

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 31 January 2025
1.00pm

Jeonghwan Kim piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Minuet in D K355
Eine kleine gigue K574 (1789)

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971)

Piano Rag Music (1919)

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Dance Suite BB86b (1923)
*I. Moderato • II. Allegro molto •
III. Allegro vivace • IV. Molto tranquillo •
V. Comodo • VI. Finale*

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)

Berceuse in D flat Op. 57

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)

Le tombeau de Couperin (1914-7)
*I. Prélude • II. Fugue • III. Forlane •
IV. Rigaudon • V. Menuet • VI. Toccata*



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There is no consensus about the composition date of **Mozart's** Minuet in D K355. The autograph is not extant, and the piece was first published posthumously in 1801, with the title 'Menuetto avec Trio pour le Pianoforte par W. A. Mozart, et M. Stadler'. Maximilian Stadler did indeed add a trio in B minor, though modern editions usually do not include it. There are several schools of thought about the date, with some arguing that the chromaticism and motivic saturation point to the final years of Mozart's life (c. 1790), while others link the minuet to a consciously experimental group of works Mozart composed around 1782. The worklist in Grove settles for '1786-7'. What is in any case striking is that the chromatic voice leading – present right from the opening bars – results in harmonies that were far from orthodox in the late 18th Century, in some cases because of their dissonance quotient and in others their tonal ambiguity. No such doubts about chronology beset another short dance piece, Eine Kleine Gigue in G K574. This was written directly into the album of the Leipzig court organist, with the date 16 May 1789. Mozart had just undertaken a concert tour of Dresden, Leipzig and Berlin, and while in Leipzig he renewed his acquaintance with the music of Bach. This rebounded on several of his own late works, and for some Mozart scholars this little piece is among them.

Stravinsky composed Piano Rag Music in 1919, while he was also working on the ballet score *Pulcinella*, usually considered the first of his neo-classical works. In truth, the Stravinsky aesthetic establishes continuities across the pedigreed three periods of his creative life: Russian, neo-classical and serial. His music consistently engages in a dialogue with existing musical styles, ensuring that there is a recognisable stylistic background which is then subject to foreground distortion. There is a sense, then, in which his music is really about style. The background may be folkloristic, classical or modernist, and it may emerge at times close to the foreground, or alternatively all but recede from view. When he encountered ragtime in Paris, Stravinsky identified it as a candidate for just this kind of treatment, holding a newly recognisable style at arm's length and ingeniously enlivening it with characteristic tonal distortions, polychordal writing, asymmetrical rhythms and *ostinato* patterns, all trademark Stravinsky.

In 1873, Buda and Pest were united to form modern Budapest, becoming one of the twin capitals of the recently established dual monarchy of Austro-Hungary. Fifty years later, in 1923, the Budapest City Council commissioned several composers to mark the anniversary of this unification, giving birth to Bartók's Dance Suite for Orchestra, which he arranged for piano two years later. The work perfectly demonstrates that Bartók's fascination with traditional (demotic) music was never about narrow nationalisms, for its six movements draw on agrarian traditions from diverse ethnic groups, notably Hungarian, Romanian and Arabic. Throughout the Dance Suite, simple folk-inspired fragments of melody

are presented against complex harmonic backcloths, with driving asymmetrical rhythms creating a raw energy that is truly infectious. Only in the fourth movement is this energy stilled. Inspired by Arabic traditions, this movement creates an evocative soundscape that alternates fragments of chromatically twisting monody with densely dissonant, layered harmonies. Several movements from the suite are linked by a *ritornello* theme, and this, together with material from the first movement, is also incorporated into the finale.

Chopin's original title for the Berceuse, Op. 57 (1844) was 'Variantes', and this describes well its final form, a set of 16 short variations on an *ostinato* ground. In a sketch for the work, the separate variantes are actually presented in columns and numbered. An interesting detail: the composer's original autograph did not have the two-bar introduction. This was added by Chopin to a scribal copy, perhaps at the time he changed the title, since the accompaniment pattern establishes the genre before the melody enters. The Berceuse is indeed a work of rarest originality in which ornamental filigree takes on a quite new significance within Chopin's music, precisely because its curve of complexity is divorced from harmony (a repeating cycle of tonic and dominant) and dynamic shape (a stable piano level). In a quite literal sense, then, this music is shaped almost entirely by texture and sonority. Along with the Barcarolle, Op. 60 and Polonaise-fantasy, Op. 61, the Berceuse is widely recognised as one of the masterpieces of Chopin's final years.

Ravel's *Le tombeau de Couperin*, composed between 1914 and 1917, is one of several works in which 'modern' French pianist-composers, notably Fauré, Debussy and Ravel himself, established a conscious connection with the *clavecinistes français* of the late 18th Century. Thus, the six movements here take their titles, as well as much of their form and character, from the French keyboard suite. That Ravel was paying homage to the national heritage at a time of war is given added nuance by the dedication of each movement to the memory of one of his friends who died in the war, and also by the death of his mother in 1917. The first two pieces make a natural pairing, from the *moto perpetuo* figuration of the Prélude, out of which wisps of melody emerge, to the exquisite blend of craft and colour that constitutes the Fugue. In the third movement, the Forlane, plangent harmonies (the adjective is all but inescapable in Ravel commentaries) slide by with deceptive ease, facilitated by the hypnotic rhythms of a compound duple metre. Only with the lively Rigaudon in C major-minor and the graceful Menuet in G does the music leave its E-minor home, and this is restored in a spirited Toccata finale that seems to belie any sense that this suite is a memorial to the dead. As Ravel reportedly said: 'The dead are sad enough, in their eternal silence'.

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