

Igor
LEVIT

PIANO

Wed, October 30, 2024 | 7:30PM



24/25 SEASON



Dear Friends,

Welcome! We are thrilled to have you with us for this special evening that launches pianist Igor Levit's short residency at Princeton University Concerts. It always feels particularly meaningful to have an artist return after making their debut with us at a young age—since his unforgettable debut with us in 2016, Igor has risen to international superstardom, captivating audiences around the globe. For many of us, his music provided connection and comfort during the most isolating moments of the pandemic. Through his almost daily house concerts streamed on his social media channels, Igor bridged distances and reminded us of the power of music to heal and inspire. For that, we are deeply grateful.

That sense of personal connection is at the heart of his long-awaited return to Princeton, which includes an opportunity to get to know this extraordinary artist and human being on a personal level:

Saturday, November 2 at 1PM | Film Screening

Igor Levit: No Fear, a documentary film about Levit | Princeton Garden Theatre

Sunday, November 3 at 3PM | Healing with Music Series

"Igor Levit: Pianist and Advocate for Change," a conversation permeated by live music between Levit and NPR award-winning journalist Deborah Amos
Richardson Auditorium, Alexander Hall

I feel so fortunate that we can enjoy "the world's greatest musicians among friends" in this unique community, and that through multi-faceted experiences like these, the world's greatest musicians become our friends. Please join me in giving a warm welcome to Igor Levit.

With gratitude and excitement,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marna Seltzer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Marna Seltzer, Director

Wednesday, October 30, 2024 at 7:30PM • Richardson Auditorium, Alexander Hall

PADEREWSKI MEMORIAL CONCERT

IGOR LEVIT Piano

**JOHANN
SEBASTIAN
BACH**

(1685–1750)

Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue
in D Minor, BWV 903

**JOHANNES
BRAHMS**

(1833–1897)

Ballades, Op. 10
No. 1 in D Minor
No. 2 in D Major
No. 3 in B Minor
No. 4 in B Major

INTERMISSION

**LUDWIG VAN
BEETHOVEN**

(Arr. Liszt)

(1770–1827)

Symphony No. 7 in A Major, Op. 92
Poco sostenuto—Vivace
Allegretto
Presto
Allegro con brio



About the Program

By Lucy Caplan © 2024 • Program Annotator

Lucy Caplan is Assistant Professor of Music at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. Her first book, 'Dreaming in Ensemble: How Black Artists Transformed American Opera,' will be published by Harvard University Press in 2025. She is a winner of the Rubin Prize for Music Criticism.

Introduction

The trifecta of composers featured on this evening's program—Bach, Beethoven, Brahms—stands at the pinnacle of the tradition known as German musical universalism. Because of its focus on instrumental music that does not reference specific narratives, instead dwelling in the realm of pure sound, this tradition is sometimes presumed to have an appeal which transcends the borders of identity, enabling it to take on an apolitical status. But both scholars and artists have challenged the idea that any music can be divorced from politics, instead asking how music and musicians are connected to the exigencies of the wider world.

“ Music can provide people with an idea. A piano piece can't save the world. But we can.”

For Igor Levit, this is not an abstract concern. He is both a renowned interpreter of these composers' works and an artist who foregrounds his leftist commitments by contributing actively to political discourse. The relationship between his artistry and his politics can sometimes be easy to grasp; he has championed such explicitly political works as Frederic Rzewski's "The People United Will Never Be Defeated!". It is more often unspoken, yet foundational nonetheless. Performing Beethoven or Bach or Brahms is not usually an act that can be attached to a specific political goal or outcome, but that does not mean it is politically meaningless. Levit has observed that music "can provide people with an idea. A piano piece can't save the world. But we can." To acknowledge music's political potential is, in some ways, a more appealing concept than the idea of universalist transcendence: it takes seriously the weight that art carries in the world and its capacity to change our

lives. (*Hear Levit reflect on the relationship between his musical and political identities in conversation with acclaimed journalist Deborah Amos when he appears on the Healing with Music series this Sunday, November 3, 2024 at 3PM.*)

