

WIGMORE HALL 125

Sunday 4 January 2026
7.30pm

Martin James Bartlett piano

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme BWV645 (c.1748-9)
transcribed by Ferruccio Busoni for piano

II. Siciliano from Flute Sonata in E flat BWV1031 (after
1740) *transcribed by Wilhelm Kempff for piano*

Toccata in C minor BWV911 (c.1710)

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Piano Sonata in A K331 (c.1783)

I. Tema con variazioni. Andante grazioso •

II. Menuetto & Trio • III. Alla Turca. Allegretto

Interval

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

Vallée d'Obermann from *Années de pèlerinage*,
première année, Suisse S160 (1848-55)

Enrique Granados (1867-1916)

El Amor y la muerte from *Goyescas* (1909-12)

Aleksandr Skryabin (1872-1915)

Piano Sonata No. 4 in F sharp Op. 30 (1903)

I. Andante • II. Prestissimo volando



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In 1748, Johann Georg Schübler published a set of chorale preludes for organ by **JS Bach**, among which was *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme*, a transcription of the fourth movement of the cantata of the same name. It unfolds with graceful serenity – the chorale melody in the tenor register, a memorable obbligato line dancing above, a roaming bass beneath – and became one of many Bach works later transcribed for piano by Ferruccio Busoni. The authorship of the Flute Sonata in E flat BWV1031, which dates from the 1730s, is less certain but is commonly attributed to Bach. Its lilting *Siciliano* slow movement in G minor has a mood of haunting melancholy, and was arranged for piano by Wilhelm Kempff.

A very different beast is the Toccata in C minor BWV911, one of seven that Bach composed for keyboard in his early career. Originating in Italy, a Toccata usually suggests a display of manual dexterity. In the hands of Froberger and Buxtehude, it became a form combining improvisatory and fugal elements, and in this German tradition Bach was happy to follow. A florid opening gesture gives way to an *Adagio* section, accumulating tension before letting fly in a fugue with a long, winding subject. After a brief interlude, the fugue starts up again with an accompanying figure that ratchets up the rhythmic energy, before closing with a final flourish. For all the freewheeling exuberance on display, this is a work that shows the young composer delighting in counterpoint more than finger-speed for its own sake.

Mozart's Piano Sonata in A K331 has long been one of his most popular piano works. It's also one of his most unusual, in that none of its three movements are actually in sonata form. First is a set of variations, on an elegant *Andante grazioso* theme, which keeps to a set harmonic pattern, only deviating with a foray to the minor. Some scholars suspect a pedagogical motive – Mozart may have intended the sonata for his piano pupils, or even to demonstrate composing variations with a variety of textural patterns and ornaments. A crisp and light minuet follows, whose trio section features delicate moments of hand-crossing (another useful lesson perhaps). But the star of the show is undoubtedly the *Alla turca* finale, which reflects the contemporary fascination with Janissary music that Mozart had explored in his opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio* – this sonata was likely composed not long after. Such was the vogue for the 'Turkish' military music that some piano makers were adding extra pedals to their instruments that could imitate drums or cymbals. That same theatrical spirit is present in the bold contrasts that Mozart employs: the scurrying main theme in the minor is a splendid foil to the bombastic march in the major.

In 1835, the young **Franz Liszt** caused a scandal when he eloped from Paris with the married Countess Marie d'Agoult. The couple absconded to Switzerland, where they remained for over a year. On these travels,

Liszt penned his suite *Album d'un voyageur*, which he later revised into the first 'book' of *Années de pèlerinage* (Years of Wandering). The Swiss *Années* is full of Romantic literary quotations: 'Vallée d'Obermann' refers to the Swiss-set novel *Obermann* by Senancour, while additional lines from Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* head up the score too. 'What am I? What can I ask of nature?' *Obermann* muses – clearly the archetype of the introspective wanderer, brooding among sublime landscapes, had immense appeal for the composer. The expressive descending melody that opens the piece goes on several harmonic adventures of its own. Mysterious low trills lead to an explosive cadenza, and in the work's glittering climax, we can surely catch glimpses of alpine scenery.

'I fell in love with the psychology of Goya and his palette', wrote **Enrique Granados**, of the artist who had documented and satirised Spanish society a century before him. *Goyescas*, composed in 1909-12, offers six responses to the artist's pictures, and 'El Amor y la muerte' (Love and Death) is inspired by an etching of a woman supporting the body of her dying lover – a sword on the ground shows he has lost a duel. 'Intense pain, nostalgic love, the final tragedy' Granados wrote, 'all the themes of *Goyescas* are united [here]'. Though its forceful opening theme foretells danger, much of what follows is sensual and lush, with a characteristically Spanish ornamented style. In passages that Granados labels 'conversation' and 'flirtation' we can appreciate the observation of the critic Ernest Newman that to play *Goyescas* is like 'passing the fingers through masses of richly coloured jewels'. But such voluptuous pleasures cannot last: death finally arrives in a succession of stark octaves, and a slow knell of solemn chords.

Aleksandr Skryabin composed ten piano sonatas, and the Fourth, from 1903, is among his shortest; written in two continuous movements, it also represents the turning point of his cycle towards consolidated forms. At the same time, a burgeoning interest in mysticism and esoteric philosophy was expanding his imagination. His programme note – a rather heady brew of poetic verbiage – describes a distant star, and a dreamy flight towards it. The opening *Andante* certainly sets a star-struck tone, with a delicate ascending theme, later decorated with twinkling figurations. But when the second movement explodes into life, *Prestissimo volando*, our cosmic voyage takes the form of a breathless, madly skipping dance. Skryabin reportedly demanded that this be played 'as fast as possible...it must be a flight at the speed of light'. The first movement's theme returns to crown the work, now ecstatic, with hammered chords that blaze with the energy of a thousand suns.

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