

Alexander Malofeev
BIG ARTS
March 12, 2026

Alexander Malofeev, *Piano*

Five Pieces, Op. 75, "The Trees" Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)
When the Rowan Blossoms
The Solitary Fir Tree
The Aspen
The Birch
The Spruce

Duration: 12 minutes

From Holberg's Time, Op. 40 Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)
Praelude: Allegro vivace
Sarabande: Andante
Gavotte: Allegretto – Musette: Poco più mosso – Gavotte
Air: Andante religioso
Rigaudon: Allegro con brio

Duration: 21 minutes

Sonata No. 2, Op. 64, "The Fire Sermon" Einojuhani Rautavaara (1928-2016)
Molto allegro
Andante assai
Allegro brutale

Duration: 12 minutes

~~~~~intermission~~~~~

Waltz in A-flat major, Op. 38..... Aleksandr Scriabin (1871-1915)

Duration: 6 minutes

*Symphonies of Wind Instruments* ..... Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)  
Arranged by Arthur Lourié

Duration: 12 minutes

*Cinq Préludes Fragiles*, Op. 1 ..... Arthur Lourié (1892-1966)  
Lento

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Calme, pas vite

Tendre, pensif

Affable

Modéré

Duration: 11 minutes

Sonata No. 2 in D minor, Op. 14 ..... Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Allegro, ma non troppo

Scherzo: Allegro marcato

Andante

Vivace

Duration: 18 minutes

## Notes on the Program by Dr. Richard E. Rodda

### Five Pieces, Op. 75, "The Trees" Jean Sibelius

Born December 8, 1865 in Hämeenlinna, Finland.

Died September 20, 1957 in Järvenpää, Finland.

*Composed in 1914.*

Though Sibelius' symphonies, tone poems and incidental music provide the core of his legacy and anchor his reputation, they are complemented in his creative output by a sizeable body of works in more intimate genres: songs, choral numbers, chamber music (mostly early, but with a fine string quartet, *Voces Intimae*, dating from 1909), many small pieces for violin and piano, organ works and some 150 compositions for solo piano written throughout his creative life, most finely crafted miniatures with evocative titles.

Of the Five Pieces, Op. 75, "The Trees," Eric Tawaststjerna, Sibelius' biographer, wrote, "The taller the trees grew around Villa Ainola [the composer's home thirty miles north of Helsinki, named for his wife, Aino], the more animistic he found them. They were like beings with living souls: 'The trees spoke,' he said. In the Five Pieces, all of which were produced in the autumn of 1914, one seems to be listening to the spirit of the trees.

"*When the Rowan Blossoms* reproduces the timelessness of the white Nordic nights of June. The piece begins as an improvisation on a melodic idea and gropes its way until the theme is fixed in a firm melodic line: the scent of the rowan [mountain ash] with melancholy undertones.

"In *The Solitary Fir Tree*, the barren sound and harmonies suggest a mood of defiant resignation. The top of the tree is struck by a gust of wind and the trunk shakes in a storm of dissonances. But when it's all over, the fir tree rises as defiantly as ever.

"*The Aspen* is a late impressionistic vision in tones of delicate green, light grey, pale yellow and violet tones. If anyone could portray the 'sensitivity' of the Finnish forests, it was Sibelius.

"In *The Birch*, broken chords mirror the reflections of the sun and the sighing of the summer wind in the treetops.

"In *The Spruce*, one can again hear the wind sighing, but this time winter twilight descends upon the landscape with the music's minor key and darkly sonorous chords."

### *From Holberg's Time*, Op. 40 Edvard Grieg

Born June 15, 1843 in Bergen, Norway.

Died there on September 4, 1907.

*Composed in 1884.*

In 1884, Grieg was approached by the commission organizing the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Ludvig Holberg, the writer generally acknowledged as the founder of the Danish-Norwegian school of literature, to make a musical contribution to the proceedings. Holberg (1684-1754), a native of Grieg's hometown of Bergen, Norway, gained fame with his satiric comedy *Peder Paars* of 1719, a work with sufficient social barbs to rouse the ire of the authorities. His recognition continued to grow, however, and in 1722 he was named playwright to the newly formed Danish National Theater. His comedies were the first original plays written in the Danish language. After 1727, he wrote several volumes of history and biography, but his early plays always remained his most popular works.

