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Keyboard Artist Series

Michael Min

Piano

Friday, January 23, 2026
7:00 p.m.

T. Earl Hinton Music Hall, Wright Music Building

Ricercar a 3 in C minor from The Musical Offering, BWV 1079

J.S. Bach
(1685–1750)

Chaconne in D minor from Partita No. 2, BWV 1004

J.S. Bach
Arr. Ferruccio Busoni
(1866–1924)

Erlkönig, D. 328

Franz Schubert
(1797–1828)
Arr. Franz Liszt
(1811–1886)

Deux Arabesques, L. 66

Claude Debussy
(1862–1918)

I. Andantino con moto
II. Allegretto scherzando

Sonata No. 7 in B-flat major, Op. 83

Sergei Prokofiev
(1891–1953)

Allegro inquieto
Andante caloroso
Precipitato

Middle Tennessee State University School of Music

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Mr. Mark Britt, Piano Technician

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Ricercar a 3 in C minor from The Musical Offering, BWV 1079

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

In 1747, Johann Sebastian Bach visited the court of Frederick the Great of Prussia, where his son C. P. E. Bach served as a court musician. During this visit, the King presented Bach with a highly chromatic theme and challenged him to improvise a fugue on it. That encounter became the foundation for *The Musical Offering*, a collection of canons, fugues (ricercars), and a trio sonata built entirely around the “royal theme.”

The Ricercar a 3, a three-voice fugue, stands as one of the central works in the collection. The term *ricercar*—derived from “to search”—was used in the Renaissance and Baroque periods for pieces that explore a musical subject with clarity and focus. Bach’s treatment of the royal theme in this fugue is austere yet expressive, balancing impeccable contrapuntal technique with a quiet sense of introspection.

The chromaticism of the theme lends the music a thoughtful, almost meditative character. As the fugue unfolds, each voice enters with natural inevitability, revealing Bach’s mastery of structure without relying on virtuosic display or ornamental flourishes. The result is a work of striking purity—one that draws its power from the discipline and beauty of its construction.

Stories surrounding Bach’s visit to the Prussian court suggest that Frederick the Great hoped to test the composer’s ingenuity with such a difficult theme. Whether or not every detail of the legend is accurate, *The Musical Offering* remains a testament to Bach’s remarkable ability to transform a single idea into a rich world of counterpoint. The collection also includes several “puzzle canons,” reflecting Bach’s lifelong fascination with music as both intellectual exploration and artistic expression.

The Ricercar a 3 continues to stand as one of Bach’s most distinguished demonstrations of contrapuntal writing—simple in materials, profound in its effect, and an enduring tribute to the art of musical thought.

Chaconne in D minor from Partita No. 2, BWV 1004

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Transcription for piano by Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924)

Few works in the solo repertoire possess the emotional weight and architectural sweep of Bach’s Chaconne in D minor, the culminating movement of the Partita No. 2 for solo violin. Composed around 1720, the Chaconne is built on a repeating bass pattern and harmonic progression—a Baroque form often used for variation and invention. In Bach’s hands, however, this familiar structure becomes the framework for a vast emotional and spiritual journey.

Though no direct evidence survives, it has long been believed that Bach wrote the Chaconne in response to the sudden death of his first wife, Maria Barbara, while he was away on travel. Whether or not this interpretation is historically precise, the music’s depth, gravity, and sense of

private lament have invited generations of listeners to hear it as a memorial of profound personal loss. Over the course of fifteen minutes, the violin traces a path from grief and austerity to radiant affirmation, all through the expressive potential of a single melodic line.

The work has inspired countless transcriptions, but Ferruccio Busoni's 1893 arrangement for solo piano is perhaps the most influential. Rather than creating a literal translation of the violin part, Busoni reimagined the piece for a modern instrument with orchestral capabilities. His version expands the harmonic forces, deepens the registral contrasts, and enriches the textures, transforming the Chaconne into a Romantic tone poem while preserving the spirit of Bach's original.

Johannes Brahms famously wrote of the violin Chaconne:

"On one stave, for a small instrument, the composer writes a whole world of the deepest thoughts and most powerful feelings." Busoni's transcription allows that "world" to unfold through a different lens—broader in sonority, more symphonic in scale, yet still anchored in Bach's expressive truth.

