

8:10pm (UTC+8)
30th April 2025
YST Concert Hall

Works by:
Krol
Poulenc
Brahms



Chloe Chai

Horn Senior Recital

A message from me

Hello there,

If you're reading this, you've picked up my program booklet– either because you're genuinely curious, or because you're early and needed something to do.

Either way, welcome.

I've always been a bit of a visual person. At concerts, I'm the one flipping through the program, hoping to read a story, an image or even metaphors to help me stay focused when my mind starts wandering.

Now I know that not everyone in the audience is a music person. Some of you are friends, family, or people who got dragged here out of love (*or mild obligation*), and musical terms might sound like wizard-speak. So, I wanted this booklet to be something you can follow and enjoy– not just a list of unfamiliar titles and names. Hopefully, it gives you something to hold onto as you listen.

This concert marks the end of a meaningful chapter in my life, and this program is my way of sharing the journey with you– the moments, the memories, and all the beautiful chaos in between.

Thank you for being here, I hope you enjoy my recital.

Chloe ♥

Bernhard Krol **(1920–2013)**

Laudatio for Solo Horn

Bernhard Krol was a German composer, conductor, and Horn player. Krol studied with Josef Rufer, a disciple of Arnold Schoenberg. He played with renowned orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic and the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra. As a composer, he favored tonal music in the tradition of Max Reger and Paul Hindemith, and was known for his works for brass and church music.

Francis Poulenc **(1899–1963)**

Élégie for Horn and Piano

Francis Poulenc was a French composer and pianist, celebrated for his distinctly French composition style that combined modernism with lyricism. His music is characterized by wit, melodic richness, and a blend of modern influences with traditional tonality, often infused with humor. Poulenc remains a significant figure in 20th century French Music.

10 minutes intermission

Johannes Brahms **(1833–1897)**

Horn Trio in E-flat Major,
Op.40

Johannes Brahms was a German composer, pianist, and conductor, regarded as one of the leading figures of the Romantic era. His career took a turn after meeting Robert and Clara Schumann in 1853, as Robert famously hailed him as a music genius, which brought Brahms' early recognition. A Brahmsian work would often look like a mixture of classical structures with Romantic expressiveness. Brahms' music is noted for its rhythmic complexity, contrapuntal mastery, and emotional depth.

Laudatio by Bernhard Krol

The piece opens with this motif:



reminiscent of a question— a **spiritual** question frequently asked in this piece. Krol envisioned this work as a meditative journey in search of understanding, with expressions of anger, sorrow, and longing.

The Latin word *Laudatio* translates to laudation in English, which refers to the act of praise or commendation. This piece is inspired by the Gregorian chant ***Te Deum Laudamus*** (“We Praise Thee, O God”), which forms the thematic core of the composition*. *Laudatio* for Solo Horn was composed in 1966 for the renowned horn player Herman Baumann, who requested a short work for a radio recording.

*“A discussion of selected works of Bernhard Krol featuring the horn: Thoughts of historical lineage and performance” (Kilp, 1998)

While I was narrowing down my options for an opening piece for this recital, I found myself particularly drawn to the piece *Laudatio* for its emotional depth and the freedom it offers to the performer to explore vulnerability through sound. Unlike most traditional solo horn works that showcase technical brilliance, this piece invites a kind of inner stillness. It feels less like a performance and more like a conversation– with oneself, with something greater, or with silence itself.

To the listeners, *Laudatio* comes across like a single voice echoing in a large, empty space. The horn line is exposed and raw– at times, it sounds like it’s pleading, searching, or even grieving. There are long, flowing phrases that suddenly shift into intense, emotional outbursts. The pauses and the silence between phrases are just as important as the phrases themselves, creating this reflective, almost anticipative atmosphere that draws the attention of the listeners.

“Who am I, and What now?”

Laudatio somehow reminded me of my time as a freshman when I first left home and came to this unfamiliar land called Singapore. It reminded me of how I felt then: lost, uncertain, yet quietly hopeful.

