

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 30 September 2021 7.30pm

Leon McCawley piano

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Piano Sonata in C HXVI/50 (c.1794-5)

I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro molto

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Fantasia in C minor K475 (1785)

Piano Sonata in C minor K457 (1784)

I. Molto allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegro assai

Interval

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Fantasy Sonata in G D894 (1826)

I. Molto moderato e cantabile • II. Andante • III. Menuetto. Allegro moderato - Trio • IV. Allegretto

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Although **Haydn** is less readily associated with the piano sonata than with the quartet or symphony, he composed prolifically for keyboard throughout his career: from the trifling harpsichord works of the 1750s to the three magnificent sonatas, Nos. 50-52, inspired by the sonorous Broadwood fortepianos he encountered in London visits. He wrote both No. 50 in C and No. 52 in E flat for the professional pianist Therese Jansen in 1794, during his triumphant second London visit. The first movement of No. 50 is a supreme example of Haydn making the maximum capital from minimal material. It opens with a bald, staccato theme, a vision of dry bones, which Haydn immediately elaborates, initially with full, rolling chords, then with hints of two-part counterpoint. This fertile idea reappears, contrapuntally enriched, as a 'second subject', initially transferred to the bass.

At the peak of the development's climax is a famous 'open pedal' passage, where the once-bare theme is transformed into something rich and strange. What Haydn envisaged here was the *una corda* (i.e. soft) pedal available on the new Broadwood instruments but rarely found on contemporary Continental fortepianos. In the recapitulation the theme reaches its lyrical apotheosis with another 'open pedal' passage, now ethereal rather than darkly mysterious.

After a rhapsodic, quasi-improvisatory *Adagio*, the finale is a candidate for the most subversively comic piece that even Haydn ever wrote. A scherzo in all but name, it continually baffles with its lopsided phrases, outrageous silences and disorienting feints to remote keys that remain arbitrary and unexplained to the end.

When **Mozart** was literally kicked out of the service of Archbishop Colloredo of Salzburg in June 1781, he was confident that fame and fortune were his for the taking in Vienna. For the next few years he was triumphantly vindicated, earning a handsome living from teaching (mainly) aristocratic pupils, supplemented by concerts and publications. It was for one of his regular pupils, Therese von Trattner, that Mozart composed his Sonata in C minor K457, in the autumn of 1784, when he was riding the crest of a wave. When the sonata was published the following year, with a dedication to Therese, Mozart prefaced it with an elaborate Fantasy in same key, K475, dated 20 May 1785.

Therese must have been not only accomplished technically but also an uncommonly sensitive musician, to judge by the expressive range of the Fantasy and Sonata. The Fantasy, which welds extreme contrasts of key (the opening bars slip from C minor to an audaciously remote B minor), texture and tempo into a cohesive whole, brings us as close as we can get to Mozart the inspired improviser. Everything about this music is surprising.

It is typical of Mozart in C minor vein that the Sonata opens with a striding unison arpeggio, followed by a harmonised *piano* phrase: a pianistic recreation of an impassioned operatic duet. Operatic, too, are the treble-bass dialogues in the more relaxed second group of themes. But it is the stern opening motif that controls the narrative, through the combative development, to the gruff canonic imitations of the coda.

The *Adagio*, a rondo in E flat with two episodes, brings necessary balm. On each recurrence, the rondo theme is enhanced by delicately expressive ornamentation - another taste here of Mozart the improviser. The harmonically searching second episode was surely in Beethoven's mind when he composed the *Adagio* of the *Pathétique* Sonata.

Replete with syncopations and abrupt silences, the sonata-rondo finale combines turbulence with intense pathos. As in the opening *Allegro*, the movement's scale and reach demand a momentous coda. Mozart duly writes one of his most dramatic perorations, involving hand-crossing, huge leaps and a mining of the keyboard's depths. Beethoven is already glimpsed lowering on the horizon.

Schubert's two major instrumental works of 1826, the String Quartet D887 and the Sonata D894, share the same key and the same sense of infinite spaciousness. Yet in mood they could hardly be more different. While the quartet is restless and troubled, the Sonata, despite occasional moments of disturbance, is lyrically serene. There is no truly fast, or indeed truly slow, music in the entire work. It was a favourite of Robert Schumann, who deemed it the most perfect of all Schubert's sonatas.

Dedicated to Schubert's staunchest friend Joseph von Spaun, the G major Sonata was advertised on the title page as 'Fantasy, or Sonata'. With the genre of the piano sonata in decline, the publisher evidently calculated that 'Fantasy' would prove more alluring to prospective purchasers.

The first movement seems to hover between dream and dance - another reason, perhaps, why the publisher styled it 'Fantasy'. The opening theme, drifting into the remote key of B major and back again (shades here of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto), exudes a hypnotic tranquillity. Not for the only time in Schubert's piano works, the textures suggest a string quintet with two cellos. For his second theme Schubert writes a spiritualised waltz that he later embellishes with playful figuration high in the keyboard.

The delicately ornamented melody of the *Andante* distantly evokes a courtly minuet. Schubert contrasts this with a strongly rhythmic episode that veers between *fortissimo* agitation and *pianissimo* pathos, with bittersweet major-minor equivocations. Although marked *Menuetto*, the third movement, with its obsessive repeated-note patterns, is more a countrified *Ländler*. The main section, in B minor, contrasts a stomping repeated-note motif with a soft, luminous response, while the *Trio* slips from minor to major for Schubertian vision of bucolic innocence. The *Menuetto's* repeated-note pattern recurs in the main theme of the finale, where musette drones and slow-moving harmonies again evoke an idealised rusticity. True to the spirit of the whole sonata, the finale ends *pianissimo*, with a dream-echo of the main theme.

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