

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 22 September 2022
7.30pm

Angela Hewitt piano

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

From *The Well-tempered Clavier Book II* (c.1740)
Prelude and Fugue No. 5 in D BWV874
Prelude and Fugue No. 6 in D minor BWV875
Prelude and Fugue No. 7 in E flat BWV876
Prelude and Fugue No. 8 in D sharp minor
BWV877

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Piano Sonata in A minor K310 (1778)
I. Allegro maestoso •
II. Andante cantabile con espressione •
III. Presto

Interval

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Piano Sonata in D K311 (1777)
I. Allegro con spirito •
II. Andante con espressione •
III. Rondeau. Allegro

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)

Nocturne in B Op. 62 No. 1 (1846)
Nocturne in E Op. 62 No. 2 (1846)
Scherzo No. 2 in B flat minor Op. 31 (1837)

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The Well-tempered Clavier was copied out complete in 1722, with the note on the title-page: 'For the use and profit of the musical youth desirous of learning, as well as the pastime of those already skilled in this study.' Part II followed some two decades later. Each part, as is well-known, consists of 24 Preludes and Fugues, one in each of the major and minor keys. This principle **Bach** probably found in the *Ariadne musica* of JCF Fischer, published in 1702, though that omits the major keys of C sharp and F sharp, and the minor keys of E flat, A flat and B flat, throwing in two different versions of E minor (Dorian and Phrygian) in partial recompense. Part of Bach's point was that he'd found a tuning scheme that had eluded Fischer, that made these keys work: but rather than dismiss yet again the fallacy that Bach was promoting today's tuning system of equal temperament, let us turn to some early judgments of musical quality.

The Well-tempered Clavier was not published till 1801. It appeared in instalments from 1810, with a grandiloquent Introduction by Samuel Wesley: 'It seems to be with some stupendous Works of Art, as with those of Nature: the Surprise and Admiration they excite render Praise not only superfluous, but also show it inadequate to the Subject producing them. Among such Instances we conceive the following Pieces of Harmony to be meritoriously enumerated. The 48 Preludes and Fugues have always been regarded by the most scientific among scientific Musicians (the Germans) as matchless Productions. These introductory Remarks are not designed as a Panegyric upon Compositions which have perpetually delighted the candid Lover of Truth, Science, Taste, and Expression, and even exerted the Approbation of those whose Prejudices had formerly superseded their better Judgment' ... and on for page after page, including remarks on the necessity of being able to play without looking at your fingers.

Goethe was introduced to Bach's music by an acquaintance who played to him every day for three weeks, for three or four hours at a time. Goethe wrote: 'It is as if the eternal harmony were conversing within itself, as it may have done in the bosom of God just before the Creation of the world. So likewise did it move in my inmost soul, and it seemed as if I neither possessed nor needed ears, nor any other sense – least of all, the eyes.'

Mozart would be pleased to be sharing a programme with the great Cantor of the Thomaskirche. The music critic, Friedrich Rochlitz, witnessed a great occasion during Mozart's visit to Leipzig in 1789: 'The St Thomas Choir surprised Mozart with the performance of the double-chorus motet *Singet dem Herrn*. Mozart knew this master more by hearsay than by his works, which had

become quite rare; at least his motets, which had never been printed, were completely unknown to him. Hardly had the choir sung a few bars when Mozart sat up, startled; a few bars more and he called out: "What is this?" And now his whole soul seemed to be in his ears. When the singing was finished he cried out, full of joy: "Now, there is something one can learn from!"

In 1777, Mozart set off on tour, accompanied by his mother. He made a lengthy stay in Mannheim, where the brilliant orchestra inspired him to a magnificent C major Sonata that incorporated a musical portrait of the conductor's daughter, (Leopold Mozart's letters to his son at this point became particularly insistent that Wolfgang should move on) and to the present Sonata in D, which may have been intended for a patron in Munich. Eventually, Mozart tore himself away from the conductor's daughter, and went on to Paris. But there, success was elusive, and Mozart's mother died. The bereft 22-year-old was comforted by his friend, Johann Christian Bach, whom Mozart had met in London in 1764, and who was in France to cast his latest opera.

A good deal of this angst and consolation found its way into the A minor Sonata (Köchel got them in the wrong order), and into its tempo markings – 'majestic', 'singing expressively'. But this raises a question: Mozart in this sort of mood usually chooses the key of G minor. There is very little Mozart in A minor. Why would he choose A minor this time? The Cobbe Collection of Keyboard Instruments at Hatchlands in Surrey may possess the answer: a tiny square piano of 1778, signed by JC Bach himself. It was found in an auction near the great house where Bach was the guest of the Maréchal de Noailles, and it's possible that Mozart played this very piano when he visited in his turn. It has two damper levers rather than a sustaining pedal, and so you can only 'change the pedal' when you have a hand free. One lever controls the dampers from middle C upwards, the other from B downwards. This means that the hammered-out chords at the beginning, if they were in G minor, would blur, since the B flat and the A would both be sustained. But transposed to A minor, the C can be sustained whilst the B is not: the sort of thing Mozart would have discovered as he improvised the opening in a variety of keys, perhaps.

Chopin's final pair of Nocturnes Op. 62 were published in Paris in 1846. The B flat minor Scherzo dates from nine years earlier. It's one of the handful of pieces where Chopin doesn't end in the tonic. Here, it's the closely related key of D flat, which uses the same key signature as B flat minor. It provides a jubilant unclouded ending.

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