Sunday, September 28, 2025, 3pm
Zellerbach Hall

Daniil Trifonov, *piano*

PROGRAM

Sergei TANEYEV (1856–1915) — Prelude and Fugue in G-sharp minor, Op. 29 (1910)
- Prelude, Andante
- Fugue, Allegro vivace e con fuoco

Sergei PROKOFIEV (1891–1953) — *Mimoletnosti* (*Visions Fugitives*), Op. 22 (1915–17)
- Lentamente
- Andante
- Allegretto
- Animato
- Molto giocoso
- Con eleganza
- Pittoresco (Arpa)
- Comodo
- Allegro tranquillo
- Ridicolosamente
- Con vivacità
- Assai moderato
- Allegretto
- Feroce
- Inquieto
- Dolente
- Poetico
- Con una dolce lentezza
- Presto agitatissimo e molto accentuato
- Lento irrealmente

Nikolai MYASKOVSKY (1881–1950) — Sonata No. 2 in F-sharp minor, Op. 13 (1912, rev. 1948)

INTERMISSION

Robert SCHUMANN (1810–1856) — Sonata No. 1 in F-sharp minor, Op. 11 (1833–35)
- Introduzione: Un poco adagio – Allegro vivace
- Aria
- Scherzo: Allegrissimo – Intermezzo: Lento
- Finale: Allegro, un poco maestoso

Sergei Taneyev
Prelude and Fugue in G-sharp minor, Op. 29

A brilliant pianist and an accomplished composer, Sergei Taneyev today is more famous for the major composers—among them, Rachmaninoff, Scriabin, and Nikolai Medtner—he trained as a revered composition teacher at the Moscow Conservatory. He was also a close colleague—and perhaps lover—of Tchaikovsky, who respected Taneyev's refined criticism of his music more highly than anyone else's. After Taneyev played the Moscow premiere of his First Piano Concerto, Tchaikovsky entrusted the premieres of his Piano Concerto No. 2 and his Piano Trio in A minor to him.

Unlike Tchaikovsky who favored spontaneity in composing his music, Taneyev believed in rigorously detailed preparation before launching a score. An intellectual who in his spare time studied mathematics, the sciences, and philosophy, his chief musical obsession was counterpoint. A master of this subject, he spent 20 years writing a two-volume treatise, *Moveable Counterpoint in the Strict Style*, which remains influential today.

Despite his own keyboard virtuosity, Taneyev preferred composing chamber music to piano music. Daniil Trifonov has chosen the one piano piece that remains firmly in the repertoire: the Prelude and Fugue in G-sharp minor, written in 1910. It was composed in memory of Taneyev's beloved nurse, Pelageya Vasil'evna Chizhova, who cared for him from childhood until her death. In two sections, it includes a gentle *cantabile* prelude followed by a tempestuous fugue at breakneck speed. Taneyev's grieving nostalgia for Chizhova is beautifully captured in the yearning appoggiatura leaps that permeate this tender piece, with graceful counterpoint adorning the melody. Marked *Allegro vivace e con fuoco*, the fugue confounds the pianist's fingers and our ears with its highly chromatic subject racing in sixteenth notes and sparked by staccato dotted-note leaps. A climactic *Maestoso* passage near the close turns those leaps into fiery javelins hurled above the ominous rumble of the bass. Bach would have been astounded!

Sergei Prokofiev
***Mimoletnosti* (*Visions Fugitives*), Op. 22**

The young Sergei Prokofiev was not known for the subtlety of his compositions or his playing. During his 10 years at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, he managed to annoy and even enrage nearly all his teachers. Bursting with arrogance, he was a radical young genius: a pianist of staggering technical prowess and a composer who marched to his own drummer. One critic's reaction to the 1912 premiere of his First Piano Concerto was: "If that is music, I really believe I prefer agriculture."

Composed over the course of the three war years 1915-1917, the 20 brief pieces of his *Visions Fugitives* were astonishingly different: rather than brutal and aggressive, they were mostly delicate, dreamlike, and able to deftly explore a mood or an emotion in one minute or less. One favorable critic exclaimed: "Prokofiev and tenderness—you don't believe it? You will see for yourself when this charming suite is published."

Prokofiev's new musical direction was inspired by reading poetry by the Russian symbolist poet Konstantin Balmont (1867–1942), whose verse he had already set in several songs. The composer gradually wrote these whimsical miniatures, often for friends, over these years as war-burdened Russia drifted toward revolution. The performing order of the complete set does not reflect the order in which they were written, but was chosen by the composer for maximum contrast and drama.

