



College of Music
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

ARTIST-FACULTY AND GUEST RECITAL SERIES
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Solo Piano Soundscapes

Derek Kealii Polischuk, piano

Friday, October 3, 2025
Cook Recital Hall, 7:30 p.m.

PROGRAM

Album Leaf

Marie Jaëll
(1846-1925)

Impromptus, Op. posth. 142, D. 935

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)

Allegro moderato

Allegretto

Andante

Allegro scherzando

Intermission

Spiritual Suite

Margaret Bonds
(1913-1972)

Valley of the Bones

The Bells

Troubled Water

Over the Rainbow

Harold Arlen
(1905-1986)

arr. Keith Jarrett

PROGRAM NOTES

Marie Jaëll: Album Leaf – At first glance, Marie Jaëll’s *Album Leaf* may look like one of those nineteenth-century salon miniatures—graceful, charming, meant to delight without asking much in return. That is exactly how women’s music was too often dismissed in her time: pretty, decorative, secondary. But Jaëll’s music refuses that narrative. Beneath its surface lies a depth of thought and originality that challenges the narrow roles assigned to women composers and insists on being heard alongside the great works of her era.

Jaëll was not only a pianist and composer of rare distinction – she was also one of the most original musical thinkers of her generation. At a time when women were expected to interpret rather than innovate, she wrote, composed, and theorized with conviction. Her groundbreaking writings on touch, sensation, and the physical experience of playing the piano were decades ahead of their time, yet too often sidelined precisely because they came from a woman. Today, their influence on modern pianism is undeniable.

This short piece embodies her artistic vision: lines that sing with natural lyricism, harmonies that shift with quiet daring, and rhythms that breathe with freedom. Its elegance is not just ornamental, but part of a musical language shaped by both intellect and imagination.

Franz Schubert: Impromptus, Op. 142, D. 935 – Few works in the piano repertoire reveal more about Schubert’s genius than these four Impromptus, written in December 1827. He was just 30, standing at the edge of his final year. The sense of both refinement and urgency runs through all four pieces. Despite their title, they are not offhand improvisations but carefully constructed large-scale works that can stand alone—or be heard together as a cycle. Schumann even suggested they be considered a disguised sonata: “The first is so obviously the first movement of a sonata, so completely worked out and self-contained, that there can be no doubt about it.”

I. Allegro moderato in F Minor – The first Impromptu is anything but casual. It is among Schubert’s grandest achievements for the piano, built on the architecture of sonata form. The opening theme in F minor is restless and searching; the contrasting second theme in A-flat major sings with that long-breathed lyricism only Schubert could write. But shadows soon return,

PROGRAM NOTES (cont.)

and the development rises to an almost unbearable intensity before receding into stillness. The closing pages feel suspended between resignation and defiance, refusing to settle on either.

II. Allegretto in A-flat Major – This impromptu unfolds like a dream of a Viennese ball glimpsed through layers of time and mist—graceful waltzes and courtly dances flickering at the edge of memory. Its melodies seem at once intimate and distant, softened by nostalgia, as though heard from another room. In the heart of the movement, however, the music bursts with an urgent, almost breathless intensity. Rhythms quicken, figures cascade with dazzling energy, and the harmonies shimmer with heightened brilliance, as if the dancers themselves are caught in a moment of exhilaration and abandon. Then, gradually, the momentum softens, and the opening themes return—radiant, serene, yet now touched with the memory of that fleeting, intoxicating intensity.

III. Andante in B-flat Major – The third Impromptu is one of Schubert's most expansive works in variation form. Its stately, almost hymn-like theme is introduced with simplicity and poise, as if laying out a luminous, architectural foundation. From this quiet elegance, the variations unfold like a grand stage slowly coming to life: delicate filigree textures sparkle like candlelight on gilded walls, while soaring melodic lines stretch the piano's expressive range. Occasional dramatic turns, fleeting yet powerful, suggest shadows passing across the ballroom of sound, moments of tension that only make the return of the theme more radiant. Schubert's variations shimmer with contrasts—intimate whispers of lyricism alongside brilliant, almost theatrical flourishes—drawing the listener into a world at once tender, expansive, and deeply human.

