



EXPRESS CONCERT:

# Conrad Tao Plays Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 24

**September 30–October 2, 2022**

Ordway Concert Hall,  
Ted Mann Concert Hall

**EXPRESS CONCERTS**»»

*Please note:*

*this program will proceed without pause.*

## About the Program

With this program I was inspired by a couple of salient features in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 24 in C minor. I wanted to reflect the concerto's chromaticism — exemplified by its opening 12-bar phrase, which touches all 12 notes of the chromatic scale in spooky, hollow octaves — and the rich emotional ambiguity and intensity that results. I also wanted to find pieces that spoke to Mozart's unique balance of formal elegance and seeming spontaneity, the way his music feels both inevitable and surprising.

So, we have the serpentine harmonies and slippery modulations of one of Carlo Gesualdo's madrigals, the classical drama of a Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach keyboard concerto (with a second movement that, via its interplay between minor-key tolling and delicate major-key expression, achieves an emotional complexity later found in the Mozart), and the unforced, enigmatically placed chromatic sounds of Morton Feldman's *The Viola in My Life 3*. And bookending our musical journey is a rarely performed piece by Ruth Crawford Seeger, *Music for Small Orchestra*, written in 1926 and full of mystery. Its first movement ("Slow, pensive") comprises several chromatic layers moving simultaneously, semi-independently, accumulating and dispersing like clouds; the second movement ("In roguish humor. Not fast"), which closes the program, follows a similar trajectory, but at a faster speed and with greater rhythmic precision, the instruments eventually careening into each other.

I hope that this program brings you inside the world of Mozart's extraordinary concerto and illuminates how timeless this music is.

— Conrad Tao

**Ruth Crawford Seeger** 1901-1953

## Music for Small Orchestra

Slow, pensive

# Program Note

In 1926, American composer Ruth Crawford Seeger won a scholarship in composition from the Institute of Musical Art, which had just been taken over by the Juilliard Musical Foundation. With her application for the scholarship, she submitted two samples of her work: the Sonata for Violin and Piano and Music for Small Orchestra. According to Crawford's records, Music for Small Orchestra was not performed during her lifetime; the premiere was in 1969 at West Texas State University.

Music for Small Orchestra is the first of three orchestral works in Crawford's compositional output. The piece is uniquely scored for flute, clarinet, bassoon, four individual violin parts, two individual cello parts, and piano. Crawford experiments with simultaneously using high and low instruments in the extremes of their registers throughout the two-movement suite. For example, the bassoon will play high pitches sounding above low sonorities on the flute, and the cellos sometimes play higher than the violins. Additionally, there is very little instrumental doubling in the piece. As such, when the four violins and cellos have a solo melody in unison, it creates a powerful musical moment.

One of the most significant compositional features of Music for Small Orchestra is Crawford's use of ostinatos, which are repeated musical patterns. In the first movement, multiple ostinatos are layered on top of each other, creating a dense texture. Often, this layering results in extraordinary polyrhythmic complexity between each part and a thick veil of sound. These ostinatos are usually harmonically unrelated as well, further contributing to the intensity.

The second movement also uses ostinatos, although there is a more pronounced distinction between the free, rhapsodic melody of the theme and the repetitive underlying ostinatos. Marked as "In roguish humor. Not fast," this movement exhibits many of the joke-like qualities of a scherzo. There is perpetual motion, and duple rhythms in the accompanying ostinatos are layered with triple rhythmic figures in the soaring theme.

Music for Small Orchestra is one of Crawford's earliest works, and it demonstrates many of the artistic priorities and compositional techniques that would become integral to her later pieces. These include the use of quartal and quintal harmonies infused with the dissonant tritone, counterpoint centered around intervallic patterns, and the use of rhythm as a structural parameter.

**Carlo Gesualdo** 1560–1613

Arr. by Jonathan Posthuma

**“Resta di darmi noia” from  
Madrigals, Book 6**

## Program Note

Carlo Gesualdo is equally famous for the extraordinary chromaticism in his musical compositions and for the scandals surrounding his personal life. The Prince of Venosa and Count of Conza, Gesualdo married Maria d’Avalos in 1586. Just four years later, he murdered Maria and her aristocratic lover upon finding them “in flagrante delicto di fragrante peccato.”

