

**M** Manhattan  
School of Music

# ***LIVES OF THE PIANO***

Lisa Yui (DMA '05), Director

**CELEBRATING THE HISTORY OF MSM'S PIANO  
DEPARTMENT AND THE LEGACIES OF  
DORA ZASLAVSKY KOCH (1904–1987) AND  
CONSTANCE KEENE (1921–2005)**

**THURSDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2018 | 7:30 PM  
GORDON K. AND HARRIET GREENFIELD HALL**





*Dora Zaslavsky Koch*



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<i>Introduction</i>	<b>Lisa Yui</b>
<i>Video Presentation</i>	<b>John Blanchard</b> , Institutional Historian and Director of Archives
<i>Program</i>	
Johannes Brahms	Intermezzo in E Major, Op. 116, no. 6 <b>Donald Isler</b>
Abram Chasins	Prelude for Piano in E-flat Minor, Op. 12, no. 2
Johann Strauss/ Alfred Grünfeld	<i>Soirée de Vienne</i> <b>Nianyi Huang</b>
Frédéric Chopin	Ballade No. 2 in F Major, Op. 38 <b>Zhiheng Guo</b>
Frédéric Chopin	Waltz in A-flat Major, Op. 69, no. 1
Zequinha de Abreu/ Yoni Levyatov	<i>Tico-Tico</i> <b>Yoni Levyatov</b>
Robert Schumann	<i>Fantasiestücke</i> , Op. 12 <i>Des Abends</i> (In the Evening) <i>Aufschwung</i> (Soaring) <i>Warum?</i> (Why?)
Robert Schumann/ Franz Liszt	<i>Widmung</i> , Op. 25, no. 1 <b>Phillip Kawin</b>
<i>Panel Discussion</i>	<b>Marc Silverman</b> , Chair of the Piano Department, and <b>Phillip Kawin</b> , Panelists <b>Lisa Yui</b> , Moderator

## **CENTENNIAL NOTE**

Manhattan School of Music's founder, Janet Daniels Schenck (1883–1976), attended Columbia University, earned a graduate degree from the New York School of Social Work, and was associated with the Union Settlement House in East Harlem. Dr. Schenck was also a pianist. That instrument was the basis and the center of music education at the School from its beginning.

The young Janet Daniels was traveling in Europe before the start of the First World War when she first was introduced to the great pianist Harold Bauer (1873–1951). After hearing her play, he became her teacher and, when she was creating her own music school a few years later, the first member of her Artist Auxiliary Board in 1918. Bauer continued a relationship with the School for the remainder of his life, giving special classes and teaching privately between concert tours.

A focus of today's event will be the continued legacy of two influential former members of the piano faculty, whose combined teaching careers cover a large part of the School's 100-year history: Dora Zaslavsky Koch (1904–1987) and Constance Keene (1921–2005).

Dora Zaslavsky's musical talent was discovered early by Dr. Schenck and she became one of the first graduates of the School, later joining the faculty herself and teaching for many decades, from 1926 to 1986. Zaslavsky also studied with Harold Bauer, as well as with Wilhelm Backhaus. Her severe stage fright curtailed an extensive performing career and no recordings of her playing can be found. In 1935, Dora married American realist painter John Koch and together they maintained a home where they created a world of music, art, and intellectual activity from which Dora's students often benefited.

Constance Keene joined the MSM piano faculty in 1967, was Chair of the department from 1982 to 1984, served as a member of the Board of Trustees, and helped bring many of the world's best pianists to give master classes at the School. Her early extensive international career included appearances on important stages and with the world's leading orchestras. She and her husband, pianist and composer Abram Chasins, performed and recorded music for piano duo. Keene attracted praise for her 1964 recording of the Rachmaninoff Preludes, as well as the complete *Études-tableaux*, which she recorded more than thirty years after the Preludes. Her recordings of the works of Hummel, Weber, and Mendelssohn also won critical acclaim.