IV. Allegro scherzando in F Minor – The final movement returns to F minor, giving the set a sense of sonata-like unity. Its dotted-rhythm theme prances and jerks forward with nervous energy, playful yet taut, as if each note carries a flicker of anxiety. Even in moments of lighter, lilting passagework, a subtle undercurrent of tension hums beneath the surface, like the restless flutter of wings or the quickened heartbeat of a startled room. The music races and swirls, propelled by surging rhythms and biting harmonies, until it collides with a fierce, unyielding conclusion—raw, uncompromising, and haunted by its own tragedy.

PROGRAM NOTES (cont.)

Margaret Bonds: Spiritual Suite – Margaret Bonds was trained as a pianist and composer in Chicago and New York, living at the intersection of concert music, spirituals, and the broader Black artistic renaissance of her time. *Spiritual Suite* is among her most frequently performed works, a set of three piano pieces that bring biblical stories to life through the language of the spiritual.

I. Valley of the Bones – The opening movement is based on the spiritual *Dry Bones*, with its imagery of resurrection and renewal. The music begins with stark, fragmented gestures—almost skeletal in their sparseness. Gradually, rhythmic momentum builds and harmonies deepen, suggesting the stirring of energy, until the fragments coalesce into something alive. Bonds translates the song's vision of transformation into sound: a resurrection not only of bodies, but of spirit.

II. The Bells – Here the piano takes on an almost orchestral resonance. Bonds draws on the spiritual *Peter, Go Ring Dem Bells*, layering tolling sonorities and bright cascades to create the effect of a great peal of bells. The music oscillates between grandeur and tenderness, evoking bells that can call to worship, toll in mourning, or mark celebration. The imagery is rich and direct, grounded in the spiritual's call to rejoicing.

III. Troubled Water – The final movement is based on the spiritual *Wade in the Water*, with its layered meanings of deliverance, baptism, and coded guidance along the Underground Railroad. Bonds transforms the spiritual into a virtuosic piano work, full of rhythmic drive, brilliant figurations, and gospel-inspired harmonies. It closes the suite with a reminder of music's power to hold history, struggle, and hope in a single gesture.

Harold Arlen, arr. Keith Jarrett: Over the Rainbow – Keith Jarrett's 1995 solo concert at La Scala in Milan closed with an encore unlike any other. After an evening of unbroken, often wild improvisation, Jarrett offered an unadorned, devastatingly beautiful rendition of "Over the Rainbow". In his hands, the song becomes a prayer. Its surface is tender, but beneath it is a profound sadness. There is an acknowledgment of longing, loss, and the ephemeral nature of joy.

For me, playing this piece is an act of gratitude—for music, for the piano, and for the chance to share these moments with friends and students. Jarrett's *Over the Rainbow* reminds us that even in times of uncertainty, beauty remains: fragile, fleeting, but enduring enough to carry us forward.

ARTIST-FACULTY BIO

Derek Kealii Polischuk is Professor of Piano and Director of Piano Pedagogy at the Michigan State University College of Music. A native of San Diego, he studied with Krzysztof Brzuza before earning the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Piano Performance with distinction at the University of Southern California under the guidance of Daniel Pollack.

An active recitalist and recording artist, Polischuk has received international critical recognition for his solo release *Terra Incognita* (Blue Griffin), praised for its balance of interpretive imagination and structural clarity. His recording *Latin American Music for Two Pianos* has likewise been lauded for its rhythmic vitality and musical veracity.

Equally devoted to pedagogy, Polischuk presents at major conferences including MTNA, NCKP, and the DOCTRID Conference in Ireland, and serves on national and international boards advancing piano teaching and inclusion. His book *Transformational Piano Teaching* (Oxford University Press) has been described as a landmark in the field for its vision of pedagogy that is both rigorous and deeply inclusive.

Founder and director of *Celebrating the Spectrum*, a festival for advanced pianists on the autism spectrum, Polischuk's work integrates artistry, scholarship, and advocacy, shaping a pedagogy attuned to the diverse voices of today's pianists.

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