

## Brett Dean: The Homage Etudes (2009-2023)

Benjamin Grosvenor piano

Brett Dean (b.1961)

From *Hommage à Bach* (2010)

*Prelude*

*Hommage à Kurtág* (2011)

*Music for Drakenstein - Two Etudes* (2018) world première

*I. Tallying • II. Envoy (Hommage à Beethoven)*

*Hommage à Janáček* (2009)

*Hommage à Lutosławski* (2017)

From *Hommage à Bach*

*II. Chorale (Transcription of JS Bach's 'Gute Nacht, o Wesen' from BWV277)*

*Faustian Pact (Hommage à Liszt)* (2023) UK première

*Commissioned by Festival Le Piano Symphonique and the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra, Wigmore Hall and Symphony Center Presents, Chicago* (2023)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Brett Dean

*Intermezzo in B minor Op. 119 No. 1* (1893)

From *Hommage à Brahms* (2013)

*I. Engelsflügel 1 (Angels' Wings 1)*

Johannes Brahms

Brett Dean

*Intermezzo in E minor Op. 119 No. 2*

From *Hommage à Brahms*

*II. Hafenkneipenmusik (Harbourside Bar Music)*

Johannes Brahms

Brett Dean

*Intermezzo in C Op. 119 No. 3*

From *Hommage à Brahms*

*Engelsflügel 2 (Angels' Wings 2)*

Johannes Brahms

*Rhapsody in E flat Op. 119 No. 4*

CLASSIC *fm* Wigmore Hall £5 tickets for Under 35s supported by Media Partner Classic FM



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](http://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



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



I began my ongoing series 'The Homage Etudes' for solo piano in 2009 and today's concert marks their first ever performance as a complete set (...so far!).

Not possessing particularly skilled pianistic 'chops' myself, these études were conceived as a means of gathering opportunities and gaining experiences in composing for the keyboard, choosing piano works from an array of different composers across the centuries as the starting point for each one. In most cases these are, not surprisingly, homages to recognised pianist-composers such as Beethoven, Liszt, Brahms and Kurtág. However there are a couple of others in there, e.g. Lutosławski and Janáček, who aren't especially known for their piano music but whose piano output has nevertheless fascinated me over the years. Hence this is a collection of études not only for the performer but also for me as composer.

We begin with **Hommage à Bach**, originally commissioned by Wigmore Hall for Angela Hewitt's *Bach Book* (2010), for which 'short new piano pieces that are either Bach transcriptions or pieces directly inspired by Bach' were being sought. I took Ms Hewitt very much at her word by providing one of each, a *Prelude* which opens this concert and a *Chorale* which appears later on. Both movements draw on relatively early Bach works: the *Prelude* on the youthful exuberance and mechanics of his keyboard toccatas (written following his famous pilgrimage to hear Buxtehude play in Lübeck in 1705), while the *Chorale* is a transcription of a particularly beautiful chorale, 'Gute Nacht, o Wesen', from the longest and richest of Bach's funeral motets, *Jesu, meine Freude* from c.1723.

My **Hommage à Kurtág** also began life as a Wigmore commission, premièred in this hall in 2011 by Piers Lane. This is the only work in the set where the inspiration has been my own personal experiences of meeting and conversing with a living composer. György Kurtág was a vital early mentor for me during his time as composer-in-residence with the Berlin Philharmonic in the mid 1990s (while I was still a member of the orchestra's viola section). His imploring manner, hands clasped, pleading for ever more intensity during the extraordinary chamber music sessions I experienced with him, lies behind the rising-falling cluster motive heard throughout the piece.

**Music for Drakenstein** is in two parts. Originally conceived in 2018 for a sadly cancelled memorial performance that was to take place at Drakenstein Prison in South Africa where Nelson Mandela spent the last part of his long imprisonment, this work finally receives its world première today. The first movement, *Tallying*, is inspired by the way in which prisoners mark up their days spent in confinement by means of lines etched upon the walls. Four stubbornly repeated crotchets stand for the vertical lines; the ensuing horizontal line is dissipated in rambling ornaments, as if already setting out into the wider world. The following movement, *Envoy*, takes up that longed-for freedom in a

fleet-of-foot scherzo that pays homage to Beethoven, referencing one of my very favourite Beethoven piano sonata movements from his Op. 27 No. 1.

**Hommage à Janáček** is the earliest of my piano études, written for Italian pianist Emanuele Torquati in 2009. While far better known for his operas and orchestral works, Janáček's relatively lean oeuvre of piano music is nevertheless full of similarly great character and poignancy. My étude examines his masterly use of small repeated fragments in creating not only energy and heightened dramatic tension but also moments of inward reflection.

**Hommage à Lutosławski** was composed for US pianist Gloria Cheng's tribute project in memory of the American composer Steven Stucky, a wonderful colleague with whom I shared a mutual love of Lutosławski's music. Again, while not especially known for his piano music, it seemed fitting to pay my respects to Steve with something inspired by Lutosławski. My brief toccata-esque piece takes as its starting point a striking figuration drawn from the piano part of Lutosławski's Third Symphony and closes with a very soft and distant quotation of that remarkable work's 'big tune'.

My most recent addition to this étude collection is *Faustian Pact* from 2023, a homage to that most mercurial of pianist-composers, Franz Liszt, and composed for today's remarkable soloist Benjamin Grosvenor. Through my years as an orchestral musician, encounters with Liszt's music were largely limited to warhorses such as his piano concertos and *Les préludes*. Spending time more recently studying works such as the *Transcendental Etudes* and the B minor Sonata has been an ear-, eye- and mind-opening experience. My *Faustian Pact* pays homage to this marvellously inventive mind in a musical argument that touches on Liszt's harmonic quirkiness and originality as well as his daringly phosphorescent pianism and surprising moments of mystical reflection.

This recital comes to a close with my **Hommage à Brahms**, which pays homage not only to Brahms the composer but also the man. It was written for American pianist Emanuel Ax, and was premièred by him in 2014 in Chicago. This set of three movements was conceived to be played as interludes between Brahms's four final solo piano pieces of Op. 119 from 1893, and that is how they will be heard today. I drew particular inspiration from accompanying textures and figurations as found in Brahms's duo sonatas and Lieder. Taking into account aspects of Brahms's personal life, and specifically the long and complicated relationship he had with Clara Schumann, these homage-pieces emerge out of the idea of a line or part that's absent, the person *not* by his side. It is music that grows out of accompanying figurations yet takes on a life of its own, shining a light on Brahms's poignantly melancholic op. 119 pieces.

© Brett Dean 2024

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.