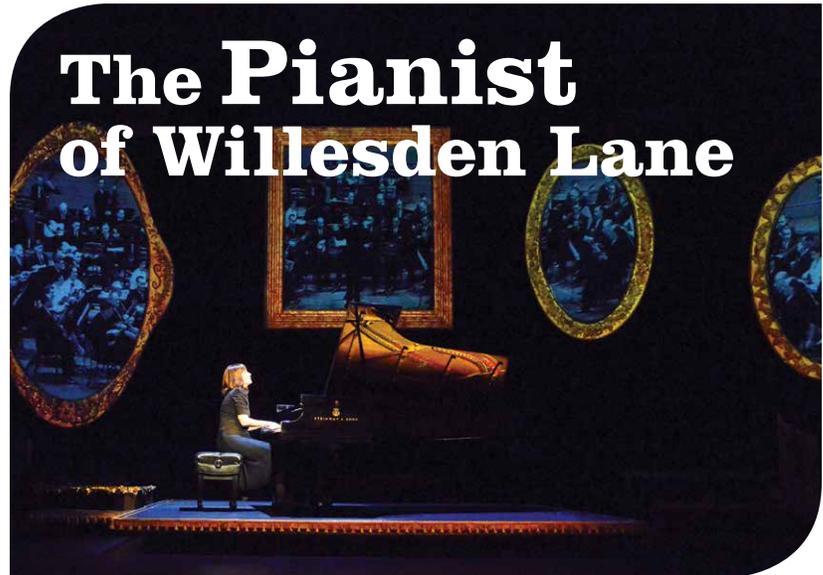


# Window on the Work



## The Pianist of Willesden Lane

McCallum Theatre Institute's  
Aesthetic Education Program  
2016 | 2017



## Performed by Mona Golabek

What is a **Window on the Work** — and why have one? Well, like windows in general, it provides a look in (or out!) at something. That something, in this case, is a work of art. The work of art in question will be studied in the classroom and then viewed — live. Classroom teachers, students, and teaching artists will be engaged, together, in determining what that study will ultimately look like. A document like the **Window on the Work** you hold in your hand at this moment will help you play your part in that process. It gives you not just one view but many views into the work of art. It supplies you with answers to the questions you raise. It inspires new questions, suggests new avenues of inquiry. It rounds out the picture. It sparks new ideas. See if the ideas below make sense to you.

W  
O  
W

**In the planning phase,** Windows on the Work can help establish the most effective line of inquiry and richest unit of study

- answer questions about the work of art as they come up
- help you approach the work of art from various vantage points
- spark curricular connections

**During the unit of study,** Windows on the Work can

- help you expand the study in particular contextual areas
- become a reference for student use

**After the unit of study,** Windows on the Work can

- help keep the work of art alive in the classroom
- suggest pathways for further study
- help tie together strands of learning later in the year

# The Pianist of Willesden Lane

TEXTS BY  
MARK ALMY,  
EXCEPT WHERE  
OTHERWISE CREDITED

Performed by Mona Golabek

---

## Table of Contents

### The Work

- The play: *The Pianist of Willesden Lane*
- The music repertoire

### The Artists

- Creator and performer Mona Golabek
- Pianist Lisa Jura
- Director Hershey Felder
- Mona Golabek interview

### Craft

- The piano
- The rise of the public concert pianist
- One-person plays

### Roots

- Holocaust
- Kindertransport
- Classical music eras

### Responses

- What teachers are saying

### Sample Lessons

- Companion projects for the classroom

### Resources

- Read it here!
- Hear it too!
- On the Web

### Glossary

- Useful terms in studying this work of art

# The Work

---



## The play

Sporting a red wig, the woman takes her place at the piano and begins to tell her story – or rather, her mother’s story. Her fingers, ever nimble, flutter one second and strike the next, extracting from her instrument the whole range of sounds the telling of such a story demands. For this is the story of a youngster torn from her family in Vienna and sped by train – the Kindertransport (Children’s Transport)– to the safer shores of Britain in 1938. Her name? Lisa Jura. She couldn’t have known as she made her way to safety that her parents would die in a Nazi concentration camp. But she surely experienced the pain of separation, not least separation from her two siblings. Of the couple’s three children, it was she who received the single ticket the family had at its disposal, perhaps because as a prodigy of the piano she seemed poised for a future which must not be cut short.

Now, daughter Mona, her student and survivor, shares the story of that prodigy – the carrying forward, generation by generation, of the sacred flame of artistry – with us.

Adapting her own book of the same title, she interweaves speaking in the voice of her mother with playing the pieces which her mother taught her on the piano. She begins fittingly at the beginning – in Vienna as the fates of Jewish families gradually worsen, moves through the Kindertransport, and on through the Blitzkrieg in London.

