

WIGMORE HALL 125

Tuesday 2 December 2025
7.30pm

Elisabeth Brauss piano

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

Elegy from *Lyric Pieces* Op. 38 (1866-83)

Waltz in A minor from *Lyric Pieces* Op. 12 (1864)

Troldtog from *Lyric Pieces* Op. 54 (1889-91)

Til våren from *Lyric Pieces* Op. 43 (1886)

Hans Abrahamsen (b.1952)

From *Ten Studies* (1998)

Arabeske • Sturm

Edvard Grieg

Sylfide (Sylph) from *Lyric Pieces* Op. 62 (1893-5)

Aften på højjældet from *Lyric Pieces* Op. 68 (1898-9)

Heimweh from *Lyric Pieces* Op. 57 (1890-3)

Hjemad from *Lyric Pieces* Op. 62

Hans Abrahamsen

From *Ten Studies* (1998)

Blues • Rivière d'oubli

Edvard Grieg

Bryllupsdag på Troidhaugen from *Lyric Pieces* Op. 65 (1896)

Interval

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Variationen über das Motiv von Bach S180 (1862)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 31 in A flat Op. 110 (1821-2)

I. Moderato cantabile molto espressivo •

II. Allegro molto • III. Adagio ma non troppo –

Fuga. Allegro ma non troppo



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The programme has changed slightly since these programme notes were written.

Elisabeth Brauss's richly varied recital contrasts atmospheric Scandinavian miniatures with larger-scale works by two great pianist-composers.

Edvard Grieg's famous Piano Concerto shows that he was more than competent at handling large forms. However, he was often happiest writing short, characterful compositions such as the 66 *Lyric Pieces* for piano, created between 1866 and 1883 and published in ten volumes. Most have their roots in Norwegian folk music, to which Grieg had been introduced by his compatriot Rikard Nordraak in 1864. It was a seminal experience, as he later recalled: 'Suddenly a mist fell from my eyes and I knew the way I had to take.' Some of the *Lyric Pieces* are based on Norwegian traditional dances, while others are inspired by the country's landscape and legends. The majority are in ternary (ABA) form, with central sections that contrast strongly with outer ones.

Tonight, Elisabeth Brauss plays pieces drawn from seven volumes. The exquisitely simple Waltz in A minor comes from Book 1 (Op. 12). Book 2 (Op. 38), from which we hear two numbers, was composed some 16 years later. The delicate outer sections of 'Berceuse' frame a dance-like central episode; 'Elegy' is notable for its rhythmic flexibility and alternately mournful and consolatory mood. Grieg described Book 3 (Op. 43) as 'spring songs', and indeed its closing number is entitled 'Til våren' (To spring). Ardent and lyrical, it displays the composer's melodic gift to the full. 'Trolldog' (March of the Trolls) from Book 5 (Op. 54) portrays the boisterous mythical inhabitants of Norway's Jotunheimen mountains through quasi-orchestral textures and playful flourishes across the keyboard. The dark-hued, melancholic outer sections of 'Heimweh' (Homesickness) from Book 6 (Op. 57) evoke an emotion Grieg knew well from his student days in Germany. 'Hjemad' (Homewards) from Book 7 (Op. 62) is contrastingly exuberant, though with a gentler central section reminiscent of the composer's famous *Elegiac Melody* Op. 34 No. 2. Tonight's final *Lyric Piece* is the popular 'Bryllupsdag på Trolldhaugen' (Wedding Day at Trolldhaugen) which closes Book 8 (Op. 65). Its jubilant march-like outer sections frame a tender love song. Grieg dedicated this piece to his wife Nina in celebration of their silver wedding anniversary.

The Danish composer **Hans Abrahamsen** has described his *Ten Studies for Piano* (1998) as 'studies of the piano's character, or soul [...] A soul that has been created by all the music that has been written for the instrument.' His titles, in German, English, French and Italian, reflect different pianistic traditions. The first four studies recall the 'Schumannesque and Chopinesque worlds' of the Romantic age; Nos 5 to 7 explore the 'mechanical' and 'rhythmical' aspects of 20th-century American music; Nos 8 and 9 pay tribute to French musical impressionism; and No. 10 celebrates Italy. Tonight, we hear the wild *moto perpetuo* 'Sturm' (No. 2), the quizzical 'Blues' (No. 7) and the dreamy 'Rivière d'oubli' (River of forgetfulness, No. 8), whose translucent textures

and flexible tempo recall water music by Debussy and Ravel.

Franz Liszt was motivated to write *Variationen über das Motiv von Bach* by the death of his 26-year-old daughter Blandine in 1862. His theme is the chromatic bass line from the opening chorus of Johann Sebastian Bach's Cantata BWV12, *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen* (Weeping, wailing, fretting, fearing) – a chorus known to some through its reworking as the 'Crucifixus' of Bach's Mass in B minor. Liszt's work opens with a fierce introduction, which gives way to a pensive statement of the theme. The inventive ensuing variations are alternately furious, despairing and supplicatory. With the introduction of a new theme – the closing chorale of BWV12, 'Was Gott tut, das ist wohlgetan' (what God doeth is well done) – the mood shifts to calm acceptance and finally to solemn exaltation.

In April 1820, **Ludwig van Beethoven** signed a contract with the publisher Adolph Martin Schlesinger for three piano sonatas. He completed the first (Op. 109) later that year, but illness prevented him finishing the second (Op. 110) until January 1822. It was published some months later. Due to a breakdown in communication with Schlesinger, the score bore no dedication, though it is thought its intended dedicatee was Beethoven's close friend Antonie Brentano (a possible candidate for his much-discussed Immortal Beloved). It is the composer's penultimate piano sonata, and was considered by the writer George Bernard Shaw to be his most beautiful.

The measured first movement is marked *cantabile molto espressivo* (in a very expressive singing style) and *con amabilità* (with amiability). Its two main themes respectively feature a song-like melody and delicate cascading figuration. Beethoven ingeniously combines them in his central and closing sections. While the movement has melancholy moments, its mood is predominantly serene. The musicologist Charles Rosen described the ensuing *Scherzo* as 'humorous, folksy, sometimes brutal and even sardonic'. Its energetic outer sections are allegedly based on two folksongs, 'Unsa Kätz häd Katzln ghabt' (Our cat has had kittens) and 'Ich bin lüderlich, du bist lüderlich' (I am dissolute, you are dissolute). The central trio episode is a manic *moto perpetuo* punctuated by furious fortissimo chords.

The finale is one of Beethoven's most original creations. A free-flowing opening recitative leads into a quasi-operatic 'lamenting song' (*Klagender Gesang*). From its hushed close emerges a broad-breathed melody that becomes the basis of an elaborate three-voice fugue (where a repeated theme is heard at different pitches accompanied by increasingly elaborate counter-melodies). It builds to a majestic climax, only to be interrupted by an anguished reiteration of the lament. However, despair gives way to hope as the fugue returns, initially in inverted (upside-down) form, gradually gains in energy and eventually evolves into a full-throated song of triumph that ends the sonata in a mood of transcendent euphoria.

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