

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 6 November 2021 1.00pm

Mishka Rushdie Momen piano

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)	Prelude and Fugue No. 1 in C BWV846 from <i>The Well-tempered Clavier</i> (1722)
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)	Fantasia in C minor K475 (1785)
Robert Schumann (1810-1856)	Impromptus sur une romance de Clara Wieck Op. 5 (1850 version)
György Ligeti (1923-2006)	Etude No. 10 'Der Zauberlehrling' from <i>Etudes Book II</i> (1988-94)
Franz Schubert (1797-1828)	Fantasy in C D760 'Wanderer' (1822) <i>I. Allegro con fuoco, ma non troppo • II. Adagio • III. Presto • IV. Allegro</i>

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It is a commendably confident pianist who plans a whole recital in the key of C, starting with what must be **Bach's** best-known piece (bearing in mind the arguments over the D minor organ toccata). As it happens, I've just been compiling a Listening Guide on the C major Prelude for our postgrads at Southampton, designed to show them how performing fashions change over the years. It begins with Wanda Landowska, the harpsichordist on some of whose Paris recordings the guns in the not very distant trenches can be heard, and who settled an argument about style with the words: 'You play Bach *your* way, and I'll play him *his* way'. At the other end of the scale comes Glenn Gould, who made a great to-do about playing things *their* way, but was a bit of a Frank Sinatra when it came down to it. It's a fascinating study, and an interesting test of the roundness of one's view, or the uncertainty of one's opinions, whichever way you like to look at it.

The piece is, of course, the very first item in *The Well-tempered Clavier*, a work in which part of Bach's message was that he'd found a way to tune keyboards where the difficulty that A flat and G sharp, for instance, (which are actually different pitches) need to share the same key-lever, was overcome so cleverly that he could write in all 24 tonalities, major and minor, for each of the twelve different notes. A tuning method is called a temperament, hence 'Well-tempered'. The collection was not called the 'Equally-tempered Clavier', because Bach's subtly slanted approach made the different tonalities all sound different from one another. It's noticeable that this first demonstration-piece for Bach's new temperament plays each chord twice, so we can really get it. Equal Temperament, where, as the cynics say, all the keys are equally out-of-tune, did not fully take over until the 1890s. We're used to it now.

Mozart composed his C minor Fantasia on 20 May 1785. When it was published later that year, it was partnered by a Sonata in the same key, written six months before the Fantasia. They are often played together, but each works well independently. The Fantasia ranges through so many keys so quickly that Mozart writes most of it with no key signature at all, putting in the accidentals as he needs them. Only the *Andantino* (after the short cadenza) settles down long enough to merit a key signature of two flats.

Schumann and Clara Wieck, the daughter of his piano teacher, Friedrich Wieck, became engaged in 1837, though it took them three years to overcome her father's strenuous objections. The little *Romance Varié* on which Robert's piece is based was probably composed in 1831, very early in their acquaintance. The first version of Robert's tribute was composed at the end of May 1833, but a sketch of the theme in his hand seems to date from 1830 – he must have lent it to Clara! In the *Impromptu*, the

theme may be thought to represent Clara, while Robert is the more diatonic material that comes especially to the fore in the concluding fugue-like impromptu. Themes-as-characters was a familiar game for them: in her *Variations on a Theme of Robert Schumann*, which dates from 1853, Clara quoted her Romance-theme in counterpoint with Robert's theme. During the 1840s Schumann became dissatisfied with a number of his early works, and revised them. Some think that what he gained in coherence he lost in spontaneity. The most noticeable change in the 1850 version we hear tonight is the omission of the only section not in C. The general effect of the changes was to make the piece less about Clara and more about Robert.

Ligeti's music is most widely heard in the films of Stanley Kubrick. The Piano Etudes – two books of six, and an unfinished book of four – have become instant piano classics since they began to appear in 1985. Their general fiendishness makes them particularly popular at piano competitions. This one, 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice', seems to have little to do with Goethe's poem: perhaps the title is more to do with the dedicatee, Pierre-Laurent Aimard.

Schubert composed his song 'Der Wanderer' in 1816, revising it slightly before its publication in 1821. Both song and Fantasy (composed in November 1822) bear witness to his enduring fascination with the dactylic rhythms of the second movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, which was first performed in December 1813. (The repressive Friedrich Wieck went to the rehearsals: he said Beethoven must have been drunk.) Schubert's song indulges in repeated notes from the very beginning, but the true rhythm has to wait until the words 'The sun sets coldly'. This melody, in C sharp minor, is given some lovely variations to form the second section of the Fantasy. It has opened, however, in C major, the forceful rhythm dismembered and hammered home from the very beginning, and audible practically throughout. Schubert shares Mozart's views about a fantasy's key-structure: the second subject of this first section is miles away in E major; and the third section, a Scherzo and Trio in all but name, is in A flat, at least for some of the time. Schubert's modulatory sleight-of-hand is everywhere apparent, much of its magic explained by the Chord of the German Sixth, which sounds exactly like the more familiar Dominant Seventh until it tears off its false whiskers and progresses in entirely the wrong direction. That G flat was an F sharp after all (which takes us back to the question of Bach and his temperaments). The finale is a monstrous fugue. Schubert came to grief once, playing it, and shouted out: 'Let the Devil play the stuff!'

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