Her fingertips alternately caress and storm the keyboard. The sounds of Beethoven, Debussy and Chopin express one moment all the horrors of the time and the next the delicacy of daily joys. As Ms. Golabek tells us, however, it is Edvard Grieg’s piano concerto which plays the central role. It had held a special place in the affections of Lisa. She meant to make her professional debut with this work. How many times over the subsequent years had she tried to convey to her daughter the ways in which the Norwegian composer’s melodic passages expressed all the different facets of her life experience? Daughter Mona demonstrates. The first movement of Grieg’s masterpiece – all fire, bombast, and passion – connects to those now distant, turbulent days in Vienna...the uncertainty, the confusion, the growing dread, the mounting violence. She turns next to the second movement. Here too is drama and peril. This, mother has assured daughter, tells in musical terms what those foreboding days and terror-filled nights in London were, for her. In this movement, too, are passages of tenderness and calm. In these, the pianist finds reference to her mother – “saucy, vivacious, but with a profound piece of her heart missing.” She moves then to the concerto’s conclusion, its third movement. Here, if there

is passion, there is also resolution. Ms. Golabek's playing is by turns probing and brilliant. She launches into the cadenza. (A cadenza is a solo flourish – often extended and demanding special virtuosity – which comes very near the end of a piece.) Her voice soars over the swirling scales as she informs us “My mother told me that when the bombs started in England, she'd go down to the basement of the hostel and pound out the cadenza of the Grieg, determined to drown out the bombs.”

She pauses, as if struck fresh by the familiar, beloved strains. “Stunning music, isn't it?”

Similarly she finds the power of Rachmaninoff chords illustrative of D-day. In the intricate, repetitive patterns of a Bach partita she uncovers a correlative to her mother's sewing machine as it spit out uniform after uniform in an army factory.

Rounding off this moving presentation are archival photos and newsreel footage. These get projected onto screens within glowing frames which hover over the stage, as if they were so many portraits of cruelty, resistance and triumph in an otherwise darkened gallery.

Ms. Golabek isn't an actor and doesn't aspire to be one. Instead, her style is simple and sincere. She tells her mother's story with integrity – and gets us rivetingly to imagine Lisa Jura's life in London. Mona adopts the voices of various men, women and refugee children her mother encountered. She causes us to feel the anxiety of trying to make – and losing – contact with family members back in Austria. Above all she provokes in us some sense of the passion she and her mother both developed for the piano, the triumph of career highs, and the satisfaction of expressing all there is to be expressed through those flurries of notes.

The play, *The Pianist of Willesden Lane*, opened in Los Angeles at the Geffen Playhouse in 2012, and has been performed subsequently in Chicago, Boston, Berkeley and New York. The book, on which the play is based, came about when in 1983 Mona Golabek, performing Grieg's piano concerto, found herself thinking, “This was the piece of music that told the story of [my mother's] life.” So she set about interviewing her mother's friends, and with the information and insights she gathered, and with the help of co-author Lee Cohen, began to reconstruct her mother's life.



## The music repertoire

Mona Golabek performs selected passages from the following works. These are woven into the fabric of the play. In her view, the music tells the story along with her words. See if you agree.

### **Edvard Grieg: *Piano Concerto in A minor***

The history of Norway is intimately linked with both Sweden and Denmark. For many years, Denmark dominated its larger neighbor, Copenhagen serving as its cultural center. At age 15 Grieg entered the music conservatory at Leipzig, Germany. Four years later, he was an accomplished musician. Early pieces gained him favorable attention. But as he went along he was increasingly dissatisfied with the heavily Germanic influence present in his work. Led by the example of colleagues, he began moving toward a more specifically Norwegian style of composition, based in large part on native folk tunes. In this he was emulating the Russians who strove to develop a distinctly Russian music, and Dvorak whose musical themes were often adapted from Czech folk tunes.

In 1868, he finished what is perhaps his most revered piece, the *Piano Concerto in A-minor Opus. 16*. He was just 24 years old. It has three movements – or sections. It shares in common with Robert Schumann's piano concerto a similarity of feel. They are both in the key of A-minor. And neither composer ever wrote a second. We know that Grieg heard the Schumann played by Schumann's wife Clara in Leipzig in 1858. We also know the Grieg revised his concerto no fewer than seven times. He was a tireless worker and could be quite critical of his compositions. The A-minor concerto was, by the way, the very first concerto to be recorded in the early days of sound recording. Owing to the crude technology of the time, however, the full length work was cut down to a mere six minutes.

### **Claude Debussy: *Clair de lune***

This well-loved work constitutes one of four movements of Debussy's *Suite Bergamasque*, which is among his most acclaimed piano suites. Originally written in 1890, it was heavily revised by the composer for its eventual publication in 1905. It's thought that Debussy's ideas of piano composition had so developed within that 15 year span, that he found his original work unacceptable. At the time of its alteration, movement number three changed title from *Promenade Sentimentale* to the name by which it is so well known today. The work was inspired by a Paul Verlaine poem by the same name. Composed in D-flat major, *Clair de lune* can be translated as "moonlight." Musically, this piece – and Debussy's output in general – is called impressionistic. As such, it enjoys a connection to impressionism in the visual arts.

### **Johann Sebastian Bach: *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring***

Predating the invention of the piano by a good number of years, this piece was originally composed as the last movement of a cantata – written between 1716 and 1723 – called (in English translation) *Heart and Mouth and Deed and Life* and scored for voice and instruments. The redoubtable Myra Hess – who figures prominently into *The Pianist of Willesden Lane* – created a piano transcription in 1926, and this is what Mona Golabek (portraying Lisa Jura) plays for us. British organist Peter Hurford wrote an organ transcription, and this gets played often in church services, weddings and other ecclesiastical events.

