

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 7 May 2025
7.30pm

This concert is supported by the Rubinstein Circle

Richard Goode piano

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Piano Sonata in B minor HXVI/32 (1776)
*I. Allegro moderato • II. Menuet •
III. Finale. Presto*

Piano Sonata in D HXVI/24 (1773)
I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Finale. Presto

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Rondo in A minor K511 (1787)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

6 Klavierstücke Op. 118 (by 1893)
*Intermezzo in A minor • Intermezzo in A •
Ballade in G minor • Intermezzo in F minor •
Romance in F • Intermezzo in E flat minor*

Interval

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Piano Sonata in D K576 (1789)
I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Allegretto

Johannes Brahms

4 Klavierstücke Op. 119 (by 1893)
*Intermezzo in B minor • Intermezzo in E minor •
Intermezzo in C • Rhapsody in E flat*



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The German musicologist Friedrich Blume proposed a single Classic-Romantic era of music history that reached back well into the 18th Century and extended forward into the early 20th. It is a periodisation that recovers something of an early 19th-century understanding of Romanticism as a movement or tendency that ran concurrently with, rather than succeeding, Classicism. Our programme highlights the formative stages of Blume's Classic-Romantic era, with two Haydn sonatas dating from 1773-6, and also features its twilight moment, with two Brahms cycles composed in 1892-3. The **Haydn** works were composed at Esterházy, well before the composer had gained the wider recognition that would accompany him in later life, and they were among the last of the sonatas he designated 'for harpsichord' rather than 'for harpsichord or fortepiano', or simply 'for keyboard'. The classical sonata was then in its infancy, and Haydn was instrumental in establishing prototypes, formal as well as generic. Yet, remarkably, each of his many sonatas created its own distinctive musical world, as the two contrasted works performed here illustrate. The B minor encloses a graceful minuet within its dark and dramatic outer movements (echoes of what used to be characterised as Haydn's 'Sturm und Drang' music of the late 1760s and early 1770s), but the trio of this minuet soon dispels the charm and poise, and returns us to the storm and stress. In contrast, the D major sonata is all sunlight and brilliance, albeit with a stately and deeply expressive slow movement in the tonic minor, a movement whose ornamental melody is reminiscent at times of Baroque practice.

In 1787, not much more than a decade after Haydn composed these sonatas, **Mozart** wrote his Rondo in A minor, K511. Given the expressive intensity and melancholy *Affekt* of this work, it is easy to understand why early 19th-century critics such as ETA Hoffman found it natural to apply the term 'romantic' to selected works by Haydn and Mozart, a usage that bolsters Friedrich Blume's thesis. Although K511 does indeed follow the formal scheme of a rondo, we are more likely to register the seamless unfolding of its musical material, and perhaps also to hear the work as a large-scale ternary structure, with an extended middle section in the tonic major and an elaborately ornamented reprise. Exactly as in the Haydn pairing, our second Mozart work, the piano sonata in D major K576, dispels the darker mood of the Rondo, offering instead a buoyant first movement, whose 'hunting' theme is subject to some ingenious imitative treatments, and an elegantly embellished melody in the *Adagio*. This was Mozart's last piano sonata. It was composed in 1789, and was originally intended as one of six sonatas Mozart promised to the Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm II for his daughter Princess Friederike (the other five did not materialise). The commission apparently specified 'easy' sonatas, a directive Mozart conspicuously ignored, and especially so in the challenging rondo finale, with its

technical wizardry and playful contrapuntal exchanges.

In the early 1890s **Brahms** returned to solo piano compositions after a lengthy break, publishing four late multipartite collections, Opp. 116-119, that are somewhat different in character from his earlier piano music. Many of the pieces are introspective in tone, and their elastic phrasing, evasive rhythms and close-knit, integrated thematic working fully justify Schoenberg's polemical label, 'Brahms the Progressive'. Of these late collections, it was the 7 *Fantasien*, Op. 116 that established the prototype: a set of mutually compatible character pieces, and this was closely followed by the 3 *Intermezzi*, Op. 117. Both sets were published in December 1892, and in the following year the 6 *Klavierstücke* Op. 118 and 4 *Klavierstücke* Op. 119 completed the package. If there really is an aura of 'twilight moment' – of nostalgia – surrounding these opuses, it is encapsulated above all in some of the slower pieces: in the achingly beautiful melody of Op. 118 No. 2, for example; or the oneiric simplicity of Op. 118 No. 5 in F major, with its strangely parenthetical interlude in D major; or the consolatory, short-breathed phrases in the middle section of Op. 119 No. 2; or, and perhaps especially, in the 'dying fall' of major and minor thirds in Op. 119 No. 1.

Yet if they remember the glorious past of Blume's Classic-Romantic era, these pieces also look to a modernist future. As tonal relations loosened in the late-19th Century, composers were inclined to place greater emphasis on a closely integrated thematic process as a means of shaping and unifying musical works, and in this Brahms was a key figure. Already in the impassioned opening *Intermezzo* of Op. 118, a single three-note motive generates the entire musical discourse, not only furnishing new motivic variants but also percolating down into the accompaniment layer. This kind of close-knit motivic working, where the musical texture is dense with information, is characteristic of several pieces in these collections. In Op. 118 No. 4, for example, wisps of melody emerge from, but also derive from, elusive and mercurial figurations, made all the more capricious by an unpredictable play on rhythm and meter. Or consider Op. 118 No. 6, where an elegiac theme, enclosed within the narrow compass of a minor third, winds its way in overlapping layers of counterpoint, in due course thickened into double notes in thirds to create what Schoenberg called 'a unity of musical space'. This is really what Anton von Webern was getting at when he wrote in relation to Schoenberg's String Quartet, Op. 7: 'There is, one can say, not a single note in this work that does not have a thematic basis. This is unparalleled. If there is a connection with another composer then that composer is Johannes Brahms'. Schoenberg's quartet was composed in 1904-5, a mere decade or so after these pieces by Brahms.

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