Élégie for Horn and Piano

by Francis Poulenc

Élégie is a single-movement piece composed by Francis Poulenc in 1957, written in memory of the well-respected British horn player Dennis Brain, who died tragically in a car accident at the age of 36. This work was first performed on February 17, 1958, in a BBC broadcast by horn player Neil Sanders and Poulenc himself at the piano.

It is evident in Poulenc's other works that he had a remarkable gift to switch between humor and heartbreak. Critics and musicians often describe his music as "the clown with tears," reflecting how his cheerful surface often conceals deeper emotional feelings. *Élégie*, however, is seen as one of his more **somber** pieces, capturing both the shock of Brain's sudden death and the deep respect Poulenc held for him.

The piece opens with an uncomfortable 12-tone row, alternating between agitated, dissonant passages to more lyrical, mournful sections. The work ends quietly, with the horn presenting a new sequence, fading into a soft, unresolved cadence— a bid of **farewell**.

Élégie can be heard as a reflection of the **7 stages of grief**—a non-linear emotional journey that mirrors the aftermath of loss.

**Shock → Denial → Anger → Bargaining →
Depression → Coping → Acceptance**

Working on *Élégie* reminded me to see grief not only in the negative sense but also in a positive one; the kind of loss that comes with change, like letting go of the old versions of myself. In my sophomore year, I was in this strange in-between space: unlearning habits I had held onto for years, while trying to build new ones. It was messy and uncomfortable, with lots of tears involved, but also necessary.

In many ways, the emotional arc of *Élégie*— with its shifts between confusion, intensity and self-reflection felt like a soundtrack to that process. It reminded me that growth often involves grieving, and that is okay.

Horn Trio in E-flat Major Op.40

by Johannes Brahms

The *Horn Trio, Op. 40* stands as one of The Brahms' most distinctive and emotionally charged chamber works of the 19th century. Composed in 1865, the trio was written for the unusual combination of natural horn, violin, and piano– a choice that reflected both Brahms' personal history and his artistic vision. The work was conceived in the wake of the death of Brahms' mother, Chirstiane, and its mournful character is often interpreted as a deeply personal tribute to her memory.

Brahms' decision to use the natural, valveless horn– an instrument he had learned as a child and one associated with nostalgia and sounds of nature– imbues the trio with a unique timbral color and a sense of longing.

The opening theme in the **Andante**, is inspired by a walk in the Black Forest, which pacing feels like a quiet stroll: unhurried, with the rise and fall of gentle melodies mirroring the landscape. The **Scherzo** whisks away the short-lived calmness with its spirited tempo and buoyant rhythms. The subtle shifts between triple and duple time creates a sense of rhythmic unpredictability. A quiet and slow rolling piano line then opens the emotional heart of the trio, **Adagio mesto**. The violin and horn then joins in with long, winding lines that seem to search for direction, only to circle back or linger, showing the aimlessness that accompany deep grief. The movement is concluded with a subtle hint of a dream-like variation of a German folksong– believed to have been taught to Brahms by his mother.

The finale, **Allegro con brio** bursts forth with spirit and energy, banishing the grief and darkness of the previous movement. The movement's lively tempo and playful rhythms features hunting-horn style motifs and leaping horn calls. The piano's staccato articulation and syncopated rhythms mimic the gallop of the horse , while the horn and violin exchange hunting calls suggesting emotional resolution of the trio, representing hope and the possibility of joy after sorrow.

Brahms' Horn Trio holds a very special place in my heart.

It was the very first piece I played for one of my teachers, Jamie. 4 years later, it will be the last piece I perform in this school– for him, the same person who walked me through every step of this journey. Coming back to it feels like closing a loop, but with so much growth in between.

Theres something quietly poetic in ending where I started. This performance is both a farewell and a thank you– to my teachers, colleagues and friends who believed in me before I knew how to believe in myself, and to the place that shaped me.



Encore? Only if the stars align...or if you clap really loud :)