

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 23 September 2023
1.00pm

Wigmore Hall Voices of Today

Stewart Goodyear piano

Stewart Goodyear (b.1978)

Mending Wall (2023) *world première*

Commissioned by Wigmore Hall (with the generous support of the Marchus Trust and the Wigmore Hall Endowment Fund)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 29 in B flat Op. 106 'Hammerklavier' (1817-8)

I. Allegro

II. Scherzo. Assai vivace

III. Adagio sostenuto

IV. Largo - Allegro risoluto



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I have always been inspired by people when I compose a work, becoming constantly inspired as I observe or hang out with them. When I wrote my *Callaloo* suite for piano and orchestra, for example, I was taken with crowds of people coming together to celebrate life. The past pandemic was a profound challenge to compose. As the mandate was to separate ourselves to keep each other safe, the quarantine was unbearable even if it was necessary. When I was commissioned to write a work for Wigmore Hall that spoke of the lockdown experience, I was taken with the incessant rhythm of stabilising a barrier that brings two people together and apart at the same time, collaborating to make sure that this barrier is stable enough to keep them separate. Robert Frost's poem of coming together through isolation left an indelible imprint as I musically depicted every image that the poet described. Throughout the one-movement symphonic poem, there is a repetition of figures and rhythms that reflect this task of building this wall, the mood moving from drudgery to hypnotic, and then finally with a warmth as Mr Frost asks the purpose of this wall. I was especially taken with the description of the two people in the poem, one being 'all pine' and the other being 'apple orchard'.

No other sonata has inspired such discussion, dissection and argument as **Beethoven's** 'Hammerklavier'. It has been called the 'Mount Everest' of sonatas, the seeking for Elysium, a scale so massive and imposing mere mortals cannot come close to it. It is also an emotional and human sonata, one striving for peace and sanity but never reaching them. It is a very tragic sonata in the major key of B flat.

Almost everything about this sonata encourages bloodshed between musicians, the biggest thing being the metronome markings in the score. The first movement is marked half-note=138, a marking deemed by many to be utterly ridiculous. The metronome marking is correct, if one thinks of the movement as being in homage to a Baroque concerto movement, and not 'Mount Everest'. The movement begins with a fanfare, followed by a dialogue between voices or instruments, leading to another full-orchestral fanfare utterance. This is very similar to how a Bach or Vivaldi first movement would be composed. The rhythm of the opening is repeated and developed; it is the germ of the whole movement, and the insistence of the rhythm is very exciting and holds momentum in Beethoven's metronome marking.

If the second movement is pure slapstick and one of the shortest of all movements, the third is pure anguish and one of the longest. All the elements of human suffering seem to be in this movement, and the pianist can range from showing restrained sorrow to screaming sobs. The improvisatory introduction in the last movement is utter magic. Starting with all the Fs (except one) in the piano, the listener is led on an odyssey until the fugue which concludes the sonata.

If the last movement of the 9th Symphony was an 'Ode to joy', the last movement of the 'Hammerklavier' is an Ode to *chutzpah*. This might be the most thorough and craziest fugue ever written in the piano literature. The subject of the fugue is developed, turned upside down, and even played backwards. The subject also pays homage to that of the first movement of the sonata, the first two notes with their huge leap being shared. And as the entire sonata opened with an upbeat, Beethoven rests the final chords on upbeats.

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