



College of Music
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Music
Artist-Faculty & Guest Recital Series

Piano Homecomings

Four Hands

Ya-ju Chuang, piano
Zhao Wang, piano

Generously sponsored by
George Orban and Rae Ramsdell

Friday, September 18, 2026
Cook Recital Hall, 7:30 p.m.

PROGRAM

Six Valses-Caprices, Op. 87

Moderato

Vivo

Poco lento

(IV.)

Poco lento

Vivo

Mel Bonis
(1858–1937)

3-Day Mix

Eleanor Alberga
(b. 1949)

Drei Stücke zu vier Händen

Allegretto

Allegro molto

Allegretto grazioso

Fanny Mendelssohn
(1805–1847)

Intermission

Six Pièces Romantiques, Op. 55

Primavera

La chaise à porteurs

Idylle arabe

Sérénade d'automne

Danse hindoue

Rigaudon

Cécile Chaminade
(1857–1944)

Summer Dreams, Op. 47

The Brownies

Robin Redbreast

Twilight

Katy-dids

Elfin Tarantelle

Good Night

Amy Beach
(1867–1944)

Gavel Patter

Libby Larsen
(b. 1950)

PROGRAM NOTES

Six Valses-Caprices, Op. 87 – French composer Mélanie “Mel” Bonis adopted the gender-neutral professional name “Mel” at a time when women faced significant barriers to careers in composition. A student at the Paris Conservatoire, she developed a musical language rooted in the French Romantic tradition, distinguished by elegant melodic writing, rich harmony, and a keen sense of color.

The *Six Valses-Caprices, Op. 87* transform the familiar waltz into a series of imaginative character pieces. While the graceful triple-meter motion of the dance remains a unifying element, Bonis continually varies its mood, texture, and expressive character. Lyrical passages and delicate gestures alternate with more animated and virtuosic writing, while the four-hand medium allows the piano to take on an unusually broad range of sonorities. Together, the six pieces reveal both the refinement and spontaneity suggested by the title *valse-caprice*.

3-Day Mix

Born in Jamaica and later based in the United Kingdom, Eleanor Alberga has developed a distinctive compositional voice shaped by a wide range of musical influences. Her music frequently combines rhythmic vitality, vivid instrumental color, and elements drawn from both Western classical traditions and her Caribbean background.

3-Day Mix brings that rhythmic imagination to the piano duet. Rather than unfolding through the lyrical gestures and regular dance patterns associated with much nineteenth-century four-hand repertoire, the work is driven by sharply defined rhythms, changing textures, and energetic exchanges between the two pianists. Musical ideas pass rapidly between the players, sometimes combining and sometimes colliding, creating a sense of spontaneity and conversation. The piano becomes not simply a melodic instrument but also a strongly percussive one, with rhythm, accent, and physical momentum playing central roles in the work's character.

Drei Stücke zu vier Händen

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel was a gifted pianist and prolific composer whose musical development closely paralleled that of her younger brother, Felix Mendelssohn. Although her family circumstances and nineteenth-century social expectations limited her opportunities to pursue composition publicly, she created a substantial body of songs, piano works, chamber music, and larger compositions.

PROGRAM NOTES (cont.)

Drei Stücke zu vier Händen (“Three Pieces for Four Hands”) belong to the intimate tradition of domestic music-making that flourished during the nineteenth century. Written for two pianists sharing a single keyboard, the pieces emphasize close musical interaction: melodies and accompanying figures move between the players, textures overlap, and individual gestures become part of a larger shared sound. Their lyricism, clarity, and finely balanced textures reflect Mendelssohn Hensel’s characteristic sensitivity to melodic line and harmonic color, while the four-hand setting gives the music an especially conversational quality.

Six Pièces Romantiques, Op. 55

Cécile Chaminade enjoyed an unusually successful international career as both pianist and composer, performing extensively in Europe and the United States. Her music was widely published and admired during her lifetime, particularly for its melodic charm, elegance, and pianistic imagination.

Six Pièces Romantiques, Op. 55 form a colorful suite of contrasting scenes and dances. *Primavera* opens the set with a fresh, flowing character, while *La chaise à porteurs* (“The Sedan Chair”) suggests graceful movement and theatrical elegance. *Idylle arabe* and *Danse hindoue* reflect the nineteenth-century European fascination with imagined exotic settings, using stylized musical gestures rather than attempting ethnographic representation. *Sérénade d’automne* introduces a more reflective, autumnal atmosphere before the suite concludes with the lively *Rigaudon*, a dance whose crisp rhythms provide an energetic finale. Across the six pieces, Chaminade uses the expanded resources of four hands to create orchestral fullness while retaining the clarity and refinement characteristic of her piano writing.

Summer Dreams, Op. 47

Amy Beach was one of the most prominent American composers and pianists of her generation and the first American woman to achieve major recognition as a composer of large-scale concert music. Alongside her symphonic and chamber works, she wrote extensively for the piano, often displaying a gift for evocative miniature forms.

