



presents...

LISE DE LA SALLE | Piano

Thursday, March 12, 2026 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

FREDERIC CHOPIN **Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52**

FRANZ LISZT **Cantique d'amour, S. 173**
Réminiscences de Don Juan, S. 418

INTERMISSION

FREDERIC CHOPIN **Ballade No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 23**

FRANZ LISZT **Sonata for Piano in B Minor, S. 178**

This performance is made possible in part by the generous support of Michael Mueller and Christine Cullens.

Lise de la Salle is represented by Harrison Parrott
South Wing, Somerset House, The Strand, London, WC2R 1LA UK harrisonparrott.com

Steinway Model D, Pro Piano, San Francisco.



ARTISTS PROFILES

San Francisco Performances presents Lise de la Salle for the fourth time. She first appeared in January 2009.

Lise de la Salle is an internationally recognized pianist with a career spanning over twenty years. Her award-winning recordings and international performances have made her a prominent figure among contemporary pianists. A *Washington Post* critic once remarked, “For much of the concert, the audience had to remember to breathe... the exhilaration didn’t let up for a second until her hands came off the keyboard.”

The 2025–26 season marks another milestone in her career, featuring collaborations with orchestras such as Staatskapelle Berlin under Nathalie Stutzmann, Wiener Symphoniker and Petr Popelka, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Kristiina Poska, Antwerp Symphony and Eliahu Inbal, Polish National Radio Symphony and Stephanie Childress, as well as Orchestre Symphonique de Québec, Shanghai Philharmonic, Enescu Philharmonic, Colorado Springs Philharmonic. She will also work with the French conductor Samy Rachid with the Gulbenkian Orchestra, as well as on tour with the Philharmonie ZuidNederland.

Lise has played with many leading orchestras across the globe: Chicago, Boston and Washington Symphony Orchestras, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Philharmonia, BBC Symphony and London Symphony Orchestras, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Münchner Philharmoniker, Dresden Staatskapelle, hr-Sinfonieorchester, Orchestre de Paris, Orchestre National de France, Orchestra dell’Accademia Nazi-

onale di Santa Cecilia, Filarmonica della Scala, Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI, Rotterdam Philharmonic, St Petersburg Philharmonic, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic and NHK Symphony Orchestras, Singapore Symphony Orchestra and Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra among many others. She collaborated with conductors such as Herbert Blomstedt, Fabio Luisi, James Conlon, Gianandrea Noseda, Krzysztof Urbanski, Antonio Pappano, Rafael Payare, Karina Kanellakis, Lioner Bringuier, Thomas Søndergård, Fabien Gabel, Marek Janowski, Robin Ticciati, Osmo Vanska, James Gaffigan, Semyon Bychkov, and Dennis Russell Davies.

She has performed in many renowned concert venues, including the Vienna Musikverein, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Herkulessaal in Munich, Berlin Philharmonie, Tonhalle Zürich, Lucerne KKL, Bozar in Brussels, Wigmore Hall and Royal Festival Hall in London, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, and the Hollywood Bowl. Her festival appearances include Klavier-Festival Ruhr, Bad Kissingen, Verbier, La Roque d’Anthéron, Bucharest Enescu Festival, San Francisco Performances, the Chicago Symphony recital series, Aspen, and Ravinia Festivals.

She also takes pleasure in educational outreach and conducts master classes in many of the cities in which she performs.

Her extensive discography on Naïve includes critically acclaimed recordings such as an all-Chopin album and the Liszt album, which was awarded a Diapason d’Or in *Gramophone* magazine. Her latest releases include *When Do We Dance?*, which explores a century of dance music with elegance and flair, and *Phantasmagoria*, dedicated to Liszt and featuring his famous Sonata.

Lise de la Salle began playing piano at age four and gave her first concert at nine, broadcast live on Radio France. A graduate of the Paris Conservatoire, she studied with Pascal Nemirovski and was mentored by Geneviève Joy-Dutilleux. She won the Young Concert Artists International Auditions in New York in 2004.

PROGRAM NOTES

Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Opus 52

FREDERIC CHOPIN
(1810–1849)

Chopin himself was the first to use the term “ballade” to refer to a piano composition, appropriating the name from the literary ballad: he appears to have been most taken with the lyric and dramatic possibilities of the term, for his four ballades fuse melodic writing with intensely dramatic—almost explosive—gestures. After Chopin’s death, Liszt, Grieg, Fauré, and Brahms would compose works for solo piano that they too called ballades.

