

Society for the Performing Arts  
Presents  
**Nobuyuki Tsujii**  
**Thirteenth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition**  
**Nancy Lee and Perry R. Bass Gold Medalist**

Sunday, September 27 at 2 p.m.  
Worham Center's Cullen Theater

**The Program**

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| Beethoven | Piano Sonata No.14 C-sharp minor, Op.27, No. 2 “Moonlight”<br>Adagio sostenuto<br>Allegretto<br>Presto             |
| Beethoven | Piano Sonata No.23 in F minor, Op. 57 “Appassionata”<br>Allegro assai<br>Andante con moto<br>Allegro ma non troppo |

**Intermission**

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| Chopin | Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op.23   |
| Chopin | Four Mazurkas, Op.24  |
| Chopin | Nocturne in C-sharp minor, Op.27 No. 1                                    |
| Chopin | Nocturne in D-flat major, Op.27 No. 2                                     |
| Chopin | <i>Andante Spianato et Grande Polonaise brillante,</i><br>in E-Flat major |

**TWO PIANO SONATAS**  
**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)**

**Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Op. 27, No. 2 (“Moonlight”)**

It is almost more fascinating to read all the debunked theories about the naming of Beethoven's “Moonlight” Sonata than hearing a performance of the famed piano work. One theory links the sonata to Beethoven's celebrated love letter to his mysterious “Immortal Beloved” – alas, missing the mark by 11 years! There are more prosaic, though plausible theories that some music publisher had a blank title page with a picture of the moon on it. If the moon were involved, it would have to be shrouded by a

dense fog in the somber opening movement, lifting only in time to let the lovers cavort in a bright harvest moon during the central Scherzo. But its light would be obliterated during the violent thunderstorm that wracks the finale.

Pianist Edwin Fischer came up with an interesting theory about the origin of its dirge-like opening movement. Citing a Viennese manuscript in Beethoven's handwriting, he claimed the composer copied out some very similar triplet figures from the violin part during the opening scene of the Commendatore's assassination in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, transposing the passage to C-sharp minor, the key he would choose for his "Moonlight" Sonata. And about the time he composed the sonata, he allegedly sat and improvised at the piano alongside the corpse of an aristocrat who had befriended him. Is it not plausible to connect these three funereal phenomena, Fischer wondered?

While asserting that Beethoven had nothing to do with any of these "moonlight" fantasies, modern scholar William S. Newman reminds us that it was the second of two sonatas Beethoven labeled "quasi una fantasia," and the third successive sonata that does not begin with the expected sonata-form movement, common to his first 11 piano sonatas and the vast majority of sonatas by his immediate predecessors.

While Beethoven broke the mould with a more free-form work in the first "quasi una fantasia" sonata (Op. 27, No. 1), the "Moonlight" Sonata paired with it might be considered a sonata without an opening movement – merely a darkly brooding slow movement, a playful scherzo and a furious, climactic sonata-form finale. Whatever unanswered questions remain about this mysterious piece, its dramatic changes in mood guarantee it a special place in Beethoven's early pianistic legacy.

### **Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57 ("Appassionata")**

Beethoven's explosive "Appassionata" Sonata may well be his most popular, frequently performed work in that medium. It was begun the end of 1804 and completed the following year, right at the center of what is variously called the Middle Period or the Heroic Decade of Beethoven's compositional career. Its monumental companion pieces included the three Rasoumovsky string quartets, the Fourth Symphony and Fourth Piano Concerto, and the first version of the opera that became *Fidelio*.

The "Appassionata" also represented a climactic moment in Beethoven's composition of piano sonatas. After completing the work, he did not undertake another piano sonata until 1809, four years later.

The work is built upon standard forms: a sonata-allegro for the opening movement, a placid theme and four variations as the central slow movement, and another sonata movement with breathlessly paced coda in the finale. But the "Appassionata's" singular fame results from the high drama in its expressive content: sudden eruptions of tone throughout the brooding first movement; a marked self-containment of emotion in the quiet slow movement, followed by a headlong rush toward a dark, seemingly self-destructive ending in the final movement. An uncommon sense of tragedy hangs over the entire sonata.

## **PIANO WORKS**

### **FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)**

#### **Ballade No. 1 in G minor, Op. 23**

Whether expressed in poetry, song, or instrumental music, the ballade was an artistic medium perfectly suited to the temperament of the Romantic movement. Its recourse to an extended narrative, its sense of mystery, and its love of faraway places and bygone eras inspired many 19<sup>th</sup>-century creative artists. Above all, its structure was free and undetermined, imposing no formal constraints upon the poet or composer.

Chopin composed four ballades over a seven-year period, 1834-43, and all four of them blend lyricism and virtuosity in generous amounts. After an opening flourish, the G minor Ballade settles

into its opening theme, a sighing melody that is stated twice before coming to a close in a florid little cadenza.

A section of complex passagework leads to a stirring second theme, and the ballade continues with ever-more elaborate technical display and greater contrasts between the mournful opening theme and the heroic secondary theme. Finally, a rapid coda brings the ballade to a brilliant conclusion in a welter of scale passages ranging widely up and down the keyboard.

#### **Four Mazurkas, Op. 24**

The catalog of Chopin's works lists 58 mazurkas, composed over a 26-year period from the time he was 16 until the last year of his life. They are among his most intimate pieces and the most overt musical expression of his Polish heritage. The four mazurkas in Chopin's Op. 24 were composed in 1833 and were dedicated to the Count Perthuis, director of music to King Louis-Philippe, and a friend and patron of Chopin during his long exile in Paris.

