



Golden Resonance: Wynona Yinuo Wang Opens Bachauer's 50th Anniversary Season

Description

Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center, Salt Lake City, UT The Gina Bachauer International Piano Foundation opened its golden-anniversary season with an evening that balanced memory and momentum. 2024 Bronze Medalist and Young Steinway Artist [Wynona Yinuo Wang](#) offered a recital titled *Adrift* a program conceived for Bachauer audiences and shaped by the personal journey her career has taken since last year's competition.

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A Fragrant Opening: Rachmaninoff's Flower Songs

Wang began with two short Rachmaninoff flower songs, *Lilacs* and *Daisies*. Though modest in length, these pieces carry deep nostalgia: Rachmaninoff composed them more than a decade apart, and together they capture the bittersweet longing of an artist preparing to leave Russia, never to return.

As reported in *The Utah Review*, Wang first played *Daisies* in her Bachauer quarterfinals, when her host Marilyn Smolka listened "with tears in her eyes, holding her cat," and told her, "This is what it must feel like to be in heaven." After Friday's concert, Wang added a touching detail: the cat's name was Daisy. That coincidence, she explained, was part of the reason she brought the piece back for this anniversary season—transforming a delicate miniature into a gesture of gratitude, memory, and personal connection.

image
Wynona Yinuo Wang

Memories in Music: Zhang Zhao's Colors

The program moved next into the world of contemporary Chinese composer Zhang Zhao with *Kangding Love Song* and *Pi Huang*. Wang described onstage how *Pi Huang* recalled weekends with her grandmother, who loved watching Peking Opera. “The piece rang a bell for me. I remembered the smell of the ribs my grandma was cooking, and it brought back a sweet part of my childhood memory.”

In performance, she captured Zhao’s fusion of Peking Opera drama with the shimmering textures of Debussy and Ravel, shifting from percussive flourishes to delicate washes of sound. The coda, drawn from the *Ode to the Plum Blossom*, embodied resilience: “Her petals may be ground in the mud, but her fragrance will endure.”

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Wynona Yinuo Wang

Searching for Belonging: Schubert’s *Wanderer*

Schubert’s monumental *Fantasy in C Major, D. 760* (“Wanderer”) closed the first half. The piece has long carried a reputation for being nearly unplayable—so much so that Schubert himself, unable to perform it cleanly, supposedly remarked that “the devil may play it.” With its relentless octaves, ferocious leaps, and unbroken drive, it remains one of the most technically daunting works in the repertoire.

Yet Wang’s performance transcended mere virtuosity. She described the work as “the story about being lost and searching for the place where we belong,” and her interpretation emphasized narrative over display. The opening declamation thundered with authority, not as a dare but as an invocation—a restless traveler setting out into unknown terrain.

Most striking was her ability to bring coherence to the work’s vast structure. The second movement’s variations, spun from the wanderer’s lament, each revealed a different emotional shade: tender, defiant, questioning, resolute. The scherzo danced with crystalline lightness, offering relief between the weight of surrounding movements, while the finale surged with stormy propulsion without tipping into chaos.

In Wang’s hands, the *Wanderer* became less about diabolical difficulty and more about existential searching. Its nickname may suggest the devil, but here it spoke of the profoundly human—of yearning, displacement, and the possibility of finding one’s way home.

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Wynona Yinuo Wang

Dark Histories: Janáček’s *Sonata 1.X.1905*

After intermission, the mood shifted sharply. Wang turned to Janáček’s searing *Sonata 1.X.1905* (“From the Street”), written in tribute to František Pavlík, a young Moravian carpenter killed during demonstrations in Brno. The sonata’s title marks the date of the tragedy, and its music carries both private grief and public outrage.

The history of the work is as haunting as its sound. Dissatisfied with the score, Janáček removed a planned third movement—a funeral march—just before the premiere. Later, in despair, he threw the entire manuscript into the Vltava River, recalling that it floated away “like white swans.” Only because pianist Ludmila Tuřková had secretly copied the score do we have the two surviving movements: *Foreboding (Předtucha)* and *Death (Smrt)*. That sense of absence lingers within the piece, its silences as eloquent as its tones.

Wang’s interpretation brought out both turbulence and fragility. The opening movement surged forward with jagged intensity, dissonances never resolving, as if embodying the anxiety of protest in the streets. The second unfolded like a lament, its hesitant chords and spare textures lingering long after they faded. Her pacing gave the silences resonance, drawing the audience into uneasy stillness.

What made the performance most powerful was its immediacy. Though more than a century old, Janáček’s sonata spoke to civic unrest, state violence, and personal mourning that felt disturbingly familiar today. Wang let the rawness remain, leaning into the sonata’s jagged edges so it could speak as both historical document and living protest.

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Wynona Yinuo Wang

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A Thunderous Finale: Prokofiev’s Seventh Sonata

The evening closed with Prokofiev’s *Sonata No. 7*, the most famous of the composer’s wartime “war sonatas,” which Wang delivered with breathtaking intensity.

From the unsettled *Allegro inquieto*, she captured restless, jagged rhythms with crystalline precision, her left hand driving the ostinatos while the right hand flashed like sparks off steel. The volatility was palpable—moments of tenderness snapped back into percussive violence, keeping the audience suspended between beauty and unease.

In the *Andante caloroso*, Wang offered a fleeting oasis. Her phrasing softened into long, yearning lines, almost songlike, yet even here instability shadowed the warmth. The melody felt fragile, as if it might collapse under the weight of wartime dread.

Then came the *Precipitato* finale, a movement legendary for its relentless drive and physical demand. Wang attacked it with ferocious energy, every note etched with clarity yet never losing the pulse’s inexorable momentum. The rhythm pressed forward with motoric inevitability, evoking the “anxiously threatening atmosphere of a world that has lost its balance,” as Sviatoslav Richter once described it. The hall seemed to shake under her percussive clarity, and as the music accelerated to its volcanic close, the effect was seismic.

The final chords detonated like cannon fire, leaving a stunned silence before the audience erupted in ovation. People rose almost instinctively, swept up in the raw power of the performance. It was a thunderous conclusion not only to the sonata but to the entire evening—a reminder of music’s power to confront chaos with uncompromising force.

Looking Ahead: A Golden Season

Wang's recital was not only a triumph in itself but also a fitting prelude to the artistry awaiting audiences in Bachauer's 50th season. On November 14, Gold Medalist Arthur Greene (1978) offers *Passages*, a program of keyboard titans—Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, and Liszt. On March 13, Mackenzie Melemed (fifth prize, 2012 Young Artists Competition) presents *Americana*, an all-American program featuring Copland, Florence Price, Amy Beach, and new commissions. The season concludes April 13 with a duo recital by Lukas Geniušas (2010 Gold Medalist) and Anna Geniushene (Van Cliburn 2022 Silver Medalist), performing a cosmopolitan program of Rachmaninoff, Copland, John Adams, and Colin McPhee.

Artistic Director Douglas Humpherys noted that today's young pianists—many of whom have grown up entirely in the 21st century—are already playing at extraordinarily high levels. Audiences, he added, can expect to hear teens who will knock them out of their seats.

Wang's luminous opening night made clear that Bachauer's golden anniversary season will be one to remember.

For tickets and more information about the upcoming season, see the [Bachauer website](#).

Social Media: [@wynona_yinuo_wang](#)

Wynona's [Upcoming Events](#), <https://wynonapiano.com>

Read Les Roka's Preview on Wynona Wang at [The Utah Review](https://www.theutahreview.com): <https://www.theutahreview.com>

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