—John Blanchard (MM '89), *Institutional Historian and Director of Archives*

## **ABOUT THE ARTISTS**

### **Zhiheng Guo**

Pianist Zhiheng Guo, a senior at Manhattan School of Music, has studied with Marc Silverman, Chair of the Piano Department, since 2015. Zhiheng has performed throughout Asia, Europe, and the United States, in concert halls including Lincoln Center, Shanghai Theater, Hangzhou Concert Hall, Nanjing Great Hall of the People, Xian Concert Hall, Concert Hall of the Vietnam Academy, the Netherlands and French consulates, and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, with accomplished pianists such as Cyprien Kataris and with orchestras including the Shanghai Oriental Symphony Orchestra, Xiamen Philharmonic, and Hanoi Philharmonic Orchestra. He had a wide range of repertoire even in middle school, including both the Prokofiev and Rachmaninoff Concerto No. 3. One of his most accomplished performances was of Bach's entire *Goldberg Variations* for his graduate recital (2015). Zhiheng Guo has taken master classes with Dominique Merlet, Jenő Jando, John Perry, Arie Vardi, Mikhail Voskresensky, Berry Douglas, and Fu Cong. He is the recipient of numerous awards and honors, including first prize and Best Concerto Player in the 4th Hanoi International Competition (September 2018), the Mieczysław Munz Scholarship (2017), first prize in the Beijing International Music Festival and Academy Concerto Competition, first prize in the Jiangsu International Music Festival, and the honorary prize in the Golden Bell Piano Competition in Guangzhou.

## Nianyi Huang

Pianist Nianyi Huang has studied with Professor Phillip Kawin at Manhattan School of Music since 2016. Born into a musical family in Anhui Province, China in 1998, Nianyi Huang started his piano studies at the age of 4 with his mother and won a number of piano competitions in Anhui Province under her guidance. He was admitted to the Middle School affiliated with the Shanghai Conservatory of Music in 2010, then continued his studies in high school with Prof. Yun Sun, a member of the Piano faculty of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, until he was admitted to Manhattan School of Music as a scholarship student in Phillip Kawin's studio. In 2017, he won second place in the Dora Zaslavsky Koch Piano Concerto Competition at MSM. In July 2017, he gave a recital at the Nanjing Steinway Hall in China. In 2018, he was a finalist in the Eisenberg–Fried Concerto Competition at MSM. He also was awarded first prize and Best Performance of Chosen Pieces in the Shanghai Spring International Piano E-Competition in May and received the Special Gold Medal in the China Music Talent Award International Competition in August.

## Donald Isler (BM '73, MM '75)

Pianist Donald Isler is the founder of KASP Records, which has produced recordings of his performances of music by Schnabel and Spohr, as well as music of Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, and Schumann; music of the American composer Louis Pelosi; and performances by great pianists of the past, Constance Keene, Adrian Aeschbacher, and Bruce Hungerford. KASP Records will soon release a DVD of the only known concert video of Bruce Hungerford. A graduate of New York's High School of Music and Art, he received his Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from Manhattan School of Music. His teachers included Bruce Hungerford, Constance Keene, Robert Goldsand, Lilian Kallir, Eleanor Hancock, Zenon Fishbein, and Sina Berlinski. Donald Isler teaches at the Hackley School Music Institute and has served on the faculties of the Brooklyn College Preparatory Center, among many other schools. He has been an adjudicator for the Pre-College Concerto Competition at the Juilliard School and a member of the Bruce Hungerford Award Committee at the Young Concert Artists Competition. He has written many reviews for the *Classical Music Guide* and regularly writes articles about teaching and music on his Facebook page, entitled *Isler's Insights*.

## Phillip Kawin (BM '82, MM '85)

Phillip Kawin has received critical acclaim for his performances in venues throughout the world, from Sydney's Angel Place Recital Hall to Beijing's Forbidden City Concert Hall. As recitalist and soloist with orchestra, he has performed throughout Australia, China, Korea, Italy, Russia, Spain, and the U.S. His debut album featuring works of Beethoven, Schumann, Liszt, and Prokofiev was launched at Steinway Hall in New York in 2008. He has an exclusive recording contract with the Master Performers label. Kawin's all-Schubert solo CD was received with critical acclaim. His recording of the Beethoven Concerto No. 3 with the Russian National Orchestra under the baton of Gerard Schwarz will be released this year on Blu-ray.

