

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
Piano Sonata No. 24 in F-sharp major, Op. 78 (“À Thérèse”)

Composed in 1809 and dedicated to Countess Thérèse von Brunswick, this compact two-movement sonata stands apart from Beethoven’s larger, more dramatic works of the same period. Instead of grandeur, it offers intimacy, elegance and humour.

William Bolcom (b. 1938)
Nine Bagatelles

Composed for the 1997 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, Bolcom’s Nine Bagatelles offer a witty and contemporary reimagining of a traditional form. The term bagatelle derives from the French word meaning something “trifling” or “lightweight,” yet, as in much of the repertoire, the music often transcends its modest label. Each miniature reveals a sharply defined character—by turns humorous, reflective, sarcastic, and virtuosic—while showcasing a wide palette of colors and textures.

In these pieces, Bolcom brings a distinctly modern and eclectic voice to the genre, alluding to composers such as Frédéric Chopin, Claude Debussy, Olivier Messiaen and Sergei Prokofiev to varying degrees. Like the Preludes of Debussy, Bolcom places descriptive titles at the end of each piece, in parentheses, as if to suggest rather than define the character of the music—though in his case, the titles are often more cryptic and elusive, inviting a more ambiguous or playful interpretation.

- I. (...the ghost mazurka)
- II. (...aimai-je un rêve?)*
- III. (...forgotten prayers)
- IV. (...cycle de l'univers)
- V. (...la belle rouquine)**
- VI. (...Pegasus)
- VII. (...this endernight)
- VIII. (...recess in hell)
- IX. (...Circus Galop)

*Translating to “Did I love a dream?”, a line from the poem *Afternoon of a Faun* by Mallarmé, the same poem which Debussy set his music to in *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*.

**The redheaded girl

Intermission

Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

Three Petrarch Sonnets, S.161 (Nos. 47, 104, 123) from *Années de pèlerinage* (years of pilgrimage) - Italie

Inspired by the poetry of Francesco Petrarca, these deeply expressive works translate the poet's meditations on love into music of great lyrical intensity. Originally conceived as songs, Liszt later transformed them into piano works of soaring melodic lines and rich harmonic language. Each sonnet explores a different emotional landscape—from tender longing to spiritual exaltation—requiring both virtuosity and poetic sensitivity.

Sonnet 47 – “Benedetto sia ’l giorno” (“Blessed be the day”)

Blessed be the day, the month, the year, the season, the hour, and the moment when I first saw her;
blessed the place where I was struck by love;
blessed the sweet pain and the arrow that pierced my heart.

Blessed be the words, the sighs, and the tears born of my love;
and blessed be all that I have written in her praise—
and she herself, who alone fills my thoughts.

Sonnet 104 – “Pace non trovo” (“I find no peace”)

I find no peace, yet I am not at war;
I fear and hope, I burn and freeze;
I soar above the heavens, yet lie on earth;
I hold nothing, yet embrace the world.

Love imprisons me but does not free me;
it neither kills nor loosens its hold;
I see without eyes, cry without voice.

I desire death, yet beg for life;
I love another, yet hate myself—
caught in this contradiction, I suffer endlessly.

Sonnet 123 – “I’ vidi in terra angelici costumi” (“I beheld on earth angelic grace”)

I saw on earth angelic beauty and heavenly grace
in a form so perfect that words cannot describe it.
Her gaze brought peace, her presence filled the air with sweetness.

She seemed a living sun among us,
and all who saw her were transformed.
No mortal thing appeared in her—only divine light.

And even now, recalling her,
my heart trembles with longing
for that vision of beauty beyond the world.

Franz Liszt (1811–1886)

Waltz from the Opera “Faust” (after Gounod)

Liszt’s paraphrase on Faust captures the charm and elegance of the opera’s famous waltz scene. In Act II, the waltz takes place during a lively village festival, where crowds dance and celebrate. Amid this joyful atmosphere, Faust—newly restored to youth through a pact with the devil—catches his first glimpse of Marguerite and becomes instantly captivated by her.

Reimagined for solo piano, the music sparkles with brilliance and theatrical flair. Beneath its graceful surface, however, the waltz hints at seduction and illusion, reflecting the darker forces at play in the story. Combining virtuosic display with lyrical elegance, the piece brings both the excitement and underlying tension of the operatic stage to the concert hall.