Gesualdo dealt with increasingly severe mental illness and interpersonal conflicts for the remainder of his life. It is reported that he had a volatile relationship with his second wife Leonora d’Este, he took a mistress who was convicted of witchcraft, and he kept a servant for the sole purpose of ritually beating him each day.

Gesualdo’s most well-known works are his six books of five-voice madrigals, which he published between 1594 and 1611. His earliest madrigals were composed in Ferrara and may have been intended for performance by women in the renowned Concerto delle donne, one of the earliest ensembles of professional women musicians in Western Europe.

Madrigals of the time were intended to showcase cleverness and complexity, and every textual image is matched with its own musical idea. Composers of the time utilized a myriad of compositional devices such as dissonance, register changes, disjunct melodies, long melismas, and sighing motives to aurally depict words such as love, agony, death, and ecstasy.

It was Gesualdo’s fifth and sixth books of madrigals, in particular, that established his legacy as a composer. Gesualdo modeled his madrigals on the aforementioned principles, yet he pushed the boundaries of chromaticism and dissonance in Books 5 and 6 to extremes that would not be seen again in Western classical music for another 300 years.

“Resta di darmi noia” was published in Gesualdo’s sixth book in 1611, and the text portrays the bitter anguish of unrequited love. The narrator lashes out at the cruel and deceitful feelings of infatuated passion and concludes that all joy is dead. The sensational details of Gesualdo’s personal life and the uniquely forward-thinking compositional devices he employed inspired a number of twentieth-century novels, short stories, and operas.

## Lyrics

Resta di darmi noia,  
pensier crudo e fallace,  
ch'esser non può già mai quel che a te piace! Morta è per me la gioia, onde  
sperar non lice  
d'esser mai più felice.

Cease giving me trouble,  
cruel and deceitful thought,  
for what you desire can never be. Joy is dead to me,  
therefore I'm allowed no hope  
of ever being happy again.

**Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach** 1714–1788

### Concerto in D for Piano and Orchestra

Allegro di molto

Andante

Allegretto

**Conrad Tao**, director and piano

## Program Note

Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach composed a prolific number of concertos across his career, although he regarded his 1772 collection of Six Concertos for Keyboard as some of his best. Just four years before their publication, Bach had been released from his nearly thirty-year court appointment to Frederick the Great in Berlin to become the music director for the city of Hamburg. This position included many new professional responsibilities, such as composing a setting of the Passion each year, writing music for civic occasions, and overseeing the music performed at the five city churches each week.

At the same time, there was an increasingly large market of amateur musicians interested in purchasing keyboard music. Now that Bach had the opportunity to compose for a broader public audience rather than for a small group of court aristocrats, he began to publish collections with a more popular appeal. The Six Concertos for Keyboard, which includes the concerto on today's program, are one such collection. Bach published the concertos at his own expense and sold copies of them through subscription. Although Bach marketed the pieces as "easy," they are by no means simplistic.

The sense of "easiness" in the Concerto in D comes from its straightforward phrasing, tuneful melodies, and appealing dance-like rhythms. Yet there is



also a sense of formal adventurousness in the piece. For example, the soloist unexpectedly interrupts the orchestra with slow musical material two times in the first movement. Moreover, the first movement proceeds directly into the second movement without pause, and Bach uses unconventional key relationships between these movements. The first movement is in D major, while the second is in the unusual key of E minor. This unique combination of approachable phrases and melodies with intellectual compositional experimentation resulted in a concerto that both amateurs and connoisseurs found appealing.

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## Program Note

American composer Morton Feldman was a pioneer in the development of indeterminate and avant-garde music. Many of his works are depicted in graphic scores with grids, rather than with conventional music notation. Feldman also experimented with chance in his music by indicating the number of notes to be played in a certain number of seconds, while not specifying the notes' individual durations and/or pitches.

In addition to his more experimental works, Feldman also composed using traditional Western music notation of pitch and duration. This is the case for *The Viola in My Life 3*, which was published in 1972. Like many of his works, the performance indication in the score is "extremely quiet." The piece is scored for viola and piano, and it imperceptibly alternates between 2/2 and 3/2 meters.

Feldman admired the "flat surface" found in the paintings of American artists such as Mark Rothko and Philip Guston, and he desired to create the sonic equivalent to that visual concept. As such, his music is not saturated with any type of complex polyphony between the parts and is quite straightforward in procedure. Feldman's pieces are crafted in such a way as to give the illusion that the listeners themselves are shaping the trajectory of the music as they experience it in real time.