A member of MSM's College piano faculty since 1989 and of the Precollege faculty since 1986, Mr. Kawin has given lectures and master classes in Russia, Germany, Italy, Israel, China, South Korea, the U.S., and Australia. His engagements have included the Moscow Conservatory, Saint Petersburg State Conservatory, Tel-Hai International Piano Masterclasses, the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Seoul National University, Van Cliburn Piano Institute, the Harvard Club, the Sibelius Academy, and the Royal Danish Academy of Music through Manhattan School of Music's Global Conservatory videoconference master class series. For more than two decades, he has been affiliated with the PianoSummer International Institute/Festival at SUNY New Paltz and has appeared regularly at the Summit Music Festival (New York), where he is coordinator of the Intensive Piano Seminar; the Euro Music Festival and Academy (Germany); the International Academy of Music (Italy); the Beijing International Music Festival (China); and the Busan International Festival (South Korea). Mr. Kawin's students have won top prizes in national and international competitions, including the Young Concert Artists Auditions, Martha Argerich International, Jacob Flier International, World Piano, Kosciuszko Foundation Chopin Piano, Thelonious Monk International (jazz piano), Mieczyslaw Munz, Leschetizky, Long-Thibaud Crespin International, and Osaka International. Phillip Kawin has also been an adjudicator for the Beethoven International Piano Competition Vienna, Bösendorfer USASU International Piano Competition, Sydney International, and Sixth International Tchaikovsky Competition for Young Musicians (Suwon, Korea). A Steinway Artist, he is featured on five DVDs recorded live at the World Piano Pedagogy Conference. Currently Chair of Manhattan School of Music's College Faculty Council, Phillip Kawin also served as a faculty representative on the Board of Trustees from 2008 to 2011.

## Yoni Levyatov (MM '04, AD '07)

Yoni Levyatov, winner of the San Jose International Piano Competition, was recognized by the *New York Times* as a soloist and chamber artist with "an appealing electricity." The Russian-born Israeli pianist and composer made his recital debut at Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center, and his New York City concerto debut as the winner of the Dora Zaslavsky Koch Competition, performing the Schumann Piano Concerto under the baton of Philippe Entremont. He has also been heard with the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, Manhattan Chamber Orchestra, the Bogota Philharmonic, Denver Brass, and the Philharmonic Orchestra of the Americas. His compositional oeuvre includes works for solo instruments, chamber ensembles, and orchestra and has been performed throughout Europe, the United States, and Israel, with a recent orchestral premiere at Weill Hall in New York City. Beyond the classical realm, he has toured with the JP Joffre Hard Tango Band across the U.S. and internationally. Mr. Levyatov was a recipient of the Dorothy McKenzie Artist Recognition Award and Harold Bauer Award and was a Silver Medalist at the International Boesendorfer Piano Competition. Teachers have included Harvey Wedeen, Jerome Rose, Constance Keene, Solomon Mikowsky, and Alexander Volkov. Mr. Levyatov was awarded the Clairmont Prize in Tel Aviv and has been a scholar of the America-Israel Cultural Foundation since 1990. Recent appearances have included performances at Steinway Hall, Barge Music, the United Nations, the International Keyboard Institute and Festival, and Mannes School of Music in New York; Music in the Mountains in Colorado; St.-Mary College of Maryland; Thornton School of Music at USC, San Francisco; the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles; the Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix; Xavier University in Cincinnati; Menora Hall in Manchester, England; Philharmonic Hall in St. Petersburg, Russia; Spiegelsaal in Rheinsberg, Germany; Auditorium de Cajacanarias in Tenerife, Spain; and the Jerusalem Music Center and Tel Aviv Museum of Arts in Israel.

