

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 11 July 2023
7.30pm

Supported by the Rubinstein Circle

Mozart Piano Sonata Cycle

Mao Fujita piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Piano Sonata in B flat K281 (1775)

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

Piano Sonata in A K331 (c.1783)

*I. Andante grazioso - Adagio - Allegro •
II. Menuetto • III. Alla Turca. Allegretto*

Interval

Piano Sonata in C K545 (1788)

I. Allegro • II. Andante • III. Rondo. Allegretto

Fantasia in C minor K475 (1785)

Piano Sonata in C minor K457 (1784)

I. Molto allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro assai

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Mozart was something of a veteran in the genres of symphony, serenade and opera when he produced his earliest surviving set of keyboard sonatas, K279-284, in the winter of 1774-75. The first movement of the **Sonata in B flat K281** is a classic example of the teenaged composer using *galant* formulae to ebulliently individual ends, not least in the second theme's sparkling repartee between left and right hand. The central development brings a welcome moment of lyricism before Mozart gets to work on the opening theme, with further impish dialogue between the hands.

The gracefully falling and rising scale patterns at the start of the *Andante amoroso* echo almost note for note the dulcet trio of Haydn's so-called 'Trauer' Symphony, No. 44, of 1771: coincidence, or an unconscious reminiscence? The *crescendo* and *decrescendo* markings within the theme confirm that Mozart conceived this music in terms of the touch-sensitive fortepiano rather than the harpsichord. Like many of Mozart's sonata finales, the gavotte-like *Rondeau* suggests a concerto for one, with vivid contrasts of *piano* and *forte*, 'solo' and 'tutti'. Amid returns of theme are two episodes: the first, in G minor, by turns wistful and vehement; the second softening to the (for Mozart) warm key of E flat. The surprise dynamic contrasts in the final bars set the seal on a movement of captivating wit and élan.

A century after the Turkish siege of Vienna, music evoking Ottoman Janissary bands was all the rage in Austria. In the early 1780s Mozart capitalised on the 'Turkish' vogue in the opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and the rondo *Alla Turca* finale of the **Sonata in A K331**, composed some time between 1781 and 1783. Alternating A minor mystery and A major flamboyance, the rondo quickly became a Mozartian popular hit. Its Janissary imitations - cymbals, drums and triangle - would have been even more vivid with the percussion stop available on some early fortepianos.

Mozart prefaced his 'Turkish' rondo with a set of variations on a lulling nursery tune and an extended minuet and trio. The upshot is his only keyboard sonata without a movement in sonata form. The six variations of the *Andante grazioso* explore an inventive range of textures: say, in the hand-crossings and sensuous parallel thirds of variation four, or the swashbuckling figuration of the final variation, with its (surely intentional) foretaste of the rondo *Alla Turca*. Opening with a suggestion of horn fanfares, the central minuet mingles the ceremonial and the lyrical, while the expansive trio recreates the sensuous textures, complete with hand-crossings, of variation four in the *Andante grazioso*.

By 1788 Mozart's glory days as an impresario and keyboard virtuoso in Vienna were over. The city's cultural life was now disrupted by Austria's debilitating war with Turkey; and Mozart could no longer count on his aristocratic patrons to support his subscription concerts. Teaching still remained one fairly reliable source of income; and it was for one or other of his

pupils that he composed the 'little sonata for beginners', the **Sonata in C K545**, in June 1788, the period of the last three symphonies - though given Mozart's urgent need for money, it is surprising that such an obviously marketable, 'easy' piece was only published in 1805, under the title 'Sonate facile'.

The immaculately bred opening movement is famous for beginning its recapitulation not in the expected tonic, C major, but in the subdominant, F major. But rather than merely copying the exposition a fourth higher, Mozart composed new music to make the final reappearance of C major that much more emphatic. The *Andante* is an innocent serenade, with a gently melancholy minor-keyed episode, while the finale, in gavotte rhythm, is a delightful miniature *Rondo*, with a middle section that varies and develops the main theme. The tiny canon between left and right hands at the very opening is a charming, witty touch.

With the **C minor Fantasia K475** and **C minor Sonata K457**, we move back to the mid-1780s, when Mozart was earning a handsome living from teaching, concerts and publications. It was for one of his regular pupils, Therese von Trattner, that he composed the C minor Sonata in the autumn of 1784. When the sonata was published, with a dedication to Therese, Mozart prefaced it with an elaborate Fantasia in same key, dated 20 May 1785.

Therese must have been an uncommonly sensitive musician, to judge by the expressive range of the *Fantasia* and Sonata. The *Fantasia*, which welds extreme contrasts of key (the opening bars slip from C minor to an audaciously remote B minor), texture and tempo into a cohesive whole, brings us as close as we can get to Mozart the inspired improviser. Everything about this music is surprising.

It is typical of Mozart in C minor vein that the Sonata opens with a striding unison arpeggio, followed by a soft harmonised phrase: a pianistic recreation of an impassioned operatic duet. Operatic, too, are the treble-bass dialogues in the more relaxed second group of themes. But it is the stern opening motif that dominates the narrative, through the combative development, to the gruff canonic imitations of the coda.

The *Adagio*, a rondo with two episodes, brings necessary balm. On each recurrence, the rondo theme is enhanced by delicately expressive ornamentation - another taste here of Mozart the improviser. Beethoven surely remembered the harmonically searching second episode when he composed the *Adagio* of his 'Pathétique' Sonata.

Replete with syncopations and abrupt silences, the finale combines turbulence with intense pathos. As in the first movement, the music's scale and reach demand a momentous coda. Mozart duly writes one of his most dramatic perorations, involving hand-crossing, huge leaps and a mining of the keyboard's depths. Beethoven is already glimpsed louring on the horizon.

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