



WASHINGTON  
PERFORMING ARTS

2024/25 SEASON



*Hayes Piano Series*

# CLAYTON STEPHENSON

*Piano*

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Saturday, March 15, 2025 / 2:00 p.m.

*Kennedy Center Terrace Theater*



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# PROGRAM

*This performance is approximately 75 minutes,  
with a 15 minute intermission.*

## **FRANZ SCHUBERT**

[1797-1828]

## **Four Impromptus, D.899**

*No. 1 in C Minor*

*No. 2 in E-flat Major*

*No. 3 in G-flat Major*

*No. 4 in A-flat Major*

## **IGOR STRAVINSKY**

[1882-1971]

## **Three Movements from *Petrushka***

*Russian Dance*

*In Petrushka's Cell*

*The Shrovetide Fair*

## **INTERMISSION**

## **HAROLD ARLEN**

[1905-1986]

## **Over the Rainbow**

## **ARR. KEITH JARRETT**

## **GEORGE GERSHWIN**

[1898-1937]

## **Rhapsody in Blue**

## **Linger Longer!**

*Please join us for a post-concert discussion with the artist.*

*This event is an external rental presented in coordination with the Kennedy Center  
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# MEET THE ARTIST

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*Image courtesy of the artist.*

## **CLAYTON STEPHENSON, piano** **2022 Van Cliburn International** **Piano Competition finalist**

American pianist Clayton Stephenson's love for music is immediately apparent in his joyous charisma onstage, expressive power, and natural ease at the instrument.

Growing up in New York City, Clayton credits community programs with providing him musical inspiration and resources—from Third Street Music School, Morningside Music Bridge, and Boy's Club of New York

to Juilliard's Music Advancement and Pre-College programs to the Lang Lang International Music Foundation. Now, his commitment to making an impact through his music-making helps define his artistic vision.

Over the past two years, Clayton became the first Black finalist at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, was named a Gilmore Young Artist and an Avery Fisher Career Grant recipient, and graduated from the Harvard-New England Conservatory dual degree program. Performance highlights include debuts with the Houston Symphony and New York Philharmonic; Grand Teton and Tippet Rise festivals; and Fondation Louis Vuitton and Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall.

# PROGRAM NOTES

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## **FOUR IMPROMPTUS, D.899**

### **Franz Schubert**

Born January 30, 1797, Vienna

Died November 19, 1828, Vienna

Schubert wrote his eight *Impromptus* for piano during the summer and fall of 1827, probably in response to a request from his publisher for music intended for the growing number of amateur musicians with pianos in their homes: this music is melodic, attractive, and not so difficult as to take it out of the range of good amateur pianists. The term “impromptu” lacks precise musical meaning. It refers to a short instrumental piece, usually for piano, without specified form; the title suggests music that gives the impression of being improvised on the spot. But the notion that this music is improvised should be speedily discounted—Schubert’s impromptus are very carefully conceived music, set in a variety of forms that include variation, rondo, and minuet.

Some have hailed Schubert as the inventor of the impromptu and the composer who freed piano music from sonata form—they see these pieces as opening the way for the wealth of short piano pieces by composers such as Chopin, Schumann, Mendelssohn, and others. Too much has been made of this. A number of composers earlier than Schubert, including Mozart and Beethoven, had written short piano pieces not in sonata form, and several composers before Schubert had used the title *Impromptu*. Still, Schubert’s impromptus have become the most popular music published under this title—when someone says “impromptu,” we automatically think of Schubert.

This program offers the four impromptus Schubert wrote late in the summer of 1827, only a year before he died; the first two were published that same year, but the final two did not appear until twenty years later, in 1857. *No. 1 in C Minor* is marked by unusual focus and compression. It is built largely on the quiet unaccompanied melody heard at the very beginning and then developed in quite different ways. This impromptu has no clearly defined trio section, but Schubert introduces beautifully contrasting lyrical secondary material. Especially remarkable are the harmonic progressions on the final page, where the music works its graceful way to an almost silent close in C major. *No. 2 in E-flat Major* is built on long chains of triplets that flow brightly across the span of the keyboard; the center section is stormy and declarative,

