



SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Presents

Samuel Brown and Alyssa Dickens, Clarinet
Dr. Cecilia Kao, piano

Sunday, March 29th, 2026

2:00pm

PepsiCo Recital Hall

Program

Première Rhapsodie

Claude Debussy
(1862-1918)

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano in E-flat Major, Op. 120, No. 2

I. Allegro amabile

II. Allegro appassionato

III. Andante con moto – Allegro

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

Intermission

Arlequin

Louis Cahuzac
(1880-1960)

Tango Étude No. 3

Astor Piazzolla
(1921-1992)

Concert Fantasia on Motives from Rigoletto

Luigi Bassi
(1833-1871)

Konzertstück á la Feidman

István Kohán
(b. 1990)

This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Music in Performance.

Sam Brown and Alyssa Dickens are students of Dr. Corey Mackey.

The use of recording equipment or taking photographs is prohibited.

Please silence all electronic devices including watches, pagers, and phones.

Program Notes

Première Rhapsodie

Claude Debussy (1862–1918) composed *Première Rhapsodie* for clarinet and piano between December 1909 and January 1910. At the time, Debussy had recently joined the governing board of the Paris Conservatoire at the invitation of its director, Gabriel Fauré. One of his responsibilities in this role was to help prepare music for the Conservatoire’s annual performance examinations. For the 1910 clarinet competition, Debussy wrote two pieces: a short sight-reading work titled *Petite Pièce* and the much lengthier *Première Rhapsodie*. He dedicated the work to the Conservatoire’s clarinet professor, Prosper Mimart, who later gave the public premiere and inspired Debussy to write an orchestral accompaniment.

Although originally composed for academic performance evaluation, *Première Rhapsodie* quickly became one of the most beloved works in the clarinet repertoire. Debussy’s writing reflects the impressionistic style that defined much of his music, emphasizing color, fluid phrasing, and subtle shifts in harmony rather than strict formal structure. The piece also demonstrates the expressive and technical versatility of the clarinet, combining lyrical melodies with passages that demand agility, control, and a wide range of tone colors.

The work unfolds in a single continuous movement with several contrasting sections. It opens with a calm, mysterious introduction in which the clarinet presents a gentle, flowing melody above soft piano harmonies. This lyrical atmosphere gradually gives way to more animated and playful passages, including a scherzando-like section filled with quick articulation and light, dancing rhythms. Throughout the piece, Debussy alternates between expressive melodic lines and brilliant technical writing, allowing the clarinet to display both its singing quality and virtuosic capabilities. The music builds toward a lively and energetic conclusion, highlighting the clarinet’s range and shimmering tone.

Sonata for Clarinet and Piano in E-flat Major, Op. 120, No. 2

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) composed his *Sonata for Clarinet and Piano in E-flat Major, Op. 120, No. 2* in 1894 during the final years of his life. At the time, Brahms had largely withdrawn from composing, believing his career was coming to a close. However, after hearing the remarkable playing of the German clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld, he was so inspired that he returned to composition and wrote several new works featuring the clarinet. Among these were two clarinet sonatas that quickly became some of the most important pieces in the instrument’s repertoire. Rather than writing a flashy display piece, Brahms created a work that highlights the clarinet’s warm, expressive voice and its ability to blend naturally with the piano. The sonata reflects Brahms’s late musical style, featuring intimate moments and lyricism full of subtle emotional depth.

The sonata unfolds in three movements, each with a distinctive character while maintaining a gentle, unified mood. The first movement, marked *Allegro amabile* (“pleasant and charming”), opens with a smooth, lyrical theme that passes between the clarinet and piano, establishing the warm and graceful atmosphere that defines the work.

The second movement brings a contrasting mood, beginning with a darker and more passionate character before shifting to a calmer and more reflective middle section. The final movement is built on a simple, flowing melody followed by a series of variations in which the theme is reimagined in different ways. As the movement progresses, the music gradually becomes more energetic and playful before reaching a bright and satisfying conclusion. Throughout the sonata, Brahms allows the clarinet and piano to engage in a close musical conversation, with each instrument sharing important musical ideas. The result is a work that feels intimate and expressive, showcasing the clarinet's lyrical qualities while reflecting the thoughtful, reflective character of Brahms's final years as a composer.

Arlequin

Louis Cahuzac (1880–1960) was both a distinguished performer and a respected composer. A student of the renowned pedagogue Cyrille Rose at the Paris Conservatoire, Cahuzac became known for a playing style characterized by a fluid tone and elegant legato phrasing. His close familiarity with the clarinet informed his compositions, many of which highlight the instrument's expressive range and technical versatility. Among these works, *Arlequin* is notable as his only piece written for unaccompanied solo clarinet.

