

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 7 February 2024
7.30pm

Leon McCawley piano

- Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) Piano Sonata in D HXVI/33 (by 1778)
I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Tempo di menuet
- Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) From *The Seasons* Op. 37a (1875-6)
March (Song of the lark) • October (Autumn song)
- Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953) Piano Sonata No. 2 in D minor Op. 14 (1912)
I. Allegro ma non troppo • II. Scherzo. Allegro marcato • III. Andante • IV. Vivace
- Interval*
- Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849) Impromptu No. 1 in A flat Op. 29 (c.1837)
- Franz Schubert (1797-1828) 4 Impromptus D935 (1827)
Impromptu in F minor • Impromptu in A flat • Impromptu in B flat • Impromptu in F minor

CLASSIC *fm* Wigmore Hall £5 tickets for Under 35s supported by Media Partner Classic FM



Our Audience Fund provides essential unrestricted support for our artistic and learning programmes, connecting thousands of people with music locally, nationally, and internationally. We rely on the generosity of our audience to raise £150,000 each year to support this work. Your gifts are, and continue to be, indispensable. To donate, please visit <https://wigmore-hall.org.uk/audiencefund>

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management.

In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions.

Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141.

Wigmore Hall is equipped with a 'Loop' to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.



Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • wigmore-hall.org.uk • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan

Department
for Culture
Media & Sport

LOTTERY FUNDED

Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

Registered with
**FUNDRAISING
REGULATOR**

The late 1760s saw **Haydn** extending his emotional and technical range. He regarded the Op. 9 string quartets as the beginning of his work – it's lucky he wasn't Mozart, or by that age he'd have been dead already – and by 1771, when he published the Op. 17 set of six quartets, he'd really got into his stride. As to the Op. 20 quartets of 1772, the great musicologist Donald Tovey thought that 'no document in the history of music was more important'. But string quartets were Haydn's private diversion. His actual job, from 1761 till 1790, was to provide music for the great house of Eszterháza, with its orchestra and opera house. At least 80 of his symphonies were composed for these musical Counts, the first of whom played a weird instrument almost no-one else liked called the baryton, for which Haydn produced no fewer than 161 works.

During the 1770s Haydn became ever busier managing his opera house, and wrote two dozen operas for the Eszterházy. None of them has stuck in the repertoire: Haydn was too interested in the music, so the action had to loiter about while the music did its thing.

Strange that in the middle of all this, Haydn should find time for solo piano pieces as well. Up until the great C minor Sonata of 1771, Haydn referred to what we now call his piano sonatas as *divertimenti*, a title he also applied to works for various chamber ensembles, including the Op. 20 quartets. But the C minor Sonata marks a departure into the personal for his piano solo music, almost in the manner that was to become Beethoven's. He continued with such emphatic musical statements right through to the last three piano sonatas which he wrote for the technologically advanced pianos he found in London in the 1790s. But he also produced simpler keyboard works, possibly intended for the harpsichord, and often in just two parts, one for each hand, with an occasional chord thrown in. The various Complete Editions of the sonatas present a little flurry of such works immediately after the C minor Sonata, many of them dedicated to Count Nikolaus, headed by tonight's delightful D major sonata, dated 1771 on stylistic grounds. But a newly discovered manuscript bears the date 17 January 1778, proving the prescient wisdom of Christa Landon, who wrote in the preface to her complete edition: 'while Haydn was striving to evolve new and more personal musical forms he apparently continued to compose *galant* pieces for the *dilettanti*'.

Tchaikovsky's 12 pieces, now known as *The Seasons*, were originally published one by one in 1876 in the monthly magazine *Nuvellist*. They were published as a complete set by Jurgenson in 1886. Both the overall title and the opus number seem to have been chosen by the publisher, the latter to emphasise the fact that they were written around the time of Op. 37 – the 'Grand Sonata'. As to 'Seasons' – usually four in

number, after all – Fanny Mendelssohn's 1841 set of 12 month-pieces had already used the title 'The Year'.

Prokofiev's mother, Maria, came from a family of serfs once owned by one of Russia's most enlightened great families, who encouraged their dependents to pursue the arts and theatre. Maria, having made a fortunate marriage, spent Sergey's early childhood having piano lessons in Moscow or St Petersburg for two months every year, and the boy benefited from her contacts – the composer-pianist Glière spent several summers at the Prokofiev house, teaching him. Prokofiev was a controversial student at the St Petersburg Conservatoire, but acquired enough admirers for his then shockingly dissonant style to be able to hold his own after the death of his supportive father. He left the Conservatoire in 1914 having won a grand piano for his performance of his First Piano Concerto Op. 10. A review of its première in 1912 said that the composer 'seems to be either dusting the keys or striking high or low notes at random', but two years later the tolerance of the musical world had increased dramatically. 1912 also saw the composition of the well-known *Toccata* Op. 11, a second Piano Concerto (to be rewritten in 1923), and this Second Sonata, the work of a pleasant summer break in Kislovodsk.

Prokofiev declared that his music followed two major principles, clarity and brevity, and embodied four characteristics: classical ('born when I heard my mother play Beethoven sonatas'), innovation ('which started after Taneyev's mocking remark about my "much too simple" harmony'), toccata-like character ('of less importance'), and lyricism. 'A fifth character,' continued Prokofiev, 'the so-called "grotesque", is a side-line'.

Elizabeth Norman McKay, in her book about **Schubert's** use of keys with many flats in their key signatures (*The Piano and Dark Keys*) suggests that in his eight impromptus, all composed in 1827, Schubert was 'attempting a fresh approach to extended works for solo piano, one that would enable him to expand the musical content and expressive range without the restrictions of classical sonata forms'. The last of tonight's *Impromptus* is 'a structure more complicated and unusual than anything he had written so far'.

Tovey identified the same quest in **Chopin's** impromptus, explaining how they have 'shaped themselves from the new material, just as the old classical forms shaped themselves from their own'. The first *Impromptu* found an unlikely fame in George du Maurier's 1894 novel *Trilby*, where the eponymous heroine, hypnotized by Svengali, was able to sing it as a wordless envoi to her concerts.

© David Owen Norris 2024

Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.