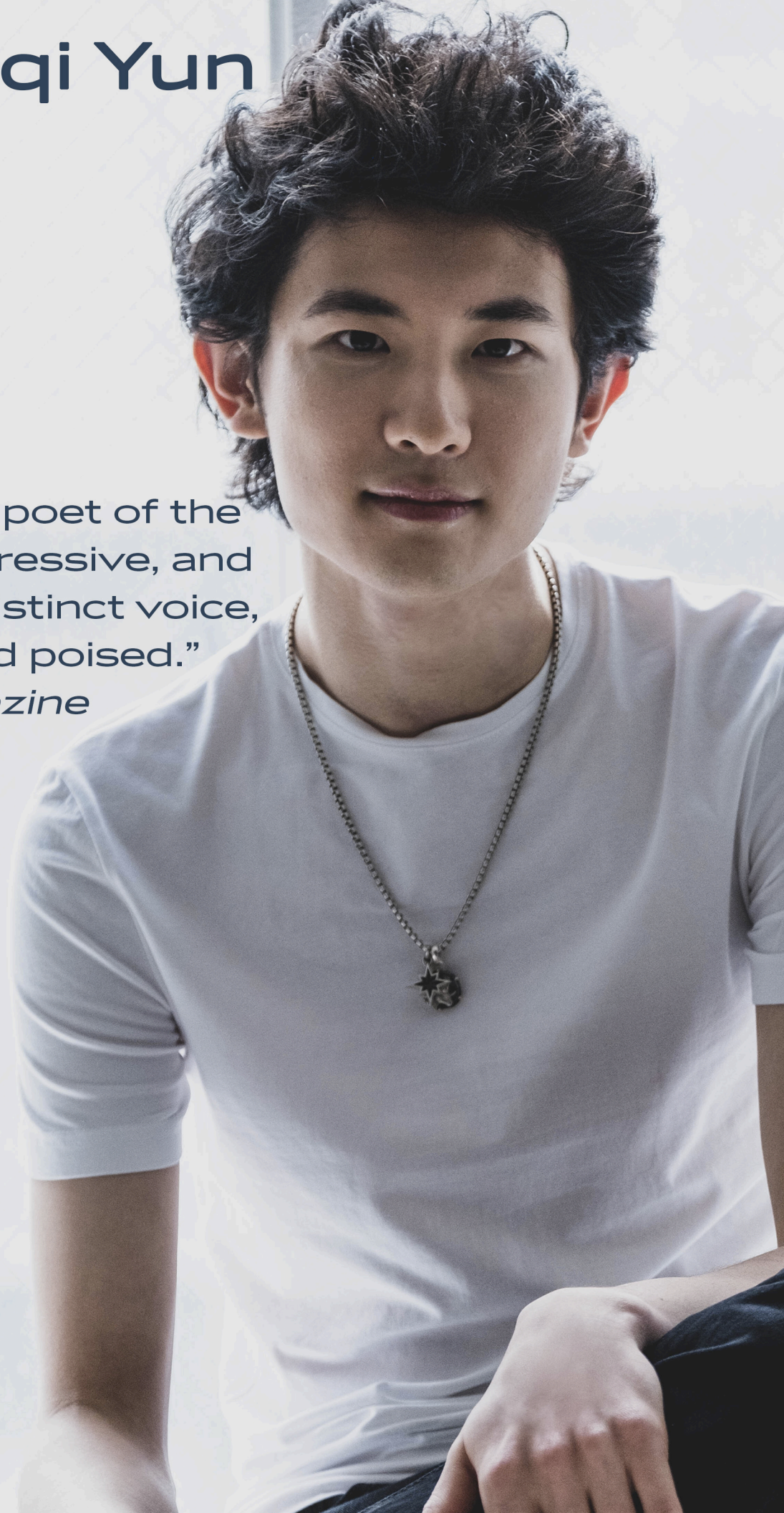


Tony Siqi Yun

piano

“Tony is a true poet of the keyboard. Expressive, and with his own distinct voice, yet elegant and poised.”

– *Pianist Magazine*





Tony Siqi Yun, piano
2024-2025 Biography (~250 words)

The Canadian-born pianist Tony Siqi Yun, Gold Medalist at the First China International Music Competition (2019) and awarded the Rheingau Music Festival's 2023 Lotto-Förderpreis, is quickly becoming a sought-after soloist and recitalist. At the age of 23, he has been hailed as a "poet of the keyboard" (*Pianist Magazine*), and *The Philadelphia Inquirer* noted his thrilling performance and "interpretive flashes that point to an emergent big personality: moments of grandness or deep expressivity."

In 2024-2025, he appears with the Nashville Symphony, New Jersey Symphony and Colorado Springs Philharmonic orchestras, among others. He also returns to China this season, appearing with orchestras in Shanghai and Guangzhou. Major recital debuts this season are with Washington Performing Arts, San Francisco Symphony's Shenson Spotlight Series, and Friends of Chamber Music Denver.

