

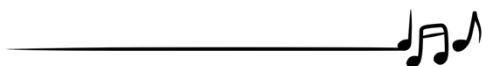


A MAJESTIC CONCERTO, A MASTERFUL SYMPHONY

Grieg Piano Concerto

Sunday March 29th, 2026 – 3:30pm
Maltz Performing Arts Center

Domenico Boyagian, *Conductor*
Shuai Wang, *Piano*



E. GRIEG (1843 – 1907)
Shuai Wang, Piano

Piano Concerto, in A minor, Op. 16 (1869)

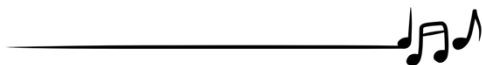
- I. Allegro molto moderato
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegro moderato molto e marcato – Quasi presto – Andante maestoso

~ Intermission ~

J. BRAHMS (1833 – 1897)

Symphony No. 4, in E minor, Op. 98 (1885)

- I. Allegro non troppo
- II. Andante moderato
- III. Allegro giocoso
- IV. Allegro energico e passionato



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Domenico Boyagian



Celebrated for his expressive artistry, clarity of vision, and dynamic leadership, Maestro Domenico Boyagian has been hailed by The Cleveland Plain Dealer as “a born conductor” and “a conductor for whom the music is the sole point of standing before musicians.” Milwaukee’s Shepherd Express praised his “insightful grasp of style” and his ability to lead “with sensitivity in tempo and phrase.”

Now in his eighth season as Music Director of the Suburban Symphony Orchestra, Boyagian has guided the ensemble through a vibrant period of growth, highlighted by a complete Beethoven Cycle that culminated in a sold-out Ninth Symphony at Severance Hall to celebrate the orchestra’s 70th anniversary. The 2025–26 season features works by Holst, Grieg, Prokofiev, Saint-Saens, Tchaikovsky, Sibelius, as well as the annual Young Soloist Concerto Competition. A dedicated advocate for education, Boyagian collaborated with pianist Lang Lang on the “101 Pianists” program to inspire young performers.



As Music Director of Cleveland Opera Theater, Boyagian has elevated the company to a leading regional force, conducting productions across the U.S. with companies such as Florentine Opera, Opera Southwest, Florida Grand Opera, Opera North, Opera Delaware, Opera Baltimore, and the Manhattan School of Music. Guest engagements have included the Milwaukee Symphony, Delaware Symphony, Palm Beach Symphony, National Symphony Orchestra of Costa Rica, and the Bulgarian Festival Orchestra.

Born in Bologna, Italy, Boyagian studied at the Bologna Conservatory, Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena, and the Cleveland Institute of Music. He has recorded Grieg works with Antonio Pompa-Baldi and the Ohio Philharmonic for Centaur Records, as well as Margaret Brouwer’s Voice of the Lake with Blue Streak Ensemble. His honors include a “Most Distinguished Artist” grant from Cleveland’s Community Partnership for Arts and Culture and recognition as one of the “Top 10 Most Successful Italians Under 40 in the U.S.” by the Italy-America Chamber of Commerce of New York.



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Meet our Guest



SHUAI WANG, PIANO

Steinway Artist Shuai Wang has performed extensively in major venues such as Lincoln Center, Merkin Hall, and Symphony Space in New York, the Kennedy Center and Phillips Collection in Washington D.C., the Dame Myra Hess Concert Series in Chicago, the Gardner Museum in Boston, also appeared in concert series such as the Buffalo Chamber Music Society and Chamber Music Detroit. She tours regularly throughout China and Europe, and has served as a guest artist at dozens of universities, conservatories, and arts academies throughout the United States and abroad. She has appeared as the soloist with the Cleveland Philharmonic Orchestra, Canton Symphony Orchestra, Tianjin Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Institute of Music Orchestra, Heights Chamber Symphony, Suburban Symphony Orchestra, and the Cleveland State University Symphony Orchestra.



As an orchestral pianist, Dr. Wang has performed under the baton of Ton Koopman (The Cleveland Orchestra), JoAnn Falletta (Buffalo Philharmonic), Gerhardt Zimmermann (Canton Symphony), and Robert Moody (Columbus Symphony). She is also a devoted advocate for contemporary music, forming the Ara Futura Ensemble in 2014, regularly commissioning, premiering, and performing works by living composers.

