

# WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 12 July 2023  
7.30pm

## Mozart Piano Sonata Cycle

Mao Fujita piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Fantasia in D minor K397 (c.1782)

*Andante - Adagio - Allegretto*

9 Variations on a Minuet by Duport K573 (1789)

Piano Sonata in D K284 (1775)

*I. Allegro • II. Rondeau en polonaise. Andante •  
III. Tema con variazione*

Interval

Piano Sonata in B flat K570 (1789)

*I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegretto*

Piano Sonata in D K311 (1777)

*I. Allegro con spirito • II. Andante con  
espressione • III. Rondeau. Allegro*

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After moving to Vienna in May 1781 Mozart quickly made a name as a brilliant keyboard improviser. He was also increasingly in demand as a teacher, mainly of aristocratic ladies, priding himself on charging top fees that were non-refundable in the event of cancellation. Many of his shorter solo keyboard works doubtless started life either as teaching pieces or extemporisations. Among the latter is the ***Fantasia in D minor*** from around 1782, loosely modelled on the fantasias of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. After a sequence of brooding arpeggios, the first section consists of three statements of a D minor theme replete with sighing appoggiaturas, like a mournful soprano aria. Each statement takes a different direction before dissolving into cadenza-like figuration. Finally minor brightens into major courtesy of an innocent, song-like melody. All sails along happily until Mozart's autograph breaks off in mid-flow. While there have been various attempts to complete the *Fantasia*, the most commonly played is the one originally published by Breitkopf that simply adds a few bars to Mozart's score to end with a flourish.

The ***9 Variations on a Minuet by Duport K573***, date from May 1789, during Mozart's ultimately frustrating visit to the Prussian court of King Friedrich Wilhelm II at Potsdam. Mozart was no fan of the cellist Jean-Pierre Duport, director of the royal chamber music. But he diplomatically took a Duport minuet as a basis for a set of scintillating keyboard variations. Extrovert major becomes lamenting minor in variation 6, while the penultimate variation transforms the jaunty minuet into a delicately ornamented adagio.

The frequent dynamic markings in the six sonatas K279-284 from 1774-5 indicate that they were conceived essentially for the new fortepiano rather than the harpsichord. Mozart evidently relished the last and most brilliant of the set, the ***Sonata in D K284***, as a virtuoso display piece. After playing all six on a new fortepiano by Johann Andreas Stein in Augsburg in 1777, he wrote to his father: 'The last one, in D [K284] sounds absolutely great on Stein's fortepiano. The device with which you control the action by pressing with your knee is so much more perfect in his pianos than in anyone else's. All I need to do is to touch it, and it works instantly; the moment you remove your knee even a little, there's not the slightest vibration....'

More than in any of his other early sonatas, Mozart seems to be thinking orchestrally in K284's opening *Allegro*, with its sudden contrasts of *forte* and *piano*, its orchestral-style 'drum' basses and its simulation of trumpet-fuelled 'tuttis'. For his central movement Mozart writes a gentle *Rondeau en polonaise*, closer in style to the original stately Polish dance than to the kick and snap of the Chopin polonaise. By far the longest movement, the finale is a set of 12 variations on a leisurely, gavotte-like theme. Both theme and variations are predicated on contrasts of 'solo' and

'tutti', while the variations form a compendium of contemporary keyboard techniques.

We know nothing about the origins of Mozart's penultimate keyboard sonata, the ***Sonata in B flat K570*** from February 1789, though it is a fair guess that he composed for one of his pupils. Dominated by its gracefully rocking opening theme, the first movement unfolds in lean contrapuntal textures that evoke a string duo or trio. The *Romanze*-style *Adagio*, in E flat, is first cousin to the *Larghetto* from the C minor piano concerto K491. The opening theme, with its suggestion of horns, is in Mozart's solemn, Masonic vein. There are two contrasting episodes: one in C minor, the other in A flat whose melody seems to cry out for the velvet warmth of clarinets. The playful finale is a rondo of sorts, though the refrain only appears at the beginning and end. Its first episode, again evoking a wind band, runs directly into the second, which flirts briefly with two-part counterpoint.

In the autumn of 1777 Mozart, accompanied by his mother, embarked on the most momentous tour of his life, to Paris via Mannheim, in search - vainly, as it turned out - of a position that would enable him to leave Salzburg for good. After stops in Munich and Augsburg mother and son reached Mannheim on 30 October 1777. Welcomed by Christian Cannabich, director of the famed Mannheim Orchestra, Mozart quickly composed two keyboard sonatas, in C major, K309, and in D, K311.

With the splendours of the Mannheim Orchestra in Mozart's ears, these sonatas often evoke other sound worlds. At the opening of the ***Sonata in D K311***, for instance, a sonorous 'tutti' chord is followed by a figure evoking woodwind and horns, succeeded in turn by a dainty staccato theme for a pair of violins. The movement's lavish array of ideas includes a chromatically inflected cantabile theme and a 'tutti' that tosses a five-note motif between the hands. You can never predict which of his ideas Mozart will choose for development. Here it is the little sighing phrase that closes the exposition, worked in dramatic sequences which suddenly break off as if nothing had happened.

The *Andante con espressione*, in rondo form, conjures a vein of delicate sensibility, ruffled by the frequent alternations of *piano* and *forte*. Each return of the theme provides an object lesson in the art of tasteful embellishment. Anticipating several of Mozart's piano concertos, the finale is an exuberant movement in 6/8 'hunting' metre. On the first page alone there are 'tally-ho' horn calls, tambour effects and capricious changes of texture and register. The second episode begins with a tonally restless trilling theme and culminates in a written-out cadenza that further underlines the music's concerto associations.

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