

**MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY | COLLEGE OF MUSIC**

*presents*

***Russell Sherman,  
Piano***

***The Belle and Julius Harris  
Visiting Artist Fund***

***established by  
Dr. Lauren Julius Harris***

**3:00 pm, Sunday, September 15, 2013  
Cook Recital Hall**

## Program

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| <i>Drei Klavierstücke</i> , Op. 11<br>Mässig<br>Mässig<br>Bewegt              | Arnold Schoenberg<br>(1874 – 1951)  |
| <i>Estampes</i><br>Pagodes<br>La soirée dans Grenade<br>Jardins sous la pluie | Claude Debussy<br>(1862 – 1918)     |
| Sonata No. 4 in F-sharp Major, Op. 30<br>Andante<br>Prestissimo volando       | Alexander Scriabin<br>(1872 – 1915) |

## Intermission

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| Twenty-four Preludes, Op. 28<br>No. 1 in C Major<br>No. 2 in A Minor<br>No. 3 in G Major<br>No. 4 in E Minor<br>No. 5 in D Major<br>No. 6 in B Minor<br>No. 7 in A Major<br>No. 8 in F-sharp Minor<br>No. 9 in E Major<br>No. 10 in C-sharp Minor<br>No. 11 in B Major<br>No. 12 in G-sharp Minor<br>No. 13 in F-sharp Major<br>No. 14 in E-flat Minor<br>No. 15 in D-flat Major ("Rain Drops")<br>No. 16 in B-flat Minor<br>No. 17 in A-flat Major<br>No. 18 in F Minor<br>No. 19 in E-flat Major<br>No. 20 in C Minor<br>No. 21 in B-flat Major<br>No. 22 in G Minor<br>No. 23 in F Major<br>No. 24 in D Minor | Frédéric Chopin<br>(1810 – 1849) |
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## Program Notes for Frédéric Chopin's 24 Preludes, Op. 28

I. The cycle begins with a brazen display of the mother key (C major) in the breathless meter of 2/8. No sallow introduction to the ball, but a dithyramb of wild exuberance, frenetic joy – yet suffused with the rich counterpoint of rhythm and line, uncorking the champagne, that only a wise Master can know and reveal.

II. From the lair of Mussorgsky, prophetic omens delivered over stony, wretched basses that progressively disintegrate – into a macabre entropy resolving, fantastically, to a tonic chord *deus ex machina*. The third and fourth bars of the treble line disclose the not-so-secret primary motive (or rather melodic shape) which threads the cycle.

III. By the brook, *Wohin*, an innocent rejoinder to the prior tremors. The contradictions are falling into place. No simple sequence of balanced entities will suffice. Equilibrium will be based on the disparate insights only an inspired madness can provide.

IV. A two-note *cantilena* expires at the hand of a death-inviting bass. The soul glides gratefully, with one gasping rattle in bars 16-18, to its peaceful demise. Thus destined, the sentiment is calm and unashamed.

V. A remarkable “sleight of hand” in that essential melodic fragments are gently dislocated off the pulse, giddy and heedless of the whirling sixteenths. The whole flirtation lasts but a moment – and abruptly cadences with a *grand jeté* off the stage.

VI. The sadness, the unbridgeable gulf, is sadly (for the pianist) echoed by the impossible task of matching the untethered LH melody with a RH formula that only once (bars 7-9) breaks from its obstinate rhythmic duty. The exotic interval of the seventh on the third beat of bar 22 exquisitely and eerily adumbrates the seventh at the close of the twenty-third Prelude.

VII. Cinderella's doll is alive and well. Her slippers are yellow, but judging from the original pedaling, they do not touch the floor.

VIII. A *grand guignol* of passion, yet acutely aware of the supernatural hints and vibrations. The main voice is plunged into the midsection of the instrument, but levitates by grace notes imitating an octave above within the figuration. The harmonic onslaught is ferocious, as though seeking quarter-tones to vent its chromatic wrath.

IX. The great gates of Warsaw, a homeland at once invincible and Herculean in its resistance to foreign invaders.

X. The schematic flutterings of a distraught bird, landing on the branch of a distant mazurka – in a “harp of shadow” (Milosz).

XI. A piece of no consequence – only insofar as tender entreaties of the soul have no effect on the real world. It barely exists, but without it there is no existence.

XII. A sinister, lacerating scherzo of defiance and doom. Premeditated: it takes no prisoners.

XIII. In the eye of the hurricane, a barcarolle. An enveloping languor detoxifies, cleanses – and revels in the disembodied tonality, last of the sharp keys. The middle section is the purest of odes, to a love beyond love.

XIV. The cycle descends into undifferentiated anarchy. The violence, not from anger but of the unknown, is exemplified by a music unparalleled in its Cyclopean gaze: every note of the piece but the last has the same rhythmic duration, and every note of the piece is in the same clef. The two hands play the same pitches, an octave apart, throughout. All that remains is vibration and terror.

XV. Only a mythical Beatrice can lead us back from the underworld. Her raiment is embroidered with Burgundian sixths.

XVI. A tempestuous Etude which brings us back, soberly, to the task of playing the piano. The piano, that complicated box of a labyrinth of a machine – can it also be a spokesman for good and evil? What other human activity affords so much range and immediate impact? Gives so much chance to soar and delineate, instruct and pierce? Pity one has to move one’s fingers too. So much Sisyphus for a touch of heaven.

XVII. Another (pre-Ravel) apotheosis of the waltz, or in this case, the ball. The decor is sumptuous, the harmonies verdant, and Andre Gide remarked that no music could be more joyous than the two middle episodes. Yet despite the grandeur, one always feels the tension between individual soul and the unreachable communion of satisfaction. In its last statement, the theme becomes indistinct memory, spectral and sotto voce; in the bass the great bell of Time unsexed, reminds.

