

# WIGMORE HALL

Monday 3 June 2024  
1.00pm

Angela Hewitt fortepiano

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Variations in F minor HXVII/6 (1793)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Rondo in D K485 (1786)

Fantasia in D minor K397 (c.1782)  
*Andante - Adagio - Allegretto*

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Impromptu in G flat D899 No. 3 (1827)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 14 in C sharp minor Op. 27 No. 2  
'Moonlight' (1801)  
*I. Adagio sostenuto • II. Allegretto •  
III. Presto agitato*



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**Haydn** composed what he styled *Un piccolo Divertimento* in Vienna in 1793 for the talented pianist Barbara ("Babette") Ployer, for whom Mozart had written his concertos K449 and K453. The title is deceptive, perhaps even ironic. This profoundly felt music vies with the *Andante* of the 'Drumroll' Symphony No. 103 as Haydn's greatest set of alternating minor-major variations. After the stoic melancholy of the F minor opening, permeated by gently insistent dotted rhythms, the ornamental F major theme exudes a kind of abstracted playfulness. Haydn originally planned to end with the second F major variation and a few concluding bars. As an inspired afterthought he added a repeat of the F minor theme and a disturbingly chromatic coda that draws unsuspected force from the dotted rhythms before erupting in a feverish swirl of arpeggios. At the close the dotted rhythms toll deep in the bass, like a funeral knell.

Haydn was the least confessional of composers. Yet it is not far-fetched to suggest, as several commentators have done, that the coda's tragic intensity may have been prompted by the recent death of his close friend and confidante Maria Anna von Genzinger, aged just 42.

Dating from January 1786, when **Mozart** was embroiled in *Le nozze di Figaro*, the Rondo in D K485 is not a rondo at all but an exuberant sonata-form movement that grows entirely from its opening theme - an unusual procedure for the melodically lavish Mozart. We can sense the composer's glee at displaying the theme in an unpredictable variety of keys and textures, right through to the teasing coda. The whole, joyous piece gives a vivid flavour of Mozart the inspired improviser.

Probably composed in 1782, the year after Mozart abruptly departed the service of the Salzburg Archbishop Colloredo for a freelance life in Vienna, the D minor *Fantasia* K397 is a Mozartian response to the fantasias of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, second son of Johann Sebastian. Like the Rondo K485, it may have begun life as an improvisation. Opening with a sequence of brooding arpeggios, the first section consists of three statements of a D minor melody replete with sighing appoggiaturas. Like so much of Mozart's music, this is opera by other means. After a cadenza-like flourish, D minor brightens to D major for a melody of childlike innocence. Then Mozart's autograph suddenly breaks off shortly before the finishing line. The 10 concluding bars in the version usually heard today are thought to have been added by the Leipzig Thomaskantor August Eberhard Müller.

In the early 19th Century there was a growing demand for small-scale, 'characteristic' keyboard pieces in the flourishing amateur domestic market. Famous examples of this trend are Beethoven's bagatelles and the impromptus and *Moments musicaux* **Schubert** produced in the last few years of his life. The Bohemian composer Jan Voříšek seems to have been the first to coin the term 'impromptu' for a set of piano miniatures. Capitalising on their commercial success, the ever-canny Viennese publisher Tobias Haslinger affixed the title to four piano pieces Schubert composed in Vienna during the summer of 1827.

Daunted by the six flats in the key signature, Haslinger transposed the third impromptu from G flat to the easier key of G major. But for Schubert the dusky associations of the extreme flat keys were crucial to the mood of this Romantic nocturne, with its long-drawn-out right-hand melody above a gently purling accompaniment. At the movement's centre the mood of twilight enchantment is faintly threatened by a turn to E flat minor and a nagging rhythmic figure in the bowels of the keyboard.

By 1801 **Beethoven's** Viennese career as composer-virtuoso was shadowed by a marked deterioration in his hearing. Yet his creativity continued unabated. That year, amid work on the Second Symphony, he composed no fewer than four piano sonatas: Op. 26 in A flat, the so-called 'Pastorale' Op. 28 and, between them, the two sonatas Op. 27 which Beethoven designated 'sonata quasi una fantasia' - 'sonata that is almost a fantasia'. His description refers both to the sonatas' unusual sequence of movements and their intensely personal, idiosyncratic expressive world.

In the famous C sharp minor Sonata Beethoven complements extremes of expression with an outré key that he returned to only at the end of his life, in the Op. 131 String Quartet. He dedicated the sonata to the young Countess Giulietta Guicciardi, with whom he was hopelessly in love. Some biographers have even suggested that the first movement is a reflection of his sorrow at Giulietta's unattainability.

After Beethoven's death this hazy opening *Adagio*, evoking both a doleful chant and a funeral march, suggested to the poet Ludwig Rellstab 'a boat visiting, by moonlight, the primitive landscapes of Lake Lucerne'. The nickname has stuck. Yet for all its rhapsodic, improvisatory spirit, the movement is cast in a clear sonata form, with a central development and a radically rethought recapitulation that pushes the music to a new pitch of intensity. Marked to be 'played throughout with the greatest delicacy and *senza sordino*' ('without the dampers', i.e. with the sustaining pedal), this was probably Beethoven's most famous piece in his lifetime, to the composer's increasing irritation. Following without a break, the second movement is a faintly wistful *Allegretto* in C sharp major, written for the player's convenience in D flat. Liszt memorably described this poetic intermezzo, neither quite a minuet nor quite a scherzo, as 'une fleur entre deux abîmes' - 'a flower between two abysses'. The second 'abyss' is Beethoven's most violent stormscape to date, pushing the fortepiano to breaking point (stories abound of the composer smashing the hammers of his instruments). Like the opening *Adagio*, this finale - a *Presto agitato* shot through with moments of romantic yearning - is saturated almost throughout by the minor mode. Beyond this, it confirms Beethoven's concern to unify the whole work by dynamically reinterpreting the *Adagio's* thematic material, most obviously its pervasive arpeggio textures and its repeated G sharps, softly tolling in the *Adagio*, frenziedly percussive in the finale.

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