

WIGMORE HALL 125

Saturday 1 November 2025
7.30pm

This concert is supported by The Marchus Trust

Thomas Larcher Composer in Residence Focus Day

Thomas Larcher piano
Paul Lewis piano

Thomas Larcher (b.1963)

Poems – 12 Pieces for Pianists and Other Children (1975-2010)

*I. Sad yellow whale • II. Cantabile •
III. Babu Chiri's house • IV. Waking up in Najing •
V. (The day) When I lost my funny green dog • VI. A little
piece for Ursu • VII. Frida falls asleep • VIII. MUI I •
IX. one, two, three, four, nine • X. 12 years old •
XI. Don't step on the Regenwurm! • XII. A Song from?*

Piano Sonata (2019)

*I. Viertel ca. 50, quasi improvvisando, Paul Gürtler
gewidmet • II. Scherzo, drei Viertel ca. 210 • III. fallen out of
time, für Lars Vogt • IV. Toccata, Allegro, Viertel ca. 176*

Interval

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 5 in C minor Op. 10 No. 1 (?1795-7)

*I. Allegro molto e con brio •
II. Adagio molto • III. Prestissimo*

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Fantasie in F minor D940 (1828))

*I. Allegro molto moderato • II. Largo • III. Scherzo. Allegro
vivace • IV. Finale. Allegro molto moderato*



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Poems

Poems is a cycle consisting of 12 pieces for piano. The pieces were composed to be also suitable for performance by children, the demands of each piece vary considerably. All the pieces are extremely short and concentrated. My aim was to undertake a personal exploration of this 'miniature form'. Each title is associated with (auto)biographical connotations of the (tonal) self, particularly as the starting point for some of these movements delves far back into my past history.

'Sad yellow whale': When writing music, I have the habit of painting over thrown-away passages ... with a pencil, with a pen or also with watercolours ... one day a (sad) yellow whale appeared on the music sheet ...

'Cantabile': a once ferocious motif came to my mind while running through some woods ... and became a bit melancholic ...

'Babu Chiri's house': When walking through Nepal we slept in a house formerly owned by Babu Chiri, one of the most famous sherpas. He had been dead for some years by then (he fell into a crevasse on Mt Everest) and his brother's family was running the lodge. In the dark kitchen someone hummed this melody again and again ...

'Waking up in Najing': waking up at cock's crow and being awakened by a cock's crow in Nanjing ... no mattress, only some wooden planks – I never liked those animals!

'(The day) When I lost my funny green dog': I had a lovely cap with a funny green dog on it ... it warmed my head, when I walked up to a summit ... however when going down I realised that it was not here anymore ...

'A little piece for Ursu': an endless, vast landscape pinned down by some few notes

'Frida falls asleep': A child struggles against falling asleep ... but not very successfully ...

'MUI 1': a number plate as the trigger for a little piece referring to the nights as Bartók might have imagined them ...

'one, two, three, four, nine': a new method of counting ... invented by Stephanie in 2008 ... and an old melody from my 'Illness'-piece ...

'12 years old': a piece I wrote in 1975 ... I took it up in 2010 and made another ending ...

'Don't step on the regenwurm': Karin held a lecture at the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin and explained that earthworms feel the pain twice when they are torn apart ... in each part of their body ...

'A song from?': ... definitely a song from my string quartet 'Madhares' ... I once had heard a Nepali melody and then could not get hold of it anymore ... and I always imagined what this song could have been like ... and so this came up. A long time later I came across

the original melody again ... what you believe is memory and your imagination can carry you away from the origins, that's for sure ...

Some of the pieces are very easy, for example '(The day) When I lost my funny green dog' or 'Babu Chiri's house'. These stand in contrast to others with specific technical demands (e.g. slightly prepared piano in 'one, two, three, four, nine' and the crossing of hands in 'Frida falls asleep').

Poems was created in response to a commission issued by the festival Spannungen 2010 in Heimbach/Germany where the individual pieces of this cycle received their first performances in complete form either by Lars Vogt or by myself at the end of the festival – Lars and I spent a long time deciding which of us would be willing to rise to the challenge of these difficult pieces – in the end it was Lars who had to bite the bullet!

© Thomas Larcher (translated by Lindsay Chalmers-Gerbracht)

Larcher's Piano Sonata presents four individual though interrelated movements. The first, *quasi improvando*; the second *Scherzo*, at the nail-biting tempo of 210 bpm; the third *fallen out of time*, dedicated to Lars Vogt; and the fourth *Toccata, Allegro*, which returns to another blistering tempo of 176 bpm. In his preface to the score, Larcher shares the following questions, which seem to underline the work, if not also give it generative flair, teasing out the essence of sonata form itself:

What is a thought, an idea, an invention?
Where does the stream of developments come from, and what feeds it?
What is it, an idea? Where does it come from?
Whose ideas have triggered mine? And whose triggered theirs?
When composing, one is an interface in an infinite and never-ending circuit of connections.

Beethoven composed his Op. 10 sonatas during 1795-8, a time in which he sought to move away from the orbits of Haydn and Mozart. One of the most dramatic of the set, the Piano Sonata No. 5 in C minor is marked by the fiery temperament, structural vigour, and rhetorical silences that would characterise his mature compositional voice. The opening movement unleashes a restless energy, with its terse motives and bold contrasts. The second movement provides a lyrical counterbalance: marked *Adagio molto*, unfolding with poignant restraint in an ABAB sonatina structure, and anticipating the slow movements of Beethoven's later works. The finale, a restless *Prestissimo*, pushes forward with inexorable drive, bringing the sonata to a conclusion that is both exhilarating and unsettled, with explosive dynamic contrasts, dashing scalar passages, frenzied tremolos, and the unusual emphasis of unexpected angular

harmonies. Compact and concentrated, the work exemplifies Beethoven's ability to traverse vast emotional landscapes within relatively concise form, and at an almost superhuman pace.

Where Beethoven's sonata can be seen as an embodiment of youthful defiance, **Schubert's** Fantasie in F minor speaks of intimacy, lyricism, and connection. Written in 1828, the final year of Schubert's life, it was dedicated to his close friend and piano teacher, Countess Caroline Esterházy. Composed for piano four hands, the work is both personal and expansive; a dialogue between two players that becomes a metaphor for companionship. The Fantasie unfolds in a continuous arc of four linked movements usually lasting around 20 minutes. The first features a wistful, lyrical theme whose tenderness is soon shadowed by darker undertones, modulating to the distant key of F sharp minor in preparation for

the next section. While marked *Largo*, the second movement begins with a more intense *fortissimo* theme, before suddenly yielding to a more graceful second theme. The third movement takes the form of a vivacious scherzo, full of rhythmic sparkle, modulating back to the F minor of the fourth movement via C sharp minor. The finale revisits earlier material in a virtuosic display of variation and transformation, culminating in a fugue whose intensity and tragic grandeur suggest the proximity of Schubert's own mortality, as the music repeatedly tries to reconcile the diverging paths of F minor and F major. The unsettled closing cadence in the last eight bars is widely considered to be one of the most striking in Schubert's oeuvre for its unusual harmonic and rhetorical turn.

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