

presents...

The Shenson Piano Series

JAN LISIECKI | Piano

Thursday, November 12, 2026 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

WORLD OF DANCE

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ **Three Czech Dances, H.154**
Obkročák: Tempo de Polka
Dupák: Allegro con brio
Polka: Rubato: Tempo de Polka

MANUEL DE FALLA **Two Spanish Dances from *La vida breve***

KAROL SZYMANOWSKI **Four Polish Dances, M.60**
Mazurka
Krakowiak
Oberek
Polonaise

FRANZ SCHUBERT **Sixteen German Dances, D.783**

BÉLA BARTÓK **Romanian Folk Dances**
Jocul cu bâță
Brâul
Pê Loc
Buciumeana
Poarga Românească
Mărunțel

ALBERTO GINASTERA **Danzas Argentinas, Opus 2**
Danza del viejo boyero
Danza de la moza donosa
Danza del gaucho matrero

INTERMISSION

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN	Grand valse brillante, Opus 18
JOHANNES BRAHMS	Waltz in G-sharp Minor, Opus 39, No. 3
FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN	from Three Waltzes, Opus 34 <i>No. 1 in A-flat Major</i> <i>No. 2 in A Minor</i>
JOHANNES BRAHMS	Waltz in A-flat Major, Opus 39, No. 15
ASTOR PIAZZOLLA	Libertango
ISAAC ALBÉNIZ	No. 2 Tango from España, Opus 165
MANUEL DE FALLA	Ritual Fire Dance from <i>El amor brujo</i>
FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN	Polonaise in A-flat Major, Opus 53

This series is made possible in part by the generous support of Fred M. Levin, The Shenson Foundation.

This program is made possible in part by the generous support of James R. Meehan.

Jan Lisiecki is represented by KD Schmid, Hardenbergstr, 9A, 10623 Berlin, Germany, Jannik Varlemann

Steinway Model D, Pro Piano, San Francisco.

ARTIST PROFILE

San Francisco Performances presents Jan Lisiecki for the third time. He made his SF Performances debut in December 2013.

"Pristine, lyrical and intelligent"

—The New York Times

"A musician of unusual refinement and imagination"

—Boston Globe



Canadian pianist **Jan Lisiecki** looks back on a career spanning a decade and a half on the world's greatest stages. He works closely with the foremost conductors and orchestras of our time, performing over a hundred concerts a year.

The 2026–27 season includes return engagements with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Orchestre National de France, Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, NDR Radiophilharmonie Hannover, Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, and Barcelona Symphony, where he opens the orchestra's season, among others. He also makes his long-awaited debut with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Sinfonieorchester Basel, and returns to the Sao Paulo State Symphony Orchestra for a two-week residency.

His current recital program juxtaposes various Dances by Martinů, Szymanowski, Schubert, Chopin, Bartok and de Falla and was recently presented in 25 cities worldwide, including the Philharmonie Berlin,

Vienna Konzerthaus, and the Palau de la Música in Barcelona. It will next be heard in San Francisco, Portland, Cologne, Wiesbaden, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, Ravello, and Trento, among other destinations.

Previous orchestra engagements include the New York Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, The Cleveland Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich and Staatskapelle Dresden. Lisiecki is a fixture at major summer festivals across Europe and North America, has performed at the Salzburg Festival and recently made his third appearance at the BBC Proms.

At the age of 15, Jan Lisiecki signed an exclusive recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon. He has since released eleven acclaimed albums for the label, most recently Mozart's Piano Concerts Nos. 9 & 22 with Bamberger Symphoniker and Manfred Honeck in April 2026. His recordings have received numerous distinctions including the JUNO Award, ECHO Klassik, Gramophone Critics' Choice, Diapason d'Or and Edison Klassiek.

At 18, he received both the Leonard Bernstein Award and Gramophone's Young Artist Award, becoming the youngest ever recipient of the latter. He was named UNICEF Ambassador to Canada in 2012.

