

Stella Chen



Juilliard



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The Juilliard School
presents

Gerschen Cohen Violin Recital

Stella Chen, Violin
Henry Kramer, Piano

Wednesday, November 10, 2021, 7:30pm
Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall

BÉLA BARTÓK
(1881-1945)

Sonata for Violin Solo, Sz. 117 (1944)
Tempo di ciaccona
Fuga. Risoluto, non troppo vivo
Melodia. Adagio
Presto

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797-1828)

Ständchen, D. 889 (1826, arr. Elman)

SCHUBERT

Sei mir gegrüßt, D. 741 (1822, arr. Chen)

ELEANOR ALBERGA
(b. 1949)

No-Man's-Land Lullaby (1996)

RICHARD STRAUSS
(1864-1949)

Violin Sonata in E-flat Major, Op. 18 (1888)
Allegro, ma non troppo
Improvisation: Andante cantabile
Finale: Andante—Allegro

Approximate performance time: 1 hour and 15 minutes, without an intermission

The Gerschen Cohen Violin Recital is made possible by a generous bequest from the Harvey M. Cohen Revocable Living Trust.

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In a world irreversibly shaken by a global pandemic, music and the opportunity to share it with others have become that much more precious to me. Tonight's program is composed of works that stretch the imagination, test the limits of possibility, and showcase the most beautiful human quality, vulnerability.

Sonata for Violin Solo, Sz. 117 BÉLA BARTÓK

Béla Bartók

Born:

March 25, 1881, in
Sânnicolau Mare,
Romania

Died:

September 26, 1945,
in New York City

Bartók's sonata for solo violin is widely considered the greatest contribution to the genre since Bach's sonatas and partitas. The piece was written on a commission from his friend superstar violinist Yehudi Menuhin, who gave its premiere here at Carnegie Hall in November 1944. Bartók had been ailing for many years and was finally diagnosed with leukemia in summer 1943. He spent most of the last year of his life between treatment in North Carolina and his various places of residences in New York, including 309 West 57th Street, where one can find a plaque and a bust of Bartók, mere steps from where we are tonight. Menuhin greatly admired Bartók's music and offered him \$500 to write a work for solo violin—little did he know that this gesture would give rise to the creation of one of Bartók's masterpieces.

Rarely programmed because of its extreme difficulty, the sonata combines elements of traditional form with innovative harmonic language and Bartók's unmistakable style. The work is a beautiful marriage of the past and the future, sharing unmistakable similarities with Bach's G Minor sonata, as evidenced by the titles of the movements. The first movement is a folksy, tempestuous, wild *Tempo di ciaccona*, while the second is a fugue that starts with a deceivingly simple and declamatory subject that quickly turns into a whirlwind of colors and emotions as reappearances of the subject are introduced, heightened by technical feats such as the Bartók snap pizzicati, double, triple, and quadruple stop chords, tremolo, harmonics, and more.

The third movement is a hauntingly beautiful *Melodia*, and the last is a *Presto* that features Bartók's usage of microtones. The movement opens with almost a minute of quiet, almost menacing murmuring and buzzing, featuring quarter tones and microtones, which had appeared in his music before but not to the extent that they do here.

Upon seeing the score for the first time in March 1944, Menuhin found himself “shaken ... it seemed almost unplayable.” In fact, one can find in the archives of Carnegie Hall that the program for Menuhin’s November 1944 recital included Bartók’s rhapsodies rather than the solo sonata. Despite his initial misgivings, Menuhin came to love the piece. “Over the years, the music has come to speak to me, and I believe all of us, on the deepest spiritual terms”, he said, deeming it “one of the most dramatic and fulfilling works I know,” expressing regret that Bartók was unable to hear him play it when he felt he had come to a finished interpretation. Indeed, the solo sonata is a treasure trove and there is more to be discovered with every performance.

