

# WIGMORE HALL

Monday 14 March 2022 1.00pm

Ingrid Fliter piano

BBC  
RADIO



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3

**Joseph Haydn** (1732-1809)

Piano Sonata in E minor HXVI/34 (c.1770s)

*I. Presto • II. Adagio • III. Finale. Molto vivace*

**Domenico Scarlatti** (1685-1757)

Sonata in C sharp minor Kk247

**Robert Schumann** (1810-1856)

Etudes symphoniques Op. 13 with posthumous études (1834-7)

*Thema. Andante – • Etude I. Un poco più vivo • Etude II. Andante •  
Posthumous Etude I • Etude III. Vivace • Etude IV. Allegro marcato •  
Etude V. Scherzando • Posthumous Etude III • Posthumous Etude IV •  
Etude VI. Agitato • Etude VII. Allegro molto • Etude VIII. Sempre  
marcatissimo • Etude IX. Presto possibile • Etude X. Allegro con energia  
• Etude XI. Andante espressivo • Etude XII. Finale – Allegro brillante •  
Posthumous Etude II • Posthumous Etude V*

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It's always a pleasure to hear a **Haydn** piano sonata. He employed his inexhaustible imagination and endless technical ingenuity especially happily in music for his own instrument. Not a great player himself, Haydn nonetheless knew remarkable virtuosi, and his sonatas provide a treasure chest of works both for the concert stage and for solitary enjoyment. It's a matter of regret that students are so often steered to Mozart's sonatas rather than Haydn's. Mozart concertos, by all means – they require the dramatic imagination that make Mozart so good at opera. Haydn, who composed nearly as many operas as Mozart, conspicuously lacked those dramatic powers, so he wasn't brilliant at the social dynamics of concertos either – but, sonatas ... now you're talking!

For **Scarlatti**, the sonata was a single movement, divided into two sections, each repeated. Sometimes he wrote such sonatas in pairs, but they work well enough singly. This C sharp minor sonata is a delicate tissue, never more than three notes at a time. Thematically, it's a stream of consciousness, its material winding out from the reel of the composer's mind. The first section, unusually, is 11 bars long, with a tiny melodic tag that sounds like a two-part invention in the first two bars. We reach the dominant note, G sharp. Scarlatti could go back to his tonic, but instead stays to explore the new key with new ideas, nearly all of which are immediately repeated (a favourite device of Debussy). We reach the very same note we reached at bar 10, but this time sounding definitely like the new home key – it's taken 38 bars to 'establish' it, as they say.

The tiny melodic tag returns, but infiltrated by the little dual statements we've been getting used to. Now Scarlatti pulls a very great surprise. His bass sidesteps for a moment, and we find ourselves in the key of F minor – four flats instead of four sharps! Like many minor-key pieces, the music turns to what we call the relative major – A flat, which also has a key signature of four flats. Scarlatti pauses on this note – and we realize that it's the same note as the G sharp we've paused on before. A very brilliant pulling of the rug from under our feet, and somehow marvellously augmenting rather than diminishing the first surprise that set us out on this path. It's a little like Alice through the Looking-Glass – to get home, you walk away from it. The music recalls ideas we've heard before, in the original key – but where is that little melodic tag? No, that never returns – you can never quite go back to where you were. That comfortable illusion must wait for Beethoven's style of sonata.

We must remember that keyboard tuning is a constant compromise, because flats and sharps that share a key are,

mathematically, different notes. If you're used to tuning keyboards, as all Baroque composers were, it was the A flat/G sharp dichotomy that you dreaded, since you tuned the other black notes first. If your tuning had spread a little as you went along, the note 'howled' when you played it with another – that's to say, it vibrated unpleasantly, like a violin does while two strings are being brought into perfect accord. And because it 'howled', it was the 'Wolf Note', and you had to start all over again. Elgar, who tuned pianos for his living for a while, has enormous fun with the note A flat all through his music – another little 'jape' for those who get it.

**Schumann's** original title for Op. 13, which he began in 1834, was 'Studies of an orchestral character for pianoforte, by Florestan and Eusebius', the latter being two of the *alter egos* which Schumann allowed to inhabit his persona – unwisely, as it turned out. Florestan was the extrovert and Eusebius was the clever, shy one. Later, Schumann could also become David, always fighting the Philistines (a personification of artistic ignorance that seems to have originated with Schumann). If you notice that Clara (eventually his wife), David, Eusebius and Florestan, form an alphabetical sequence, you'll get some idea of how Schumann's mind worked.

The variations are inextricably linked with Schumann's complicated love-life. He became engaged to a fellow pupil of Friedrich Wieck, Ernestine, not knowing that her protecting 'relative', a Baron von Fricken, was in fact her father. Schumann wrote a set of variations on the notes A-S-C-H (the name of the town where the Baron lived – all those letters are notes in German), and began this set based on a theme actually composed by the Baron. In 1835, Robert found himself spending a great deal of time with Wieck's daughter, Clara – their first kiss occurred on 25 November – and he also discovered the truth about Ernestine's parentage. Ernestine was given her marching orders on New Year's Day, but Schumann carried on with the variation-studies. The version he published has ten variations plus a major-key *Finale*. Long after Schumann's death, Brahms published five more variations, with no indication as to where they might slot in. But, since the first known performance of any of it was when Clara played just three variations to mark her secret engagement to Robert, perhaps it doesn't matter.

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