

# WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 28 November 2021 7.30pm

Imogen Cooper piano

**Franz Schubert** (1797-1828)

Piano Sonata in A minor D845 (1825)

*I. Moderato • II. Andante poco moto •*

*III. Scherzo. Allegro vivace • IV. Rondo. Allegro vivace*

Interval

**Maurice Ravel** (1875-1937)

Sonatine (1903-5)

*I. Modéré • II. Mouvement de menuet • III. Animé*

**Franz Liszt** (1811-1886)

Les jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este from *Années de pèlerinage, troisième année*  
S163 (1877-82)

**Maurice Ravel**

Jeux d'eau (1901)

Valses nobles et sentimentales (1911)

*Modéré, très franc • Assez lent, avec une expression intense •*

*Modéré • Assez animé • Presque lent, dans un sentiment intime •*

*Vif • Moins vif • Epilogue. Lent*

**Franz Liszt**

Hungarian Rhapsody No. 13 in A minor S244 (1846-53)

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In 1826, **Franz Schubert** went on the longest holiday-cum-tour of his short life. From May to September, he and the singer Johann Michael Vogl travelled through Austria together, giving concerts and seeing the sights. There was also time for composition, including significant work on the 'Great' C major Symphony D944 – and the completion of the Piano Sonata in A minor D845, the first such work of his to be published, even though it is chronologically the 18th in his catalogue.

The Sonata is of grand, quasi-Beethovenian design in four movements: an austere opening, graceful *Andante* variations, a remarkably orchestral *Scherzo* and a dramatic finale. A lengthy review, issued by the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in March 1826, tells us much about the unusual approach Schubert was seen to be taking in this work. The piece, the critic writes, 'bears the name of Sonata, though it was fantasy, quite evidently, which had the largest and most decisive share in it... in the matter of expression and technique, although it preserves a praiseworthy unity, it moves so freely and originally within its confines, and sometimes so boldly and curiously, that it might not unjustly have been called a Fantasy. In that respect it can probably be compared only with the greatest and freest of Beethoven's sonatas.'

**Maurice Ravel's** *Sonatine*, composed between 1903-5, is a brilliant bringing together of 18th-century elegance and Lisztian virtuosity. The first movement was first sketched as a competition entry, but it took a further two years to complete the piece. It was to become one of the works that he most often performed on tour, and he even recorded piano rolls of the first two movements in 1913. The *Sonatine* is unified by the simple gesture of a falling fourth, from F sharp to C sharp, with which the piece begins. The limpid textures and busy passagework of the first movement give way to a minuet with more than a hint of the decorous courtliness of Couperin (interestingly, Ravel advised that it should be paced to match that of the minuet in Beethoven's Sonata Op. 31 No. 3). The finale, a brilliant *moto perpetuo*, again emphasises fourths, seconds and sevenths, the final ringing A major chord undermined by a single C natural, a minor third, in the flourish which precedes it.

**Liszt's** *Les Jeux d'Eau à la Villa d'Este* is taken from the third book of his *Années de pèlerinage*, by which time the composer had relocated to Rome. In the late 1860s he was invited to the Villa d'Este at Tivoli where its occupant, Cardinal Gustav Hohenlohe, was in the process of restoring the grounds – and in particular, the spectacular array of waterfalls and fountains – to their former glory. This piece is Liszt's musical celebration of the fantastic spectacle of seeing the fountains flowing once more; a sequence of sparkling keyboard variations in F# major. Just a few decades later, in 1901, Ravel composed his *Jeux d'eau*, the title of which was derived from Liszt's earlier work. Again we

hear splashing, tumbling fountains, and Ravel heads the score with a quotation from Henri de Régnier's poem 'Fête d'eau': 'A river god laughing at the water which titillates him'. The trickling, sparkling waterplay is in part pentatonic – a reminder that Ravel had heard gamelan players at the Exposition Universelle in 1901, and this new palette is brought to bear alongside the glittering sevenths and cascades of mini cadenzas.

The *Valses nobles et sentimentales* were written ten years later, and Ravel tells us that the title 'sufficiently indicates my intention of writing a series of waltzes in imitation of Schubert' – who had, in the 1820s, published a volume of *Valses nobles* D969 and another of *Valses sentimentales* D779. It takes a moment to refocus one's ears enough to catch the Schubertian – and indeed Beethovenian – references within such a distinctively Ravellian harmonic world. Every waltz begins and ends with a seventh (just like *Jeux d'eau*), which immediately undermines the sense of being 'in' a key; and indeed, the harmonic language of the set shocked many. Ravel tells us that the piece was 'first performed amid protestations and boos at a concert... in which the names of the composers were not revealed.' It speaks volumes that, although Ravel was correctly identified as the author, other suggested writers included Eric Satie, Charles Koechlin, and even Zoltán Kodály! The swing and lilt of the Viennese waltz is strongly in evidence, and the composer pointed to the seventh in particular as strongly characteristic. The final waltz in the set is marked 'Epilogue', a dreamy, fragmentary remembrance of past dances. As with *Jeux d'eau*, a quotation from Henri de Régnier appears on the score: 'The delightful and always novel pleasure of a useless occupation.'

We return to Liszt for the final piece in this evening's concert – his Hungarian Rhapsody No. 13 in A minor. The first impetus for his sequence of Hungarian Rhapsodies (19 in all, composed over the course of several decades) was a month-long visit to Hungary in 1839, which piqued his interest in arranging some of the pieces he heard performed during his stay. These *Magyar Dalok* ('Hungarian National Melodies') formed the basis for the Rhapsodies, many of which include genuine folk melodies – although Liszt often confused Magyar music with that of the Vlach and Romungre Roma, which unsurprisingly caused offence to all parties. The Thirteenth Rhapsody follows the common pattern of a slow, melancholic '*Lassú*', followed by the sparkier and more virtuosic '*Friss*'. The linking passage between these two sections, which can be austere and disjointed, is striking for its rich, orchestral textures – and the whole band continues to play into the dancing *Friss*, tripping and turning before reaching a spectacular conclusion.

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