

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 7 April 2022 7.30pm

Piers Lane piano

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Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor Op. 13 'Pathétique' (1797-8)
I. Grave - Allegro di molto e con brio • II. Adagio cantabile • III. Rondo. Allegro

Piano Sonata No. 31 in A flat Op. 110 (1821-2)
I. Moderato cantabile molto espressivo • II. Allegro molto • III. Adagio ma non troppo - Fuga. Allegro ma non troppo

Interval

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)

Waltz in E B44 (c.1829)
Waltz in B minor Op. 69 No. 2 (1829)
Waltz in D flat Op. 70 No. 3 (1829)
Waltz in A flat B21 (1830)
Waltz in E minor B56 (1830)
Waltz in G flat Op. 70 No. 1 (1832)
Waltz in E flat 'Grande valse brillante' Op. 18 (1831-2)
Waltz in A flat Op. 34 No. 1 (1835)
Waltz in A minor Op. 34 No. 2 (c.1834)
Waltz in F Op. 34 No. 3 (1838)
Waltz in A flat Op. 42 (1840)
Waltz in F minor Op. 70 No. 2 (1842)
Waltz in D flat Op. 64 No. 1 'Minute' (1847)
Waltz in C sharp minor Op. 64 No. 2 (1847)
Waltz in A flat Op. 64 No. 3 (1847)
Waltz in A minor B150 (1847)

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Beethoven completed his Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor Op. 13 'Pathétique' in 1798. Unusually, he titled it himself and the sonata soon achieved popularity. The keyboard virtuoso Ignaz Moscheles was advised to avoid Beethoven's music, as it was 'the oddest stuff possible'. He disregarded this and later recalled, 'I seized upon the 'Pathétique' and found solace and delight such as no other composer afforded me.' The ancient Greek word *pathos* indicates suffering, pain, passion or violent emotion, rather than any English notion of being pathetic. From its opening sequence, the sonata expresses Beethoven's inner turmoil and can therefore be seen as a perfect representation of *Sturm und Drang* (literally, 'Storm and Stress') in his work. Its three movements are imaginatively linked together. The weighty phrases that begin the opening movement are recalled twice within it: at the start of the faster development section and at the movement's conclusion. The famous middle movement is in rondo form and is based upon a A-B-A-C-A design of thematic material. The closing movement, also a *Rondo*, combines elements from the preceding movements within its angular two-part counterpoint.

Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 31 in A flat Op. 110 dates from 1821. The primary theme of the opening movement carries an unusual marking for this stage in Beethoven's career, *con amabilità* ('with amiability'). Its material informs much of the entire sonata. The second theme is a compact amalgam of brief ideas spread across the instrumental range. The middle movement acts as a condensed scherzo, and though its tone is surly it also displays surface level humour. A brief trio section presents difficulties with its syncopated rhythms. The closing movement forms the heart of the sonata and shows Beethoven at his most daring. A grave recitative-style opening is characterised by various tempo changes before the *Adagio* properly takes hold. The immediately ensuing large three-voice fugue, notable for the rigour of its polyphonic writing, has been termed 'Passion music'. Its tumultuous emotions draw the listener inexorably along a path of betrayal, crucifixion and resurrection. The fugal subject itself recalls the outline of the first movement's primary melody more by associative suggestion than outright imitation, before dissolving into an *arioso* section. The fugue returns in an inverted form and leads to a triumphant coda.

Chopin's waltzes, once commonly programmed in a recital's second half, may not be as frequently performed today, but their undeniable tunefulness perennially delights listeners. They were written between 1824 and 1849, the year of his death. His models were Schubert's dances, particularly the *Ländler*, and Weber's *Invitation to the Dance*, written in 1819. Piers Lane echoes the practice of other pianists, including Dinu Lipatti, by presenting the waltzes in his own bespoke order. He includes waltzes Chopin published and assigned opus numbers to, alongside genuine and posthumously published works and others ascribed to him. These

sometimes have simpler structures compared to the waltzes he selected to publish.

The waltz in E B44 was found in a folio of Chopin's manuscripts that he did not intend to publish. It is a seven-part rondo that moves between the keys of E major, G-sharp minor and A major. The B minor waltz, Op. 69 No. 2, is built out of three themes. Bookended with material that twists and turns, the central section invokes a contrasting rhythmic pattern. Op. 70 No. 3 could be the archetypal keyboard waltz. An early work, it hints at what was to follow. Four brief dances are arranged within a mirror structure.

The waltz in A flat B21 recalls a Schubertian *Ländler* dance and is Chopin's only waltz written in a 3/8 time signature. Written around the age of 20, before Chopin left Poland, the waltz in E minor B56 is notable for its dramatic character. Op. 70 No. 1 has a marked Viennese flavour. This three-part work, with its schmaltzy central section, is Chopin's only wholly cheerful waltz. The 'Grande Valse Brillante', Op. 18, is closer to Weber's model. A medley of six contrasting waltzes, it effervescently evokes a breathless dancefloor experience. Op. 69 No. 1 is constructed from two themes: the quasi-operatic first one is varied on each reappearance; the second theme is grounded in a series of upwards chords.

Chopin's Op. 34 consists of three waltzes. Nos. 1 and 3 open with brief introductions that have melodies in the left hand and the waltz rhythm in the right. The central sections are full of unusual modulations. No. 2, in A minor, contrasts with its partners by foregoing the dance form for introspection and melancholia. The waltz in A flat Op. 42 possesses a remarkable sense of sweeping drama, progressing from an inspired opening via a series of dances to an elaborate conclusion that combines the major themes. Chopin is known to have presented autograph copies of Op. 70 No. 2 to five friends; the demand for those perhaps reflects its sentimental yet sombre nature. The rhythm is understated as the melody shifts between the major and minor keys.

There are also three waltzes within Op. 64. No. 1, the 'Minute', is amongst the most recognisable of all piano compositions. The misleading nickname, not of Chopin's choosing, supposedly refers to the work's brevity. It alludes to the instantaneous conception and dissipation of a musical idea that possessing both grace and anxiety. No. 2 is rather more bitter than sweet in tone; a speech-like rhythmic pattern is propagated in the repeated note sequences, against which a waltz rhythm periodically appears. No. 3 possesses interesting rhythmic irregularities, whilst the abstract central section makes it sound more like a mazurka than a waltz. The waltz in A minor B150, perhaps written by a Chopin pupil under his guidance, shifts from positivity to negativity and then reverts to positivity again.

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