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JULIUS ASAL

LAST WORDS 未尽之言

PIANO RECITAL SINGAPORE 2026

新加坡钢琴独奏会

11 NOVEMBER 2026

WEDNESDAY • 8:00PM

VICTORIA CONCERT HALL

GHOSTS • FAREWELLS • LOVE • ETERNITY

《幽灵 • 离别 • 爱 • 永恒》

SINGAPORE PREMIERE

Lera Auerbach's
Love Letters of Emma
Hauck

PROKOFIEV-

ROMEO & JULIET

Featuring Julius Asal's
piano arrangements

- Auerbach
- Beethoven
- Schumann
- Prokofiev





*"There's something sublime about his
artistry, impossible to express in words
but always deeply moving."*

*Dr. Clemens Trautmann, President,
Deutsche Grammophon*

JULIUS ASAL

Praised for his "uniquely beautiful sound and special sonority," German pianist Julius Asal is quickly establishing himself as one of the promising performers of his generation.

In October 2023, Deutsche Grammophon announced Asal as one of its new exclusive recording artists. The following year, he was selected by BBC Radio 3 as a New Generation Artist for a two-year collaboration and named Rising Star 2024 by Classic FM.

Asal has performed at many of the world's most prestigious venues and festivals, including Wigmore Hall London, Klavier-Festival Ruhr, Seoul Arts Center, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Musikverein Vienna, Suntory Hall Tokyo, and the Oxford, Rheingau, Davos, and Gstaad festivals. In 2025, he received the Terence Judd–Hallé Award and made recital debuts in Tokyo, Osaka, and Frankfurt, while appearing as soloist with ensembles including the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, BBC Concert Orchestra, Munich Symphonic Orchestra, and BBC Symphony Orchestra. Another highlight of 2025 was his last-minute appearance with the Orchestra del Teatro Comunale di Bologna, stepping in for Evgeny Kissin to perform Scriabin's Piano Concerto Op. 20 under Andrey Boreyko.

His discography includes his Deutsche Grammophon debut Scriabin–Scarlatti (2024), which has surpassed 25 million streams worldwide, and Siena Tapes (2025), an imaginative fusion of Maurice Ravel's compositions and Asal's own improvisations, recorded near Siena at the private estate of producer Rick Rubin. His earlier recording, released by IBS Classical in 2022, featured works by Sergei Prokofiev alongside his own transcriptions from Romeo and Juliet and received widespread international acclaim.

Improvisation is a defining element of Asal's artistry, reflecting a spontaneous and highly intuitive relationship with the instrument. This quality has been particularly evident in performances where he has stepped in at short notice, including Deutsche Grammophon's Yellow Lounge in 2023 and his Seoul Arts Center debut in 2024, where he combined classical repertoire with improvisation.

His distinctive approach has drawn international critical attention, with *Le Monde* describing his performances and programming as possessing a "captivating strangeness" under the headline "The Secret and Subtle Alliances of Julius Asal."

ABOUT THE RECITAL

What do composers say when ordinary words are no longer enough?

Last Words brings together four works that inhabit the space between expression and silence — music composed in the shadow of illness, in the grip of longing, at the close of a life's work, or at the final parting of two people who cannot be together. Each piece asks a version of the same question: what is left to express once language itself begins to fade?

Robert Schumann's Ghost Variations and Beethoven's final piano sonata, Op. 111, both emerge from the closing chapters of towering careers—a fragile, private farewell paired with a grand, transcendent vision of departure. Lera Auerbach's Love Letters of Emma Hauck then turns to a very different kind of testament: not the composer's own, but a woman's unanswered, desperate plea, borrowed and transformed into sound. Finally, Prokofiev's Romeo and Juliet closes the evening not with quiet, but with the full, sweeping drama of Shakespeare's ultimate partings, creating a vivid tapestry of tenderness, conflict, and a final goodbye before dawn.

Julius Asal presents *Last Words* as a journey through expressions of memory, transcendence, longing, and farewell — each work offering its own perspective on what lingers when words fall short of what the heart longs to say.

Performed on a magnificent C. Bechstein concert grand, *Last Words* invites us into an evening of contrasting voices: music that speaks in very different ways, yet continues to resonate long after the final note.

PROGRAMME

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–1856)

- Ghost Variations, WoO 24 (1854)** 🍃 11 min
- | | |
|---|---|
| Theme – Leise, innig (Quiet, earnest) | Variation III – Etwas belebter (Somewhat more animated) |
| Variation I | Variation IV |
| Variation II – Canonisch (Like a canon) | Variation V |

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

- Piano Sonata No. 32 in C minor, Op. 111 (1821–1822)** 28 min
- I. Maestoso – Allegro con brio ed appassionato** 🚫
- II. Arietta: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile** 🍃

INTERMISSION

LERA AUERBACH (B. 1973)

- Liebesbriefe von Emma Hauck (2026)** 🍃 20 min
- (Love Letters of Emma Hauck)

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891–1953)

