

# WIGMORE HALL

Monday 3 March 2025  
7.30pm

Alexander Gadjiev piano

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

From *Préludes* Book II (1911-3)

*Brouillards • La terrasse des audiences du clair  
de lune • Ondine • Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq.  
P.P.M.P.C. • Feux d'artifice*

John Corigliano (b.1938)

Fantasia on an Ostinato (1985)

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

Out of Doors, Sz. 81, BB89 (1926)

*I. With Drums and Pipes • II. Barcarolla •  
III. Musettes • IV. The Night's Music •  
V. The Chase*

*Interval*

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Gesänge der Frühe Op. 133 (1853)

*I. Im ruhigen Tempo • II. Belebt, nicht zu rasch •  
III. Lebhaft • IV. Bewegt • V. Im Anfange ruhiges,  
im Verlauf bewegtes Tempo*

Sergey Rachmaninov (1873-1943)

Piano Sonata No. 2 in B flat minor Op. 36 (1913, rev. 1931)

*I. Allegro agitato • II. Non allegro - Lento •  
III. Allegro molto*



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**Claude Debussy** (1862-1918) was a radical, almost by stealth. His style and voice were fully formed by the time he was in his late 30s, with three masterpieces, his opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* and the orchestral works *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and *La mer* under his belt by 1905. By that time, his solo piano music had become a floating world of dreams, symbolism, impressionism and allusion that both stretched and strengthened traditional Western harmony. Some of these pieces are technically modest, others extremely virtuosic. His mastery of the instrument was exceptional, especially in the use of the pedals.

The second book of *Préludes* appeared in 1913, the printed score ambiguously revealing the title at the end of each one, as though an afterthought. *Brouillards* ('Fog') opens with quiet C major chords balancing 'black-note' arpeggios in the right hand, as shapes shift and dissolve, and this study in grey is unresolved at the end. The title of *La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune* ('The terrace for audiences in the moonlight') is thought to have been suggested by a newspaper report of the extended festivities for King George V's coronation as Emperor of India in 1911. Its oriental setting is alluded to in a web of wonder and delicacy. *Ondine* ('Water sprite') was inspired by the illustrations of Arthur Rackham, and possibly by Ravel's own *Ondine*. Water imagery abounds, and Debussy captures the sprite's playfulness as well as her feral spite. In *Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq. P.P.M.P.C.*, Debussy evokes the genial good nature of Dickens's famous character, setting the tone with a pompous caricature of the National Anthem. *Feux d'artifice* ('Fireworks') is a brilliant musical impression of gasp-inducing glamour.

The prolific American composer **John Corigliano** (born 1938) is probably best known for his film score *The Red Violin*, later adapted as his Violin Concerto for Joshua Bell, and for his opera *The Ghosts of Versailles*. Corigliano wrote his *Fantasia on an ostinato* as a test piece for the 1985 Van Cliburn Competition. He described it as his 'first experiment in minimalist techniques', leaving the performer free to decide the duration of repeated passages. The Fantasy circles the famous A minor theme of the Allegretto movement from Beethoven's Symphony No. 7, which is revealed in full at the end of the piece. Corigliano later orchestrated the work, with the notation leaving nothing to chance.

**Béla Bartók** (1881-1945) was a composer-concert pianist (specialising in Liszt), as well as a teacher and academic. As composer, he trod a singular path. After his early Romantic works, including *The Miraculous Mandarin* and *Bluebeard's Castle*, he did not sign up to the current avant-garde orthodoxy (and tyranny, some would say) of serialism – although he folded the Golden Section and the Fibonacci series into his music as an organising principle – finding inspiration from his encyclopedic ethno-musical researches, with fellow composer Kodály, of the folk music of Hungary, Romania and eastern Europe. His output and work ethic were prodigious, his sense of creative purpose formidable, and a great number of his works have become A-list repertoire, which is odd, given that he left no school of influence.

He wrote the five short pieces of *Out of Doors* in 1926, and they are infused with the elemental spirit of folk music, with ferocious rhythms, astringent harmonies, and an unabashedly percussive piano style. 'With drums and pipes' overwhelms a suggestion of a children's folk song with pounding poly-rhythms. The second piece, 'Barcarolla' is far removed from 19th-century Venetian gondola romance; flowing triplets are soon subverted by ever-changing time-signatures, creating an uneasy instability suspended over watery depths. *Musettes* ('Bagpipes') suggests the pipers settling into their performance, in the process becoming more assured. Then comes *Musiques nocturnes* ('Musics of the night'), a genre Bartók made his own, with unrelated sounds and gestures of fauna scratching, rustling and croaking in the summer night. The final piece is *The Chase*, a ferociously pounding toccata recalling the terrifying close of *The Miraculous Mandarin*.

**Robert Schumann** (1810-56) wrote *Gesänge der Frühe* ('Songs of the dawn') in November 1853, the same year the young Brahms had erupted into the Schumanns' lives and three months before Schumann's suicide attempt and admittance to an asylum. His wife Clara wrote 'dawn songs very original as always but hard to understand, their tone is so very strange'. The five increasingly ambiguous pieces form a short cycle, linked by key and theme. The opening is a chorale of wonder and possibility, and the second piece suggests the reawakening of life, followed by a jaunty, extrovert and virtuosic gallop. The penultimate piece is a passionate, minor-key outburst, and the fifth returns briefly to the style of the opening, then elaborates into an elusive close.

Stravinsky referred to **Sergei Rachmaninov** as 'a six-and-a-half-foot scowl', and Rachmaninov was as famous for his forbiddingly stern demeanour as for his prodigious playing. As a composer, he was an uncompromising, conservative Romantic, not completely at home in the 20th Century, yet a composing and performing giant both in Europe and the United States, where he emigrated to in 1918. Before that, in 1913, Rachmaninov was working on his choral symphony *The Bells*, and its spirit saturates the first movement of his Piano Sonata No. 2, from the same year, in a flood of Mussorgsky-esque pealing sonorities, especially in the build-up to the return to the cataclysmic opening material. The middle movement settles into a song-like reverie in the remote key of E minor, with a bridge passage leading into the Finale in the home key major. The music refers back to the first movement, here transformed by optimism and virtuoso grandeur, hurtling to a stupendous and triumphant Presto close. Rachmaninov played the Sonata No. 2 a lot, and in 1931 he revised it, making cuts to all three movements, lightening textures and making some of the technical demands more reasonable. Alexander Gadjiev is playing the Horowitz version (a mix of the 1919 and 1931 versions of the Sonata).

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