

21C Music

**Tony Yike Yang and Friends
Celebrate Chinese New Year**

Friday, January 23, 2026 at 7pm

This is the 1,491st concert in Koerner Hall

Tony Yike Yang, piano

Dora Wang, bamboo flute

Cynthia Qin, guzheng

PROGRAM

Vincent Ho: Selections from *The Twelve Chinese Zodiac Animals, Book 2: Preludes and Fugues* (Ontario premiere)

No. 1 - Rascally Rat

No. 3 - Dance of the Tigers

No. 4 - Jubilant Rabbit

No. 5 - Soaring Dragon

No. 7 - The Galloping Horse

No. 8 - Drowsy Lamb

No. 9 - Mimicking Manic Monkeys

No. 12 - Tranquil Pig

Xin Qiji: *The Green Jade Pedestal: The Lantern Fairs*

INTERMISSION

Alexander Scriabin: 5 Preludes, op. 16

No. 1 in B Major (Andante)

No. 2 in G sharp Minor (Allegro)

No. 3 in G flat Major (Andante cantabile)

No. 4 in E flat Minor (Lento)

No. 5 in F sharp Minor (Allegretto)

Alexander Scriabin: Fantasy in B Minor, op. 28

Nikolai Kapustin: Eight Concert Études, op. 40

No. 1 Prelude

No. 2 Rêverie

No. 3 Toccata

No. 4 Reminiscence

No. 5 Shuitka (Raillery)

No. 6 Pastoral

No. 7 Intermezzo

No. 8 Finale

Chen Gang & He Zhanhao: *The Butterfly Lovers* (arr. Chen Gang)

Huang Yijun: *Blooming Flowers and Full Moon*

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.

Vincent Ho

Born in Ottawa, ON, 1975

Selections from *The Twelve Chinese Zodiac Animals, Book 2: Preludes and Fugues* (Ontario premiere)

2021 saw the release of Book 1 of this series – a collection of solo piano works depicting each of the Chinese zodiac animals in their young ages and written for young students. Each work incorporated sounds, harmonies, and performance techniques of Chinese traditional instruments in pianistic form while capturing the spirit of each animal's personality. Since its publication, the works have been performed worldwide and The Royal Conservatory of Music has included 10 of the 12 movements into their piano series/syllabus. Book 2 of this series is a collection of 12 preludes and fugues that represent each of the Chinese zodiac animals in their teenage years. The principle of creating this collection is to have the animals "grow up" in musical form so students can grow older with them. Thus, the materials of each animal from Book 1 are retained in Book 2 but rewritten in ways to reflect their musical growths and technical advancements. The choice of writing them as Preludes and Fugues serves two purposes:

1. They are forms that most students and pianists of an advanced level will be familiar with (through the works of Bach) and thus easier for them to embrace.
2. This allows me to express Chinese cultural themes within Western musical traditions to represent my bi-cultural identity in musical form while introducing students and pianists to Chinese culture.

- Vincent Ho

Xin Qiji

Born in Licheng (now part of Jinan), China, May 28, 1140; died in Shangrao, China, October 3, 1207

The Green Jade Pedestal: The Lantern Fairs

The poem "The Green Jade Pedestal: The Lantern Fairs" was composed by Xin Qiji, a poet of the Song Dynasty. The poem starts by vividly depicting the lively and colourful scene of the Lantern Festival and then contrasts it with a female figure who is aloof, indifferent, and transcendent, different from the gold, jade, and powder of the mundane world.

众里寻他千百度，蓦然回首，那人却在，灯火阑珊处。

Searching the crowds for her again and again along the streets, With a sudden glancing back, I see her just standing in there, Where lanterns gleam softly in the trees.

- Cynthia Qin

Alexander Scriabin

Born in Moscow, Russia, December 25, 1871/January 6, 1872; died there, April 14/27, 1915

Five Preludes, op. 16 (1894-5)

Fantasy in B Minor, op. 28 (1900)

Alexander Scriabin died aged 43, leaving 74 published works that trace an astonishing evolution over a mere quarter century. Few composers were so wholly absorbed by their own creative vision. A mystic and self-proclaimed prophet of art, he believed his music would one day bring about a cosmic revelation. His personality and work became inseparable – radiant sensuality fused with metaphysical ambition and daring harmonic imagination that led him ever further from convention. The seeds of this visionary world lie in his early piano music, the medium through which he

expressed himself most intimately. His chosen titles – prelude, waltz, nocturne, mazurka, impromptu – reveal his debt to Chopin, whose poetry of brevity and nuance he absorbed before transforming it into something wholly personal.

