

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 14 October 2022
7.30pm

Andreas Haefliger piano

Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

Piano Variations (1930)

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Davidsbündlertänze Op. 6 (1837)

*Lebhaft (F&E) • Innig (E) • Etwas hahnbüchen (F) •
Ungeduldig (F) • Einfach (E) •
Sehr rasch und in sich hinein (F) •
Nicht schnell mit äusserst starker Empfindung (E) •
Frisch (F) • Lebhaft (F) •
Balladenmässig. Sehr rasch (F) • Einfach (E) •
Mit Humor (F) • Wild und lustig (F&E) •
Zart und singend (E) • Frisch (F&E) •
Mit gutem Humor (F&E) • Wie aus der Ferne (F&E) •
Nicht schnell (E)*

Interval

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 32 in C minor Op. 111 (1821-2)

*I. Maestoso - Allegro con brio ed appassionato •
II. Arietta. Adagio molto semplice cantabile*

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The 11-minute *Piano Variations* of 1930 is **Copland's** first extended piece for solo piano. Its dogged manipulation of a theme of seven notes ushered in a new, austere style. Copland worked out most of the variations before he decided what order they should come in, but the absolutely convincing integrity of the piece as a whole certainly endorses his solution to that puzzle. The piece shocked many of its early hearers, but Copland's advice to himself was: 'You really must be brave, but the bravery is derived from inner conviction'.

Schumann played the piano in a way all his own. Words and music were very closely linked in his mind – he, of all composers of the Romantic period, is the one most likely to give a piece a title, beyond a genre description like 'Mazurka' or 'Song without Words'. Schumann's father was a publisher, and young Robert was inspired to write stories, poems and plays. He always remained a literary man, an editor and a critic. So, reading a romantic novel could lead to a piano suite, while a poem might not confine itself to becoming a song – it could start a symphony: the motto theme of the First Symphony, for instance, perfectly fits the poetic line that inspired it.

Schumann's literary imagination led him to people his music with characters, many of them simply Schumann in disguise. He could be Eusebius or Florestan or David, always fighting the Philistines (a personification of artistic ignorance that seems to have originated with Schumann). And if you notice that Clara (his wife), David, Eusebius and Florestan, form an alphabetical sequence, you'll start to get some idea of how Schumann's mind worked.

The *Davidsbündlertänze* were composed in 1837, during Robert's protracted courtship of Clara Wieck, his piano teacher's prodigy daughter. The first two bars are taken from a Mazurka that Clara had just composed. The Mazurka proceeds from the G major chord to a C major chord, but Schumann changes that to a B major chord, followed by a gap, presumably for Clara to catch her breath. Schumann's bold progression plays a part in seven of the pieces. There are two versions of the work. The original is divided into two sets of nine pieces each, and ascribes each piece either to Eusebius or Florestan. The final piece of each set is prefaced by a phrase in the whimsical style of ETA Hoffmann – 'Hereupon Florestan stopped, and his lips trembled sorrowfully' and 'Quite redundantly, Eusebius added the following; but great happiness shone in his eyes the while'. The second edition of 1850 sweeps all that away, renames itself *Die Davidsbündler* (no mention of dancing) and smooths away some of the rougher edges of the musical language.

Beethoven began to assemble Op. 111's sketches in January 1822, but quickly succumbed once more to what had become a chronic state of illness, suffering

till the summer with 'gout in the chest'. To what a dizzying array of diseases were the inhabitants of newly industrializing Vienna prey! It's easy to forget that the tragically early age at which Schubert died, for instance – 31 – was the age at which most Viennese men died. Beethoven at least managed to hang on till he was 56. Despite his gout, he sent Opp. 110 & 111 off to the commissioning publisher, Schlesinger, in Berlin early in 1822, cannily following this up by agreeing an excellent price for his recent Mass, even though he had already promised it to another publisher. (He later offered the Mass to two more publishers, and even worked on a plan of *not* publishing it, but making it available only in luxurious – and expensive – manuscripts.) Schlesinger published Op. 110 in July 1822, but waited until April 1823 for Op. 111 – by which time Clementi had already published it in London.

Beethoven's musical language in intimate works like sonatas and string quartets has become by this stage in his development extremely concentrated. The word 'cantabile' – 'singing' – crops up everywhere, reminding us of Wagner's idea of late Beethoven as 'endless melody'. Unsurprisingly then, Beethoven uses compositional techniques appropriate to melody: fugue and variation. The impression of deep thought is attained by the insertion into allegros of improvisatory adagio passages. Beethoven had been a great improviser in the days when he could hear, and the three late sonatas all show him harnessing some of his old habits of sudden surprise to the polished vehicle of long-considered composed forms. Who knows where that development may have taken him, had another Schlesinger requested another set of sonatas?

The C minor Sonata begins with all three possible versions of the chord of the diminished seventh, which was just beginning its long career as a sinister symbol (Entry of Villain, etc) at precisely this period, in the operas of Weber. The main theme is Beethoven at his most C minorish, gruff, angry and obsessively tumultuous. The calm trumpet-call of the second theme comes, not in the usual key of E flat major – at 51, Beethoven no longer does much that seems 'usual' – but in A flat: the main theme having made a particular point of the note A flat. The variations of the finale flow on at a constant speed, which not only explains the fact that the sonata has only two movements, but also emphasises its effect. We stay pretty much in the home key of C major, until that significant A flat starts to push in again over a set of trills. This time it takes us to the key we avoided earlier – E flat major. Beethoven's plans run deep in these great works.

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