PROGRAM NOTES

Three Czech Dances, H. 154

BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ
(1890–1959)

Martinů composed his *Three Czech Dances* in Paris in 1926. That title sounds innocent enough, but listeners (and performers!) should beware—this is music of stupefying difficulty, and all three of these brief dances bristle with technical challenges: constantly-shifting meters, blistering octave runs, rapid chordal writing, very fast tempos, continual chromatic passages.

Many of the folk-dances of Eastern Europe involve particular kinds of steps, and the *Three Czech Dances* open with two of these. An *Obkročák* is a "stepping dance." Martinů specifies that it should be in a *Tempo di Polka* but then sets the piece in 3/4 rather than the expected 2/4, and quickly this very fast dance is leaping between such meters as 5/8, 2/8, and 3/8. This music has a wild energy, full of angular themes and chromatic coloring.

A *Dupák* is one of many Eastern Europe-

an folk-dances that incorporate stomping. Martinů marks this one *Allegro con brio*, and it too pounds along shifting meters; an *Allegro vivace* central episode begins quietly enough but quickly races back to the opening material. Martinů titles the last movement *Polka*, but by now the wary listener will know not to expect the comfortable duple pulse of that traditional dance. Once again the music erupts with energy and concludes with a brief *Vivace* coda.

Two Spanish Dances from *La vida breve*

MANUEL DE FALLA
(1876–1946)

Falla wrote his two-act opera *La vida breve* ("The Brief Life") in 1904–05, and it was first performed in Nice in 1913. Set in Granada, the opera tells the *verismo*-like tale of Salud's betrayal by her lover Paco and her sudden death at the moment she accosts him at his wedding. The opera is seldom performed today, but its atmospheric music, tinged with Andalusian themes, has become popular in performances outside the opera.

The *Two Spanish Dances* on this program have become familiar in their arrangements for a variety of instruments. Both dances come from Act II, and on this program Mr. Lisiecki performs them in reverse order. The *Spanish Dance No. 2* takes place on the day of the wedding of Paco and Carmela, and in the opera it is sung as well as danced. Falla marks the opening *Allegro ritmico e con brio* but then stresses that the opening theme should be played *con gentilezza*.

The *Spanish Dance No. 1* has become far better known than the second, particularly in Fritz Kreisler's arrangement for violin and piano. It takes place at a fiesta the night before the wedding, and Falla sets it in the form of a *jota*, a lively dance in triple time. The opening section is a sinuous dance in 3/8, full of chromatic writing and swirling triplets and spiced with the sound of castanets and other percussion. This is set off by the heavy-footed central section, which pounds along menacingly before the return to the opening theme and the rush to the sizzling close.

Four Polish Dances, M.60

KAROL SZYMANOWSKI
(1882–1937)

In 1926 Karol Szymanowski was invited to contribute to a project called *Folk Dances of the World*, and he responded with a

set of pieces titled *Four Polish Dances*. All of the dances are Szymanowski's own (rather than being arrangements of existing folk dances), and all are set in traditional Polish dance forms. The set is very brief, and all these dances are free harmonically: though the pieces have key signatures, Szymanowski's writing is so chromatic that any sense of a home key is often blurred.

Szymanowski's *Mazurka* is brief but animated, and after all its energy, it comes to a very quiet close. As the title suggests, the *krakowiak* came from the region of Krakow. It is a fast dance in duple time, and Szymanowski marks his example *Allegretto gracioso*. An *oberek* is a fast dance in triple time that requires spins, jumps, and lifts from the dancers. Szymanowski's *Oberek* is quite animated—he marks it *Vivo e agitato* and specifies that the playing should be *martellato*: “hammered.” A key to the character of the concluding *Polonaise* may be found in Szymanowski's marking: he wants the performance to be *Festivo, pomposo*, though he sets this off with a quiet central episode marked both *tranquillo* and *dolce*.