Formally, Chopin’s ballades most closely resemble the sonata-form movement (an opening idea contrasted with a second theme-group, and the two ideas developed and recapitulated), but the ballades are not strictly in sonata-form, nor was Chopin trying to write sonata-form movements. His ballades are quite free in form, and their thematic development and harmonic progression are sometimes wildly original. All four ballades employ a six-beat meter (either 6/4 or 6/8), and the flowing quality of such a meter is particularly well-suited to the sweeping drama of this music. All four demand a pianist of the greatest skill.

Because of the literary association and the dramatic character of the music, many have been quick to search for extra-musical inspiration for the ballades, believing that such music must represent the attempt to capture actual events in sound. Some have heard the Polish struggle for independence in this music, others the depiction of medieval heroism. Chopin himself discouraged this kind of speculation and asked the listener to take the music on its own terms rather than as a representation of something else.

Many regard the *Ballade in F Minor*, composed in 1842, as Chopin’s finest creation. A brief introduction leads to the waltz-like opening theme, marked *Andante con moto*,

which gradually evolves into music of extraordinary animation. A slightly-swung second subject is swept into the ballade, and the two themes alternate in an atmosphere of increasing tension, leading to a grand climax and a brilliant close.

Cantique d'amour from *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*, S. 173/10

FRANZ LISZT
(1811–1886)

Liszt composed his *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* between the years 1847 and 1852, one of the most momentous periods in his life: in those years he became music director in Weimar and also entered into what would be a lifelong relationship with the Princess Carolyn Sayn-Wittgenstein. The process of creating the ten pieces of *Harmonies* was complex. Some of them Liszt revised from earlier compositions, some were transcriptions of pieces he had written earlier but not for piano, one was a free transcription of a piece by another composer, and several were entirely new compositions. Liszt published the collection in 1853 under the title *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* and dedicated it to Carolyn. The *Harmonies* have been described as Liszt's only work on a religious theme for piano, but that is not entirely accurate, and the scope of these pieces is wide: the *poétiques* is just as important here as the *religieuses*.

The ten pieces offer some of Liszt's finest writing for piano—including such movements as *Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude* and *Funérailles*—and it also contains pieces that remain virtually unknown. Liszt's biographer Alan Walker reports that the *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses* was one of the composer's favorites among his works and that late in life—when he had long given up the role of touring virtuoso—Liszt took delight in playing individual movements for his friends.

Harmonies poétiques et religieuses concludes with a movement titled *Cantique d'amour*, a great love-song clearly intended for Carolyn. A surprisingly subdued introduction leads to the opulent statement of love, which features some very dramatic writing, including staccato octaves and huge runs that sweep across the range of the keyboard. The firm final chords make a dramatic conclusion to the *Harmonies poétiques et religieuses*.

Réminiscences de Don Juan, S. 418

FRANZ LISZT

The “Don Juan” of this French title is actually Don Giovanni of Mozart's great opera. Liszt wrote this paraphrase on themes from *Don Giovanni* in 1841, just as he turned 30 and was at the crest of his fame as a touring virtuoso. Unlike some of Liszt's paraphrases, which string together tunes from an opera, the *Réminiscences de Don Juan* is a much more carefully conceived composition. Liszt chose three characteristic scenes from the opera and treated each in turn and at some length. The result is a very serious piece of music—it has been described as “symphonic”—that is remarkable not just for the virtuosity of the writing but for the imagination of Liszt's treatment of Mozart's ideas.

The three scenes Liszt chose are quite different, and each shows us a different face of Mozart's opera. The opening section is a powerful extension of the music that accompanies one of the most dramatic moments in the opera—the appearance of the statue at Don Giovanni's dinner party at the very end of the final act, when the Don is dragged down into hell. Liszt then turns to Don Giovanni and Zerlina's great duet from Act I, *Là ci darem la mano*, as he attempts to seduce her. This is one of the best-loved melodies in all music (Chopin and others have also written variations on it), and here Liszt evolves two long variations. The extended final section is based on what has been called the “champagne aria”—Don Giovanni's *Finch'han dal vino* from Act I, when he orders Leporello to prepare a party at which he plans to seduce as many women as possible. It is a sparkling aria in the opera, and Liszt uses its drive to energize his own virtuoso treatment. It all comes to a brilliant close, and it is no surprise that Liszt performed this music so often (or that it proved so popular with nineteenth-century audiences).