The hub of the 1884 Holberg celebration was in Bergen, where the playwright was born. A new statue

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of him was to be unveiled on the waterfront and a series of concerts was planned to commemorate the event, to which Grieg contributed a cantata for men's voices and the piano suite *From Holberg's Time*, which he arranged the following year for string orchestra. In the suite, a vivacious *Praelude*, a miniature sonata-form movement, is followed by a series of dances: a touching *Sarabande*; a perky *Gavotte*, which is linked to a *Musette* built above a mock-bagpipe drone; a solemn *Air*, modeled on the *Air on the G String* from Bach's Third Orchestral Suite; and a lively closing *Rigaudon*.

## Sonata No. 2, Op. 64, "The Fire Sermon" Einojuhani Rautavaara

Born October 9, 1928 in Helsinki.

Died July 27, 2016 in Helsinki.

*Composed in 1970.*

Einojuhani Rautavaara, born in Helsinki in 1928, studied at the Sibelius Academy and Helsinki University before being selected in 1955 by Jean Sibelius himself to receive a Koussevitzky Foundation scholarship awarded to a young Finnish musician in honor of that venerable composer's ninetieth birthday. Rautavaara used the grant to study at Juilliard and at Tanglewood with Aaron Copland. After returning to Finland, he composed steadily and also served as librarian of the Helsinki City Orchestra, director of Helsinki's Käpylä Music School, and faculty member of the Sibelius Academy. His many awards included the Finnish Artist Professor of State, Sibelius Prize, Bax Society Medal, membership in the Royal Swedish Academy, and Commander in the Order of the Finnish Lion.

Much of Rautavaara's music is referential and always evocative, a characteristic seen in the titles of several of his dozen works for solo piano: *The Fiddlers*, *The Devil and the Drunkard*, *Icons*, *Narcissus*, *Fuoco* ("Fire"), *Mirroring*. His Piano Sonata No. 1, subtitled *Christus und die Fischer* ("Christ and the Fishermen"), was inspired by a reproduction of an old German painting depicting Christ's early disciples that hung in his study. Rautavaara wrote, "Like many of my works, Piano Sonata No. 2, 'The Fire Sermon,' written in 1970, derived its musical energy from its sub-title; the magic words 'The Fire Sermon' stuck in my mind, repeating themselves like a mantra. There is no conscious link, however, with T.S. Eliot's poem of the same name or Buddha's famous sermon. All three movements observe the principle of continuous growth and the initial idea grows in extent, density and strength until the texture cracks (often into clusters), becomes dissonant, dissolves into a fog of sound or, as in the concluding fugue, goes overboard from pathos to trivial irony for a fleeting instant. The mysticism and devotion of the First Sonata have here given way to pessimism, to a repeated and frustrating struggle."

## Waltz in A-flat major, Op. 38 Alexander Scriabin

Born January 6, 1872 in Moscow.

Died there on April 27, 1915.

*Composed in 1903.*

"The Muscovite seer"; "the Russian musical mystic"; "the clearest case of artistic egomania in the chronicles of music": Alexander Scriabin was one of the most unusual of all composers. Living in the generation between Tchaikovsky and Prokofiev, he showed an early talent for music and trod the accepted path of lessons, conservatory training, and teaching. His visions, however, refused to be channeled into the conventional forms of artistic expression, and he developed a style and a philosophy that were unique. He believed that mankind was approaching a final cataclysm from which a nobler race

