



Bard College Conservatory of Music

20 Years of Music, Vision, and Excellence

Undergraduate Degree Recital

Unthinkable Tenderness

Ryan Michki, *tenor*

David Sytkowski, *piano*

Saturday, April 11, 2026, at 4:00 PM

László Z. Bitó '60 Conservatory Building, Performance Space

Hektors Abschied, op. 58, no. 1
An Emma, op. 58, no. 2
Nachtstück, op. 36, no. 2

Franz Schubert
(1797-1828)

Selections from *Venezia*
I. Sopra L'acqua indormenzada...
II. La Barcheta

Reynaldo Hahn
(1873-1947)

Che gelida manina, from *La Bohème* (Act I)

Giacomo Puccini
(1858-1924)

– INTERMISSION –

Lydia, op. 4, no. 2

Gabriel Fauré
(1845-1924)

Sanglots, from *Banalités*

Francis Poulenc
(1899-1963)

La Lune Blanche, from *La bonne chanson*

Fauré

Finishing The Hat, from *Sunday in the Park with George*

Stephen Sondheim
(1930-2021)

Grief

William Grant Still
(1895-1978)

Love, Let the Wind Cry

Undine Smith Moore
(1904-1989)

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Ryan Michki is a tenor well versed in the arts of opera, art song, and musical theatre. Coming from a family of 2 music educators, Ryan has been deeply involved with the world of music since childhood. He is wrapping up his final semester at Bard Conservatory, and is on track to graduate this Spring with a B.M. in Voice Performance, and a B.A. in Historical Studies. Throughout his time at Bard, Ryan has performed in various opera scene shows with the Bard College Opera Workshop, as well as Assistant Directing alongside director Emily Cuk.

His most recent scenes with the Bard Opera Workshop included playing the role of Tamino in the opening scenes of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*. Some of Ryan's recent major endeavors include being a Chorus Fellow of the 2024 Spoleto Festival choir, winning the fall 2024 undergraduate division of the Bard Conservatory Concerto Competition with his performance of *On Wenlock Edge* by Ralph Vaughn Williams, his various involvements with Opera Saratoga and the Berkshire Opera festival in the summer of 2025, and his performance of the orchestration of Vaughan Williams' *On Wenlock Edge* with TON in November of 2025 at Symphony Space. Coming up in the Summer of 2026, Ryan will be joining the Chautauqua Institution and Opera Company as a Studio Artist under the direction of Steve Osgood, where he will be covering the role of Ivan in *The Music Shop* by Richard Vargo, and playing various roles in 3 workshops of new opera works.

Immediately following this performance, on April 12th at 2pm, Ryan will join pianist Ricky Moreira in a recital of German Lieder at the New Rochelle Public Library as part of Young Musicians of Westchester free concert series.

David Sytkowski is an Artist in Residence at Bard College, where he is Music Director for Opera Workshop, leads the Musical Theater Performance Workshop, coaches singers, teaches aural skills and private piano.

He is a sought-after pianist, vocal coach, and music director, and often collaborates with legendary cabaret artist Justin Vivian Bond, among others. Recent projects include *All The Things We Are* with Joshua Jeremiah, Brooke Schooley and Vira Slywotzky in NYC (March 2026), *Crushed Ice* with Bond at Joe's Pub (December 2025), *Ariadne in America* with Jordan Rutter-Covatto at the cell (October 2025), *Dear Edvard* at Martha's Vineyard Playhouse (Summer 2025), Handel's *Giulio Cesare* with RB Schlather at Hudson Hall (April 2025), Sondheim and Weidman's *Assassins* at Bard (April 2025), and *Woo Girl Miracles!* With Bond at Joe's Pub (February 2025).

VOWEL MOVEMENTS, a subversive classical/cabaret/drag collaboration with Pretty Lamé (also known as tenor Joshua Sanders), premiered at Hudson Hall in June 2023 and was remounted for ICA Miami in February 2024, made possible by a generous grant from The New York State Council on the Arts.

Other notable past projects include *Urinetown* at Bard (Spring 2024), Handel's *Rodelinda* at Hudson Hall (Fall 2023), recording Kyle Gann's *Whispers* for microtonal piano (Summer 2023), and *Dance of the Ages* at Jacob's Pillow (Summer 2022).

From 2014-2021, he served as Principal Music Coach for operas at Bard SummerScape, including Korngold's *Das Wunder der Heliane* and *Die tote Stadt*, Mascagni's *Iris*, Dvorak's *Dimitrij*, Smyth's *The Wreckers*, Weber's *Euryanthe*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Tsar's Bride*, Vaughan Williams' *Sir John in Love*, Chausson's *Le roi Arthus*, Rubenstein's *Demon*, and Moniuszko's *Halka*.

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

The title of this program came to me via a night of intense brainstorming with a close friend and incredible poet, and is pulled from the title of Argentinian poet Juan Gelman's collection of selected poems called *Unthinkable Tenderness*. Gelman's poetry, while based in the context of the brutal reality of his and his family's experiences with the Argentine military government, the poems themselves speak to a reverence of life and family, even when dealing with grief and tragedy. This phrase "unthinkable tenderness" drew a connecting line through the poetry featured in this program that no other words could accurately describe. While the program does not feature any of Gelman's work, the spirit of his poetry is ever present in the love, grief, obsession, and acceptance of the poets and librettists featured today.