Balmont himself attended a private performance of the *Visions Fugitives* in 2017 and gave them their name. Fascinated, he wrote a poem on the spot, which Prokofiev

Opposite: Daniil Trifonov. Photo © Dario Acosta.

called "a magnificent improvisation." Balmont's verse includes these evocative lines expressing what he intuited about the composer's intentions:

> I do not know wisdom—leave that to others
> I only turn fugitive visions into verse.
> In each fugitive vision I see worlds,
> Filled with the fickle play of rainbows.

Here are some highlights. The first "vision" in the set (marked *Lentamente*) is clear and candid with its gentle melodic lines mostly tracing a diatonic path reminiscent of French impressionism. As is often the case within this work, it forms an expressive pair with the second piece (*Andante*), in which more dissonance and ornamentation are added; particularly effective are the right hand's tiny high notes dripping like glistening raindrops. Soft, enigmatic chords, marked *misterioso*, tie the two pieces together.

Prokofiev's familiar motoric rhythmic style dominates the fourth piece (*Animato*), a whirl of racing scales and hammering chords. It ends with a tick-tocking ostinato that will appear like a trademark in many future pieces. The writing for No. 7 (*Pittoresco (Arpa*) suggests a harp, and indeed this beautiful and most dreamlike piece was later scored for that instrument. Steady bass arpeggios provide an impassive foundation for the glittering broken chords of the right hand. It forms a pair with No. 8 (*Commodo*), with its serene melodies, free of dissonance. By contrast, the very energetic No. 10 (*Ridicolosamente*) reflects Prokofiev's dry sense of humor. Here, the left hand's stubborn ostinato cannot stop the antic flights of the right hand, though at the end the two hands change roles.

The second half of the work gravitates to darker images, some of them related to the onslaught of the Revolution. Written in 1917, No. 14 (*Feroce*) evokes that terrible time with its dissonant, ferociously hammered chords played fast and fortissimo (fff at the end). This piece harkens back to the brash student who loved to shock. Its expressive partner, No. 15 (*Inquieto*), is driven by an urgent, thundering left hand, which triggers a wild, dissonant race in the right hand; the left hand's ostinato grows louder and more insistent until its brutal end. This music seems to describe the boiling anger of the rioting Saint Petersburg crowds.

Continuing this revolutionary mood, No. 19 (*Presto agitatissimo*) is linked to Prokofiev's memory of a moment of personal terror. "The February Revolution found me in Petrograd [Saint Petersburg], hiding behind house corners when the shooting came too close." A relentless high-speed chase, it closes with the roar of guns. *Visions Fugitives* concludes most unusually with a quiet, dreamlike statement (*Lento irrealmente*), which seems to be searching for a key—or an answer to an unknown question.

Nikolai Myaskovsky
Sonata No. 2 in F-sharp minor, Op. 13

Honored by Shostakovich as "the most noble, the most modest of men," Nikolai Myaskovsky was once ranked with Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and Khachaturian as the greatest of Soviet composers. Creator of 27 symphonies, 13 string quartets, and nine piano sonatas, he was not only prolific but a master of the traditional genres of classical music. A man of unshakable integrity, he quietly devoted himself to his composing and his work as an influential teacher of composition at the Moscow Conservatory, where he guided a generation of Soviet composers, including Khachaturian and Kabalevsky.

Yet, despite his efforts not to annoy the Soviet authorities, Myaskovsky in 1947 was denounced, along with Shostakovich and Prokofiev, during Zhdanov's infamous purge of leading musicians, condemned as "formalists." Instantly, performances of his music were banned. Bravely, Myaskovsky refused to grovel and admit his "guilt." And

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by then seriously ill with cancer, he had no time to wait for a reprieve. He died before a rehabilitation of his reputation began, and his music has never recovered its former popularity. The advocacy of his substantial *oeuvre* by great artists like Daniil Trifonov is sorely needed.

Composers as diverse as Tchaikovsky and Scriabin influenced Myaskovsky's style, which changed little over the course of his career. He gravitated toward music's darker colors and moods, as we'll hear in his Second Sonata, composed in 1912 shortly after his graduation from the Saint Petersburg Conservatory (where he became a close, life-long friend of his classmate Prokofiev). In one continuous movement, it evolves through many contrasting sections, constantly haunted by the famous "Dies Irae" ("Day of Wrath," referring to the biblical Last Judgment) chant theme loved by many composers (especially Russians). Trifonov will perform Myaskovsky's 1948 revision of the Second Sonata.

