WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 4 April 2023
7.30pm

Pavel Kolesnikov piano

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)	Waltz in A minor Op. 34 No. 2 (c.1834)
	Waltz in E B44 (c.1829)
	Waltz in E minor B56 (1830)
	Waltz in A flat Op. 69 No. 1 (1835)
	Waltz in C sharp minor Op. 64 No. 2 (1847)
	Nocturne in E minor Op. 72 No. 1 (c.1829)
	Nocturne in D flat Op. 27 No. 2 (1835)
	Nocturne in C sharp minor Op. 27 No. 1 (1835)
	Mazurka in C Op. 33 No. 3 (1838)
	Mazurka in A minor Op. 7 No. 2 (1830-2)
	Mazurka in A minor Op. 68 No. 2 (c.1827)
	Mazurka in B minor Op. 30 No. 2 (1837)
	Mazurka in C Op. 56 No. 2 (1843-4)
	Mazurka in A minor Op. 17 No. 4 (1833)
	Interval
Franz Schubert (1797-1828)	4 Impromptus D935 (1827) *Impromptu in F minor • Impromptu in A flat • Impromptu in B flat • Impromptu in F minor*

Chopin only really got going with mazurkas after he'd left Poland for good. At the time of the Warsaw Uprising against the colonial Russians in November 1830, he happened to be in Vienna, and he never managed to get back home. The most significant thing about the mazurkas he began to write, stuck in Vienna, was that they were not polonaises; the polonaise was the smart-society Polish dance, the one that was welcome in the concert hall, suitably perfumed. Even Bach wrote that sort of polonaise. But the mazurka, much more suspect and folksy, became Chopin's private Poland: and once he'd settled in Paris, it marked him as an Eastern Exotic.

Chopin's own playing of his mazurkas bewildered everyone. Hector Berlioz lamented: 'Virtually nobody but Chopin himself can play his music and give it this unusual turn, this sense of the unexpected …. There are unbelievable details in his mazurkas; and he has found how to make them doubly interesting by playing them with the utmost degree of softness, *piano* in the extreme, the hammers merely brushing the strings, so that one is tempted to go close to the instrument and put one's ear to it as if to a concert of sylphs or elves.'

Lovely to imagine Berlioz, of all people, being captivated by *very quiet piano music*. And notice, by the way, that he's not describing a concert, but one of those fancy salons where time can stand still and no-one's trying to prove anything. As Chopin said himself: 'Concerts are never real music'.

One of Chopin's piano pupils was Wilhelm von Lenz, a Russian agent. (Chopin can't have known, with *his* politics.) Lenz went to Chopin specifically to study the mazurkas. He made the error of mentioning that he'd studied some with Liszt. Lenz writes:

'"Ah?", said Chopin in a drawling though most polite tone. "How can I be of any help to you then?"' And when the hapless Lenz played some ornaments that Liszt had taught him, 'Chopin courteously whispered: "This run isn't yours, is it? He showed it to you – he has to put his stamp on everything; well, he may; he plays for thousands of people and I rarely play for one."'

Improvised ornaments in Chopin? Well, Moritz Rosenthal, born in 1862, studied with Chopin's devoted pupil, Karol Mikuli, and in his 1934 Abbey Road Chopin recordings, he adds not only extra twiddles, but extra bars.

The Mazurka Op. 33 No. 3 is the subject of Wilhelm von Lenz's best story. Chopin was giving him a lesson on it, when in came the opera composer Meyerbeer, so full of himself that he didn't even knock. '"That's in 2/4", said Meyerbeer. Chopin beat triple time on the piano with his pencil, his eyes blazing. "2/4", repeated Meyerbeer. "It's in 3/4", shouted Chopin, who rarely raised his voice above a murmur. He sat at the piano himself, counting aloud, and stamping the beat with his foot, but Meyerbeer stuck to his guns, and they parted on bad terms.'

Some pianists steeped in the mazurkas occasionally shorten the second and third beats so that the two add up to roughly the same as the first beat. Meyerbeer's problem was that he owned a metronome, I dare say. Charles Hallé, Manchester's most musical eponym, studied mazurkas with Chopin when he was a young German called Karl Halle. He was obviously not so annoying as Meyerbeer, because he once counted 4-in-a-bar while Chopin played mazurkas, and Chopin only laughed.

As for nocturnes, Chopin wrote 21 of them, building on a field - as it were - already established by his near-contemporary, Irish composer John Field. The Nocturne in D flat Op. 27 No. 2 has found its way into James Bond (in *The Spy Who Loved Me*); though given a late Opus number, the E minor Nocturne Op. 72 No. 1 was actually the first nocturne Chopin ever wrote.

Though he composed waltzes throughout his life – 36 in all – Chopin himself published only eight. Albert Giraud's poem, *Valse de Chopin*, that came to be part of Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*, tells us what waltzes meant in Paris:

The consumptive's bloody spit
Bursts the bubble of vermilion.
So within this morbid music
A pernicious sweetness lies.
Twisting, turning,
Brooding, burning,
Chopin waltzes dark and moody.

And *The Waltz* by Lord Byron, the Romantic hero of all Europe (and especially of Liszt), puts its finger on an important aspect of the dance's appeal:

Waltz—Waltz alone—both legs and arms demands,
Liberal of feet, and lavish of her hands;
Hands which may freely range in public sight
Where ne'er before—but—pray "put out the light."

Schubert was the only great composer of the Viennese School actually to be Viennese – a reminder of the cosmopolitan nature of that swirling centre of empire. His natural form of self-expression was the piano – often in combination with a voice, of course, but on all sorts of other occasions too. A painting of a charade being acted by a group of his friends – 'Adam & Eve', with the morally dubious Schober as the Serpent, and the unusually tall Kupelwieser, the painter of the picture, as the Tree of Life – shows Schubert sitting at the piano in a corner, attended only by a patient dog, as he strums a doubtless dramatic chord with his left hand alone. He composed D935 in December 1827. Robert Schumann suspected that they were a disguised piano sonata, though the key scheme would be rather odd for a sonata. The second and third numbers are the popular favourites, the latter being based on a tune from Schubert's incidental music to the play *Rosamunde* (1823) – a version of which he also used for a set of variations in his 1824 String Quartet D804.