- Romeo and Juliet, Op.64 (1935) — Excerpts arr. for piano** 20 min
- | | |
|---|--|
| I. Romeo at the Fountain (arr. Julius Asal) 🚫 | VI. Dance of the Girls with Lilies (arr. Sergei Prokofiev) 🚫 |
| II. Friar Laurence (arr. Sergei Prokofiev) 🚫 | VII. Romeo with Juliet Before Parting (arr. Sergei Prokofiev) 🚫 |
| III. Madrigal (arr. Julius Asal) 🚫 | VIII. Dance of the Knights (arr. Sergei Prokofiev) 🍃 |
| IV. Tybalt Recognizes Romeo (arr. Julius Asal) 🚫 | |
| V. Mercutio (arr. Sergei Prokofiev) 🚫 | |

Total performance time – 79 mins (excluding 15 mins intermission). Programme subject to change at the artist's discretion.

FOR A COMFORTABLE RECITAL EXPERIENCE 观演须知



Doors open 30 mins prior. Latecomers admitted only at suitable intervals.
准时入场:演出前30分钟开放。迟到者仅限在合适间歇入场。



Please silence all devices. We appreciate your silence during the performance.
保持安静:请将电子设备调至静音,并在演出期间保持安静。



Recommended for ages 9 and above.
建议9岁以上观赏,儿童需由家长陪同。



No photography or video. Please refrain from clapping between movements.
观演礼仪:严禁摄影录像。各乐章之间请勿鼓掌。



15 mins Intermission. No entry once doors close for the second half.
中场休息:15分钟。下半场开演关门后,迟到者将无法入场。

PROGRAMME NOTES



Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

Robert Schumann was born in Zwickau, Germany, and became one of the central figures of German Romanticism. Initially drawn to literature as well as music, he developed a distinctive artistic identity that combined composition, piano writing, criticism, and poetry. His marriage to pianist Clara Wieck in 1840 became an important creative partnership, while his later years were increasingly affected by severe physical and mental illness.

Schumann's music is characterised by its highly personal harmonic language, interconnected motifs, and frequent blurring of the boundaries between musical form and literary expression. His piano works in particular often function as psychological studies, with contrasting ideas appearing as shifting states of mind rather than conventionally developed themes.

1. Ghost Variations, WoO 24 (1854) 🖐️

11 min

The Ghost Variations (*Geistervariationen*) were composed in February 1854, during the final period of Schumann's creative life. The work is based on a simple theme which Schumann believed had been revealed to him by angelic voices. The melody had, in fact, appeared previously in the slow movement of his Violin Concerto, but Schumann apparently did not recognise the connection. He composed five variations on the theme and presented the completed manuscript to his wife Clara shortly before his mental collapse and admission to the asylum at Endenich.

Unlike many of Schumann's earlier piano works, the Ghost Variations are notably restrained. The theme is presented with considerable simplicity, while each variation alters its rhythmic character, harmonic colouring, register, or texture without substantially disrupting its underlying identity. The work therefore derives much of its expressive power from subtle transformation rather than dramatic contrast.

The title Ghost Variations was not given by Schumann himself and reflects later associations with the circumstances surrounding its composition. More significant musically is the work's concentrated treatment of a single melodic idea. Its limited expressive vocabulary—particularly the repeated return of the theme and the gradual reduction of texture—creates an unusually intimate final statement within Schumann's piano output.



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Ludwig van Beethoven stands among the defining figures of Western music. Born in Bonn, he moved to Vienna in 1792, where he established himself as a pianist, improviser, and composer. His works expanded the formal and expressive possibilities of the Classical tradition, particularly in the symphony, string quartet, and piano sonata.

By the final period of his life, Beethoven was almost completely deaf and increasingly isolated from public musical life. Yet his late works demonstrate an extraordinary freedom from conventional expectations, often combining highly concentrated forms with complex contrapuntal writing and radically expanded approaches to rhythm and

harmony. His final three piano sonatas, Opp. 109, 110, and 111, represent the culmination of this development.

2. Piano Sonata No. 32 in C minor, Op. 111 — 1821–1822 🖐️ 28 min

Beethoven's final piano sonata departs from conventional sonata structure immediately: rather than three or four movements, Op. 111 consists of only two. The first, *Maestoso – Allegro con brio ed appassionato*, begins with a slow introduction before moving into an intensely concentrated movement built from sharply defined rhythmic motifs, syncopation, and contrapuntal writing. The recurring contrast between the solemn opening material and the restless *Allegro* creates a sustained sense of tension.

The second movement, an *Arietta* followed by five variations, presents a striking change of character. The theme is simple and almost hymn-like, but Beethoven gradually transforms it through increasingly elaborate rhythmic and textural variations. Particularly notable are the syncopated rhythms and shifting accents of the third variation, which create a sense of rhythmic displacement far removed from the measured character of the opening theme.

As the variations progress, the distinction between melody and accompaniment becomes increasingly fluid. The final variations move into a lighter, more transparent texture before arriving at the extended closing passage of trills and sustained high-register writing. Rather than ending with a conventional climax, the sonata gradually releases its rhythmic momentum.