### **Ludwig van Beethoven: *Piano Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Opus 27, No. 2*, (popularly known as the *Moonlight Sonata*)**

We're back to moonlight with this one. And right away we must mention that Beethoven never | referred to moonlight in his publication of this sonata. After his death, music critic Louis Rellstab remarked that the first movement sounded to him like moonlight shimmering on Lake Lucerne – and the name stuck. Beethoven grew impatient with the extreme popularity of this work, saying, "Surely I've written better things." Completed in 1801, it was dedicated to Beethoven's pupil, a countess. Although the opening of its three movements is the most famous, the composer actually upended the usual structure of the classical sonata by positioning the weightiest movement last (instead of first) and the slow movement (usually in the second position) right at the beginning.

### **Sergei Rachmaninoff: *Prelude in C-sharp minor, Opus 3, No. 2***

One of the Russian composer's most recognized works, this was written when he was 19 and just out of the Moscow Conservatory. At that time, composers in Russia were not paid royalties when their music was published. Rachmaninoff got all of 40 rubles as a publishing fee. Later he included it in an edition of 24 preludes, each in a different key, following in the footsteps of J. S. Bach. His cousin, Alexander Siloti, played the work in the west – and it caught on like wildfire.

**Strachey & Maschwitz: *These Foolish Things (Remind Me of You)***

Featured in the 1949 Humphrey Bogart film *Tokyo Joe*, this song has been recorded by a who's who of American artists – from Billie Holiday to Frank Sinatra to James Brown – and it has become a standard with jazz instrumentalists, as well. Strange that such a popular song started out so neglected. Composer Jack Strachey and lyricist Eric Maschwitz set it aside when Maschwitz's agent, finding it uninspired, refused to publish it. The song collected dust on top of a piano until one day musician Leslie Hutchinson discovered it there and recorded it. *These Foolish Things* became a huge hit for him. Lucky for Maschwitz, his agent had relinquished all claims to the song – and the torrent of revenue it realized over the years went exclusively to the creator.

**George Gershwin: *Strike Up the Band***

Written in 1927, this engaging up-tempo march is perhaps the most enduring item to emerge from the show which bears the same title but which was not much of a success on Broadway. A few years later, the Hollywood film studio MGM bought the rights to the show – and completely re-crafted it as a vehicle for their breakout hit duo, Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland.

# The Artists

---

**Mona Golabek**

A native of Los Angeles, Mona Golabek was taught piano primarily by her mother, concert pianist Lisa Jura. This takes on the feeling of a family tradition when we realize that Lisa Jura was taught piano by her mother in Austria. In speaking of her musical training, Mona Golabek says, "I studied with several outstanding pianists such as Leon Fleisher, Reginald Stewart and Joanna Graudan. But my mother was my true teacher and inspiration."

That exemplary training led to early successes as winner of the Young Concert Artists International Auditions in 1976, a New York City recital debut at Hunter College and an Avery Fisher Career Grant.

Her concert appearances have included performances with major orchestras and conductors around the world. The Hollywood Bowl, Kennedy Center for the Arts in Washington D.C. and Royal Festival Hall in London are just three of the starry locations at which she has given solo recitals. The subject of a PBS documentary, *More Than the Music*, she can also count a Grammy nomination to her credit.

In 1992, she and her sister Renee, a pianist as well, put together a recording of *The Carnival of the Animals* by French composer Camille Saint-Saens, featuring some of poet Ogden Nash's animal verses. Actors such as Audrey Hepburn, James Earl Jones, William Shatner and Betty White spoke the texts. Proceeds went to charities that promote animal welfare. The two sisters have also made a recording of Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite* with actress Meryl Streep as narrator.

Ms. Golabek hosts her own classical music radio program *The Romantic Hours*, a mashup of love letters, romantic poetry and classical music.

A rolling stone that gathers no moss, Ms. Golabek has also established the Hold On To Your Music Foundation. Through it, she looks to expand awareness of the ethical implications of world events such as the Holocaust, and the power of music and the arts to embolden the human spirit in the face of adversity.

## Lisa Jura

Lisa Jura, as you will have gathered, was a Viennese child prodigy who, as a result of the Kindertransport, ended up in England and later in Los Angeles, where she raised a family. The Kindertransport was a rescue movement that transplanted children threatened by the Nazis to England in the years from 1938 to 1940. Her teenage years were passed in relative quiet at the Willesden Lane Orphanage in London. Work included a stint as a maid, and then in a factory making army uniforms. At night, she played the orphanage piano, giving pleasure and inspiration to the 30-some children living there.

An audition with the Royal Academy of Music in London earned her a scholarship to study with Mabel Floyd. In time, she found herself playing piano for soldiers at the Howard Hotel. When the war ended, she moved to Paris, where she performed the Grieg piano concerto and met her husband, French Resistance fighter Michel Golabek.

Immigrating to the United States with her new husband, she took up teaching piano. Her prize pupils were her daughters. Daughter Mona says her fellow students were in awe of her mother's "compassion, unique inner fire and uncanny intuition." Having only recently passed away, Lisa Golabek gave benefit concerts throughout her life, raising money for Israel, cancer research and hospices that care for people with AIDS.

