

# WIGMORE HALL

Monday 20 February 2023  
1.00pm

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet piano

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Piano Sonata in D HXVI/24 (?1773)

*I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Finale. Presto*

Piano Sonata in A flat HXVI/46 (c.1767-8)

*I. Allegro moderato • II. Adagio • III. Finale. Presto*

Piano Sonata in E flat HXVI/49 (1789-90)

*I. Allegro • II. Adagio e cantabile •  
III. Finale. Tempo di Menuet*

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By his own admission **Haydn** was no keyboard virtuoso. Many of his 60-odd sonatas for harpsichord and (from around 1780) fortepiano were composed for pupils. Yet far more than Mozart's much slenderer body of sonatas, his keyboard sonatas chart and epitomise the evolution of the classical sonata: from the lightweight early harpsichord divertimenti, through the more personally expressive works of the late 1760s and early 1770s, several influenced by the *Empfindsamkeit* of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, and the consciously 'popular' idiom of the 1770s and 1780s, to the three great sonatas (Nos. 50-52 in Hoboken's catalogue) inspired by the sonorous Broadwood instruments he encountered in London.

Opening Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's all-Haydn programme, the Sonata No. 24 in D comes from a set of six likely composed in 1773 and printed the following year with a judicious dedication to Haydn's employer, Prince Nikolaus Esterházy. The composer was careful to tailor these predominantly lightweight pieces to the taste and technique of the flourishing amateur market. The tone is essentially *galant*. But there is plenty of Haydnesque inventiveness and drama *en route*. The athletic first movement of No. 24, in 3/4 time, alternates wiry two-part writing with brilliant toccata sequences (shades here of Domenico Scarlatti). At the opening of the central development Haydn intensifies the main theme in a series of taut canonic imitations.

The *Adagio*, in D minor, opens with a dolefully hesitant theme over a Baroque-style repeated-note accompaniment – a peculiarly Haydnesque blend of pathos and austerity – before growing more floridly expressive. Following the example of many of CPE Bach's slow movements, Haydn then lets the music dissolve into the mercurial *Presto Finale*. This opens with a gracefully syncopated theme, followed by an airy variation that makes even greater play with syncopation. Then, after what promises to be a literal reprise of the original theme, a pause on an alien chord mischievously derails the listener's expectations

No Haydn sonata is more obviously indebted to CPE Bach's *Empfindsamkeit* – the language of heightened sensibility that had its literary roots in the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the German poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock – than the Sonata No. 46 in A flat, composed around 1767-8. Beyond any specific influence, this beautiful work reflects the striking intensification of Haydn's musical idiom after his elevation to Esterházy Kapellmeister in 1766. Opening with a typically *empfindsamer* theme, irregularly phrased and characterised by delicate ornaments and sighing appoggiaturas, the first movement surpasses all its predecessors in scale and expressive richness. As so often in Haydn's earlier sonatas, the central section is more a free fantasia

than a true development, though here the exhilarating toccata-like figuration sweeps through an unusually adventurous range of keys.

For the central *Adagio*, Haydn moves flatwards to D flat major, an *outré* key in the 18th Century and one never used by Mozart. With the extreme tonality goes a peculiar intimacy of expression. From the delicate contrapuntal opening, with the bass descending passacaglia-style, this is one of Haydn's most poetic slow movements. The chromatic enrichment of the main theme in the development suggests not so much CPE as JS Bach at his most inward.

With its catchy, quicksilver main theme, the *Finale* provides a glorious physical release. Yet for all its ebullience this is no mere frothy romp. Haydn's darting semiquaver figuration always has a strong sense of direction, not least in the powerful chromatic sequences just before the recapitulation.

Over two decades later, in 1789, Haydn composed an *Allegro* and minuet for keyboard, probably intending them to stand as another two-movement sonata. The following spring he added an *Adagio e cantabile* to create a three-movement work, Sonata No. 49 in E flat. Although the autograph carries a dedication to Maria Anna ('Nanette') Jerlischeck, the Esterházy housekeeper, Haydn intended the sonata for his close friend and confidante Maria Anna von Genzinger. 'This sonata is in E flat, entirely new and forever meant only for Your Grace,' he wrote to her, adding that the *Adagio* was 'somewhat difficult, but full of feeling'. While delighted with the sonata, she did indeed find the *Adagio* 'somewhat difficult', asking Haydn to simplify a passage involving crossed hands in the rolling, romantically impassioned B flat minor central episode. (Whether or not he made a simplified version for her is unknown.) If Haydn was in love with Maria Anna – and we can guess that he was – his feelings might be divined from this extraordinarily sensitive, intimate music.

Despite its nonchalant opening, the sonata's initial *Allegro* is a dramatic, closely wrought movement that evolves virtually all its ideas from the main theme. The far-reaching development culminates in a tense modulating passage on a four-note 'drum' rhythm, with extreme contrasts of register. Remarkable, too, is the expansive coda, musing first on the gentle cadential theme and then on a lyrical idea that had immediately followed the opening. The minuet *Finale*, a free rondo with two episodes (the second in E flat minor), relaxes the tension after two highly charged movements – though it is surely no coincidence that its first episode recalls the opening movement's cadential theme.

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