

Pianist Yerko Difonis to Spotlight Sergei Lyapunov's Transcendental Études in Rutgers DMA Capstone

The Chilean pianist will explore Lyapunov's rarely performed 12 Transcendental Études, Op. 11 in a lecture recital at Mason Gross School of the Arts

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ, UNITED STATES, October 5, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Concert pianist and Doctor of Musical Arts candidate Yerko A. Difonis is preparing a lecture recital devoted to [Sergei Lyapunov's](#) 12 Études d'exécution transcendante, Op. 11 as a capstone project toward completion of his DMA in Piano Performance at [Mason Gross School of the Arts](#) at Rutgers University. Planned for Spring 2027 in New Brunswick, New Jersey, the public presentation will combine performance and musical exploration of a demanding body of Russian Romantic piano repertoire that Difonis believes deserves wider attention among performers and audiences.



Yerko Difonis, Pianist

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Written by Russian composer Sergei Lyapunov (1859–1924), the twelve études were conceived in relation to Franz Liszt's celebrated Transcendental Études. Difonis sees Lyapunov's cycle as an important continuation of that tradition and an opportunity to bring greater attention to repertoire that remains comparatively unexplored in Western concert life.

The project represents both an academic culmination and

the result of a musical interest that Difonis has pursued for approximately a decade.

Difonis first encountered Lyapunov's music while searching for Romantic repertoire outside the standard canon. His attention was captured by the fifth étude, *Nuit d'Été* (Summer Night), whose expressivity and emotional depth led him to explore more of the composer's work. He subsequently learned the fifth and tenth études, performed a Lyapunov nocturne and studied and performed the composer's Second Piano Concerto.

When Difonis auditioned for the DMA program at Rutgers in 2022, Lyapunov was already among the composers he was considering for his eventual lecture recital. His initial idea centered on Lyapunov's Piano Sonata in F minor, but his research ultimately shifted toward the complete cycle of Transcendental Études.

For Difonis, his development as an artist is also closely connected to his Christian faith. He describes music not simply as a profession, but as a vocation and a calling that has shaped his artistic path since childhood.

"Completing my DMA degree is one more step toward fulfilling my God-given calling as a performing artist," Difonis said. "I consider this a great opportunity to explore and share Lyapunov's music, which is not as well known as it should be. I hope to contribute to the performance of the great Romantic repertoire."

Difonis is preparing the project with Dr. George Stauffer, his lecture recital advisor, and Dr.



Yerko Difonis at the BMF International Music Festival in Paris



Sergei Lyapunov, Russian Pianist and Composer at the Center of Yerko Difonis's Work

Karina Bruk, his primary piano instructor and collaborator in the preparation of the program. The lecture recital will be open to the public, with the specific Spring 2027 date and performance hall to be announced.

The project also marks one of the final stages of a musical and academic path that has taken Difonis from Chile to the United States and to international performances.

Born in Valparaíso, Chile, Difonis began formal music and piano studies at age 11 at the Filomen M. D'Agostino Greenberg Music School in New York. He later studied piano at Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts before returning to Chile, where he completed conservatory studies at the Sergei Prokofiev Music Conservatory with pianist Mario Cervantes. He also earned a bachelor's degree in education with a concentration in English pedagogy.

Difonis returned to the United States to pursue graduate studies at Mason Gross School of the Arts, beginning his studies at Rutgers in 2020 under Bruk. He is now in the final stages of the Doctor of Musical Arts program in Piano Performance.

His recent performance activity includes appearances with the Bella Music Foundation Symphony Orchestra in 2024 and the Bella Music Foundation International Symphony Orchestra in Paris in September 2025 as part of the BMF International Festival for the Blind. He also performed with the Rutgers Sinfonia in November 2024 and appeared as a soloist in community outreach performances while in Paris. Difonis received second place in the 2024 Bella Music Foundation International Concerto Competition for the Blind and an honorable mention in the 2024 Rutgers Concerto Competition.

Difonis, who has navigated significant visual and hearing impairments since childhood, views his approaching doctorate not as an endpoint but as a foundation for the next stage of his professional life. Following completion of the DMA, he hopes to continue his piano studies, pursue opportunities as a performer, educator or arts administrator, and further develop his career in the United States.

As he approaches that next stage, Difonis is also seeking patronage and sponsorship to support his continued university studies and artistic development. He hopes the lecture recital will reach not only pianists and classical music audiences interested in discovering Lyapunov's repertoire, but also concert presenters, arts professionals and organizations interested in supporting emerging artists.

For Difonis, however, the immediate focus remains on the music itself: bringing a substantial but less frequently encountered Romantic piano cycle before a new audience while completing a defining academic milestone.

The lecture recital is planned for Spring 2027 at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers

University, in New Brunswick, New Jersey. The final date, venue and attendance information will be announced once confirmed.

About Yerko A. Difonis

Yerko A. Difonis is a Chilean concert pianist and Doctor of Musical Arts candidate in Piano Performance at Mason Gross School of the Arts at Rutgers University. His performance experience spans solo, ensemble and orchestral appearances in the United States, Chile and Europe. His current artistic and academic work includes an exploration of Sergei Lyapunov's 12 Études d'exécution transcendante, Op. 11 as part of the culmination of his doctoral studies.

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