

GREETINGS

A brief and final welcome from me to this, my last planned season of *Music in the Afternoon*. Representing the end of my 20-year association with the WMCT, you may not be surprised by the cello-positive nature of a good deal of the programming. I am sure you will agree however that this feature adds a wonderful flavour to the season, and I hope that you will be transported by the music performed and the musicians performing. May we all be uplifted by every moment! - *Simon Fryer*



A warm welcome to the 128th season of WMCT's *Music in the Afternoon* and my first season as Artistic Director. This fall, I get to sit back and enjoy with you a lovely musical lineup curated by Simon. Karoline Podolak and Rachael Kerr will open our season with operatic hits and Slavic songs personal to Karoline. Born in Toronto, she studied Opera Performance in Poland so it's both a homecoming and a privilege to welcome this world-class soprano. In

November, the Maxwell String Quartet will bring the music of Haydn, the father of the string quartet, alongside folk tunes from their native Scotland. The Maxwells believe "every melody is a song" and "every rhythm a dance" so I look forward to experiencing the string quartet repertoire from this perspective alongside all of you.

-*Amy Hillis, WMCT Artistic Director*

October 9th, 2025, concert
Karoline Podolak
and
Rachael Kerr

The WMCT gratefully acknowledges
Dianne Henderson
for her support of the Student Outreach Program

Join us for a complimentary
Welcome Back Coffee at intermission
supported by an anonymous donor.

As a courtesy to others, please refrain from wearing perfume or other scents.
Please turn off cell phones and other noise-making devices.
No photography or recordings of any type during the performance.

Please come and meet the artists on the stage following the concert.

Tuning Your Mind Lecture:
A Lifetime of Singing
Lorna MacDonald, Professor of Voice
and Lois Marshall Chair in Voice Studies, U of T
Open to all, 12.15 p.m. sharp
Walter Hall, Edward Johnson Building

Visit the artist's website at www.karolinepodolak.com

PROGRAM for OCTOBER 9, 2025

Ah! Où va la jeune indoue (Bell song) Léo Delibes
from *Lakmé* (1836-1891)

No. 1 *Zyczenie (The Wish)* Frédéric Chopin

No. 2 *Wiosna (Spring)* (1810-1849)

No. 7 *Posel (Messenger)*

No. 8 *Sliczny chlopiec (Handsome Lad)*

No. 9 *Melodia (Melody)*

No. 12 *Moja pieszczota (My Darling)*

No. 16 *Piosnka litewska (Lithuanian Song)*

No. 17 *Spiew z mogily (Song from the Tomb)*

Kazala mi mama (My Mother Says) Feliks Nowowiejski
(1877-1946)

---INTERMISSION---

Zdes khorosho (How Fair this Spot) Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873-1943)

Když mne stará matka zpívat učívala'
(Songs My Mother Taught Me) Antonín Dvorák
(1841-1904)

Solovey (The Nightingale) Alexander Alyabyev
(1787-1851)

Meine Lippen, sie küssen so heiss
(On my lips every kiss is like wine) Franz Lehár
from *Giuditta* (1870-1948)

Mein Herr Marquis Johann Strauss II
from *Die Fledermaus* (1825-1899)

Una voce poco fa Gioachino Rossini
from *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1792-1868)

Il bacio Luigi Arditi
(1822-1903)

Surtitles for today's concert by James Sandau

NOTES for OCTOBER 9, 2025

A concert of songs and arias. Why the different designations? The word aria suggests that what we are hearing comes from an opera or operetta, and sure enough the sources are identified for us. But when an aria is removed from that context, it is much closer to the songs that make up the rest of the program. The arias may strike you as more dramatic in their musical gestures, especially since their overt theatricality could be what has made them so popular in the first place. In contrast, many of the songs were designed for more intimate spaces, and more subtle expression. But these differences are far from universal, and in this case perhaps my former students had it right: they frequently ignored my complaints and referred to any music simply as a song.

I have sometimes gone off at a tangent in these notes about opus numbers. These are normally attached to published works, and they can be helpful, although a little esoteric. But they can also be confusing. Today's songs by Chopin are an example. They all belong under Op. 74, suggesting that he thought of them as a group, and had deliberately chosen their order. In fact, Chopin published no songs during his lifetime; these were gathered together after his death by Julian Fontana, a friend and pupil of the composer. This rather colourful figure, who was born in Warsaw, spent time in England, Cuba, New York and Paris, and as well as having a performing career, studied law, was the author of a book on folk astronomy, and translated Cervantes' *Don Quixote* into Polish. More importantly, he acted as Chopin's copyist, preparing clean copies of many of his works for publication. He also prepared a posthumous edition of Chopin's unpublished works, and the Op. 74 songs are part of that undertaking. Chopin had requested that all his unpublished works should be destroyed, and complex negotiations took place after his death involving Fontana, the composer's mother and sister, and Jane Stirling, the Scottish amateur pianist who was another pupil of Chopin and a benefactress during his last years. It was finally agreed that Fontana should oversee their publication.