and Schubert rounds the work off with a brief coda. In *No. 3 in G-flat Major* Schubert spins an extended, song-like melody over quietly rippling accompaniment; measure lengths are quite long here (eight quarters per measure) to match the breadth of his expansive and heartfelt melody. Throughout, one hears those effortless modulations that mark Schubert's mature music. *No. 4 in A-flat Major* is built on a wealth of thematic ideas. The opening theme falls into two parts: first comes a cascade of silvery sixteenth notes, followed by six chords; Schubert soon introduces a waltz tune in the left hand. In the central section he modulates into C-sharp minor and sets his theme over steadily pulsing chords before the music makes a smooth transition back to the opening material and concludes brightly.

### **THREE MOVEMENTS FROM PETRUSHKA**

#### **Igor Stravinsky**

Born June 17, 1882, Oranienbaum

Died April 6, 1971, New York City

In the early 1920s, Igor Stravinsky—one of the greatest orchestrators in history and creator of some of the finest music ever written for orchestra—began to write for solo piano. There were several reasons for this. In the aftermath of World War I, Stravinsky discovered that orchestras that could play huge and complex scores were rare (and expensive). And in any case Stravinsky did not wish to go on repeating himself by writing opulent ballets. But the real factor that attracted Stravinsky to the piano was that he was a pianist and so could supplement his uncertain income as a composer by appearing before the public as both creator and performer; this was especially important during the uncertain economic situation following the war.

While not a virtuoso pianist, Stravinsky was a capable one, and over the next few years came a series of works for piano that Stravinsky introduced and then played on tour. The impetus for all this piano music may well have come from Artur Schnabel, who asked the composer to prepare a version of the ballet *Petrushka* for solo piano, which Stravinsky did during the summer of 1921. Schnabel paid Stravinsky what the composer called “the generous sum of 5,000 francs” for this music, but Stravinsky made clear that his aim was not to cash in on the popularity of the ballet: “My intention was to give virtuoso pianists a piece of a certain breadth that would permit them to enhance their modern repertory and demonstrate a brilliant technique.” Stravinsky stressed that this was not a transcription for piano, nor was he trying to make the piano sound like an orchestra; rather, he was re-writing

orchestral music specifically as piano music.

The ballet *Petrushka*, with its haunting story of a pathetic puppet brought to life during a Russian fair, has become so popular that it easy to forget that this music had its beginning as a sort of piano concerto. Stravinsky said: "I had in my mind a distinct picture of a puppet, suddenly endowed with life, exasperating the patience of the orchestra with diabolical cascades of arpeggi." That puppet became Petrushka, "the immortal and unhappy hero of every fair in all countries," as the story of the ballet took shape, but the piano itself receded into the background of the ballet. Perhaps it was only natural that Stravinsky should remember the ballet's origins when Rubinstein made his request for a piano version.

Stravinsky drew the piano score from three of the ballet's four tableaux. The opening movement, *Russian Dance*, comes from the end of the first tableau: the aged magician has just touched his three puppets—Petrushka, the Ballerina, and the Moor—with his wand, and now the three leap to life and dance joyfully. Much of this music was given to the piano in the original ballet score, and here this dance makes a brilliant opening movement. The second movement, *In Petrushka's Cell*, is the ballet's second tableau, which introduces the hapless Petrushka trapped in his room and railing against fate and shows the entrance of the ballerina. The third movement, *The Shrovetide Fair*, incorporates most of the music from the ballet's final tableau, with its genre pictures of a St. Petersburg square at carnival time: various dances, the entrance of a peasant and his bear, gypsies, and so on. Here, however, Stravinsky excises the end of the ballet (where Petrushka is murdered and the tale ends enigmatically) and replaces it with the more abrupt ending that he wrote for concert performances of the ballet suite.

