WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 15 October 2026
7.30pm

This concert is supported by Sam and Alexandra Morgan

Yunchan Lim piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Piano Sonata in C K279 (1775)
I. Allegro • II. Andante • III. Allegro

Piano Sonata in D K284 (1775)
I. Allegro • II. Rondeau en polonaise. Andante • III. Tema con variazione

Interval

Fantasia in D minor K397 (c.1782)

Piano Sonata in F K332 (1781-3)
I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro assai

Piano Sonata in A minor K310 (1778)
I. Allegro maestoso • II. Andante cantabile con espressione • III. Presto

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Surprisingly, given their popularity, the piano sonatas of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart have historically received less praise than much of his other instrumental music. They have sometimes been viewed as mere precursors to the sonatas of Beethoven, or as less innovative than his symphonies, concertos and quartets (Edward MacDowell dismissed them as 'entirely unworthy of the author of *The Magic Flute*'). In fact, the sonatas are wondrously inventive masterpieces of the highest quality. They were among the first of Mozart's works to appear in print and contain some of his most deeply personal and finely wrought music. As Johann Abraham Peter Schultz, writing in 1775, noted, '…in no form of instrumental music is there a better opportunity than in the sonata to depict feelings without words'.

Although Mozart is known to have written at least five piano sonatas as a child, these no longer survive. His first extant work in this genre is the **Sonata in C K279**, the opening sonata of a set of six, written at least partly in late 1774 to early 1775, during Mozart's visit to Munich for the production of his opera *La finta giardiniera* (K196). The cheerful opening movement begins with a five-note figure in the left hand that recurs throughout, whilst the lyrical slow movement, in F, calls to mind the later Piano Concerto in C K467. A playful *Allegro*, featuring some lively semiquaver passagework, concludes the piece.

The last in this set of Munich sonatas, and the only one to be published in Mozart's lifetime, is the **Sonata in D K284**, nicknamed 'Dürnitz' after its commissioner, Baron Thaddäus von Dürnitz (who never actually paid for it). It opens with a brilliant first movement that is truly orchestral in scope, featuring a great number of different thematic ideas that act as musical signposts for the listener. These range from the fanfare-like unison opening, along with dramatic tremolos and chords in the right hand that imitate violins, to brilliant scalic passages and a contrasting second theme in the singing style. The middle movement, unusually, is a graceful *Rondeau en polonaise* in A major, whilst the finale is an extended set of 12 variations on a theme in another dance style, the gavotte. Whilst variations 1 and 2 maintain an air of elegance, variation 3 introduces bustling figuration in the right hand, which is then taken up by the left hand in variation 4, against the theme. More brilliance arrives in variation 6, in the form of some hand-crossing, before Mozart switches to the minor mode in variation 7, followed by octaves and sudden dynamic contrasts in variations 8 and 9. The emotional heart of this Sonata, however, is the exquisite variation 11. In the first edition, published in 1784, Mozart added a great number of embellishments to this variation that are not present in the autograph, offering insights into how he might have performed it himself.

Alongside the sonatas, Mozart composed a number of miscellaneous pieces for solo piano. One of the most celebrated of these is the **Fantasia in D minor K397**, a work that encapsulates, in miniature, Mozart at his most dramatic. It is full of improvisatory flourishes, expressive pauses and restless chromatic harmonies, anchored by a tragic singing melody that returns several times. As with his piano concerto in the same key (K466), however, Mozart suddenly changes gear in the coda, switching to a sunny D major. The original ending of this work is lost (or was never written): the final 10 bars, as usually played today, come from an edition published in 1806, and were probably written by the then-Leipzig Thomaskantor August Eberhard Müller (1767-1817).

The **Sonata in F K332** is last in a group of three written in the early 1780s, during Mozart's first years in Vienna, although its exact dating – and purpose – is unclear. It is a perfectly formed work that constantly alternates between light and dark: the elegant main theme of the first movement is genial and songlike, but tension is then introduced with a shift to D minor and C minor, before a graceful second theme takes over. Similarly, the beautiful, elaborately ornamented *Adagio* in B flat opens with an operatic melody that is then immediately restated in the darker minor mode. The finale is marked *Allegro assai*, which in Mozart's day did not mean 'very fast', as we would interpret it today. Although the movement is brilliant and virtuosic, there are also many lyrical passages, with moments of both humour and pathos.

In the summer of 1778, Mozart visited Paris with his mother, Anna Maria, in search of new employment. During their stay, Anna Maria suddenly became seriously ill, and died on 3 July. This tragic event deeply shocked the 21-year-old Wolfgang, who then had to deliver, as he put it, 'one of the saddest and most painful pieces of news' to his father, who subsequently blamed Wolfgang for his mother's death. Almost nothing is known about the origins of the **Sonata in A minor K310**, except that it was written around this time. One of only two piano sonatas by Mozart in a minor key, its intense, emotionally unstable character is very striking. The bleak opening movement is full of anger and frustration, dominated by insistent repeated notes and chords, chains of dissonances and slithering scales and arpeggios that become even wilder in the development, accompanied by an unrelenting drum-beat rhythm. Respite comes in the moving *Andante cantabile* and its tender, operatic main theme, although the pulsating chords and swirling, stabbing figuration of the middle section suggest a suppressed darkness. The *Presto* finale then bursts forth with great anxiety, filled with ferocious (and treacherous) leaps, with only the briefest of excursions into A major before ending defiantly in the minor. Perhaps Mozart indeed composed this extraordinary Sonata to depict his true feelings when words failed him.

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