J.S. Bach, Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue in D Minor, BWV 903 (c. 1720)

Arnold Schoenberg once quasi-joked that Bach could be considered the first twelve-tone composer, given his proclivity for thorny chromaticism and harmonic adventurousness. This piece exemplifies the idea, reveling in the vivid sonic palette that emerges when all notes of the chromatic scale are present. It begins with two striking runs up and down the keyboard, which firmly establish the key of d minor. But this is a tonal center which does not hold, as the piece soon tilts into a range of faraway keys, from A-flat major to B major. The Fantasia's first section is a tempestuous prelude, rippling with arpeggiated figures. Next comes a section marked "Recitativ," underscoring the sudden shift from pianistic virtuosity to speech-like patterns, followed by a marvelously improvisatory culmination. The fugue is based on a long, winding chromatic subject. While it begins in a rather severe style, the rules of counterpoint seem to loosen their grip with each additional voice, giving the piece an increasingly fantastical feel. Like the Fantasia, it moves freely and furiously across keys, taking full advantage of the chromaticism of the subject.

The complexities of Bach's score are heightened by the fact that no single authoritative manuscript exists. Several versions are extant, many of which date from Bach's own time—suggesting that he returned to and revised the piece multiple times. Their collective existence is a fascinating reminder that the piece's intricacies, spellbindingly complex as they are, were never set in stone but rather open to constant reimagination.

Johannes Brahms, Ballades, Op. 10 (1854)

Even as a young man, Brahms tended toward musical melancholy. The Ballades, written when he was in his early twenties, have a faint yet pervasive sense of grief even in their more buoyant moments. The individuality of Brahms's compositional voice is especially apparent given that the ballade was a popular form among nineteenth-century composers; most notably, Chopin had written four such works in the 1830s. But where Chopin had imbued his works with a whimsical sense of freedom, Brahms hewed more closely to the form's parameters. His Ballades are clearly structured, each unfolding in ternary form; they also comprise a clear set, with the first two in the parallel keys of D minor and D major, and the next two in the parallel keys of B minor and B major. Even the major-key ballades, though, are characterized by emotional restraint.

In the score for the first Ballade, Brahms indicated that the piece was inspired by the Scottish poem “Edward,” which appeared in Johann Gottfried Herder’s *Voices of the People*, an anthology of folk songs. It is a hauntingly simple work, which uses parallel fifths to create a sense of gravitas before moving into a warmer second theme. The second Ballade is gentle and subdued. The tranquil opening section gives way to an agitated middle section. Although quite different in tone from the opening, it feels less like an outburst than a momentary disturbance, intensified by the repetition of triplet figures throughout. Sure enough, the serenity of the opening melody soon returns. The third Ballade is a stormy Intermezzo, propelled forward by syncopated rhythms; its use of open fifths recalls the first Ballade, lending a sense of unity to the set. The fourth begins with a quietly heart-wrenching gesture: a melody that begins on a D natural rather than the expected D sharp, as if yearning for a contentment that is just out of reach. The longest of the four pieces, it is also the most surprising, introducing so many new themes that it ultimately takes on a rondo-like quality.

Ludwig van Beethoven (arr. Liszt), Symphony No. 7 in A Major, Op. 92 (1863)

In a 1970 essay titled “Musica Practica,” the French critic and philosopher Roland Barthes posited a crucial distinction between the music one plays and the music one listens to. The former requires embodied, physical action, while the latter can be reduced to a wholly passive experience, especially when the performer serves a mere “technician” whose job is to convey existing musical ideas. To Barthes, Beethoven is the rare composer who simply cannot be listened to passively; the complexity of his music requires deeper engagement.