## Hershey Felder

Director Hershey Felder adapted Ms. Golabek's book for the theater, and subsequently helped to shape the presentation and intensify its effectiveness. Felder is himself a performer with solo shows about composers under his belt. His *George Gershwin Alone* debuted at Berkeley Repertory Theater not so long ago. A Canadian born in 1968, he is in addition to playwright and director, a pianist, actor, composer, and producer. Over the course of his career, he has given 4,000 performances.

The arc he has created for *The Pianist of Willesden Lane* takes its cue from the concerto form – a series of three contrasting yet thematically complimentary movements. He has also, in assessing the gifts and training that Ms. Golabek brings to the project, wisely gone for authenticity. "Trying to make her into an actress would be a mistake," said Mr. Felder. "The intention was to make her honest. Something like this works because it's a true story, and it's her true story."

---

## Mona Golabek Interview - Bringing *The Pianist of Willesden Lane* to Chicago

By Barbara Keer – *Splash Magazines*

### **BK: In what way did living in Los Angeles influence your career?**

MG: Los Angeles gave me my start in that I grew up there as a child prodigy at the piano and rose through the ranks of competitions and orchestral appearances in the formative years. Of course, it is such a center for a broad spectrum of arts and one can't help being influenced on many levels. However, I must confess that my heart really belongs to Old World Europe, and even other time periods.

### **BK: The [organization] you and your family started, "Hold on to Your Music" sounds very interesting. What does it do? How does it work?**

MG: Our mission is to spread the story of my mother, Lisa Jura, and its inspiring message of the power of the arts to embolden the human spirit during challenging times. To date, nearly 200,000 students across America have read the book, *The Children of Willesden Lane*, and we work with civic leaders and teachers to gift the books and provide a live performance. Our website, [www.HoldonToYourMusic.org](http://www.HoldonToYourMusic.org), provides educational resources that can be downloaded for free and accessed by students and educators.

**BK: What inspired you to write the book, *The Children of Willesden Lane*?**

MG: My mother, Lisa Jura. She was the most breathtaking mother. I knew in my heart, that if I could write her story and get it published, I would have the privilege of inspiring so many people. That has been my greatest joy – to see how this story has entered the hearts of people from all walks of life!

**BK: How did you meet Hershey Felder?**

MG: I first knew of Hershey Felder from his highly successful artistic reputation. Then, Steve Robinson, V.P. of WFMT Radio here in Chicago, brought me to see *Beethoven as I Knew Him* and I was stunned. I decided to seek Mr. Felder's advice about my dream to bring my mother's story to the stage. He graciously invited me to meet with him at the Geffen Playhouse and share the story. He took me under his wing and guided me to fulfill my dream.

**BK: You are the creator and voice of *The Romantic Hours*, a syndicated radio program that combines classical music with readings of poetry, letters and stories. How has this experience prepared you for your performance in *The Pianist of Willesden Lane*, which also seems to have similar elements?**

MG: Well, both projects have one thing in common – music and storytelling. My mother always said "Each piece of music tells a story" and both the radio broadcasts and the theatrical show have this thread.



# Craft

---



## The piano

Even in prehistoric times, people produced sounds using strings. Artifacts like gourds and bows sported taut strings which could be plucked and bowed. It was probably inevitable, then, that someone would attach a keyboard to a set of strings. The dulcimer, which made its first appearance in the 1300s, was the earliest such device, involving a box, wire strings and a couple of hammers. Next came the clavichord and the virginal followed by the harpsichord. The only problem was that musicians who could elicit varying degrees of volume from other instruments were dissatisfied with the

single, unvarying dynamic level possible on the otherwise popular harpsichord. It was left to a Paduan, Bartolomeo di Francesco Cristofori (1655-1731), to invent the first pianoforte, later shortened to piano. Piano means soft; forte means loud. You can see the earliest version of his instrument still in existence today in New York at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Pianos have 88 keys. 52 white ones and 36 black ones. This princely instrument is so versatile, it shows up practically everywhere. Some of the loftiest works in the classical canon were written for the piano – sonatas by Mozart and Beethoven, for example. But it is of equal value in the genre of jazz. Its strings sound when we press down the keys. Its action is percussive. Pedals help sustain – or otherwise affect the sound.

---

## One-person plays

*The Pianist of Willesden Lane* is by no means an anomaly in its reliance on one actor to perform the entire show. At the McCallum, for example, audiences have enjoyed one-person shows like audience favorite Gale LaJoye's *Snowflake* or last season's *I Am Jack*. To the examples already cited, we could easily add many more including Tovah Feldshuh as Golda Meir in *Golda's Balcony*, as well as the brilliant Anna Deavere Smith in her documentary theater pieces *Twilight: Los Angeles* and *Fires in the Mirror*. Trekie Patrick Stewart played 43 roles in his one man version of Charles Dickens' holiday favorite *A Christmas Carol*. Avante garde Irish playwright Samuel Beckett fashioned his *Krapp's Last Tape* for a solo male performer, and more recently British actress Pauline Collins made a tasty meal starring in the one-woman play *Shirley Valentine*. Fringe Festivals often host groundbreaking works in which a solo performer holds the stage.