would emerge, with himself playing some exalted but ill-defined Messianic role in the new order. (He welcomed the beginning of World War I as the fulfillment of his prophecy.) As the transition through this apocalypse, Scriabin posited an enormous ritual that would purge humanity and make it fit for the millennium. He felt that he was divinely called to create this ritual, this "Mystery" as he called it, and he spent the last twelve years of his life concocting ideas for its realization. Scriabin's mammoth "Mysterium" was to be performed in a specially built temple in India (in which country he never set foot), and was to include music, mime, fragrance, light, sculpture, costume, bells hung from the clouds, etc., etc., which were to represent the history of man from the dawn of time to the ultimate world convulsion. He even imagined a language of sighs and groans that would express feelings not translatable into mere words. He whipped all these fantasies together with a seething sexuality to create a vision of whirling emotional ferment quite unlike anything else in the history of music or any other art. In describing the *Poem of Ecstasy* to his friend Ivan Lipaev he said, "When you listen to it, look straight into the eye of the Sun!"

As a young composer, before the visionary flights of his later music, Scriabin was a devotee of Frédéric Chopin (he slept with scores of Chopin's music under his pillow), and his Etudes, Preludes, Mazurkas and Waltzes were created under that inspiration. The Waltz in A-flat major, Op. 38 shows how Scriabin brought to the earlier models an increasing expressive freedom in harmony and complex textures.

*Symphonies of Wind Instruments*  
Igor Stravinsky  
*Arranged for Piano by Arthur Lourié*

Born June 17, 1882 in Oranienbaum, near St. Petersburg.  
Died April 6, 1971 in New York City.

*Composed in 1920.*

Igor Stravinsky first met Claude Debussy following the premiere of *The Firebird* in Paris in 1910. A mutual admiration sprang up between the two, and Stravinsky dedicated his cantata *Zvezdoliki* (*King of the Stars*) to Debussy, and Debussy reciprocated by inscribing the *Scherzando*, the third of his three pieces for two pianos, *En Blanc et Noir*, to Stravinsky. Though they saw little of each other during the First World War, Stravinsky was greatly saddened by Debussy's death on March 25, 1918.

In June 1920, Stravinsky left Switzerland, where he had taken refuge during the war, and installed himself in the French coastal village of Carantec in Brittany. Soon after arriving, he received a request from Henri Prunières, editor of *La Revue Musicale*, to contribute a short musical piece to a special December issue of that periodical commemorating Debussy. He accepted the commission, and on June 20th composed a wordless chorale in piano score, which he submitted to Prunières. The chorale, however, was pressed into further service. A full year before, in July 1919, Stravinsky had begun sketching a wind ensemble piece incorporating the mixed-meter rhythms of *The Rite of Spring* and the austere sonorities of *Les Noces*, and the Debussy chorale was conceived as the closing section of this earlier work, which became, in the composer's words, "a grand chant, an objective cry of wind instruments, in place of the warm human tone of the strings." The *Symphonies d'instruments à vents* ("*Symphonies of Wind Instruments*") was drafted in piano score by July 2, 1920 and orchestrated by November 30th, when Stravinsky was living in Garches. The composition was dedicated to Debussy.

Stravinsky intended that the title "symphony" here not be taken in the traditional Classic-Romantic sense, but rather in its original, 17th-century meaning, indicating simply a "sounding together." He characterized the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* as "an austere ritual that is unfolded in terms of short litanies.... According to my idea, the homage I intended to pay to the memory of the great musician ought not to be inspired by his musical thought; on the contrary, I desired rather to express myself in a language that should be essentially my own."

*Cinq Préludes Fragiles*, Op. 1  
Arthur Lourié

Born May 14, 1892 in St. Petersburg, Russia.  
Died October 12, 1966 in Princeton, New Jersey.

*Composed in 1908-1910.*

