Piano Recital March 20th, 2021, at 7pm

Programme Notes

Thank you to all of you for coming this evening. We have sold over 100 tickets, thanks to you all.

Please turn on your mute when I start the introduction.

Programme

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)
Waltz in F minor Op. 70, No. 2

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
Songs without Words
Op. 19, No. 1, Andante con moto
Op. 30, No. 1, Andante espressivo
Op. 53, No. 1, Andante con moto

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
Impromptu in Bb Major Op. 142, No. 3

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Sonata in F minor Op. 2, No. 1
Allegro
Adagio
Menuetto – Allegretto
Prestissimo

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)
Waltz in F minor Op. 70, No. 2

Chopin, who spent his life first in Poland and later in France, is often described as a '*lyric poet of the piano'.* He showed extraordinary ability from an early age, and his teacher of composition said that: '*his gifts are uncommon'*. Chopin was a friend of both Liszt and Bellini. Stephen Hough writes: '*Chopin was dazed by the sweet melancholy of Bellini's bel canto'* and Chopin is, without doubt, a composer who makes the piano sing.

In Chopin's time, the waltz was all the rage. Robert Schumann (1810–1856), famously commented that Chopin's aristocratic diversions should be danced only by countesses and,

indeed, Chopin intended his waltzes for the fashionable salons, whether showy dances or melancholy utterances for lost love.

Chopin's waltzes are the most frequently performed pieces of his piano repertoire and each waltz brings challenges of interpretation as to the combination of longing, elegance and the oom-pah-pah of the accompaniment.

Chopin's composed several so-called sad waltzes, that is in a minor key, and the Waltz in F minor from Opus 70 is one of these. The three waltzes of Op. 70 were published in 1855, six years after Chopin's death. I have chosen this particular waltz because, despite the minor home key, I find it rather uplifting, as it oscillates between minor and major, yearning and resolution.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
Songs without Words
Op. 19, No. 1, Andante con moto
Op. 30, No. 1, Andante espressivo
Op. 53, No. 1, Andante con moto

'Who has not sometimes sat alone at twilight before his pianoforte, and unconsciously, while improvising, has not softly sung a quiet melody to himself? Provided one is, above all, a Mendelssohn, and that one occasionally unites the melody to the accompaniment with the hands alone, the finest of "songs without words" will be the result.' So wrote Robert Schumann in his review of Mendelssohn's second volume of Lieder ohne Worte, Op. 30, and it could apply equally well to the Songs I have chosen for this evening from amongst my favourites.

Mendelssohn's first foray into writing songs for the piano seems to date from around 1828, when he was still a teenager. The lyrical ability and intimacy of solo piano gives the composer, as well as the pianist, great scope in interpretation, together with the challenge of bringing out the top line without losing the balance of the supporting parts.

We can easily see how the gentle lyricism of these pieces inspired Schumann's vision of solitary improvisation at twilight. A number of Lieder ohne Worte were written with specific women in mind, whom Mendelssohn knew. Op. 30 was dedicated to Elise von Woringen, the daughter of one of Mendelssohn's principal supporters in Düsseldorf. Other pieces were composed for Clara Schumann, Mendelssohn's sister Fanny, and other female pianists whom he admired. Op. 53, No.1 was dedicated to Sophie Horsley, daughter of English composer, William Horsley.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
Impromptu in Bb Major Op. 142 No.3

Schubert was considered to be one of the most prolific Viennese composers of his day. The Oxford Companion to Music tells us that his '*rapidity and his facility [was] so great that, on occasion, he was known to fail to recognise his own work…'*

Schubert composed his second set of four Impromptus, Opus 142, in December of 1827. They were published in two sets of four each: the first was published in the composer's lifetime as Op. 90, and the second was published posthumously. They are considered to be among the most important examples of this popular early 19th-century genre. The word Impromptu suggests that they were improvised, but they are highly sophisticated creations.

