WIGMORE HALL 125

Friday 16 January 2026
7.30pm

Tim Horton piano

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)	Nocturne in C minor Op. 48 No. 1 (1841)
	Nocturne in F sharp minor Op. 48 No. 2
Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)	Valses nobles et sentimentales (1911) *I. Modéré – Très franc • II. Assez lent, avec une expression intense • III. Modéré • IV. Assez animé • V. Presque lent, dans un sentiment intime • VI. Vif • VII. Moins vif • VIII. Epilogue. Lent*
	Interval
Fryderyk Chopin	Scherzo No. 1 in B minor Op. 20 (1834-5)
	Scherzo No. 2 in B flat minor Op. 31 (1837)
	Scherzo No. 3 in C sharp minor Op. 39 (1839)
	Scherzo No. 4 in E Op. 54 (1842-3)

UNDER 35S

Supported by the AKO Foundation
Media partner Classic FM

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management. In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions. Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141. Wigmore Hall is equipped with a loop to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.

Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • Wigmore-hall.org.uk • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan

It is a perversity of composer biographies that the trickiest thing to discuss in biographical terms is the composing itself, in all its experiential complexity. Chopin sitting at a desk hardly makes for exciting copy, especially when compared with an elopement to Majorca in the company of George Sand. Yet Chopin spent many hours of his life – and for him they were doubtless among the richest and most satisfying – sitting at a desk in Nohant, Sand's country house near Le Châtre in the province of Berry. He undoubtedly produced some of his greatest music during the summers spent in this fairly remote corner of rural France. The Two Nocturnes, Op. 48 were composed during his second summer there in 1841, at a time of significant change in his stylistic evolution. From Op. 27 onwards, Chopin had published his nocturnes in complementary pairs rather than in groups of three. This was indicative of the greater weight he attached to individual nocturnes, and the first of the Op. 48 pair is certainly among the most imposing and dramatic of the entire series. It is also one of the most expansive, and its 'fully scored' reprise enlarges to powerfully climactic effect one of Chopin's most expressive ornamental melodies. The second nocturne is hardly less ambitious, allowing the constantly unfolding 'endless melody' of its outer sections to stand in sharp relief against the obsessive two-bar repetitions of the middle section, whose D flat major tonal setting is unusual for a work cast in F sharp minor. In sheer scale and ambition these two nocturnes constituted something of a step change in Chopin's engagement with this signature genre.

Ravel conceived the idea of a musical tribute to the waltz in 1906 in an unfinished piece called *Wien* (Vienna). Later in life, in 1920, it was developed into his orchestral masterpiece *La Valse*. Between these two dates, he composed his *Valses nobles et sentimentales*. This work was completed in 1911, as a linked chain of eight waltzes for piano. The title is a homage to Schubert's waltzes, signalling that historical moment in the early 19th Century when the genre first defined itself against a variety of rather similar so-called 'German dances', before it went on to conquer Europe in aristocratic ballrooms, bourgeois salons, and eventually commercial dance halls. It is hard to resist viewing these three 'waltz moments' in Ravel as a collective gesture of nostalgia for a disappearing world. But in any event *Valses nobles et sentimentales* was by no means his only work to look to the past in this way, and it exhibits a discreet neo-classicism in which there is a recognisable background of diatonic harmony distorted by 'tonal interferences'. These latter usually take the form of added notes, as in the clashing chords of the opening waltz, which were by no means welcomed by contemporary audiences. Indeed, the work as a whole was widely castigated on its first performance on 8 May 1911. In broad terms, the separate pieces juxtapose slow waltzes, with that plangent tone so characteristic of Ravel, with high-tempo ones. The contrast is at its most extreme in the last two pieces, with the final waltz functioning as an extended epilogue. Those who are familiar with *La Valse* will certainly recognise the penultimate waltz.

By adopting the title 'scherzo' for a single-movement work, Chopin immediately transformed its meaning, a transformation so radical that it confused not only his contemporaries but also late 19th- and early 20th-century critics. Yet his use of the term was by no means arbitrary. In general, Chopin was committed to genre as a compositional control, a force for conformity and stability. Like the four ballades, the four scherzos really do belong together. In all four, he reinterpreted the element of contrast at the heart of the conventional genre, building the central formal contrast into the detailed substance. This is clear from the opening paragraphs of all four scherzos, where fragmentary motives are presented with calculated discontinuity, something far from common in Chopin. The simplest in construction is No. 1 in B minor (1834-5), in which a popular melody (almost certainly based on the opening phrase of a Polish carol) is enclosed within an impassioned figuration. Schumann's reaction has become legendary. 'How is gravity to clothe itself if humour wears such dark veils?' The most complex is No. 2 in D flat major (conventionally, but dubiously, described as in B flat minor), composed in 1837. Here the ternary design is overlaid by elements of sonata form, including thematic dualism and sections of a developmental character. Despite the powerful contrasts and an expressive differentiation between the themes, it is a closely integrated work, with clear links between the outer sections and the middle section. No. 3 in C sharp minor, Op. 39, composed in 1839, is as close to Liszt as Chopin ever comes, both in the bravura octave passages of the outer flanks and in the delicate washes of colour that decorate the trio, a 'hymn' in the tonic major. This hymn transitions smoothly into the reprise, and since the materials of the outer sections and the middle section are interwoven, the distinctive tripartite design is strategically blurred. In No. 4 in E (1842-3) Chopin returned to the simpler ABA outline of the first Scherzo, but the construction is much more refined in the later work, and the character utterly different, as calm and benign as No. 1 is troubled and feverish. In this fourth Scherzo Chopin laid out spacious, relatively self-contained paragraphs, maintaining interest over a lengthy time span through a delicate juxtaposition of contrasts. The effect of these contrasts is all the more powerful in that it has little to do with drama and opposition, and everything to do with the weighting and placement of essential formal components.