## Marc Silverman (MM '77, DMA '83)

Acclaimed by the *New York Times* for the “exceptional authority and impeccable taste” of his playing, pianist Marc Silverman, Chair of the Piano Department at Manhattan School of Music, has performed throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia as a recitalist, soloist with orchestra, and chamber musician. His “richly colored sonorities” and “thrilling surges of power” have prompted critics to compare him to the legendary Josef Hofmann. Among Dr. Silverman’s appearances were six recitals at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C. and seven performances in Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall. He has toured China, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and the Czech Republic performing televised concerts, conducting master classes for piano soloists and chamber musicians, and presenting lecture-demonstrations on the traditions and techniques of romantic interpretation.

Chair of the Piano Department since 1989, Dr. Silverman has also coordinated piano chamber music at MSM since 1985. In 2009 he was awarded the President’s Medal for Distinguished Service, the highest award bestowed by the School. His students, from over thirty countries and from every continent, have been the recipients of an exceptional number of international awards and honors. Marc Silverman is a founding member of the Carnegie Trio. In addition to their international touring and residencies at summer festivals, they recorded works by Beethoven, Brahms, Ravel, and Copland. As a soloist, Dr. Silverman has recorded 20th-century works in RCA’s Studio A for international release. He is an award winner of the Kapell International Competition, the Gina Bachauer Competition, and the Kosciuszko Foundation Chopin Competition. He is frequently quoted in publications, including *Chamber Music America*, *Piano and Keyboard Magazine*, the *New York Times*, and the Korean monthly, *Eumag-Choonchu*. Over the past decades, Dr. Silverman has made numerous tours throughout Asia, performing as both soloist and chamber musician, conducting master classes, and serving as a judge for international competitions. In 2010 he was invited to the Czech Republic to perform a series of chamber music concerts with some of the country’s most notable string musicians. During the last four years, he has made many trips to China, conducting lecture-recitals and master classes throughout the country and appearing as a soloist in the National Center for the Performing Arts and the Beijing Concert Hall. In August of 2016 he served on the faculty of the Silk Road Festival in Lanzhou.

## Lisa Yui (DMA '05)

Described as “a musical phenomenon” (*Pianiste*), Yamaha Artist Lisa Yui enjoys a multifaceted musical career as pianist, lecturer, educator, author, and musical director. Dr. Yui originated the Lives of the Piano lecture/concert series, now in its nineteenth season, at Manhattan School of Music, where she is also Associate Dean of Assessment and Academic Programs. Since making her concerto debut at the age of seven, she has performed throughout North America, Europe, and Asia. She is the top prizewinner of the Senigallia International Piano Competition in Italy and has twice been the recipient of a Canada Council Scholarship. Lisa Yui has performed as soloist with prominent orchestras including the Tokyo Symphony, the Polish National Radio, the Toronto Symphony, and the Krakow State Philharmonic. She has performed in Suntory Hall in Tokyo, Roy Thompson Hall in Toronto, Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, and the Liszt Ferenc Memorial Museum in Budapest. In 2005 she represented Canada to perform in the World Exposition in Aichi, Japan. Her DVD/Blu-ray of four Beethoven Sonatas and CD of the music of Carl Maria von Weber and Jan Ladislav Dussek garnered rave reviews. Dr. Yui teaches piano literature, keyboard skills, Historical Recordings of Great Pianists, and The Beethoven Piano Sonatas at Manhattan School of Music. She is also on the piano faculty at Montclair State University.

## ***My Teacher, Dora Zaslavsky***

**Sondra Tammam (Sondra Cohen) (BM '75)**

One of the most extraordinary teachers of the 20th century was Dora Zaslavsky. Dora was not only a master of interpretation and technique, but she also knew how to instill the sense of a “big” overall scope to each piece she taught. Whether it was style, articulation, tempi, mood, fingering, or choice of repertoire, Dora recognized what was the best “fit” for each of her students.

My relationship with Ms. Zaslavsky began with an introduction from Raphael Bronstein, the Violin Department Chair at Manhattan School of Music. Mr. Bronstein, my chamber music coach at the Kneisel Hall Summer Music Festival, recommended that I audition for her. At my audition, I was immediately awestruck by the art and decor of her magnificent apartment on Central Park West. Dora introduced me to her husband, John Koch, the renowned artist, and took me for a tour of their gallery. Then, she immediately made it clear that if I was leaving high school and committing to being the youngest “college” student in her studio, a lot would be expected of me. Dora asked me if I liked to perform, and I recall her talking about how the life of a woman in the concert world was not an easy one.

