

**CCM**

GUEST ARTIST SERIES  
PRESENTS

FRANK HUANG, PIANO

**Monday, October 7, 2024**  
**Robert J. Werner Recital Hall**  
**7:30 p.m.**

University of   
**CINCINNATI** | COLLEGE-CONSERVATORY  
OF MUSIC

# PROGRAM

Fairy Tales, Op. 34

Nikolai Medtner  
(1880-1951)

*Tempo cangiando, abbandonamente (The Magic Violin)*  
*Allegro cantabile e leggiro*  
*Allegretto tenebroso*  
*Molto sostenuto e semplice*

Sonata Triad, Op. 11

Nikolai Medtner

*Allegro non troppo*  
*Andante molto espressivo (Sonata-Elegy)*  
*Allegro moderato, con passione innocente*

## *Intermission*

Prelude (Book II), La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune

Claude Debussy  
(1862-1918)

Variations and Fugue in Eb Major, Op. 35 ("Eroica")

Ludwig van Beethoven  
(1770-1827)

# PROGRAM NOTES

## **NIKOLAI MEDTNER**

Sergei Rachmaninov once stated that Nikolai Medtner (1880-1951) was “the greatest composer of his time.” Such a resounding endorsement from the greatest composer-pianist would lead one to think that Medtner enjoyed an illustrious career—but instead, he operated much of his life in obscurity and poverty.

Medtner’s neglect could be possibly explained when one considers that the Russian romantic composer’s personality was completely separated from everyday life. He viewed writing and performing music as a sense of duty, almost like a sacrosanct calling. In his mind, the integrity of the music was paramount. As a constant learner, he devoted himself fervently to studying music, philosophy, culture, and literature. Everything else including marketing and self-promotion was secondary. He was also not too keen in performing music by other composers. These choices seemed to stunt his career growth—even with the aid of Rachmaninov who would help arrange a U.S. concert tour for him in 1924.

When undertaking a massive project of recording his complete solo piano works, a nine-disc set, I often asked myself: how can we not know of this great music? The way in which Medtner wrote for the piano clearly showed his affinity towards the instrument, similarly to Chopin. He admired the Germanic tradition in the contrapuntal writing and the thematic art of J.S. Bach and Beethoven respectively. His strongest compositional attribute was his spellbinding harmonic language which Rachmaninov greatly respected. And yet, Medtner’s music was undeniably “Russian” sounding, especially with his penchant for Russian literary and folklore connections.

I can recall my first encounter with Medtner as a student at The Juilliard School. After hearing a classmate perform *Sonata tragica*, a work that I recorded in my previous Medtner album, I remember the immediate visceral effect that it had on me. I hope the music in tonight’s program will do the same for you as well.

## **Fairy Tales, Op. 34**

Medtner maintained an extraordinary level of innovation and artistry throughout his entire collection of *Fairy Tales*. The Op. 34 set is no exception and should be highlighted for its own special recognition. Unlike many of his other *Fairy Tales*, the composer was unusually forthcoming of the literary sources that inspired each piece within this set.

For the first piece, Medtner gave the title, *The Magic Violin*. The late British-pianist, Hamish Milne, suggested that this title came from a poem of the same name by Nikolai Gumilev in which the poet begs a child to not succumb to the seductive violin that will unleash the horrors upon him through its magic.

In the second piece, Medtner described the piece as a “tale told by a river bank.” He also included a short quotation of a poem by Fyodor Tyutchev, *Peace* (“what we once called ours, it departs from us forever”), suggesting deeper thoughts of fleeting moments of existence.

# PROGRAM NOTES

The third tale contains another description by Medtner: “Wood spirit (but a kind, plaintive one).” One of Medtner’s students described this dark work as a “highly capricious sorcerer who does a thousand magic tricks and conjures up all kind of strange creatures...” In any case, the left hand of the main theme conjures an eerie allusion of “Dies irae”—a Gregorian chant about death.

The last piece of this set bears a quotation from Pushkin’s poem, “The Poor Knight:” “...there lived in the world a poor knight.” This is the tale of a knight in Palestine who worships the Virgin Mary, renouncing not only all other women but also the Holy Trinity. At his deathbed, when the knight is about to be banished to hell for his blasphemy, the Blessed Virgin intervenes, and he instead ascends to heaven. At this moment of transfiguration, the anguishing D minor melody transforms into a radiant D major mixture of angelic prayers and bells. Medtner admitted that he was inspired by the magical transition from the dark D minor slow movement to the glowing D major Minuet of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata Op. 10, No. 3.

