

Seaford Music Society

Sunday 26th October 2025, at 3.00 pm

Melvyn Tan – Piano

Melvyn Tan was born in Singapore in 1956. He showed prodigious musical talent during his childhood, and at the age of twelve came to England to study at the Yehudi Menuhin School. Tan's piano teachers – Nadia Boulanger, Vlado Perlemuter and Marcel Ciampi – sparked his lifelong passion for French music in general and the works of Debussy, Ravel and Messiaen in particular. At the Menuhin school he was encouraged to think about the nature of music, to consider its structure and shaping forces, and ask questions of the score. After he enrolled at the Royal College of Music in 1978, he broadened his scope of enquiry to include the sounds of early pianos and the playing styles that conditioned them.

Tan's decision in 1980 to specialise in fortepiano, brave and forward-looking at the time, was rewarded by rapid professional progress over the following decade. He forged an enlightened artistic partnership with Roger Norrington and the London Classical Players, intensified in 1987 during a landmark tour of Europe, America, Australia and Japan. Capacity audiences attended their Beethoven Experience weekend at London's South Bank Centre and subsequent international tour, during which Tan performed on Beethoven's Broadwood fortepiano of 1817.

Not content to rest in the box reserved for early music practitioners, Tan began exploring works on the modern concert grand piano. He launched this new phase in his career on Christmas Day 1996 with a performance of Mozart's Piano Concerto No.9 'Jeunehomme', given in Cologne in company with the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie. The following year he gave a recital of Chopin's Préludes and Schumann's Kreisleriana at Wigmore Hall. Tan's refreshing interpretations of everything from Bach and Rameau to Chopin and Debussy are directly informed by his knowledge of historical playing styles and intuitive feeling for the modern piano's timbres and textures.

After an absence of three decades, Melvyn Tan made a triumphant return to Singapore in January 2011, where he played to a full Esplanade Hall, and since September 2012 he has held the position of Artist in Residence at Singapore's Yong Siew Toh Conservatory.

Tan has performed as concerto soloist with such prestigious ensembles as the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra, Salzburg's Camerata and Mozarteum orchestras, Melbourne Symphony and the Australian Chamber Orchestra. More recently he has made regular appearances with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra and with the London Chamber Orchestra, recording Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 12 and Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 2 on the orchestra's LCO Live label.

In addition to his concert and recording activities Melvyn Tan gives masterclasses at the Villa Medici-Giulini in Italy and at the Yong Siew Toh and Aureus Conservatories of Singapore. He is also a keen and long-standing supporter of Buskaid, the outstanding South African music project in a Soweto township, listed by Gramophone Magazine as one of the world's ten most inspiring orchestras.



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Johann Sebastian BACH (1685-1750)

French Suite No.5 in G major, BWV816

- I *Allemande*
- II *Bourrée*
- III *Courante*
- IV *Loure*
- V *Sarabande*
- VI *Gigue*
- VII *Gavotte*

After his appointment in 1717 as Kapellmeister to the court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, Bach cultivated two particular musical genres in his creative career, the sonata and the suite. The suite had by then achieved its classical layout, based around the dance forms of the allemande, courante, sarabande, and gigue, with other dances added. Bach wrote three sets of six suites for keyboard, most of which date from his years at Cöthen. The so-called English Suites introduce their group of contrasted dances with a weighty prelude. But this is missing in the simpler design of these French Suites. The title "French Suite" is not Bach's own, but was probably coined on account of the appearance of several French dances, such as the loure in No.5.

In his study of Bach's music, written in 1802, Johann Nikolaus Forkel spoke of this fifth French Suite in the following terms: "By design, the composer is here less learned than in his other suites and has mostly used a pleasing, more predominant melody." Less learned, perhaps; melodious, certainly.

Maurice RAVEL (1875-1937)

Le Tombeau de Couperin

- I *Prélude*
- II *Fugue*
- III *Forlane*
- IV *Rigaudon*
- V *Menuet*
- VI *Toccata*

One of the enthusiasms that contributed to the style of both Debussy and Ravel was for the rich heritage of classical French music and dance of the 17th and 18th centuries. Thus it came about that Ravel completed in 1914 a suite of piano pieces in memory of the great François Couperin, using the collective title *tombeau* in the specialized sense of a memorial. The titles of the individual movements look back to the Baroque era, but there is nothing antiquarian about the harmony Ravel used in these pieces. Couperin would scarcely have recognized it, nor is he known to have begun a suite with a prelude and fugue.

The gentle and almost continuous motion of the *Prélude* is like a pastoral spinning-wheel, its gyrations passed from hand to hand and ending with an upward harp-like flourish. Still profoundly gentle is the *Fugue*, adhering strictly to its three voices, and lucid enough in its texture to show masterly ingenuities, such as the syncopated subject imitating itself upside-down. The *Forlane* is a courting, flirtatious dance in 6/4 or (as here) 6/8 time with frequent repetitions of phrase. The dance is salted with piquant and whimsical harmonies. The *Rigaudon* is a robust hopping and skipping dance marked by two slower steps at the outset. This is very evident in the short refrain (slow, slow, quick, quick, slow) which begins, punctuates and ends the piece. The gentle *Menuet* includes a big climax wrought by parallel harmonies of increasing intensity. The final *Toccata* stands squarely in the tradition of perpetual motion.

