

# WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 22 January 2025  
7.30pm

Mariam Batsashvili piano

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Piano Sonata in D HXVI/37 (pub. 1780)  
*I. Allegro con brio • II. Largo e sostenuto •  
III. Finale. Presto ma non troppo*

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Rondo a Capriccio in G Op. 129 'Rage over a lost penny'

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

6 Klavierstücke Op. 118 (by 1893)  
*Intermezzo in A minor No. 1  
Intermezzo in A No. 2  
Ballade in G minor No. 3  
Intermezzo in F minor No. 4  
Romance in F No. 5  
Intermezzo in E flat minor No. 6*

*Interval*

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Impromptu in A flat D935 No. 2 (1827)  
Impromptu in F minor D935 No. 4 (1827)

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in C sharp minor S244  
Hungarian Rhapsody No. 13 in A minor S244 (1846-53)



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We know **Haydn** as the ‘father of the symphony’ and a pioneer of the string quartet, but in recent years a number of pianists have been exploring the treasures of his more than 55 surviving keyboard sonatas, recent champions including Wigmore Hall regulars Marc-André Hamelin, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet and Paul Lewis. The Sonata No. 37 in D major was published as part of a set of six sonatas dedicated to the talented sisters Franziska and Maria Katherina von Auenbrugger, pupils of Haydn, ‘whose way of playing and... close attention to the music,’ were, he declared, ‘equal to those of the great masters’. The first movement draws on the ebullience and bristling energy we hear in Scarlatti’s sonatas, demanding precision and subtle weighting that exposes the minutest flaw in fingerwork. With its dotted rhythms and fast flourishes, the second movement draws on the style of the Baroque French overture though cast in a mournful, songful mould. Following without a break, the Finale is a Rondo (a form comprising alternating and returning sections) and returns to a bright mood, more playful than the first movement. The coy hesitation on a repeated ‘A’ before the final return of the first section is typical of Haydn’s wit and no doubt one of the many ‘delicious little naughtinesses’ that Mariam Batsashvili has said she admires in this work.

Another ebullient Rondo comes next, the breathless, Hungarian-flavoured piece described in a note on the manuscript (in an unknown hand, not Beethoven’s) as ‘The rage over the lost penny, played out in a Capriccio’.

**Beethoven** left it unaccountably unfinished and it was completed and published by Anton Diabelli in 1828, the year after Beethoven’s death. Its lively spirit and virtuosic display (by no means confined to the right hand) bear out its ‘capriccio’ styling, which implies a free, whimsical nature and a sense of improvisation – features also associated with the impromptus and rhapsodies that follow in tonight’s programme. The fanciful ‘rage over the lost penny’ title clearly references the intense energy of the piece. It’s gone at with great gusto, but ultimately amounts to no more than a storm in a teacup.

The 20 short pieces contained in **Brahms**’s late well-spring of piano works, gathered into four groups (Opp 116–119), are among the most poignant, poetic and introspective in the piano repertoire – a culmination both of the composer’s relationship with the piano and his expressive powers in his autumn years. More than half of each set (including all three of Op. 117) are classed as Intermezzos – 14 in all. It’s possible, especially in the context of tonight’s programme, to see these as more reflective, less ‘brilliant’, incarnations of the caprice – and Brahms interspersed Capriccios with Intermezzos in the Op. 116 set, as well as in the earlier eight pieces of Op. 76. The Op. 118 set was dedicated to Clara Schumann, to whom Brahms had been an intimate friend since the death of her husband Robert in 1853. On receiving the published scores for Opp 118 and 119, Clara wrote just before Christmas in 1893: ‘Oh, if only I could find words to express what the new pieces mean to me, what a cordial they are to my soul!’

The Intermezzo in A minor has a passionate sweep, underpinned by the wide, surging *arpeggios* rippling

across the hands. The tender A major Intermezzo, one of the most popular pieces from the four sets, carries an undercurrent of unspoken regret within its eloquent lyricism. The middle section features Brahms’s much-loved overlaying of notes grouped in threes with notes grouped in twos, as well as a quietly ravishing bell-like chorale. The only piece marked as a Ballade, the third piece gallops boldly along, contrasted by an effortlessly flowing middle section which strays deliciously into a gentle (but momentary) premonition of the galloping theme before its return proper.

No. 4 begins as a wispy *scherzo*, but the customary lightness is modified by the indication *un poco agitato*. This is enigmatic from the start, a mood compounded by the fragile middle section, where the downward-reaching chords create a vacuum of desolation, the position of the strong beat being displaced and obscured in Schumann-esque fashion.

The luminous, hymn-like opening of the Romance (No. 5) eventually breaks into a contrasting section, airy and chirruping. With the sixth and final piece we seem to enter an other-worldly realm, with a desolate song around which mysterious harp-like strains blow. A new idea, borrowing the galloping chordal texture from No. 3, returns us to terra firma, building to a climax in cascading octaves. The tightly wound song of the opening returns in various guises – stirring, ethereal, funereal, anguished – but the final chord suggests quiet acceptance.

**Schubert** was not the first to write impromptus for the piano (that honour goes to the Bohemian Jan Václav Voříšek) but his two sets of four such pieces – D899 and D935 (the latter published posthumously) – are the earliest to remain in the repertoire, followed by examples from Chopin, Liszt and Fauré among others. No. 2 in A flat takes the form of a minuet and trio, the opening divided into a serene melody and a more resolute, chordal complement. Fluid triplets run through the middle section, while the left hand continues the stressed–unstressed dactylic rhythm. The more playful Impromptu No. 4 opens with the flavour of a Hungarian dance, contrasting it with a yodelling middle section that features impressive free-flowing scales.

**Liszt** celebrated his Hungarian musical heritage in his 19 *Hungarian Rhapsodies*, at the same time combining musical rhapsodising – inspired by the improvising Gypsy bands – with extravagant technical display. No. 2 carries a profusion of themes – perhaps the most fetching of which are the sparkling Allegro zingarese, which sparkles high in the treble of the keyboard, and its rather suave successor. The Hungarian Rhapsody No. 13 crops up rather less frequently in recital programmes and appears more continuous in form. Its conclusion is – relatively speaking! – less barnstorming than that of No. 2 but it features a notoriously perilous version of a theme, presented in fiendish fast-repeated notes.

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