The title refers to Harlequin, a playful and mischievous clown from the Italian *commedia dell'arte* tradition. Cahuzac intended the performer to portray this theatrical character vividly through the music. Cahuzac wrote:

“It was the composer's intention to depict the main traits of this emblematic figure of the Italian *commedia dell'arte*: the whimsical clown's blunders and mistakes amuse and entertain an audience that laugh at his pains and joys alike. The clarinet translates the character's pirouettes and turns, his exuberant gesticulating and comical melancholy. A few subtle references to jazz rhythms and styles express the composer's views on a character whose timelessness transcends all schools and genres.”

Arlequin unfolds in a loose ternary (ABA') form, contrasting lively, playful passages with more reflective moments. Rapid shifts in articulation, rhythm, and character allow the performer to suggest the clown's exaggerated gestures, sudden turns, and flashes of melancholy. Through these contrasts, Cahuzac transforms the solo clarinet into a theatrical storyteller, bringing the colorful personality of Harlequin vividly to life.

Tango Étude No. 3

Astor Piazzolla (1921–1992) was an Argentine composer and bandoneón virtuoso who revolutionized the traditional tango. After studying classical composition and absorbing influences from jazz and twentieth-century concert music, Piazzolla developed a style known as *nuevo tango*, which blended the rhythmic drive and expressive intensity of Argentine tango with the harmonic language and structural ideas of classical music. His works expanded tango beyond the dance hall and into the concert stage, where they are now widely performed by classical musicians. Today, Piazzolla's music is celebrated

for its passionate character, rhythmic vitality, and distinctive blend of popular and classical traditions.

The *Tango Études* were written in 1987 for solo flute but are frequently performed on other instruments, including clarinet. Étude No. 3 is a virtuosic and highly expressive piece that highlights both rhythmic energy and lyrical phrasing. Rapid changes in texture and flowing passages create the illusion that more than one instrument is playing at once, giving the music a rich and dramatic character. While technically demanding, the étude also reflects the spirit of tango itself, a musical tradition that originated in late nineteenth-century Buenos Aires and is known for its intensity, elegance, and expressive freedom.

Concert Fantasia on Motives from Rigoletto

Luigi Bassi (1833–1871) was a celebrated virtuoso clarinetist and composer. Born in Cremona, Italy, he studied at the Milan Conservatory and later became principal clarinetist at the renowned La Scala opera house. Known for his exceptional technical skill, rich tone, and expressive phrasing, Bassi often drew inspiration from the operatic repertoire he performed, transforming familiar melodies into dazzling concert works for clarinet and piano.

His *Concert Fantasia on Motives from Rigoletto* is based on Verdi's 1851 opera, which premiered at Teatro La Fenice. The opera tells the tragic story of the cynical court jester Rigoletto, his innocent daughter Gilda, and the reckless Duke of Mantua. When the Duke seduces the daughter of Count Monterone, Rigoletto mocks the grieving father. In response, Monterone places a curse on both the Duke and Rigoletto, foretelling misfortune for them both. The drama unfolds as Rigoletto seeks revenge on the Duke, only for the curse to be tragically fulfilled when Gilda sacrifices her life to save the man she loves.

Bassi's fantasia has become a standard showpiece of the clarinet repertoire, celebrated for both its expressive range and virtuosic demands. The piece alternates lyrical passages with brilliant runs, wide leaps, rapid articulations, and elaborate ornamentation. Each section reflects contrasting moods from the opera from tender, reflective melodies to fast-moving, energetic passages, allowing the performer to convey the story vividly through the clarinet.

Konzertstück á la Feidman

István Kohán (b. 1990) is a Hungarian clarinetist and composer who has built an international career as both a performer and teacher, eventually settling in Japan. His musical background reflects a deep connection between Western classical traditions and the folk music of Eastern European Jewish culture. Kohán's father, a clarinetist with the Budapest Operetta Theatre and an active klezmer musician, served as his first teacher and introduced him early to both styles. This dual influence continues to shape Kohán's compositions, which often combine the structure and virtuosity of classical music with the expressive freedom and improvisatory spirit of Klezmer. The result is a style that feels both rooted in tradition and highly personal, allowing performers to explore a wide range of colors and expressive gestures.

Konzertstück á la Feidman, written for two clarinets and piano, is Kohán's tribute to the legendary clarinetist Giora Feidman, who is widely known for bringing klezmer music to international concert audiences. Like Kohán, Feidman is celebrated for bridging the worlds of classical performance and klezmer tradition. The piece reflects this connection through its lively character and virtuosic writing. Rapid runs, brilliant passages, and dramatic cadenzas highlight the technical agility of the clarinet while capturing the expressive flair associated with klezmer performance. At the same time, the work maintains a playful and entertaining spirit, allowing the two clarinets to interact in an energetic musical dialogue.