In our own day, when it may seem sacrilegious to “tamper” with a masterpiece like *Don Giovanni*, it is important to remember that we do not come to this music to hear Mozart but to hear what Liszt does with Mozart: Humphrey Searle has remarked that this piece is “Mozart-Liszt and not Mozart, and one should appreciate it for what it is.” And what it is, is quite impressive: over its nearly twenty-minute span this paraphrase reminds not just of the greatness of Mozart but of Liszt's own powerful musical personality.

Ballade No. 1 in G Minor, Opus 23

FREDERIC CHOPIN
(1810–1849)

Chopin began work on the *Ballade in G Minor* in 1831 in Vienna and completed it four years later in Paris. A portentous seven-bar introduction of uncertain tonality gives way to the opening episode, a waltz-like theme in G minor. The second theme is much more dramatic but—curiously—is related to the waltz theme. This second theme undergoes a brilliant development, though this *Ballade* lacks the recapitulation that would be expected at this point in a sonata-form movement. Instead, Chopin brings back the waltz theme briefly before launching into the coda, appropriately marked *Presto con fuoco*.

Piano Sonata in B Minor, S. 178

FRANZ LISZT

Liszt wrote his *Sonata in B Minor* in 1852–3 and dedicated it to Robert Schumann. The first public performance took place four years later in Berlin in 1857, when it was played by Liszt's son-in-law Hans von Bülow. The *Sonata in B Minor* is in all senses of the word a revolutionary work, for Liszt sets aside previous notions of sonata form and looks ahead to a new vision of what such a form might be. Schumann himself, then in serious mental decline, reportedly never heard the piece but could not have been especially comfortable with the dedication of a piece of music that flew so directly in the face of his own sense of what a sonata should be. Another figure in nineteenth-century music, however, reacted rapturously: Wagner wrote to Liszt to say, “The Sonata is beautiful beyond any conception, great, pleasing, profound and noble—it is sublime, just as you are yourself.”

The most immediately distinctive feature of the Sonata is that it is in one continuous span rather than being divided into separate, discrete movements. Despite the single-span structure, Liszt achieves something of the effect of traditional three-movement sonata form by giving the work a general fast-slow-fast shape. The entire Sonata is built on just four themes, all introduced in the opening moments: the slowly descending scale heard at the very beginning, marked *Lento assai*; the jagged,

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leaping theme in octaves that follows immediately—this is marked *Allegro energico*; dove-tailed into this is a propulsive figure of repeated eighth-notes, played first deep in the left hand; and a powerful hymn-like theme marked *Grandioso* and stamped out over steady accompaniment. These themes undergo a gradual but extensive development—a process Liszt called “the transformation of themes”—and are often made to perform quite varied functions as they undergo these transformations. For example, the propulsive left-hand figure, which sounds so ominous on its first appearance, is later made to sing in unexpected ways, while the jagged *Allegro ener-*

gico theme becomes the subject for a fugue at the opening of the third “movement.” At the end, Liszt winds all this energy down, and the Sonata concludes on a quiet recall of the slowly-descending *Lento assai* from the very beginning. After so much energy, the Sonata vanishes on a very quiet B, deep in the pianist’s left hand.

The *Sonata in B Minor* was to some extent shaped by Schubert’s “*Wanderer*” *Fantasy* of 1822, a work Liszt knew and greatly admired—he performed it often and made an arrangement of it for piano and orchestra. In the “*Wanderer*” *Fantasy* Schubert built an extended work in several contrasted sections, all based on a theme from his song *Die Wanderer*. Liszt allows himself more themes, but his technique is exact-

ly the same as Schubert’s: a single span of music evolves out of the ingenious transformation of just a few thematic ideas. Over the succeeding generations that idea would attract composers as different as Schoenberg (*Chamber Symphony No. 1*) and Sibelius (*Seventh Symphony*).

The *Sonata in B Minor* is extremely dramatic music, so dramatic that many guessed that it must have a program, as so much of Liszt’s music does. But Liszt insisted that this is not descriptive or programmatic music. He wanted his sonata accepted as a piece of “pure music,” to be heard and understood for itself.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger