

# Piotr Anderszewski

## Tuesday 31 October 8pm

**Bach** Partita No 6 BWV 830

**Szymanowski** Mazurkas Op 50, Nos 3, 7, 8, 5, & 4

**Webern** Variations for Piano, Op 27

**Beethoven** Piano Sonata No 31, Op 110



### **J. S. Bach (1685-1750)**

#### **Partita No 6 in E minor, BWV 830**

- 1 Toccata
- 2 Allemande
- 3 Corrente
- 4 Air
- 5 Sarabande
- 6 Tempo di Gavotta
- 7 Gigue

Bach's Six Keyboard Partitas belong to the years 1725-1730 and were conceived during his early employment as Kapellmeister to the four main churches in Leipzig. The first of these works was published at his own expense in 1726 and the full set issued as his Op 1 in 1731. As so often with Bach, pleasure and pedagogy went hand in hand and, aside from an opportunity for players to 'refresh their spirits', the work's purpose is made explicit by the title *Clavier-Übung* - meaning 'keyboard practice'. Some fifty years after the composer's death, Johann Nikolaus Forkel claimed these 'excellent clavier compositions had never been seen or heard before'.

Inscribed on the title page are the words 'music-lovers', an expression possibly intended for only exceptionally gifted keyboard players. While the Partitas may have been designed for the talents of his first son, Wilhelm Friedemann, they may also have been within the reach of skilled amateurs in the towns of Saxony and Thuringia. Beyond these German-speaking states, Bach had no experience of foreign court appointments enjoyed by many of his contemporaries, but he was fully aware of the musical fashions of the day and all six works abound in dance movements inspired by French, Italian and German styles. The opening movements of the Partitas invariably set the scene for the mood and scale of what is to follow.

The misleading title for the opening 'Toccata' hardly prepares one for its extended design prelude - fugue - prelude where each section is linked by an expressive sigh. Excepting the 'Overture' of the Fourth Partita, the massive scale and grandeur of the Sixth outclasses any of the previous opening movements. A more relaxed, yet equally noble and more chromatic 'Allemande' yields to a nimble 'Corrente' where

playful syncopations underpin its rhythmic impetus. The brief 'Air' presents few challenges, but the 'Sarabande', one of Bach's most poetic creations, is a passionate fantasia-like movement of extraordinary harmonic imagination. Lively dance patterns would surely have enabled players to 'refresh their spirits' in the 'Tempi di Gavotta', while the concluding 'Gigue' might have been more of a challenge, its rhythmic complexities a potential 'graveyard' for all but the most agile performers. Its demands may have prompted Forkel's assertion that 'whoever learnt to perform any of these pieces to a high standard could make his fortune in the world'.

### **Karol Szymanowski (1882-1937)**

#### **Mazurkas, Op 50 Nos 3, 7, 8, 5, & 4**

Born into a wealthy landowning family of Polish origins in Tymoszwówka, then part of the Russian Empire and now Ukraine, Karol Szymanowski completed his musical studies at the State Conservatory in Warsaw. As with many composers of his generation, Wagner was to influence his earliest works, while the so-called French impressionists (principally Debussy and Ravel) shaped his creative energies during the years of the Great War. It is to these years that his first mature pieces belong and include his First Violin Concerto and Third Symphony, a work that so startled Lutoslawski that he claimed to spend days trying to recapture the sounds on the piano.

At the turn of the century, the piano music of Chopin and Scriabin provided a fertile source of inspiration for Szymanowski's Op 1 Preludes. Some 15 years later, a more modernistic style swept through his opulent *Masques* where his fascination with the East furnished a wholly new atmosphere. But it was folk song, and a return to Chopin, that occupied the composer's last creative phase; his Op 50 Mazurkas combining a delicately spun lyricism, harmonic asperity and a rustic strength that drew on his explorations of the indigenous music of Poland's Tatra mountains. Begun from the mid-1920s, these twenty works offer an absorbing range of moods and are dedicated to friends of the composer including Arthur Rubinstein who described the Tatra peaks as 'mysterious and aloof' and 'forbidding to outsiders'. Mystery may be heard in the exotic colouring of the third and seventh and within the bitonality of the fifth, while the brooding eighth brings darker shadows. If stamping rhythms within the fourth suggest

village carousing, its ruggedness mirrors the regions topography. If these works take their cue from Chopin, they speak with a pungency that is Szymanowski's alone and bear little or no hint of the poverty and ill-health that blighted his final years.

