

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 4 June 2022 7.30pm

Richard Goode piano

In memory of Margaret Hess

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Papillons Op. 2 (1830-1)

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Piano Sonata in A minor D845 (1825)

*I. Moderato • II. Andante poco moto •
III. Scherzo. Allegro vivace • IV. Rondo. Allegro vivace*

Interval

Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

15 Hungarian Peasant Songs BB79 (1914-8)

*4 Old Tunes: I. Rubato • II. Andante • III. Poco rubato • IV. Andante
V. Scherzo. Allegro.
VI. Ballad (Theme with variations). Andante
Old Dance Tunes: VII. Allegro • VIII. Allegretto • IX. Allegretto •
X. L'istesso • XI. Assai moderato • XII. Allegretto •
XIII. Poco più vivo • XIV. Allegro • XV. Allegro*

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 28 in A Op. 101 (1816)

*I. Etwas lebhaft und mit der innigsten Empfindung •
II. Lebhaft. Marschmässig • III. Langsam und sehnsuchtsvoll •
IV. Geschwind, doch nicht zu sehr, und mit Entschlossenheit*

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'The assembled guests did not seem to me to take in *Papillons*, as they looked at each other conspicuously and couldn't grasp the rapid changes.' So noted **Robert Schumann** after a salon evening in which Clara Wieck had played her future husband's piece *Papillons*. As its title suggests, the piece rarely stays put, flitting rapidly from scene to scene. In just 14 minutes, the young Robert manages to bring together a series of 12 lively and vividly characterful dance scenes.

The inspiration for these tableaux was two-fold: the music of his barely-predecessor Schubert (particularly the waltzes and four-hand piano music) which had been an obsession throughout his student years, and the dance scenes in the novels of his favourite author, Jean Paul, a popular early 19th-century writer of formless yet caustic satirical novels.

A brief introduction raises the curtain before launching us through a whirlwind of moods and characters. Melodies and motifs occasionally connect across movements: the muted waltz that interrupts number six comes back as a full throttle movement ten. The opening reappears to interrupt the finale which is patterned on the traditional end-of-evening dance, the Grandfather Waltz. The final chord, where each note is slowly subtracted, gives the impression of departing guests and the piece closes quietly.

1825 was a year of great transition for **Schubert**. For two years he had survived the physical assaults of syphilis, whose effects were now becoming more manageable if no less fatal. Conversely it was also during this time that publishers began to print his work, for the first time bringing a new recognition and popularity. The A minor sonata comes out of this period, a special work that does away with the more ornamental nature of the sonatas he had composed in his early years, replacing it with a more serious style of writing.

The first movement is made up of two ideas, a delicate theme which is contrasted with a second, more militant idea, both taken to unusually distant harmonic places. The second movement is a theme and five variations that grow to include fantastical runs, turns, and harmonic excursions. Schubert was remembered by his friends for his special singing style of playing in this piece, and one can imagine that this was especially evident throughout these variations. The next movement is a scherzo that has at its heart, a beautiful lilting trio in F Major. A busy finale in two distinct voices gives a brilliant close to the whole work.

The *15 Hungarian Folk Songs* by **Béla Bartók** were collected around 1910 in what is now Slovakia. In his travels into the countryside, Bartók collected thousands of songs, partly to save from extinction, and partly to transform with his own inimitable musical language. He has the ability to present these songs as

classical piano music yet still with the rawness of the original rudimentary melodies, singers, and instruments they were played on. The final movement for example is an imitation of a bagpiping competition Bartók heard in one village, the fifth movement has original lyrics of 'my wife is so clean/she only needs to wash monthly.'

If the Schubert A minor sonata marks the start of a new mature style, so too does the Op. 101 Sonata for his hero, **Beethoven**. This piece roughly marks the beginning of his final period of writing. His hearing by this point had deteriorated so that he could no longer hear instruments or converse without writing, and the music consequently begins to take on an inward and private character. There is also the new feature of extended counterpoint, a return to his childhood and the Well-Tempered Clavier which he had been brought up on.

Beginning as if in mid-sentence, with a gently swinging melody, the first movement is in compressed sonata form that is so cleverly disguised it comes across more as improvised introduction, and one that does not even settle on the chord of A major until almost 100 bars into the piece. Beethoven himself referred to this as 'impressions and reveries' and this opening is one of the most dream-like beginnings to any of his works so far. Bursting in to interrupt is a clipped march that like its first movement never quite seems to settle, giving way to a calmer middle section that is riddled with contrapuntal shifting that drives the music constantly forward.

Once again the line between improvisation and movement proper becomes blurred in the third movement, marked 'slow and full of longing,' the only time that Beethoven used the word in a score. The music contains a slow procession of little baroque turns and figures, until after a little set of sequences, the music of the first movement actually returns in brief. Nowhere is Beethoven at his most rhapsodic and free, joining together what could be considered two interludes to two movements proper.

From there we go straight into the final movement, made of a rush of exciting and angular material. The development here is a long fugue that grows to enormous proportions. At the climax of the fugue, Beethoven makes use of the expanded range of his new pianos, using a low E (he specifically marks it 'contra e') at the bottom of the piano for the first time in all his music, and to thrilling effect. We are pulled back to our opening music and through to a rousing finish.

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