He made his Carnegie Hall debut in 2023-2024 under the baton of Yannick Nézet-Séguin with Orchestre Metropolitain, following his 2022-23 debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra. Mr. Yun has appeared recently with the Toronto Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Calgary Philharmonic, Buffalo Philharmonic, Hamilton (ON) Philharmonic and Rhode Island Philharmonic; outside North America, he has recently appeared with Orchestre de Chambre de Paris and Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. Previous recital appearances in North America include Stanford Live, La Jolla Music Society, Gilmore Rising Stars Series, 92nd Street Y in New York, and the Vancouver Recital Series; in Europe, he has given recitals at the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, Gewandhaus Leipzig, Tonhalle Düsseldorf, and Philharmonie Luxembourg.

Mr. Yun is a 2024 graduate of The Juilliard School, where he was a recipient of the Jerome L. Greene Fellowship and studied with Professors Yoheved Kaplinsky and Matti Raekallio.

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Tony Siqi Yun

Critical Acclaim



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“Tony Siqi Yun established himself as a first-rate talent. He shaped every phrase with a sculpted, directional sense of line. A milky, arioso tone and nimble, electrified arpeggios dripped from his arms, infused with character.”

CadenzaNYC

“Technically, he’s all there and thrillingly so, but what’s better are interpretive flashes that point to an emergent big personality: moments of grandness or deep expressivity. The encore, Rachmaninoff’s Prelude in B Flat Major, Op. 23, No. 2 was pure adrenaline.”

Philadelphia Inquirer

“Tony Siqi Yun and Nézet-Séguin combined to give an admirable performance....the climax was broad and very powerful, and the finale full of excitement....the pianist’s graceful rendering of that wonderfully lyrical movement was poetic, full of romantic feeling and tremendously satisfying.”

Classical Source

“It was easy to see how Yun has managed to secure so many prizes and awards throughout his career. I would describe his performance as nothing less than prodigious. His interpretation of the concerto’s sweeping melodies and intricate passages was both deeply emotional and technically flawless. The orchestra provided a compelling counterpart to Yun’s masterful piano playing.”

Music City Review

“His playing was noteworthy in all three movements: strong and forthright in the march-like opening, with gentle cantabile and subtle phrasing following on in the song of the slow movement...In the finale, the endless cascades of octaves and arpeggios were dispatched with skill, finesse, and almost nonchalant ease...An enormous standing ovation greeted the final notes, entirely merited.”

Large Stage Live

“Yun displayed a robust, muscular sound in the cadenza that complemented the tug-of-war that occurs between soloist and orchestra in this work. He never struggled to be heard over the full forces of the orchestra, but he brought more than brawn to the party. In particular, he shaded the third movement’s extended rondo with dazzling flourishes of color and a sense of intimacy amid the finale’s gathering musical storm.”

Bachtrack

“With a refined touch, he deploys a rich palate of nuances in a concerto very well chosen for its style and personality. Sincerity and musicality emerge from his interpretation.”

Ludwig Van

“His touch was fiendishly fleet.”

Bachtrack

Tony Siqi Yun

VANITY FAIR

April 28, 2025

Juilliard for a Song? The Legendary School Is Going Tuition-Free

Alums Jessica Chastain, Jon Batiste, Christine Baranski, and more talk memories, auditions—and a heartening trend in higher ed.

By Chris Murphy

Photography by Ruven Afanador



For [Christine Baranski](#), the most evocative space at the Juilliard School isn't a black box theater or a rehearsal room where she cut her teeth as an actor. "I get really emotional when I set foot in the elevator," she says with a sigh. She remembers its "new car smell" when she rode it in the early 1970s, as part of the third class to ever study in the drama school. And she remembers, just as viscerally, the people she rode in it with. "I was in the elevator once

with [Leonard Bernstein](#), with [Martha Graham](#), [George Balanchine](#)," she says. "I was in the elevator once with [Maria Callas](#)."

If you know anything about Juilliard, it's probably that it is where some of our greatest artists learned to be great. The school, established in 1905 as the Institute of Musical Art in Manhattan's Greenwich Village, has long given students world-class training in their chosen discipline: dance, drama, or



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music. Last September the drama department's MFA program went tuition-free, as [the Yale School of Drama](#) had a few years before. Now—and this is why we gathered some celebrated alumni for a portrait backstage at the school's Peter Jay Sharp Theater—Juilliard has announced that it intends to go entirely tuition-free. For every student. The great work has already begun. Starting this fall, 40 percent of Juilliard students will attend the institution at no cost.

Reaching the school's ultimate goal will take serious fundraising, but other elite educational institutions are increasingly thinking along the same lines. (Harvard College, for instance, announced that it will be tuition-free for families with incomes of under \$200,000.) Since he became Juilliard's president in 2018, [Damian Woetzel](#), a former principal dancer with the New York City Ballet, has worked to make the school accessible to all students, not only increasing financial aid but also designating several programs tuition-free already. Juilliard currently costs north of \$50,000—not including room and board—and more than 95 percent of the students already receive some support from the school. "The overall goal is to move steadily more tuition-free—to that ultimate place—and make sure that talent is the opportunity, not the ability to pay for it," Woetzel says.