### **Anton Webern (1883-1945)**

#### **Variations, Op 27**

- 1 Sehr mässig
- 2 Sehr schnell game of pairs
- 3 Ruhig fließend

Revered and reviled as a standard bearer of the 20th century avant garde, few composers come with such a forbidding reputation as Anton Webern. Exactly 60 years after his death, BBC Radio 3 devoted a day to his music on September 15th 2005 prompting *The Telegraph* to announce 'A whole day devoted to Webern... is Radio 3 completely mad?' Regardless of these doubts, his music belongs to the Austrian tradition, continuing a line from Mozart, through Beethoven and Schubert, to Mahler. To Arnold Schoenberg, the brevity of his works suggested they were like 'a novel contained within a single sigh'. Webern's concision and structural intricacies, which for some are more like musical crossword puzzles, were a profound influence on the younger generation of composers. When his Variations was performed in Darmstadt in 1948, devotees listened in a quasi-religious trance, unperturbed by its absence of tonal hierarchy and its complex symmetrical patterns.

Completed in August 1936, the Op 27 work is typical of the composer's aphoristic manner. Notwithstanding the wide intervallic leaps, abrupt dynamic changes and equally sudden changes of register, a sense of weightlessness governs each movement, with playfulness occupying the first two and a sense of stillness or unease in the third. Webern's annotated score, prepared for the work's premiere by Peter Stadlen in 1937 is littered with expressive markings including instructions such as 'a restrained cry of sorrow', 'like an improvisation' and 'left hand like a mysterious drumbeat'. Improbable as it may seem, Webern compared the first to a Brahms Intermezzo and the sprightly second to the 'Badinerie' from Bach's Orchestral Suite No 2. Only in the third do the actual variations unfold: each inhabiting an active and a reflective element, the former steadily dominating. Perhaps the American journalist Alex Ross

gets closer to defining these works when he likened them to 'the abstract beauty of ice crystals'.

## Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

### Piano Sonata No 31 in A flat major, Op 110

- 1 Moderato cantabile, molto espressivo
- 2 Molto allegro
- 3 Adagio, ma non troppo – Allegro, ma non troppo

Beethoven's penultimate Sonata in A flat occupied him throughout the year 1821, and it reached completion on Christmas Day. Plagued by bouts of ill health, first rheumatism and later jaundice, it was the only work he finished that year, though he was simultaneously planning his *Missa Solemnis*. His Op 110 Sonata retreats from the gigantism of the earlier 'Hammerklavier' and returns to the more modest dimensions and intimacy of Op 90 and 101, the American musicologist Maynard Solomon suggesting Beethoven was now cultivating an 'etherealized, improvisatory tone'. Together with its neighbours, Op 109 and Op 111, the A flat Sonata strives towards vocal expression and creates its own independent form with the main weight resting on the finale. Each of the final three sonatas is a transcendent masterpiece, and while the first and last both end with a serene set of variations, all three reflect Beethoven's late-found interest in reviving the Baroque fugue.

The first two movements of Op 110 are relatively contained, with the opening 'Moderato cantabile, molto espressivo' unfolding from a gentle introduction inscribed 'con amabilità' (amiably). Its first four bars provide both the mood and the material, albeit in embryonic form, for all that follows, with its melodic curve traversing the interval of a sixth,

gaining increasing significance over the course of the next 25 minutes. It can be heard in the cantabile melody immediately after the introduction and again in the rising contours of a brief subsidiary theme, both ideas juxtaposed by a delicate tracery of harp-like gestures spanning the piano's entire compass. The succinct development is occupied with the first four notes of the introduction (underpinned by left hand scale figures), while the concluding section recalls the two earlier themes, not without some startling harmonic excursions that bring their own subtle drama.

