

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 25 October 2021 1.00pm

Alexandre Tharaud piano



This concert is being broadcast on BBC Radio 3

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

4 Impromptus D899 (1827)

*Impromptu in C minor • Impromptu in E flat • Impromptu in G flat •
Impromptu in A flat*

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune (1891-4) *transcribed by Alexandre Tharaud*

Franz Schubert

Movements from Rosamunde D797 (1823) *transcribed by Alexandre Tharaud*
Andantino • Allegro • Andantino

Welcome back to Wigmore Hall

We are grateful to our Friends and donors for their generosity as we rebuild a full series of concerts in 2021/22 and reinforce our efforts to reach audiences everywhere through our broadcasts. To help us present inspirational concerts and support our community of artists, please make a donation by visiting our website:

[Wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate](https://www.wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate). Every gift is making a difference. Thank you.

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management.

In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions.

Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141.

Wigmore Hall is equipped with a 'Loop' to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.



Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • [Wigmore-hall.org.uk](https://www.wigmore-hall.org.uk) • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG

Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Halfway through writing *Winterreise*, and one year before his early death at the age of 31, **Schubert** completed two sets of piano impromptus. They are part of the flurry of great works he completed in 1827, including the E flat Piano Trio D929, the six *Moments Musicaux*, and the 9th Symphony.

Despite the belated but growing acclaim Schubert began to receive in his final years, few of these works saw the light of day until long after his death. The first two impromptus in the D899/Op. 90 set were the exception, published almost immediately. Others had to wait 30 years before arriving in print, even then with the editorial liberty of transposing the third impromptu up a semitone, so as not to put off the market of pianists who might struggle against a key with six flats.

The first impromptu begins with a forceful unison stab that dissolves into a plaintive oboe-like solo line. After being taken up as a tentative march, Schubert transforms this music into a new melody, which he then develops in multiple variations before finally drawing the piece to a close in redemptive C major.

The second impromptu features the Schubertian specialty of running triplets, which are used to great effect as accompaniment in much of his piano writing. Here he places them center stage as the main feature in endless, almost manic runs, stretching into the distant upper regions of the keyboard. This cheerful exuberance is contrasted in the dark and tempestuous section that follows, and after a return to the beginning runs, Schubert makes the unorthodox choice to end with the second section, leaving the movement emotionally unresolved.

Schubert wrote to his publisher that these sets of impromptus could *almost* be considered a sonata, and while there is really no similarity to the forms and finales of his piano sonatas, the contrasting characters of the movements work well together as a set. The move from second to third impromptu is a great example of this, the new atmosphere in G flat major acting as a tonally related resolution to the disquiet of the previous piece. Here the triplets are reinstated to their normal role as the burbling undertow to a long-breathed melody, the whole movement a stunning precursor to what Mendelssohn would later do with his 'Songs Without Words'.

The last impromptu shows Schubert's fascination with the major and minor modes to maximum effect. We spend a full 30 bars of rippling downward arpeggios believing we are firmly set in A flat minor only to discover that the music is in fact in A flat major. Only after fully establishing this shift do we get a lilting melody in the left hand. The middle trio section appears with arching phrases over stable and pulsing chords before the arpeggios return to close out the piece.

Stéphane Mallarmé's poem *L'après-midi d'un faune*, with its focus on the 'pure sound' of words and its emphasis on atmosphere, was

the perfect inspiration for **Debussy** to create a totally original dreamworld of unusually transparent textures, voicings, and washes of whole-tone harmony. Debussy admitted his setting of the poem was not a literal translation into music, but follows the general contours of Mallarmé's poem about the mythical half man, half animal, and his semi-lucid thoughts and memories of the seduction of two nymphs.

The opening solo flute line of the faun is first subtly harmonized and then used as material for new themes until a sensual and gently diving theme takes hold of the whole orchestra. Several chases follow, which subside into the opening line again, no longer solo and harmonized now within the tonic center of E major before sighing into silence.

Mallarmé was wary when he learned of the piece since he considered his own 'music' enough, but on first hearing he left the hall converted. 'I have just come out of the concert, deeply moved. The marvel! Your illustration of the Afternoon of a Faun, which presents no dissonance with my text, but goes much further, really, into nostalgia and into light, with finesse, with sensuality, with richness. I press your hand admiringly, Debussy. Yours, Mallarmé.'

Of the 11 completed operas and singspiels that Schubert wrote, not a single one made it onto the stage, largely due to some impressively bad libretti (not even Schubert could compose his way out of a plot with characters named Roland *and* Boland). However, several pieces of incidental music for plays have achieved considerable popularity, in particular the music to *Rosamunde*.

In this case, the music did at least help dig the show out from under an especially turgid script by Helmina von Chézy, a passionate social reformer from the nobility, who also wrote the libretto for Weber's *Euryanthe* which flopped that same year in 1823. (A *Euryanthe* revival in 1903 prompted Mahler to describe her as a poet 'with a full heart and an empty head.')

The plot concerns the Princess Rosamunde, brought up as a shepherdess. She sets out to reclaim her throne from the acting governor Fulgentius who, despite elaborate plotting, makes the mistake of dying by his own poison, leaving Rosamunde free to reclaim the throne.

It closed almost immediately, but not before special praise was given to the music, with demand high enough to allow publication of several numbers in piano arrangement. The full score was finally pieced together in 1867 by George Grove and Arthur Sullivan, who discovered the original parts in a stack of dust and music in a Viennese cupboard. The charm and directness of the music, including some beautiful melodies, have made it one of Schubert's most popular concert hall staples.

© Mark Rogers 2021

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.