

MAY 1 | 2005

# YUNDI LI, PIANO

THE SIDNEY AND CHARLTON FRIEDBERG CONCERT

**WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART [1756-1791]**

Piano Sonata No. 17 in B-Flat Major, K. 570

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegretto

**FRYDERYK CHOPIN [1810-1849]**

Polonaise in A Major, Op. 40, No. 1  
Polonaise in C Minor, Op. 40, No. 2

**FRANZ LISZT [1811-1886]**

Works to be announced

**I N T E R M I S S I O N**

**FRANZ LISZT**

Piano Sonata in B Minor, S178

- I. Lento assai
- II. Andante sostenuto
- III. Allegro energico



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Yundi Li appears by arrangement with COLUMBIA ARTISTS MANAGEMENT INC  
Personal Direction: R. DOUGLAS SHELDON

# artist BIOGRAPHIES



## **YUNDI LI** — piano

Yundi Li was born in Chongqing, People's Republic of China, in 1982. He displayed a remarkable sensitivity to music from an early age and began to learn the accordion at age four, followed by piano at seven. At the age of nine he had decided on his professional goal: he wanted to become a pianist. Prizes followed at competitions in his own country and at a number of youth competitions in America.

Given his plans for the future, participating in a great international contest such as the Polish capital's was therefore a logical consequence, and his career was launched by victory in 2000 at the renowned Warsaw Chopin Competition. Moreover, Li was not only one of the youngest winners in the history of the competition, but also the first person in fifteen years to be awarded a first prize. For the musical world, Li's win in Warsaw was a real sensation. Here, at this now traditional trial of keyboard artistry held every five years in the name of Chopin, there was a victory by an entrant from China, bringing him into the company of such famous past winners as Martha Argerich and Maurizio Pollini.

Now, at twenty-three, Yundi Li is praised as a pianist capable of deciphering the message of a work and conveying it to his audience in a completely original and convincing interpretation. Following his U.S. debut at Carnegie Hall in June 2003 as part of Steinway's 150th anniversary gala concert, in July, he made his American concerto debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra performing

Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1. That summer, he was honored at a special reception at the home of China's Ambassador in Washington, where he performed Liszt for U.S. State Department officials and guests, including former Secretary of State Alexander Hague. Highlights of 2003-04 included appearances at the Kennedy Center in September; concerts with the Cincinnati Symphony and Paavo Jarvi; a tour of Germany with the Moscow Philharmonic led by Yuri Simonov; concerts in Budapest with Ivan Fischer and the Budapest Festival Orchestra; a tour of Japan with the Cincinnati Symphony and Paavo Jarvi; and concerts with the Israel Philharmonic, the San Francisco Symphony, and the Malaysian Philharmonic along with recitals in Berlin, Tokyo, Amsterdam, Shanghai, Pamplona, Bilbao, Hamburg, Munich, Boston, Vancouver, San Francisco, New York, and Warsaw. Yundi Li was given the special honor of being the only piano soloist to be invited to perform in a gala concert celebrating the 10th anniversary of Ozawa Hall at Tanglewood in August.

Yundi Li's recent programs have consisted exclusively of works by Chopin and Liszt. His second recording for DG of Liszt recital works was released in Europe and Asia in 2002 and in the United States in August 2003. The New York Times named the Liszt CD "Best of the Year" for 2003. A third recording of Chopin Scherzi was released this past Fall and is to be followed by a new recording each year until 2009. Yundi Li currently resides in Hannover, Germany.

# China

“Li is a rarity among young musicians...a distinct musical personality....” – THE WASHINGTON POST

## Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

### Sonata in B-Flat Major, K.570

Many of Mozart's later works in B-flat express gentle, somber resignation; among them are his last piano concerto (K. 595) and his next-to-last piano sonata (K. 570). The sonata's opening movement looks back to the rhythmically similar opening of the F Major Sonata (K. 332), but it lacks the energy and drive of the earlier piece. This lyrical movement has no well-defined contrasting theme, but Mozart the dramatist is, nevertheless, never far away. The movement plunges almost immediately and abruptly, to great effect, into E-flat. The tension mounts as the second part of the theme rises in pitch and volume, leading to a bass entry, marked piano, of the opening subject.

The second movement, an introspective E-flat adagio, is – rather unusually for a second movement – in rondo form. Its opening episode bears a striking likeness to the C Minor passage in the central movement of the K. 491 Piano Concerto. There is a parallel with the grave beauty of Fiordiligi's "Per pietà" in *Così fan tutti*; the mood is resignation without bitterness.