The **Prelude** remained Scriabin's lifelong touchstone. Across his career he wrote nearly 90 – miniature tone-poems that distil a single mood or idea, often within a page or two. Their concision and freedom suited his improvisatory nature, mirrored in the inspired spontaneity of his own playing. Witnesses recalled that each performance seemed newly created, shaped by supple rubato and a skilled use of the sustaining pedal. The first of the op. 16 set, with its falling romantic melody, invites such flexibility, while the second suggests another hallmark of Scriabin's playing with its nervous intensity and sudden pathos. The next two Preludes are intimate confessions, poised between salon grace and spiritual aspiration – though No. 4, just 12 bars long, says more with less. No. 5 in F sharp minor closes with poised caprice and conversational rubato.

The **Fantasy in B Minor, op. 28** (1900), written between the Third and Fourth Sonatas, expands this idiom to an altogether grander, virtuoso scale. A single continuous movement – essentially a sonata-form opening – it unfolds with Lisztian sweep and a pianist-composer's instinct for colour and texture. Bold harmonic turns and ecstatic surges foreshadow the transcendental sound world of his later works, while its melodic fervour and glittering passagework bid farewell to Chopin. The Fantasy stands as both culmination and prophecy – Romantic passion giving way to mystical revelation.

Nikolai Kapustin

Born in Gorlovka, Donetsk province, Ukraine, November 22, 1937; died in Moscow, Russia, July 2, 2020

Eight Concert Études, op. 40 (1984)

Ukrainian-born but long-time Moscow resident, Nikolai Kapustin occupies a singular place in the music of the past century – a classically trained Russian composer and pianist whose works speak the language of jazz without leaving the concert hall. Trained at the Moscow Conservatory, he absorbed the Russian virtuoso piano repertoire and the rigour of classical form while privately nurturing a love of swing, improvisation, and big-band rhythm. Yet Kapustin never cultivated concert improvisation. "I never tried to be a real jazz pianist, but I had to do it because of the composing. I am not interested in improvisation – and what is a jazz musician without improvisation? All my improvisations are written, of course, and they became much better; it improved them." Kapustin composed at the piano, his dazzling, often formidable keyboard writing blending jazz idiom with classical discipline. His music dances between two worlds – Rachmaninov and Oscar Peterson, Prokofiev and Art Tatum – bridging the divide between classical composition and jazz performance.

With 20 piano sonatas, six concertos, and numerous études, preludes, and chamber works, his art finds freedom within structure, transforming classical design into an exhilarating vehicle of syncopation, virtuosity and wit.

The **Eight Concert Études, op. 40** (1984), epitomise this synthesis of classical craft and jazz vitality. Conceived in the Lisztian sense as transcendental concert studies, they explore rhythmic and stylistic challenges: the Prelude bristles with flamboyant, syncopated drive; *Rêverie* sings with blues-tinged lyricism; *Toccata* tests stamina with its relentless swing; and *Reminiscence* turns reflection into rhapsody. *Shuitka* (Raillery) boogies with finger-crossing humour; *Pastorale* dances with lightly drawn grace; *Intermezzo* fuses contrapuntal intricacy with rhythmic ease; and the *Finale* nods back to the opening Prelude, crowning the set in a blaze of jazz-fuelled bravura. "It was the only way I could improvise – with a pencil," Kapustin remarked. Here, with a display of pianistic theatre, his written spontaneity achieves full voice – disciplined, inventive, and irresistibly alive.

- Scriabin and Kapustin program notes copyright © 2026 Keith Horner

Chen Gang & He Zhanhao

Chen Gang was born in Shanghai, China, March 10, 1935; He Zhanhao was born in Zhuji, Zhejiang Province, China, 1935

The Butterfly Lovers (arr: Chen Gang)

The Butterfly Lovers is one of the most cherished works in Chinese classical music, celebrated for its lyrical beauty and emotional depth. The piece is based on the ancient legend of Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai, a tragic love story often referred to as China's Romeo and Juliet. The narrative follows the two lovers from their joyful first meeting and shared years of study, through their forced separation and eventual heartbreak. In the end, their love transcends

earthly bounds as they are transformed into a pair of butterflies – forever united in the afterlife. The music's most iconic theme captures both beauty and sorrow, making it a deeply moving and unforgettable experience for listeners. This adaptation draws from the original violin concerto composed by He Zhanhao and Chen Gang.