## **OVER THE RAINBOW**

**Harold Arlen**

Born February 5, 1905, Buffalo

Died April 23, 1986, New York City

**arr. Keith Jarrett**

Harold Arlen's *Somewhere over the Rainbow* is an indelible part of the American consciousness. The idea for this song came to Arlen while his wife was driving him to Grauman's Chinese in Hollywood. Arlen asked her to pull over and stop (in front of Schwab's Drug Store), and he quickly sketched out the music for a song that became a classic. In *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy—played by Judy Garland—sings this song while wondering if it might be

possible to find a place where there was no trouble. To a generation of Americans weary of the Depression and on the verge of World War II, the song spoke for the national consciousness.

There have been countless arrangements of *Over the Rainbow* over the last 85 years, and one of the most impressive is the version for solo piano by the pianist-composer Keith Jarrett. Jarrett maintains the shape and progress of Arlen's song, but to it he brings his own skill as an improviser, fleshing out textures and shaping rhythms in entirely original ways. Arlen's song has a power all its own, but Jarrett finds dimensions of his own in this five-minute arrangement. Jarrett has performed *Over the Rainbow* all around the world, and many of these performances are available on the internet. His classic performance, though, remains the one recorded at a live concert in Tokyo in 1984.

## **RHAPSODY IN BLUE**

**George Gershwin**

Born September 28, 1898, Brooklyn

Died July 11, 1937, Hollywood

If, as Dvořák suggested, American classical music would have to come from uniquely American roots, then *Rhapsody in Blue* is probably *the* piece of American classical music. In it, Gershwin combined the European idea of the piano concerto with American jazz and in the process created a piece of music that has become famous throughout the world: in addition to its many recordings by American orchestras, *Rhapsody in Blue* has been recorded by orchestras in England, Germany, Australia, and Russia. Gershwin was in fact aware that *Rhapsody in Blue* might become a kind of national piece; he said that during its composition he "heard it as a sort of musical kaleidoscope of America—of our vast melting pot, of our unduplicated national pep, of our blues, our metropolitan madness."

Classical purists argue that this is not a true piano concerto, and jazz purists argue that it is not true jazz. Of course both are right, but none of that matters—*Rhapsody in Blue* is a smashing success on its own terms. Gershwin was right to call this one-movement work a *rhapsody*, with that term's suggestion of a form much freer than the concerto. Soloist and orchestra are not so tightly integrated as in a concerto, and the *Rhapsody* tends to be episodic: the piano plays alone much of the time and then gives way to orchestral interludes; only rarely does Gershwin combine all his forces.

Gershwin wrote the *Rhapsody* at the invitation of band leader Paul Whiteman,



who set out to give a concert that would combine classical music with jazz, which was still considered slightly suspect—in the program book that concert was described as “An experiment in modern music.” Gershwin composed the *Rhapsody* very quickly in the fall of 1923, when he was only 25, and this music exists in a number of different forms. Gershwin originally composed it for two pianos—the solo part and the accompaniment—and Gershwin made a few suggestions in his manuscript about the instrumentation he would like. But Gershwin was uncertain about his ability to score, and so that job was given to Ferde Grofé, who would later compose the *Grand Canyon Suite*. At the premiere in Aeolian Hall in New York City on February 12, 1924, Gershwin was soloist with a seventeen-piece jazz ensemble led by Whiteman, but Grofé quickly re-scored the accompaniment for full orchestra, and that is the version usually performed today. On this program, the *Rhapsody* is heard in Gershwin’s own arrangement for solo piano.

The *Rhapsody* has one of the most famous beginnings in all of music: the trill that suddenly spirals upward in a seductive, almost sleazy glissando leads directly into the main theme, which will recur throughout. The various episodes are easy to follow, and the music requires little detailed comment. One should note, though, Gershwin’s ability to move so smoothly from episode to episode—these changes in tempo and mood seem almost effortless. Also noteworthy is the big E-major tune marked *Andantino moderato con espressione*; near the end Gershwin transforms this theme’s easy flow into a jazzy romp that concludes on a stridently-dissonant chord before the triumphant close, which brings back earlier themes in all their glory.

*Program notes by Eric Bromberger*

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 Jesse Goodman and  
 Nicole Lurie  
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 Matt Korn and Cindy Miller  
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<sup>†</sup> *deceased*



# THE RUTH BADER GINSBURG MEMORIAL FUND

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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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*† deceased*

*As of January 1, 2025*

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