Sixteen German Dances, D.783

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797–1828)

Across his brief lifetime Schubert composed countless dances for solo piano: waltzes, *ländler*, *ecossaises*, German dances, *galops*, *minuets*, *cotillons*, and so on. This is relaxed music-making, and it was probably written for several purposes: it could accompany social occasions, it could be danced to at parties, some of it was written with the emerging market of middle-class amateur pianists in mind, and much of it was probably written simply for Schubert's own enjoyment.

Schubert composed the *Sixteen German Dances* over a long span—he began them in January 1823 and completed them in November 1824. A German dance, or *Deutsche*, is a short dance in triple time, believed to have originated as a peasant dance. Schubert's set of sixteen dances whips past in less than eleven minutes. Each dance consists of two eight-bar phrases, and the dances are played without pauses between them. Schubert supplied no tempo markings for these dances. Some are clearly meant to be fast, though others seem slower and remind us that the waltz—soon to be a craze in Vienna—descended in part from the *Deutsche*.

The individual dances need no description. This is music to be enjoyed, whether one

is seated at the keyboard making it happen or seated in the audience and having these cheerful little dances come to life on the stage.

Romanian Folk Dances

BÉLA BARTÓK
(1881–1945)

Bartók's *Romanian Folk Dances* date from 1915. Over the previous six years, he had systematically collected songs and fiddle tunes of Romania, finally gathering over 3500 melodies from that region. The *Romanian Folk Dances*, concise arrangements and harmonizations of six of these, have become his most popular composition. The six brief movements (the final dance, in two sections, is sometimes counted as two movements) come from quite specific parts of Romania, but they share some general features. There is often a steady and powerful chordal accompaniment over which the melodic line, full of syncopations and surprising turns and harmonies, unfolds in long themes. *Jocul cu bâță* (Dance with Sticks) features a strongly-accented main theme and pungent harmonies. The very brief *Brâul* (Waistband Dance), from a region now in Yugoslavia, takes its name from the cloth belt worn by the dancers. *Pe Loc* (which translates In One Spot) is a stamping dance in which the dancers do not move from one spot. *Buciumeana* (Hornpipe Dance) is built on a soaring, rhapsodic melody which is stated and then repeated. The lively *Poarga Românească* (Romanian Polka), a children's dance, jumps back and forth between 2/4 and 3/4 throughout, while the concluding *Măruntel* is a swirling fast dance. In the score, Bartók notes that such a dance uses “very small steps and movements.” Given the blistering pace of this music, the dancers would need to use very small steps indeed.

Danzas Argentinas, Opus 2

ALBERTO GINASTERA
(1916–1983)

Alberto Ginastera was only 21 and still a student at the National Conservatory in Buenos Aires when he composed his *Danzas Argentinas* in 1937. Already he had discovered that native Argentinian materials—folksongs, rhythms, melodies—could furnish the basis for his own music. Each of Ginastera's brief *Danzas Argentinas* has

a different topic, but all three have a pronounced Argentinian flavor: all are full of rhythmic energy that grows out of ostinato figures, and all three have a harmonic piquancy that results from Ginastera's polytonal writing.

Danza del viejo boyero (a *boyero* is someone who takes care of oxen during long journeys) derives much of its energy from the opening ostinato, which will return throughout; Ginastera separates these returns with quiet lyric material before the dance comes to a sudden close. *Danza de la moza donosa* (“Dance of the Graceful Maiden”) rides along another ostinato, and over this Ginastera offers the lilting and infectious main theme. *Danza del gaucho matrero* (“Dance of the Cunning Gaucho”) is a portrait of the outlaw gaucho who hides in the woods. This is the most aggressive of the dances, bristling with energy and constant motion, and it drives to an exuberant close full of swoops across the range of the keyboard.

