

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 30 November 2023
7.30pm

Pavel Kolesnikov piano

Henryk Mikolaj Górecki (1933-2010)

For Anna (2008)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 17 in D minor Op. 31 No. 2 'Tempest'
(1801-2)

I. Largo - Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegretto

Interval

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)

La colombe from *Préludes* (1928-9)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Piano Sonata in A K331 (c.1783)

*I. Andante grazioso - Adagio - Allegro •
II. Menuetto • III. Alla Turca. Allegretto*

Henryk Mikolaj Górecki

For Anna

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Piano Sonata in A minor D784 (1823)

I. Allegro giusto • II. Andante • III. Allegro vivace



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A criminal returns to the scene of the crime and is captured by the police. The seasons repeat to a very beautiful effect. A multitude of strictly arranged identical objects creates a spectacular sight. Repetitive sound can be torturous or induce a trance.

Ironically, this programme, which owes its existence to my fascination with *repetition*, its qualities and possibilities, arose from my half-conscious fear of it. For a classical performer, this is a particularly touchy subject. Every time we perform, we aim to play existing pieces as close to the original text and as perfectly as possible. But does this mean that we have to, or even that we can, ever repeat ourselves? Should we try changing approaches and exploring new colours, or should we simply trust the precise material of the score? Repetition is somewhat of a mythical three-headed monster - undesirable, unavoidable, and unattainable. It is linked to the idea of perfection (unattainable in itself) while being incredibly elusive. Nothing is ever exactly the same. Between every two identical entities, there is always a difference to spot, and the slighter it is, the greater its worth might be. Perhaps it's fair to say that repetition in its pure form doesn't exist at all.

In the last few years, I have worked on a number of complex, laborious projects that were meticulously designed evocative programmes: *'From Dusk to Dawn'*, *'For Marcel Proust'*, *'Celestial Navigation'*, and a few others. Lately, however, I have found myself seeking *another* experience, a *different* and more abstract way to design a programme. With an interest in cleaner lines, I began considering progressions that had less detail and instead had more clear, free space for the pieces to unfold.

The three sonatas you will hear tonight are chosen purely intuitively. Each is a work with a strong aura, capable of conjuring emotions that are, perhaps, inaccessible to us otherwise. Unlike my other programmes, this follows a more linear path that does not rely as much on interaction and reaction between the pieces. In fact, the pieces are almost too different for that; their sound worlds too individual to mix. In a peculiar way, the only thing that really bridges them together is the role *repetition* plays in their architecture.

I've come to think of **Beethoven's** 'Tempest' Sonata not as an illustration of Shakespeare's play, but as an amalgamation of some of its images and ideas - a mystical cloud hovering over Prospero's island. Despite its drama and intense emotions, the music remains airy, almost mirage-like. The conflict it contains is elusive and somewhat illogical, as in a sequence of interconnected dreams. Technically, the piece is composed with myriad closely related multiplied patterns, insistently repeated phrases, rolled chords and ostinato rhythms. Composition is astonishingly economical throughout, with the first two movements relying on little more than a couple of short themes that are repeated, layered and multiplied as a way of building up the tension. It culminates in that unforgettable 'minimalist' finale,

almost entirely composed using an ever-repeating pattern of four notes, obsessive and melancholic.

There is no other **Mozart** piano piece as bewildering as the Sonata in A, in the way it mixes sublime with profane: fun, exuberance, silliness. In the *Andante grazioso*, the celestial melody of the simple theme doesn't promise the subtle extravagance of subsequent variations. Each of them, of course, follows the exact harmony and structure of the theme: two symmetrical musical sentences, each repeated twice. However, this seemingly neoclassical structure is constantly jeopardised by dozens of unexpected, delicious slips and faux pas. Authentic practice requires varying the repeats, but I prefer refraining from it to have an extra chance to savour the exquisite and cheeky original text. While many might be looking forward to the outrageous *'Alla Turca'* finale, I would like to draw attention to the mysterious not-quite-*Menuetto*. With every phrase fluid and decisively asymmetric, the simple structure, aided by numerous looping repeats, appears pleasantly confusing. Something of a magic mirror chamber, this movement seems more labyrinthine than it really is. Its fragile hidden mechanism plays some well-forgotten trick, granting us precise moments of being lost in suspended time.

Once, in my teens, I happened to sight-read a peculiar piece. I had a distinct feeling that something was missing in it, to a point that it was becoming disturbing, so I checked if the music was right. Indeed, everything was there in that chillingly empty score. That was my first encounter with **Schubert's** Sonata in A minor D784, composed in 1823 - one of the most extreme, avant-garde works ever written for the piano. Devoid of any decoration whatsoever, the piece has nothing in it but the most essential, unyielding, monumental, and unapologetically exposed structure. I cannot help but see it as architecture rather than a musical work. The material is primeval, austere and unadorned. The themes are used as building blocks piled one on top of another, and repetition is the ruling principle.

Accordingly, there is very little development in this resolutely static work, where each movement remains as immobile and unchanged as a piece of rock. Interestingly, this principle is taken to the extreme, particularly in the seemingly agitated finale, which simply repeats three times a contrasting pair of themes, almost unaltered. So out of place in the early 19th Century, this work is no less astonishing nowadays and remains one of the most singular works of art, defying its genre and somehow even its medium.

I've decided to add to these great works three smaller pieces that will play the role of preludes. Or to be more precise, two pieces, as one of them is repeated twice. Simple and abstract, they will provide a moment of meditation before diving into those distinctive sound worlds we will be exploring tonight.

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