Arthur Vincent Lourié was among the most prominent Russian avant-garde musicians of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Born in St. Petersburg in May 1892, Lourié studied for a time at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, but soon dropped out of school to experiment with various advanced compositional techniques and participate in new music groups. By 1915, he had written some piano works heavily influenced by Debussy and Scriabin, as well as the iconoclastic *Formes en l'air* ("Shapes in the Air"), for whose notation without traditional bar lines he adapted graphic elements of cubism; the score was dedicated to Picasso. In 1918, Lourié was appointed musical commissar for the new Soviet Union, but he decamped to Berlin three years later because of strong opposition to his progressive policies. In Berlin, he met Ferruccio Busoni, with whose broad cultural interests and artistic philosophy he had much in common. From 1924 to 1941, Lourié lived in Paris, where he devoted himself to composition and formed a close friendship with Stravinsky. He moved to the United States in 1941 and joined the staff of Voice of America's Russian Division and became a naturalized citizen after the war. He died in Princeton, New Jersey in 1966.

Though Lourié gained fame as a modernist, his earliest works were piano pieces firmly rooted in the recent Russian music of Scriabin and Rachmaninoff and the Impressionism of Claude Debussy, whose music was well known in Russia by 1908-1910, the time of Lourié's *Cinq Préludes Fragiles*. These are remarkably polished works for a composer still in his teens, and he acknowledged their value by awarding the set his first opus number. Lourié called these beautiful pieces "*Fragile Preludes*," and in character they are indeed reflections or meditations or even reveries, succinct in melody, luminous in sonority, wispy in dynamics, gently floating, as their movement titles suggest – *Lento*; *Calme, sans vite* [*without hurrying*]; *Tendre, pensif*; *Affable*; *Modéré*. Only the fourth movement – affable, good-natured, friendly – shows any eagerness of motion.

Sonata No. 2 in D minor, Op. 14  
Sergei Prokofiev

Born April 23, 1891 in Sontzovka, Russia.  
Died March 5, 1953 in Moscow.

*Composed in 1912.*

*Premiered on January 23, 1914 in Moscow by the composer.*

By 1912, just two years before he completed his formal studies at the St. Petersburg Conservatory, Sergei Prokofiev had established himself as a formidable prodigy of both piano and composition. The first work upon which he bestowed an opus number, the Piano Sonata No. 1 of 1907 (he was sixteen), was good enough to win him an association with the prestigious publisher (of Tchaikovsky, among others) Jurgenson. Other compositions for solo piano, voice and orchestra quickly followed the First Sonata, and Prokofiev's performance of his own keyboard works established his reputation as a brilliant and powerful virtuoso and a composer in the most daring styles of the day. The most important of Prokofiev's pre-graduation creations was the Piano Concerto No. 1, which stirred spirited comment, pro and con, when he premiered it in Moscow in 1912. After playing the Concerto again in Pavlovsk, he joined his mother at the Caucasian resort of Kislovodsk, where he balanced a rigorous schedule of composition with hiking in the mountains and reading. It was at Kislovodsk in August that he completed the Piano Sonata No. 2, begun the previous March. He sent the manuscript to Jurgenson with a note stating that, in view of

the interest excited by his recent appearances in Moscow and Pavlovsk, a new, higher scale of fees should be instituted. Two hundred rubles, he said, was his price for the new Sonata, and he would accept nothing less. Jurgenson met his demand.

The Second Sonata opens with a precisely regulated sonata form that traverses a main theme of high rhythmic tension, a transition of quiet intensity, and a contrasting, waltz-like second subject. A development built from motives of the earlier themes is followed by a full recapitulation. The compact *Scherzo*, with its central section of ostinato-like octave figurations, is a reworking of a piece Prokofiev wrote in 1908 for Anatoly Liadov's composition class at the St. Petersburg Conservatory. The *Andante*, whose depth of emotion masterfully balances the wit and verve of the surrounding music, is based on two themes. The first is a smoothly contoured melody of quiet motion; the second is more animated and wide-ranging. A repeated-note motive is introduced in the movement's central portion, and serves as the underpinning for the varied repetitions of the two themes that occupy the closing section. The finale is another sonata form whose main theme is impetuous and leaping; the second theme is built from short phrases in longer note values.

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