

Celestial Navigation

Pavel Kolesnikov piano

Louis Couperin (1626-1661)	Pavane in F sharp minor
Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)	Regard de l'Etoile from <i>Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus</i> (1944)
Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)	Nocturne in D flat Op. 27 No. 2 (1835)
Olivier Messiaen	Regard de l'Etoile from <i>Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus</i> La colombe from <i>Préludes</i> (1928-9)
Fryderyk Chopin	Nocturne in E minor Op. 72 No. 1 (c.1829)
Olivier Messiaen	La colombe from <i>Préludes</i> Prélude (1964)
Fryderyk Chopin	Nocturne in C sharp minor Op. 27 No. 1 (1835)
Olivier Messiaen	Prélude
Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)	Une barque sur l'océan from <i>Miroirs</i> (1904-5)
Thomas Adès (b.1971)	Darknesse visible (1992)

Interval

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)	4 Impromptus D935 (1827) <i>Impromptu in F minor • Impromptu in A flat • Impromptu in B flat • Impromptu in F minor</i>
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This concert takes its name from a sculpture by the American artist Joseph Cornell (1903-72). It's characteristic of his creations – glass-fronted boxes displaying everyday objects or clippings of images, arranged to evoke a dialogue between formality and Surrealist fantasy. In the box entitled *Celestial Navigation*, four wine glasses (one full of blue marbles) sit below a planet-like orb, while behind, a fragment of a cherub's head and clippings from a celestial atlas sink into a roughly daubed background with a pale streak of sky blue.

As Pavel Kolesnikov sees it, 'Cornell assembles objects but without ever falling into the genre of a still-life. What he puts together is the art of a free spirit who makes links between disparate elements. It is, overall, a weaving together of paradoxical links which rests on intuitive energies'. He sees parallels between Cornell's assemblage and the concept of a piano recital: 'What is a recital if it's not a Cornell box?', he says. 'If each work is a world in itself, the relationship of these worlds engenders a variety of further worlds, whose significance is always superior to their sum'.

Olivier Messiaen certainly believed in another world – through the lens of his Catholic faith, the whole cosmos was part of a divine harmony. He experienced synaesthesia: particular musical sounds made him see vivid colours. And he believed that the gift of musical creation was not bestowed upon humans alone. A newspaper reporter interviewed him for *France-Soir* in March 1948:

'Which composers do you recognise as having influenced your music?'

'The birds'.

'Excuse me?'

'Yes, the birds. I've listened to them a lot, when lying in the grass, pencil and notebook in hand'.

Composed in Nazi-occupied Paris and premièred in 1945, *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* is a cycle of 20 keyboard meditations on its sacred subject. Messiaen describes its second movement *Regard de l'Étoile* as depicting 'The fall of Grace: the Star shines innocently, surmounted by a Cross'. *La colombe* ('The dove') predates any of this; as the first piece in Messiaen's first published work, the eight *Préludes* for piano of 1928-9, Messiaen saw its tonality and soundworld as 'orange, with violet veins'.

In their quiet way, **Chopin's** Nocturnes (Op. 27 dates from 1835, and Op. 72 No.1 from a few years earlier – it was published posthumously) were just as revolutionary: wordless, stylised love songs for piano, transfigured into poetic impressions of night. Liszt went into raptures over 'these vague aeolian harmonies, these half-formed sighs floating through the air, softly lamenting and dissolved in delicious melancholy'.

Ravel, too was intensely alive to nuances of colour and light. The sections of his piano suite *Miroirs* (1904-5) were meant, as the name implies, to reflect distinct visual impressions. In the third, *Une barque sur l'océan*, the *luxe, calme et volupté* of a warm sea is unmistakable, just as **Thomas Adès's** early piano work *Darknesse visible* (1992) paints its own, haunted, sonic picture. Adès describes it as 'a seven-minute explosion of John Dowland's lute song *In Darknesse Let Me Dwell* ... No notes have been added; indeed, some have been removed. Patterns latent in the original have been isolated and regrouped, with the aim of illuminating the song from within'.

Schubert's 4 *Impromptus* D935 date from Vienna in the second half of 1827. Robert Schumann – the man more responsible than anyone else for rediscovering the 'lost' Schubert – suggested that Schubert might have conceived them as a single, four-movement sonata. They do suggest a kind of musical journey, from the expansive, often turbulent No. 1 in F minor and its counterpart, the peppery, virtuosic Hungarian dance of No. 4, also in F minor.

In between come two ravishingly conceived intermezzis, each suffused with a tender inwardness: the minuet-like No. 2 and – serving as a slow movement – the increasingly fantastic variations of No. 3, whose theme resembles a melody from Schubert's music to the play *Rosamunde* (1823). Draw your own conclusions: what's certain is that these pieces went unheard until 1839. Schubert, by then, had been in his grave for more than a decade. The Austrian poet Franz Grillparzer wrote his epitaph: 'Music has buried here a great treasure; but still greater hopes'.

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