

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 25 May 2023
7.30pm

Angela Hewitt piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Fantasia in D minor K397 (c.1782-7)

Piano Sonata in D K576 (1789)

I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegretto

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 7 in D Op. 10 No. 3 (1797-8)

I. Presto • II. Largo e mesto •

III. Menuetto. Allegro • IV. Rondo. Allegro

Interval

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Piano Sonata in C minor K457 (1784)

I. Molto allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro assai

Ludwig van Beethoven

Piano Sonata No. 32 in C minor Op. 111 (1821-2)

I. Maestoso - Allegro con brio ed appassionato

II. Arietta. Adagio molto semplice cantabile

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Mozart's keyboard fantasies give us an idea of what his skills as an improviser must have been. The majority of them were composed in 1782, the year when Mozart became acquainted with the music of Bach and Handel, and the style of Bach's toccatas, with their sometimes abrupt shifts of mood and tempo and their cadenza-like passages, seems to have rubbed off on him. The Fantasia in D minor K397 is incomplete, and it was first published more than a decade after his death as a *morceau détaché*. A second edition, issued shortly afterwards, included the completion which has remained a familiar part of the piece ever since. The added bars are, however, rather perfunctory and abrupt, and Mozart himself might well have preferred to end with a return to the mysterious atmosphere of the Fantasia's beginning.

The Sonata in D K576, of 1789, was Mozart's last work of the kind. The 'horn-call' main subject of its first movement, initially heard in simple octaves, reappears at the start of the exposition's second stage in the form of a tightly-knit canon; and the strict two-part counterpoint returns during the opening half of the development section.

In the slow movement it is the expansive middle section, in Mozart's rarely used key of F sharp minor, that makes the deepest impression. Its winding theme is given out over a pulsating repeated-note accompaniment; and both theme and accompaniment return, radiantly transformed into the major, in the coda. The finale is one of Mozart's two-to-the-bar allegrettos whose moderate tempo allows the gentle main theme to give way to much more brilliant figuration. Mozart provided very few dynamic markings for the piece, but from the simple, understated style of its closing bars it seems likely that he wanted this most virtuosic of all his sonata finales to fade gently away into the distance.

Beethoven's three sonatas Op. 10 appeared in September 1798. The grandest of them, and the only one to be cast in four movements rather than three, is the last, in D major. Its main expressive weight is carried by its D minor slow movement, one of the great tragic utterances among Beethoven's earlier music. The heading includes the word *mesto* ('sadly'), a term he used again for the melancholy *Adagio* of the 'Razumovsky' String Quartet Op. 59 No. 1. In the sonata the main theme unfolds over long-sustained chords deep in the bass, as though the melody were weighed down with grief. The reprise has it even more thickly scored, with the harmony shifting on each half-bar, and the bass echoing the melodic line in dissonant canon. In the final bars the texture thins out, until all that is left are sighing two-note phrases, answered by a single reiterated note from the depths of the abyss four octaves below.

The gentle minuet in the major acts as a resolution of the slow movement's tragedy. The trio, with its accompaniment in a constant flow of triplets, is more agitated; but as if anxious to return to the calming influence of the movement's beginning, Beethoven cuts it short, and makes an abrupt return to the minuet.

The finale rounds the sonata off in sparkling style. Particularly witty is the central episode, whose five-beat phrases are disturbingly out of step with the obstinately symmetrical and conventionally shaped left-hand accompaniment. Rather than end the work with a grandiose gesture, Beethoven allows it to disappear in a puff of smoke at the bottom of the keyboard.

When, in 1785, Mozart published his Sonata in C minor K457, he issued it in tandem with a newly composed fantasia in the same key, K475. In an attempt to mirror the fantasia's improvisatory style he added intricate ornamentation to the reprises of the slow movement's theme when the two pieces were published together. Nevertheless, it is possible to feel that they make uncomfortable bedfellows, and that the sonata's dramatic impact is seriously weakened when it is preceded by the equally intense fantasia.

The Sonata K457 is a work that exerted a considerable influence on the young Beethoven. Beethoven's Sonata Op. 10 No. 1, in the same key, begins with a 'rocketing' theme rather similar to Mozart's; and both composers' first movements feature a startling turn to the major at the start of their development section. Mozart's style reaches a peak of dramatic intensity in the finale, with its syncopated theme and its halting phrases and abrupt silences. Near the close the music appears to dissolve into grief-stricken inarticulateness, but it eventually gathers momentum, and comes to an explosive conclusion, still in the minor.

Beethoven composed his last three piano sonatas, Opp. 109-111, between 1820 and 1822, during the period when he was also working on his *Missa solemnis*. They find him exploring a radically new approach to the form – one in which the main weight of the argument is placed firmly on the finale. In the first and last works of the group the shift in emphasis is ensured by casting the last movement as a valedictory set of variations.

The C minor Sonata Op. 111 begins in an atmosphere of high drama, with an introduction whose brutal octaves anticipate the shape of the following *Allegro's* main subject. The *Allegro* itself is a piece of remarkable intensity (this is one of the composer's comparatively rare pieces to carry a marking of '*appassionato*'), and so determined is Beethoven to maintain the atmosphere of highly-strung tension that he limits the consolatory second subject to a mere half-dozen bars, before a cascading arpeggio leads back to the turbulence of the main subject, whose transmutation from minor to major has done nothing to rob it of its former violence.

Beethoven describes the variation theme of the sonata's only remaining movement as an '*Arietta*'. The variations themselves unfold at the same basic pulse, though their progressively diminishing note-values give the impression of a gradual acceleration. Eventually, the music dissolves in a long-sustained trill, before the sonata is rounded out with a reminiscence of the *Arietta's* original rhythm in all its simplicity.

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