That opportunity is hard to come by. Juilliard's Drama Division typically accepts 18 students a year—8 to 10 undergraduate students and 8 to 10 graduate students—making it one of the most competitive and sought-after drama programs in the world. Even Baranski had a tough time getting in. "They put me on a waiting list in the spring," she says. It wasn't because she showed a lack of promise: "They thought that the space between my teeth might've been causing a sibilant s," she says. "Over the summer, I had dental work." After capping her teeth and taking speech therapy classes, Baranski reauditioned for the speech teacher and the Drama Division's artistic director, Oscar winner John Houseman. "I did a paragraph that was filled with nothing but s-words," she recalls. It must have

done the trick, because the moment the speech teacher signed off, Houseman accepted her on the spot. To this day, Baranski says, it's "one of the most moving moments of my life."

[Jessica Chastain](#) calls Juilliard her "home away from home." The Northern California native studied at the school in the early aughts, immersing herself in roles like Arkadina in *The Seagull* and honing the craft that would eventually win her an Oscar. "When you're training, you have no idea what little seeds you're planting and growing inside of you—how it's going to develop into your career," Chastain says. The first from her family to attend college, she struggled to afford tuition, particularly on top of the hair-raising cost of living in New York City. "I was so stressed out about money," she says. She worked part-time in the library and the student affairs office on her lunch breaks and took out loans—"a lot" of them—to get by. "I couldn't even afford to go to a restaurant. So it was all the cafeteria," she says. Asked how the food was, she winces. "I mean, it's a cafeteria," she quips.

After Chastain received the Robin Williams Scholarship, which covered the last two years of her four-year degree, she could breathe more freely. "Having that cushion was like, Okay, I can finish," she says. "I can get my degree. I'll still be in debt, but I won't be consumed and overwhelmed by it."

[Danielle Brooks](#) had to pay full tuition when she left South Carolina for Juilliard. "I did not have the scholarship money," she says. "My parents had to refinance our home for me to come here." Even that wasn't enough. "Unfortunately, my godmother had passed away and, to my surprise, left me \$20,000 in her will. That was what helped me to start my first semester at Juilliard."

Brooks made it through the program, starring in productions like *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Clybourne Park* while working multiple front-desk jobs at the school, which she stuck with after graduation. "I remember nights of crying right after I graduated," she says. "Not having the money and working all these odd jobs, trying to pay for college."

Brooks is now a Tony-and Oscar-nominated actor for the stage and screen versions of [The Color Purple](#). “My cheeks hurt from the joy of *surviving* this place,” she says.

[Jon Batiste](#) talks in terms of survival too. He moved to Manhattan from New Orleans to study music at Juilliard in 2004. He was 17. Musically, he felt “very prepared” but describes the transition to living in the city as “very much a learning curve.” He remembers “surviving New York City, surviving the limitless options that are presented to you as an artist that’s trying to discover who they are.” Now a new member of Juilliard’s board of trustees—and the winner of seven Grammys—he’s come to believe that it’s the institution’s responsibility to provide a space where the students can wholly commit to their chosen passion with as little stress as possible. “There’s enough in trying to sing the perfect aria or to play in the jazz band,” he says. “There’s so many summits that you have to climb before you can reach the level of greatness that everybody who comes here inevitably wants to reach.”

There are setbacks along the way, of course. “I was unbelievably bad in a production here,” says [Laura Linney](#). “I was distracted. I knew I was bad. It was brutally painful.” So painful, she says, that she decided to walk away from the school altogether. Then an acting teacher took her aside and taught her the most important lesson she’d ever learn at Juilliard: “He said, ‘This is where you’re supposed to fail. You’ll never learn until you learn how to fail.’ ” Now the four-time Emmy winner is a vice chair of Juilliard’s board. “I’ve never left again.”

How do the alums feel about future students getting a free ride? “Give me my money back,” Brooks deadpans.

“Y’all owe me.” Chastain says that removing the barrier of paying tuition is a “great equalizer” for aspiring artists. If the children of wealthy families have a built-in advantage, she says, “then the whole industry is populated with privilege.” In her opinion, that doesn’t always make for the most vital art: “Those aren’t the stories that I necessarily think we should focus on and tell.”

Money will always be a factor in the life of an artist—it’s a famously precarious profession after all. But with a tuition-free arts education, students can focus on collaboration rather than starvation. At the shoot, Brooks and her old friend Batiste talked about working together when they studied drama and music here. “We were thinking about MLK Day and the performances we used to put on,” she says. “We were all just creating together.”

For this portrait, the veterans were joined by **Kayla Mak**, a current Juilliard student and dancer with American Ballet Theatre’s Studio Company, and **Tony Siqi Yun**, an award-winning classical pianist and recent Juilliard grad. Batiste, who’s stationed next to a grand piano, couldn’t help but improvise with whatever song came next on the playlist. Soon enough, Brooks was riffing along with Batiste in perfect harmony and Baranski was cooing melodious oohs and ahhs. By the end of the shoot, Batiste and Yun had spontaneously begun playing the four-hand arrangement of Beethoven’s virtuosic “Appassionata” sonata. “We had an impromptu jam on that,” Batiste says later. He’s already charting Yun’s path forward: “He is going to pick up the baton,” Batiste says. “He doesn’t just want to star in the world—he also wants to build it.”