Rather than involving literal transcription of Polish folk melodies, Chopin's mazurkas were stylized abstractions, customarily retaining the characteristic *long-short, long, long* kick rhythm and alternate verse/refrain patterns associated with the mazurka tradition in Polish folk music. Sometimes, the music wandered into other rhythmic patterns, most frequently the waltz, as happens at the end of the first mazurka of this set.

The second mazurka, in C major, abandon's the long-short pattern altogether, but it returns in the third, set in A-flat major. The final mazurka is the most elaborate and also the most elusive, thanks to much chromatic movement in the melody line and a series of cadences that camouflage the tonal center of this fascinating little piece.

#### **Two Nocturnes, Op. 27**

The Romantic nocturne was invented by early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Irish composer John Field, but Chopin's 19 nocturnes brought lasting fame to the genre. Like many of the works on this program, the two nocturnes in Op. 27 were composed in the early 1830s (1835, to be specific), when the composer had gained considerable fame in Paris and much of Western Europe.

These two nocturnes in C-sharp minor and D-flat major are centered on an identical tone, but present opposite sides of the coin with their contrasting minor-key and major-key orientation. The C-sharp minor Nocturne is a set in a large three-part form, beginning with a doleful melody over a rolling broken-chord bass line. The central section gains speed and dramatic power, coming to a climax in the major key. Eventually, a left-hand cadenza returns to the opening melody and a gentle coda.

The D-flat major Nocturne is more decorative and its form is different, consisting of three repetitions of the melody, each with a more elaborate ornamental ending. Its character is more evenly serene while its melody is more complex than in the C-sharp minor Nocturne.

#### ***Andante spianato et Grande Polonaise brillante*, in E-flat major, Op. 22**

As its title suggests, Chopin's greatest keyboard showpiece, the *Andante spianato and Grand Polonaise brillante*, is a hybrid of two works, composed in reverse order and joined together in the middle. The Polonaise was written first in 1830-31, before Chopin left Poland on a tour that was to end with his permanent residence in Paris. The lyrical *Andante spianato* was added in 1834, and Chopin played the complete work at one of his last public appearances there, April 26, 1835.

The work exists in two forms: as a very popular solo piano piece and as a solo/orchestral piece, whose orchestral sections were provided by someone other than the composer and were merely inserted amid pauses in the piano part.

The *Andante spianato* (best translated as "smooth" or "even") is idyllic in character. Although its melodic line becomes increasingly florid, a very placid interlude and codetta counterbalance its decorative tendencies.

By contrast, the spirited Polonaise is full of energy, suggesting lots of kicking dance steps with its strongly accented start-stop rhythms. It is a brilliant showpiece, exhibiting ever greater technical challenges as it wends its way toward a thrilling conclusion.

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## **NOBUYUKI TSUJII, Piano**

The announcement of 20-year-old Japanese pianist Nobuyuki Tsujii as winner of the Nancy Lee and Perry R. Bass Gold Medal at the Thirteenth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition marked a significant historic milestone for this extraordinary artist and the competition. Already known in his home country for his refined and effortless playing, his spell-binding performances at the 2009 Cliburn brought Mr. Tsujii to the attention of hundreds of thousands of new fans throughout the world, while raising his status in Japan to superstar. Along with the medal, he received three years of international concert engagements coordinated by the Van Cliburn Foundation in the United States and by IMG Artists in Europe, as well as a CD recording of his award-winning Cliburn Competition performances for the *harmonia mundi usa* label.

Blind since birth, “Nobu” began receiving awards at age seven, when he was named first-prize winner at the All Japan Blind Students Music Competition. At the age of 12, he made noted recital debuts at Tokyo’s Suntory Hall and Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall. In 2005 at the age of 16, he was presented the Critic’s Award at the Fifteenth Chopin Competition in Poland. Performance credits include appearances with the Orchestre des Concerts Lamoureux, Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as with most of Japan’s leading orchestras. He has also performed in the Czech Republic, Russia, and Taiwan. An acclaimed debut album released by Avex classics in 2007 led to a 15-city tour of Japan and a second recording featuring Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 2 with Berlin’s Deutsche Sinfonie Orchestra, released in 2008.

Immediately following his success at the 2009 Cliburn Competition, Mr. Tsujii made a recital debut in Germany at the Klavier-Festival Ruhr and returned to the United States for an Aspen Festival debut. His 2009–2010 concert season is also highlighted by performances with the Santa Fe Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Europa at London’s Queen Elizabeth Hall, and recitals in Houston, Indianapolis, and Washington, D.C. Among engagements offered for the 2010–2011 season are a Martin Theater recital debut as part of the 2010 Ravinia Festival in Chicago; chamber music with the Takács Quartet; and concerts in Japan led by Vladimir Ashkenazy. In fall of 2009, *harmonia mundi usa* releases his 2009 Cliburn Competition recording featuring works by Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt, and a recent work by American composer John Musto—a performance that earned him the Best Performance of a New Work prize.

Born in Tokyo, Nobuyuki Tsujii is devoted to his mother, Itsuko Tsujii, who has written two bestselling books about raising her gifted child. He is currently a participant of the performer’s program at the Ueno Gakuen College of Music, and has studied with Masahiro Kawakami, Yukio Yokoyama, and Kyoko Tabé. More information can be found at [www.nobupiano1988.com](http://www.nobupiano1988.com). His Cliburn competition performances are available for viewing at [www.cliburn.tv](http://www.cliburn.tv).