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Pianist Brian Ganz: Wounded by Chopin

By [Emily Wilson](#)

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Local pianist Brian Ganz has come a long way since deciding to pursue music at age 12, not much older than the age of his muse, child-prodigy Frédéric Chopin when he composed his first Polonaises. Since that moment, Ganz has studied with teachers Yida Novik and Claire Deene, as well as Leon Fleisher at the Peabody Conservatory of Music, where Ganz now teaches. He's played in concert halls worldwide, and is also a member of the piano faculty and the current Artist-in-Residence at St. Mary's College in Maryland.

Ganz, a Maryland native and current resident of Annapolis, recalls the moment when he "recognized that [music] was going to be my life." Upon hearing the music of Chopin, "it wounded me—and that wound has shaped my life." He describes music itself as being "full of beauty and mystery," but Chopin, in particular, speaks to him. "He speaks my native language," Ganz says,

"when I listen to Chopin, I feel as though I've been plunged deep into the language of the human soul ... He has a gift for melody, an exotic quality in his Mazurkas ... like any example of good craftsmanship, the more you look, the more you see."

Thus Chopin will be the featured composer at a series of concerts, dubbed the "Strathmore Chopin Project," in which Ganz hopes to perform Chopin's works in their entirety; not just every piece, but every version of each piece as well.

Noted for his humility and ability to include his audiences instead of just impressing them, Ganz will be holding a number of free preview concerts in preparation for his first performance in the series at Strathmore on January 22 at 8 p.m. "I love people," he says, "I love meeting them and getting to know them." Oftentimes musicians are perceived as "artistes," figures on pedestals meant to be admired; Ganz hopes to change this perception with Q and A sessions after each of his preview concerts. "I want to melt those barriers," explains Ganz.

Has he ever been stumped at a Q and A session? He once had a music teacher point out that he was playing from the score (a practice frowned upon by most music teachers, who argue that it indicates a lack of practice and professionalism). In response, he joked, "That's a good point—you sound like a good teacher," and went on to explain that what he values most is doing a piece justice. And if he's a bit rusty on a certain piece (Chopin alone composed more than 200 pieces), he's not afraid to reference the score if he

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has to. But generally, Ganz looks forward to audience participation. "I enjoy being put on the spot—bring it on!" he exclaims.

Do you think you can stump Brian Ganz? Yearning to hear your favorite Chopin piece? He will be fielding questions and taking requests after the first of his preview concerts on Saturday, December 11, at 7:30 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist church in Annapolis. For more information, see our [local news article](#).

Here's a more detailed schedule of his performances:

Preview Concert

7:30 p.m., Saturday, December 11
Unitarian Universalist Church in Annapolis
Call 410-266-6910 or visit Uuca-md.org for information

Birthday Concert Honoring Composers Chopin and Schumann

*note, this performance also features pianists Eliza Garth and Beverly Babcock
4 & 7 p.m., Sunday, December 12
Montgomery Hall at St. Mary's College
Call 240-895-2000 or visit Smcm.edu for information

Brian Ganz Studio Recital

5 p.m., Friday, December 14
Auerbach Auditorium at St. Mary's College
Call 240-895-2000 or visit Smcm.edu for information

Preview Concert

7:30 p.m., Saturday, January 8
Unitarian Universalist Church in Annapolis
Call 410-266-6910 or visit Uuca-md.org for information

Chopin Concert

8 p.m., Saturday, January 22
Music Center at Strathmore
Call 301-581-5100 for tickets (\$34–44, children 7–17 are free), or visit Nationalphilharmonic.org

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