

A photograph of an orchestra performing in a concert hall. The musicians are dressed in formal black attire with white shirts and bowties. They are playing various instruments including violins, violas, cellos, and double basses. The background features dark wood paneling and large windows with curtains. The lighting is warm and focused on the performers.

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Get ready to be impressed, in more ways than one. Tonight's CIM Orchestra concert isn't only the group's season finale. It's also a special night when the stars have aligned, when the combination of program, performers, and venue herald an uncommonly dazzling experience.

Start with the first element, the program. Igor Stravinsky's *Firebird* Suite and Sergei Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3 are two of the most sensational works in the classical canon. The creations of Russian greats at peak form, they are showpieces, works whose power derives in part from their sheer difficulty. In this regard, the Rachmaninoff is the most famous, given the incredible demands it places on the soloist, but the Stravinsky is also no walk in the park. Its challenges are merely collective, not individual; the entire orchestra must remain on its toes. The same can be said of Lili Boulanger's *D'un matin du printemps* (Of a Spring Morning). It, too, is a virtuoso handful, an elegant, intricate nod to Claude Debussy.

Now to that second part of the equation, the performers. Anywhere else, one might be nervous seeing students take on such music. This, though, is CIM, where the students and the work ethic are exceptional. Here, we have no cause for concern. I know they'll amaze.

Ditto Sergei Babayan, tonight's soloist. CIM's artist-in-residence lives and breathes Rachmaninoff. He is truly one of the few on the planet fully qualified to undertake the Third Concerto. All I can say about him is, hold onto your hats.

Speaking of, I'm also confident you'll be amazed by tonight's dynamic conductor Sarah Hicks. Sarah may be new to our podium, but she is far from new to leading orchestras. In fact, she's worked with major orchestras across the U.S., including the usual inhabitants of this room, The Cleveland Orchestra.

Which brings me to the last variable, Severance Music Center. You sit now in one of the most beautiful concert spaces in the world, a room that never fails to inspire great performances. Indeed, this hall is one of the reasons the world's most talented students flock to CIM, for the rare and special opportunity to play here.

Your presence makes that opportunity more meaningful. Whatever your connection to the CIM Orchestra, I am grateful you chose to be here tonight, to help make this season finale even more memorable. Thank you, and I hope to see you again next year.

Onward!

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BABAYAN PLAYS RACHMANINOFF

Tuesday, April 16, 2024
7:30pm | Severance Music Center

CIM Orchestra

Sarah Hicks, guest conductor

Kulas Foundation Visiting Artist

Sergei Babayan, piano

Lili Boulanger
(1893–1918)

D'un matin du printemps (1918)

Igor Stravinsky
(1882–1971)

The Firebird Suite (1919)

Introduction

L'oiseau de feu et sa danse

Variation de l'oiseau de feu

Rondes des princesses

Danse infernale du roi Kastchei

Berceuse

Finale

Intermission

Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873–1943)

Piano Concerto No. 3 in D minor, Op. 30

Allegro ma non tanto

Intermezzo: Adagio

Finale: All breve

Sergei Babayan, piano

Visiting artist appearances, including this and others throughout the season, are made possible by a generous grant from the Kulas Foundation.

FROM THE SOLOIST

I would like to dedicate my performance tonight of the Piano Concerto No. 3 by Sergei Rachmaninoff to the memory of Victoria Vronsky. I am forever indebted to Vitya Vronsky, a person of the highest ideas in music, an extraordinary human being of exceptional culture and artistic depth. She studied with Artur Schnabel and Egon Petri, and knew personally Sergei Rachmaninoff, Igor Stravinsky, Arthur Rubinstein, Marc Chagall, and Feodor Chaliapin. Vitya was the first person who insisted in the early 1990s that I should be invited to teach at CIM. I owe my residency at CIM to these three individuals: Victoria Vronsky, David Cerone, Karen Knowlton. Thank you my dearest friends for believing in me.

— Sergei Babayan

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Sarah Hicks' versatile and vibrant musicianship has secured her place as an in-demand conductor across an array of genres, as well as an educator, Emmy-winning producer, writer, and speaker. Her career has seen collaborations with diverse artists, from Olga Kern and Dmitri Hvorostovsky to Roseanne Cash and the Dirty Projectors; during the summer of 2011 she toured with Sting as conductor of his Symphonycities Tour. Her cross-genre partnerships include a 2019 album with rap artist Dessa and the Minnesota Orchestra, with whom she holds a titled position, and the 2023 premiere of Rufus Wainwright's *Want Symphonic* at the BBC Proms.

A highly sought-after guest conductor, Hicks has worked extensively both in the U.S. and abroad. Notable ensembles include The Philadelphia Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Pops, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Czech National Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, WDR Funkhausorchester Köln, St. Petersburg Philharmonic, and Tokyo Philharmonic, among many others. Her opera appearances include the East Slovak State Opera Theater and Curtis Opera Theater, as well as operas in concert with the Minnesota Orchestra and RTÉ Orchestra.

A specialist in film music and the film in concert genre, her live concert recordings can be seen on Disney+ and on ABC. She acts as advisor for Disney Music Group and is a frequent collaborator at Disney Concerts. Her first major feature film credit, *Renfield*, was released in 2023 and her live album with the Danish National Symphony, *The Morricone Duel*, has garnered over 200 million views on YouTube.