XVIII. Great spasms of despair, expletives undeleted. Curses, chains, shrieks woven into a compositional tapestry that celebrates the *appoggiatura* and as well, the Master who can divine sense from agony.

XIX. An essay in delirium, but balletic and serene. Everything tumbles, or spires, to an ozone where harmony meets gladness – courtesy of the eternally benign E flat major tonality now in tremulous heat. How radiant, but cool. How kind, but self-sufficient.

XX. An ode to grave formality, or to the formality of the grave. The king is dead, long live his biographer.

XXI. A melody so beautiful it can’t be repeated, only dissolved into rapturous chant. As though it were possible to have music for solo violin and organ, a universe where intimacy and glory are brethren.

XXII. The rats are leaving the sinking ship. A cry of anguish, of courage, hovers over the wreckage. The plea for redemption is scorned.

XXIII. Pastoral digression. A windmill turns, children are playing, complete amnesia. Gide is besides himself, and says that the E flat (seventh to the tonic) in the penultimate bar, and subsumed in the final chord, is like the “tip of a camouflaged ear.”

XXIV. The four horsemen of the Apocalypse ride again. Contrary to T. S. Eliot's prediction, the world ends with a bang, not a whimper.

– Russell Sherman

An eloquent communicator both on and off the concert stage, legendary pianist **Russell Sherman** continues to garner accolades from critics and audiences alike for his grace, imagination and poetry. The New York Times calls him “one of the best pianists in this or any other country.” As the author of a highly acclaimed book *Piano Pieces* (a rhapsodic compilation of vignettes and personal anecdotes from Mr. Sherman’s life experiences as a pianist and teacher), Russell Sherman has been praised not only as an ingenious virtuoso but also as an insightful master.

Mr. Sherman has performed with such major orchestras as the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, Orchestra of St. Luke’s (with whom he performed the five Beethoven concertos), Philadelphia Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony and the San Francisco Symphony. Abroad, Mr. Sherman has played in the major cities of Austria, Canada, the Czech Republic, England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Netherlands, Korea, China, Russia and South America.

In recital, Russell Sherman has appeared on Carnegie Hall’s Keyboard Virtuoso Series, California’s Ambassador Foundation Series, the Distinguished Artists Series at New York’s Tisch Center for the Arts at the 92nd Street Y, and the Bank of Boston Celebrity Series. He has performed at Lincoln Center’s Alice Tully Hall, Sarasota’s Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, Boston’s Symphony Hall, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Jordan Hall, Columbia University’s Miller Theater, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Chicago’s Orchestra Hall. Additionally, he has appeared at the Ravinia Festival, the Hollywood Bowl, the Mostly Mozart Festival and the Wolf Trap Festival, as well as recitals at Spain’s Santander Festival and Germany’s Ruhr Triennale Festival. In January 2010, he collaborated with Mark Morris Dance Group alongside Minsoo Sohn and the Orchestra of Emmanuel Music in the Boston premiere of *Mozart Dances* presented by Celebrity Series of Boston.

Mr. Sherman is a prolific recording artist. He has recorded the five Beethoven concertos with the Czech Philharmonic and the Monadnock Festival Orchestra, and the complete Beethoven sonatas, recorded as five dual-CD sets (each having been released individually and as a complete set). The entire Beethoven sonatas project has been called “a set for the ages” by Bernard Jacobson in *Fanfare*.

This makes Mr. Sherman the first American pianist to have recorded all of the sonatas and concertos of Beethoven. His earlier recording of Liszt’s *Transcendental Études* was critically acclaimed: Anthony Tommasini in a 1999 New York Times piece said, “Several impressive recordings of Liszt’s ‘*Transcendental Études*’ prove that these audaciously difficult works are actually playable and triumphantly pianistic. But none make Liszt’s visionary understanding of what the piano could do more palpable and exciting than Russell Sherman’s extraordinary 1990 recording.” Mr. Sherman has also recorded Gershwin’s *Piano Concerto in F*, Brahms’ *Variations on a Theme by Paganini, Op. 35* and *Fantasies, Op. 116*, Chopin’s *24 Preludes, Op. 28*, Schubert’s *Sonata in D major, D. 850* and *Sonata in B-flat major, D. 960*, both Grieg and Schumann concertos and works by Liszt, including the *B minor Sonata*, *Don Juan Fantasy*, and transcriptions. He has also recorded Mozart’s two concertos in minor keys plus solo fantasies with the Orchestra of Emmanuel Music under Craig Smith. Additional recordings include a GM Recording CD, “*Premieres & Commissions*,” in which he performs contemporary repertoire by Schoenberg, Schuller, Helps, Perle and Shapey. Except for Schoenberg’s *Six Piano Pieces*, he has personally premiered and commissioned all of these works. Mr. Sherman’s releases on Avie Records include a CD of Debussy’s *Estampes*, *Images Book II* and *Préludes Book II*, a DVD of his live performance of the Liszt *Études d’exécution transcendante*, and most recently, the complete Chopin *Mazurkas*. Mr. Sherman has also performed and recorded the complete sonatas of Mozart, the Bach *English Suites* and the complete piano works of Schoenberg.

Russell Sherman was born and educated in New York, beginning piano studies at age six. By age eleven, Mr. Sherman was studying with Eduard Steuermann, a pupil and friend of Ferruccio Busoni and Arnold Schoenberg. Sherman graduated from Columbia University at age nineteen with a degree in the humanities. He was Visiting Professor at Harvard University and is currently a Distinguished Artist-in-Residence at the New England Conservatory. At age 83, Sherman continues to explore, and to merit the title “a thinking man’s virtuoso.”