Tony Siqi Yun

The Philadelphia Inquirer

March 6, 2024

It was Rachmaninoff, Sibelius, and Yannick on Tuesday at the Kimmel. But not with the Philadelphia Orchestra.

The conductor's "other" orchestra, Montreal's Orchestre Métropolitain was joined in Rachmaninoff by pianist Tony Siqi Yun.

By Peter Dobrin



The visiting orchestra series at the Kimmel Center, [newly revived this season](#), held out the promise of sounds new and unfamiliar, and yet in the first two of three planned concerts it has delivered a very familiar personality: Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

The conductor is so ubiquitous at the moment — with the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Metropolitan Opera, and doing publicity for the Leonard Bernstein [Maestro](#) film, on which he was a consultant — that his presence Tuesday night in Verizon Hall with his “other” orchestra, the Orchestre

Métropolitain, might have looked like it would offer no novelty, no new insights. The program hardly increased the chances for revelation: Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 and Sibelius' Symphony No. 2 — two works deeply ingrained in the history of the Kimmel's resident orchestra.

But the visit by the Montreal ensemble was fascinating in the way it threw into relief Nézet-Séguin's relationship with the Philadelphia Orchestra. The conductor is a bright, shiny object, and listeners tend to give him a lot of the credit for the Philadelphia Orchestra's



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special character. Here, the Orchestre Métropolitain was a reminder that the Philadelphia Orchestra sounds the way it does because, well, it is the Philadelphia Orchestra.

That's not meant to take anything away from the conductor, who does bring his own point of view to the Philadelphia partnership, or the Métropolitain, which is a different orchestral animal. It's smaller and its members are part-time, and the ensemble has an appeal all its own.

And it generates a lot of sound. Controlled Burn for orchestra and cello by Alberta-born composer Cris Derksen arrived with all the urgency and enveloping presence of video-game music. Derksen claims both Indigenous (Cree) and Mennonite heritage, and the piece is meant to depict the Indigenous practice of setting controlled fires intentionally for various beneficial purposes. You could detect some of the score's specificity (seagull calls, for instance), but the work's greater impact came in the soulful wailings of Derksen, who also played the solo-cello part, and the lovely intense glow of spirituality the piece left in its wake.

One of the birthrights of our city is hearing the Philadelphia Orchestra in Rachmaninoff, and, in the Piano Concerto No. 2, the strings of the Orchestre Métropolitain didn't have the depth of sound we've come to take for granted here. Still, the Montrealers had a leanness and clarity that left plenty of room to appreciate pianist [Tony Siqui Yun](#). Technically, he's all there and thrillingly so, but what's better are interpretive flashes that point to an emergent big personality: moments of grandness or deep expressivity. The encore, Rachmaninoff's Prelude in B Flat Major, Op. 23, No. 2 was pure adrenaline.

Nézet-Séguin's Sibelius Symphony No. 2 isn't Ormandy's. Rather, it was straightforward and terse in spots where greater detailing might have brought majesty and complexity. Still, the second-movement dialogue between the solo trumpet and flute was especially stirring, and the ensemble has a pert, spirited quality. You could sense the musicians pushing themselves to give Nézet-Séguin the sweep he was looking for, and he got it.

Tony Siqi Yun

Cadenza

NYC

March 8, 2024

Nézet-Séguin Brings His Hometown Orchestra to Carnegie Hall

By Brian Taylor



New York City and Montréal communed in midtown Manhattan on Wednesday night when [Orchestre Métropolitain de Montréal](#) concluded their second US tour, under the baton of their maestro of 25 years, Yannick Nézet-Séguin. C'était magnifique.

The evening began with a new work, relevant to current events. Nézet-Séguin, in introductory remarks, recalled last summer's Canadian wildfires and those infamous orange skies. Canadian Cree composer and cellist [Cris Derksen](#)'s tone poem ***Controlled Burn*** is inspired by the traditional indigenous practice of managing forest fires. Derksen played

solo electric cello in this sonic drama accompanied by large orchestra, recorded sound design, and electronic effects.

Mournful, meditative chord sequences that build to militaristic drumming straight out of a Hans Zimmer film score are marked by imaginative string writing. Derksen plays the cello soulfully, and her climb to the highest register peaked with soaring swoops like calling seagulls — perhaps symbolizing firefighting aircraft dropping water bombs. This moody piece brought the aesthetic of the Paul Winter Consort's



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nature-inspired Solstice concerts to Carnegie Hall.

From the first resonant chords of Sergei Rachmaninoff's **Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor, Op. 18**, soloist Tony Siqui Yun, in an impressive Carnegie Hall debut, established himself as a first-rate talent. He shaped every phrase with a sculpted, directional sense of line. A milky, arioso tone and nimble, electrified arpeggios dripped from his arms, infused with character, whether Rachmaninoff indicated *con passione* or *espressivo*.

Few piano concertos entwine soloist and orchestra so closely and Nézet-Séguin and Yun shared sweeping melodic hooks and long dramatic arcs effortlessly in step. The orchestra and pianist fed off each other's energy in symbiosis, giving the concerto the feel of chamber music. Following a spectacular encore, Yun launched the orchestra into an impromptu "Happy Birthday" in honor of Yannick's 49th.

