

# WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 22 November 2023  
7.30pm

Alexander Gavrylyuk piano

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Piano Sonata in B minor HXVI/32 (by 1776)

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

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)

Etude in E flat minor Op. 10 No. 6 (1830-2)

Etude in E Op. 10 No. 3 (1832)

Fantasy in F minor Op. 49 (1841)

*Interval*

Modest Musorgsky (1839-1881)

Pictures from an Exhibition (1874)

*Promenade 1 • The Gnome • Promenade 2 •  
The Old Castle • Promenade 3 • Tuileries • Bydlo •  
Promenade 4 • Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks •  
"Samuel" Goldenberg und "Schmuyle" •  
Promenade 5 • The Market Place at Limoges •  
Catacombs (Sepulchrum Romanum) •  
Cum mortuis in lingua mortua •  
The Hut on Fowl's Legs (Baba-Yaga) •  
The Great Gate of Kiev*

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**Haydn** composed more than 60 keyboard sonatas, the earliest dating from the 1750s and the latest completed in 1795. They include many deeply characteristic works and several masterpieces. Haydn's mature sonatas are tremendously important in the development of the genre, yet few areas of any major composer's output are so neglected. The B minor Sonata, composed c.1774-5 and published in 1776, is one of Haydn's greatest. Its key of B minor, rare at that time, suggests that the music will occupy a distinctive emotional world. Thus, the *Allegro moderato* is predominantly serious, even grim, with an obsessiveness evident in the multi-repetition of a dotted rhythm in a melodic figure near the close of the development. The central minuet in B major is more relaxed but Haydn returns to B minor for the powerful trio. The *Presto Finale* derives much of its driving energy from the hammered repeated notes first heard at the opening, while many silences or pauses add to the tension.

**Chopin** was only 19 when he made the first drafts of his ground-breaking Opus 10 *Etudes*, although he did not complete the final versions until three years later. Dedicated to Liszt, the studies were published in 1833. Etude No. 6, marked *Andante* and in the key of E flat minor, has a brooding melancholy which is enhanced by the chromatic figuration in the middle of the texture. Etude No. 3 in E major – *Lento ma non troppo* – requires a singing melodic style, though the middle section is slightly more animated, rising to a passage marked *con bravura*.

Chopin composed his Fantasy in F minor in 1841. This epic, dramatic work, closely related to Chopin's ballades, begins in slow march tempo – music which never returns. Following a rather improvisatory accelerating passage, there is an extended, agitated section characterised by virtuosic keyboard writing. This turbulence gives way to a slower passage – a serene hymn-like melody in B major, before the passionate mood returns with cascades of triplets. A brief reminiscence of the hymn-like passage precedes a final return to the brilliant triplet figuration and the emphatic close.

When Viktor Hartmann – artist, architect, designer and illustrator – died aged 39, **Musorgsky** was distressed at the loss of a talented friend. A memorial exhibition of Hartmann's work was arranged and in 1874 Musorgsky composed *Pictures from an Exhibition* as a personal tribute. He wrote: 'Hartmann is boiling inside me ... sounds and ideas have been hanging in the air; I am devouring them and stuffing myself – I barely have time to scribble them on paper.' The Russian Romantic piano repertoire is meagre, but this powerful masterpiece, a rare example of great music inspired by the visual arts, would stand out in any company. In its searing realism the music

transcends the creations of an artist who, without Musorgsky's musical homage, would be forgotten.

Representing a spectator at the exhibition, the *Promenade* subsequently functions as a linking device, or breathing space, between some of the pictures. *Gnomus* is based on Hartmann's design for a nutcracker in the form of a grotesque, limping gnome with bandy legs – one of several pictures to have been lost. A calm version of the *Promenade* leads to *The Old Castle*, a haunting evocation of a troubadour's melancholy serenade ('*con dolore*').

An imposing recall of the *Promenade* leads to *Tuileries* – a representation of squabbling children in the Tuileries Gardens in Paris (marked *capriccioso*). Here Musorgsky reveals a remarkable empathy with a child's world, equally evident in his song-cycle *The Nursery*. *Bydlo* provides another strong contrast – an enormous, lumbering Polish ox-cart brought to life by Musorgsky's stark, vivid, rough-hewn music. From the massive climax, the piece recedes into the distance. A tranquil version of the *Promenade* clears the air before the quirky *Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks*, inspired by Hartmann's designs for an actual ballet sequence. The next of Musorgsky's pieces was derived from pictures which Hartmann had given to him a few years earlier. "*Samuel*" *Goldenberg und "Schmujle"* is usually understood as a representation of two gentlemen – one rich, one poor – but an intriguing alternative theory suggests that this is not two men but simply the outer and inner aspects of a single man. *Samuel* is the Germanised form of the Yiddish *Schmujle*, so the two names may well represent one and the same person.

In *The Market Place at Limoges* Musorgsky evokes a market seething with gossip. The *Catacombs* (of Paris), an oppressive, uncannily powerful section, is followed by the subdued and eerily atmospheric *Cum mortuis in lingua mortua* ('With the dead in the language of the dead'), evoking the glowing of skulls in a large cage. Marked *con lamento*, it is based on a gentle transformation of the *Promenade* melody.

*The Hut on Fowl's Legs*, based on Hartmann's design for a clock, is the home of the fairy-tale witch Baba-Yaga. In the middle section Musorgsky imagines the witch's ride in a giant mortar in which she ground the bones of lost children.

The final picture was inspired by Hartmann's design for a triumphal entrance to the city of Kyiv, an aborted project. Within this magnificent conclusion are Musorgsky's evocation of the characteristic sounds of Russian bells, passages in the manner of Orthodox chant and a last recall of the *Promenade* theme.

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