

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 17 June 2025
7.30pm

Tim Horton piano

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Piano Sonata No. 1 in F sharp minor Op. 11 (1832-5)

I. Introduzione. Un poco Adagio – Allegro vivace •

II. Aria • III. Scherzo e Intermezzo: Allegrissimo – Lento •

IV. Allegro, un poco maestoso

Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928-2007)

Klavierstück VII (1954)

Interval

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)

Nocturne in C sharp minor Op. 27 No. 1 (1835)

Nocturne in D flat Op. 27 No. 2 (1835)

Mazurka in A minor Op. 59 No. 1 (1845)

Mazurka in A flat Op. 59 No. 2 (1845)

Mazurka in F sharp minor Op. 59 No. 3 (1845)

Piano Sonata No. 3 in B minor Op. 58 (1844)

I. Allegro maestoso • II. Scherzo. Molto vivace •

III. Largo • IV. Finale. Presto non tanto



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This programme allows us to register the marked contrast between Chopin's widely-spaced, pellucid piano textures and the more 'symphonic' pianism associated with Beethoven, Schumann and Brahms, notable for heavier chordal writing and a tendency to bind the two hands together, often in rhythmic unison. **Schumann's** immensely challenging Piano Sonata in F sharp minor, Op. 11, composed in the early 1830s, is characteristic of this symphonic manner. It opens with a slow introduction somewhat in the manner of a stately and rather portentous French Overture, complete with the trademark dotted rhythms. When this introduction returns unexpectedly in the development section of the ensuing *sonata allegro* movement, it creates an obvious formal discontinuity, but it also signals integrative thematic connections. These are reinforced when a lyrical melody that emerges in the course of the introduction also forms the basis of the second movement 'aria', a slow movement described by Liszt as a 'song of great passion, expressed with fullness and calm'. Given that the falling fifth motive at the outset of the work underpins all four movements, it becomes apparent that the introduction really serves as a generative source for the entire work. The third movement is a scherzo with two trios, of which the second is a parodic polonaise, *all burla, ma pomposo*, where the dramas of Schumann's fictional characters Florestan and Eusebius seem to come centre stage, albeit without specificities. This sense of a latent plot is strengthened when an operatic recitative (the voice is specified in the score as an oboe) precedes the return of the scherzo in the 'wrong' key, and on from there to what are perhaps the most explicit representations of Florestan and Eusebius, the two themes of the *sonata rondo* finale.

We step into a different world with **Stockhausen's** *Klavierstück VII*, different in syntax, in texture, and above all in teleology. To best appreciate the beauties of this piece we need to forget the goal-directed momentum of Schumann's sonata and experience the music rather from moment to moment. Stockhausen's creative development throughout the 1950s might be glibly summarised as a journey from 'points' to 'groups' to 'moments', with the present piece, composed in 1954, representing the second stage, where he experimented with what he called 'Group Form'. The reference point here is a sequence of pitches, beginning with a C sharp, each of which is positioned at the centre of a spatial field of sounds, some heard as 'points', represented by performed notes, while others arise from the resonating harmonic spectra created when other notes are silently depressed. The central pitches are easily picked out by the listener, but the resonance created by 'sympathetic' vibrations demands more concentrated listening. It is as though we strain to hear sounds emerging from the depths – the soul – of the piano without any obvious human agency. It is just this kind of concentrated listening that encourages us to focus on the moment rather than the goal.

In 1832, when **Chopin** had just arrived in Paris, he began the process of publishing his music, presenting it to the world in clearly ordered, newly consolidated genres. Among the first works he sent for publication were the Op. 6 and Op. 7 mazurkas and the Op. 9 nocturnes, thus establishing two of the most important of what we might reasonably call Chopin genres. From Op. 27 onwards, he published his nocturnes in contrasted pairs rather than in groups of three (as in Op. 9 and Op. 15). The two of Op. 27, composed in 1835, are perfectly complementary, the darkly brooding C sharp minor of the first transformed enharmonically into the consolatory D flat major of the second, whose alternation of an ornamental aria and a sequentially developing theme represents one of the most common nocturne formats.

In Op. 50 and Op. 59 (each containing three rather than the four mazurkas of earlier opuses), Chopin's ambition for this genre reached new heights. These later pieces, composed in 1842 and 1845 respectively, are dance poems on the grandest scale, and for many Op. 59 represents the peak of his achievement in the genre. That he was increasingly self-critical in these later years is evidenced by the manuscript sources for these mazurkas, where we learn for example just how much effort went into the extended, multi-sectional coda of the second, in A flat major. Notice, too, how the opening of the first piece, in A minor, transforms the normal phrase structure of a mazurka (it has 12-bar rather than 8-bar phrases), while its middle section in the tonic major can only be described as a kind of fantasy, notable for its hidden repetitions and discreet motivic variations.

Chopin's first piano sonata was a student work, and is seldom performed today. Of the other two, it is the B flat minor, Op. 35 (1839), the so-called *sonate funèbre*, that is by far the more unorthodox (Schumann referred to its four movements as 'unruly children under the same roof'). As in the *sonate funèbre*, the scherzo of the B minor Sonata Op. 58 (1844) precedes the slow movement, and also as in that work the principal thematic group of the first movement is omitted in the reprise. However, in other respects the B minor is a very different order of sonata, taking a step closer to established Austro-German traditions than its predecessor. This is especially the case in the first movement, whose continuous development and transformation of motives comes close to a process of 'developing variation' that would later be associated with Brahms. Likewise, the slow movement theme has something of the measured, stately tread, the classical poise, of a late Beethoven or late Schubert *adagio*, and the *sonata-rondo* finale is at the very least a more conventional way to end a sonata than the muted, understated finale of the *sonate funèbre*. In Op. 58, Chopin tackled the historical archetype of the sonata on something like its own terms and emerged triumphant.

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