L'Orchestre Métropolitain? World class. Nézet-Séguin is one of Carnegie Hall's "regulars," appearing frequently with The Philadelphia Orchestra and the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. But this is the band that put him on the map. How lucky are Montrealers — it's a fantastic ensemble, with a personality quite distinct from Philly or the Met.

They brought just enough acid and heat to the unctuousness of Rachmaninoff's C Minor Concerto, but they really got to strut their stuff, and enjoy the auditorium's revered acoustics, in the program's second half: Jean Sibelius's **Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op.**

43.

The placement of the basses — seated in the rear of the orchestra, rather than the usual stage-left — must contribute to the orchestra's plush, beefy sound. The woodwinds have a warm, well-rounded color, yet rhythmic and edgy details sparkle, as in the epic landscape of the symphony's first movement, *Allegretto*. Nézet-Séguin drew intense expression from the strings — leaning in, as if mind-melding with the players. The group navigated Sibelius's hills and valleys with panache, each mountaintop a well-earned climb, as in the heraldic return of the second theme, which felt like a wail of despair, or a battle cry.

The mysterious, lumbering bass and cello pizzicato that begins the second movement, *Tempo andante, ma rubato*, was limber, but tight, giving rise to a mythic, shape-shifting slow movement with beautifully tuned choirs of winds. The scherzo was indeed *Vivacissimo*, crisp and fleet, but running headlong into dangerous clouds. The contrasting *Lento e suave* passages revealed a wind-blown haze under a haunting, sinuous oboe solo, kept the suspense afloat, before a rafter-shaking crescendo arriving at the rousing, boundless *Finale: Allegro moderato*, which levitated on the wings of thrillingly virtuosic timpani playing.

The piece's final plagal cadence had the impact of an organ with all the stops pulled out, and Nézet-Séguin wisely suggested a "nightcap:" Edvard Grieg's **To Spring** arranged for strings. Breezy and hopeful, it was the right choice, sending the festive audience into the rainy evening with optimism.

Tony Siqi Yun

ConcertoNet.com

March 7, 2024

A musical night to remember

By Lewis Whittington



Conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin with the Orchestre Métropolitain (OM) is on tour in his adopted hometown where he is Philadelphia Orchestra's music director, telling a sold-out Verizon Hall he was "excited bringing my wonderful Canadian family to my wonderful American family." He led OM in what proved to be a sterling program of Rachmaninoff, Sibelius, and a premiere from Canadian composer Cris Derksen. It was a playlist which proved a musical night to remember for the audience and for the musicians onstage.

Nézet-Séguin introduced Cris Derksen and described her piece *Controlled Burn* as the conjuring of a fire burning used to nourish the land practiced by the composer's North Tallcree Nation ancestry and the piece also alludes to the massive Canadian wildfires of recent years, allusive to effects of climate change. Derksen performed on her silvery electric cello, throughout the piece there were acoustic – *col legno battuto* (the cellists cracking their bow over the strings in

16th notes) –illustrating the crackling of burning forests and some electronic with Derksen performing on a mini-keyboard. Metallic whooshing sound evoking aerial sorties deployed to extinguish the flames, muffled screeching sounds of birds fleeing the trees. Meanwhile the orchestral thrust of this piece is equally captivating in its fusion of classicism and feral symphonic effects. A soundworld that is as mysterious and organically organized as nature itself. Derksen's transcendent cello passage near the end of the piece is breathtaking.

Rachmaninoff had a storied history with Eugene Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra, and his canon is always a marquee draw and his *Piano Concerto No. 2* a perennial favorite, especially being performed by soloist Tony Siqi Yun, winner of the inaugural 2019's China International Music Competition, and his performance on this night was electric right out of the gate. Yun dramatic opening bars of the concerto slowly that leads its Rachmaninoff most famous symphonic theme – which millions heard as the film soundtrack to the 40s British classic "Brief Encounter".

This concerto is tricky to keep fresh because of its romanticism and familiarity with generations of listeners. To counter that, Nézet-Séguin eliciting a depth of orchestral sound with each



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Tony Siqi Yun

MCR

Music City Review

April 26, 2025

A Celebration to Remember: Nashville Symphony Captures Tchaikovsky's Magic

Brady Hammond



I was lucky enough to attend the Nashville Symphony's performance entitled "Tchaikovsky's Celebration" at the Schermerhorn Symphony Center on Thursday, April 24th. The show was conducted by resident music director, Giancarlo Guerrero and featured guest soloists Oliver Herbert on cello and Tony Siqi Yun on the piano. The program featured a selection of some of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky's most memorable compositions, highlighting his unique style that mixed Western European fundamentals with Russian musical traditions.

While most people may think of the *Nutcracker* or *Swan Lake* when asked to name Tchaikovsky's most iconic work, *Romeo and Juliet Overture-Fantasy* may just be his most ubiquitous composition. It's been featured in *Wayne's World*, *Sesame Street*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *South Park*, *The Simpsons*, *The Sims*, and the list goes on and on. So how did

Nashville's performance stack up against the many examples from contemporary pop culture? They blew them out of the water. Guerrero's interpretation really highlighted the juxtaposition of the piece's beautiful, swelling melodies with its grandiose, crashing themes. The overture opens with a delicate theme in the woodwinds before transitioning to a more tumultuous section that crashes back and forth between different sections of the orchestra. Powerful brass and dynamic strings eventually break, and the famous love theme emerges in their place. I cannot emphasize enough how compelling the Nashville Symphony's performance of this piece was. It's truly been one of my favorite renditions from this season.

