

# WIGMORE HALL

Monday 10 July 2023  
7.30pm

## Mozart Piano Sonata Cycle

Mao Fujita piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Variations on 'Ah vous dirai-je, maman' K265 (1781-2)

Piano Sonata in C K279 (1775)

*I. Allegro • II. Andante • III. Allegro*

Piano Sonata in C K330 (1781-3)

*I. Allegro moderato • II. Andante cantabile •  
III. Allegretto*

*Interval*

Adagio in B minor K540 (1788)

Rondo in A minor K511 (1787)

Piano Sonata in A minor K310 (1778)

*I. Allegro maestoso • II. Andante cantabile con  
espressione • III. Presto*

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Although Mozart wrote keyboard music from early childhood, much of his playing in courts, salons and public concerts was extemporised. A favourite practice was to take a popular melody - a traditional tune, or a hit from a recent opera - and improvise variations on it. Composed in Vienna in 1781 or 1782 (not in Paris, as was once assumed), Mozart's 12 variations in C major on the French children's song '**Ah vous dirai-je, maman**' (known in Britain as 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star') may well have started life as an extemporisation before being refined and written down for publication. After seven increasingly brilliant variations comes a beautiful contrapuntal variation in C minor. Variation 11 transforms the nursery tune into a soulful quasi-operatic aria, before the final variation provides a virtuoso sendoff.

Mozart composed his first surviving keyboard sonatas, K279-284, in the winter of 1774-5, partly in Salzburg and partly in Munich. His immediate models were the euphonious sonatas of JS Bach's youngest son, Johann Christian, and the works of Georg Christoph Wagenseil, master of Viennese *galanterie*. But there is no question of mere imitation in works that infuse the contemporary Italianate *lingua franca* with a coltish exuberance of invention.

Staking everything on brilliance of effect, the opening *Allegro* of the **Sonata in C K279** simulates the peal and clatter of an early Mozart symphony. Memorable tunes are at a premium, but such is the music's coursing vitality that it hardly matters.

Where the first movement specialises in lean two-part writing, the *Andante* is more luxuriant both in texture and harmony. In music that evokes an amorous operatic aria, Mozart sets the player the challenge of creating the impression of a sustained *cantabile* flow amid frequent changes of texture, dynamics and register. The ebullient finale returns to the mood and two-part textures of the first movement, with an added puckish humour and concerto-like contrasts of 'solo' and 'tutti'.

During Mozart's early years in Vienna he was in constant demand as a keyboard teacher to the daughters of the Viennese aristocracy and the newly affluent bourgeoisie. Although he will have played the **Sonata in C K330** himself, he could well have composed it for one of his pupils, either in Vienna between 1781 and 1783 or during his staying in Salzburg in summer 1783. The sonata combines the *galant* refinement of JC Bach with a Mozartian subtlety and expressive warmth. Its leisurely first movement is a virtually unbroken flow of limpid lyricism, with minimal contrasts between themes and bouts of brilliant figuration which flatter the amateur's technique by sounding harder than they really are.

At the centre of the soulful F major *Andante cantabile* is a hushed, mysterious episode in F minor, initially underpinned by a repeated bass pedal. The opening of the episode, now resolved into the major key, reappears in the coda - an inspired afterthought on Mozart's part. Like the finale of K279, the perky *Allegretto* finale evokes

a concerto in its contrasts of 'solo' and 'tutti'. It also shares the first movement's lyrical profusion, with a homely new tune in the development that could have stepped out of *Die Zauberflöte*.

Mao Fujita opens the second half of his recital with Mozart's two most poignant movements for keyboard, both in keys he rarely used: the **Adagio in B minor** of March 1788 and the **Rondo in A minor** composed a year earlier. Characterised by halting, broken phrases, sighing suspensions and aching diminished seventh chords, the *Adagio* unfolds in sonata form, with a brief, concentrated development exploring far-flung tonalities and an intensely chromatic coda that slips from minor to major in the last bars: a magical stroke that only deepens the music's pathos.

With its yearning appoggiaturas, unquiet chromaticism and rhapsodic ornamentation, the siciliano-style main theme of the A minor *Rondo* sounds more prophetic of Chopin than anything else in Mozart. Even its two major-keyed episodes are increasingly tainted by chromaticism. On the theme's final return Mozart intensifies its melancholy fatalism with desultory two-part counterpoint and a fragmentation of the texture.

Nine years earlier, Mozart's stay in Paris in the summer of 1778 brought professional frustration and personal tragedy in the death of his mother. With Mozart it is always dangerous to make direct links between biography and music, between what TS Eliot called 'the man who suffers and the mind that creates'. It may be too facile to say that the E minor Violin Sonata K304 and the **Sonata in A minor K310** are musical responses to his mother's death. Yet at a more inscrutable level, these two troubled minor-keyed works reflect the growing depth of Mozart's inner world at this disturbing period of his life.

The A minor Sonata's opening *Allegro maestoso* combines gravitas, pathos (in the *piano* phrases within the main theme) and a fierce, hammering energy. With its bold dynamic contrasts and stabbing accents, this is emphatically music conceived for the fortepiano rather than the older harpsichord. In the central development the main theme's martial dotted rhythms are worked in ascending sequences against churning bass semiquavers to create a climax of violence unprecedented in a piano sonata. Mozart then matches this shocking intensity where we least expect it: in the grinding dissonant sequences and groaning bass trills that, astonishingly, disrupt the noble serenity of the F major *Andante*.

Back in A minor, the finale is wiry, fretful music that harps with unhappy obsessiveness on its main theme. A pastoral episode in A major, with a hint of musette drones, momentarily lightens the mood. But the opening theme returns with renewed insistence. Beethoven surely admired the stark, laconic ending.

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