

WIGMORE HALL 125

Friday 19 September 2025
7.30pm

This concert is supported by Stephen Croddy

Elisabeth Leonskaja piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Fantasia in C minor K475 (1785)

Dmitry Shostakovich (1906-1975)

Piano Sonata No. 2 in B minor Op. 61 (1943)

I. Allegretto • II. Largo • III. Moderato con moto

Interval

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

3 Klavierstücke D946 (1828)

No. 1 in E flat minor. Allegro assai •

No. 2 in E flat. Allegretto • No. 3 in C. Allegro

Fantasy in C D760 'Wanderer' (1822)

I. Allegro con fuoco, ma non troppo • II. Adagio •

III. Presto • IV. Allegro



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Fantasias are sometimes embellished by the practices of improvisation. Great keyboard improvisers love to change key. There are a number of reasons for this: key-changes can often be brought about by the repetition, a few notes higher or lower, of standard riffs – sequences, they're called. The thought-processes involved in this, if not simple, are at least codified, and so can be undertaken on the wing comparatively easily. Then, once you've reached a new key, you can play something you've already played in the old key, and still have it sound new. Another feature of improvisations is often a recapitulation of the idea you started with. **Mozart's** C minor Fantasy perfectly exemplifies all this: it may even have begun life as an actual springtime improvisation, shortly after his father's long visit during which Haydn told proud Leopold what a good composer his son was. The C minor Fantasia is the first fantasy Mozart wrote after meeting Haydn, and compared with his earlier fantasies, is full of surprises about which key we're in – an interesting instance of Haydn's more exploratory nature (Haydn was an inveterate modulator!) bearing fruit in the younger man's music.

Schlösser, a fellow-student of Salieri, tells us how spontaneous **Schubert** was at the piano, and how his eyes shone as he played. And though Schlösser admits that 'the expressions of the world within him far outweighed his technical development', he goes on to insist 'but who could think of this when, carried away by some bold flight of imagination, oblivious of everything around him, he recited the mighty Fantasy or the A minor Sonata! It is not without reason I choose this word; for the long familiar pieces sounded to me like dramatic recitations, like the outpourings of a soul which creates its musical forms from the depths of its being and clothes them in the garment of immaculate grace.' Schlösser's memories may have clouded a little by 1883 when he wrote them down, but although his choice of word may have been influenced by Liszt's introduction of the word 'recital' for a solo piano concert (at the Hanover Square Rooms on 9 June 1840), his vivid descriptions clearly show Schubert's Romantic side. Perhaps one of Schubert's greatest strengths is his Protean navigation between Classical and Romantic aesthetics. Schubert would have been in complete agreement with Schlösser's technical assessment. Once, 'falling off' the last movement of the Fantasy, he sprang up from the stool crying 'Let the devil play the stuff!'

Schubert composed the 'Wanderer' Fantasy in November 1822. It may have been its compelling nature that prevented the completion of the B minor Symphony that Schubert had been working on in October; though others have associated the abandonment of the mighty 'Unfinished' with the fact that it was during the autumn of 1822 that Schubert caught the syphilis that dogged the rest of his short life. Perhaps that explains why Schubert's mind turned

to the song 'Der Wanderer' that he had composed in October 1816:

I am a stranger everywhere. I wander silent, joyless, sighing: "Where?" The answer comes in a ghostly whisper: "There, where you are *not*, there is happiness".

The aspect of the song that appealed to Schubert, Classically enough, was not its mood (except in the slow movement, which directly relates to the song) but the repeated chords at the opening. A simple idea, but all Schubert's inexhaustible fecundity required.

It's worth comparing the unconscious fancy of the two composers. Mozart's mastery of opera stems from his astoundingly integrated mind. He was able to follow every twist of the plot with suitable music, and though the often-absurd situations required enormous contrast in the material, we never feel we're suddenly in a different opera. His C minor Fantasy is full of abrupt contrast too, but somehow it's all one piece. Schubert wrote operas too, but their lack of success, partly through his lack of production opportunities, is perhaps also due to his Romantic interest in his subject matter at the expense of the plot. His wonderful songs rarely deal with 'plot', fortunately, while his instrumental music displays a mastery of form.

The three piano pieces D946 were composed in another Viennese May-time, in 1828, but not published until 40 years later. Schubert shows himself to be just as enthusiastic a modulator as Haydn was. E flat minor gives way to B major in the first one, E flat major to C major and A flat minor and B minor in the second, and C major to D flat major in the last. Almost incidental to such *tours de force* is a further masterly exploration of repeated notes and chords, to set beside the earlier Fantasy.

Shostakovich was not sure what key his Second Sonata would be in. He'd already composed a Sonata in B minor at the age of 20, a sonata that aspired to be 'in the style of Liszt', which might explain the choice of key – Liszt's Sonata is in B minor. Shostakovich first sketched his Second Sonata in four movements in the key of C sharp minor, but eventually composed three movements (the last a set of variations) on entirely different material, in B minor once again. The piece was instigated by the composer's grief at the death of his piano teacher, Leonid Nikolayev.

Rather like its first critics, Shostakovich was not sure, either, about what he thought of his Second Sonata. Unusually, he never recorded it himself, and he once described it as a 'trifle'. But later he regarded it as the best of his piano works. It has taken time to reveal its beauties and excitements, to expose the depths behind its 'deceptively simple structure', and to relish its rich variety.

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