Erlkönig, D. 328

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Arranged for solo piano by Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

Few works in the Romantic repertoire capture dramatic intensity as vividly as Schubert's *Erlkönig*, composed in 1815 to Goethe's celebrated poem. The story unfolds in a single, unbroken sweep: a father rides through the night carrying his frightened son, who believes he is being pursued by the supernatural Erlking. Schubert brings this narrative to life through remarkable economy—shifting harmonies, contrasting registers, and a relentless accompaniment figure that evokes the horse's gallop. Each character emerges with a distinct musical identity, making the song a compact yet powerful study in tension, fear, and emotional urgency.

Franz Liszt's solo piano transcription expands the expressive and technical range of the original while preserving its essential dramatic contours. Rather than offering a literal transfer from voice and piano to solo keyboard, Liszt reimagines *Erlkönig* through the possibilities of the modern piano: the galloping accompaniment becomes a driving motor of energy, while the varied voices of narrator, father, child, and Erlking are shaped through dynamic contrasts, voicing, and timbral color. The result is a work that remains faithful to Schubert's conception even as it acquires an orchestral breadth and heightened virtuosity.

Liszt's version demands exceptional control and stamina from the performer, who must sustain the relentless rhythmic motion while projecting the shifting emotional landscape of the drama. In this transcription, the piano becomes both storyteller and protagonist, allowing the narrative to unfold through instrumental means alone.

This arrangement has become a cornerstone of the virtuoso piano repertoire, admired for its ability to translate Schubert's vocal drama into a compelling instrumental work. Liszt's *Erlkönig* stands as a testament to his deep reverence for Schubert and to his extraordinary skill in illuminating new expressive dimensions within an established masterpiece.

Deux Arabesques, L. 66

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

Composed between 1888 and 1891, Debussy's *Deux Arabesques* come from an early period in his career, well before the works that would later define his mature style. Yet even in these pieces, one can hear the beginnings of the musical language that would shape the course of twentieth-century music. They possess a lyricism and delicacy that stand apart from the dominant Romantic traditions of their time, suggesting a new way of thinking about line, color, and atmosphere.

The title “arabesque,” borrowed from the decorative arts, refers to flowing, intricate patterns—motifs that unfold with natural grace. Debussy adapts this idea to music by allowing melodic lines to trace gentle, curving paths, supported by harmonies that move with quiet subtlety. The result is less about formal structure and more about an experience of organic motion, as if the music were shaped by instinct rather than by strict design.

The *First Arabesque* is luminous and fluid, marked by rippling figures and a melody that rises and falls with effortless charm. Its clarity and lightness give it an almost improvisatory character, though the writing is carefully balanced. By contrast, the *Second Arabesque* carries a more reflective tone. Its wistful theme, colored by shifting harmonies and delicate rhythmic inflections, suggests a more inward expression—gentle, thoughtful, and understated.

Though not technically demanding in a virtuosic sense, the *Deux Arabesques* require a refined sense of touch and phrasing. The performer must shape lines with transparency and restraint, allowing the music's colors to emerge naturally. This balance between control and freedom points toward the aesthetic Debussy would later explore more fully, where nuance and suggestion play a central role.

Over time, these pieces have become cherished works in the piano literature—not only for their charm and accessibility, but also for the glimpse they offer into Debussy's evolving musical imagination. They stand as early examples of a composer beginning to move beyond traditional boundaries, seeking a more poetic and atmospheric approach to sound.

Piano Sonata No. 7 in B-flat major, Op. 83

Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953)

Composed between 1939 and 1942, Prokofiev's *Seventh Sonata* is the second of the three “*War Sonatas*,” works written during a period marked by political pressure, personal displacement, and the mounting tension of World War II. Without being explicitly programmatic, the sonata reflects an atmosphere of unease—music shaped by restless energy, stark contrasts, and brief moments of lyricism that seem to appear almost in spite of the surrounding turbulence.

The opening movement, *Allegro inquieto*, is driven by sharply defined motifs and an unsettled rhythmic profile. Its angular lines and sudden harmonic turns create a sense of instability, while

fleeting lyrical fragments offer momentary clarity before dissolving back into the movement's more fractured texture. The contrast between these ideas gives the movement its distinctive character: a forward motion that is always charged, never fully at ease. The second movement, *Andante caloroso*, provides a contrasting inner world. Its gently lilting theme unfolds with warmth and simplicity, colored by subtle harmonic inflections that give it both intimacy and distance. As the movement develops, the texture broadens and the harmony darkens, suggesting that even this moment of repose carries an underlying weight. The music remains tender, but the sense of vulnerability gives it depth and expressive resonance. The final movement, *Precipitato*, is among Prokofiev's most recognizable creations. Built on a driving 7/8 rhythm, it moves with remarkable economy and precision. The writing is percussive and propulsive, yet grounded in a clear thematic idea that gives shape to the momentum. Its cumulative energy leads to a conclusion of overwhelming force—one that feels both triumphant and hard-won.