Franz Liszt’s transcriptions of Beethoven’s symphonies offer a perfect example of this idea. The solo performer becomes an orchestra, an immensely difficult feat. In turn, the listener is compelled to listen actively, thinking critically about how the transcription both evokes and departs from the orchestral original. And there is much to consider. Liszt transcribed all of Beethoven’s symphonies, a project that was both a sign of his admiration for the composer and an act of democratization, enabling more people to hear this orchestral music. He includes the names of orchestral instruments in the score for the performer’s reference, and there are also abundant subtle adaptations, intended to showcase Beethoven’s ideas (as well as the performer’s virtuosity) as comprehensively as possible. From its first moments, the transcription of Symphony No. 7 celebrates both the majesty of Beethoven’s music and the dazzling sonic capabilities of the modern piano. The expansive tessitura of the first movement’s introduction is condensed somewhat, but it soon explodes into an astonishingly choreographed dance. The haunting second movement asks much of the performer, who is often responsible for conveying multiple melodies and countermelodies at once. The ferocious third movement teems with dramatic trills in every octave. In the final movement, Liszt invites

the performer to marshal every resource at their disposal to convey the sheer exuberance of Beethoven's music. The listener emerges with the sense that what they have heard is inimitable: an homage to Beethoven that is also unmistakably something else.

About *the* Paderewski Memorial Concert

The Paderewski Memorial Concert is funded in part by an endowment from The Paderewski Foundation founded by Edward and Jeannette Witkowski. It honors the memory of Ignacy Jan Paderewski: Polish pianist, composer, and statesman. Born in Poland in 1860, Paderewski was a student of Leschetizky, and rapidly rose to international fame—indeed, his name is still synonymous with virtuosity.

Following World War I, he laid aside his concert career, holding the offices of Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland. As such, he was a signer of the Treaty of Versailles, becoming friendly with President Woodrow Wilson whose support had been influential in the establishment of Poland as an independent state. On Tuesday, November 10, 1925, Paderewski performed here in Alexander Hall.

Princeton University Concerts thanks The Paderewski Foundation for its generous support of tonight's concert.

About the Artist



IGOR LEVIT, Piano

The New York Times describes Igor Levit as one of the “most important artists of his generation,” the *New Yorker* as a pianist “like no other.” Since the 2022/23 season, Igor Levit is the Co-Artistic Director of the Heidelberger Frühling Musikfestival. With the Lucerne Festival he initiated the Piano Fest which will take place in May 2025 for the third time.

In the 2024/25 season in addition to tonight’s recital, Igor Levit performs in recital at the Musikverein Vienna, Philharmonie Berlin, La Scala Milan, Carnegie Hall New York, Walt Disney Concert Hall Los Angeles, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, as well as in Naples, Rome, Stockholm, and Évian among others. For the inauguration of Christian Thielemann as the new General Music Director of the Berlin State Opera, he opens the new season with the Staatskapelle Berlin. Further highlights of Igor Levit’s orchestral season are a full Beethoven cycle with the Cleveland Orchestra and Franz Welser Möst, as well as a Prokofiev cycle with the Budapest Festival Orchestra and Ivan Fischer. With the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and Sir Antonio Pappano and the Orchestra of the Bayerische Rundfunk and Esa-Pekka Salonen he will interpret the monumental piano concerto of Ferruccio Busoni.

Igor Levit’s 2019 highly acclaimed first recording of the 32 Beethoven sonatas was awarded the Gramophone “Artist of the Year” Award as well as the Opus Klassik in autumn 2020. In June 2022 his Album *On DSCH* was awarded the “Recording of the Year” Award as well as the Instrumental Award of the *BBC Music Magazine*. As a reaction to the attacks

(Continued on page 10)



Igor LEVIT

PIANIST RESIDENCY
AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY CONCERTS

Sat, November 2, 2024 | 1PM
DOCUMENTARY FILM SCREENING AT
THE PRINCETON GARDEN THEATRE

IGOR LEVIT: NO FEAR

A fly-on-the-wall documentary following pianist Igor Levit from the final recordings of his Beethoven piano sonata cycle and into the beginning of Covid lockdown.