Some one-person plays call upon the performer to address the audience directly. This is called "breaking the fourth wall." Such a format may allow the person on stage to form a strong connection with those sitting in the audience, while giving the listeners the sense that they are privy to special information or are even entering into a relationship with the personage depicted. Other plays by contrast (Beckett's play is an example) don't allow for direct addressing of the audience. In these, the actor stays firmly within his or her role(s), and the fourth wall remains unbreached.

Where has this style of theater emerged from? Well, it's possible to see antecedents in storytellers, orators, and poets of ancient times, through whom oral histories and other texts were transmitted. Monologists in the era of Sophocles and company are surely some of the earliest examples before us. The minstrels of Merrie Olde England provide further instances. And we must add to these the troubadours from neighboring France. In the 19th century, literary figures such as Edgar Allen Poe and Charles Dickens traveled the American lecture circuit reading from their works. The latter, in particular, was given not to mere reading alone but frequently and most dramatically embodied the characters he had created. And Mark Twain, whose words would later provide fodder for Hal Holbrook's lively reenactments, developed his own presentational style to the extent that it became a matter of performance versus simple lecture. One can see how presentations of this sort gradually developed into monodramas, that is, entire plays performed by a single player, and in the process changed venue from lecture hall to theater.

When searching for reasons why actors might choose to take on such an assignment, consider this quotation from Enid Nemy from "Four for the Season, Alone in the Spotlight" (*New York Times* 10/5/84): "In the world of the theatre, the one-man show is perhaps the closest thing to having it all, a supreme test of assurance and ability, of magnetism and charisma. The format is both seductive and frightening; there's no one to play against, to lean on, to share the criticism. But, for an actor, the prize at the end of a successful solo performance is not only applause but also acclaim – unshared."

---

## The rise of the public concert pianist

Pianists were not always the center stage celebrities that they have become in the past 200 years. It was composer Franz Liszt who changed the game. His keyboard technique was flashy and virtuosic to a degree not seen before. A young man of striking good looks and with charisma to burn, he elevated the piano concert to a hybrid of pilgrimage and theater. Women went into frenzies at his concerts, exhibiting behavior not out of place at a modern rock concert. And while pianists prior to Liszt shied away from playing from memory (it was thought to imply egotism, as if the player were pretending the music was his own – in those cases when it wasn't), the brilliant Hungarian routinely cast the sheet music aside and dove in.

“Liszt deliberately placed the piano in profile to the audience so they could see his face. He'd whip his head around while he played, his long hair flying, beads of sweat shooting into the crowd. He was the first performer to stride out from the wings of the concert hall to take his seat at the piano. Everything we recognize about the modern piano recital – think Keith Jarrett, Glenn Gould, Tori Amos or Elton John – Liszt did first. Even the name “recital” was his invention.”

— NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO



# Roots

---



## **Kindertransport**

Between the years 1938 and 1940, thousands of refugee children from Jewish families were allowed to leave Nazi Germany and take up temporary residence in Great Britain through the Kindertransport. The plan was to return these children to their families when the war was over. In hindsight, we know of course what happened to those families. However, the saving of these youngsters stands as one of the high points in humanitarian effort then or since. It was the very savagery of the pogrom staged by the Nazis, known as Kristallnacht that caused British immigration to ease restrictions, opening the way for the Kindertransport. Children under the age of 17 were allowed temporary travel visas and transportation out of Germany (and Austria and Czechoslovakia) and into Great Britain, so long as someone – private citizens or organizations – could guarantee each child’s care, education and eventual return home. Parents could not accompany the children. The occasional infant was tended to by transport children. High on the priority list were children whose parents were in concentration camps, as well as orphans. Approximately half of these children were placed with foster families. Others were settled in hostels, farms and schools. After the war, many of these refugees applied for and received British citizenship. Many immigrated to Israel, the U.S., Canada and Australia. The overwhelming majority, of course, never saw their families again.

---

## **The Holocaust**

Also called the Shoah (Hebrew for catastrophe), this was the genocide of some 6 million Jewish people across Europe by the Nazis and their allies during World War II. Of these, 1.5 million were children. When it was all over, two-thirds of all Jewish Europeans were dead. Many other people were rounded up and disposed of, as well, among them ethnic Poles, Soviets and the disabled. A large portion of these crimes were committed in internment camps. Auschwitz is an example. Some of these can be visited still today, maintained as reminders of what took place and of what must be guarded against in future.

---

## Eras in classical music

Classical music is sort of the catch-all term for all of these epochs. The Classical era is specifically that span from 1750 to 1820 when Mozart, Haydn and others in their mold composed.

The oldest excerpt Mona Golabek includes comes from the Baroque era: Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*. The two greatest composers of this epoch of ornate music making, who really define the Baroque by having exhausted everything it could be, were Georg Friedrich Handel and Johann Sebastian Bach. The years of the Baroque ran from 1600 to 1750 approximately.

The next generation of composers rebelled against the highly decorative, formal and elaborate styling of Baroque. Even Bach's own composer-sons looked at papa's style of composition as outdated and fusty. The classical era sought to sweep out all the musical frippery and replace it with clean lines, in spirit much like the architectural style of classical Greece. The titans of this new era were Franz Josef Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The years of the classical period ran roughly from 1750 to 1820.

