Sunday, March 16, 2025, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Evren Ozel, *piano*
Music of the Night

PROGRAM

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN(1770–1827) — Piano Sonata in C-sharp minor, Op. 27, No. 2, *Moonlight* (1802)
- Adagio sostenuto
- Allegretto
- Presto agitato

Claude DEBUSSY (1862–1918) — *Images,* Book II (1907)
- Cloches à travers les feuilles
- Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut
- Poissons d'or

Béla BARTÓK (1881–1945) — *Out of Doors*, Sz. 81 (1926)
- With Drums and Pipes
- Barcarolla
- Musettes
- The Night's Music
- The Chase

INTERMISSION

Robert SCHUMANN (1810–1856) — *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12 (1837)
- Des Abends
- Aufschwung
- Warum?
- Grillen
- In der Nacht
- Fabel
- Traumes Wirren
- Ende vom Lied

Maurice RAVEL (1875–1937) — *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908)
- Ondine
- Le Gibet
- Scarbo

Evren Ozel is a winner of the Concert Artists Guild International Competition.

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Ludwig van Beethoven
Piano Sonata in C-sharp minor,
Op. 27, No. 2, *Moonlight*

Beethoven's radical recasting of the classical forms bequeathed to him by Haydn and Mozart did not wait until his extraordinary late period. In 1801, the year before he wrote his revolutionary *Eroica* Symphony, he was already experimenting boldly in his two piano sonatas of Opus 27, which he significantly labeled "quasi una fantasia" ("in the manner of a fantasia"). A fantasia in this period was a piece in the style of an improvisation. However, these sonatas were anything but improvised; their spontaneous-sounding eccentricities were carefully conceived.

As William Drabkin has pointed out, with Opus 27, Beethoven began to reconsider how extremely different mixtures of elements could work together to make a whole. In both sonatas, he included movements that differed widely. Movements lasting a little more than a minute stand side by side with elaborately constructed sonata forms. Furthermore, the first movement is no longer an imposing sonata form, but something structurally more modest. And breaking with Classical practice, Beethoven now shifted the weight of the piece to a more substantial last movement.

Introducing the *Music of the Night* theme of this program, Evren Ozel will play the second of the pair: the well-loved Sonata in C-sharp minor, subtitled, but not by Beethoven, *Moonlight*. Here the composer elevates the slow movement to the first position. Though not unprecedented, this was certainly an unusual choice for a Classical-era first movement. The composer instructs the pianist to play this mesmerizing music "in the most delicate manner." It is like a sustained, improvised meditation on a few simple elements: arpeggios and a spare melody emphasizing repeated notes.

Moving enharmonically to D-flat major, the second movement is a tiny scherzo with a cheerful, lilting gait.

The final movement in a frenzied *Presto agitato* tempo is a sonata form in which the thematic material is based more on rhythm and harmony than a melodic line. The languorous arpeggios of the first movement are transformed into an angry whirlwind with a violent slap at the end of each phrase. This choleric music doesn't pause for breath until just before its close. In the words of Beethoven scholar Lewis Lockwood, this sonata "presents a succession of intense emotional atmospheres unlike any other early Beethoven sonata."

Claude Debussy
Images, Book II

In Claude Debussy's friendship circle, there were as many painters, sculptors, poets, and writers as there were musicians, all providing stimulus to his creativity. As he once wrote to a friend, "I am almost as fond of pictures as I am of music." Thus, it is not surprising that he should emerge as a master of tonal colors in his music, able to paint in sound what others might attempt with a brush or chisel. In three different works, he chose the word "images" as his title: the well-known *Images for Orchestra* of 1913 and the two books of *Images* for the piano, composed in 1903–05 and 1907 respectively.

Debussy had just finished *La Mer* in 1905 when he finally returned to the commission for piano works for which his publisher Jacques Durand had been impatiently waiting since 1903. By this time, he had created a sound world for the piano never heard before, both delicate and powerful and perfectly suited to his pictorial imagination. Biographer Oscar Thompson summarizes some of its key components: "His new concepts of sonority, his skillful adjustments of dynamics, his subtle employment of the pedal, his ambiguous treatment of tonalities, his block-like chord formulas, his quest of unobtrusive dissonance," which hinted at moods that could never be captured in words. Tiny, fleeting melodies coursed

Opposite: Dorrance Dance, *The Nutcracker Suite.*
Photo by Christopher Duggan.

through his music, but were rarely given the grand treatment. Though a product of the conservative Paris Conservatoire, Debussy dispensed with most of the rigid rules he'd been taught and chose to follow his own instincts, especially in matters of harmony.