Sun, November 3, 2024 | 3PM
HEALING WITH MUSIC SERIES

**CONVERSATION BETWEEN IGOR LEVIT
& JOURNALIST DEBORAH AMOS**

Get to know this pianist on a personal level as he speaks to the ways in which he uses his platform and artistry to respond to global crises including antisemitism, climate change, and social justice.

Co-Sponsored by:
Princeton Institute for
International and Regional Studies



of Hamas on October 7, 2023, Igor Levit recorded a selection of the *Songs Without Words* from Mendelssohn, his most personal album to date. A live recording of the acclaimed piano concertos of Johannes Brahms with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra and Christian Thielemann, paired with Brahms' Fantasies and Piano Pieces, was released in October 2024. In spring 2021 Hanser published Igor Levit's first book *House Concert*, co-authored by Florian Zinnecker followed in Fall 2022 by the release of the feature documentary *Igor Levit: No Fear* in cinemas and on DVD.

Born in Nizhny Novgorod, Russia, Igor Levit moved to Germany with his family at the age of eight. He completed his piano studies in Hannover with the highest score in the history of the institute. His teachers included Karl-Heinz Kämmerling, Matti Raekallio, Bernd Goetzke, Lajos Rovatkay, and Hans Leygraf. Igor Levit was the youngest participant in the 2005 International Arthur Schnitzler Competition in Tel Aviv, where he won silver, the special prize for chamber music, the audience prize, and the special prize for the best performance of contemporary pieces.

In 2018 Igor Levit was named the eighth recipient of the prestigious "Gilmore Artist Award," conferred only every four years to a classical pianist and recognized as the largest and one of the world's most distinguished music awards. In spring 2019 he was appointed professor for piano at his alma mater, the University of Music, Theatre and Media Hanover.

For his political commitment Igor Levit has been awarded the 5th International Beethoven Prize in 2019 followed by the award of the "Statue B" of the International Auschwitz Committee in January 2020. His 53 Twitter-streamed live house concerts during the lockdown in spring 2020 garnered a worldwide audience, offering a sense of community and hope in a time of isolation and desperation. In October 2020 Igor Levit was recognized with the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Igor Levit made his Princeton University Concerts debut in 2016. He returns this season for a short residency. In addition to tonight's concert, PUC will screen "Igor Levit: No Fear," a documentary film about Levit, at the Princeton Garden Theatre on Saturday, November 2, 2024 at 1PM. He will return to Richardson Auditorium on Sunday, November 3 at 3PM in conversation with NPR award-winning journalist Deborah Amos as part of PUC's Healing with Music series.

**FREE
FOOD!**



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: COME TO INTERNOSHIN'!

Tonight, at intermission, meet your fellow student attendees in the **Richardson Lounge (basement level)** and share your thoughts about the concert over free snacks.

Hosted by the Student Ambassadors of Princeton University Concerts.

For more information visit:
puc.princeton.edu/students

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OF PRINCETON UNIVERSITY CONCERTS

SUPPORT US

Supporting Princeton University Concerts is critical to our future. Ticket sales cover less than half of the cost of presenting the very best in world-class music. Remaining funds come, in part, from our generous endowment, left to PUC by the Ladies' Musical Committee in 1929. We remain eternally grateful for the support of the Philena Fobes Fine Memorial Fund and the Jesse Peabody Frothingham Fund.

Other support comes from donors like you. We are grateful to the individuals whose support at all levels ensures that musical performance remains a vital part of Princeton, the community, and the region.

If you wish to make a donation to Princeton University Concerts, please call us at 609-258-2800, visit puc.princeton.edu, or send a check payable to Princeton University Concerts to: Princeton University Concerts, Woolworth Center, Princeton, NJ 08544.

