WIGMORE HALL 125

Thursday 9 April 2026
7.30pm

**Eric Lu** piano
**Kate Liu** piano

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| **Franz Schubert** (1797-1828) | Allegro in A minor D947 'Lebensstürme' (1828) |
| | Fantasie in F minor D940 (1828)<br>*I. Allegro molto moderato • II. Largo • III. Scherzo. Allegro vivace • IV. Finale. Allegro molto moderato* |
| | *Interval* |
| **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** (1756-1791) | Sonata in D for 2 pianos K448 (1781)<br>*I. Allegro con spirito • II. Andante • III. Allegro molto* |
| **Fryderyk Chopin** (1810-1849) | Rondo in C Op. 73 (1828) |


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## Socialising through Music: Two-Piano Literature of the late 18th and early 19th centuries

Although two-piano literature was gaining in popularity during the late 18th Century, **Mozart** (1756-91) completed only one multi-movement sonata for that set of instruments, the Sonata in D for two pianos, K448 (1781). Like most two-piano pieces of the time, this sonata was not initially intended for public performance. Rather, it served a strategic and social purpose – helping Mozart establish himself in Vienna after his recent relocation. In a letter to his father dated 27 June 1781, Mozart mentioned that his new Viennese lodgings contained two grand pianos, likely facilitating his work for two instruments. In addition, Mozart sometimes performed two-piano literature in Vienna with his talented new pupil, Josepha Barbara Auernhammer. Mozart stated 'she plays enchantingly, though in the cantabile, she loses sight of true refined expression; she does not play smoothly.' In a letter of 25 May 1781, to his father, Mozart noted that he and his pupil were to perform the Concerto in E flat major for two pianos, K365 for Countess Maria Wilhelmine von Thun, one of his important patrons. It was with Auernhammer in mind that Mozart composed the Sonata K448 several months later. In a letter dated 24 November 1781, Mozart noted that he and Auernhammer played the same concerto again along with the Sonata K448 for a small salon-style gathering that included prestigious guests, such as the Countess Thun, Baron von Swieten, along with other influential members of Viennese society. Mozart wrote that he composed the piece specifically for that event. The Sonata K448 remains one of the most celebrated works in the two-piano repertoire. Written in the *galant* style, the three-movement work features sophisticated melodic interplay between the instruments. One unusual feature in the first movement is the introduction of a new theme before the recapitulation. The slow middle movement is lyrical and expressive, with the second piano initially functioning as accompaniment to the main melody that is presented in piano one. The final movement showcases brilliance and virtuosity, reflecting both Mozart's compositional mastery and the technical capabilities of his performing partner.

If Mozart's sonata functioned as a vehicle for social and professional advancement, **Chopin**'s Rondo in C Op. 73 represents an early milestone in a young composer's development. At 18 years of age, Chopin was still studying with Józef Elsner at the Warsaw Conservatory when he composed the piece. He worked on the Rondo while spending the summer of 1828 in a small tranquil town in central Poland, Sanniki. Chopin was hosted by the wealthy Pruszak family in their palace. Chopin wrote to his friend Tytus Woychiechowski on 9 September 1828 that he revised the piece upon returning to Warsaw. Subsequently, he tried it out with Maurycy Ernemann (1800-66), who had been a professor of piano at the Warsaw Conservatory since 1825. Their impromptu trial took place at Fryderyk Buchholtz's instrument factory. Chopin wrote: 'Ernemann and I tried it today at Buchholtz's and it went fairly well.' Although there were plans to perform the work publicly, no documentation confirms that such a performance occurred. The piece was not published until after Chopin's death. Despite being a youthful composition, the Rondo Op. 73 demonstrates characteristics that would define Chopin's mature style: the fusion of lyricism with dance rhythms, particularly Polish idioms, and brilliant piano figurations. Both pianos are given equally demanding, interconnected parts. However, the work also reflects the conservatism of Chopin's student years, evident in its adherence to traditional formal structures.

If Chopin composed his Rondo at the beginning of career and enjoyed playing it with a colleague, **Schubert**'s two-piano pieces on this programme represent the output of a mature and seasoned composer. In 1828, Schubert composed several significant pieces for two pianos, including the Allegro in A minor D947 and the Fantasie in F minor D940. Like the other two-piano pieces discussed, these compositions were also initially intended for intimate gatherings. Many of Schubert's friends and admirers assembled to hear his music at events known as 'Schubertiades'. Scholars have speculated that Schubert may have intended to pair the Allegro with the Rondo in A D951, composed just one month later. However, Schubert's untimely death later that year prevents confirmation of this hypothesis. After Schubert's death, Diabelli (1781-1858) purchased a substantial portion of the composer's estate from Schubert's brother, Ferdinand. Diabelli gradually released the pieces over several decades. Although the Rondo was published posthumously in December 1828, the Allegro did not appear in print until 1840, when Diabelli assigned it the descriptive title, 'Lebensstürme' (Storms of Life). The evocative title likely refers to the turbulent figural work in the opening, but this is balanced by the serenity of the second chorale-like subject. The work is further characterised by dramatic silences that heighten its expressive intensity. Also composed in 1828, the Fantasie presents a more expansive formal design. Schubert first performed this piece with his friend, Franz Paul Lachner (1803-90) in a Schubertiade on 9 May 1828. Like many of his late works, it was published posthumously, appearing in print in 1829. The Fantasie unfolds in four continuous sections, performed without a break. Throughout the work, Schubert repeats the opening melancholy theme, marked by its characteristic dotted rhythms. A stormy *Largo* in F sharp minor follows the opening melancholic *Allegro moderato*, intensifying the emotional landscape. A playful *Scherzo* in F sharp minor provides momentary relief before a return to the tonic. The work culminates with dramatic double fugue, after which the opening theme returns. This masterful integration of thematic development and structural unity has ensured the Fantasie's enduring influence.

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