Ludwig van Beethoven straddles both the end of the classical era and the early part of the Romantic era, which followed. His earlier works echoed in aesthetic and structure the music of his teachers, among them Haydn. Later, however, he moved in a more passionate and musically shocking direction, as his notions of Humanism and man's place in the universe informed the epic and stormy compositions so familiar to us today. As is the case with each successive innovator in the history of classical music, Beethoven introduced harmonies into his compositions which audiences at the time found jarring, discordant, and unfamiliar. Other Romantic composers – Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and Liszt – continued to develop the category of piano music, as did Chopin and Grieg, whose work is represented in this program. Late Romanticism – the time (1850-1900) when grandeur of utterance was being replaced by subtlety, nuance, and evocative coloration brings us to Debussy and Rachmaninoff.

Alexander Scriabin comes just a hair later. His early works are awash in lush harmonies and beguiling tunes, while his later works march resolutely into atonal territory, making him very much a composer of the 20th century era. This was also the time of Arnold Schoenberg, whose music challenged audiences with its cutting edge vocabulary.



# Responses

---

## What teachers are saying about *The Pianist of Willesden Lane*.

“The idea that everything happens the way it is meant to happen. Even though we try to change the flow of life, sometimes we just have to be patient and see the way things will eventually work out. We all have a story. The way we tell it can make it interesting to others.”

— ERIC STEIN-STEELE, LAS PALMITAS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

“One idea was the storytelling component and reflecting more with my students. I want them to have discussions, draw pictures, or even act out what they saw or heard.”

— TERESA RODRIGUEZ, LINCOLN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

“Storytelling! Also allowing students to become the storyteller...this would be a great fluency building idea...focusing on the expression.”

— ANONYMOUS, BUBBLING WELLS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

# Sample Lessons

---

**Classroom teachers ask us: what can we do with our students to help get them ready for experiencing the performance? Check out these ideas:**

Teacher-led lessons connected with *The Pianist of Willesden Lane* might include:

**Line of Inquiry – LOI is an essential question that generates a lesson:** How do the creators of *The Pianist of Willesden Lane* explore the life and lessons of pianist Lisa Jura through her relationships – to music and her daughter?

## Lesson one

**Start a discussion in class by asking:** Who are the members of our families who teach us things? What things do they teach us? How do these lessons take place? Why do these family members undertake to teach us things like that?

Offer students a little context about the performance they are going to see. The woman who wrote and performs in it was taught piano by her mother. Her mother taught her other things along the way, like courage, the value of hard work and dedication, a deep love of music. She also taught her, by sharing with her the events of her early life, about inhumanity toward others, resilience and triumph.

Students determine which family member they want to focus on. They think carefully about the thing(s) this family member has taught them – and the ways in which they have done that. They interview that family member about their own experiences growing up, which member of their family was most instrumental in teaching (mentoring) them in some way. If that family member is not available for interviewing, the student interviews one or more family members about him/her. Having collected this information, the student composes a true story called *The Family Member Who Has Taught Me Something*.

These are shared aloud on a subsequent class day. This will be a great opportunity to have listeners do a “close read” of these texts. Ask questions of the listeners after each reading that requires them to return in their minds to the text they’ve just heard in order to provide answers. A liberal sprinkling of open-ended questions – always connecting back to the heard text – can take the dialogue into higher level thinking.

## Lesson two

**Line of Inquiry:** How – in *The Pianist of Willesden Lane* – does Mona Golabek explore the storytelling capacity of the musical excerpts she plays?

**Play each of these musical pieces:** Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata*; Bach’s *Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring*; Rachmaninoff’s *Prelude in C-sharp minor*; Debussy’s *Clair de Lune*; Grieg’s *Piano Concerto in A minor, Opus 16* opening movement; *These Foolish Things* (instrumental); and *Strike Up the Band* (instrumental). Have students respond to each of these in various ways: for example, drawing images that the music calls up for them; writing descriptions of what they hear in the music; determine what they think the dominant emotion expressed in the music might be – and what suggests this.

*Moonlight Sonata*, 1st movement – [www.youtube.com/watch?v=nT7\\_IZPHHbo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nT7_IZPHHbo)

*Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring* – [www.youtube.com/watch?v=yaCg\\_nC2W5s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yaCg_nC2W5s)

*Prelude in C-sharp minor* – [www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXQCPARoEHo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXQCPARoEHo)

*Clair de lune* – [www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvFH\\_6DNRCY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvFH_6DNRCY)

*Piano Concerto in A minor, Opus 16* – [www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1Yoyz6\\_Los](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1Yoyz6_Los)

*These Foolish Things* – [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zgl18-CMic](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zgl18-CMic)

*Strike Up the Band* – [www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3ULI4\\_TULk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d3ULI4_TULk)

## Lesson three

**Line of Inquiry:** How – in *The Pianist of Willesden Lane* – does Mona Golabek include information about the composers that helps flesh out the audience’s understanding of their significance in Lisa Jura’s life?

