chopin International Competition in Warsaw. In early 2016, he signed an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon and, in 2023, Cho was awarded the prestigious Samsung Ho-Am Prize in the Arts in recognition of his exceptional contributions to the world of classical music.

In the 2025-26 season, Seong-Jin Cho is the London Symphony Orchestra’s Artist Portrait. The position sees him work with the orchestra on multiple projects across the season, with concerto performances including the world premiere of a new Piano Concerto by Donghoon Shin, written especially for him. The position also features

touring performances across Europe, as well as chamber music concerts and in recital at LSO St Luke's. Elsewhere, he notably returns to Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra under Manfred Honeck with performances in Pittsburgh and Carnegie Hall, to Boston Symphony Orchestra with Andris Nelsons, and to Los Angeles Philharmonic under Gustavo Dudamel. Cho embarks on several international tours, including his notable return to Czech Philharmonic with Semyon Bychkov in Taiwan and Japan, and Münchner Philharmoniker with Lahav Shani in Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. He also performs with Gewandhausorchester Leipzig with Andris Nelsons throughout Europe in autumn 2025.

Born in 1994 in Seoul, Seong-Jin Cho started learning the piano at the age of six. In 2009, he became the youngest ever winner of Japan's Hamamatsu International Piano Competition. In 2011, he won Third Prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow at the age of 17. From 2012-15 he studied with Michel Béroff at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris. Seong-Jin Cho is now based in Berlin.

Seong-Jin Cho made his Royal Conservatory debut on October 28, 2018, and this is his third appearance in Koerner Hall.