

# WIGMORE HALL

Monday 3 October 2022  
7.30pm

François-Frédéric Guy piano

I wish to dedicate this concert to two great pianists, Nicholas Angelich and Lars Vogt, who both sadly passed away much too soon this year at the age of 51. They were very close friends of mine and their demise is an enormous loss. I had known Nicholas since he was 13 years old and we played dozens of piano duet concerts together. He and Lars Vogt were immense artists, both great Brahms players. We will never forget them as both friends and artists.

- François-Frédéric Guy

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)	Nocturne in C minor Op. 48 No. 1 (1841) Ballade No. 1 in G minor Op. 23 (c.1835) Piano Sonata No. 3 in B minor Op. 58 (1844) <i>I. Allegro maestoso • II. Scherzo. Molto vivace • III. Largo • IV. Finale. Presto non tanto</i>
	Interval
Tristan Murail (b.1947)	Impression, soleil levant (2022)
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)	Piano Sonata No. 32 in C minor Op. 111 (1821-2) <i>I. Maestoso - Allegro con brio ed appassionato • II. Arietta. Adagio molto semplice cantabile</i>

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*The programme has been changed slightly since the programme notes were written.*

**Chopin** used the term 'ballade' to indicate a sonata movement that was too unruly, and too self-sufficient, to be part of a sonata. He completed the first of his four such works in 1835, on the basis of sketches he had made four years before. A short but momentous introduction leads into a first theme whose 6/4 time signature represents double bars of waltz time. An eruption, however, overpowers the dance and clears the way for a second theme in E flat. Development tumbles into a reprise of the second theme and then, more steadily, of the first, until the mighty coda, *Presto con fuoco*, leads in another direction.

The B minor sonata takes us on nine years, but also takes us back in history, to face the composer we will encounter at the end of this programme: Beethoven. Among Beethoven's sonatas, Chopin's taste seems to have been for the A flat major Op. 26 (whose pattern, with scherzo second, he followed here, as in his preceding B flat minor sonata), though the more heroic Beethoven also features in the dialogue set up in this work, and certainly holds sway in its thoroughly motivic passages. The opening gesture, a falling – or, rather, downward hurtling – arpeggio, resurfaces in multiple transformations throughout the dynamic first part of the exposition, and then it is as if, at once summoned by and struggling against this Beethoven-Chopin, there arrives the Chopin-Chopin of the very characteristically moonlit second subject, which starts in the relative major, D. The melody here leads into more public music, but then the theme that arrives to close the exposition is intimate again. The development fixes largely on music of the forward-moving kind, except in one rippling sequence, and ends by debouching into the latter part of the exposition, from the nocturnal song to the end, whose reworking of the movement's initiating arpeggio is enough reminder of what has not been thoroughly recapitulated.

The shimmering *Scherzo* is in the distant key – though one foreshadowed in the oasis within the *Allegro's* development – of E flat, and is the frame for a trio in B major that can reflect, and reflect on, the enigmas that the first movement presented and set aside for later. Coming almost to a standstill at times on a three-note motif, this trio also seems to be hearing echoes of a military march.

Next comes a slow movement that, while telling its own elegant story, is also in B major and so again can gloss the work's opening *Allegro*. Where the slow movement of Chopin's previous, B flat minor sonata was a funeral march, this one may be understood as a funeral song, with a melodic poignancy that justifies and even necessitates some extraordinary harmonic progressions.

The triumphant return of B minor, at the start of the last movement, is a decisive acceptance that the sonata's initial material, never properly recapitulated, remains on the agenda. This strenuous and majestic closing movement wraps up Chopin's most powerful contribution to a discourse that also engaged Schumann at the time: that of how to create a multi-movement form that would be singular in its force and being. So much greater is the achievement when it comes by way of a *Finale* that seems to be galloping as much away from the inevitable end as towards it.

François-Frédéric Guy opens his second half with a piece **Tristan Murail** wrote for him at the beginning of this year. *Impression, soleil levant* ('Impression, sunrise') is an impression of an impression – of the canvas Monet painted in 1872, showing the orange sun, dimmed by mist but still reflected in the clouds and in the water at Le Havre, the port where both Monet and Murail were born. Buildings and most of the boats are lost in shadow, and it is with a striking effect of shadow that Murail's piece starts out. But of course there is much more light, flecked as it is in the painting.

That Chopin kept his sketches with him through his travels may have been because he had a great example. **Beethoven** in 1821 found the prompt for what would be his last sonata in one of his sketchbooks: an idea he made the main theme of his opening movement. Before this there is a stormy introduction, and the tension is by no means then relaxed. Rather the 20-year-old theme bounds like an animal. It pauses, then bounds again, on to a passage of colossal right-hand leaps across the keyboard, alleviated by the second subject, in A flat. Before the exposition is over, the principal theme is back, to become the subject of a fugue in the development. The theme comes vigorously back in double octaves to initiate the recapitulation, where everything appears in a new light, and there is a coda that brings the music not so much home as to a resting place from which it can go somewhere else. Its immediate destination proves to be a set of variations on a song in C major. The third variation is a 'boogie-woogie' (Mitsuko Uchida), 'like looking back on life before leaving it' (Claudio Arrau). That departure then takes place through a progressive diminution of note values into trills that take the music into the high treble, before it falls as a shadow falls. Thomas Mann, in *Doktor Faustus*, has one of his characters averring that Beethoven is not only concluding his final sonata here but also the whole history of the sonata as a genre. Perhaps the last word, however, should be Alfred Brendel's: 'Perhaps nowhere else in piano literature does mystical experience feel so immediately close at hand.'

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