Op. 111 was Beethoven's final piano sonata, and while Beethoven may not have set out explicitly to write a final farewell to the genre, its unusual two-movement structure, highly developed variation technique, and radical treatment of form give it an undeniable sense of ultimate resolution, placing it among the most significant achievements of his late style.

PROGRAMME NOTES



Lera Auerbach (b. 1973)

Lera Auerbach is a Soviet-born composer, pianist, conductor, poet, and visual artist whose work spans orchestral, chamber, vocal, operatic, and ballet repertoire. Her compositions frequently draw upon literature, historical figures, and visual art, reflecting her broader practice across several artistic disciplines.

Auerbach's musical language combines elements of traditional tonality with modern harmonic and textural approaches. Her works often explore psychological states and the relationship between sound, language, memory, and identity, resulting in music that can be simultaneously highly structured and emotionally immediate.

3. Love Letters of Emma Hauck 🖐️

20 min

Written especially for Julius Asal, *Love Letters of Emma Hauck* was commissioned by BBC Radio 3 and the Henry Barber Trust, in collaboration with the Aldeburgh Festival. The work was first performed by Asal on 27 March 2026 at the Barber Institute in Birmingham.

The composition is inspired by the letters of Emma Hauck, a German woman committed to a psychiatric institution in 1909. During her confinement, Hauck wrote numerous letters to her husband, repeating the words “Herzensschatzi, komm”—“Darling, come”—thousands of times across entire sheets of paper. None of the letters were ever delivered.

For Auerbach, these letters transcend their tragic origins to become relentless attempts to reshape reality through language: repetition becoming invocation, and the written word becoming a means of asserting existence and calling into being a world in which Hauck's husband might return.

The piano work does not attempt to recreate or illustrate the letters. Instead, Auerbach responds to their inner pressure—to what is contained, withheld, and ultimately unattainable. In doing so, the work transforms a deeply personal historical document into a contemporary meditation on longing, expression, and the limits of communication

PROGRAMME NOTES



Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1955)

Sergei Prokofiev was one of the major composers of the 20th century, producing important works across the symphonic, operatic, ballet, chamber, and piano repertoire. His musical style combines strong rhythmic drive, sharply characterised melodies, distinctive harmonic colours, and an exceptional sense of dramatic pacing.

After spending much of his early career abroad, Prokofiev returned permanently to the Soviet Union in 1936. His later works were produced under increasingly restrictive cultural conditions, yet he continued to develop a highly individual musical language, balancing modernist elements with greater accessibility and theatrical clarity.



PROGRAMME NOTES

4. Romeo and Juliet, Op. 64 (1935) — Excerpts

20 min

I. Romeo at the Fountain (arr. Julius Asal) 

II. Friar Laurence (arr. Sergei Prokofiev) 

III. Madrigal (arr. Julius Asal) 

IV. Tybalt Recognizes Romeo (arr. Julius Asal) 

V. Mercutio (arr. Sergei Prokofiev) 

VI. Dance of the Girls with Lilies

(arr. Sergei Prokofiev) 

VII. Romeo with Juliet Before Parting

(arr. Sergei Prokofiev) 

VIII. Dance of the Knights (arr. Sergei Prokofiev) 

Prokofiev composed *Romeo and Juliet* in 1935 for the Kirov Ballet, basing the work on Shakespeare's tragedy. The ballet underwent several revisions before reaching the stage. Most notably, Prokofiev's original scenario ended with Romeo arriving in time to save Juliet, allowing the lovers to survive. The idea was eventually abandoned, and Shakespeare's tragic conclusion was restored. The complete ballet was first staged in 1940.

The score contains some of Prokofiev's most vividly characterised music. Rather than relying solely on thematic development, he often establishes characters and dramatic situations through distinctive rhythmic patterns, harmonic colours, registers, and textures. The heavy, asymmetric rhythms of the *Dance of the Knights*, for example, immediately establish its imposing physical presence, while the *Madrigal* uses a more lyrical language to suggest the intimacy of Romeo and Juliet.

Prokofiev subsequently arranged sections of the ballet for both orchestra and solo piano. These transcriptions demonstrate the strength of the original musical material, which retains its dramatic identity even without choreography or orchestral colour.

Tonight's selection combines Prokofiev's own piano transcriptions with new arrangements by Julius Asal. Moving between Friar Laurence's solemnity, the lyrical *Madrigal*, Tybalt's dramatic confrontation, the *Dance of the Knights*, and the lovers' final farewell, the excerpts present the narrative in concentrated form.

As the final work of *Last Words*, *Romeo and Juliet* shifts the programme from the inward world of personal expression to the broader dramatic language of theatre. Its final scenes bring together many of the themes explored throughout the evening—love, separation, conflict, and the impossibility of reversing what has already been said and done.

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MAY
29



RON MAXIM

8pm • Victoria Concert Hall

JUL
24



JAN SCHULMEISTER

8pm • Victoria Concert Hall

AUG
29



ROMAN BORISOV

8pm • Victoria Concert Hall

NOV
11



JULIUS ASAL

8pm • Victoria Concert Hall

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Takeshi Oi
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Karel Kosarek
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