Hicks is a frequent lecturer and panelist and was on faculty at the Curtis Institute of Music from 2000 to 2005 and staff conductor until 2012. Her interest in mental wellness and mindfulness has led to numerous projects, including Music and Healing with the Minnesota Orchestra. Available digitally, it includes a concert, commissioned works, and conversations with neuroscientists and wellness experts. Her advocacy continues on her blog and YouTube channel; she is currently pursuing studies in MBSR and teacher training in Vipassana meditation.

Hicks was born in Tokyo, Japan, and raised in Honolulu, Hawaii. Trained on both piano and viola, she received her BA magna cum laude from Harvard University and an Artists' Degree from the Curtis Institute of Music. In her spare time, Hicks enjoys running, hiking, her Papillon, and cooking (and eating) with her husband.

~ ~ ~

Sergei Babayan is one of the leading pianists of our time: Hailed for his emotional intensity, bold energy, and remarkable levels of color, Babayan brings a deep understanding and insight to an exceptionally diverse repertoire. *Le Figaro* has praised his “unequaled touch, perfectly harmonious phrasing and breathtaking virtuosity.” *Le Devoir* from Montreal put it simply: “Sergei Babayan is a genius. Period.”

Babayan has collaborated with such conductors as Sir Antonio Pappano, David Robertson, Neeme Järvi, Rafael Payare, Thomas Dausgaard, Tugan Sokhiev, and Dima Slobodenouk. Over the years, Babayan has performed with Valery Gergiev numerous times to great critical acclaim, including appearances at the Barbican Centre with the London Symphony Orchestra, at the Théâtre des

Champs-Élysées in Paris, the Salzburg Festival, and at the Rotterdam Philharmonic-Gergiev Festival, where Babayan was artist-in-residence.

In recent seasons, Babayan's schedule included concert performances with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Bamberg Symphony Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, and Verbier Festival Orchestra, among others. Babayan regularly performs at many of the world's most prestigious venues, including the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall in London, Vienna Konzerthaus, Munich's Prinzregententheater, Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, Maison de la Radio in Paris, Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, Alte Oper Frankfurt, and Zurich Tonhalle. He has appeared at major festivals including La Roque d'Anthéron, Piano aux Jacobins in Toulouse, Gstaad Menuhin Festival, and Verbier Festival. Babayan performs with the world's foremost orchestras, including the London Symphony Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, Warsaw Philharmonic, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre National de Lille, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. At Konzerthaus Dortmund, Babayan was a curating artist.

Babayan is a Deutsche Grammophon exclusive artist. His 2020 release *Rachmaninoff* was hailed by the international press as a groundbreaking recording and received numerous awards including BBC Recording of the Month and CHOC Classica. ("This musical journey, born out of a limitless imagination and thought in minute detail, is one big masterpiece.") His previous DG release of his own transcriptions for two pianos of works by Sergei Prokofiev, with Martha Argerich as his partner (*Prokofiev for Two*; DG 2018), was praised by reviewers as "the CD one has waited for" (*Le Devoir*), an "electrifying duo that leaves the listener in consternation" (*Pianiste*). Babayan's performances have been broadcast by Radio France, BBC-TV and BBC Radio 3, NHK Satellite Television, and Medici TV.

Born in Armenia into a musical family, Babayan began his studies there with Georgy Saradjev and continued at the Moscow Conservatory with Mikhail Pletnev, Vera Gornostayeva, and Lev Naumov. Following his first trip outside of the USSR in 1989, he won consecutive first prizes in several major international competitions including the Cleveland International Piano Competition, Hamamatsu Piano Competition, and Scottish International Piano Competition. An American citizen, he lives in New York City.

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The poster features a dark blue background with a starry night sky. Several bright, glowing yellow and white stars of varying sizes are scattered across the scene. The word "Luminaries" is written in a large, elegant, gold-colored cursive font. Below it, the words "BENEFIT CONCERT" are written in a smaller, gold-colored, all-caps sans-serif font.

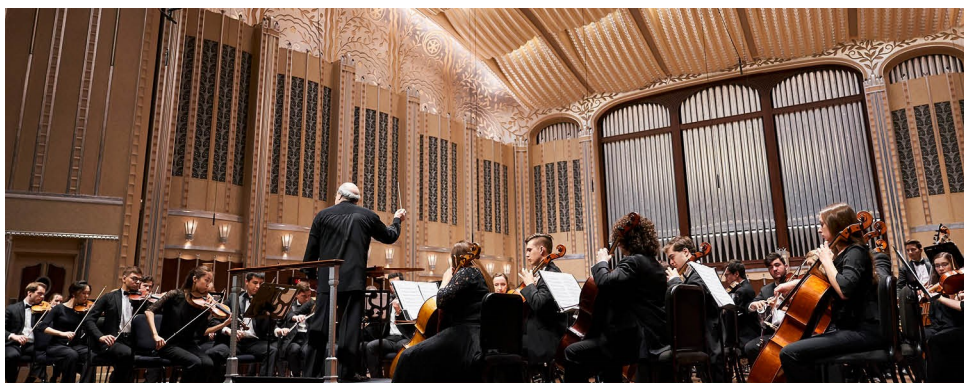
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Cleveland Institute of Music
Friday, May 17, 2024

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