Born in Tianjin, China, with a full scholarship, she came to the United States to study piano at the Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan. Received Bachelor of Music at the Cleveland Institute of Music where she subsequently earned dual master's degrees in piano performance and collaborative piano, as well as an artist diploma in collaborative piano and a DMA in piano performance. She is currently teaching piano at CIM and CASE, also teaches privately in Beachwood.

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Notes on the Program

By Dan Qu

EDVARD GRIEG: PIANO CONCERTO IN A MINOR, OP. 16

Premiere: April 3, 1869 (Copenhagen) | **Duration:** Approximately 30 minutes

Instrumentation: Solo piano, 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, and strings.

Edvard Grieg composed his Piano Concerto in the summer of 1868 in the quiet village of Søllerød, Denmark. At only 25 years old, the composer was already attempting to forge a distinct musical identity for Norway. Inspired by Schumann's piano concerto in the same key, Grieg adopted its basic architecture while adding a Lisztian brilliance to the piano solo. The resulting work merges the structural grandeur of the German Romantic tradition with the rugged, folk-inspired melodies of his homeland. The premiere took place in Copenhagen on April 3, 1869, with Edmund Neupert as soloist and Holger Simon Paulli conducting the Orchestra of the Royal Theater. It was an instant success. Yet, ever the perfectionist, Grieg continued to revise the concerto throughout his life until his death in 1907. Today, it remains his most popular large-scale work, beloved for its dramatic flair and crystalline, "Northern" beauty.

The first movement opens with a dramatic timpani roll followed by a descending cascade in the piano that outlines an A-minor chord. This sequence, consisting of a descending second followed by a descending third, is a characteristic Norwegian melodic gesture. The movement follows a traditional sonata form. The first theme, rhythmic and spirited, is introduced by the woodwinds before being passed to the solo piano over an arpeggiated accompaniment in the left hand. Suddenly, the piano leaps into an *animato* section, employing lively figurations often used by folk fiddlers. A short lyrical passage leads to the warm second theme in C major, introduced by the cellos. The piano then takes over the melody, developing it into a passionate display of Lisztian virtuosity. The orchestra joins in, pushing the exposition to its climax as the trumpets proclaim four measures of triumphant C's. The development section belongs primarily to the orchestra; returning to A minor, it is relatively brief and begins quietly, with the first theme alternating between different orchestral sections. The piano remains in an accompaniment role, decorating the orchestral textures until the very end, when it takes the lead for the expansive recapitulation. Just before the coda, the soloist performs a massive, virtuosic cadenza that demands both extreme technical power and delicate sensitivity.


The second movement shifts to the distant, warm key of D-flat major and follows a simple ternary (A-B-A) form. It is a masterpiece of orchestral color, beginning with a muted, prayer-like melody in the strings. When the piano finally enters, it does not compete with the orchestra; instead, it provides a series of ornamentations—delicate, crystalline runs evocative of water falling over ice. The piano and orchestra gradually integrate, weaving together the thematic material. This brief, nocturnal movement leads without a pause (*attacca*) into the finale.

The finale, written in a modified Sonata-Rondo form, is a celebratory explosion of Norwegian culture. The primary theme in A minor is based on the "Halling", a vigorous Norwegian folk dance characterized by its "kicking" rhythms and athletic energy. A contrasting second theme in



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By Dan Qu



F major features a flute solo of breathtaking beauty—a lyrical "mountain melody" that provides a moment of pastoral peace. The development section is short; here, the primary theme is fragmented and moved through various keys, building tension through increasingly difficult octaves and leaps in the piano part. The movement concludes with a massive coda where Grieg transforms the dancing Halling theme into a grand, majestic triple meter. The work ends in a triumphant A-major blaze of the folk-inspired second theme.

BRAHMS NO. 4 IN E MINOR, OP. 98

Premiere: October 25, 1885, with Brahms himself conducting the Meiningen Court Orchestra.

Duration: Approximately 40 minutes

Instrumentation: 2 flutes (one doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, double bassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, triangle, and strings.

