

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 23 January 2023
7.30pm

Lucas Jussen piano
Arthur Jussen piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) Sonata in D for 2 pianos K448 (1781)
I. Allegro con spirito • II. Andante • III. Allegro molto

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) Rondo in A D951 (1828)

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) La valse (version for 2 pianos) (1919-20)

Interval

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) The Rite of Spring (version for piano duet) (1911-3)
Part I: Adoration of the Earth • Introduction: Lento, tempo rubato – • The Augurs of Spring (Dances of the Young Girls): Tempo giusto – • Game of Abduction: Presto – Spring Rounds: Tranquillo – • Games of the Rival Clans: Molto allegro – Procession of the Wise Elder: Lento – • Adoration of the Earth: Lento – Dance of the Earth: Prestissimo
Part II: The Sacrifice • Introduction: Largo – Mysterious Circles of the Young Girls: Andante con moto – • Glorification of the Chosen Victim: Vivo – Evocation of the Ancients: Vivo – • Ritual of the Ancients: Lento – Sacrificial Dance (The Chosen Victim)



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30

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Of the many students **Mozart** taught to keep him financially afloat, most were the unpromising children of aristocrats, but in Josepha Barbara Auernhammer, he had an exceptionally talented pianist and composer to teach - one with big ambitions to match. Early on, she declared to Mozart that she wanted to remain unmarried and make a living from her musical talents. Mozart evidently encouraged this plan and began going daily to the family's house to give lessons. He helped promote her by dedicating the early violin sonatas to her, letting her edit them for publication, and performing publicly together in music for four hands or two pianos.

This Sonata was written for the pair of them to play in a salon concert at her father's house in November 1781, with Josepha on first part and Wolfgang the second. While the music may be for a social gathering, the depth and complexity of the writing makes this practically a Viennese symphony for two pianos.

The opening *Allegro* presents a quick succession of motifs and themes. There are fanfares, humorous turns and playful jumps around the keyboard, all established by the partners in unison before breaking off into separate parts. The second movement is more like the slow movements of Mozart's piano concertos, with lyrical melodies and a soloist-orchestra relationship between the two players. The final movement brings the fun and comedy to the party, and if the runs and patterns show off Josepha's playing, the shifting harmonies and moods, from playful to mock sadness, show off Mozart's ability to write music that balances intelligence and entertainment.

For similarly domestic circumstances, **Schubert** was unique in composing just as much music for piano four-hands as he did for solo piano. Publication opportunities were more plentiful for this combination, particularly for the larger and more developed movements he was wanting to write.

The Rondo in A major comes from 1828, the final year of his life, just as he was beginning to receive real acclaim and popularity. Its main theme is one of many effortless, beautiful melodies that seemed to pour out of Schubert throughout his life, although, as natural as the melody may appear, it also bears the complexity of his later writing. Each time the rondo theme returns, it is always with a fresh variation to it, with ornamentation, or re-orchestration or a new mood. Each of the other themes in the piece stem just as naturally from this main idea, and the roaming wildness of some of their harmonic departures is a hallmark for this final stage of Schubert's music, hinting at what could have come had he lived past 31.

By 1929, the age of the grand waltz had ended. Its style and carefree glamour seemed a kind of decadence that had soured after the First World War, and jazz was fast becoming the new dancing soundtrack. So it was then that Diaghilev commissioned a tribute to the waltz from **Maurice Ravel**. Ravel had always loved the waltz form and had plans beginning in 1906 for a project based on it. The 1911 *Valses nobles et sentimentales*

were another sort of tribute, and some of the material is used again here in *La valse*. But while the earlier work is a charming series of tableaux, *La valse* is a grand virtuosic memorial for the bygone era of parties, and the waltzes that accompanied them.

Ravel describes the scene, 'Through whirling clouds, waltzing couples may be faintly distinguished. The clouds gradually scatter: one sees at letter A an immense hall peopled with a whirling crowd. The scene is gradually illuminated. The light of the chandeliers bursts forth at the *fortissimo* letter B. Set in an imperial court, about 1855.'

The music builds from whispered rumblings in one long *crescendo* until we hit the brilliant, neon-chandeliered climax that is so often compared to the sound of a society on the verge of collapse. Ravel vehemently denied this intention, but when the final bar comes, he subverts the triple meter of the dance by cramming four notes where three should be, and we hear the waltz finally collapse and fall apart, either from the energy of the music or as the society that supports it finally crumbles.

In the late 19th Century, a new fascination with Russian culture and life spread across Europe, particularly through cosmopolitan Paris where improved transportation brought many artists, writers and musicians to the French capital.

The Ballets Russes drew on this new fascination and *The Rite of Spring*, as well as the previous ballets **Stravinsky** was commissioned for (*The Firebird*, *Petrushka*), dealt with Russian myths and legends. But where the first two were fairy tales, *The Rite of Spring* plays out the scene of a ritual sacrifice that came to Stravinsky 'in a fleeting vision'. It is a portrayal of an ancient, pagan Russia in the extreme, and everything in Stravinsky's music is invented to bring this to life. The wild, unpredictable rhythms, the lurching, threatening sounds and the crunching harmonies, piled up in grotesque combinations, still retain their ability to shock.

The first part of the ballet depicts the thawing of the winter snow and the coming together of the people to celebrate and sanctify the earth in a great dance. In the second part a girl is chosen for sacrifice, and in the finale, dances to death surrounded by the village elders.

The piano four-hands arrangement was created to be used in rehearsals and published for general study, but has since become a featured part of the piano duo repertoire. While both Stravinsky and Ravel alter the glitter of their original orchestration, many more qualities become exposed in high relief. The detail of harmony and interplay between voices becomes clearer, and the rhythmic qualities particularly in the Stravinsky become even more exciting and exposed, all revealing anew the brilliance of these well-known pieces.

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