



WASHINGTON
PERFORMING ARTS

2024/25 SEASON



NIKOLAI LUGANSKY

Piano

Sunday, February 9, 2025 / 2:00 p.m.

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Terrace Theater



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PROGRAM

*This performance is approximately 2 hours,
including a 15-minute intermission.*

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

(1809-1847)

Selections from *Songs without Words*

No. 1 in E Major, op. 19

No. 6 in A-flat Major, op. 38

No. 4 in C Major "Spinnenlied," op. 67

No. 6 in E Major, "Lullaby," op. 67

No. 2 in F-sharp Minor, op. 67

No. 4 in D Major, op. 85

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770-1827)

Piano Sonata in D Minor, Opus 31, No. 2

"Tempest"

Largo; Allegro

Adagio

Allegretto

INTERMISSION

RICHARD WAGNER

(1813-1883)

Selections from *Die Götterdämmerung*

Brünnhilde and Siegfried's Love Duet

(Prologue)

Siegfried's Rhine Journey (Prologue)

Siegfried's Funeral March (Act III)

Finale: Brünnhilde's Immolation (Act III)

RICHARD WAGNER

(1813-1883)

Isoldens Liebestod: Schlußszene aus

Tristan und Isolde, S.447

MEET THE ARTIST



Photo by Marco Borggreve

NIKOLAI LUGANSKY, piano

Pianist Nikolai Lugansky is renowned for his interpretations of Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev, Chopin and Debussy. He has received numerous awards for recordings and artistic merit. Described by *Gramophone* as “the most trailblazing and meteoric performer of all,” he is a pianist of extraordinary depth and versatility.

In the 2024/25 season, he has been invited by the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo (Dutoit), the NDR Radiophilharmonie Hannover (Kochanovsky), the Brussels Philharmonic (Ono), the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France

(Peltokovsky), the Berlin Konzerthaus Orchester (Valčuha), the Philharmonia London (Rouvali), at St. Louis Symphony Orchestra (Denève). He continues touring his Wagner transcriptions in recitals at the Teatro alla Scala, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, the Wiener Konzerthaus, the Wigmore Hall, the Zurich Tonhalle, the Piano à Lyon, the Gulbenkian, among many others. He will return to Korea with a recital tour in Ulsan, Daegu and Seoul, as well South America in Bogotá and with the Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo, and to the U.S. with a recital tour in various cities, including Aspen, Washington D.C., and Kansas City.

Lugansky has an exclusive contract with Harmonia Mundi. His recordings have received several awards including the Diapason d’Or, Choc de l’Année, and Gramophone Editor’s Choice. His latest recording “Richard Wagner” was released in March 2024.

PROGRAM NOTES

Selections from *Songs without Words*

Felix Mendelssohn

Born February 3, 1809, Hamburg

Died November 4, 1847, Leipzig

Between 1830 and 1845 Mendelssohn composed a number of short pieces for piano that he called *Lieder ohne Worte* ("Songs without Words"). That title makes clear that the impulse in this music is fundamentally lyric. A singing melody, usually in the right hand, is supported by a relatively straightforward accompaniment in the left, and many of these pieces are easy enough to suggest that Mendelssohn intended them for the growing number of amateur pianists in the first part of the nineteenth century. But many of them are frankly virtuosic, so difficult that they remain beyond the reach of all but the most talented amateur pianists. All these pieces show Mendelssohn's virtues—appealing melodies, a nice sense of form, rhythmic vitality, and polished writing for the piano—and they became vastly popular, particularly in England. On one of his visits to London, Mendelssohn played several of the *Songs without Words* for Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

Mendelssohn collected and published these pieces in groups of six; six sets appeared during his lifetime and two more posthumously. The form of these brief pieces is generally straightforward: the melody is presented immediately, the center section sees a brief development of this material, and Mendelssohn usually rounds matters off with a restatement of the melody at the close.

Mendelssohn composed the *Lieder* in E Major, Opus 19, No. 1 around 1829 when he was only 20. He marks it *Andante con moto*, and a rippling accompaniment in the left hand continues virtually throughout. Above this murmuring sound, Mendelssohn sets a flowing, gentle melody that he stresses should be *cantabile*, and this evolves gracefully as the piece makes its way to the quiet close.

Mendelssohn himself gave the *Andante con moto* in A-flat Major (Opus 38,

No. 6) the nickname “Duetto.” Composed in 1836, this music offers a graceful melodic line that seems to be performed by two different pianists, or perhaps two different singers. This “duet” has the performers seeming to converse—or respond—to each other, and in the score Mendelssohn specifies that a performer must take care to project both voices clearly.