Ständchen, D. 889
Sei mir gegrüßt, D. 741
FRANZ SCHUBERT

My love of Schubert began with my first encounter with his cello quintet, perhaps the most moving piece of chamber music of all time, for good reason. No composer conceives of more beautiful melodies, in part due to Schubert’s extraordinary ability to portray vulnerability in his writing. His music seems to teeter precariously at the brink of life and death, devastatingly exposed and fragile, almost otherworldly. Today, you will hear arrangements of two lieder: “Ständchen” from *Schwanengesang*, one of Schubert’s most famous songs, and “Sei mir gegrüßt,” one of his most obscure. Schubert transformed his own “Sei mir gegrüßt” into the theme of a set of variations in his C Major Fantasie for violin and piano, a piece I have developed a lifelong love affair with after playing it at the Queen Elisabeth Competition and choosing it as the subject of my doctoral dissertation. Almost unfathomably, the fantasie was met with a disastrous critical reception for more than a century after its premiere, one of the chief complaints being Schubert’s vulgarization of his own song in the theme and variations. Today, Henry and I present our arrangement of “Sei mir gegrußt” in a version closer to his original song than the version in the fantasie, not to mention Mischa Elman’s famous arrangement.

Franz Schubert

Born:

January 31, 1797,
in Vienna

Died:

November 19, 1828,
in Vienna

No-Man's-Land Lullaby ELEANOR ALBERGA

Eleanor Alberg

Born:

September 30, 1949,
in Kingston, Jamaica

Jamaican-British composer Eleanor Alberg's *No-Man's-Land Lullaby* is a beautiful yet terrifying work inspired by a melody and by Paul Fussell's book *The Great War and Modern Memory*, a dissection and portrayal of World War I and life on the front lines.

The composer writes:

Setting about writing a new work for violin and piano in summer 1996, I had planned a somewhat lightweight and predominately upbeat piece. However, I was to receive visitations that ensured that the piece that emerged as *No-Man's-Land Lullaby* has neither of these qualities. Indeed, for me the work became a kind of acknowledgement of my European heritage and a realization that two world wars are part of my history also.

Visiting parts of central Europe that summer, I was struck by the almost unreal beauty of the landscapes; yet I received a heavy sadness in the atmosphere that took me back to the events of half a century ago, some of which had been played out against this very scenery. At the same time I was visited by a melody. It arrived unbidden and would not leave me alone. It seemed, however, to offer comfort.

It was the imagery of the First World War that finally brought these things together, especially the image of men dying slowly and uncomforted in a place called No-Man's-Land. I am especially indebted to Paul Fussell's book *The Great War and Modern Memory* for laying out so clearly the life of soldiers in the trenches. The piece is cast in three sections and is entirely based on the melody that emerges most identifiably toward the end.

The work starts with a gentle quality, a semblance of peacefulness as we hear a lullaby in fragments, accompanied by celestial chords in the piano. It is soon apparent that all is not well, and there are episodes of fear, terror, anticipation, close encounters, battle, and abandonment. At the end of the piece, we hear the most complete version of the lullaby, yet there is little sense of solace. I discovered this piece during the quarantine and felt spiritually connected to it. It puts mortality and the fragility of existence at the forefront of attention in a painfully exquisite light.

Alberg wrote this piece for her husband, violinist Thomas Bowes, and they performed it in this very hall in 2000.

Violin Sonata in E-flat Major, Op. 18

RICHARD STRAUSS

We end the evening with Strauss' violin sonata, which he wrote at the tender age of 23. Perhaps best known for his operas and tone poems, Strauss displays his most gloriously romantic style in one of his only chamber works and flaunts a blatant disregard for the limited instrumental forces of the violin/piano sonata. The music is rich with drama and amorous emotion, perhaps prompted by Strauss' falling in love with the soprano Pauline de Ahna, who would later become his wife. Though the violin sonata is an early work, Strauss clearly had a firm grasp on the capabilities of the piano and the violin, comfortably demanding virtuosity at the edge of possibility. The sonata at times is more reminiscent of a symphony than simply a violin/piano work.

The first movement opens with an outburst, almost fanfare-like, from the piano, which the violin quickly joins. Each melody is more heartfelt, more passionate than the last—the performers and listeners are hardly given a chance to breathe as wave after wave of emotion surges. One idea is still fading when the next joins in. The second movement, marked *Improvisation*, is one of the gems of the repertoire. Unusually meditative for most of the movement, the tranquility and subdued beauty give the impression that the performers are improvising on stage despite very detailed markings by Strauss. It goes straight into the third movement via a quiet, yet dramatic, introduction by the piano. The last movement is an explosion of heroism, grandeur, and virtuosity. Although we do not think of Strauss as a prodigy—in fact, he liked to call himself a second tier composer—this sonata, a well-loved staple of the violin literature, is a great escape into the romantic and heroic world of a young person in love.