As Nils Viegland writes of Feldman's music, "Though it is true that his values of graduation can be exceedingly fine, when one enters this scale and comprehends it, something truly new and wonderful opens up in the art of music — a world in which the relative and the absolute become engaged with themselves."

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**Morton Feldman** 1926–1987

*The Viola in My Life 3*

Hyobi Sim, viola

Conrad Tao, piano

## Program Note

### Concerto No. 24 for Piano and Orchestra

Allegro

Larghetto

Allegretto

Conrad Tao, director and piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart composed Concerto No. 24 during his fourth season in Vienna at a time when he was gaining rapid renown as a pianist and composer of concertos. Concerto No. 24 was premiered in April 1786 at the Viennese Burgtheater, with Mozart himself playing the solo part and conducting the orchestra from the keyboard. Ludwig van Beethoven was tremendously impressed by the work, and Johannes Brahms later wrote that this concerto was a “masterpiece of art and full of inspired ideas.”

The extensive first movement of Concerto No. 24 repeatedly defies the listener’s expectations by challenging conventions of structure and harmony. Most concertos from this time period open with a straightforward melodic theme that clearly defines the key of the piece within the first few measures. The first theme of Concerto No. 24, however, boldly contains all twelve chromatic pitches, and the home key of C minor remains ambiguous until measure thirteen. Likewise, in many of Mozart’s other concertos, the first solo entrance begins with the same music played by the orchestra at the opening of the movement. In Concerto No. 24, the pianist instead enters with a lengthy passage of new musical material.

The development section of the first movement features a particularly turbulent, passionate, and operatic dialogue between the pianist and the orchestra before leading into a more conventional recapitulation of the opening themes. Boundaries are broken once more in the coda at the very end of the movement, as the pianist unexpectedly interrupts the orchestra for a final virtuosic solo moment.

One of the defining sonic features of Concerto No. 24 is Mozart’s imaginative and unusual use of both oboes and clarinets. Throughout the piece, the winds have important moments where they take precedence over the strings. This is especially noteworthy in the tender Larghetto. With its elegant phrases, simplistic themes, and predictable ABACA rondo structure, this movement provides an exceptional contrast to the tumultuous first movement. Concerto No. 24 concludes with a theme and variations, which begins with a straightforward orchestral statement of the theme. Each of the eight variations inventively incorporates rhythmic, harmonic, textural, and/or melodic contrast, with the final variation and coda bringing the whole concerto to a triumphant close. Operatic drama permeates Piano Concerto No. 24, which was written shortly before Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro* premiered. In fact, Mozart would shortly thereafter become known more as an opera composer than as an instrumental composer and performer.

### **Music for Small Orchestra**

In roguish humor. Not fast

## Program Note

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# Artist Profiles

**Conrad Tao**, director and piano

## Biography

Conrad Tao has appeared worldwide as a pianist and composer and has been dubbed “the kind of musician who is shaping the future of classical music” by New York Magazine, and an artist of “probing intellect and open-hearted vision” by The New York Times. He is the recipient of the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant and was named a Gilmore Young Artist — an honor awarded every two years highlighting the most promising American pianists of the new generation. As a composer, he was also the recipient of a 2019 New York Dance and Performance “Bessie” Award, for Outstanding Sound Design / Music Composition, for his work on *More Forever*, his collaboration with dancer and choreographer Caleb Teicher.

Conrad Tao has recently appeared as soloist with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, and Boston Symphony. As a composer, his work has been performed by orchestras throughout the US; his first large scale orchestral work, *Everything Must Go*, was premiered by the New York Philharmonic in 18-19, and will be premiered in Europe by the Antwerp Symphony in 21-22. In the same season, his violin concerto, written for Stefan Jackiw, will be premiered by the Atlanta Symphony under Robert Spano, and the Baltimore Symphony under Kirill Karabits. In the 2021-22 season, he will also make his London solo recital debut at the Wigmore Hall, and will appear in recital throughout North America, including Boston, New York, Washington, and Seattle. Tao’s Bessie Award-winning dance work with Caleb Teicher, *More Forever*, will continue to tour North America, including performances at Cal Performances in Berkeley and Fall for Dance North in Toronto. Other collaborations include his duo work *Counterpoint*, also with Caleb Teicher, and a multi-city tour with violinist Stefan Jackiw and cellist Jay Campbell, as a member of the Junction Trio.

