WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 29 October 2026
7.30pm

Alexander Gadjiev piano

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)	Piano Sonata No. 21 in C Op. 53 'Waldstein' (1803-4) *I. Allegro con brio • II. Introduzione. Adagio molto • III. Rondo. Allegretto moderato – Prestissimo*
Tōru Takemitsu (1930-1996)	Rain Tree Sketch II: In Memoriam Olivier Messiaen (1992)
Claude Debussy (1862-1918)	L'isle joyeuse (1903-4)
	Interval
Franz Liszt (1811-1886)	From *Années de pèlerinage, Première année, Suisse* S160 (1848-55) *Les cloches de Genève • Orage*
Robert Schumann (1810-1856)	Piano Sonata No. 1 in F sharp minor Op. 11 (1832-5) *I. Introduzione. Un poco Adagio – Allegro vivace • II. Aria • III. Scherzo e Intermezzo: Allegrissimo – Lento • IV. Allegro, un poco maestoso*

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Count Waldstein's role in **Beethoven**'s rise to fame can hardly be overstated. We have the insistence of this musical friend and patron partly to thank for Beethoven's move to Vienna to study with Haydn, prompting Waldstein to prophecy that he would 'receive Mozart's spirit from Haydn's hands'. Yet by 1802, Beethoven's own spirit had dimmed considerably owing to his deafness as recorded in the 'Heiligenstadt Testament'. Remarkably, this crisis was followed by a flurry of compositional activity that produced, among other works, the 'Waldstein' Sonata.

From its opening bars, the Sonata projects a sense of rugged adventure. The driving first theme is set against a statelier 'chorale' theme setting up the dialectical play of opposites which shapes the first movement's dramatic trajectory. The slow movement, acting as an extended introduction to the finale, gives the Sonata a sense of symphonic scale. The hushed atmosphere and unsettled harmony leave us feeling alternately surefooted and unmoored. This gloom dissolves *attacca* into the radiant principal theme of the *Rondo* finale. The melody returns in various guises and keys, interspersed with full-throated bravura figuration. The breathtaking *prestissimo* coda features those notorious octave glissandi which leave us slack-jawed and marvelling at the incandescent nature of Beethoven's pianism.

French music was an important influence on Japanese composer **Tōru Takemitsu**, in particular that of Debussy and Messiaen. Following the latter's death in 1992, Takemitsu composed *Rain Tree Sketch II* in his memory. Takemitsu was fascinated by nature and water – several of his works make reference to rain, and a 'rain tree' is one that allows drops to fall from its foliage long after precipitation has ceased, much as Messiaen's music would continue to inspire others after his death. The performance direction of 'celestially light' is the sort of elevated language the Frenchman would recognise – likewise, the piece's delicate, crystalline chords draw on the mysterious sound of his so-called 'modes of limited transposition'. They are interposed with meditative pauses, and rooted by a very quiet, low D.

Similarly exotic modes can be found in **Debussy**'s *L'isle joyeuse* (the happy isle) which dates from 1903-4. One source of inspiration may have been the painting *The Embarkation for Cythera* by Jean-Antoine Watteau, which shows a group of lovers on a journey to the island birthplace of Venus. The work's opening cadenza on a long trill – which flickers with suggestions of the whole-tone scale – introduces the manic energy of the opening section, and the improvisatory arabesques that follow establish the modally-inflected key of A major. Soon a grander theme emerges in right-hand chords, which later drives an ecstatic climax of the work, before the final virtuoso flourish.

In 1835, the young **Franz Liszt** caused a scandal when he eloped from Paris to Switzerland with the married Countess Marie d'Agoult. The couple remained in the country for over a year, and during their travels Liszt penned a piano suite titled *Album d'un voyageur*, which he later revised into the first 'book' of his *Années de pèlerinage* (Years of Wandering).

The score of the Swiss *Années* quotes extensively from Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, and the Romantic archetype of the melancholy wanderer clearly had great appeal to the composer. *Les cloches de Genève*, the bells of Geneva, is a nocturne based on a hushed descending bell-figure, which turns into flowing arpeggios as the music builds to a passionate climax. There are no such niceties in *Orage* (thunderstorm) however, a ferocious octave study that depicts the power of nature at its most fearsome and sublime. It explodes into life and offers the pianist little respite. This is the only piece in the Swiss *Années* that was not revised – Liszt composed it in Weimar in 1855 – and it remains an apt reminder of his status as a leading virtuoso of his time.

Robert Schumann composed his Piano Sonata in F sharp minor over several years in his early twenties. It was finished in 1835 and published the following year with the inscription 'dedicated to Clara, by Florestan and Eusebius' on the title page. Florestan and Eusebius were his twin alter egos, inspired by the literature of Jean Paul, who represented the outgoing and pensive aspects of his character respectively. This literary conceit – and his then-unrealised love for the pianist and composer Clara Wieck – runs through his early piano works, of which various cycles of short character pieces offered a fruitful vehicle for a musical temperament characterised by wild mood swings. In this Sonata, however, Schumann attempts to apply his highly subjective musical instincts with the more objective contours of sonata form.

The first movement begins with an autumnal, self-contained introduction, before the main *Allegro vivace* sweeps us away with a galloping rhythm – here Schumann recycles material from an unpublished *Fandango* he had composed in 1832. Though powered by a seemingly relentless energy, the music eventually subsides to a despondent close. The middle two movements are shorter, and much more like the character pieces he was naturally drawn to. The *Aria* second movement is based on a song, *An Anna*, that he composed when he was 18 (its theme is also subtly previewed in the first movement's introduction). Marked 'without passion but expressive', it provides much-needed breathing space before the high spirits of the *Scherzo*, which features an ironically pompous *Intermezzo* section, and a mischievously deceptive transition back to the main theme. But in the finale, Schumann lets his imagination run wild. Its very first page takes us from an intense F sharp minor theme to *delicato* material in remote E flat major, and the rollercoaster that follows is scarcely any more predictable. If there is one concession to musical tradition, it is the Beethovenian switch to the major mode in the coda, which ensures a triumphant conclusion.

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