Even more subtle and atmospheric than the pieces of Book I, Book II is connoisseurs' music. Because of the extremely wide range utilized and the complexity of the figurations, Debussy decided to use three staves instead of two for his notation. And in order to blur the harmonies, he required the pianist to make continual but refined use of the piano's pedals. As he told his publisher, "I'm more and more convinced that Music is not, in its essence, something that can flow along in rigorous traditional forms. It's a matter of colors and rhythmicised time."

The idea for the first movement's title, "Cloches à travers les feuilles" ("Bells through the Leaves"), was suggested to Debussy by his close friend Louis Laloy, a music journalist with a deep interest in Asian cultures who described hearing the tolling of bells in the Jura region, "passing from village to village through the yellowing forests in the silence of the evening." It also drew on Debussy's enduring love of Javanese gamelan music, which he'd first heard at the Paris Universal Exhibition in 1889. The music grows out of the opening descending whole-tone scales, while the right hand sounds both the bell melody and the rustling-leaves ostinato that accompanies it.

Deepening what Debussy might have considered the "Asiatic sonorities" of the first movement, "Et la lune descend sur le temple qui fut" ("And the Moon Sets over the Temple that Was") was dedicated to Laloy. Again, this movement grows from a sonority: an open fifth of E to B with a dissonant note tacked on. The use of such open chords throughout evokes the implied Asian location of the ancient temple while the dissonances convey mystery. High in the right hand, we hear a gleaming bell-like melody that again suggests the gamelan.

The final movement, "Poisson d'or" ("Goldfish"), draws its inspiration from a Japanese lacquered panel of goldfish decorated with gold and mother-of-pearl that Debussy kept in his workroom. He captures here the shimmer of the goldfish fins as they swim through this piece of scintillating rhythms and glinting dissonances. Not surprisingly, since it is the most pianistically showy of the set, this movement is most often played alone.

Béla Bartók
***Out of Doors*, Sz. 81**

As Béla Bartók's involvement with collecting folk songs in Hungary and Romania declined after World War I, he devoted himself more fully to finding his own personal style, which became more radical and "modern." Premiered in 1926, his shocking ballet *The Miraculous Mandarin* epitomized this new direction. Moreover, 1926 was also Bartók's greatest year of composing major piano pieces for his burgeoning concert career, as well as that of his gifted second wife, Ditta Pásztory. These keyboard works demonstrated his new conception of the piano: as he wrote: "It seems to me that the inherent nature [of the piano tone] becomes really expressive only by means of the present tendency to use the piano as a percussion instrument."

This afternoon, we will hear one of the finest of these works, Bartók's *Out of Doors*. Though it's often named a suite, the composer didn't call it that, but rather "five fairly difficult piano pieces." And Bartók did not usually play all five pieces together, but selected different ones for his programs—most often the path-breaking fourth piece, "The Night's Music."

The first piece, "With Drums and Pipes," is almost pure percussion. It is based very freely on the folksong "Gólya, gólya, gilice,"

which is a rhythmic children's game popular in Hungary. Portraying the drums, the left hand hammers a dissonant ostinato at the very bottom of the piano, while higher up we hear the pipes. In the rocking rhythm of a boat at sea, "Barcarolla" is much gentler. A sinuous chromatic ostinato first heard in the left hand dominates the piece migrating to the right hand and to both hands. Little stabbing accents throughout add bite. Mark Satola describes "Musettes" as "a graphic, burlesque caricature of a bagpiper and his instrument, from the creaking of the bag as it fills with air to the plangent skirling of the dual pipes, complete with cunning evocations of the instrument's 'out-of-tune-ness.'"

Longest of the pieces, "The Night's Music" is Bartók's first example of the very distinctive "night music" he would include in several future pieces. Here he explores the noises one might hear on a summer's night in Hungary: sounds of birds, cicadas, and the Hungarian *unka* frog. Whirring scales and tone clusters reproduce these sounds in ways that are both realistic and uncanny. Lively dance music, as if from a distant tavern, can also be heard. Not surprisingly this piece quickly became the work's audience favorite.

