

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 15 April 2025  
7.30pm

Juan Pérez Floristán piano

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Sonatine (1903-5)

*I. Modéré • II. Mouvement de menuet • III. Animé*

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 18 in E flat Op. 31 No. 3 'The Hunt' (1802)

*I. Allegro • II. Scherzo. Allegretto vivace •  
III. Menuetto. Moderato e grazioso • IV. Presto con fuoco*

*Interval*

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Papillons Op. 2 (1830-1)

*Introduzione • No. 1 • No. 2 - Prestissimo • No. 3 •  
No. 4 - Presto • No. 5 • No. 6 • No. 7 - Semplice • No. 8 •  
No. 9 - Prestissimo • No. 10 - Vivo • No. 11 •  
No. 12 - Finale*

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Fantasy in C D760 'Wanderer' (1822)

*I. Allegro con fuoco, ma non troppo • II. Adagio •  
III. Presto • IV. Allegro*



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The term 'impressionism' is over-used in music criticism, but it serves as a useful signpost to the kind of post-Lisztian pianism typified by works such as **Ravel's** *Jeux d'eau* of 1901. There were, however, other sides to Ravel. A few years earlier, he had composed a *Menuet antique*, notable for its understated neo-classicism. It is perhaps a little glib to view his *Sonatine* as a synthesis of these two aesthetics, but the textbook sonata form of its opening movement, the elegance of its *Minuet* (without trio) and its toccata finale do indeed invoke a classical heritage, while the textural intricacy throughout picks up on the impressionism. The work was composed between 1903 and 1905, and its opening movement, composed in response to a competition that specified a sonatina first movement, neatly exemplifies this synthesis. Consider its opening bars, where the outer voices present a clean-cut melody, doubled at the octave, while the inner parts share a delicately variegated and carefully crafted accompaniment layer. Those opening bars also encapsulate the motivic basis of the work. Thus, the pairing of falling fourth and rising fifth (extended and elaborated in various ways) is present at the outset of all three movements, recalling those cyclical forms that had so engaged an earlier generation of French composers, and it also percolates down through the texture to shape some of its smallest constituent particles.

It is conventional to refer to three periods in **Beethoven's** creative life. The second of them, usually thought to begin when he returned to Vienna in 1802 after the crisis engendered by his loss of hearing, is sometimes labelled his 'heroic period'. It would be a mistake to dismiss such periodisation out of hand, but even a cursory inspection of Beethoven's evolution encourages us to blur the boundaries of these periods and to qualify their characterisation. Thus, the Piano Sonata in E flat, Op. 31 No. 3, composed in 1802 at the beginning of his second period, was published as one item in a composite opus, in the manner of his earlier sonatas rather than his later single-opus sonatas. Its tone, moreover, is anything but 'heroic'. Rather, its disposition is genial, even jovial, and this is by no means incompatible with innovative features such as the tonally inductive opening, affirming the E-flat tonic only in bar 8, or the novel play on rhythmic asymmetries that subverts the classical cut of the second theme. Even in overall design, the sonata marks a new departure, eschewing the pedigreed slow movement in favour of a *Scherzo* (so labelled by Beethoven, although it is in duple time) followed by a graceful *Minuet*, whose trio is strikingly original in its harmonic dislocations. It was the finale – *Presto con fuoco* – that suggested (to someone unknown) the nickname 'The Hunt', though as Donald Francis Tovey once remarked, only a very experienced hunter could maintain this speed!

The aesthetic of the fragment was a preoccupation of the early Romantics, and not just in music. **Schumann's**

*Papillons*, Op. 2, completed in 1831 when Schumann was 21 years old, is characteristic, presenting an assemblage of 12 discrete and mostly epigrammatic sound images that are juxtaposed to create a larger constellation. This work was the prototype for later collections such as *Carnaval* and *Kreisleriana*, and it really constitutes a succession of dance pieces (mainly waltzes, but with two polonaises) and a few short, lyrical character pieces. The inspiration was Jean Paul's unfinished novel *Flegeljahre*, and although Schumann did not specify a programme as such, he did suggest in correspondence that the intention was to depict the masked ball that crowns the final scene of the novel. Modern scholarship, based on a variety of sources, has rendered the connection between the music and the novel more specific, right down to the depiction of a love triangle and its *dénouement*, but this is largely incidental to our appreciation of the music. It is worth noting that the more lyrical moments (nos. 5 and 7, but also some sections of the later pieces) allow Schumann to thin out the keyboard texture, in contrast to the more characteristic chordal and often mono-rhythmic piano style employed elsewhere. The work as a whole is end-weighted, with the last three pieces longer and more multi-sectional than the earlier ones, and with the final piece recalling earlier moments in a gesture of synthesis, as well as introducing a pictorial detail, the chiming of the clock as the masked ball draws to a close.

The German musicologist Carl Dahlhaus remarked on the tendency of a post-Beethoven generation of composers to favour a conception of musical form that is driven by theme; as Dahlhaus put it, one in which the form presents 'the history of a musical theme'. He was referring in particular to a technique of thematic transformation, where new self-sustaining themes are created from old, as distinct from one of thematic development, where themes are broken down into dependent parts. Liszt and Wagner were key figures, but if there is any one antecedent it is **Schubert's** Fantasy in C D760, the so-called 'Wanderer' Fantasy, composed in 1822. This work was greatly admired by Liszt, and has often been acknowledged as a model for his own B minor sonata. The 'Wanderer' Fantasy is in four movements played without a break (they are linked by transitional material), and – as in the later Liszt work – its thematic substance consists of transformations of a single melodic core, drawn from Schubert's song *Der Wanderer*. This is presented most clearly in the second movement's theme and variations in C sharp minor, the original key of the song, but it likewise informs the opening *Allegro* and the third movement *Scherzo*. So, in a sense, the entire work is an elaboration of the song. The opening of the finale is a fugato passage, yet another gesture borrowed by Liszt in his B minor sonata.

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