MENDELSSOHN - Variations sérieuses, Op. 54
Completed on the 4th of June in 1841, Felix Mendelssohn’s Variations sérieuses, Op. 54, is a composition that consists of a theme in D minor and 17 variations. While the composer is known to have written a total of three sets of variations for the piano, only this set was published during his lifetime. Mendelssohn wrote this piece as part of a contribution for a piano album for a fundraising campaign in aid of building a large bronze monument of Beethoven in Bonn. However, in contrast to the many virtuosic compositions written by the 19th-century composers at that time for the aid, Mendelssohn presents a simple yet captivating four-part harmony theme at the beginning of the work to dissociate his piece with the others.

Apart from wanting to be set apart from the other composers, the Variations sérieuses stay true to its name. Not only are they “serious,” but it is very much more than that - one may even call the piece *tragic*. His expression of emotions are shown from the very beginning in his theme, as the passage sighs in falling chromatics.

The mood and style diversities of this piece are far from being ideas that are inconsistent with each other; rather, the 17 variations have been structured in groups carefully. The first half of the work is built to increase in tempo and rhythmic activity gradually. Mendelssohn does this by adding decorations and embellishments to the melody and harmony, and even thickening the texture by expanding his range. A few variations evoke some romantic flavours of the composer, while others tone down the mood by spiralling down to a calming fugue. The fourteenth variation is not hard to look out for, as it is the only one in a major key which changes the mood another direction - it could also be interpreted as the composer pausing at a religious atmosphere of finding consolation in prayer. In fact, the variation even sounds like an organ playing a church hymn. Finally, the passionate Coda at the end of the piece contains much haste and brilliance, with the impression that one hand is being chased by the other until they come together in agreement in the closing bars to signify the end of the piece.

ALBENIZ–GODOWSKY - Tango in D Major
The tango - a partner dance which originated in the 1880s along the River Plate, the natural border of Uruguay and Argentina. In fact, the tango is actually the national dance of Argentina. While the dance used to be practiced in brothels and bars of ports, the dance’s sharp yet alluring and gliding movements have made the dance so popular that it spread to the rest of the world. Now, as they can vary widely in character, many variations of tangos now exist.

This simple, short, and romantic Tango in D Major was originally written for the solo piano by Isaac Albeniz and composed as part of the suite España, Op. 165, in the year 1890. Because of the simplicity of the theme, it was very well received by many - in fact, this tango was even said to be the most famous tango in concert music. Since then, there have been many transcriptions of this dance, not just for piano, but even for the guitar. The arrangement that will be presented to you this recital is written by none other than Leopold Godowsky, where he keeps most of the original melody of the Tango yet adds his own personal touch of flair to the captivating piece.
MEDTNER - Sonata Tragica, Op. 39 No. 5
The Sonata Tragica, Op. 39 No. 5, is part of the five-piece second cycle of Nikolai Medtner’s Forgotten Melodies set. This one-movement sonata is the 11th sonata Medtner composed, and it is regarded as one of Medtner’s finest works.

In this sonata, Medtner introduces the theme(s) and emphasises theme repetitions by stating them dramatically - he launches the first theme by a blow of fate, and the second, in contrast to the first, in a consolatory manner. A remarkable intensity and diversity of emotions are concentrated in its single movement. This is shown with calm and cantabile moments in the sonata along with the rising agitation that slowly builds up as the piece develops.

There is also a theme that recurs once from “Canzona Matinata,” the piece that precedes this work. This happens in the development. It is an almost literal restatement of the central theme; however, there is little relief. Just before the recapitulation, a fugue-like passage based on the first theme is launched; however, it does not develop into a full-fledged one. Instead, it returns to the recapitulation, and tension continuously rises all the way up to the coda, where the piece reaches its peak. The violent and devastating ending is concluded once again with the blow of fate which started the sonata.