Richard Strauss

Born:
June 11, 1864,
in Munich

Died:
September 8, 1949,
in Garmisch-
Partenkirchen,
Germany

About the Artists



Stella Chen

American violinist Stella Chen (DMA '21, violin) garnered worldwide attention with her first prize win at the 2019 Queen Elisabeth International Violin Competition, followed by the Avery Fisher Career Grant and Lincoln Center Emerging Artist Award, both last year. After debuts with the Chicago Symphony and Chamber Orchestra of Europe this past summer, Chen's auspicious 2021-22 season sees her recital debut at Carnegie Hall and recital, concerto, and chamber music appearances throughout Europe, Asia, and North America, including debuts with Kremerata Baltica, German State Philharmonic, and New Japan Philharmonic as well as appearances with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center both in New York and on tour. Chen's most recent engagements include appearances with the Belgian National Orchestra, Brussels Philharmonic, and the Luxembourg Philharmonic as well as at the Phillips Collection in Washington DC and the Salzburg Mozarteum, Ravinia, and Kronberg Academy festivals. She has appeared as a chamber musician at festivals including the Rockport, Ravinia, Sarasota, and Bridgehampton festivals as well as the Perlman Music Program and Music@Menlo. Collaborators include Matthew Lipman, Itzhak Perlman, Donald Weilerstein, and Robert Levin. She is the first recipient of the Robert Levin Award from Harvard University, top prizewinner of the Tibor Varga International Violin Competition, and youngest prizewinner of the Menuhin Competition. She completed her doctorate at Juilliard under the guidance of Li Lin, Donald Weilerstein, and Catherine Cho, and has also been mentored by Itzhak Perlman and Mihaela Martin. Chen plays on the 1700 ex-Petri Stradivarius, on generous loan from Ryuji Ueno and Rare Violins in Consortium, Artists & Benefactors Collaborative. She serves as a teaching assistant at Juilliard to her longtime mentor, Li Lin.

Henry Kramer

Henry Kramer (BM '09, MM '11, piano) is developing a reputation as a musician of rare sensitivity who combines stylish programming with insightful and exuberant interpretations. In 2016, he won second prize in the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels, and in 2019 he was awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Kramer began playing piano relatively late, at age 11, in his hometown of Cape Elizabeth, Maine, after being entranced by the sound of film melodies as a friend played the piano, inspiring him to teach himself on his family's old upright. His parents enrolled him in lessons shortly thereafter, and within weeks, he was playing Chopin and Mozart. Kramer has soloed in concertos with the Bilkent Symphony Orchestra, Belgian National Orchestra, Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestra, Indianapolis Symphony, and the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, collaborating with conductors such as Marin Alsop, Gerard Schwarz, Stéphane Denève, Jan Pascal Tortelier, and Hans Graf. Throughout the pandemic, he appeared on digital concert programs including a livestream on the Violin Channel and at the Rockport Music Festival, Walla Walla Chamber Music Festival, and Portland Chamber Music Festival as well as a performance of Schumann's piano concerto with the Columbus (Georgia) Symphony Orchestra. Kramer will make appearances in the 2021-22 season at BravoPiano! festival in Hilton Head, where he will premiere a work he commissioned by composer Hannah Lash; Rachmaninoff's third concerto with the Hartford Symphony; and chamber music with Camerata Pacifica. Since 2018, Kramer has held the L. Rexford Whiddon Distinguished Chair in Piano at the Schwob School of Music at Columbus State University in Georgia. He has also had positions at Smith College and the University of Missouri Kansas City Conservatory of Dance and Music. A Steinway artist, Kramer graduated from Juilliard, where he worked with Julian Martin and Robert McDonald, and received his DMA from the Yale School of Music under the guidance of Boris Berman. His teachers trace a pedagogical lineage back to Beethoven, Chopin and Busoni.



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