

# WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 18 January 2023  
7.30pm

Yunchan Lim piano

John Dowland (1563-1626)

Pavana Lachrymae (1590s) *arranged by William Byrd*

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

15 Sinfonias BWV787-801 (c.1720 rev. 1723)

*No. 1 in C • No. 2 in C minor • No. 3 in D •  
No. 4 in D minor • No. 5 in E flat • No. 6 in E •  
No. 7 in E minor • No. 8 in F • No. 9 in F minor •  
No. 10 in G • No. 11 in G minor • No. 12 in A •  
No. 13 in A minor • No. 14 in B flat • No. 15 in B minor*

Interval

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

7 Bagatelles Op. 33 (1801-2)

*Bagatelle in E flat • Bagatelle in C •  
Bagatelle in F • Bagatelle in C •  
Bagatelle in A • Bagatelle in D •  
Bagatelle in A flat*

15 Variations and a Fugue on an Original Theme in E flat 'Eroica Variations' Op. 35 (1802)

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Shakespeare's contemporary **John Dowland** was widely hailed as the greatest lutenist of his time. Yet despite professional success in England and, from 1598 to 1606, as lutenist to Christian IV of Denmark, Dowland was one of life's perennial malcontents. His own motto 'Semper Dowland semper dolens' is reflected in his music, which typically mines a Hamlet-like vein of melancholy introspection.

Best known as the song 'Flow my teares', the darkly brooding *Pavana Lachrymae* started life in the early 1590s as a pavan for solo lute. Among many subsequent keyboard arrangements, that by **William Byrd** elaborates Dowland's original lute solo with a unique richness of harmony and figuration.

**Bach** was as painstakingly systematic in his teaching methods as in his compositions. In 1720, while Kapellmeister to Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Köthen, he presented his nine-year-old son Wilhelm Friedemann with a 'little keyboard book' into which he wrote pieces designed to hone his musical skills. These include preludes from what became Book I of *The Well-tempered Clavier*, and early versions of the Two- and Three-Part Inventions, or *Sinfonias*, as the latter were styled. In a preface to the autograph manuscript of 1723 Bach stressed that after learning 'to play cleanly in 2 voices' in the Two-Part Inventions, the player was to graduate to the Three-Part Inventions 'to deal correctly and well with 3 obligato parts, simultaneously...and above all to arrive at a singing manner in playing'.

Yet as in *The Well-tempered Clavier*, the music's didactic purpose goes hand in hand with a wide expressive range, from profound inwardness to unbridled jubilation. As ever with Bach, the spirit of the dance is rarely far away. Sinfonia No. 2 in C minor is a jig, No. 5 in E flat a gracefully ornamental sarabande, No. 9 in G minor a wistful minuet. Bach is at his most inward in the grieving, chromatic No. 9 in F minor, and his most blithely extrovert in No. 12 in A. Fittingly, the final Sinfonia, in B minor, crowns the set with a flurry of virtuosity.

**Beethoven's** seven Op. 33 *Bagatelles* (or, as he dubbed them, 'Kleinigkeiten' - 'trifles') may be mere shavings from his workshop. But Beethoven being Beethoven, these delightful miniatures are full of subtleties, with that Beethovenian knack of avoiding the obvious. Published in 1803 - the year of the 'Eroica' Symphony - they originated at various times over the previous decade. Some may have started life as improvisations. Beethoven's trademark disruptive tendencies are immediately evident in No. 1 in E flat, where pastoral innocence is faintly threatened by *sforzando* accents, then undermined by a flurry of tumbling scales. In No. 2 in C major, the first of three scherzos in the set, Beethoven has anarchic fun with explosive offbeat accents and crazy contrasts of dynamics and register.

In No. 3 the limpid pastoral tune becomes confiding, mysterious, with a deflection from F major to D major and a dip from *piano* to *pianissimo*. No. 4 in A is a

tender song without words in which the melody migrates from alto to soprano then, after a shadowy minor-keyed episode, from the bass to tenor register.

Beethoven is at his most capricious in No. 5, a C major scherzo that seems to poke fun at the strutting rhythms of the then-fashionable polonaise. The minor-keyed trio, with its right-hand melody in octaves and surging triplets deep in the bass, brings maximum contrast. Marked 'with a certain speech-like expression', No. 6 in D is a short story in music, combining the simplicity of a folksong with an intimate, narrative quality. After an embellished repeat of the melody, the coda suggests softly pealing bells. The final *Bagatelle* (presto, A flat major) is another antic scherzo, with its volatile snatches of melody, tiny, twice-repeated trio and blunt, enigmatic ending.

The seed of Beethoven's 'Eroica Variations' lies in his ballet *Die Geschöpfe des Prometheus* ('The Creatures of Prometheus'), triumphantly premièred in Vienna's Burgtheater in March 1801. In the spring of 1802, in the then rural retreat of Heiligenstadt, he began to sketch two sets of variations, Opp. 34 and 35, completing them in the autumn. While Op. 34 is predominantly intimate, Op. 35, the so-called 'Eroica Variations', was designed as a showcase for Beethoven's own virtuosity. Its basis is the contredanse theme in the finale of the *Prometheus* ballet, famous for its appearance in the 'Eroica' Symphony. (Beethoven's own title for Op. 35 was *Prometheus Variations*.) As in the symphony, the theme itself is preceded by its skeletal bass: a vision of dry bones that progressively comes to life in three variations marked *a due, a tre, a quattro* - ie, in two, three and four parts.

After the theme itself sails in, Beethoven mines its potential in 15 inventively contrasted variations. Variations 1 and 2 frolic blithely, while No. 3 adds a characteristic touch of grotesquerie with ungainly leaps between registers. Nos 5 and 6, by contrast, are reflective in tone, the latter hovering between C minor and the home key of E flat major. Several variations, including the muscular No. 7, feature contrapuntal imitation between the hands. No. 8 transmutes the contredanse theme into a Romantic intermezzo, No. 10 includes, uniquely, a dramatic key change in the second half, while No. 13 makes comic-grotesque capital out of the theme's repeated chords.

Both the plaintive No. 14, in E flat minor, and the florid No. 15 seem to dissolve the theme in reverie. Then comes an extended finale, beginning as a fugue built from the first four notes of the bass and a dancing continuation. The fugue forms a climax of virtuosity. Yet as in the 'Diabelli' Variations of two decades later, fugue does not have the last word. Instead Beethoven adds two final variations, the first recalling the contredanse theme in its original innocence, the second creating a brilliant sendoff.

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