Next the spotlight fell to Oliver Herbert for *Variations on a Rococo Theme* for Cello and Orchestra, Opus 33. This piece was written to commemorate the centennial of Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, and its classical inspirations have no trouble shining through. The composition features a reduced orchestra, which gives it a unique focused sound when compared to the other pieces in the program. Herbert's whimsical performance was a joy to observe. He seemed to dance back and forth as he got caught up in the music. As for the piece itself, listeners can expect a vibrant dialogue between the cello and the rest of the orchestra as the



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light elegant theme is passed back and forth among its numerous iterations.

After the intermission, the night picked back up with “Concerto No. 1 in B-flat Minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 23. This time it was Tony Siqui Yun’s turn to give a solo performance. It was easy to see how Yun has managed to secure so many prizes and awards throughout his career. I would describe his performance as nothing less than prodigious. His interpretation of the concerto’s sweeping melodies and intricate passages was both deeply emotional and technically flawless. The orchestra provided a compelling counterpart to Yun’s masterful piano playing. The back and forth between pianist and orchestra was truly mesmerizing. The concerto begins with a bold, sweeping chords in the piano that unfold over a stately orchestral introduction. The first movement (*Allegro non troppo e molto maestoso*) then goes on to alternate between virtuosic piano passages and emotional, dynamic melodies. The *Andantino semplice* is the second movement of the concerto, which begins in the flutes before being echoed by the piano. This movement was particularly memorable, as Yun’s delicate touch and lyrical sensibility brought out the movement’s tender beauty. The final movement (*Allegro con fuoco*) is an energetic

combination of themes from traditional Russian folk dance and virtuosic piano. There is a steady build shared among the orchestra and piano to a thrilling climax. After the concerto’s conclusion Yun also provided a short encore.

Finally, the program concluded with *Capriccio Italien*, Opus 45. This is a vibrant and colorful piece inspired by Tchaikovsky’s travels to Rome and his experiences during the Carnival season. The Nashville Symphony embraced the work’s festive spirit, delivering a performance full of energy and character. The opening brass fanfare was a nice change of pace, offering something a little different as it set the stage for the orchestra to come back in with the lively Italian folk melodies featured throughout the remainder of the piece. The loud and exuberant ending of the composition was a perfect way to conclude the program. It kept the audience excited and energized all the way to the very end of the show.

“Tchaikovsky’s Celebration” was a powerful evening that reaffirmed the enduring appeal of Tchaikovsky’s music. Through passionate interpretations and exquisite performances, the Nashville Symphony, along with Oliver Herbert and Tony Siqui Yun, created an experience that was both moving and memorable, earning its place as one of the highlights of this season.

Tony Siqi Yun
**SAN DIEGO
STORY**

January 23, 2024

**Tony Siqi Yun's Compelling Schumann
'Symphonic Études' at The Conrad**

By Ken Herman



The 22-year-old Canadian virtuoso pianist Tony Siqi Yun delighted those who admire the piano works of Robert Schumann by giving a robust and captivating account of the composer's *Symphonic Études*, Op. 13, in his debut recital Sunday for the La Jolla Music Society. After he won First Prize at the China International Music Competition in 2019, Music Director Yannick Nézet-Seguin invited him to make his debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra, where he played Schumann's Piano Concerto this past season. His accomplished account of Op. 13 at The Conrad certainly established his command of Schumann's effulgent Romantic vision.

Always cited as one of Schumann's most demanding piano compositions, the *Symphonic Études* did not spring forth in a vacuum. Much of the work's 30-minute span is devoted to an extensive set of variations on a theme written by a musical amateur, Baron von Fricken, the father of Ernestine von Fricken, an attractive young piano student of master piano teacher Friedrich Wieck, with whom Schumann also studied. When Schumann started composing this variation set, he was quite smitten with Ernestine, but the Baron disapproved of this relationship and sent Ernestine off to another teacher. Schumann, of course, ended up

marrying Wieck's own musically gifted daughter Clara.

After the breakup with Ernestine, Schumann stuffed his unfinished Variation Cycle on the Baron's theme in a drawer and forgot about it until year later when he heard Frédéric Chopin perform in Leipzig. After experiencing Chopin's etudes and nocturnes, he retrieved his Variation Cycle and refurbished it inspired by Chopin's panache.

Once Tony Siqui Yun dispatched Schumann's concise setting of the Baron's austere theme in the opening movement, the pianist hurled himself into the bravado of Schumann's First Variation, encompassing its expansive air with an engaging, warm sonority that I had missed in his cerebral account of Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata, Op. 57, on the program's first half. His astonishing technique allowed him to blaze through Schumann's several *vivace* and *vivacissimo* variation

s with cool precision, yet he imbued the more reflective variations such as Étude VIII—marked *Andante*—with the luminous definition of a Chopin nocturne. For the substantial Finale—marked *Allegro brillante*—Schumann pulled out all the stops, which allowed Tony Siqui Yun to draw compelling, bracing orchestral textures from the piano with apt dramatic flair.

