

# WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 9 January 2025  
7.30pm

Alim Beisembayev piano

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Variations in F minor HXVII/6 (1793)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 7 in D Op. 10 No. 3 (1797-8)

*I. Presto • II. Largo e mesto  
III. Menuetto. Allegro • IV. Rondo. Allegro*

*Interval*

Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757)

Sonata in D minor Kk213

Sonata in A Kk24

Sonata in D minor Kk77

Sonata in G Kk455

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Kinderszenen Op. 15 (1838)

*Von fremden Ländern und Menschen •  
Curiose Geschichte • Hasche-Mann •  
Bittendes Kind • Glückes genug •  
Wichtige Begebenheit • Träumerei •  
Am Camin • Ritter vom Steckenpferd •  
Fast zu ernst • Fürchtenmachen •  
Kind im Einschlummern •  
Der Dichter spricht*

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Variations on a Theme by Paganini (Book I)

Op. 35 (1862-3)



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'A melancholy Andante in F minor, with variations so masterful that the piece almost sounds like a free-flowing fantasy': so one Leipzig critic described **Joseph Haydn's** Variations in F minor HXVII/6 upon their publication. Written in Vienna in 1793, they are one of Haydn's last piano works, and his most famous single piece for the instrument. Although later dedicated to Baroness Josephine von Braun, the piece was written for Mozart's pupil Barbara Ployer, and seems to have originally been intended to form part of a sonata. Haydn humorously headed one manuscript copy 'Un piccolo Divertimento' ('A small divertissement'), but in reality, the work is neither small, nor intended for light entertainment. Indeed, as the Leipzig critic noted, the F minor variations possess a unique character, displaying a depth of emotional intensity new in Haydn's music.

This work is actually a set of double, or 'hybrid', variations, in which two themes are alternately varied. The sorrowful first theme is in the minor key, whilst the second is in F major and characterised by lighter, more carefree figuration. Each theme is varied twice: in the first variation 'set', the initial theme is heard in syncopation, whilst the second is ornamented using trills; the second variation 'set', meanwhile, features the first theme in delicate lyrical passagework, now perfectly answered by charming triplet figuration in the major mode. The opening Andante subsequently returns unadorned, but then proceeds to take an extraordinary turn, morphing into a 'free-flowing fantasy' filled with dramatic pauses, unsettling chromaticisms, and wild scales and arpeggios. All this material is obsessively dominated by the rhythm of the first theme, leading to a shattering coda that disappears into the distance.

In the same year Haydn wrote the F minor variations, he was giving counterpoint lessons to the young **Ludwig van Beethoven**, who subsequently dedicated his first set of published piano sonatas (Op. 2) to his teacher. These were soon followed by Beethoven's three Op. 10 sonatas (1796–8), of which the Sonata in D major Op. 10 No. 3 - described by Czerny as a 'grand and significant' piece - is the longest. It begins with a thrilling Presto, featuring an opening theme in staccato octaves and many bravura passages. The slow movement that follows, marked Largo e Mesto, is deeply tragic; out of this despair, however, emerges a genial, consolatory Menuetto, partnered by a humorous Trio in which the melody is tossed between the hands. The finale, a Rondo, begins with a slight, unassuming motif of just three notes, from which Beethoven constructs an entire movement full of extraordinary invention - and a capricious ending.

Most of **Domenico Scarlatti's** 555 keyboard sonatas were written for his patron and pupil, Princess Maria Barbara of Portugal (later Queen of Spain). Although Scarlatti's one-movement sonatas are typically in a simple binary form, consisting of two distinct sections that are both repeated, they are astoundingly inventive. For instance, Scarlatti unexpectedly appends a minuet to the Sonata in D minor Kk77, which also shares its key with the darker Sonata Kk213. Ralph Kirkpatrick described the

Sonata in A Kk24 as 'a veritable orgy of brilliant sound', in which the harpsichord 'is made to imitate the whole orchestra of a Spanish popular fair' through exciting leaps, repeated notes, double thirds and scales. Repeated notes are also the central feature of the Sonata in G major Kk 455, which evokes the Spanish guitar style.

One of **Robert Schumann's** most beloved piano works, the set of pieces entitled *Kinderszenen* (Scenes from Childhood), Op. 15, was composed in 1838, and apparently inspired by his future wife Clara's comment that he 'sometimes seemed like a child'. Unlike the *Album for the Young* Op. 68, however, these are not student pieces written for children: rather, they are intended as evocations of childhood for adults (the titles, according to Schumann, were added afterwards). Originally, the set contained thirty pieces, which eventually became thirteen; the others were published later in the *Bunte Blätter* Op. 99, and the *Albumblätter* Op.124.

*Kinderszenen* opens with the cheerful 'Vom fremden Ländern und Menschen' ('From foreign lands and people'), featuring a five-note motif that returns throughout the set. After a 'Kuriose Geschichte' ('Curious Story'), 'Hasche-Mann' portrays children running around and giggling in a game of Blind Man's Buff; its opening figure is then transformed into an entreating child's plea in 'Bittendes Kind', and their subsequent happiness in 'Glückes genug'. A jovial mood also pervades 'Wichtige Begebenheit' ('An important event'), full of playful pomp.

The central piece, 'Träumerei' ('Dreaming'), is one of Schumann's best-known compositions, a beguiling mixture of tender melody and delicate counterpoint. It leads into a cosy, but lively, conversation in the same key, 'Am Kamin' ('By the fireside'). The next few pieces take us deeper into realms of fantasy and imagination, from the knight rocking on the hobbyhorse in 'Ritter vom Steckenpferd', to 'almost too serious' daydreaming in 'Fast zu ernst', and alternating wistful and threatening passages in 'Fürchtenmachen' ('Frightening'). Exhausted, the child eventually falls asleep ('Kind in Einschlummern'), leaving the last word to the adult in the poignant 'Der Dichter spricht' ('The poet speaks').

A close friend of the Schumanns, **Johannes Brahms** wrote his *Variations on a Theme of Paganini* Op. 35 in 1863, shortly after having moved to Vienna. This work is spread across two books, each consisting of 14 variations on Paganini's famous theme from the Caprice No. 24 in A minor. Dedicated to the pianist Carl Tausig, Brahms also intended the variations as virtuoso studies, focusing on a whole range of technical obstacles including double thirds and sixths, repeated notes, trills, hand-crossing, treacherous leaps, octaves, glissandi, and much else besides. Their extreme difficulty led Clara Schumann to call them 'Hexenvariationen' ('Witch's Variations'); the critic James Huneker, meanwhile, remarked that playing them 'requires fingers of steel, a heart of burning lava and the courage of a lion'.

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