As a prodigy, Ms. Zaslavsky toured Europe and knew what it was like to be “on stage.” The renowned pianists Harold Bauer and Wilhelm Backhaus certainly recognized her talent. She enjoyed reminiscing about her own experiences as a student and a concert artist and was committed to sharing her knowledge in a unique setting. Dora had a weekly studio class, every Wednesday at 5, which challenged her students. Dora upheld her reputation for being strict. The mandatory class served as a dress rehearsal for our upcoming performances. Sitting amongst the students, pen in hand, she had her place, with an ornate music stand, following your score to critique each piece. It went without saying that each of us had to perform, whether it was a “first time” tryout or a repeat performance to get ready for a competition or recital. “Superstars” like Abbey Simon and David Bar-Ilan would often drop by to play a selection for an upcoming tour. Who didn’t look forward to intermission and dinner served by her adored staff, Yvette and Mickey—homemade fried chicken, rice, Caesar salad, biscuits, and the best brownies in New York. What a way to hear music and broaden our horizons. The range and amount of repertoire we heard was truly amazing.

Those who were privileged to study with Dora will never forget the experience of working with her. Often, just hearing her say her favorite word, “easy,” would imply that the nuances of a phrase or the tone did not meet her high standards. At every lesson Dora not only was your mentor, but also your friend and confidant. In her own way, she cared about us like “family.” Instilled in each of us was the belief that anything was possible. Her devotion and positive energy encouraged us to do our best.

Who I am today is largely due to my years of study with Dora. I realize the profound influence she had on me and continue to share her invaluable guidance and inspiration. Dora is always in my heart.

## ***My Memories of Constance Keene***

**Penny Johnson (DMA '07)**

As the song goes, “It’s autumn in New York. It’s good to live it again.” The words of this song by Vernon Duke always manage to take me back to the start of a new year at Manhattan School of Music. Yet here I am in Canada, facing a blank screen on an overcast afternoon in late September. There’s no sound of rattling subway trains and no fighting for a practice room. Nevertheless, a wonderful picture begins to emerge as I begin to recall the two very happy years when I was a piano student of Constance Keene.

Opening the journal in which I entered copious notes following every lesson, I spot the notes I made for this very day 15 years ago—October 17, 2003. I had just begun my doctoral studies and had barely known Ms. Keene for a month. On that particular day, one gem of musical wisdom stood out: “You need to get your ideas past the footlights!”

I can still picture Ms. Keene and her husband, Milton, sitting in Greenfield Hall for my first doctoral recital. Ms. Keene was 83 years old and Milton, I believe, was 90. There they were, in the middle of a New York winter, dressed up and supporting the student they’d known for less than a year. I savor that memory of the devoted teacher and friend.

A musical descendent of Anton Rubinstein, Theodor Leschetizky, and Franz Liszt, Ms. Keene was a pianist of the grand manner, who worked tirelessly throughout her life to impart to her students the wisdom of her own masters. Certain phrases I can still hear her say:

“Standards, you must *always* have standards.”

“You can’t be shy at the piano. If you know the notes, *play* them.”

“As pianists, we are communicators through sound.”

“You must first hear what it is you want to do with the sound. If you can do this, then your body will find a way to make it happen.”

“Tops, tops, tops! You must imagine you have bells on your pinkies.”

And then, of course, there was the nonmusical advice: “You *must* rehearse in your shoes and concert dress!”