The finale, lighthearted and spontaneous, is a would-be rondo in which two contrasting episodes work out their differences with ingenious contrapuntal cheer.

## Fryderyk Chopin

### Polonaises in A Major and C Minor, Op. 40, Nos. 1 and 2

According to James Huneker, whose Victorian-era *Chopin: The Man and his Music* remains one of the best introductions to the subject, "In the Polonaises we find two distinct groups: in one the objective, martial side predominates, in the other is Chopin the moody, mournful and morose."

There are no more strongly characterized examples of these two types than the pair of Polonaises in Chopin's Opus 40. It was Anton Rubinstein, Chopin's greatest and most influential 19th-century interpreter, who called the A Major Polonaise "Poland's Greatness" and its companion in C Minor, "Poland's Downfall." While Chopin did not give the first of these its popular title, the "Polonaise Militaire," that nickname is

nonetheless most appropriate: the rhythm, the pomp and the grandeur of the march all recall a triumphant military parade. For almost a century after Chopin's death in 1849, it was the most frequently performed of Chopin's Polonaises. And while it seems to have dropped out of the actual concert repertory of the piano, it remains popular, is instantly recognizable and is considered so representative of the Polish nation that its first phrase was chosen as the opening music for the Warsaw Radio. All of Chopin's six other mature Polonaises, beginning with the pair of Opus 26 and concluding with the Polonaise-Fantasy, Opus 61, tend to have at least something of an introspective, even brooding, quality, but not this "Polonaise Militaire." It is all pomp and drama. It is also one of Chopin's only works which doesn't contain, even once, the indication piano. All the dynamic markings are forte, fortissimo and even triple fff.

All of this prepares us for the noble, troubled opening of the C Minor Polonaise – an Allegro maestoso, marked sotto voce, that is a moving funeral elegy for a fallen Poland. The polonaise rhythm soon appears in the form of indignant chords that reflect growing restlessness. When the tension seems to diminish, slowly losing force, a left-hand rhythm calls back a recollection of the opening. The return to the initial theme is made through some of Chopin's most ingenious (and anxious) counterpoint: like the chorus in a Greek tragedy, the left hand continues to intone the main theme, while, above it, the right hand thunders forth the new addition like a knell of doom.

## Franz Liszt

### Sonata in B Minor

In dedicating to Schumann the only work he ever called a piano sonata as a late return gift for that composer's dedication to him of the Fantasy, Op. 17, Liszt surely knew he was tempting the fates. He had read the 1839 essay in which Schumann – after writing his own, less-than-successful three sonatas piano sonatas – had concluded that "this form has run its course." While the evidence – after the deaths of Beethoven in 1827 and Schubert in 1828 – that the genre was in decline was undeniable, Liszt's intention was not to write a sonata in several movements that

resembled those of his predecessors.

Liszt is generally credited with the invention of the symphonic poem, in which he emphasized a device he called the "Metamorphosis of Themes." Liszt demonstrates the principle at its best in his B Minor Sonata, which Wagner characterized as "beyond all conception, beautiful, profound, noble and sublime."

Unlike most classical-era piano sonatas from Haydn and Mozart through Beethoven and Schubert, the Liszt Sonata is not written in three or four movements and is not based on the opposition of contrasting themes. It consists of a single movement, in three connected parts, and all of its thematic material is introduced in its opening measures. We hear a repeated tone, from which scales slowly and irregularly descend; after a silence, a very energetic theme appears; then a marcato passage in the bass; and, finally, a chorale-like theme, marked grandioso, with broad repeated chords.

The rest of the sonata is the life story of these themes as they undergo inexhaustibly resourceful transformations that demonstrate compelling fantasy and constructive logic. Ranging from outbursts of dark intensity to passages of meltingly lyrical tenderness, the Sonata's moods shift purposefully, its depth of emotion inseparable from its formal originality.

In the work's first section, the themes are first transformed lyrically, then threaded through ingenious transformations and variations in key and mood into a recitative. The latter leads into the sonata's adagio middle section, built on an Andante sostenuto in F-sharp, filled with tranquil and lyrical delicacy. The third and final section begins, garbed in the form of a fugue (actually, a fugato). Moving ever faster, it finally reaches a dazzling stretto climax in rapid piling on of voices. Romantic convention might have led the listener to expect a triumphant and tumultuous conclusion – something which Liszt's sketches indicate that he initially planned. But the music slips away in a raptly meditative close, with a gentle pianissimo resolution in B Major, that perfectly completes the circle opened by those searching, apparently hesitant, descending scales half an hour before. \*

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