

# WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 14 March 2024  
7.30pm

This concert is supported by the Rubinstein Circle

Pavel Kolesnikov piano  
Samson Tsoy piano

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

The Rite of Spring for piano 4 hands (1911-3)

*Part I: Adoration of the Earth • Introduction: Lento, tempo rubato – • The Augurs of Spring (Dances of the Young Girls): Tempo giusto – • Game of Abduction: Presto – Spring Rounds: Tranquillo – • Games of the Rival Clans: Molto allegro – Procession of the Wise Elder: Lento – • Adoration of the Earth: Lento – Dance of the Earth: Prestissimo • Part II: The Sacrifice • Introduction: Largo – Mysterious Circles of the Young Girls: Andante con moto – • Glorification of the Chosen Victim: Vivo – Evocation of the Ancients: Vivo – • Ritual of the Ancients: Lento – Sacrificial Dance (The Chosen Victim)*

Interval

Leonid Desyatnikov (b.1955)

Trompe-l'œil (2023)

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Fantasia in F minor D940 (1828)

*I. Allegro molto moderato • II. Largo • III. Scherzo. Allegro vivace • IV. Finale. Allegro molto moderato*



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To hear *The Rite of Spring* in its version for piano four hands is to be reminded of **Stravinsky's** very particular relationship with his own instrument. Rejecting the legacy of Schubert, Chopin and Rachmaninov, Stravinsky treated the piano as the modern machine *par excellence*, ideal for projecting terrifyingly technical, almost mechanically inhuman perfection. It was the ideal instrument for a composer who infamously claimed that 'music is, by its very nature, essentially powerless to express anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature, etc.'

The piano proved to be especially suited to *The Rite of Spring*, and not just because it was Stravinsky's habit to compose at the instrument. The score had its origins in a commission for Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes*, and the story of its scandalous première at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on 29 May 1913 has been told many times. Roerich's libretto – more an elaborate confection of his own imagination than an accurate reflection of anthropological scholarship on the primitive rituals of the ancient Slavs – was perfectly tailored to appeal to Parisian audiences' taste for the exotic. With Nijinsky's deliberately spasmodic choreography and neo-primitivist designs by Roerich himself, the ballet amply lived up to its subtitle of 'Pictures from Pagan Russia'.

One memoirist recalls an early run-through of the four-hand version of *The Rite*, given by Stravinsky and Debussy. 'When they had finished, there was no question of embracing, nor even of compliments. We were silent, overwhelmed by this hurricane that had come from the depths of the ages and torn up our life by the root.' Stripped of Stravinsky's dazzling orchestration, the score ceases to be an iconic piece of gaudy Russian nationalism, offering instead a terrifying premonition of the industrialised slaughter of the so-called 'Great War' that broke out just over one year later.

Stravinsky's four-hand version of *The Rite of Spring* was never intended for concert use; it was designed instead for the extensive rehearsals that the dancers of the Ballets Russes required in order to master its infernal rhythms. By contrast, **Leonid Desyatnikov's** *Trompe-l'œil* was written for this evening's performers, who premièred it at the Aldeburgh Festival on 12 June 2023. Born in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv in 1955, Desyatnikov studied at the (then) Leningrad Conservatory. After many years based in St Petersburg, he now resides outside of Russia – the score of *Trompe-l'œil* is datelined: 'Haifa, 8.3.23.'

Like Stravinsky in his interwar Neoclassical years, Desyatnikov is fascinated by the music of the past, which he refashions through a series of often playful, even parodic gestures (particularly in his many film scores). He has arranged Piazzolla's *The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* for chamber orchestra, and his 2005 opera *The Children of Rosenthal* features clones of Mozart, Musorgsky, Tchaikovsky, Wagner and Verdi. Schubert has been a particular object of fascination for

Desyatnikov. His *Wie der alte Leiermann...* was composed to mark Schubert's bicentenary in 1997, picking up where *Winterreise* leaves off.

In *Trompe-l'œil*, is it Schubert's *Fantasie in F minor* that is subjected to Desyatnikov's creative reworking. As the composer himself says: 'You can envisage my piece as the follow-up to or the rough draft of Schubert's *Fantasie*. Something incomplete. Like a study for a composition that's been abandoned *en route*.' A kind of postmodern doppelgänger to Schubert's original, it adheres to the four-part structure of the *Fantasie*, obsessively combining and recombining its characteristic melodic and rhythmic motifs. As Pavel Kolesnikov and Samson Tsoy observe: 'Simultaneously an interpretation, a recomposition and an independent work, it exposes and magnifies the essence of Schubert's gestures, multiplying them as in a mirror chamber.' As they also suggest: 'Then, at some point, the obsessive, pointed rhythms of the *Fantasie* start resembling those of *The Rite*.'

So what of **Schubert's** *Fantasie* itself? In many ways, it harks back to the early 19th Century when, long before the advent of recording, duets were the only way for music lovers to familiarise themselves with symphonic works. Chamber music was also part of the polite hospitality that characterised gentry and aristocratic life at the time. Schubert spent the summer of 1818 near the Hungarian town of Zseliz (now Želiezovce in Slovakia), tutoring the young daughters of Count Esterházy of Galanta. His first major works for piano duet date from this period and capture something of Marie and Caroline Esterházy's personalities.

When Schubert returned to Zseliz in 1824, he seems to have fallen in love with Caroline, now aged 18, and a flow of piano duets ensued. The *Fantasie* came four years later, and when the score was published – posthumously – it carried a dedication to Caroline. Is this evidence of a long, unrequited love affair? Or does it signal admiration of her prowess as a pianist? Schubert's enigmatic private life is, though, not the subject matter of the *Fantasie*. Rather, it proposes a radical approach to musical form, as well as a refusal to decide between head and heart. Its four movements follow the conventional structure of the Classical sonata, yet they are linked to create a single seamless whole. Its lyrical themes recall song, yet the concluding fugue has a cerebral austerity that is far removed from the genteel manners of the salon.

To hear it in the same programme as Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* is, as this evening's performers argue, a provocation to hear it in a new way. 'Perhaps Schubert's elegiac madness is not so far away from Stravinsky's violent frenzy? And maybe the link between these two masterpieces lies in their unsurpassed fearlessness to plunge into the unconscious and face the darkness.'

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