In the summer of 1884, Johannes Brahms retreated to the quiet town of Mürzzuschlag in the Austrian Alps to begin work on what would be his final symphonic testament. If his First Symphony was a struggle to emerge from Beethoven's shadow, and his Second and Third were explorations of pastoral beauty and heroic conflict, the Symphony No. 4 is a work of profound structural perfection and tragic depth. Upon finishing it, Brahms was uncharacteristically anxious, fearing the work was "too austere" for the public. He jokingly referred to it as a "set of polkas and waltzes," but the reality was far more serious. This is a symphony that looks back to the Renaissance and Baroque masters while pushing the tonal boundaries of the late 19th century. By using an archaic form for a modern symphonic finale, he proved that traditional structures could still express the most complex and modern of human emotions.

The symphony begins with four simple notes presented in two pairs: a descending major third like a sigh, followed by an ascending minor sixth like an intake of breath. These palpitating note-pairs act as small seeds that gradually grow into a sweeping, melancholic forest of sound. Although composed in sonata form, the movement deviates slightly from standard structure; instead, Brahms opted for a sense of "developing variation," where themes flow into one another and continuously reinvent themselves. After the initial variations of the first theme, a fanfare-like motif in the woodwinds and horns heralds the second theme, which emerges in the cellos before being passed to the upper strings. The keys modulate almost constantly, moving from E minor to B minor, then to B major, and back to E minor for the start of the development. This section features a set of variations on the two primary themes, interwoven with smaller motifs. Here, the modulation becomes even more fluid and the tonality more ambiguous, imparting a sense of unsettlement and anxiety. When the recapitulation arrives, it sounds like further variation and development—the ebbs and flows never truly ending until a powerful, defiant coda brings the movement to a conclusion.

The second movement opens with a haunting horn call in the Phrygian mode—a medieval scale that gives the music a timeless, legendary quality, reminiscent of a somber ballad. As the theme spreads through the woodwinds in E major, the strings first provide a pizzicato accompaniment before bowing a lush variation of the melody. A transition motif in B major introduces the gentle second theme, played by the first violins, also in B major. Brahms employed a modified



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sonata form here, merging the development and recapitulation sections to transform the movement into a series of developing variations. As it concludes, the music returns to the original E Phrygian mode. Warm and intimate, this serene movement is nonetheless underscored by a persistent sense of resignation.

Titled *Allegro giocoso*, the third movement is effectively a scherzo in character—the only one Brahms ever wrote for a symphony. However, its structure is not that of a traditional scherzo with a contrasting middle section; rather, it follows a sonata form consisting of a standard exposition (featuring a boisterous, fanfare-like Theme A and a soft, playful Theme B), development, recapitulation, and coda. The addition of the piccolo and triangle lends further color and jollity. This movement is a burst of rustic energy infused with mischievous humor, providing a necessary moment of lightheartedness and rhythmic drive before the gravity of the finale takes hold.

The finale is a marvel of musical architecture. Brahms reaches back nearly 200 years to revive *Passacaglia* (or *Chaconne*), a Baroque form consisting of a series of variations over a repeating bass line. Once again, Brahms built a grand musical structure with the minimal material. He borrowed the theme from Bach's Cantata "Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich", BWV 150, and transposed it to E minor. The theme is a stark, eight-note ascending line: E - F# - G - A - A# - B - B (octave leap) - E acting as an "ostinato" or a persistent foundation. It is first presented as a chorale by the winds and brass at the movement's opening. Brahms then develops this eight-bar theme into thirty distinct variations, each strictly eight bars long, until he finally deviates from the pattern just before the coda. Every conceivable emotion is explored, from forlorn yearning to heart-wrenching cries and violent outbursts. The beauty of the serene middle section reaches toward the sublime: beginning with a lonely flute solo, it is followed by a melancholic clarinet and oboe duet, then a solemn chorale of bassoons, horns, and trombones, eventually joined by the full woodwind section before a restatement of the theme leads into more ominous variations. Unlike his other symphonies that conclude in major keys, the Fourth—while exploring many key areas—always returns to E minor. It concludes with a relentless, tragic intensity that offers no easy consolation.

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