Much in the spirit of Leschetizky, Ms. Keene valued an artist’s individuality. “I’m so tired of hearing people just play like a sewing machine,” she remarked in an interview with the curator of the International Piano Archives at the University of Maryland. The combination of her training and the opportunities for rubbing shoulders with nearly everyone in the musical world (Vladimir Horowitz, Artur Schnabel, Leopold Godowsky, Josef Hofmann, Ernest Hutcheson, Mischa Levitzky, Jascha Heifetz, Sir John Barbirolli, George Szell, Josef and Rosina Lhevinne, Wanda Landowska, Benno Moiseiwitsch, Guiomar Novaes, Gina Bachauer, Van Cliburn, Isabelle Vengerova, William Kapell, Rudolf Serkin, Walter Gieseking, Shura Cherkassky, Serge Koussevitzky, Benny Goodman, Erich Leinsdorf, Kirill Kondrashin, and Jorge Bolet, among many others) gave Ms. Keene the tools to impart to future generations the grand tradition of pianism.

Ms. Keene sought to help carve out the individuality of her students. For me, it was the music of Bach. “The world needs another Rosalyn,” she would say. Regardless of musical style, Ms. Keene guided her students to be effective communicators through sound and always with the intention of communicating something meaningful. I can still hear her telling us, “Find what it is that you love doing and that no one else can. *That* is what you must devote your life to.” There were those students who feared Ms. Keene, but our little group in those final two years was caring and supportive. We knew our time with Ms. Keene would end soon and we savored every word, every note.

Having married her teacher, the inimitable Abram Chasins, in 1949, Ms. Keene once remarked, “It is very difficult to have a marriage with a career. I opted instantly not to have any children and I don’t miss it. Of course, look at all the students I have!” Indeed, for Ms. Keene, her students were her children. Part of the musical diet fed to us every Sunday at 5 was another remnant of that golden era of piano playing. Studio class, as it was called, was Ms. Keene’s effort to offer students a culmination of all

things musical and nonmusical. Inspired no doubt by the musicales of Leschetizky and the gatherings of Leopold (“Popsy”) Godowsky, which, as a young woman, she attended, studio classes were more than simply a chance for students to play through pieces in front of a supportive group. They also provided opportunities for students to develop their public speaking abilities. One got the sense that the ability of a pianist to speak well in public was something Ms. Keene highly valued. Occasionally, apart from my lessons and studio classes, I would visit Ms. Keene and Milton. To me, they were like grandparents and I adored them both. I can recall swimming with Ms. Keene and watching an old Spencer Tracy movie that we’d happily stumbled upon on television in Milton’s office. When I told Ms. Keene that I thought Milton looked a bit like Tracy she seemed to like this.

I would like to personally extend my wishes for another 100 years of high-level music training. Challenging as a career in the arts can be, we must look upon our current times as being rich in opportunity. As Ms. Keene said towards the end of her life, “I think that what is improving very much is that it’s not anymore, ‘I’ve got to be a concert pianist and if I’m not a concert pianist I’m nothing.’” Rather, she saw more avenues of musical exploration in the 21st century. In wrapping up my memories of Constance Keene, may we forever grasp in our hands and hearts that sense of wonder for the piano, the greatest of all musical instruments, that faithful, lifelong companion which, even at the end of an illustrious concert and teaching career, was, for Constance Keene, a reason to get up every morning. And, as she liked to say, “Play what you love the most and you will play it the best.”

# **ABOUT MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC**

Founded as a community music school by Janet Daniels Schenck in 1918, today MSM is recognized for its more than 960 superbly talented undergraduate and graduate students who come from more than 50 countries and nearly all 50 states; its innovative curricula and world-renowned artist-teacher faculty that includes musicians from the New York Philharmonic, the Met Orchestra, and the top ranks of the jazz and Broadway communities; and a distinguished community of accomplished, award-winning alumni working at the highest levels of the musical, educational, cultural, and professional worlds.

The School is dedicated to the personal, artistic, and intellectual development of aspiring musicians, from its Precollege students through those pursuing doctoral studies. Offering classical, jazz, and musical theatre training, MSM grants a range of undergraduate and graduate degrees. True to MSM's origins as a music school for children, the Precollege program continues to offer superior music instruction to 475 young musicians between the ages of 5 and 18. The School also serves some 2,000 New York City schoolchildren through its Arts-in-Education Program, and another 2,000 students through its critically acclaimed Distance Learning Program.

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