The next three Lieder are from Mendelssohn’s Opus 67, published in 1845, the year that also saw the premiere of his famous Violin Concerto. No. 4 is the famous Spinnerlied, or “Spinning Song”: Presto sixteenth-notes offer the sound of the spinning wheel, while the lighthearted song skips along above that quiet rush. No. 6 is a waltz in 3/8, marked Allegretto non troppo; after all its dancing energy, it comes to a very gentle conclusion. No. 2, marked Allegro leggiero, is in the unusual meter 12/16; it dances gracefully along its staccato writing.

Mendelssohn marks Opus 85, No. 4 Andante sostenuto and combines a heartfelt melody in the right hand with a quietly arpeggiated accompaniment in the left.

Piano Sonata in D Minor, op. 31, no. 2 “Tempest”

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born December 16, 1770, Bonn

Died March 26, 1827, Vienna

Beethoven liked to escape from hot Vienna to spend his summers in the countryside, and in April 1802 he moved to Heiligenstadt. Now a suburb of Vienna, Heiligenstadt was then a rural village, offering sunshine, streams and meadows, and a view of distant mountains. The summer proved extremely productive for the 31-year-old composer: he completed the three violin sonatas of his Opus 30, the three piano sonatas of Opus 31, his Second Symphony, and several other works for piano. Yet for all its productiveness, this was an agonizing summer for Beethoven—he finally had to face the fact that his hearing problems would eventually mean total deafness. In an extraordinary letter to his two brothers that fall before he returned to Vienna—never sent and perhaps written to himself—Beethoven confessed that he had considered suicide that summer.

But Beethoven was too great an artist to let the events of his own life dictate or stain his art, and biographers have looked in vain for evidence of internal turmoil in the music he produced that summer. The second sonata

of Beethoven's Opus 31 has been much admired, for it has seemed the most "advanced" of the set in its use of tonality, its conception of theme, and its minor-key urgency. It is the only one of the set with a nickname (it is sometimes referred to as the "Tempest") and this nickname originated—more or less—with the composer: when asked about the significance of this sonata, Beethoven is reported to have replied, "Read *The Tempest!*" That has proven a cryptic remark and perhaps not one that sheds useful light on our understanding of this music, for the sonata seems to have no relation at all to Shakespeare's play.

What it does have, though, is unusual dramatic urgency in its outer movements. The first movement has occasioned much comment because it is hard to make out exactly what constitutes the main theme: Beethoven alternates between an arpeggiated Largo and a breathless Allegro, and this starting-and-stopping quality, with its sharp contrasts of tempo and dynamic, marks the entire first movement. Beethoven drives the movement to its conclusion with a terse and abrupt section marked Allegro, and the quiet close seems to have resolved none of its tensions. The Adagio, in B-flat major, is characterized by unusual nobility, intensified by quiet, drum-like figures deep in the left hand. The second subject, marked *dolce*, rocks along innocently on dotted rhythms, but it is the quiet strength of the opening idea that haunts the memory. The sonata-form finale, marked Allegretto, has been called a perpetual-motion movement, and it is in constant motion, with dark, dramatic washes of sound pressing forward throughout. Beethoven's experiments with what constitutes a theme continue here, and the perpetual-motion quality of this movement comes from constantly overlapping arpeggios—this is music made more of texture than of distinctive musical ideas. There are moments of light along the way, but the tone remains predominantly dark, and this most impressive sonata—its energy spent—trails off into sudden silence.

Selections from *Die Götterdämmerung* (arr. Lugansky)

Richard Wagner

Born May 22, 1813, Leipzig

Died February 13, 1883, Venice

Die Götterdämmerung (composed 1869-74) is the final opera of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and it brings that cycle to its catastrophic conclusion. On this program, Nikolai Lugansky offers his own piano arrangements of four

of the most famous excerpts from that opera. *Die Götterdämmerung* opens with a dark and lengthy Prologue that foretells disaster (and which is not part of these arrangements), but the action itself begins in sunlight and strength, as Siegfried and Brünnhilde emerge from the cave where they have spent the night. In Brünnhilde and Siegfried's Love Duet he gives her the ring, and she gives him her horse Grane and sends him off in search of new adventures and new heroic deeds; he descends to the Rhine, his horn call resounding in the distance, as she waves to him from atop her rocky crag. Siegfried's Rhine Journey opens with the dark Fate motif and soon we hear the graceful theme associated with Brünnhilde and the powerful music of Siegfried, and from there we move to the Rhine journey itself. This is magnificent music, built on a majestic variant of the Siegfried motif, as well as the motifs of Fire, the Rhine, and the Rhinemaidens, and it glows with the strength and resolve of the young hero.