Summer Dreams, Op. 47 is a set of six character pieces that enters a miniature world of nature, childhood, and imagination. *The Brownies* evokes the playful supernatural creatures of folklore, followed by the gentle portrait of *Robin Redbreast*. *Twilight* turns toward a quieter and more atmospheric sound world, while *Katy-dids* suggests the persistent calls of summer insects. The brilliant *Elfin Tarantelle* brings a burst of

PROGRAM NOTES (cont.)

fairy-like motion and dance before *Good Night* closes the collection in a tender, peaceful mood. Throughout the suite, Beach combines vivid musical imagery with the warmth and lyricism of late-Romantic piano writing.

Gavel Patter

American composer Libby Larsen is known for music that responds closely to the rhythms, inflections, and energy of contemporary American life. A prolific composer of vocal, chamber, orchestral, and keyboard music, she often draws musical inspiration from patterns of speech and from sounds encountered in everyday experience.

Gavel Patter turns the piano duet into a lively rhythmic conversation. Its title suggests both the sharp, repeated strike of a gavel and the rapid flow of spoken “patter,” two ideas reflected in the work’s crisp attacks, repeated gestures, and quick exchanges between the performers. Rhythm takes center stage as the pianists trade, interrupt, reinforce, and layer musical ideas across the keyboard. The result is energetic and theatrical, demanding precise coordination while creating the impression of spontaneous dialogue. As the final work on the program, *Gavel Patter* brings the recital to a close with wit, momentum, and an unmistakably contemporary rhythmic voice.

GUEST ARTIST BIOS

Ya-Ju Chuang is an active performer and educator, appearing as a soloist, chamber musician, and collaborative pianist. She has received numerous awards and scholarships in both Taiwan and the United States, including First Prize at the Charleston International Music Competition, Golden Classical Music Awards, Brussels Grand Prize Virtuoso International Competition, American Protégé International Competition, Michigan State University Concerto Competition, and the Tuesday Musical Association Scholarship Competition. She was also a National Finalist in The American Prize in Piano Performance (Concerto) – The Lorin Hollander Award and a top-prize winner at the National Taiwan Piano Competition.

As a collaborative pianist, Chuang has performed with distinguished artists such as Martin Chalifour, Robert Chen, Elaine Douvas, Santino Fontana, Leelanee Sterrett, Jim Walker, Yevgeny Kutik, Susan Babini, and Patrick Williams. Her performances have been featured on NPR’s “From the Top”, WKAR Public Media, and Interlochen Public Radio, as well as in the Traverse Symphony Orchestra’s Maestro Series, Great

GUEST ARTIST BIOS (cont.)

Lakes Chamber Orchestra's Sunday Series, and Alluvion Concert Series. Chuang holds a D.M.A. in Piano Performance and M.M. in Piano Pedagogy from Michigan State University and currently serves as Collaborative Pianist at Interlochen Arts Academy and Camp and Piano Instructor at the Traverse City Philharmonic Community Music School.

Chinese-born pianist **Zhao Wang** is currently the Assistant Professor of Piano and Collaborative Piano and Director of Accompanying at Central Michigan University School of Music.

An avid soloist and collaborative musician, Zhao has performed in cities throughout Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, Canada, the United States, Japan, Thailand, and China, in venues such as the Banff Centre, the Kennedy Center, and the Shanghai Grand Theatre. In recent seasons, she collaborated in concerts with renowned university faculties and members of major orchestras including Philippe Berrod, Rachel Childers, Richard Deane, Amir Eldan, Maura Marimucci, Denise Tryon, and Stephen Williamson, among many others. As a founding member of the Circulo Trio (clarinet-violin-piano), she performed in multiple seasons at the Thailand International Composition Festival and in over twenty concert tours spanning North America, Thailand, and China. Placing a unique focus on interdisciplinary works, Circulo Trio has brought attention to compositions that incorporate ballet and theatrical elements into the chamber music recital space.

A dedicated educator, Zhao is committed to working with young musicians and to cultivating more concert goers. Before joining Central Michigan University, Zhao was a piano instructor at Michigan State University's Community Music School and had experience working with students of all ages. She has been serving as an adjudicator at the Michigan Piano SAT since 2018 and serves as faculty at the European Summer Piano Academy in Belgium. She teaches regularly at Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp as a piano instructor and at Interlochen Summer Intensive as a collaborative piano faculty. She has also given master classes and recitals in universities and conservatories in China, Thailand, and the U.S.

Zhao received her degrees in Piano Performance, Collaborative Piano, and Piano Pedagogy from Eastman School of Music and Michigan State University. She is forever grateful for the guidance she received from professors Deborah Moriarty, Zhihua Tang, Nelita True, Boris Slutsky, Hung-Kuan Chen, and Chen Jiang.

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