

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 9 July 2022 7.30pm

Haydn Day

Roman Rabinovich piano



Supported by the Sir Jack Lyons Charitable Trust

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Piano Sonata in F HXVI/23 (1773)

I. Allegro moderato • II. Adagio • III. Finale. Presto

Piano Sonata in D HXVI/42 (by 1784)

I. Andante con espressione • II. Vivace assai

Piano Sonata in B minor HXVI/32 (by 1776)

I. Allegro moderato • II. Menuet • III. Finale. Presto

Interval

Piano Sonata in A HXVI/30 (by 1776)

I. Allegro • II. Adagio • III. Tempo di Menuetto, con Variazioni

Piano Sonata in E flat HXVI/52 (1794)

I. Allegro moderato • II. Adagio • III. Finale. Presto

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Haydn's status as the composer in whose hands the symphony and the string quartet grew to maturity has been widely acknowledged, but when it comes to the keyboard sonata his contribution to the genre has been seriously undervalued. It's true that he reserved some of his greatest flights of keyboard imagination for his wonderful series of late piano trios, but the importance of his solo sonatas to the development of the form – to say nothing of the music's striking beauty and originality – can hardly be exaggerated. It was in Haydn's hands that the sonata rose from a drawing-room entertainment to a vehicle for serious symphonic thought, and his greatest sonatas have a dramatic sweep that was only rarely equalled by Mozart, and was not surpassed until Beethoven revolutionised the form in the closing years of the 18th Century. The instrument for which Haydn wrote his mature sonatas was not the still ubiquitous harpsichord, but the piano, and he set great store by its expressive qualities, with its greater variety of tone colour and its dynamic contrasts.

The Sonata in F HXVI/23 comes from a set of six sonatas composed in 1773, and published the following year with a dedication to Haydn's employer, Prince Nicolaus Esterházy. One of the particular beauties of its opening movement is the manner in which Haydn seizes on a tiny detail from the main subject, and uses it to launch a new idea in an expressive staccato above a 'rocking' left-hand accompaniment. The same material returns in the central development section, but now expressively enhanced through a transformation into the minor, and followed by a long chain of rippling arpeggios at the top of the keyboard which eventually triggers the recapitulation.

Following the slow movement – a deeply-felt siciliano in the minor – Haydn brings the sonata to a close in dazzling style with a *Presto* finale whose 'leaping' main subject seems to disappear into thin air at the end.

The D major Sonata HXVI/42 is the last in a group of three works dedicated to Princess Maria Hermenegild Esterházy. She married the future Prince Nikolaus Esterházy II on 15 September 1783, and Haydn's sonatas may have been intended as a wedding gift. Each of them is cast in two movements only – a design that was to be taken up on occasion by Beethoven. Both movements of the D major sonata are of utmost originality: the opening *Andante* is one of Haydn's hybrid designs, containing elements of both variation and rondo forms; while the finale is in two curiously unbalanced sections, the first of them consisting of no more than eight bars, and the second nearly a hundred. The finale, moreover, begins away from the home key, which is not firmly established at all until the closing moments.

The Sonata in B minor HXVI/32 and the A major HXVI/30 belong to a group of six keyboard sonatas Haydn entered his catalogue of works in 1776. The almost unrelieved turbulence of the B minor

work seems to look back to the composer's so-called *Sturm und Drang* years of the late 1760s and early 1770s. Its key is certainly an unusual one: among later composers, only Clementi, Chopin and Liszt wrote a significant sonata in B minor. Haydn's opening *Allegro* is highly condensed, and the ornaments of its austere main theme serve only to enhance the music's dramatic effect. Since both the *Finale* and the trio of the minuet are again starkly linear pieces, it is left to the major-mode minuet itself to provide a glimpse of radiance in the general air of austereness.

The most immediately striking feature of the A major sonata is the manner in which the opening movement is abruptly cut off before its conclusion, to give way to a dramatic burst of recitative, followed by a slow, expressive melody unfolding above a single-line, widely-spaced staccato accompaniment. The finale is a set of variations on a lyrical minuet. Haydn writes out the quasi-repeats of the last variation, again exploiting contrasting registers of the keyboard in highly original fashion. Remarkably, the entire sonata is played without a break.

Haydn composed his last sonatas during his second visit to London, in 1794-5, and at least two among the three works, including the Sonata in E flat HXV/52, were intended for Therese Jansen Bartolozzi. She was born in Germany, and after settling in England she became one of Clementi's outstanding pupils. The imperious opening theme of the E flat major sonata leaves the listener in no doubt as to the music's grandeur; and the sweeping scales covering almost the entire compass of the keyboard find Haydn relishing the evenness of tone of the English pianos of the day. The second subject is a sharply dotted idea accompanied by horn-calls. It reappears at roughly the mid-point of the development section in E major – as though to prepare for the shock of the key of the slow movement to follow.

Haydn's choice of the very distant key of E major for the *Adagio* is, indeed, one of the sonata's boldest gestures. The dotted rhythm of its opening theme gives rise in the middle section of the piece to a more dramatic idea in the minor. We might almost think we were witnessing the start of a movement in Haydn's characteristic double variation form, were it not for the fact that the material has already been too expansive for such a procedure. Instead, a reprise of the opening section is shortened by the omission of the original repeats, but Haydn compensates with a coda of great serenity.

The brilliant toccata-like *Finale* is a display piece *par excellence*, and one whose glittering brilliance seems to evoke the spirit of Scarlatti. It provides a remarkably apt tribute to the pianistic talents of Therese Jansen Bartolozzi.

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