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We are deeply grateful for the support we have received and thank all of our donors and volunteers. The list below acknowledges gifts of \$100 or more, received between April 1, 2024 and October 1, 2024. If you see an error or would like to make a change in your listing, please contact the Concert Office at 609-258-2800.

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Planned gifts made to Princeton University Concerts carry on the vision of an extraordinary group of ladies who founded the series. We are grateful to the individuals below who will continue this legacy and will help shape the series' future for years to come. To inquire about planned giving opportunities, or if you have already included Princeton University Concerts in your plans, please contact Marna Seltzer in the Princeton University Concert Office at 609-258-2800.

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Princeton University Concerts

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The first concert in what is known today as Princeton University Concerts was presented on October 29, 1894, thus establishing one of the oldest continuous series of musical events in the country. From 1894 to 1914, the “Ladies Musical Committee” presented concerts by the Kneisel Quartet. After 1914, the programs diversified. In 1929, the Ladies Committee became the Princeton University Concerts Committee—a town and gown group of interested and knowledgeable music lovers—which has guided the University Concerts to date.

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Fall 24

At the Princeton Public Library

Wed, August 28, 2024 | 10:30AM & 7PM (Book Groups)

Wed, September 4, 2024 | 7PM (Keynote Deborah Amos)

“THE PIANIST FROM SYRIA”

BY AEHAM AHMAD

At the Princeton Garden Theatre

Wed, September 25, 2024 | 7PM

“THE MUSIC OF STRANGERS”

Healing with Music

Thu, September 26, 2024 | 7:30PM

KINAN AZMEH* Clarinet

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DEBORAH AMOS Moderator

Syria: Art in a Time of Crisis

Special Event

Wed, October 9, 2024 | 7:30PM

CÉCILE MCLORIN SALVANT Vocals

At the Princeton Public Library

Thu, October 17, 2024 | 10:30AM & 7PM (Book Groups)

Thu, October 24, 2024 | 7PM (Keynote Deborah Amos)

“THE SEPTEMBERS OF SHIRAZ”

BY DALIA SOFER

All in the Family

Sat, October 19, 2024 | 1PM & 3PM

CMS KIDS Ages 3–6, Relaxed Format

Lee Rehearsal Room, Lewis Arts Complex

Special Event

Wed, October 30, 2024 | 7:30PM

IGOR LEVIT Piano

At the Princeton Garden Theatre

Sat, November 2, 2024 | 1PM

“IGOR LEVIT: NO FEAR”

Healing with Music

Sun, November 3, 2024 | 3PM

IGOR LEVIT Piano

DEBORAH AMOS Moderator

Pianist and Advocate for Change

Concert Classics Series

Thu, November 7, 2024 | 7:30PM

BENJAMIN GROSVENOR Piano

Concert Classics Series

Wed, November 13, 2024 | 7:30PM

BELCEA STRING QUARTET

ÉBÈNE STRING QUARTET

Live Music Meditation

Wed, November 20, 2024 | 12:30 PM

ISIDORE STRING QUARTET

Performances Up Close

Wed, November 20, 2024 | 6PM & 9PM

Pre-Concert: Do-Re-Meet Speed Dating | 7PM

ISIDORE STRING QUARTET*

Richardson Chamber Players

Sun, November 24, 2024 | 3PM

SONGS WITH/OUT WORDS

Special Event

Sat, December 7, 2024 | 7:30PM

Pre-Concert: Do-Re-Meet LGBTQIA+ Mingle | 5:30PM

A CHANTICLEER CHRISTMAS

Princeton University Chapel

Concert Classics Series

Wed, December 11, 2024 | 7:30PM

JANINE JANSEN* Violin

DENIS KOZHUKHIN* Piano

OUR SEASON CONTINUES
IN THE *SPRING SEMESTER*
CHECK OUT THE FULL

24/25

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