INTERVAL 15 MINUTES

There are toilets in the lobby at the back of the church.

No refreshments will be served during the interval, but we warmly invite you to join us downstairs for tea, coffee and biscuits after the concert ends.

Frédéric François CHOPIN (1810-1849)

Sonata No.3 in B minor, Op.58

- I *Allegro maestoso*
- II *Scherzo: Molto vivace*
- III *Largo*
- IV *Finale: Presto non tanto*

Chopin wrote the last of his three piano sonatas in the summer of 1844 at Nohant, the country home of the writer George Sand. He had been in a close relationship with Sand since 1838, but this was their last happy summer together. In 1845 the already consumptive Chopin's health began to decline still further, and dissension between him and Sand became apparent. The following summer was his last at Nohant: he left for good in November 1846. In 1848, despite the continuing deterioration in his health, he undertook a gruelling tour of Britain, playing both publicly and privately in England and Scotland. By the time he returned he was forced to give up teaching, and in October 1849 he died.

The *Third Sonata* is at once less radical and more expansive than the Second (the one with the famous *Funeral March*) but at the same time it shows considerable technical advance, not least in the incorporation of what had hitherto been mere decorative passage work into the essential musical substance of the piece. Chopin was a renowned improviser, and we know that he habitually composed at the piano, committing his ideas to paper only with difficulty. This shows in two particular ways. Firstly, as in improvisation, the music will often be caught up by a new idea and go off at a tangent in a quite unexpected direction. Secondly, and more importantly for the history of piano music, he developed a style of keyboard writing that perfectly suited the acoustical and mechanical properties of the instrument. His music invariably resonates, breathes almost, with the piano: it never, for instance, seeks to overpower and subdue the instrument, as Liszt's does, nor is it unceremoniously 'dumped' there, as even Beethoven's can sometimes seem.

Both these qualities are exemplified in the first movement of the *Third Sonata*, which also displays the nobility and poetic quality that are so much a feature of the composer's style. Thematic material overflows, with a superb flow of impassioned melody in the lyrical passages. Here we have a sheer miracle of continuous creation.

The quicksilver *Scherzo* belongs to the Chopin of the studies, the pianist whose command of light, even passage work so dazzled his contemporaries; while the more mellow and sonorous trio section provides fitting contrast. A sense of quiet rapture marks the *Largo*, a movement in ternary form which comes in third place rather than the customary second. The melodic lines of this movement seem effortlessly poised. Notice, though, how the dramatic opening bars, linking the E-flat major of the *Scherzo* to the B major of the *Largo*, cast their shadow over the entire movement, adjusting it to the emotional balance of the *Sonata* as a whole.

The final movement is one of great brilliance and uninterrupted vigour. In rondo form, and based essentially on two main ideas, it progresses with a remorseless surge spanning the whole movement. This powerful *Finale* so impressed Liszt that he went to the trouble of copying it out for his own use – with a few characteristic additions of his own.

We warmly invite you to join us downstairs after the concert for a cup of tea or coffee, and a biscuit or two

Our forthcoming concerts

Sunday 30th November 2025, 3.00 pm, at Seaford Baptist Church, Belgrave Road, Seaford

Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. The well-known story has been abridged by, and will be narrated by, Peter Thomson, with Ensemble V playing music by Sally Beamish, originally commissioned and premièred in 2023 by Finnish National Ballet.

Sunday 8th February 2026, 3.00 pm, at Seaford Baptist Church, Belgrave Road, Seaford

We are delighted to welcome back the **London Mozart Players Chamber Ensemble** for their annual concert here in Seaford. They will be playing works by Mozart, Britten and Beethoven: more details in the Seaford Music Society 2025-2026 brochure, or on our website: www.seafordmusicsociety.com.

Membership of the Society grants you free entry to these and all the remaining concerts this season, without additional charge. A limited number of children and young adults (under 26) may also attend without charge (children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult). If you are not a member and would like to join, see our Treasurer, Paul Moore, at the desk in the entrance foyer. The cost of your ticket for today's concert will be credited towards your membership subscription.

For non-members, single-concert tickets cost £21, and can be purchased in advance from **Newberry Tully Estate Agents** in Church Street, Seaford; **Seaford, Newhaven and Lewes Tourist Information Centres**; online through **TicketSource**; or from **our Treasurer, Paul Moore**.

Additional benefits for members of Seaford Music Society

Members may bring one guest to any of the concerts in our 2025-26 season of concerts, at a reduction of £3 off the single-ticket price, subject to the concert not having sold out.

On presentation of their current membership card, members also enjoy the following benefits:

- A reduced price of £14 at any Haywards Heath Music Society concert in their 2025-26 season
- A reduced price of £17 at any Nicholas Yonge Society concert in their 2025-26 season
- A discount of £3 off the price of any Uckfield Music Club concert in their 2026 season

Tickets at these reduced prices are available at the door, on concert days only. Details of the concerts can be found on each organisation's website:

Uckfield Music Club:	www.uckfieldmusicclub.uk
Haywards Heath Music Society:	www.haywardsheathmusicsociety.org.uk
Nicholas Yonge Society:	www.nyslewes.org.uk