

# WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 18 May 2023  
1.00pm

Julia Hamos piano

- Johann Sebastian Bach** (1685-1750) French Suite No. 4 in E flat BWV815 (c.1722-5)  
*I. Allemande • II. Courante • III. Sarabande •  
IV. Gavotte I & II • V. Menuet • VI. Air • VII. Gigue*
- György Kurtág** (b.1926) From *Játékok* (1973-97)  
Capriccioso – Luminoso • Play with Overtones (4) •  
Perpetuum mobile • Doina
- György Ligeti** (1923-2006) En suspens from *Etudes Book 2* (1988-94)  
Fanfares from *Etudes Book 1* (1985)
- Béla Bartók** (1881-1945) From *Mikrokosmos* BB105 (1926-39)  
Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm: No. 1 • No. 2 •  
No. 3 • No. 4 • No. 5 • No. 6
- Robert Schumann** (1810-1856) Davidsbündlertänze Op. 6 (1837)  
*Lebhaft (F&E) • Innig (E) • Etwas hahnbüchen (F) •  
Ungeduldig (F) • Einfach (E) • Sehr rasch und in sich  
hinein (F) • Nicht schnell mit äusserst starker  
Empfindung (E) • Frisch (F) • Lebhaft (F) •  
Balladenmässig. Sehr rasch (F) • Einfach (E) • Mit  
Humor (F) • Wild und lustig (F&E) • Zart und singend (E)  
• Frisch (F&E) • Mit gutem Humor (F&E) • Wie aus der  
Ferne (F&E) • Nicht schnell (E)*



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György Kurtág and György Ligeti both took Bartók as their foundation, and if Bach or Schumann might seem a bridge too far, we should remember that Bartók and Kurtág (with his late wife Márta) were supreme performers of Bach at the piano, that Schumann appealed to Ligeti for his rich piano textures and to Kurtág for his portmanteau forms, and that Bach's counterpoint was a model for all four later composers.

Bach's 'French suites' gained their name only after his death, when someone grouped under this title a set of six suites lacking preludes; there is nothing especially French about them, and indeed their courantes are of the dashing Italian type rather than the stately French. The suites date from around the time when Bach, the widowed father of four young children, remarried. Probably he intended them as teaching material for his highly gifted eldest son, Wilhelm Friedemann, who would certainly have been able to learn much here about finger dexterity, phrasing, balance and, not least, lithe counterpoint: the movements are generally in two sections, and the later ones in this E flat suite are full of canonic writing. In each half of the *Allemande*, the bass line progressively speeds up, equalling the right hand's sixteenth-note motion just before the end. The *Courante's* bass maintains an exciting dotted rhythm against the right hand's triplets.

Kurtág began writing *Játékok* ('Playthings') in the mid-1970s in response to a request for some children's pieces. He found the small dimensions congenial - as he did also the permission to be playful as well as deeply serious, even in one brisk motion of the fingers - and he has gone on expanding the collection, which by now numbers 383 pieces in ten volumes. *Capriccio - luminoso* is a sparkler, done within half a minute and dedicated to Jenő Szervánszky, a painter and the brother of Endre Szervánszky, a composer Kurtág esteemed. *Play with Overtones (4)*, much longer, is exactly that: a sampling of resonances from strings whose keys are silently depressed to respond to folksong phrases or leaps. *Perpetuum mobile* is one of the earliest pieces, designed to give beginning pianists proud command of the entire keyboard (but as a result, not so easy to play). *Doina* takes its name from a Romanian species of lament, and again shows how Kurtág values the freshness of folksong.

Ligeti similarly found it difficult to stop once embarked on a potentially endless succession of piano pieces: his *Etudes*, of which he published a first book of six in 1985, followed by a second of eight and four further pieces towards a third book. Debussy is close in *En suspens*, which sounds like an attempt to remember *Clair de lune*. The particular harmonic colour comes from dividing the notes between the hands: five black plus one white in the right, the six white remaining in the left. Debussy is again hailed

from a distance in *Fanfares*, which places its heraldic musical pronouncements - in thirds, sixths, fifths and triads - on a rapid ostinato of three-two-three beats, brightness on dark (the two harmonically connected).

This kind of complex compound metre is what Bartók meant by 'Bulgarian rhythm', of which he presented six ebullient examples at the end of his progressive sequence of piano pieces *Mikrokosmos* (1926-39). The first works with conflicting modalities, rather as Ligeti was to do. An ostinato breaks down, but its scale movement is not forgotten. The shifting accents of 'Bulgarian rhythm' bring a touch of the period's jazz - even more so in the second number, which again has a prominent ostinato. All the features of these first two - syncopation, different modes in the two hands, ostinatos, jazz agility and certainly the liveliness of dance - recur in the remaining numbers. The last ends brilliantly in E major, a homecoming for the whole set, which plays for under ten minutes all told.

Just as David of Israel combatted the Philistines, Schumann imagined himself and his allies as a 'Davidsbund' ('League of David') doing the same three millennia later, ranging themselves against Philistines of another sort. Among his confederates, the 'Davidsbündler', he would surely have expected to recruit Mendelssohn, Berlioz and Chopin. If the pen was mightier than the sword, Schumann might have thought the dance more potent than the march - hence these *Davidsbündlertänze*, which he wrote in 1837.

He had another war on his hands at the time, for permission from Friedrich Wieck to marry the teenage Clara, and his thoughts here were also with her. The work opens with a two-bar figure in the left hand taken from a mazurka by Clara, and references to this reappear.

Like *Carnaval*, the work belongs among efforts by Schumann and other composers at the time to find a new kind of form, equivalent in weight and length to the sonata but comprising a series of short pieces that, as much by contrast as coherence, would hang together. Here the elements are also distinctly Romantic in being voiced by two imaginary characters: the active, outgoing Florestan and the inward, dreamy Eusebius. Almost all the pieces are attributed to one or other of these, or sometimes to both, by means of subscribed initials. Eusebius's style is the slow waltz or other gentle dance; Florestan goes more for the rush and gallop. The two are entwined in the last few pieces, which bring further memories and prove the power of recapitulation within Schumann's new kind of form. All that remains, in the finale, is an *adieu*.

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