WIGMORE HALL

Monday 28 September 2026
1.00pm

Elisabeth Brauss piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)	Piano Sonata in F K332 (1781-3) *I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro assai*
Béla Bartók (1881-1945)	From *14 Bagatelles* BB50 Op. 6 (1908) *II. Allegro giocoso • III. Andante •* *IV. Grave • V. Vivo • VI. Lento •*
Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)	XV. Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus from *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* (1944)
Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)	Fantasy in F minor Op. 49 (1841)

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The sonic evolution of the piano serves as the thematic backdrop for a stylistically varied programme that takes us from the late 18th to the mid-20th Century. We begin with **Mozart**, whose Sonata in F was published in 1784, in the heyday of the fortepiano.

The Sonata begins with a pastoral theme in triple time, which quickly gives way to a chordal theme that resembles a trio of distant horns. A more dramatic contrast in mood is soon encountered in a *Sturm und drang* outburst in D minor (Mozart's preferred key for stormy and tragic works), and again in a dynamically contrasting syncopated section. The variety inherent in this movement suggests Mozart in operatic vein. On the other hand, the lyrical *Adagio* is strongly reminiscent of one of his concerto slow movements – one expects to hear a full orchestral reprise of the opening theme after eight bars. When it returns later in the movement, this theme is heavily ornamented (and seems to anticipate Chopin through its use of rapid chromatic runs).

The finale opens with some *brillante* passagework before introducing a naive theme with simplistic accompaniment. As in the first movement, contrasts abound, and soon enough we encounter a lyrical theme in the minor, as well as a minor-mode version of the *brillante* music at the start of the development. For all its propensity for loud outbursts, the Sonata ends quietly with a *calando* fade-out.

The year 1908 signified a turning point in **Bartók**'s compositional style, evidenced most obviously by his rejection of functional harmony, and emblematised in the bitonal opening number of the Bagatelles, in which the right and left hands employ different key signatures. The second number (the first in this performance) and the third likewise demonstrate Bartók's new approach to an angular kind of melodism. The *Allegro giocoso* is based around an ever-widening melodic profile (moving outwards by a semitone each way), alongside quickly repeated major seconds. The *Andante* features a more lyrical melody in the left hand while a chromatically circling ostinato occupies the right hand.

The fourth and fifth numbers are based on original folk tunes, from Hungary and Slovakia respectively. The Hungarian tune is harmonised using sonorous seventh and parallel chords and is reminiscent of Debussy's *Sarabande* from *Pour le Piano* (1901). The Slovak melody initially appears in the left hand while the right hand 'thickens' the repeated major second idea from number two into a pulsating inverted seventh chord. The slow and meandering sixth number has occasional modal leanings, encountered most obviously in the left hand's string of open fifths, which create an austere mood.

The inclusion of just one of the numbers from **Messiaen**'s remarkable *Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* (1944) may be seen as a natural culminating point for the work begun by Bartók almost 40 years earlier. The set is much in keeping with Messiaen's spiritual aesthetics and lifelong mystical adoration of the divine, expressed here through multifaceted contemplation of the Infant Jesus. Each regard is stylistically different (Messiaen himself observed), although the same thematic threads run throughout. The fifteenth number (which translates as 'the Kiss of the Infant-Jesus') is the emotional heart of the collection and takes the form of a meditative lullaby. Eventually a trickling melody appears in the upper register of the piano. Later, broken chords depict a garden into which we are invited to embrace the Infant Jesus in a blaze of light (Messiaen provides a brief commentary for each regard). After a dazzling climax, we reach a coda (titled 'l'ombre du baiser', literally 'the shadow of the kiss') featuring silky runs and arpeggios that create a delectable afterglow.

In the summer of 1841, **Chopin** found himself in Nohant (the country estate of the novelist George Sand, his partner) completing a trio of major works: the third Ballade, Op. 47; the F sharp minor Polonaise, Op. 44 ('a sort of Fantasy in the form of a Polonaise', as Chopin described it); and the Fantasy in F minor, Op. 49. The fantasy genre certainly appealed to Chopin the improviser-composer (he had already written his Fantaisie-Impromptu, Op. 66, in 1835, and would later compose his masterful Polonaise-Fantaisie, Op. 61) as it permitted a fluid integration of a wide range of contrasting materials. The Op. 49 Fantasy exhibits the kind of generic pluralism that was central to Chopin's project more generally, combining three different kinds of march (the opening funeral march, a nobler grand march and a jaunty quick march) with a contrasting prelude idea (characterised by improvisatory arpeggiations), and a chorale. The mood is by turns elegiac and exuberant as Chopin alternates between intense lyricism and rapid passagework.

While the Fantasy does adhere loosely to a Classical sonata form, the chorale (in B major – an exotic outlier in the broader chain of modulations by thirds) behaves like a parenthetical 'slow movement', an island of calm at the heart of the work. It cannot last: eventually we are jolted out of this serene reverie by a cascade of arpeggios and a reprise of opening material, which propels us not towards the home key of F minor, but the more optimistic A flat major. One last blissful moment of stillness, reminiscent of a floated vocal cadenza, gives way to a peroration in the new home key.

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