Premiered in 1943 by Sviatoslav Richter, the Seventh Sonata quickly earned its place as one of the central works of Prokofiev's piano output. It demands clarity, stamina, and a firm sense of line amid its dense textures. More importantly, it asks the performer to navigate its emotional landscape with honesty: the volatility of the first movement, the fragile lyricism of the second, and the driven clarity of the finale.

Prokofiev's Seventh Sonata stands as a vivid example of how music can reflect a historical moment while still speaking to broader human experience. Its contrasts—restlessness and calm, force and vulnerability—reveal a composer responding to a world in upheaval with a voice that is direct, concentrated, and unmistakably his own.

Artist Bio

Michael Min is a versatile Korean-American pianist whose artistic breadth spans solo performance, chamber music, vocal collaboration, and concerto work. He has appeared at distinguished venues including Orchestra Hall (MN), Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall, Merkin Concert Hall (NY), Duncan Hall, Hinton Hall, Antonello Hall, the Dinu Lipatti Recital Hall (Romania), Luis A. Calvo Hall (Colombia), and the KEPCO Art Center (South Korea), among others.

His performance accolades include top prizes at competitions such as the Venusto Music Competition (sponsored by the Mayor of Seoul), The American Prize, the Paderewski International Piano Competition (Connecticut Chopin Foundation), the Carles and Sofia International Piano Competition, the Franz Liszt Center International Piano Competition, the Calabria International Piano Competition, the Orbetello International Piano Competition, and the Concorso Città di Massa in Italy. He has also received honors at the Miedzynarodowy Konkurs Muzyczny Małopolska (Poland), the Charleston International Piano Competition, the Music International Grand Prix (NY), and the Forte International Music Competition (NY), where he received the Grand Prize. Additional recognitions include winning the Concerto Competition at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities and the Seoul National Symphony Orchestra Concerto Competition, as well as the Concerto & Aria Competition as a tenor with the Kenwood Symphony Orchestra.

As a concerto soloist, Min has performed with the Seoul National Symphony Orchestra, the Middle Tennessee State University Wind Ensemble, and the University of Minnesota Symphony Orchestra, under conductors Ik-Sung Joo and Mark Russell Smith. He was featured as a guest artist in 2022 at the 39th Festival Internacional de Piano at the Universidad Industrial de Santander in Colombia. He has also appeared as a tenor soloist with the Kenwood Symphony Orchestra and the Linden Hills Chamber Orchestra, performing arias such as *E lucevan le stelle* (Puccini) and *Vesti la giubba* (Leoncavallo).

Min is an active collaborator with a strong commitment to contemporary music. His projects include recordings of wind symphonic works by the late American composer Dr. David Maslanka, as well as *A Richer Dust* (speaker and wind orchestra) by British composer Dr. Nigel Clarke, with text by Malene Sheppard Skaerved, recorded under the direction of Dr. Reed Thomas with the MTSU Wind Ensemble. He currently serves as music director for Yan Pang Creates and works closely on Dr. Yan Pang's contemporary stage productions *One-log Bridge* and *Shelter*.

A dedicated chamber musician, Min is co-founder of the soloist ensemble MUZIK—an ensemble of University of Minnesota alumni that performs throughout the United States, China, and South Korea. He is also a member of the HLM Trio (Mary-Alice Hutton, violin; Ava Lambert, cello), recipients of awards from the Golden Classical Music Awards and the King's Peak International Music Competition. His collaborative work has also included performances with acclaimed musicians such as Dr. Timothy Lovelace, Dr. Seokho Park, Dr. Jeduthun Kim, Ashly Hall-Tighe, Philip Zawisza, and others.

Dr. Min currently serves as Lecturer in Piano at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, where he supervises graduate teaching assistants and coordinates the secondary piano program. He previously served as a staff pianist at Middle Tennessee State University—an institution that remains especially meaningful to him in his development as both a musician and collaborator.

Min holds a Doctor of Musical Arts in Piano Performance from the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, where he studied with Dr. Kyung Kim, and a Master’s degree in Collaborative Piano and Coaching under Dr. Timothy Lovelace. He also earned a Master’s degree in Piano Performance from Middle Tennessee State University, studying with Dr. Adam Clark and Dr. Eunbyol Ko, and a Bachelor of Arts in Piano Performance from Sahmyook University in Seoul, where his principal teachers included Sook-Jin Lee, Joo-Soon Lee, and Won-Eui Lee.