The sonata opens with a very brief slow introduction of downward-drifting chords in rich chromatic harmonies. Then after a pause, the *Allegro affanato* ("breathless") section erupts with a whirl of fast triplets in the left hand under agitated, chromatically tormented chords in the right. This is the turbulent first theme, reminiscent of Scriabin. It eventually softens and slows into an airy, luminous intermezzo passage, which serves as a lyrical second theme.

But trouble is on the way: thick chords in the bass intone the "Dies Irae" chant, which is actually the sonata's most dominant theme. The livelier following section plays freely with this theme, which sometimes rumbles in the bass, other times sparkles in the right hand. Myaskovsky carries it to a bold climax, marked "Festivamente."

The first "breathless" theme recapitulates with its lyrical interlude in a new, more expansive treatment. And the "Dies Irae" theme returns as well, then introduces a dancing fugal section in which fragments of the chant are developed. Gradually, the "Dies Irae" begins to assert itself more and more until the powerful, but carefully calibrated close.

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Robert Schumann
Sonata No. 1 in F-sharp minor, Op. 11

Robert Schumann's piano music is most prized today for his relatively short character pieces such as *Papillons*, *Carnaval,* and *Kreisleriana*; their vivid colors and programmatic elements were ideal expressions of his passionate love of literature, especially the early Romantics Jean Paul Richter and E.T.A. Hoffmann. Mostly written early in his career, they are loved by pianists and audiences alike for their imaginative flair and emotional power.

Much less often heard are Schumann's three keyboard sonatas, also written in the 1830s, in which he tackled the more abstract and formally governed genre glorified by Beethoven. As Eric Frederick Jensen writes: "Because of its eloquent tradition, Schumann's perception of the piano sonata was an exalted one (he characterized it as belonging to a 'a higher genre'). He was eager to become part of that tradition, but in writing sonatas he occasionally seemed preoccupied with the grand gesture, as if his usual style and approach would be inadequate."

Although scholar Charles Rosen called Schumann's First Sonata in F-sharp minor, Op. 11, composed between 1833 and 1835, "the finest and most personal of his sonatas," he also explains why pianists hesitate to tackle it. "The technical demands, such as rapid scalar passages, dense chordal textures, and intricate polyrhythms, require a performer with both virtuosic skill and a deep understanding of Schumann's idiosyncratic style, limiting its frequent inclusion in recital programs."

The year 1835, when most of this sonata was written, was very significant for Schumann. Already an admirer of Clara Wieck's gifts as a prodigy pianist, he now discovered that the talented child had blossomed into a lovely young woman of 15, and he fell madly in love with her. Fortunately, Clara returned his love. But their opportunities to be together were thwarted by her busy concert schedule and especially by her grim guardian of a father, Friedrich Wieck, who did not welcome Schumann as a suitor. Enduring long separations from Clara while working on the sonata, he later described it as "one long cry from the heart to you."

Completing the sonata in August of that year, Schumann did not include his name on the finished score. Instead, he gave it the expanded title "Pianoforte Sonata, dedicated to Clara by Florestan and Eusebius." Inspired by Jean Paul's writings, Florestan and Eusebius were alter-egos Schumann invented for himself and emphasized in his character pieces. Florestan represented his bold, extroverted, even heroic side; Eusebius was his quieter, more introspective, and lyrical persona.

Believing the sonata's traditional forms had worn out their usefulness, Schumann created new ones for his First Sonata, especially for its first movement and finale. In the opening movement, the most striking novelty is the lengthy *Introduzione: Un poco adagio,* which introduces us to the themes that not only will appear in this movement but recur in subsequent ones. Schumann was fond of pithy motto motives he could develop and transform throughout a work. Over rolling arpeggios, he immediately presents his unifying motto: an ascending and descending idea launched by dotted rhythms. Its figure of a descending fifth interval will be a major element in all four movements. It is soon joined by an ascending, yearning melody, which will become the principle theme of the second movement. Thus, this section serves an introductory role for the entire sonata. Schumann's brooding music gradually crescendos and accelerates, leaving us on the doorstep of the main *Allegro vivace* section.

This vigorous, highly rhythmic music is built on a fandango melody Schumann wrote in 1832. The exposition also includes a contrasting second theme, romantic and

soaring and surely inspired by Schumann's love for Clara. The composer concocts a lengthy development section on the fandango theme, which sometimes can grow tedious because of a lack of dramatic variety. A brief reminiscence of the *Introduzione's* falling-fifth idea appears along the way. There is really no recapitulation, and the music eventually simply dies away.