The B flat Impromptu is the most frequently played of the four impromptus of Op. 142. The piece is essentially a theme with five variations, in parts serious and demanding and, in others, a cheeky dance, with heart-rending harmonies that express yearning and happiness in equal measure, that are played out with various modulations and ornamentation.

Research suggests that Schubert was prone to mood-swings and his friend, Eduard von Bauernfeld, an Austrian lawyer-turned-dramatist, wrote: *'If there were times, both in his social relationships and his art, when the Austrian character appeared all too violently in the vigorous and pleasure-loving Schubert, there were also times when a black-winged demon of sorrow and melancholy forced its way into his vicinity; not altogether an evil spirit, it is true, since, in the dark concentrated hours, it often brought out songs of the most agonizing beauty.'*

The theme reappears in slow and sombre form in the final coda and, in contrast to some of the earlier dance-like variations, gently brings the impromptu to a close. There is some uncertainty amongst musicians about the treatment of Schubert's triplets accompanying a dotted rhythm and the pianist has a choice of which school of thought to follow.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Sonata in F minor Op. 2, No. 1
Allegro
Adagio
Menuetto – Allegretto
Prestissimo

Beethoven wrote this sonata in 1795, when he had moved to Vienna. He was meeting people and generally selling his skills, making contacts, giving lessons and, of course,

going to the opera. Beethoven himself premiered this sonata, which was one of a set of three, at the home of his sponsor, Prince Lichnowsky, in the presence of Haydn, to whom the three sonatas are dedicated, and who had been one of Beethoven's teachers.

The Sonata is in four movements, not the more usual three. The first movement is well-known and often played. It is in F minor and is somewhat agitated, taking off from the first theme with what is described as the 'Manheim Rocket', a rapidly ascending broken chord from the bass line to the top of the soprano line. The movement is in Sonata form, that is, in three sections (exposition, development, and recapitulation). The theme is developed and travels into happier major keys before a resounding and dramatic finish back in F minor.

The second movement is an adagio which is very ornamented and embellished, and it does not do for the pianist to lose count, as triplets and more complex patterns combine with even patterns of notes to keep the pianist on her toes while allowing the listener to bathe in the most exquisite melodies.

The third movement, a Minuet in the tonic key of F minor, essentially has two sections and has a dance-like quality, and is notable for its syncopation, dramatic pauses (while we dry our eyes and gather up our skirts) and return to the opening theme following a brief period of sunshine in the Trio.

The fourth movement takes us back to F minor and has a tempo mark of prestissimo. The first and last sections are contrasted with the very beautiful middle section, which means that the presto needs to be fast enough to be exciting, but not so fast that we fail to indulge in the middle section which gives us hope and optimism.

The movement ends on a fortissimo eight-note-triplet descending arpeggio, which gives, in reverse, a tidy symmetrical ending to a sonata that opened with a rising arpeggio.

The Pianist - Claire Vane

Claire, who grew up in Manchester, was a pupil at Manchester High School and a Saturday Exhibitioner at the Royal Northern College of Music junior department. She was taught by the last of the Clementis and, over the last eight years, by performer, Warren Mailley-Smith.

After graduating from Cambridge, (not in music, but in classics and modern languages), Claire did not touch the keyboard for some thirty years. Her day job is as MD of a bespoke Human Resources and Recruitment Consultancy, Integrated Resources, now in its

twentieth year, and her grand passion is for the piano. She holds a Licentiate Performance Diploma in piano.

If not working or at the piano, she can be found on the tennis court.

Integrated Resources is proud to have sponsored tonight's event:
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The Pianos

The Boudoir Grand Piano at the Gaskell House is larger than a *'baby'* and smaller than a *'concert'* grand. It has a mahogany case and was made by John Broadwood and Sons of London in the 1890s. It is similar in size and appearance to the one bought by the Gaskells from the company in 1852, and which Elizabeth refers to as a *'semi-grand'*. The piano is lent by Mrs Elizabeth Whitehead.

Tonight's recital is being streamed live on a refurbished **Steinway Model 'O' piano** from 1908.

CLV March 2021