The second movement ('Molto allegro') is, in essence, a scherzo and trio, notable for both its abrupt dynamic contrasts and, in its initial melodic descent, a further reminder of the interval of a sixth from the first movement. Tumbling phrase patterns set against a rising left hand gives the Trio a distinct outline where puckish hand crossings create an additional sense of jeopardy. Within the finale lies the sonata's emotional core; a movement fusing aria and fugue, and the whole preceded by a recitative-like passage. If these preliminary bars sound like an homage to J.S. Bach, then the expressive *arioso dolente* that follows (incorporating another sixth) may bring reminiscences of the aria 'Es ist vollbracht!' (It is finished!) from the St. John Passion. As the aria draws to a close, a fugue steals in (based on the rising pitches from the work's opening) and presses forward with great dignity before being interrupted by the reprise of the aria in a more fragile form. Ten repeated G major chords herald the fugue's second appearance (the subject now inverted) which gathers momentum via a remarkable series of rhythmic transformations leading to a triumphant and life-affirming conclusion.

David Truslove, 2023



## Paul Lewis - Schubert III

Thu 7 Dec 8pm

**Schubert** Piano sonata No 4 in A minor, D537

**Schubert** Piano sonata No 9 in B, D575

**Schubert** Piano sonata No 18 in G, D894

The final recital in the Schubert Series will take place on **Tuesday 19 March 2024**



## Piotr Anderszewski

Piotr Anderszewski is regarded as one of the outstanding musicians of his generation. He appears regularly in recital at such concert halls as the Wiener Konzerthaus, Berlin Philharmonie, Wigmore Hall, Carnegie Hall, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and Concertgebouw Amsterdam. His collaborations with orchestra have included appearances with the Berlin Philharmonic, Berlin Staatskapelle, London Symphony, Philharmonia and NHK Symphony. He has also placed a special emphasis on playing and directing, working with Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Camerata Salzburg, among others.

Piotr has been an exclusive artist with Warner Classics/Erato (previously Virgin Classics) since 2000. His first recording for the label was Beethoven's Diabelli Variations, which went on to receive a number of prizes. He has also recorded Grammy-nominated discs of Bach's

Partitas 1, 3 and 6 and Szymanowski's solo piano works, the latter receiving a Gramophone award in 2006. His recording devoted to works by Robert Schumann received the BBC Music Magazine's Recording of the Year award in 2012. Piotr's disc of Bach's English Suites nos. 1, 3 and 5, released in November 2014, went on to win both a Gramophone award and an ECHO Klassik award in 2015. His most recent release featuring a selection of Preludes and Fugues from Bach's Well Tempered Clavier Book II received a Gramophone award in September 2021.

Recognised for the intensity and originality of his interpretations, Piotr has been a recipient of the Gilmore award, the Szymanowski Prize and a Royal Philharmonic Society award. He has also been the subject of several documentaries by the film maker Bruno Monsiegeon. 'Piotr Anderszewski plays Diabelli Variations' (2001) explores Piotr's particular relationship with Beethoven's iconic work. 'Unquiet Traveller' (2008) is an unusual artist portrait, capturing Piotr's reflections on music, performance and his Polish-Hungarian roots.

In 2016 Piotr got behind the camera himself to explore his relationship with his native Warsaw, creating a film entitled 'Je m'appelle Varsovie'. In the 2022/23 season, Piotr will focus on a new recital programme, which he will perform at Philharmonie de Paris, Vienna Musikverein, Alte Oper Frankfurt and other major concert halls in Europe and Asia. He can also be heard with orchestras including Leipzig Gewandhausorchester, Kammerakademie Potsdam, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, among others.

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