I enjoyed the pianist's thoughtful, probing account of Johannes Brahms' Theme and Variations in D Minor, Op. 18b, which opened his recital, as well as his bold dynamic contrasts that successfully recreated Richard Wagner's "Isolde Libestod" from the opera *Tristan und Isolde* in Franz Liszt's transcription. Before launching into the Schumann, Tony Siqui Yun offered Ferruccio Busoni's endearing 1907 bagatelle *Berceuse* from *Elegies*, BV 249, coaxing translucent Impressionist harmonies to support the composer's asymmetrical melodies.

recapitulation sustained dramatic purpose. Yun was expressive, and even a little vampy in the first movement, landing those dense keyboard runs. Yun was more balanced with the full orchestra in the second and third movements. On balance, the interpretive artistry of Yun and this orchestra was exquisite. The audience was on its feet again with lusty applause, and coaxed back for three bows, Yun's encored with Rachmaninov's Prelude Op.23 No. 2. Yun has warmth, technical swagger and major divo hair.

The concert closer was Sibelius's *Symphony No. 2* and Nézet-Séguin noted its musicality had parallels to Canadian

sensibilities and indeed, this orchestra unleashed all of Sibelius' lustrous, journeying symphonics. At its premiere in 1902 in Helsinki, Finnish audiences embraced the work as a symbol of their freedom and a statement against Russian aggressive move to annex Finland. Sibelius later denied that there was any political intent in his composition.

After rounds of applause, Yannick bounded back onstage asking if anyone would like a 'musical nightcap' and finished the program conducting Edvard Grieg's *Letzter Frühling*, and even though the concert was already running late, most of this audience was ready to drink in one for the road.

Tony Siqi Yun



February 3, 2023

The Philadelphia Orchestra rediscovers Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony*

By Cameron Kelsall



The Philadelphia Orchestra premiered William L. Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony* in 1934, at a moment when Black composers seemed poised to be recognized alongside their white peers in the American symphonic landscape. (Both William Grant Still and Florence Price delivered important contemporaneous commissions.) Regrettably, the work largely fell out of the repertoire in the ensuing years, despite a recording made by Leopold Stokowski with the American Symphony Orchestra, nearly 30 years after its first hearing. A quick search of Bachtrack's archives turns up no reviews of the piece. When [Yannick Nézet-Séguin](#) programmed the work alongside Robert Schumann's [Piano Concerto in A](#)

[minor](#), it was the first time it had been chosen to appear on a subscription series concert.

Nézet-Séguin delivered an energized and impassioned reading of the 35-minute composition that revealed how Dawson grounded his symphonic language in the spiritual tradition. Principal Horn Jennifer Montone opened the first movement with a wailing, mournful solo quickly taken up by the brass, which is countered by slashing, high-pitched writing in the strings. The back-and-forth embedded in the score almost resembles a call and response translated to the classical form. Dawson titled this movement "The Bond of Africa", and the violent journey from a lost homeland to a new world can be gleaned in the



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swaying rhythms that dominate the music.

Dawson quotes liberally from spirituals throughout the piece, weaving them so seamlessly into the architecture of the movements that they could be mistaken for his own invention. And although he claimed that folk music served as his sole inspiration, one could hear the influence of an older generation in his compositional style. It would be easy to name-check Dvořák as a reference point, given that composer's fascination with both the indigenous music of his home country and the melting pot of American sound, but I more often heard Brahms in the hard-charging tutti passages in the second and third movements. The Philadelphia Orchestra players put aside their customary elegance and delivered a sound that was elemental and emotionally driven, reflecting Dawson's goal to encompass a culture's musical history inside his piece.

Perhaps due to lack of familiarity with the repertoire, Verizon Hall was distressingly empty on the first night of the series. I hope this won't affect Dawson's standing in future season planning – his music deserves to be heard more regularly – and I hope it won't discourage the young pianist Tony Siqui Yun, who debuted memorably in the Schumann. After bringing a soft touch to the concerto's opening statement, Yun displayed a robust, muscular sound in the cadenza that complemented the tug-of-war that occurs between soloist and orchestra in this work. He never struggled to be heard over the full forces of the orchestra, but he brought more than brawn to the party. In particular, he shaded the third movement's extended rondo with dazzling flourishes of color and a sense of intimacy amid the finale's gathering musical storm.

Tony Siqi Yun



August 11, 2023

Toronto Born Pianist Tony Yun Wins Prestigious Prize At Rheingau

By Anya Wassenberg



Canadian pianist Tony Siqi Yun has been awarded the Rheingau Music Festival's LOTTO-Förderpreis for 2023. The prize, sponsored by the Hessian lottery company, comes with 15,000 euros in cash.

Germany's Rheingau Musik Festival, which kicked off on June 24, is ongoing until September 2, and includes some 164 concerts spread over 29 locations. Tony was first invited to the Rheingau Festival in 2022, where he performed a concert that roused a wave of interest. That led to the second invitation in 2023. He will cap the prize win with a recital at the Fürst von Metternich Hall, performing a programme of Brahms, Wagner, Beethoven, Busoni and Schumann.

