

# Evgeny Kissin

**Start time:** 7.30pm

**Approximate end time:** 10pm, including a 20-minute interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change

## Programme

**Johann Sebastian Bach** *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue*

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** Piano Sonata No 9 in D major

1. Allegro con spirito

2. Andantino con espressione

3. Rondeau: Allegro

**Frédéric Chopin** Polonaise No 5 in F sharp minor

**Sergei Rachmaninov** 'Lilacs' from 12 Romances, Op 21

Prelude in A minor, Op 32 No 8

Prelude in G flat major, Op 23 No 10

Études-tableaux, Op 39:

No 1 in C minor

No 2 in A minor

No 4 in B minor

No 5 in E flat minor

No 6 in A minor

No 9 in D major

**Evgeny Kissin tonight celebrates the 150th birthday of Rachmaninov along with music by earlier keyboard legends – JS Bach, Mozart and Chopin.**

In a programme crossing musical eras, Evgeny Kissin revels in the expressive possibilities of the piano and of his own imagination, beginning with JS Bach and ending with selected works by Rachmaninov to mark the 150th anniversary of his birth on 1 April 1873.

Bach's *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue* was regarded as a unique masterpiece in his own lifetime, a testament to his ability to push the boundaries of what was possible on the keyboard. The work is notable for its use of chromaticism, with a winding melody that meanders through unexpected key changes and harmonies to create a sense of musical drama that is both emotionally powerful and intellectually stimulating. The Fugue is a masterpiece of counterpoint, beginning with a section in which the fugue subject (or theme) appears in a number of different keys and permutations. It then moves through a series of episodes, each exploring new harmonies and textures while maintaining the intricate interplay of voices.

Mozart's Piano Sonata No 9, K311, is, like the preceding piece, a fine example of a composer's mastery of form. Composed in Mannheim in 1777, it demonstrates Mozart's brilliance as a pianist and his unique ability to blend technical prowess with a broad range of moods and expression. The opening movement is joyful and exuberant, conjuring almost orchestral textures through sparkling keyboard figuration that sets the tone for the entire work. The slow movement is characterised by its lyricism, Mozart using harmony, counterpoint and syncopation to create a contemplative piece full of poignancy. A lively and energetic finale brings the sonata to a rousing conclusion with playfully virtuosic keyboard writing and some musical surprises along the way.

The mood changes as we move into the 19th century with a darkly hued work of heroism and patriotism, emotional depth and musical power. Chopin wrote his Polonaise in F sharp minor in 1841, and it reflects not only the composer's love for his native Poland and its rich musical heritage, but also pays homage to the country's past splendours, offering a sombre meditation on its tragic fate under Russian rule. It was dedicated to Princess Ludmilla de Beauveau, a prominent member of the Polish émigré community in Paris.

Out of a short menacing opening comes a defiant theme with hammering chords and rumbling trills which is answered by a series of less aggressive melodic fragments, sometimes appearing to calm the anger, or rising passionately across the keyboard.

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Suddenly the mood changes, heralding the start of the middle section. Here Chopin uses the mazurka dance form to provide contrast to the bold, energetic themes of the opening; creating writing full of rich harmonies and delicate melodies. But soon the violent polonaise material returns, with a final section full of dazzling runs, complex arpeggios and intricate textures. As this reprise seems about to fade into oblivion, Chopin closes the work with one final angry gesture – a *fortissimo* chord of octaves.

'Lilacs' is Rachmaninov's own transcription of his setting for piano and voice of a poem by Ekaterina Beketova. This deeply expressive and intimate work highlights his exceptional abilities as both composer and pianist. A delicate melody, full of sensitivity and nuance, is enhanced by lush harmonies and elegantly wrought dynamics to create an emotional depth and intensity that reflects the pain and longing expressed in the original song. The middle section brings with it more intense and passionate musical language which builds to a powerful climax before subsiding into a tenderly reflective coda.

Rachmaninov published 24 Preludes for piano, covering all the major and minor keys, and collected into three opuses. The Prelude in A minor, Op 32 No 8, has a swirling drive, fleeting yet intensely dramatic, while the G flat major Prelude, Op 23 No 10, is leisurely, warm and lyrical.

Completed in 1917, the time of the Russian Revolution and the composer's enforced exile, the *Études-tableaux*, Op 39, represent some of Rachmaninov's most innovative, virtuosic and emotionally charged writing for solo piano. Like Chopin's *Études*, the pieces make extensive technical demands on the pianist, while also offering characterful, beautiful and varied writing for the instrument. The result is a remarkable and innovative sequence, each one with its own distinctive character and emotional tone.

From the set of nine Evgeny Kissin performs six: the first, in C minor, is rapid and unsettled, with complex syncopation and endlessly surging climaxes. The second, in A minor, is nicknamed 'The Sea and the Seagulls' and has wistful outer sections whose plaintive falling figures perhaps evoke the seagulls' cries. The fourth, in B minor, is a lively gavotte, full of harmonic colour, while the fifth, in E flat minor, is passionate, dark and sombre, but ends with a glimmer of hope. The sixth, in A minor, is often referred to as 'Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf' and – as befits its nickname – is by turns mysterious, menacing and aggressive. By contrast, the ninth, in which we finally reach a major key (D major), is a jubilant, bombastic march which brings the set to a rousing and satisfying conclusion.

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## Performers

**Evgeny Kissin** piano

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