In A major, the slow movement relates more to Schumann's narrative gifts. Its tender melody, previewed in the first movement, is derived from the song "An Anna," which Schumann wrote when he was 18. Presented over a pedal on the fifth interval, it also incorporates the falling-fifths motto and its dotted rhythm throughout its nostalgic flow. Reviewing this sonata for a Parisian musical journal, Franz Liszt praised this movement as "a song of great passion, expressed with fullness and calm."

Marked *Allegrissimo*, the third movement is a stunning example of Schumann's love for intricate rhythmic play, as well as his sense of humor. Loud, staccato stresses on different beats of the measure throw everything deliciously askew. Schumann mixes up the traditional scherzo-and-trio form by including two contrasting trio sections. The shorter first one lurches tipsily off the beat. The second is the "Intermezzo": a fabulous sendup of a showboating virtuoso playing a heavy-handed polonaise that Schumann marked *Alla burla, ma pomposo* ("Like a jest, but pompous").

The dense orchestral-sounding finale is formally Schumann's most inventive. It is also the most technically challenging movement in a work already packed with difficulties. Indeed, the finale's original version, which we will not hear, was an even more severe test, but the composer replaced it in 1838, after Clara herself told him it was too difficult to play. Although some scholars call it a rondo, this movement is really a form of Schumann's own devising. Three expansive contrasting-theme groups in three different keys roll out, the first a rhythmically driving theme intensified by its duple melody being shoved into ¾ time. Then these three groups return in new keys and more elaborate variants. The sonata is wrapped up by a thrilling coda in F-sharp major, which increases the speed and, cadenza-like, raises the pianist's virtuosity to its zenith.

—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

Grammy Award-winning pianist **Daniil Trifonov** (dan-EEL TREE-fon-ov) is a solo artist, champion of the concerto repertoire, chamber and vocal collaborator, and composer. Combining consummate technique with rare sensitivity and depth, his performances are a perpetual source of wonder to audiences and critics alike. He won the 2018 Grammy Award for Best Instrumental Solo Album with *Transcendental*, the Liszt collection that marked his third title as an exclusive Deutsche Grammophon artist.

Trifonov's 2025–26 season includes three performances at Carnegie Hall. He first reunites with German baritone Matthias Goerne for a performance of Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin*, as the culmination of their North American tour of Schubert's great song cycles that also sees them perform *Schwanengesang* in Quebec City and Boston, and *Winterreise* in Toronto, Washington (DC), and Dallas. After the North American performances, Trifonov and Goerne tour the cycles to multiple

Opposite: Daniil Trifonov. Photo © Dario Acosta.

German and Austrian cities, as well as to Paris in the spring. In November, Trifonov returns to Carnegie Hall in the company of Cristian Măcelaru and the Orchestre National de France for two great French piano concertos: Saint-Saëns' Second and Ravel's jazz-inflected Piano Concerto in G. Finally, in December, Trifonov's third Carnegie Hall appearance of the season is a mainstage solo recital, with the same program performed throughout the season in both the US and Europe. Other season highlights for Trifonov include a short duo tour in Sweden and Austria with violinist Nikolaj Szeps-Znaider; a reprise of Brahms' Second Piano Concerto with the Cleveland Orchestra and music director Franz Welser-Möst, as well as three performances of the same work with the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia under the baton of Daniel Harding; and Beethoven's Second Piano Concerto with both the Cincinnati Symphony led by Măcelaru and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra—where Trifonov served as 2024–25 artist in residence—led by Esa-Pekka Salonen.

Trifonov's Deutsche Grammophon discography includes 2024's *My American Story: North*, which received the UK's Presto Music Award; the Grammy-nominated live recording of his Carnegie recital debut; *Chopin Evocations*; *Silver Age*, for which he received Opus Klassik's Instrumentalist of the Year/Piano award; the bestselling, Grammy-nominated double album *Bach: The Art of Life*; and three volumes of Rachmaninoff works with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Yannick Nézet-Séguin, of which two received Grammy nominations and the third was named *BBC Music*'s 2019 Concerto Recording of the Year. *Gramophone*'s 2016 Artist of the Year and *Musical America*'s 2019 Artist of the Year, Trifonov was made a "Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres" by the French government in 2021.

During the 2010–11 season, Trifonov won medals at three of the music world's most prestigious competitions: Third Prize at Warsaw's Chopin Competition, First Prize at Tel Aviv's Rubinstein Competition, and both First Prize and Grand Prix at Moscow's Tchaikovsky Competition. He studied with Sergei Babayan at the Cleveland Institute of Music.

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