The LOTTO prize has been awarded at the Festival since 2009, and recognizes a young artist at the dawn of their careers who shows exceptional promise and potential.

There's no doubt that Toronto-born Tony Yun fits that criteria. In making the award, the jury mentioned Yun's technical brilliance combined with naturalness, and his youthful energy.

Yun first catapulted to international attention in 2019, when he took home the [First Prize and Gold Medal](#) at the inaugural China International Music Competition in Beijing at the age of 18. He'd been studying piano for several years by that point.

- He started his music education in 2011 at the affiliated middle



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- school of the Central Music Conservatory in Beijing;
- Continued his studies at Dulwich College Beijing;
- In between competitions and performances, he's currently studying with Yoheved Kaplinsky and Matti Raekallio at the Juilliard School in New York, where he's the recipient of the Jerome L. Greene Fellowship.

Tony is also no stranger to winning competitions...

- In 2018, he won the Thomas and Evon Cooper International Piano Competition;
- Winner of Paris Play-Direct Academy 2021;
- In 2022, he won two prizes at the 20th edition of the Kissinger KlavierOlymp.

As he continues his studies, Tony Yun has launched a high profile performing career. Tony first met Montréal conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin in Beijing at the fateful competition, where he won first prize. Yun performed with the conductor leading the Philadelphia Orchestra in the final round.

Nézet-Séguin reunited with the young pianist in February 2023 for Yun's subscription debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra, where he performed Schumann's Piano Concerto.

Tony has also performed with the Cleveland Orchestra, Orchestre de chambre de Paris, the China Philharmonic Orchestra and the TSO, and he made his Canadian debut in a performance of Clara Schumann with Montréal's Orchestre Métropolitain. Tony has performed solo recitals at the Vancouver Recital Society, the Hamburg Elbphilharmonie, and the Gewandhaus in Leipzig, among other major venues.

Next season, he'll make his subscription debut at Carnegie Hall with Yannick Nézet-Séguin and Orchestre Métropolitain performing Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto. Tony Yun will receive the LOTTO prize on Sunday, August 13 during his concert at Johannisberg Castle in Rheingau, Germany.

Congratulations — and we doubt it will be the last time we make that wish to Mr. Yun.

Tony Siqi Yun

Large Stage Live!

June 5, 2022

Toronto Symphony Orchestra 2021-2022 # 6: Two Treasures and a Well-Loved Classic

By Ken Stephen

...The *Concerto* marked the Toronto Symphony Orchestra debut of Toronto-born pianist, Tony Siqi Yun. His playing was noteworthy in all three movements: strong and forthright in the march-like opening, with gentle cantabile and subtle phrasing following on in the song of the slow movement, where he was joined by the nuanced playing of principal cellist Joseph Johnson. In the finale, the endless cascades of octaves and arpeggios were dispatched with skill, finesse, and almost nonchalant ease. In short, Yun made an excellent case for the music as music, even in the first movement which is, in many ways, the weakest of the three.

An enormous standing ovation greeted the final notes, entirely merited. Yun then presented an equally blazing and technically daunting encore, *The Infernal Dance of Kashchei* from Stravinsky's *The Firebird*. It's hard to judge of the quality of the playing here since the dense chromaticism which so effectively spices the orchestral score becomes a mass of painfully thick noise on a piano keyboard. Ironically, the music sounds far more "modern" and less like the student of Rimsky-Korsakov in this form.



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Tony Siqi Yun

Pianist

May 21, 2019

Canadian pianist Tony Siqi Yun wins first prize at China International Music Competition

The 18-year-old receives the unprecedented prize of US\$150,000, plus a gold medal and representation with Opus 3 Artists & Wray Armstrong Music and Arts

By Ellie Palmer



18-year-old Canadian pianist Tony Siqi Yun has been announced as the first ever winner of the China International Music Competition, the new competition created by the China Conservatory of Music and Global Music Education League. He receives a first prize of \$150,000, a gold medal and representation with Opus 3 Artists in the United States and Europe and Armstrong Music and Arts in China which, combined, will coordinate three years of international concert tours.

Second prize was awarded to Alexander Malofeev (Russia), whilst third prize went to MacKenzie Melemed (USA).

After a virtuosic performance of Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor, Op. 23 with the Philadelphia Orchestra conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin, the jury chaired by Yoheved Kaplinsky announced him the winner at the National Centre for Performing Arts on Monday 20 May.

Pianist editor Erica Worth attended the finals and was thrilled with the results. 'A great sense of relief came over me

when President of the China International Music Competition, Wang Liguang, read out Tony's name. Tony is a true poet of the keyboard. Expressive, and with his own distinct voice, yet elegant and poised. A true poet. I look forward to seeing his career blossom.'



Of his win, the Canadian commented, 'Words cannot express how I feel to have been awarded the Gold Medal of the China International Music Competition. It has been an extraordinary time in Beijing, and I am so grateful to the jury and everyone here who have been such great colleagues.'

Audiences around the world were able to watch the finals live for free on [medici.tv](https://www.medicivt.com/) and they will remain available to online audiences on replay for one month from today, playable on all devices.



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