- Dora Wang

Huang Yijun

Born in Suzhou, China, May 4, 1915; died October 11, 1995

Blooming Flowers and Full Moon

Blooming Flowers and Full Moon was originally created as a light music piece by Huang Yijun. It was later adapted by conductor Peng Xiuwen into a traditional Chinese orchestral work, drawing from the Jiangnan Sizhu style. Both flowers and the moon are enduring symbols of beauty in Chinese culture. This piece eloquently conveys the world's tender emotions and embodies the artistic ideals that people cherish. As a result, it has become beloved by Chinese communities around the globe. - Cynthia Qin & Dora Wang

Tony Yike Yang

Piano

Hailed by *CBC Music* as one of Canada's finest young musicians, pianist Tony Yike Yang first rose to international acclaim in 2015 after becoming the youngest-ever laureate in the history of the International Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw, winning the 5th prize at the age of 16. Additionally, Tony has also won prizes at the Van Cliburn, Gina Bachauer, Hilton Head, Cooper, and the Bosendorfer & Yamaha USASU International Piano Competitions. As a soloist, Tony has performed internationally in over 40 countries in venues such as Carnegie Hall, Tokyo Metropolitan Theatre, Salle Cortot, the National Philharmonic in Warsaw, Seoul Arts Center, the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, Osaka Symphony Hall, Koerner Hall, Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, Severance Hall, Esplanade Singapore, Teatro Municipal São Paulo, Stadtcasino Basel, Milan Conservatory, Aula Simfonia Jakarta, and Dubai Millennium Amphitheatre.

Tony has also performed for dozens of dignitaries and royalty such as HRH Camilla, the Queen Consort of the United Kingdom, HRH Queen Mathilde of Belgium, former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, former Kuwaiti Prime Minister Sheikh Nasser Al-Sabah, and Polish President Andrzej Duda, among others.

Concerto highlights include appearances with the Cleveland Orchestra, Warsaw Philharmonic, Orchestre Métropolitain, Fort Worth Symphony, Basel Proms Orchestra, Ontario Philharmonic, Jakarta Sinfonietta, Toronto Sinfonietta, Edmonton Symphony, Changsha Symphony, Chongqing Symphony, Hilton Head Symphony Orchestra, Symphony Nova Scotia, and the Hohhot Philharmonic.

Tony is also passionate about the role of music in the greater community. His most devoted projects include a comprehensive collaboration as feature artist with a Toronto-based charity Looking at the Stars, delivering between five to 10 concerts a year to prisons across Lithuania and the United States. Tony also works closely with Chamber Music Kenya to make classical music accessible in eastern Africa, as well as the Guangdong Disabled Persons' Federation to bring live music to visually impaired youth in the Guangdong province. Since 2018, Tony is a Youth Cultural Ambassador to the City of Guangzhou.

Born in Chongqing and raised in Toronto, Tony received his early musical training at The Royal Conservatory of Music. A recent graduate of Harvard University with a Bachelor of Arts in Economics, he is Artist-in-Residence at the Ingesund Piano Center in Sweden and at the Chinese University of Hong Kong-Shenzhen. In the past, was a fellow at the Oberlin-Lake Como International Piano Academy. Currently pursuing his Master of Music at the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover under Prof. Arie Vardi, Tony is a recent recipient of the Harvard University Robert Levin Prize in Musical Performance, and is named "One to Watch" by *Scala Radio UK*.

Dora Wang

Bamboo flute

Dora Wang started her professional music career at the Affiliated Middle School of Tianjin Conservatory of Music with a major in bamboo flute and, during her studies, she also mastered xiao, xun, bawu, and hulusi. After immigrating to Canada, she founded her band, Melody of Bamboo Music, with whom she continues to perform at major events

across Canada. In 2016, she also became a member of KUNÉ – Canada's Global Orchestra, an initiative started by The Royal Conservatory of Music, which celebrated the cultural diversity and pluralism of Canada as it turned 150.

Cynthia Qin

Guzheng

Cynthia Qin holds a Bachelor of Arts in Guzheng Performance from the China Conservatory of Music and has performed for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games opening ceremony. After she immigrated to Canada, she has been invited to participate in Alice Ho's *Lesson of Da Ji* as well as in David Buchbinder's *The Ward Cabaret*. She also serves as a judge for both the Toronto Folk Music Graded Examination and the North American Folk Music International Competition.

Tony Yike Yang made his Royal Conservatory debut on November 10, 2016. Dora Wang made her Conservatory debut on June 2, 2017, and this is her fourth appearance in Koerner Hall. Cynthia Qin is making her Conservatory debut tonight.