Have students in groups of two or four research the composers of the pieces listed above. They get to share with the whole class what they discover in the format they wish:

- as an oral report
- as a dramatic re-enactment
- as a collage, mural, or other variety of visual art

## Lesson four (post-performance)

**Line of Inquiry:** How do the creators of *The Pianist of Willesden Lane* explore the life and lessons of pianist Lisa Jura through her relationships – to music and her daughter?

Lead students in recalling details of the performance. After some describing, you will want to ask open-ended questions that get at the essential ideas. Spend some questioning time focusing on the archival photographs and newsreel footage which appears in gilt frames.

- What happens in this play?
- How would you describe the performer's voice? Her vocal delivery?
- What kinds of moves did she make? What sorts of things did she express through movement?
- What did you notice about the ratio of spoken word to music?
- How would you characterize the music overall?
- Which composers were represented?
- How were specific pieces used to illustrate events and other things in the story?
- How would you characterize the language itself?
- How did the presentation flow? What were transitions between parts like? What tempos?
- Which moments had the greatest impact on you? Why was this?
- Which of the lesser characters presented by Ms. Golbek stands out as most memorable to you? Why?
- How would you describe Lisa Jura?
- What are some of the life lessons here? What was the mother teaching her daughter besides how to play the piano?
- What personal connections did you make to this piece – to the women whose combined story it was?
- What new things did you learn? What things you already knew were you reminded of?
- What might you do differently in the future as the result of experiencing this piece – or in what ways has your experience of *The Pianist of Willesden Lane* confirmed the choices you already make in your life?

### Homework project: Filling the frames

Have students gather old photographs of the family member they have written about. Add to these images others that illustrate in some way the ideas explored in that piece of writing. (An example: Mona Golbek might have included a picture of composer Grieg, the herding up of victims, a photo of Myra Hess, a train, and so on.) Students, using the originals or photocopies, assemble these onto a poster-sized piece of card stock. Each image is enclosed in a frame of some kind. Mona Golbek selected gold frames – what are some other choices?

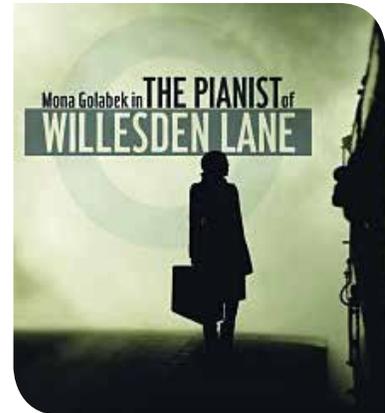
These are arranged gallery-style in a subsequent class for group viewing. Once again, your questions to observers about these images, their arrangement, framing, and so on will open up all kinds of noticing and thinking.

# Resources

## Read it here!

### ***The Children of Willesden Lane: Beyond the Kindertransport: A Memoir of Music, Love and Survival***

By: Mona Golabek and Lee Cohen  
Publisher: Grand Central Publishing, 2003  
ISBN 978-0446690270.



### ***Rescuing the Children: The Story of the Kindertransport***

By: Deborah Hodge  
Age Range: 10 years and up  
Publisher: Tundra Books, 2012  
ISBN-10: 1770492569

The book includes real-life accounts of the children and is illustrated with archival photographs, paintings of pre-war Nazi Germany by artist, Hans Jackson, and original art by the Kinder commemorating their rescue.

### ***Ten Thousand Children: True Stories Told by Children Who Escaped the Holocaust on the Kindertransport***

By: Anne Fox and Eva Abraham-Podietz  
Age Range: 10 years and up  
Publisher: Behrman House, 1998  
ISBN-10: 0874416485

Tells the true stories of children who escaped Nazi Germany on the Kindertransport, a rescue mission led by concerned British to save Jewish children from the Holocaust.

### ***Kindertransport***

By: Olga Levy Drucker  
Age Range: 8-12 years  
Publisher: Henry Holt and Co., 1995  
ISBN-10: 0805042512

The powerful autobiographical account of a young girls' struggle as a Jewish refugee in England from 1939-1945.

### ***The Piano***

By: William Miller and Susan Keeter  
Age Range: 6-9 years  
Publisher: Lee & Low Books, 2000  
ISBN-10: 1584302429

One day, Tia wanders into the white section of town. Soon she is transfixed by a wonderful melody that drifts towards her from one of the houses. Without thinking, Tia accepts a maid's job from Miss Hartwell, the woman who lives there, just so she can hear more of the music. *The Piano* is an uplifting story of caring, friendship, and the connections that can develop between people, no matter how different their ages and backgrounds.

### ***Her Piano Sang: A Story about Clara Schumann***

By: Barbara Allman

Age Range: 8 years and up

Publisher: Lerner Publishing Group, 2002

ISBN-10: 1575051516

Tells the story of the German pianist and composer who made her professional debut at age nine and who devoted her life to music and to her husband.

### ***Fun with Composers - "Just for Kids"***

By: Deborah Lyn Ziolkoski

Age Range: 7 – 12 years

Publisher: Fun with Composers Inc., 2006

ISBN-10: 0978036034

From the Author: All children should have the opportunity to experience classical music in a way that is meaningful and significant to them. It is our goal that every child participates, feels successful and, most importantly, thoroughly enjoys the music. With your help, we can take classical music from its seemingly elusive realm to one that is close to their hearts.

