

Biography

Hailed by *The New York Times* as “the hottest artist on the classical music planet”, Lang Lang has long fascinated classical audiences and critics alike with performances charged with breathtaking virtuosity, tonal refinement and dramatic intensity. Yet the pianist’s irresistible artistry, propelled by his passionate belief in music’s transforming power and served by his innate skills as a communicator, has reached far beyond the concert hall. *Time* magazine has ranked him among the world’s 100 most influential people.

Lang’s pianism evokes an earlier age of virtuoso performance through its emphasis on individuality and imagination. He invites listeners to become fully immersed in a world of potent emotions and lyrical shadings. “Music requires transformation: you share your thoughts with others, using your fingers, your brain,” observed Lang Lang in an interview with *Die Zeit*. “The piano alone does nothing; it’s a robot without a soul. There are performances in which the pianist plays everything correctly, yet they leave one cold. And then there are performances that tell you a story. The music comes in waves – it is warm and cold; it has depth and different levels.”

Millions have been inspired by Lang Lang’s example to learn a musical instrument and discover new worlds of self-expression and understanding. The phenomenon, known as the “Lang Lang Effect”, has been exported worldwide with help from the Lang Lang International Music Foundation, the charitable organisation which he founded in 2008. For many years he has worked tirelessly to promote education, notably as a Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and, since 2013, as a UN Messenger of Peace.

Lang Lang achieved household-name status following his appearance at the 2008 Olympic Opening Ceremony in Beijing. The following year he performed at the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony for US President Barack Obama and, in 2012, took part in the Diamond Jubilee Concert for Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace. In 2015 he helped build bridges between different musical cultures when he gave an electrifying open-air concert in Havana with legendary Cuban pianist Chucho Valdés as part of the city’s 500th-anniversary celebrations. The following year he performed at the Vatican for Pope Francis and guests at the inaugural Global Conference of Faith and Sport. In November 2021 he made history by giving his first ever concert on TikTok, a 30-minute performance aimed both at delighting his fans and encouraging new followers to discover more about the world of classical music. In May 2023 he appeared at the Coronation Concert at Windsor Castle, the day after the coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla. He was joined by Nicole Scherzinger for a performance of “Reflection” from the Disney film *Mulan*.

Recording has always played a central role in broadening Lang Lang's global audience. In 2017/18, the artist began reflecting on what had first drawn him to the piano. He decided to record a selection of his favourite pieces with the aim of inspiring and motivating piano students of all ages. *Piano Book* was released in March 2019 and became the best-selling classical album of 2019 across the globe.

In 2020, Lang Lang fulfilled a long-held dream by recording Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, a work he first began exploring over two decades ago. Released in September that year, the album offers two contrasting recordings of the work, one captured live at the Thomaskirche in Leipzig in early March 2020, the other set down in studio conditions a few weeks later. An extended version of the album was released in February 2021, offering seven bonus tracks related to his research for the *Goldberg Variations* project.

His next project saw him reimagine some of the most unforgettable songs from iconic Disney films. *The Disney Book* includes brand-new arrangements, for both solo piano and piano and orchestra, of beloved hit songs from *Snow White*, *Encanto*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Frozen*, *Cinderella*, *Pinocchio* and many more. Released in September 2022, it also features guest performances from such global stars as Andrea Bocelli, Sebastián Yatra & Jon Batiste. An extended edition followed in September 2023.

Lang Lang has turned to the French repertoire for his latest album. Together with the Gewandhausorchester and Andris Nelsons he has recorded Saint-Saëns's Piano Concerto No. 2 and *Carnival of the Animals*, joined in the latter by his wife and fellow pianist Gina Alice. The album also includes a selection of classic works by Debussy, Delibes, Fauré and Ravel, and music by five less familiar female French composers: Mel Bonis, Lili Boulanger, Louise Farrenc, Charlotte Sohy and Germaine Tailleferre. *Lang Lang – Saint-Saëns* will be released in March 2024.

His wide-ranging discography also includes critically acclaimed accounts of the first piano concertos of Mendelssohn and Tchaikovsky recorded with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Daniel Barenboim; Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto and *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* with the Mariinsky Orchestra and Valery Gergiev; Beethoven's First and Fourth Piano Concertos with the Orchestre de Paris and Christoph Eschenbach; Chopin's two piano concertos with the Wiener Philharmoniker and Zubin Mehta; Prokofiev's Piano Concerto No.3 and Bartók's Piano Concerto No.2 with the Berliner Philharmoniker and Sir Simon Rattle; and Tchaikovsky's Piano Trio and Rachmaninov's first *Trio élégiaque* with Vadim Repin and Mischa Maisky.

Further highlights of his recording career include the solo recital album *Live at Carnegie Hall; Memory* and *Dragon Songs*, albums devoted respectively to western classical and Chinese compositions known to the pianist since childhood; *The*

Chopin Album, featuring the Études op.25, among other works; *Liszt – My Piano Hero*, featuring solo pieces and the First Piano Concerto with the Wiener Philharmoniker and Gergiev; and *The Mozart Album*, which includes the Piano Concertos Nos.17 and 24 with the Wiener Philharmoniker and Nikolaus Harnoncourt. The pianist has also recorded original soundtrack scores by Tan Dun and Alexandre Desplat.

Lang Lang was born in the city of Shenyang on 14 June 1982. His father encouraged the boy's instinctive musicality and organised his first piano lessons soon after his third birthday. Two years later Lang Lang won the Shenyang Piano Competition and gave his first public performance.

He enrolled at Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music in 1991 to study with Professor Zhao Ping-Guo, whose demanding musical challenges are vividly recalled in Lang's autobiography *Journey of a Thousand Miles*. The young musician's hard work was rewarded in 1993 when he took first prize in the Xinghai National Piano Competition in Beijing. Two years later he won the International Tchaikovsky Competition for Young Musicians in Japan and, in 1997, moved with his father to Philadelphia to study at the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music with Gary Graffman, a former child prodigy and one of the world's finest piano teachers.

Lang Lang's international career breakthrough came in dramatic fashion in 1999 when he joined the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for its "Gala of the Century" concert as last-minute replacement soloist in Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto. Grapevine reports of his sensational performance led to a succession of invitations to appear with leading orchestras and at the world's most prestigious venues. He made his debut at Carnegie Hall, the BBC Proms and Wigmore Hall in 2001, and went on to forge lasting partnerships with conductors such as Daniel Barenboim, Gustavo Dudamel and Sir Simon Rattle.

Lang Lang has ranged beyond classical music's traditional borders to collaborate with, among others, fellow pianist Herbie Hancock, Pharrell Williams, Metallica, dubstep dancer Marquese "Nonstop" Scott, dancer, actor and activist Lil Buck. At the One World: Together at Home concert in April 2020, meanwhile, he teamed up with Andrea Bocelli, Celine Dion, Lady Gaga and John Legend for the grand finale performance of *The Prayer*.

Both Lang Lang's artistry and his inspirational work in music education and promotion have been recognised with numerous awards and honours. As well as having been presented with the 2010 Crystal Award in Davos and named as one of the 250 Young Global Leaders by the World Economic Forum, he has also received several honorary doctorates, notably from the Royal College of Music, the Manhattan School of Music and New York University. He has been awarded the highest prize given by the Ministry of Culture of the People's Republic of

China, and the highest civilian honours in Germany (Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany) and France (Medal of the Order of Arts and Letters). Grammy-nominated, he is also the recipient of a Classic Brit award and several Echo Klassik prizes, while in February 2019 he was presented with an honorary Victoire de la Musique Classique, becoming the first Chinese musician ever to be given one of these prestigious awards.

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