

WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 5 May 2024
7.30pm

Cédric Tiberghien piano

György Ligeti (1923-2006)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

György Ligeti

Ludwig van Beethoven

Musica ricercata No. 1 (1951-3)

6 Variations on a Swiss Song WoO. 64 (1790)

Musica ricercata No. 2

12 Variations on the Russian Dance from Wranitzky's ballet *Das Waldmädchen* in A WoO. 71 (1796-7)

György Kurtág (b.1926)

György Ligeti

Ludwig van Beethoven

Fleurs nous sommes from *Játékok* (1973)

Musica ricercata No. 3 • Musica ricercata No. 4 •

Musica ricercata No. 5

8 Variations on the Romance 'Un fièvre brûlante' from Grétry's *Richard Cœur-de-lion* in C WoO. 72 (1795)

Interval

György Ligeti

Ludwig van Beethoven

Musica ricercata No. 6

13 Variations on the arietta 'Es war einmal ein alter Mann' by Dittersdorf in A WoO. 66

György Kurtág

György Ligeti

Ludwig van Beethoven

Flowers we are (In memoriam Árpád Illés) from *Játékok* (pub. 1997)
...et encore une fois: fleurs nous sommes... from *Játékok* (1973)

Musica ricercata No.7

10 Variations on the Duet 'La stessa la stessissima' from Salieri's *Falstaff* in B flat WoO. 73 (1799)

György Ligeti

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Musica ricercata No. 8 • Musica ricercata No. 9

Musica ricercata No. 10 • Musica ricercata No. 11

Aria variata BWV989 (by 1717)

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Variations upon variations. **Ligeti's** *Musica ricercata* (1951-3) is a set of variations not on a theme but on a rule, that each piece adds one to the store of notes in play. The first is mostly one-note music, all on A in various registers. The entry of a new note, D, is not so much a homecoming as a doorway leading on.

In this case, it leads on immediately to the most elementary of **Beethoven's** variation sets, that of six on a Swiss song ('Es het e Buur es Töchterli', widely printed at the time), which he wrote when he was around 20. The even-numbered variations let the tune follow its inclination to march, in contrast with the third, in the minor, and the fifth, with its neat touches of chromaticism and syncopation.

In the second *Musica ricercata* item a minor second (E sharp-F sharp) provides all the material for a slip of chant, dark and threatening. A third note, G, adding a further minor second, arrives halfway through and changes the locus of the threat. Stanley Kubrick made telling use of the piece in *Eyes Wide Shut*.

Beethoven's variations on a number from Paul Wranitzky's ballet *The Forest Maid*, dating from 1796-7, suggest he was impressed by Maria Casentini's dancing in the central role – for her name, not Wranitzky's, appears on his title page, and the music often seems to be pirouetting. There are three variations in the minor, two affecting, one suddenly driven. Grace is to the fore here – and a passion for development that takes off in a long coda.

Kurtág's 'flower' variations are spread out over time, stemming from a brief moment in his *The Sayings of Péter Bornemisza* (1963-8) when the soprano sings 'Flowers we are' to a slow wide-spanning line gently handled in similar fashion by the piano. He included several versions in his first volume of *Játékok* ('Playing'), a collection he began in 1973 and intended at that point for children.

In the third piece from Ligeti's *Musica ricercata* the full assembly of four notes runs all through, wobbling and skipping around a triad of C with major and minor thirds. Not for the last time, an abstract construct ends up sounding like folk music. The fourth piece makes four notes from a G minor scale into a tipsy waltz, coming as if from a barrel organ. Almost lost, the tune recovers itself thanks to a scare from the fifth note, G sharp. Finally here, in the fifth piece, the minor-second chant of the second is revisited, but of course in denser harmony.

Back to Beethoven. 'Une fièvre brûlante' was the song sung by Blondel in Grétry's opera *Richard Cœur-de-lion* to signal his presence outside the castle in which the Lionheart is imprisoned. Beethoven, around 1795, again typically alternates delicacy with robustness, but the most remarkable feature is the coda, where a passage in A flat, warm but abruptly enclosed, is followed by free-running C major. It is as if the whole story of rescue from prison is being enacted in less than a minute.

In *Musica ricercata* No. 6 the presence of seven notes makes possible a complete diatonic scale, but one equivocating between modal varieties of A major and E, with a corresponding brightness and folk flavour.

Beethoven's next is a set of comic variations on a comic song from a comic opera, by Dittersdorf. The delayed cadence comes from the source, but then Beethoven takes over. He repeats that trick at the end of the 12th variation to append a short 'capriccio'; plays with dynamic changes; stiffens the 2/4 metre into march time or softens it into 6/8; splits the theme between the hands (second variation); and increases note divisions, as far as to triplet semiquavers. The comedy is necessarily rescinded in the conventional minor-key variation (the sixth), where the delayed cadence has a quite different effect. Dittersdorf's piece was played in Bonn in 1792, and Beethoven must have heard it shortly before moving definitively to Vienna.

Kurtág sprinkled 'flowers' through later volumes of *Játékok*, oriented more to professional pianists. From the fifth we hear *Flowers we are* (*in memoriam Árpád Illés*), remembering an artist who died in 1980. ...*et encore une fois: fleurs nous sommes...* comes again from the first book. The seventh *Musica ricercata* instalment again features something like a folk tune, one Ligeti was to re-use four decades later in his Violin Concerto. Halfway through, the theme moves up an octave and is joined by a canonic voice a fifth below, which is where the eighth note comes in. Shifts lead to a dissolve.

Beethoven bows out with his variations of 1799 on the letters duet from Salieri's *Falstaff* for Mistress Ford and Mistress Slender (as she is in the opera). Perhaps wanting to prove himself to his former teacher, Beethoven parades all the possibilities of the form: stepwise increasing speed (theme and variations I-II); syncopation (III); a touching slip into the minor (V); canon (VI); delicacy (VII); humour (VIII); and again a long coda.

In the first of the remaining Ligeti pieces a Bartókian rampage is lightly invaded by the tune from the preceding piece, but persists. Then regular tolling at the bottom of the piano gives way to bells of a different colour, flights of panic and a long coda. The death of Bartók, with whom Ligeti had hoped to study, was only a few years in the past. With 11 notes now to hand, simple tunes can be heavily chromatic or dissonated, in another compact Ligetian comedy. The collection then ends with its longest piece, which puts forward a 12-note theme and takes it round a circle and more of rising fifths while also melting it into the chromatic scales of which it is largely composed.

Cédric Tiberghien closes the spiral by stepping into a wholly other realm for the *Aria variata in A minor* that **Bach** wrote in his middle or later 20s. The aria, in two repeated sections, is followed by eight variations through which contemplative solemnity rises to virtuoso frenzy. Then, as in the *Goldbergs*, the original marvellously returns.

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