The songs were never intended for publication; many of them were written into souvenir books, a kind of scrap book or keepsake album popular in the nineteenth century, in which people collected all

kinds of memorabilia, with some items pasted in, others written or drawn in directly. Generally, Chopin did not write these specifically for the occasion but used pieces he had performed in informal salon gatherings. For these performances he often wrote out just the singer's melody and improvised the accompaniment, only writing this down later. One of the earliest of these keepsake albums is one owned by Emily Elsner, the daughter of his Warsaw piano teacher. The album was destroyed in WWII but contained six songs to poems by Chopin's close friend Stefan Witwicki, including *The Wish*, *Spring*, and *Messenger*. These all come from Witwicki's collection *Piosenki sielskie (Pastoral songs)*. Liszt made a piano arrangement of the first of these under the impression that it was a Polish folk song.

It wasn't only dilettantes and amateurs who owned memento albums of this kind, artists and writers often kept them as well. Chopin himself brought two such albums with him when he left Warsaw for Paris. Bohdan Zaleski, who wrote the poem *Handsome Lad*, inscribed other poems in an album owned by Stefan Witwicki and Chopin later added a song to one of these texts. Halina Goldberg has suggested that, after the crushing of the 1830-31 uprising in Warsaw, Polish émigrés in Paris used these albums as a setting where "discourse about the nation could be pursued without fear of censorship." The patriotic underpinning of the song titled *Melodia* is clear. The poem was inscribed by Zygmunt Krasinski into an album owned by his lover Delfina Potocka, a Polish countess and one more of Chopin's pupils. The composer added music to Krasinski's poem and dedicated the song to Potocka.

Now let's turn to the group of Slavic songs. The Polish composer Feliks Nowowiejski studied in Berlin with Max Bruch and with Dvorák in Prague. The song on today's program, which dates from sometime before 1930, has an additional title *Oberek*. This is the name of a traditional Polish dance with a rhythmic character similar to the Mazurka. The next song, Rachmaninoff's *Zdes' khorosho* is one of 12 songs he wrote in 1901-2 around the time of his famous 2nd Piano Concerto. The poetry for the collection is taken from various sources; today's song is to a poem by Glafira Galina. Dvorák's *Když mne stará matka zpívat učivala*, better known to English speakers as *Songs My Mother Taught Me* comes from a collection of seven songs to Czech poems by Adolf Heyduk and was published under the

title *Gypsy Songs*. They were written for a leading Viennese tenor, Gustav Walter, and were published initially with German texts prepared by Heyduck. *The Nightingale* by Alexander Alyabyev is possibly one of the only songs in a WMCT recital written while the composer was in prison accused of murder. The evidence was less than clear cut and he was later exiled to Siberia. The poem is by Anton Delvig and opera singers often interpolated the song into the singing lesson scene in Rossini's *The Barber of Seville*. It was also transcribed for piano by Liszt.

As I suggested earlier, even if you haven't seen the operas, you may well recognize the arias from them, since they are all favourites among singers. Although not, surprisingly, with WMCT audiences who last heard the Rossini aria in 1946 and have never heard any of the others. In something of a dramatic whirlwind, we shall be introduced to the Hindu priestess Lakmé as she retells a legend of a pariah's daughter; go to a North African city where Giuditta, who has left her husband in Sicily, now sings in the Alcazar nightclub; we will watch the chambermaid Adele, dressed in her mistress's clothes, as she tries to laugh her way out of detection at a grand ball; and we will listen to the young Rosina as she lovingly reflects on the voice she has just heard from her balcony, that of the disguised Count Almaviva. Luigi Arditi's aria is not from an opera, but it is yet another piece that was inserted by Adelina Patti and others into the singing lesson scene in this same Rossini opera, *The Barber of Seville*.

In *My Reminiscences*, a book published in 1896, the Italian violinist, conductor and composer, Arditi left a marvellously detailed account of the composition of *Il bacio*: improvising at the piano in a Manchester hotel, jotting down the music on the back of an envelope, digging it out when the soprano Marietta Piccolomini asked him to compose a song for her, and getting a baritone he was coaching to supply some words on the theme of a kiss as suggested by his wife. And then he adds a complaint echoed by many other composers over the years. He sold the French copyright for 400 francs, and the publisher made 400,000 francs from it and built splendid new business premises in Paris with the money!

-John Mayo