

WIGMORE HALL 125

Saturday 18 July 2026
7.30pm

Ariel Lanyi piano

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 24 in F sharp Op. 78 (1809)

*I. Adagio cantabile – Allegro ma non troppo •
II. Allegro vivace*

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Fantasiestücke Op. 12 (1837)

*Des Abends • Aufschwung • Warum? • Grillen •
In der Nacht • Fabel • Traumes Wirren • Ende vom Lied*

Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936)

No. 3 Notturmo from *Sei pezzi* P44 (1903-5)

No. 2 Tempestoso from *Tre preludi sopra melodie gregoriane*
(1919-21)

Interval

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Préludes Book II (1911-3)

*I. Brouillards • II. Feuilles mortes • III. La Puerta del Vino •
IV. Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses • V. Bruyères •
VI. General Lavine – eccentric • VII. La terrasse des
audiences du clair de lune • VIII. Ondine • IX. Hommage
à S Pickwick, Esq, PPMPC • X. Canope • XI. Les tierces
alternées • XII. Feux d'artifice*



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After the 'Waldstein' and 'Appassionata' Sonatas of 1804 and 1806, **Beethoven** wrote no piano sonatas until the 1809 'little' Sonata No. 24 in F sharp, Op. 78, in two movements with a duration of around 12 minutes. In other respects, though, the gap was a period of astonishing accomplishment – the symphonies Nos. 4, 5 and 6 (1806-8), the piano concertos Nos. 4 and 5 (1806-9) – all this at a time when Napoleon was terrorising Beethoven's home city of Vienna into submission. The composer had a particular affection for this work and dedicated it to Countess Therese von Brunswick, an 'Immortal Beloved' possible. The first movement is in impeccable sonata form, with a brief hymn-like introduction opening out into the main *Allegro ma non troppo*, based on a lovely, Schubertian *cantabile*. The brief finale is an *Allegro vivace*, an irresistible pairing of wit and razor-sharp agility.

Robert Schumann may have dedicated his *Fantasiestücke* Op. 12 to a Scottish girl he was seeing around 1837, but these eight short pieces are saturated with his love for Clara Wieck, the daughter of his piano teacher Friedrich Wieck, whom Robert had met when he lodged with the Wieck family. He was 21; Clara barely in her teens and already set on a career as a great concert pianist. The more their love for each other deepened, the deeper her father was opposed to any sort of union. The other inspiration to the *Fantasiestücke* was a book by ETA Hoffman, the author of fantasy fiction, whose books flew off the shelves in the first decades of the 1800s.

Schumann's eight *Fantasiestücke* show off the composer's uncanny mastery of obliqueness. The serene half-lights of *Des Abends* is both propelled and undermined by an invasive three-against-two rhythm. The restlessness is overt in *Aufschwung* (Soaring), where energy conflicts with fleeting glances at some sort of resolution. *Warum?* yearns for an answer that never comes. The humour of *Grillen* (Crickets) is unmistakable, the key progression less so. Schumann wrote to Clara that *In der Nacht* retold the tragic legend of Hero and Leander, in which Leander swims every night across the treacherous Hellespont to be with his beloved Hero. Then one night, a storm blows out Hero's guiding light. The story of *Fabel* (Fable) emerges out of the opening material. *Traumes Wirren* (Dream's confusion) lives up to its title in a swirl of furious keyboard writing. *Ende vom Lied* slides into nostalgia and hints of a tale well told.

Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936) died at the heart of Italian musical culture. Now he is remembered primarily for his three orchestral tone poems, *Fountains of Rome*, *The Pines of Rome* and *Roman Festivals*. In the land of opera, his nine are now repertoire outliers. The *Notturmo* is the third of the six short pieces written and published around 1905. A simple song-like air floats above a repetitive and hypnotic accompaniment. His *Tre Preludi sopra melodie gregoriane* appeared in 1919, the Gregorian

element aimed more at flavour than imitation. The second piece, marked *Tempestoso*, is a furious toccata surging above a stern theme stalking the bass register.

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) was a radical almost by stealth. His style and voice were fully formed by the time he was in his late-thirties, with three masterpieces, his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* and the orchestral works *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and *La mer* under his belt by 1905. By that time, his solo piano music had become a floating world of dreams, symbolism, impressionism and allusion that both stretched and strengthened traditional Western harmony. Some of these pieces are technically modest, others extremely virtuosic. His mastery of the instrument was exceptional, especially in the use of the pedals.

His second book of 12 *Préludes* appeared in 1913, the printed score ambiguously revealing the title at the end of each one. The first, *Brouillards* (Fog), opens with quiet C major chords balancing 'black-note' arpeggios in the right hand, as shapes shift and dissolve. *Feuilles mortes* (Dead leaves) is a study in random motion and absence of purpose. *La Puerta del Vino* is the Gate of Wine at the Alhambra in Granada; with guitar strummings over an obstinate *habañera* stuck in the key of D flat. *Les fées sont d'exquises danseuses* has speed and lightness, underpinned by steely strength, inspired by Arthur Rackham's fairy illustrations for JM Barrie's *Peter Pan* in Kensington Gardens. The fifth piece, *Bruyères* (Heather) has a serenity and directness similar to *La fille aux cheveux de lin* from Book 1. *General Lavine* – eccentric honours the American comic Ed Lavine, whose shows in Paris Debussy loved. Lavine was a juggler, clown, could play the piano with his toes, and his caricature is cast as a cakewalk. The title of *La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune* (The terrace for audiences in the moonlight) is thought to have been suggested by a newspaper report of the extended festivities for King George V's coronation as Emperor of India in 1911. Its oriental setting is alluded to in a web of wonder and delicacy. *Ondine* (Water sprite) was inspired by a Rackham illustration, and by Ravel's own *Ondine*. Debussy captures the sprite's playfulness as well as her feral spite. In *Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq. PPMPC*, Debussy evokes the good nature of Dickens's famous character, setting the tone with a pompous caricature of the National Anthem. A *Canope* was an ancient funerary urn. Debussy's tribute to these haunting objects – he had two of them in his house – hardly moves from D minor and is marked 'very calm and gently sad'. The penultimate *Prélude* is *Les tierces alternées*, a finger-crunching study for alternating thirds. Book 2 ends with *Feux d'artifice* (Fireworks), a brilliant impression of gasp-inducing glamour.

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