This relatively peaceful interlude is blown away by the frantic virtuosity of the final piece, "The Chase." It has much in common with the music in *The Miraculous Mandarin* during which the thugs pursue the mandarin, trying unsuccessfully to kill him. Highly dissonant cluster chords provide the basis for this savage whirlwind in Presto tempo.

Robert Schumann
***Fantasiestücke*, Op. 12**

The second half of the 1830s were Robert Schumann's great "Years of the Piano." Quantities of keyboard masterpieces flowed from his pen: among them, *Carnaval*, *Kreisleriana*, *Davidsbündlertänze*, the First Piano Sonata, and many more. As soon as he finished one piece—or even *before* it was finished—he launched another. In the summer of 1837, he was still working on *Davidsbündlertänze* when he began one of the finest of these, the *Fantasiestücke* ("Fantasy Pieces"), Opus 12; the title was borrowed from one of his favorite storytellers, E.T.A. Hoffmann and his 1814 collection *Fantasiestücke in Callots Manier*.

The eight pieces contained here are superb "character pieces," each with its own title that only partially reveals a programmatic meaning. Introspective and passionate by turns, they reflect the two symbolic personages, Florestan and Eusebius, Schumann had invented for himself to express the conflicting sides of his personality: "Florestan"—representing his more assertive, risk-taking, and extroverted characteristics—and "Eusebius"—for his more dreamy, and poetic nature. These two "spirits" animated many of the piano works of this period.

Schumann believed all his compositions were a reflection of his life and his turbulent emotions. And no year was more turbulent than 1837. It was then that he and his wife-to-be, Clara Wieck, irrevocably pledged their love to each other. That September, while *Fantasiestücke* was in progress, Clara turned 18 and gave Schumann permission to bear a letter to her father, asking him to bless their engagement. But to their mutual distress, Friedrich Wieck responded to his suit with rage. For three more years, Clara and Robert were forced to battle his lawsuits before they were finally able to wed.

The individual pieces of *Fantasiestücke* embody the alternating states of anger, despair, and hope that were Schumann's lot during this time. Schumann meant each of them to be an entity unto itself that could be played alone or as part of the set. The titles are only suggestive. As Judith Chernaik writes in her splendid recent biography of Schumann: "With or without titles, they invite the imagination of the pianist and the listener to roam freely, responding to the

emotion expressed, the varying moods portrayed—passionate, wistful, dramatic, tender, humorous." Musically tied together by their use of related keys, their alternating pattern of Eusebius music followed by Florestan music—and occasionally the two conversing within a single piece—gives these eight pieces extraordinary variety. The pianist is called upon to show off his virtuoso muscles, but he must be a poet as well.

Maurice Ravel
Gaspard de la nuit

What is the most technically difficult piece in the standard repertoire for a pianist to play? Most musicians would choose "Scarbo." the third movement of Maurice Ravel's 1908 *Gaspard de la nuit*, a trio of programmatic piano pieces inspired by the macabre prose poems of the Frenchman Aloysius Bertrand, published posthumously in 1842. A contemporary of Edgar Allen Poe, Bertrand was essentially his French equivalent. In order to express Bertrand's strange words and images, Ravel—a Poe fan himself—explored a kaleidoscope of taxing figurations that don't fit easily into the fingers, augmented by extreme harmonies and difficult rhythmic play. But he also admitted that with "Scarbo" he was trying to create the ultimate test of pianistic virtuosity, one that would surpass the infamous *Islamay* by Mily Balakirev that had astounded French audiences a few decades earlier.

Derived from the Persian, the work's title, "Gaspard," means "the man in charge of the royal treasures"; "de la nuit" refers to night and darkness, the realm of all that is mysterious and frightening. In a preface to the poems, Bertrand identified Gaspard as the Devil himself. Ravel was given these poems by the Catalan pianist Ricardo Viñes, a close friend since their years at the Paris Conservatoire, and indeed it was Viñes who gave *Gaspard* its premiere in Paris on January 9, 1909. Today it is considered one of the greatest piano works of the 20th century.

