WIGMORE HALL 125

Friday 29 May 2026
1.00pm

Wigmore Hall 125th Anniversary Festival

This concert is supported by the Maxsamba Family Trust

Yunchan Lim piano

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Piano Sonata in D D850 (1825)
I. Allegro vivace • II. Con moto •
III. Scherzo. Allegro vivace • IV. Rondo. Allegro moderato

Interval

Aleksandr Skryabin (1872-1915)

Piano Sonata No. 2 in G sharp minor Op. 19 'Sonata Fantasy' (1892-7)
I. Andante • II. Presto

Piano Sonata No. 3 in F sharp minor Op. 23 (1897)
I. Drammatico • II. Allegretto •
III. Andante • IV. Presto con fuoco

Piano Sonata No. 4 in F sharp Op. 30 (1903)
I. Andante • II. Prestissimo volando

Join & Support
Donations
FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

125 years
Mark the moment
Support the music

To find out more visit
wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate

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 • 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

On 10 August 1825, Schubert arrived – accompanied by his friend, the baritone Johann Michael Vogl – in the spa town of Bad Gastein. It was part of a long summer spent relaxing in the mountains to the south of Salzburg, and for the first time in several years, Schubert's mood was radiant. Since early 1823, he had been suffering from syphilis, and he was prone to despondency and introspection. As he wrote to one friend: 'I find myself to be the most unhappy and wretched creature in the world. Imagine a man whose health will never be right again, and who in sheer despair continually makes things worse and worse.' Throughout 1825, however, his health seemed to improve, and the Piano Sonata in D, D850, composed that August, attests to the optimism that he must have felt, if only for a time.

The Sonata also reflects something of the majesty that Schubert admired in the mountain landscapes: 'the country surpasses the wildest imagination,' he observed, awed by both 'the incredibly high rocky walls' above and 'the fearful depths below.' The other composition on which he worked at the time was the C major Symphony, D944, nicknamed 'The Great', and there is something decidedly symphonic about both the scale and temperament of the sonata. Whereas Schubert's first movements are often qualified by the description *moderato*, this sonata's opening *Allegro* is marked *vivace*, setting the exuberant tone for the work as a whole. After an arresting fanfare, Schubert unleashes torrents of cascading runs that surely convey the impression of babbling alpine streams. The second movement is marked *con moto*, and its sense of forward momentum might suggest a vigorous hike into the hills. Yet it also contains moments of reflective contemplation, and its quicksilver emotions bespeak something of Schubert's ever-changing disposition. Like the first movement, the scherzo sections of the third movement are marked *allegro vivace*, though the intervening trio section brings a greater sense of thoughtful repose. The concluding *Allegro* – this time marked *moderato* – rounds the sonata off in an entirely unexpected way. The insouciant theme on which it is based evokes, perhaps, a march for toy soldiers or some kind of mechanical automaton. Above all, it feels like a simple song reflecting the genial sociability shared between close friends as they amble through the countryside together. The final bars are some of the most affecting Schubert ever wrote. The nights grow longer, the days draw in and heat of high summer yields to the mellowness of autumn, with Schubert wondering what might face him on his return to Vienna that October.

Skryabin's Sonata No. 2 was also the product of its composer's encounter with the natural world. In 1892, after graduating from the Moscow Conservatory, he paid a visit to the Baltic coast. 'Everything glowed with magnificent majesty on the horizon,' he wrote to a friend. 'First a clear purple, then it turned rose-coloured, and finally silvery flecks stained the surface of the sea. The green of the sea blended with the blue reflection of the sky.' Skryabin soon began work on a piano sonata, although it would be another five years before it was completed. By then, he had seen the Mediterranean Sea at Genoa and – during the honeymoon that he spent in Crimea with his first wife, Vera – the Black Sea. He summed up his impressions of that trip in the short programme note he provided for the sonata (subtitled 'Sonata Fantasy'): 'The first section represents the quiet of a southern night on the seashore; the development is the dark agitation of the deep, deep sea. The E major middle section shows caressing moonlight coming up after the first darkness of night. The second movement represents the vast expanse of ocean in stormy agitation.'

Written in 1897, the Sonata No. 3 also has a poetic programme (although Skryabin's authorship is not entirely certain):

1. A free, untamed soul throws itself passionately into the abyss of suffering and strife;
2. The soul finds apparent, momentary, illusory peace; worn out by suffering, it seeks to lose itself in oblivion, to sing and to blossom;
3. The soul floats in a sea of feelings, both tender and melancholy: love, sorry, inchoate desires, vague thoughts, the charms of fragile dreams, the wish to lose itself in oblivion;
4. In a storm of the unfettered elements, the soul struggles in the intoxication of struggle; from the depths of existence arises the awesome voice of the man-creator, whose triumphant song rings out in triumph. Yet still too frail to reach the summit, it falls once again in temporary defeat into the abyss of nothingness.

Subtitled 'State of the Soul', the sonata gives some sense of Skryabin's extravagant, even egotistical personality. Here, nature becomes the platform on which the drama of the composer's inner life is staged.

The Sonata No. 4 takes us from the world of late Romanticism into the era of incipient modernism. Skryabin composed it in 1903, and from now until his death in 1915, his musical language would become ever more adventurous and innovative, more richly sensuous and headily intoxicating. Like the Second Sonata, it compromises just two movements, and despite its brevity (it lasts around eight minutes in total), it takes the listener on a vertiginous journey beyond the earth. A poem that Skryabin wrote at around the same time gives some sense of its inspiration:

'In a gentle, translucent mist, a star – lost in the distance, yet radiant – twinkles with its tender light. Oh how beautiful! The pale blue mystery of her rays lulls and caresses me. If only I could approach you, oh distant star! If only I could drown in your quivering rays, oh wonderful radiance!'

© Philip Ross Bullock 2026
Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.