HOROWITZ PIANO SERIES

Boris Berman, *artistic director*

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# Melvin Chen, *piano*

Wednesday, January 21, 2026 | 7:30 p.m.
Morse Recital Hall in Sprague Memorial Hall

Yale SCHOOL OF MUSIC

José García-León, Dean

# Program

Leoš Janáček
1854–1928

**Po zarostlém chodníčku, Kniha I (On an Overgrown Path, Book 1)**

I. Naše večery (Our Evenings)
II. Lístek odvanutý (A Blown-Away Leaf)
III. Pojďte s námi! (Come With Us!)
IV. Frýdecká Panna Maria (The Madonna of Frýdek)
V. Štěbetaly jak laštovičky (They Chattered Like Swallows)
VI. Nesmírná bolest (Words Fail!)
VII. Dobrou noc! (Good Night!)
VIII. Tak neskonale úzko (Unutterable Anguish)
IX. V pláči (In Tears)
X. Sýček neodletěl! (The Barn Owl Has Not Flown Away!)

**Po zarostlém chodníčku, Kniha II (On an Overgrown Path, Book 2)**

XI. Andante
XII. Allegretto – Presto
XIII. Più mosso
XIV. Vivo
XV. Allegro

INTERMISSION

**V mlhách (In the Mist)**

I. Andante
II. Molto adagio
III. Andantino
IV. Presto

**Sonata 1.X.1905, „Z ulice“ (From the Street)**

I. Předtucha (Presentiment)
II. Smrt (Death)

*As a courtesy to others, please silence all devices. Photography and recording of any kind is strictly prohibited. Please do not leave the hall during musical selections. Thank you.*

# Artist Profile

Melvin Chen, *piano*

A native of Tennessee, Dr. Melvin Chen has received acclaim for solo and chamber performances throughout the United States, Canada, and Asia. Dr. Chen's performances have been featured on radio and television stations around the world, including KBS television and radio in Korea, NHK television in Japan, and NPR in the United States.

As a Professor in the Practice of Piano, Dr. Chen teaches a studio of graduate and undergraduate piano students. In addition, he serves as Director of the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival/Yale Summer School of Music, where he also performs. Previously, Dr. Chen was Associate Director and on the piano faculty at the Bard College Conservatory of Music and served as Artistic Director of the chamber music program at the Hotchkiss School Summer Portals.

Dr. Chen earned a doctorate in chemistry from Harvard University and holds a double master's degree from The Juilliard School in piano and violin. He received his bachelor of science degree in chemistry and physics from Yale University, where he studied with Boris Berman, Paul Kantor, and Ida Kavafian.

Dr. Chen's notable solo recordings include Beethoven's "Diabelli" Variations (Bridge Records), which the American Record Guide described as "a classic," piano music by Joan Tower (Naxos Records), and sonatas and other pianos works by Shostakovich (Bridge Records), among others.

# Program Notes

**On an Overgrown Path**
*Katherine Balch*

Janáček began his piano cycle *On an Overgrown Path* in 1900. By its completion in 1911, it comprised fifteen intimate and affectually diverse pieces. The title references Moravian folk poetry, evoking a sound or tradition from the past that has since been overlooked or neglected. The first five songs of the cycle were intended to be Moravian folksong arrangements for harmonium (an instrument often available in Moravian village school houses), but became character pieces for piano that Janáček entitled simply "moods." The composer wrote: "The little pieces contain distant reminiscences. Those reminiscences are so dear to me that I do not think they will ever vanish... Whenever I have a moment to indulge myself undisturbed in these recollections, then I find another such little piece comes to mind."

**In the Mists**
*Lisa Moore*

In The Mist is considered the most mature of Janáček's piano works because many of his compositional techniques culminate here. These four movements are drenched with haunting folk tunes, impressionistic timbres, empassioned emotions, and speech rhythm interruptions. The title suggests an ambiguity - nature scenes, reflecting the composer's great love of long walks in the woods and also the composer's inner personal and artistic struggles.

**Sonata 1. X. 1905**
*Tony Chen Lin*

Posterity shall forever be grateful for the good sense of the pianist that saved one of the most important piano works of the twentieth century from oblivion.

Janáček was an ardent Czech nationalist who, with his aggressively anti-German sentiment, had always resented the Austrian domination of his homeland. He was compelled to write "1. X. 1905, From the Street" (later referred to as a Sonata) by a tragic incident that happened on the date the title commemorates. During a demonstration supporting the foundation of a Czech-speaking university in Brno, tension arose between the German majority and the Czech minority of the city. During a skirmish that ensued, a Moravian carpenter, František Pavlík, was violently bayoneted to death by the forces of the ruling Imperial Government of the Habsburgs. Deeply affected by this event, Janáček conceived a three-movement work as a tribute.

On the day of the premiere while the pianist Ludmila Tučková was playing through the work to Janáček, the fiercely self-critical composer grew despondent and in a fit of self-doubt tore out the last movement, a funeral march, and threw it into the fire right before the pianist's eyes. The concert went ahead, albeit with just the two-movement torso. Still dissatisfied, Janáček tossed the entire manuscript of the remaining work in the river Vltava. "And it floated along on the water that day, like white swans," he later recalled, laden with remorse for his rash act. It

wasn't until 1924, almost twenty years later, that Tučková was able to pluck up the courage and confess to the seventy-year-old composer that she had made a copy of the two-movement Sonata. Remembering it with excitement, Janacek sanctioned its publication. Like its violent history, this searing work has the power even today to disturb and shock.

The volatile first movement "Presentiment" begins with a haunting melody, dislocated by sudden unsettling angular interjections. Much of Janáček's music is peppered with these wild, obsessional and seemingly irrational outbursts, like willful aberrations. Spoken rather than sung, these agitated rhythmic patterns stem out of Czech speech. Janáček actively collected Moravian folk music and notated the speech melodies of people he encountered to use as material for his compositions. (He had, rather morbidly, scribbled down his daughter Olga's last sigh on her deathbed.) A serene second theme recalls memories of a happier past.

In the second movement "Death" a chilling five-note phrase, a prayer perhaps, persists almost apathetically in a trance as if emotionally drained and numb with grief. The intensity imperceptibly builds as grief slowly grows into anger and torturous realisation, culminating in a terrifying climax. When the theme returns it is punctuated by painful pulsations in the bass, much like irregular beats of a heavy heart. The closing bars are utterly devastating in the profound hopelessness and quiet agony they convey; a faint glimmer of hope is extinguished like a brief candle by the final chord, a single toll of a funereal bell, signifying the end; nothingness engulfed in complete darkness.

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*List as of January 21, 2026*

# More Music Awaits!

Thank you for joining us — we'd love to have you back! If you liked today's concert, here are a few more performances we think you'll enjoy:

FEB 8 **Ole Akahoshi, *cello* & Wei-Yi Yang, *piano***
**Faculty Artist Series**
3:00 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
Free admission

FEB 10 **Parker Quartet** with **Paul Watkins, *cello***
**Oneppo Chamber Music Series**
7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
Tickets start at $31, Faculty/Staff start at $23, Students start at $14

FEB 25 **Robert Blocker**
**Horowitz Piano Series**
7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
Tickets start at $17, Yale faculty/staff start at $12, students start at $8

MAR 25 **Boris Berman**
**Horowitz Piano Series**
7:30 p.m. | Morse Recital Hall
Tickets start at $17, Yale faculty/staff start at $12, students start at $8

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