

THE ST. OLAF COLLEGE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC
Presents

Andrew Cannestra, *piano*

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2026 • URNESS RECITAL HALL • 7 P.M.

PROGRAM

Polka brillante, Op. 11 Józef Wieniawski (1837–1912)

Polonaise No. 3 in G-sharp Minor, Op. 27 Józef Wieniawski

Polonaise in A-flat Major, Op. 53, “Heroic” Frederic Chopin (1810–1849)

Barcarolle in B-flat Major, Op. 29 Józef Wieniawski

Barcarolle, Op. 60 Frederic Chopin

Piano Sonata in B Minor, Op. 22 (2nd version) Józef Wieniawski

I. Allegro con brio

II. Andante

III. Allegro tumultuoso

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Please silence all personal communication devices.*

PROGRAM NOTES

This recital commemorates the recent release of Cannestra's brand-new album on the Naxos label, featuring eight works by the prolific Polish composer and virtuoso pianist **Józef Wieniawski**. Wieniawski's musical language certainly owes a great debt to his predecessor and fellow countryman Frederic Chopin; in fact, Wieniawski became only the second pianist to perform Chopin's complete études in concert (after Franz Liszt). Tonight's program pairs two works of the same genre by the two composers in the form of the Barcarolle and the Polonaise. While his music fell into relative obscurity during the 20th century, contemporary performers have begun to revitalize his works, and this album presents several works that have never been commercially recorded among others with only a small handful of recent recordings.

Wieniawski's writing is both highly virtuosic and quite pianistic, bearing the mark of a true master of the instrument and showcasing a wide variety of textures and colors. Nearly all standard Romantic-era virtuoso techniques appear in these pieces: octaves, scalar passagework, arpeggios, and free, rapid cadenzas, while also requiring a warm, lyrical tone and careful phrasing. Despite this heightened virtuosity, it is never superfluous, adding essential characters and colors that form the fabric of his music. Above all, his music is remarkable for its sincerity and refreshing takes on familiar art forms and genres.

Wieniawski: Polka brillante, Op. 11 (pub. 1852)

A relatively early work of Wieniawski's, this polka is cast in rondo form, with the charming main theme returning many times alongside three different contrasting episodes. These episodes rarely stray far from the home key of D major, offering a light-hearted, capricious character that shines throughout the piece. Near the end, the texture shifts from a simpler dance to scampering virtuosity that would be equally at home in a Chopin étude, leading to a boisterous coda full of joy.

Wieniawski: Polonaise No. 3 in G-sharp Minor, Op. 27 (1881)

The only of the four polonaises in a minor key, the third polonaise follows a similar blueprint as the others in its structure with three contrasting sections anchored by a main theme in the home key. This time, the major-key heroic themes appear as contrasting episodes, while the recurring G-sharp minor theme takes on a more sombre character. While this polonaise does end with a Picardy third in the parallel major, it does so in an understated way that does not fully leave the dark character of this polonaise behind.

Chopin: Polonaise in A-flat Major, "Heroic" (1842)

Meanwhile, little introduction is needed for Chopin's polonaise, one of the most widely heard works ever composed for the piano. Arthur Rubinstein famously called it "the composition which is closest to my heart," and that sentiment has certainly been shared by many pianists and audience members alike. The piece's subtitle, "Heroic," has been attributed to Chopin's longtime partner, writer George Sand, who understood this polonaise in light of the 1848 revolutions across Europe, including Chopin's native Poland. Whether the composer directly approved of this subtitle is unknown, but one cannot doubt that this sentiment of pride for his beloved homeland is at the forefront here.

Wieniawski: Barcarolle, Op. 29 (1884)

Traditionally, a barcarolle was a song of the Venetian gondola; it appeared frequently in Italian bel canto opera, but did not make its way to the piano until the early Romantic era. Nearly every example shares two main characteristics: a 6/8 or 12/8 metre, and a slow-to-moderate tempo featuring a gentle rocking motion, imitating the feeling of a relaxing, peaceful ride along a Venetian canal.

The barcarolle is one of Wieniawski's later works, and these harmonies are among his most adventurous, at times reminiscent of the emerging French impressionist movement. In particular, he uses the flat-sixth chord quite frequently, evoking a feeling of nostalgia. Like the polka, this work is in rondo form, with the main B-flat major theme appearing in full three times.

Chopin: Barcarolle (1845-46)

Composed near the end of Chopin's life, this barcarolle has become one of his most beloved works. As with some of his other late works, the harmonies are particularly rich and evocative, with intricate contrapuntal layers creating many layers of beauty. Chopin uses this combination of colorful harmony alongside *bel canto* melodies to beautifully elicit the feeling of nostalgia in addition to the gentle rocking motion of a Venetian boat.