The first 2 pieces, both set by Franz Schubert feature the poetry of Freidrich Schiller, who, like Goethe, was one of Schubert's many poetic inspirational fonts. **Hektors Abschied** is Schiller's poetic setting of a scene pulled straight from Homer's *Iliad*, and portrays the tragic moments in the relationship of Hector, son of King Priam of Troy, and his Wife and the mother of his children, Andromache, as Hector prepares for his imminent battle with the Greek hero Achilles. Andromache pleads with her husband to understand the risk he is taking putting his life on the line, and her fears for the future of their children and their love, while Hektor eases her fears with his confidence that, no matter what, he could crawl his way out of the river Styx back to her. Though his body may die and he may remain in the river Styx, his love will not die there. Schiller's second poem set by Schubert, **An Emma**, portrays the speaker as someone struggling with understanding their feelings with a relationship that has ended. Whether the speaker's partner has died, or left them, the speaker questions if the love they feel is still real, or if it ever really existed. Like Andromache in the *Iliad*, the fear of that love we have for someone being lost is realized in this speaker's line "Emma, can it be love?". The final Schubert song of the set, **Nachtstück**, paints the scene of a wise elder at the end of his life, having accepted the end, and the nature around him bends in reverence to him as he lays down for his final rest. There is a cherishment and adoration that trees and grass have for the old man, and in a way, there is an everlasting love and care that is shared between nature and the man as, in the final line, Death itself bends to meet him.

Venezia, a set of Venetian dialect poems by the French-Venezuelan composer Reynaldo Hahn, are a celebration of the dialect which Hahn called in the notes of his *journal d'un musicien* (1933) "enchanting" and "youthfull". In 1900 he, alongside acclaimed French novelist Marcel Proust, travelled to Venice and from there these songs would come into being. **Sopra L'acqua indormenzada...** and **La Barcheta** are a comforting indulgence in the fantasy of Venice and the various pleasures of life one can enjoy in a magical place, alongside someone you love.

The only aria on the program, **Che gelida manina** from Act 1 of *La Boheme* is easily one of the most iconic pieces of romantic music in the Opera repertoire. The scene is grounded in naivety of love at first sight, despite what tragedy we know is to come later in the opera. We see a young man, Rodolfo, bearing his soul and his life for Mimi in the most poetic way he can. After the ultra romantic Puccini climax, he ends with a gentle invitation to Mimi to introduce herself, opening the door for her to reciprocate.

Faure's **Lydia**, one of the early classics in Faure's repertoire, addresses a specific lover directly and details the borderline obsessive take over of the speaker's life through their love for Lydia. In a way, this piece makes me connect back to *An Emma*, as though *Lydia* shows the early honeymoon stages of a relationship where we feel blinded by love, and as though our lives have been completely consumed by the love we have for our person, and *An Emma* shows the fallout of said relationship, and the hole that is left by that obsession and the many questions left unanswered when the one we love leaves us. **Sanglots** from Poulenc's *Banalités* is the piece that holds the closest connection to the

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

poetry of Juan Gelman's work for me. There is a deep ache seeded in Guillaume Apollinaire's words and Poulenc's hauntingly beautiful harmonic language that draw a direct path between love and pain. The delicate wounds we bear bind us to those who came before us and who will come after, yet we share that burden among those we love and care for and find solace in the fact that love connects us in the inevitability of suffering. Finally, we come back to bask in the tenderness of Faure's **La Lune Blanche...**, one of his later works where he references his younger self in a moment of blissful nostalgia. In this piece, the melodic figure we hear in *Lydia* during the beginning line "Lydia sur tes roses joues" is repeated in the piano line of *La Lune Blanche...* in the build up to the first declarative statement of tender love in the piece, "Ô bien aimée!" or, "Oh my Beloved!". The piece basks in the beautiful vignette of sharing the exquisite moonlight hour with the one you love.

Sondheim's *Sunday in the Park with George* looks at the complex and chaotic mind and life of one of the most famous pointillist painters of the 19th century George Seraut, and his iconic masterpiece *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. **Finishing the Hat** is a central piece to George's understanding of not only his art and his love, but also himself, as he comes to terms with the fact that he will never be able to separate his art from his love. He knows he will never meet a woman who fills the hole in his soul like Dot, the love of his life who has chosen to leave him for another man. Yet he also knows he can never fully detach himself from his art to give enough of himself to Dot and their relationship. Which is why he accepts the fact that Dot has to leave him. This piece and the whole musical deals with the extremes of obsession and dedication, and strikes a nerve with an artist like myself. George's plight makes one wonder if our dedication to our art, or some higher purpose, leaves us blind to the love we can share with those around us. We are once again reminded of how grief often comes alongside love with one of William Grant Still's unpublished letters to Theodore Simmons, "**Grief**". According to Still's letters, this poem came to be when Simmons, who was accompanied by Leroy V Brant, were in a local cemetery and saw an angel statue, one that was common among many cemeteries, where the angel was seen "head down, enclosed in his arms, weeping". The image inspired Brant to send this poem to Still, who set it to music. Like the statue in the poem, Still's setting memorialized the feelings of grief we all share. The repetition of the melody note under an ever changing piano harmony gives the poetry a strengthening energy. Even in grief, we can be lifted up and find strength in love. That love, which has been so central to the tenderness of the program is reaffirmed one last time with Undine Smith Moore's **Love Let the Wind Cry**. A deeply felt, full-throated exclamation of love; one that echoes across nature and back in time to the Greek poets of old such that even Sappho and Homer understood the same primordial truth of human tenderness and connection that we know today.