

WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 19 December 2023
7.30pm

Angela Hewitt piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Rondo in A minor K511 (1787)

Piano Sonata in F K533/494 (1786-8)

I. Allegro • II. Andante • III. Rondo. Allegretto

Variations on 'Ah vous dirai-je, maman' K265 (1781-2)

Interval

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



Our Audience Fund provides essential unrestricted support for our artistic and learning programmes, connecting thousands of people with music locally, nationally, and internationally. We rely on the generosity of our audience to raise £150,000 each year to support this work. Your gifts are, and continue to be, indispensable.

To donate, please visit <https://wigmore-hall.org.uk/audiencefund>

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



On 8 January 1787 **Mozart** travelled to Prague, where *Le nozze di Figaro* was enjoying a huge success. Mozart directed several performances of the opera, and also composed a new symphony (the 'Prague' K504). On his return to Vienna the following month the first work he wrote was the Rondo in A minor K511. One of the remarkable features of this melancholy siciliano is that it uses the music's intricate ornamentation as an essential part of the music's structure, much as Chopin was to do more than half a century later. The rising chromatic phrases of the rondo theme's second and third bars already carry expressive weight, but when they return much later in the piece shrouded in trills, the effect is one less of decoration, than of intensification.

In the previous year, Mozart had written another self-contained rondo, this time in F major. However, early in 1788, he completed an *Allegro* and *Andante* for piano, and he used the *Rondo* to form the finale of what became a three movement sonata. The origin of the Sonata K533/494 in two distinct stages explains why it bears a double Köchel number. In an attempt to match the contrapuntal grandeur of the two new movements Mozart inserted a cadenza near the *Rondo's* close, and he also opted for a slightly less easy-going tempo for the piece: *Allegretto*, in place of the original 'andante'. Nevertheless, the *Rondo* remains a largely intimate piece, and its theme could scarcely be more simple, though the manner in which it exploits the keyboard's contrasting registers is striking: it begins with both hands in the treble register, and ends deep in the bass, while at its centre stands a yearningly expressive episode featuring the warm middle range.

Even more remarkable in terms of keyboard layout is the manner in which the sonata begins, with an unaccompanied melody for the right hand alone, as though the listener were about to be treated to a passage in elaborate counterpoint. However, when the left hand eventually enters, it is with the simplest of accompaniments. Mozart soon reveals the melody's latent contrapuntal possibilities by having it played in canon, but even so he has left himself with a trump card: the second stage of the exposition includes a rising staccato theme, at first given out by the left hand on its own, and the recapitulation incorporates an additional appearance of this new theme, played simultaneously with the movement's main subject.

A similar combination of ideas is presented in the slow movement. Here, the tail-end of the main subject consists of a rising scale-like passage, and this rising figure is to form the basis of a powerful passage with tightly overlapping entries during the latter part of the unusually elaborate development section that lies at the centre of the piece. The entire movement is tinged with minor-mode inflections, and in what are perhaps its most heart-stopping moments, at the end of each half, a floating new melody brings with it a radiant sea-change from minor to major.

Many of Mozart's variations for piano probably originated as improvisations. Certainly, we can imagine him enjoying himself in creating a virtuoso piece *par*

excellence out of the simplest of tunes ('Twinkle, twinkle little star' in English nursery parlance) with the *Variations on 'Ah vous dirai-je, Maman'* K265. Like several of his variation sets it culminates in an acrobatic variation which has the player's left hand constantly leaping over the right, followed by an ornate adagio and a final variation in which the theme undergoes a rhythmic transformation.

In the spring of 1832 **Schumann** conceived the idea of a fandango for piano. Although the idea came to nothing, he incorporated its theme into his Sonata in F sharp minor Op. 11, where it appears juxtaposed with a rocking motif in the bass to form the opening movement's main subject. The rocking motif is a reference to the last of the *4 Pièces caractéristiques* Op. 5 by Schumann's future wife, Clara Wieck - a piece entitled *Le Ballet des Revenants* ('Ballet of the Ghosts').

The fandango theme is preceded by a slow introduction which soon introduces a floating melodic fragment in the major. This, by an impressive piece of long-range anticipation, turns out to be a pre-echo of the theme of the sonata's second movement. The introduction ends with one of Schumann's characteristic experiments in piano sonority, which has the two notes of the rocking motif emerging *pianissimo* in the bass, out of a blurred swirl of sound.

The slow movement is based on a song Schumann had written as an 18-year-old student, called 'An Anna'. The piano version's delicate sense of understatement is underlined by the marking of *senza passione, ma espressivo*. The following movement is essentially a *Scherzo* with two contrasting trios. The tempo quickens for the first quasi trio whose opening bars are underpinned by the first movement's rocking motif; while the second trio, written very much tongue-in-cheek, abruptly abandons the adventurous style of the piece thus far, in favour of an absurdly heavy-handed polonaise, seemingly in parody of the old fashioned school. There is a further surprise in store before the *Scherzo* is allowed to return, in the shape of a recitative-like passage in quasi-orchestral style. It includes a lightly-tripping rising scale in imitation of an oboe, which is angrily dismissed by the full orchestra, as it were; and to add to the confusion the *Scherzo* returns at the wrong pitch before being thrown into the 'correct' key a couple of bars later – a typically Schumannesque touch.

There are more orchestral sonorities in the finale: tremolos deep in the bass, while above them the texture gradually increases in weight, like a crescendo over a drum roll; a staccato passage near the close, marked *quasi pizzicato, tutti* chords punched out at top speed (one of several features in the piece that present a formidable technical challenge to the pianist). The finale was the first part of the sonata to be composed, and if it lacks the opening movement's coherence and dramatic sweep, its flair and inventiveness carry it unflinchingly through to its triumphant conclusion in the major.

© Misha Donat 2023

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.