## **Sonata Triad, Op. 11**

This group of three one-movement sonatas was dedicated to Andrey Bratenshi, the composer’s brother-in-law who committed suicide in 1906. Medtner includes the following epigraph:

*And so the heart, disburdened, in a flash  
Knows; I endure, and beat, and pound with pleasure!  
Gives itself over utterly, in rash  
Thanks for the windfall, life. No common treasure.  
Then came—could it only last!—that feeling of  
Double delight from music and from love.*

This excerpt is from Trilogie of Passion, a long three-part poem by Goethe whose titles help provide further context of the triad of sonatas: To Werther, Elegy, and Atonement. Medtner did not intend for Op. 11 to be performed as a group, but the sonatas clearly follow the structure and emotional states of Goethe’s poem. Medtner is at his finest here with his exquisite lyricism and tuneful melodies.

# BIOGRAPHY

**Frank Huang** is a Steinway Artist and currently serves as an Associate Professor of Piano at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio. Previously, he was a faculty member at The College of Wooster and The Cleveland Institute of Music.

Described by New York Concert Review as a “thoughtful and accomplished performer” and that his playing was “impressive for its maturity and refinement,” Mr. Huang has gained international recognition for his artistry and technical command. Others have also acknowledged his talents, as the Chopin Foundation of the United States, Northwest Chapter has commented that “Huang plays with authority and panache” while El Comerico of Lima, Peru praised his interpretation of Mozart’s Piano Concerto, K.482 “with the utmost sensitivity.” Mr. Huang’s performances have led him throughout North America, South America, Europe, and Asia. Such notable venues include Weill Hall, Carnegie Hall, Benaroya Hall (Seattle), US Embassy in Warsaw, Zelazowa Wola (Warsaw), Kennedy Center (Washington DC), Dame Myra Recital Series at Chicago’s Cultural Center, Lincoln Center in New York, and St. Martin in the Fields, London, UK. Mr. Huang’s concerts have also been featured on radio and television broadcasts in various cities across the United States and abroad. Most recently, his performances were aired on “Primo Movimento,” a popular classical music program on RaiRadio 3 in Rome, Italy. An avid chamber musician, he has collaborated with eminent artists such as Cho-Liang Lin, Ben Hong—as well as members of the Cleveland Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and the Los Angeles Philharmonic in recitals. Equally active as a soloist with orchestra, he has performed with the Northwest Philharmonia, Peru National Symphony, Central Ohio Symphony, and Sichuan Symphony Orchestra.

Huang’s creative interests consist of promoting lesser-known works and music of our time. His commercial recordings can be found on the Centaur Records, Nimbus Alliance, and Blue Griffin labels. His latest album, Solo Piano Works of Nikolai Medtner, Volume 1, is the first installment of a major nine-disc project to bring long overdue attention to the neglected Russian romantic composer. Gramophone described in a recent review that “Huang and Medtner are made for one another” and that “Huang can hold his own next to Marc-André Hamelin.” Other albums include a chamber music disc featuring living women composers, an all-Brahms solo CD, and works by Jack Gallagher. These discs have received rave reviews as critics have described Huang’s performances as “thrilling” (The Classical Reviewer) and that “Huang deserves kudos for his sparkling and sensitive playing, and that better performances of these works would be well-nigh impossible to come by.” (Fanfare) Huang has also performed and recorded music of Mark Applebaum, Augusta Read Thomas, Lera Auerbach, and Jennifer Higdon. Recently, he has been performing Frederic Rzewski’s monumental work, “The People United Will Never be Defeated!” in recitals.

A native of Seattle, WA, Frank Huang studied extensively with Willard Schultz at the Academy of Music Northwest before obtaining Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees from The Juilliard School, where he continued his studies with Julian Martin. Following his training at Juilliard, he earned a Doctor of Musical Arts degree at The Cleveland Institute of Music under the direction of Antonio Pompa-Baldi. Other influential teachers included Lee Kum-Sing, Robert McDonald, Daniel Shapiro, and Dominique Weber. Huang has also participated in masterclasses with eminent musicians of our time including Nelita True, Byron Janis, Jon Kimura Parker, Richard Goode, and Murray Perahia.

Equally committed to continuing education, Dr. Huang has contributed guest articles to UK’s popular magazines: Pianist, Gramophone, and International Piano. He has also produced tutorial videos for G. Henle Verlag’s Urtext Score Reader app.

He makes his home in Cincinnati, Ohio, with his wife, Cindy Chang, who works as an emergency medicine physician at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital and University of Cincinnati, and their golden retriever, Theo.

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