Grand valse brillante, Opus 18

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN
(1810–1849)

Chopin arrived in Vienna in November 1830 at the age of 20, desperate to escape the political turmoil of his native Poland. He had hoped to establish his career in the fabled city of Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert, but he and the city never took to each other. Chopin may never have felt comfortable in Vienna, but he was not immune to the charm of the waltzes so popular in that city: he composed his *Grand valse brillante* in E-flat Major in Vienna, probably early in 1831, and published it three years later in Paris.

This is grand and brilliant music, and it must have made a dazzling impression in the Viennese salons for which it was intended. It opens with a call to order, very much like a trumpet call, and then Chopin sails into his vigorous opening dance. This waltz is sectional in structure: this opening episode offers a number of subordinate themes and then changes character slightly in the middle section, where Chopin moves into D-flat major and builds the music on a more flowing waltz. Soon bits of the first section begin to intrude, and the trumpet-like call from the very beginning heralds a return to opening waltz. In the final moments Chopin sends the piano into its ringing high register before the massive concluding chords.

Waltz in G-sharp Minor, Opus 39, No. 3

JOHANNES BRAHMS
(1833–1897)

We have become so accustomed to a rather forbidding image of Brahms—the man with the piercing blue eyes, flowing beard, and frosty manner—that it is easy to forget there was quite a different man and composer behind that sometimes difficult exterior. This was a more relaxed Brahms—warm, sensual, fun-loving—and this side of him appears in a number of charming works he wrote during his first years in Vienna. Brahms composed the sixteen waltzes of his Opus 39 in January 1865, and in its first version this music was for piano four-hands; the version of single pianist appeared three years later. Brahms dedicated the *Waltzes* to his friend, the music critic Eduard Hanslick, saying of his inspiration: “I hardly know how it was. I was thinking of Vienna, of the pretty girls with whom you play duets, of you yourself, who like such things, and what not.”

The sixteen waltzes are sparkling miniatures, each lasting only about a minute (some flash past in only a few seconds); all are in binary form, with the two halves repeated. The *Waltz in G-sharp Minor* is one of the most famous in the set. Brahms specifies that the performance of this delicate, poised music should be *dolce*.

from Three Waltzes, Opus 34

No. 1 in A-flat Major
No. 2 in A Minor

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN

In September 1835, Chopin's parents took one of their rare trips outside Poland, to Karlsbad in Germany, and the 25-year-old composer came from Paris to spend a happy month with them there—it was the last time he would see them. As a part of this vacation, the family were guests for a week at the home of the Thun-Hohenstein family, and during this visit Chopin wrote his *Waltz in A-flat Major* for the daughters of his hosts. Marked *Vivace*, this is brilliant music. Chopin calls matters to order with a sixteen-measure introduction that flows directly into the vigorous waltz, and a central episode in D-flat major dances just as energetically. The ending produces a surprise. Chopin speeds into a coda that races brilliantly along runs in the pianist's right hand, and the waltz seems

headed for a fiery close. Suddenly reminiscences of earlier waltz-tunes penetrate this energy, the pace slackens, and—on a combination of coda and waltz—the music makes its way to a graceful close.

The *Waltz in A Minor* dates from very early in Chopin's career: he composed it during the difficult year 1831, when—as a 21-year-old—he moved to Paris, the city that would be his home for the rest of his life. The *Waltz in A Minor* is at an unusually slow tempo—the marking is *Lento*—and its mood is somber. It opens with a brief introduction that has a dark melody in the left hand and the waltz rhythm in the right; the arrival of the main waltz theme—full of those wonderfully elastic Chopin rhythms—puts things back in the expected order. The closing moments bring a surprise: a new waltz-tune—sparkling and light—seems to flicker to life momentarily, then the music subsides into the somber left-hand melody from the very beginning.