In the 2020-21 season, Tao was the focus of a series of concerts and interviews with the Finnish Radio Symphony, performing Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 4 with Hannu Lintu and Andrew Norman’s *Suspend* with Sakari Oramo, live on television. While most performances in the 20-21 season were canceled due to the COVID epidemic, he appeared with the Cincinnati Symphony and Louis Langrée, returned to the Seattle Symphony to perform Beethoven Concerto No. 4, and returned to Blossom with the Cleveland Orchestra, and *Bravo! Vail* with the New York Philharmonic and Jaap van Zweden. Further invitations included the National Symphony Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony, New Jersey Symphony, and St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. His creation with Caleb Teicher, *More Forever*, commissioned by Works & Process at the Guggenheim, was planned for tours across the US, including *Dance Cleveland* and *Fall for Dance*, Toronto. Tao and Teicher’s latest collaboration for Works & Process, *Rhapsody in Blue*, kicked off the Guggenheim’s return to in-person performances and was lauded by The New York Times as “monumental.”



In 19-20, Tao was presented in recital by Carnegie Hall, performing works by David Lang, Bach, Julia Wolfe, Jason Eckhardt, Carter, Rachmaninoff, and Schumann. He also made his debut in recital at Walt Disney Concert Hall, where the LA Phil presented him in works by Copland and Frederic Rzewski. Following his debut at Blossom Music Center, the Cleveland Orchestra invited Tao to perform at Severance Hall in a special program featuring music by Mary Lou Williams and Ligeti, and improvisation alongside pianist Aaron Diehl. After his debut with the Boston Symphony at Tanglewood, his return date was cancelled due to COVID; instead he was invited to give a streamed recital in their Great Performers series, where he played works by Felipe Lara, Crawford Seeger, Tania León, David Lang, and Beethoven.

Additional highlights of recent seasons include Tao's LA Opera debut in the West Coast premiere of David Lang's adaptation of Thomas Bernhard's *the loser*. In Europe, he has been presented by the Swedish Radio Symphony in recital and in Andrew Norman's *Suspend* alongside Susanna Mälkki; he also recently returned to the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, performing with Antonio Pappano. Among other recent performances of his compositions are his own performance of *The Oneiroi* in New York with the Seattle Symphony, and *Spoonfuls* with the IRIS Orchestra.

A Warner Classics recording artist, Tao's debut disc *Voyages* was declared a "spiky debut" by The New Yorker's Alex Ross. Of the album, NPR wrote: "Tao proves himself to be a musician of deep intellectual and emotional." His next album, *Pictures*, with works by David Lang, Toru Takemitsu, Elliott Carter, Mussorgsky, and Tao himself, was hailed by The New York Times as "a fascinating album [by] a thoughtful artist and dynamic performer...played with enormous imagination, color and command." His third album, *American Rage*, featuring works by Julia Wolfe, Frederic Rzewski, and Aaron Copland, was released in the fall of 2019.

Tao was born in Urbana, Illinois in 1994. He has studied piano with Emilio del Rosario in Chicago and Yoheved Kaplinsky in New York, and composition with Christopher Theofanidis.

**Hyobi Sim**, viola

Associate Principal Viola

## Biography

A native Korean violist Hyobi Sim is the Associate Principal Violist of The Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. She began the study of viola when she was 12 years old. She won prizes at Tertis International Viola Competition, Music Chunchu Competition and Seoul Arts Center Competition.

Sim has made solo appearances with The Saint Paul Orchestra where she performed the Italian Serenade by Hugo Wolf and the Sinfonia Concertante in E flat Major by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. She also had solo appearances with many other orchestras such as Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, Gyungki Philharmonic Orchestra, Gyungchal Symphony Orchestra, Curtis Chamber Orchestra and more.

As an active chamber musician, Sim recently performed with members of the Accordo in Minnesota and Kumho Asiana Soloists Ensemble. She was the Guest Principal Violist at the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music in 2018 and she performed 'All in the Family Concert' at 92nd Street Y in New York. Sim has performed with great musicians including Steven Tenenbom, Ida Kavafian, Peter Wiley, Steven Isserlis, Jeremy Denk, Michael Kanne, Daniel Phillips, Pamela Frank, Roger Tapping and others. Sim is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, The Juilliard School and the Peabody Institute of Music. She studied with Roberto Diaz, Misha Amory, Hsin-Yun Huang and CJ Chang.

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