The three nocturnal poems Ravel chose include the eerily beautiful "Ondine," the horrifying "The Gibet" at sunset, and "Scarbo," depicting the Devil as a shape-shifting gremlin who torments the insomniac. The least sinister of the poems, "Ondine" tells of a seductive water nymph who tries to lure her human victim to join her in her palace deep in the lake. The poem opens: "Listen! Listen, Do you know what you hear? / It is I, Ondine, spirit of the water, / who brushes these drops, / The water on the resonant panes of your windows, / lit by the gloomy rays of the moon." When the man protests he is already in love with a mortal woman and cannot join her: "Abashed and vexed, she dissolved into tears and laughter; / vanished in a scatter of rain—white streams across the dark night of my window."

The exquisite sound of water is the dominant feature of Ravel's music, with its ceaseless shimmer of very high, whispering arpeggios and measured tremolos. Beneath, Ondine's plaintive song is voiced in single notes. The overall affect is spellbinding.

"The Gibet" is "Ondine's" opposite. Quoting the poem's beginning and end: "What is it—this uneasy sound in the dusk? Is it the screech of the north wind, or the hanged one who utters a sigh on the forked gallows? … It is the bell that tolls from the walls of a city, under the horizon, and the corpse of the hanged one that is reddened by the setting sun." In the deep-flats key of E-flat minor and a very slow tempo, this is a masterful portrait of a grim and lonely scene, haunted by the constant tolling of a bell on B-flat—particularly disturbing because it occurs off the beat. Harsh open chords seem to rivet our attention on the unfortunate body hanging from the gallows.

Scariest of all—and not just for the pianist—is "Scarbo," in which we actually see a manifestation of the Devil. The poem opens: "I have heard him again and again and seen him too! Scarbo the gremlin. He comes in the dead of the night when

the moon glitters in the sky like a silver shield…. I have seen him drop from the ceiling, pirouette on one foot and roll across the floor like the spindle of a spinning wheel…." Scarbo is a creature of inhuman nervous energy, both playful and terrifying. And Ravel embodies him in music requiring virtually inhuman dexterity: leaping from bottom to top of the keyboard, volume ranging from ppp to FF, left and right hand in frequent conflict, and all at a feverish pace. There are also disconcerting silences as Scarbo changes to a different mode of attack. And when everything reaches total frenzy, "suddenly he is extinguished."

—Janet E. Bedell © 2025

Janet E. Bedell is a program annotator and feature writer who writes for Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Caramoor Festival of the Arts, and other musical organizations.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

American pianist **Evren Ozel** has established himself as a musician of "refined restraint" (*Third Coast Review*), combining fluent virtuosity with probing, thoughtful interpretations. Having performed extensively in the United States and abroad, Ozel is the recipient of a 2023 Avery Fisher Career Grant and a 2022 Salon de Virtuosi Career Grant, and is currently represented by Concert Artists Guild as an Ambassador Prize Winner of their 2021 Victor Elmaleh Competition.

Since his debut with the Minnesota Orchestra at age 11, Ozel has been a featured soloist with the Cleveland Orchestra, Jacksonville Symphony, and The Orchestra Now at Bard College, with conductors Jahja Ling, Ruth Reinhardt, Courtney Lewis, and Leon Botstein. This month, his first album of Mozart concertos with the ORF Radio Symphony of Vienna and conductor Howard Griffiths will be released on Alpha Classics.

Ozel's 2024–25 season highlights include solo recitals for La Jolla Music Society and Capital Region Classical. Previously, he has performed recitals for the Harvard Musical Association, Schubert Club, Chopin Society of Minnesota, and The Gilmore. Carrying a vast and varied recital repertoire, his 2023–24 season included a program ranging from Bach and Rameau to Ligeti, as well as a program of Beethoven's final three piano sonatas.

An esteemed chamber musician, Ozel performs alongside artists like David Finckel and Wu Han, Stella Chen, Zlatomir Fung, Paul Huang, and Peter Wiley. He spent four summers at the Marlboro Festival, and is currently a 2024–27 Bowers Program Artist for the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. His 2024–25 season includes a tour with Musicians from Marlboro, as well as CMS concerts at Alice Tully Hall.

Ozel resides in Boston, where he is currently a candidate in New England Conservatory's prestigious and highly exclusive Artist Diploma program, under the tutelage of Wha Kyung Byun. Other important mentors include Jonathan Biss, Imogen Cooper, Richard Goode, Andras Schiff, and Mitsuko Uchida.

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