We next skip far ahead in the opera. Hagen has stabbed Siegfried in the back with a spear, killing him, and Siegfried's Funeral Music accompanies the procession that bears his body away. In the opera, two quiet timpani strokes open the Funeral Music, and the music grows quickly to a massive restatement of those two strokes (in the score Wagner marks this *Feierlich*: "solemnly"). Siegfried's body is then borne through the moonlight and mists back to the hall of the Gibichungs. Wagner builds this processional music on music that has marked Siegfried's life, particularly the motifs of Fate, the Sword, and of Siegfried himself.

The final excerpt, Brünnhilde's Immolation, comes from end of the opera. Brünnhilde comes upon the scene, learns of Siegfried's death, and forgives his betrayal of her. She throws the ring into the Rhine, orders a funeral pyre ignited for Siegfried's funeral, and rides Grane into those flames, joining Siegfried in death. The heavens open to reveal Valhalla itself in flames, and the Rhine overflows its banks, destroying the rule of the gods and cleansing the way for the rise of man.

Isoldens Liebestod: Schlußzene aus *Tristan und Isolde*, S.447

Richard Wagner

Franz Liszt

Born October 22, 1811, Raiding

Died July 31, 1886, Bayreuth

Liszt and Wagner shared a long and—at times—difficult relationship. During his years as music director in Weimar, Liszt championed Wagner's music and led a number of his operas, including the premiere of *Lohengrin*. But in 1865 Liszt's daughter Cosima abandoned her husband Hans von Bülow, ran off with Wagner, and eventually married him. Liszt was furious with both Cosima and Wagner and remained estranged from them until a reconciliation was worked out in 1872.

If Liszt could disapprove of Wagner's actions, he nevertheless admired his music, and he made piano transcriptions of music from eleven of Wagner's operas. Liszt wrote a number of what have been called paraphrases or reminiscences of music from the operas of many composers—often these were completely original compositions in which the opera music served only as the starting point for Liszt's own virtuosity. But Liszt's transcriptions of excerpts from Wagner's operas were much more respectful—they were almost always straightforward and literal. Liszt's intentions here were generous: he liked this music and felt that he could make it better known by creating piano versions of works that would be heard only rarely in their original form.

Liszt made his transcription of Isoldens Liebestod in 1867, only two years after the premiere of *Tristan und Isolde* (and during his period of estrangement from Wagner and Cosima). Isolde's final scene is of course best-known as the Liebestod (or "love-death"). At the end of the opera, as Tristan lies dead before her, Isolde sings her farewell to both Tristan and to life. This music has become familiar as one of the most famous orchestral excerpts from Wagner's operas: as Isolde finds ecstatic fulfillment in death, Wagner surrounds her with a shimmering, glowing orchestral sound. Liszt's transcription of this scene is remarkable for its fidelity to Wagner's music and for his subtle approach to the sonority of the piano.

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Photo by Nikita Lartionov



SEONG-JIN CHO, piano

Tuesday, February 18, 2025 / 7:00 p.m.

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Photo by Kira Caldwell



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Ruth Bader Ginsburg Memorial Recital

Sunday, March 9, 2025 / 7:30 p.m.

This unique concert program presented by Grammy-winning soprano Karen Slack celebrates the lives and legacies of seven African queens, weaving historical narrative through new works by acclaimed composers. This performance in the Terrace Theater also features Kevin Miller on piano.

Special thanks: National Endowment for the Arts; Kerrien Suarez; Mr. and Mrs. Michael Sonnenreich; and donors to the Ruth Bader Ginsburg Memorial Award and Recital Fund.

Photo by Ralph Lauger



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The **Ruth Bader Ginsburg Memorial Fund** was established in 2021 to honor the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's life, legacy, and passion for music with an annual award to a distinguished artist that includes the opportunity to choose a musical talent deserving of wider recognition to be presented in a Washington Performing Arts recital in Justice Ginsburg's memory.

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As of March 31, 2024

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Legacy Society members appreciate the vital role that performing arts play in the community, as well as in their own lives. By remembering Washington Performing Arts in their will or estate plans, members enhance our annual fund, endowment, or donor-designated programs and help make it possible for the next generations to enjoy the same quality and diversity of presentations both on stages and in our schools and community.

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As of January 15, 2025

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