

WIGMORE HALL

Friday 7 January 2022 7.30pm

Louis Lortie Presents: Musicians from Chapelle Reine Elisabeth

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Alexander Kashpurin piano

Alexander Gadjiev piano

Djordje Radevski piano

CLASSIC *f*M

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Beethoven/Liszt

Symphony No. 1 in C Op. 21 S464/1 (1863-4)

*I. Adagio molto - Allegro con brio • II. Andante cantabile con moto •
III. Menuetto: Allegro molto e vivace - Trio •
IV. Adagio - Allegro molto e vivace*

Symphony No. 7 in A Op. 92 S464/7 (1837 rev. 1863-4)

*I. Poco sostenuto - Vivace • II. Allegretto •
III. Presto • IV. Allegro con brio*

Interval

Symphony No. 3 in E flat Op. 55 S464/3 (1863-4)

*I. Allegro con brio • II. Marcia funebre. Adagio assai •
III. Scherzo. Allegro vivace - Trio • IV. Finale. Allegro molto*

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One might have thought that **Beethoven** (1770-1827) had written enough piano music to satisfy the most indefatigable pianist, but in 1837 **Liszt** (1811-1886) set about making transcriptions of the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh of Beethoven's symphonies. It was a happy time for Liszt. The bloom had not yet worn off his relationship with the novelist Daniel Stern (the Comtesse d'Agoult), and they were spending the summer at the country estate of another novelist, George Sand (Aurore Dupin, famous among other things for her relationship with Chopin). Liszt proudly entered these transcriptions into the dauntingly long list of pieces that he performed between 1838 and 1848. Schumann, for one, could see that they were something rather different from just big piano sonatas.

'Liszt has worked out his arrangement with so much industry and enthusiasm, that it may be regarded as an original work, a *résumé* of his profound studies, a practical pianoforte school in score-playing. This art of reproduction, so wholly different from the detail-playing of the virtuoso, the many kinds of touch that it demands, the effective use of the pedal, the clear interweaving of separate parts, the collective grasp of orchestral masses; in short, the understanding of means and possibilities as yet hidden in the piano, can only be the work of a master.' (Schumann was writing about the other symphony in Liszt's repertoire list, Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, but his remarks apply equally to the Beethoven transcriptions.)

Liszt knew how remarkable his arrangements were. That winter, stung by the recent publication of frankly inferior Beethoven transcriptions by rival virtuoso Kalkbrenner, he wrote to his publishers saying 'I am anxious my transcriptions should remain no longer in a drawer'. The Viennese publisher, Anton Diabelli, published solo piano versions of Beethoven symphonies as early as 1816, but in general, keyboard versions of symphonies were for four hands – piano duets. This was a wildly popular genre. The Cadwallader Collection, for instance, which we recently welcomed to Southampton University, contains amongst its beautifully bound riches, duet versions of most of the symphonies of Haydn, all the orchestral works of Bach, Dvořák, Mendelssohn and Beethoven (including the piano concertos), the symphonies of Saint-Saëns, and, amazingly, pretty well the complete works of Brahms, including the *solo* piano sonatas!

Richard Wagner spotted what was important about solo transcriptions. In 1869, five years after Liszt had published revisions of Symphonies 5, 6 & 7, and also completed the others, Wagner gave his opinion that it was only when Beethoven symphonies began to be heard on the piano that people could appreciate the true import of the music. And this was because at that time, only a solo pianist could control the necessary flexibility of tempo.

When Liszt retired as a solo pianist at the age of 36, he moved on to the Court Orchestra at Weimar, where he experimented with methods of transferring the freedom he had enjoyed at the piano to

his orchestral performances. He invented new tempo signs for his orchestral works – a big A for something less than an *accelerando*, for instance – and he also invented sectional rehearsals. By the end of the century, Heinrich Ehrlich could describe conductors as 'orchestral virtuosi – the instrument they play is the orchestra. They are the precise opposite of the conductors of former generations, whose over-riding concern was to play everything accurately and scrupulously in time'.

As to the symphonic originals, their importance goes even beyond the innovations in performance style – impetuosity, tempo variation, extreme expressivity – that both Liszt and Wagner were convinced Beethoven was trying to introduce in all his music. Considered purely as musical architecture, the symphonies are extraordinary in their development of thematic relationships, their employment of modulation as a means of musical argument, and their sheer revelry in new orchestral sounds. Even their mere quantity – nine of them – has become established as something of a touchstone.

The First Symphony was first performed on April 2nd 1800, and published the following year, with a dedication to Baron von Swieten, the Bach-loving diplomat who had involved himself with the work of Haydn and Mozart. Beethoven clearly intended to make a splash with the piece. He'd been working on a C major symphony for five years, but found the symphonic output, still in progress, of his teacher Joseph Haydn something of a damper on his own output. In the end, he garnished not just one but two movements with slow introductions: the finale's introduction is one of his famous pull-the-rug-away jokes, while the opening of the whole symphony remains unique in its teasing indecision over what key it's in.

The Seventh Symphony was first performed on December 8th 1813. When it was published three years later, there also appeared versions for solo piano, piano duet and for two pianos. The arrangements were probably not by Beethoven, who in general disapproved of such things – none of the other symphonies had such apparently 'official' arrangements attached to them. Wagner described this symphony as 'the apotheosis of the dance'. Others, less charitable, suggested that Beethoven must have been drunk when he wrote the horn parts in the finale.

The 'Eroica' Symphony was first performed on April 17th 1805. The story of its furiously erased dedication to Napoleon, when Beethoven heard he had crowned himself Emperor – a betrayal of all his ideals – is borne out by the hole in the manuscript copy. The 'Eroica' was longer than any previous symphony, and ushered in Beethoven's 'heroic' phase with a vengeance. The only thing about it that was not entirely new was the theme for the unprecedented set of variations that forms the finale, which had already appeared in a set of piano variations for piano solo, and in the ballet *Prometheus*.

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