---

## **Hear it too!**

### ***Piano Concertos: Grieg & Schumann with Pianist Leon Fleischer (one of Lisa Jura's teachers!)***

Label: Sony, 2005

ASIN: B000BDGWFI

### ***Rachmaninoff: Piano Concerto No. 3 with Pianist Mona Golabek***

Label: Romantic Hours, 2001

ASIN: B000VLH8DU

### ***The Children of Willesden Lane: Music and Words***

Label: Romantic Hours, 2003

ASIN: B000VLH8E4

### ***Carnival of the Animals with Pianists Mona Golabek and Renee Golabek-Kaye***

Label: Romantic Hours, 2002

ASIN: B000VLHCJU

### ***The Romantic Hours/Mona Golabek***

Label: RCA, 1998

ASIN: B000003FSG

Various artists playing varied composers with readings interspersed.

---

## **On the Web**

### **How Do You Introduce Classical Music To Kids?**

[www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2011/05/17/136359353/how-do-you-introduce-classical-music-to-kids](http://www.npr.org/sections/deceptivecadence/2011/05/17/136359353/how-do-you-introduce-classical-music-to-kids)

How do you get kids enthralled about the music you adore? Bugs Bunny? Leonard Bernstein? Lemony Snicket? National Public Radio weighs in...

### **Classical Music for Children - Five Ways to Introduce Children to Classical Music**

[www.classicalmusic.about.com/od/classicalmusictips/a/childrenclassic.htm](http://www.classicalmusic.about.com/od/classicalmusictips/a/childrenclassic.htm)

Children don't quite comprehend the complexities and meanings of classical music. Here are five ways to introduce classical music to children in exciting ways.

### **Classics For Kids – Have Fun with Classical Music!**

[www.classicsforkids.com/](http://www.classicsforkids.com/)

Classical music's great composers come to life through music and stories.

### **Classics for Kids – for Teachers**

[www.classicsforkids.com/teachers/](http://www.classicsforkids.com/teachers/)

This site is designed to help you use classical music as part of your daily classroom activities. Classical music has the power to stimulate the mind.

### **Kids Music Corner**

[www.kidsmusiccorner.co.uk/composers/classical/](http://www.kidsmusiccorner.co.uk/composers/classical/)

This exciting site offers a page on each of the most prominent classical composers!

### **Making Music Fun - Hey Kids, Meet the Composer Index**

[www.makingmusicfun.net/html/mmf\\_music\\_library\\_meet\\_the\\_composer\\_index.htm](http://www.makingmusicfun.net/html/mmf_music_library_meet_the_composer_index.htm)

Learn about the Music and Lives of Our Great Composers | Creative Resources for Elementary Music Education.

### ***The Pianist of Willesden Lane; Behind the Berkeley Rep Scenes with Mona Golabek***

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=snt\\_giq3yL4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snt_giq3yL4)

Brief glimpse of the pianist at work and tiny sampling of spoken portion of show.

### **Mona Golabek in *The Pianist of Willesden Lane***

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=csqhUwfR1HU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csqhUwfR1HU)

Sneak peak of Mona Golabek in the world premiere *The Pianist of Willesden Lane* at the Geffen Playhouse.

### **Mona Golabek and her mother Lisa Jura, Part 1**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2smTtTkKwE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2smTtTkKwE)

A portion of the broadcast *The Romantic Hours* when she talked about her mother's experience of being taken from Vienna to England on the Kindertransport.

### **60 Minutes: Sir Nicholas Winton Saving the Children**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=coaoifNziKQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coaoifNziKQ)

A 15-minute segment on a man who saved a large number of European children during the Holocaust.

### ***Into the Arms of Strangers (in 2 parts)***

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=21ba19zMSek](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21ba19zMSek)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbWJRsfv5n2E](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbWJRsfv5n2E)

An important documentary on the Holocaust, with archival footage and first-person testimony. The specific focus is Britain's policy at the time which led to the rescue of many Jewish children. Narrated by Dame Judi Dench.

# Glossary

---

**Concerto** — a composition for one or more principal instruments, with orchestral accompaniment, now usually in symphonic form.

**Dynamics** — in music, dynamics normally refers to the volume of a sound or note, but can also refer to every aspect of the execution of a given piece, either stylistic (staccato, legato etc.) or functional (velocity).

**Harmony** — the combination of simultaneously sounded musical notes to produce chords and chord progressions having a pleasing effect.

**Intonation** — accuracy of pitch in playing or singing, or on a stringed instrument such as a guitar.

**Melody** — the succession of single tones in musical compositions, as distinguished from harmony and rhythm.

**Motif** — in music, a motif or motive is a short musical idea, a salient recurring figure, musical fragment or succession of notes that has some special importance in or is characteristic of a composition.

**Movement** — a self-contained part of a musical composition or musical form.

**Prelude** — a composition, usually brief, that is generally played as an introduction to another, larger musical piece.

**Rhythm** — the pattern of regular or irregular pulses caused in music by the occurrence of strong and weak melodic and harmonic beats.

**Sonata** — a composition for an instrumental soloist, often with a piano accompaniment, typically in several movements with one or more in sonata form.

**Tempo** — the speed of a piece of music or its individual sections.

