

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 21 July 2022 7.30pm

Katya Apekisheva piano

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The two opening Mozart works will be played without interruption – please reserve your applause until after the Fantasia

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Piano Sonata in F K332 (1781-3)

I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro assai

Fantasia in D minor K397 (c.1782-7)

Thomas Adès (b.1971)

Mazurkas Op. 27 (2009)

Moderato, molto rubato • Prestissimo, molto espressivo • Grave, maestoso

Aleksandr Skryabin (1872-1915)

Fantasie Op. 28 (1900)

Interval

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)

Fantasy in F minor Op. 49 (1841)

Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937)

Mazurka Op. 50 No. 1 (1924-6)

Mazurka Op. 50 No. 2 (1924-6)

Elena Langer (b.1974)

Figaro's Dances (2022) *world première*

Fryderyk Chopin

Mazurka in C sharp minor Op. 50 No. 3 (1842)

Mazurka in D flat Op. 30 No. 3 (1837)

Mazurka in B flat minor Op. 24 No. 4 (1833)

Scherzo No. 2 in B flat minor Op. 31 (1837)

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This evening's programme offers a series of tributes across time – as well as between both halves of the programme. The works include a world première by Elena Langer, whose focus is the time of Mozart and his 1786 masterpiece *Le nozze di Figaro* – as in her 2016 opera *Figaro Gets a Divorce* for Welsh National Opera.

Mozart's Fantasia in D minor K397 is thought to be directly contemporaneous with his first collaboration with Lorenzo da Ponte, though a date of 1782, not long after Mozart arrived in Vienna, seems more likely. The piece probably began life as an improvisation, as the composer-pianist tried to make his name in what he described as 'Klavierland' in a letter to his father. Significantly, the autograph score trails off into nothing, with the publisher Breitkopf the first to add ten concluding bars. Pianists ever since have either adopted these or abandoned them in favour of another solution.

Slightly less mysterious are the origins of the Piano Sonata No. 12 in F K332, which most agree was either written during Mozart's stay in Munich for the première of *Idomeneo* at the beginning of 1781 or shortly after he arrived in Vienna later that year. Opening modestly, the sonata does not remain restrained for long, however, with an exposition that features lively exchanges between the tonic and the relative minor – and pretty much everything in between. The development is slightly more muted, though Mozart peppers the score with syncopations and dynamic contrasts that continue in the recapitulation. The slow movement, built over a rocking 'Alberti' pattern, features teasing suspensions and a particularly expressive modulation, which Mozart throws away in a wildly cheery finale.

Thomas Adès's Mazurkas Op. 27 were written for Emanuel Ax and the Chopin bicentenary of 2010, with a world première taking place at Carnegie Hall in February that year, a month before the Polish composer's 200th birthday. As with so many of Adès's 'tributes', he actively acknowledges the distance between now and then, between homage and model. The elastic *rubato* of Chopin's style is taken to expressive, even distorting, ends, while the characteristic ostinatos, dotted rhythms and prevailing melancholy of the mazurka are richly explored in what the critic Anthony Tommasini described in *The New York Times* as 'modern-day, harmonically spiky, rhythmically fractured mazurkas that imaginatively span the keyboard'.

We will hear the *fons et origo* in the second half of tonight's concert, but not before encountering **Skryabin** and his *Fantasie in B minor* Op. 28, written in 1900. Chopin is, likewise, a point of reference, not least the *Ballades*, albeit encountered through the prism of Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*. Such touchstones are fantastical enough to explain the title, though Skryabin roots the work in a sonata form, its touching second subject reaching heights of heroism during the recapitulation.

Chopin's Fantasy in F minor Op. 49 begins with a stirring march. Left behind in favour of other tropes, its rhythmic profile

nonetheless continues throughout this freely unfolding structure from 1841. Likewise, the initial pall covers much of what follows. There may be virtuosity, as well as tender remembrances of things past – notably, in the distant key of B major – yet a final plagal cadence will bring us back to the graveside.

Szymanowski was highly aware of the debt he owed his Polish predecessor. He was equally determined, however, to set himself apart, as the late musicologist Tadeusz Stefan Zieliński explained. 'Although his music paid a tribute to Chopin [...] Szymanowski proved that the piano mazurka form was not a "historic" concept forever tied with Chopin and his age (and subject to mere imitations) – no, it was a living and dynamic thing that developed just as well as other musical forms.'

When Szymanowski wrote his 20 Mazurkas Op. 50, published in five pamphlets between 1926 and 1931, he fused the original 'lowland' dance with the 'highland' music of the Tatras. These are the mountains that tower above the composer's beloved Zakopane, the capital of the culturally rich Podhale region, with its Goral folk music. We hear two of the first set of four, which Szymanowski dedicated to none other than Arthur Rubinstein. The light drone that underpins the otherworldly cantilena of No. 1 evokes local bagpipes, while the more rambunctious rondo in No. 2 strides out into the wilds, before turning more reflective.

Dance rhythms likewise inform **Elena Langer's** new work, albeit riffing more on Mozart than Polish mazurkas, as she explains:

Katya Apekisheva asked me to write her a short, dancey piano piece for this recital [...]. Looking at the rest of the programme, it occurred to me that adapting some music from my opera *Figaro Gets a Divorce* would connect nicely to the Mozart sonata she is playing in the first half of the programme.

The concert ends, however, with three of Chopin's crucial contributions to the mazurka genre, followed by his *Scherzo No. 2 in B flat minor* Op. 31. The first of the mazurkas, in C sharp minor Op. 50 No. 3, was composed and published in 1842. By this point in Chopin's career, he had made significant strides with the mutable dance form, as demonstrated by this iteration's contrapuntal flair. The D flat major Mazurka of 1837, Op. 30 No. 3, is more mercurial, with displays of major-key bravura trailed by a minor-key shadow, the latter similarly characterising the melancholy Mazurka in B flat minor Op. 24 No. 4 of four years earlier. And that same juxtaposition of key centres plays out in the Op. 31 *Scherzo*, also written in 1837. It was Schumann who captured the work's changeable nature as 'overflowing with tenderness, boldness, love and contempt'. But for all its sense of contrast and curiosity, triumph is ultimately assured.

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