Piano Sonata in B Minor, Op. 22 (1858; second version c. 1890)

The phrase “Piano Sonata in B minor” immediately brings to mind the two celebrated masterworks of Chopin and Liszt, two composers Wieniawski closely associated with. However, this work is no mere imitation, representing the pinnacle of the composer’s contributions to the piano repertoire. The difference between the two editions some three decades apart is quite substantial, showcasing Wieniawski’s evolution as a composer. Most notably, there is an increase in counterpoint, a wider variety of textures, and more adventurous harmonies, as well as a significant truncation of the recapitulation in the first movement and the complete omission of a scherzo third movement.

The first movement adheres closely to a Classical sonata-allegro form, with a lyrical second theme in D major and a lengthy development. However, the recapitulation completely skips the main opening theme, starting right on the second theme, now in B major. Notably, Chopin’s sonata forms – including his own B minor sonata – also follow this form, often referred to as ‘Type 2’ sonata form.

The second movement, in G major, offers a welcome respite from the stormy mood of the first. It follows ternary form, with lyrical outer sections full of sensuous rolled chords and operatic melodies interrupted by a wandering, increasingly tempestuous middle section.

Full of drama and tension from the very opening, the *perpetuum mobile* third movement makes for a hair-raising finale to the work. Perhaps the most unexpectedly exciting moment in the entire sonata occurs in the coda, when just as the sonata nears its conclusion Wieniawski launches into a C minor version of the opening, before finally arriving at the long-awaited Picardy third of B major.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Pianist and composer **Andrew Cannestra** first rose to prominence as the grand prize winner of the 2021 Aeolian Classics Emerging Artist Competition, where he was unanimously lauded by the jury for his “probing artistic vision.” He maintains an active performance schedule as both a soloist and a sought-after chamber musician and collaborator.

As a soloist, he won the bronze medal in the 2024 Seattle International Piano Competition. His discography includes two solo albums. The first, *Mystic Pool*, was released in 2022, featuring one of his own compositions alongside works by William Grant Still, Alexander Scriabin, Frederic Chopin, and Henri Dutilleux. More recently, he recorded eight rarely-heard works by Josef Wieniawski, which will join the Naxos catalogue in November 2025 as part of the Romantic Piano Series. He is passionate about programming music by living composers and historically under-represented composers alongside more familiar masterworks. For example, he gave the Oregon premiere of the Amy Beach Piano Concerto with the University of Oregon Symphony as well as the world premiere of Ryan Johnston’s Piano Concerto no. 1 with Boston-based Horizon Ensemble. In addition, he has given recitals at some of Chicago’s premier venues such as Guarneri Hall and Ganz Hall, and he was featured as guest artist for the recital series Henry Fogel Presents.

Cannestra also regularly collaborates as both a chamber musician and duo partner, having performed with every standard orchestral instrument. He is a founding member of Oasis Ensemble with flutist Dawn Weiss and cellist Louis Lowenstein, a piano trio that performs regularly across the state of Oregon to high critical acclaim. He has shared the stage with members of the Emerson Quartet, Viano Quartet, Delgani Quartet, Chicago Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony, Oregon Symphony, Santa Rosa Symphony, and Montreal Symphony, and has been invited to perform chamber works at the Manchester Music Festival (VT), the Redwood Arts Council (CA), and live on All-Classical Radio (OR) and Vermont Public Radio. He has also served as orchestral keyboardist for the Oregon Bach Festival.

Equally accomplished as a composer, Cannestra often performs his own solo piano music in concert. Recently, he completed *Oregon Soundscapes*, a cycle of piano works commissioned by the University of Oregon, which was premiered in spring 2025. Notable performances of his other works include a series of performances of *Flight* on the St. Olaf Orchestra’s most recent tour of Norway; a performance of *Scherzo* by the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra at a community outreach concert; a performance of *The Chronicles of Stumpy, The Squirrel Without a Tail* by the St. Olaf Band; *Elegy* for orchestra, premiered by the St. Olaf Philharmonia; and a movement from *String Quartet no. 1* premiered by the Artaria String Quartet. His music has also been featured in Peter Nelson’s award-winning animated film, *Intruder Man*.

Cannestra holds degrees from St. Olaf College (B. M.) and the Chicago College of Performing Arts (M. M.), and is currently a doctoral candidate at the University of Oregon. His previous teachers include Alexandre Dossin, David Riley, Adam Neiman, Christopher Atzinger, Kent McWilliams, Sylvia Wang, and Eun-Joo Kwak. Outside of music, he enjoys hiking, fly fishing, chasing the northern lights, cooking Italian food, and spending time with his wife, fellow pianist Kaitlyn Clawson-Cannestra.