Waltz in A-flat Major, Opus 39, No. 15

JOHANNES BRAHMS

This noble, swaying music is another of the most famous waltzes from Brahms' Opus 39. In its original form for two pianos, it was in A major, but when Brahms made the version for solo piano he re-cast it in the more difficult key of A-flat major.

Libertango

ASTOR PIAZZOLLA
(1921–1992)

In 1954 Astor Piazzolla received a grant to study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, and that great teacher advised him to follow his passion for the Argentinian tango as the source for his own music. Piazzolla returned to Argentina and gradually evolved his own style, one that combines the tango, jazz, and classical music. In his hands, the tango—which had deteriorated into a soft, popular form—was transformed into music capable of a variety of expression and fusing sharply-contrasted moods.

After two decades of success in Argentina (and a heart attack in 1973), Piazzolla decided to return to Europe. *Libertango*, composed in Italy in 1974, quickly became a hit in Europe, and it remains today one of Piazzolla's most popular works. The title of this brief tango is somewhat fanciful (Piazzolla himself described it as “a sort of song of liberty”), and listeners will be taken more by its

pulsing rhythm, which functions as an ostinato throughout, and by Piazzolla's sinuous, sensual, and dark main theme.

Tango

ISAAC ALBÉNIZ
(1860–1909)

In 1890, the thirty-year-old Isaac Albéniz composed a set of eight piano pieces that he titled *España*, and the second, a brief *Tango* in D major, has become one of his most famous compositions. Marked *Andantino*, it is built on a sultry, haunting melody that shows some relation to the habanera, particularly in the rocking left-hand accompaniment and the 3+2 rhythm of the theme. The *Tango* has become famous in its many arrangements: it is often heard in versions for guitar or in Fritz Kreisler's arrangement for violin and piano, but this music charms in whatever form it is heard.

Ritual Fire Dance from *El amor brujo*

MANUEL DE FALLA

Through his friend Martinez Sierra, Falla he met the Andalusian singer-dancer Pastora Imperio, and from her mother Rosario la Mejorana, they heard the old Andalusian tale that became the basis for *El amor brujo*. Sierra adapted a scenario, and Falla completed the music in April 1915.

Its form is unique: *El amor brujo* is a ballet for four characters based on a tale of love and magic. It tells of the young woman Candelas who loved a passionate but dissolute man who has died. Candelas is now pursued by the handsome Carmelo, but she is haunted by the ghost of her former lover: whenever she and Carmelo are about to exchange “the perfect kiss” that will symbolize their love, the ghost appears and prevents it. Carmelo asks his friend Lucia to accompany them. The ghost appears and begins to flirt with Lucia, freeing Candelas and Carmelo to exchange “the perfect kiss.” Vanquished, the ghost disappears forever and triumphant bells ring out.

The *Ritual Fire Dance* depicts Candelas' final attempt to exorcize the demon of the gypsy. Midnight arrives on its twelve quiet strokes, and over a walking bass line swirling trills lead to the famous main theme of this dance, with its characteristic triplets. Though the *Ritual Fire Dance* fails to chase off the dissolute ghost, it has become famous

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on its own (it was one of Arthur Rubinstein's most successful encore pieces).

Polonaise in A-flat Major, Opus 53

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN

Chopin's last polonaise, the *Polonaise in*

A-flat Major is one of his grandest works: exciting, dramatic, and harmonically adventurous. Composed in 1842, it is somewhat in the manner of the "*Military*" *Polonaise*, but this one is even more powerful, more dynamic. One feels this from the first instant, where the ominous, muttering runs create a sense of expectancy and of power tightly restrained. That power bursts out when this polonaise does begin to dance, but this is not the polite dance of the ballroom—this one ex-

plodes across the keyboard, driven along by thunderous runs, trills, and complex chording. A series of arpeggiated chords leads to the center section, sometimes compared to the pound of horses' hooves. This leads to a return of the fiery dance from the opening section, but now Chopin abbreviates this dance and drives the polonaise directly to its exciting close.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger