INTERNATIONAL PIANISTS IN RECITAL

PRESENTED BY THEME AND VARIATIONS PIANO SERVICES

Alexander Gavrylyuk  MONDAY 10 MARCH
Stephen Hough  MONDAY 15 SEPTEMBER

Lukáš Vondráček  MONDAY 12 MAY
Jean-Efflam Bavouzet  MONDAY 17 NOVEMBER

2014
INTERNATIONAL PIANISTS IN RECITAL

PRESENTED BY THEME & VARIATIONS PIANO SERVICES AT CITY RECITAL HALL ANGEL PLACE

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This program book for International Pianists in Recital contains notes and articles for all four recitals in the 2014 series. Copies will be available at every performance, but we invite you to keep your program and bring it with you to each recital. Please share with your companion.
Dear Music Lovers

We are proud to present the SSO’s International Pianists in Recital series for 2014 with another stunning array of pianists. And we welcome these fine soloists to the City Recital Hall Stage with great pride and delight.

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We look forward to enjoying the performance together in celebration of this significant anniversary and congratulate the Sydney Symphony Orchestra on the choice of such inspirational musicians.

Ara Vartoukian
Director and Concert Technician
ALEXANDER GAVRYLYUK IN RECITAL

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–1856)
*Kinderszenen (Childhood Scenes), Op.15*
Of Foreign Lands and People
A Curious Story
Blind Man’s Bluff
Pleading Child
Happy Enough
An Important Event
Dreaming (Träumerei)
At the Fireside
Knight of the Hobbyhorse
Almost too serious
Frightening
Child Falling Asleep
The Poet Speaks

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART (1756–1791)
Piano Sonata in C major, K330
Allegro moderato
Andante cantabile
Allegretto

FRANZ LISZT (1811–1886)
Lacrymosa from Mozart’s Requiem, S550
Tarantella from *Venezia e Napoli*, S162

INTERVAL

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891–1953)
Piano Sonata No.6, Op.82 (War Sonata No.1)
Allegretto moderato
Allegretto
Tempo di valzer lentissimo
Vivace

92.9 ABC Classic FM
This recital will be broadcast live across Australia on ABC Classic FM.

Pre-concert talk by Stephanie McCallum at 6.15pm in the First Floor Reception Room.
Visit sydneysymphony.com/talk-bios for speaker biographies.

Estimated durations:
18 minutes, 18 minutes, 3 minutes, 9 minutes, 20-minute interval, 28 minutes
The recital will conclude at approximately 8.55pm.

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Perhaps it was growing up between the Ukraine and Australia that inspired in Alexander Gavrylyuk a love of contrasts.

‘I think that the beauty of music lies precisely in the differences between artists,’ he says. ‘Everyone sees a piece of music through a prism. And that prism is built from their personality, their musical education, their vision of life, and their experiences. All those things unconsciously influence the way that they see music.

‘Personally, I love programs which are full of contrast, because I think it’s a good way to structure the flow of pieces during the concert.’

For this program, the journey from the childish purity of Schumann’s Kinderszenen to the dark hell of Prokofiev’s sixth sonata could hardly be more extreme. In what ways does has his own prism for these works been shaped by his life?

‘That’s very easy to answer in terms of the Schumann,’ he responds. ‘Two years ago, my daughter was born, and she inspires me more than anything I’ve ever experienced before – in life as well as in music-making. And of course that translates into my vision of Schumann.’

Although the iron curtain was lifted when Gavrylyuk was still a child, he said that he felt enough of the repressive regime’s influence to have an affinity for the darkness of Prokofiev’s sixth sonata.

‘My childhood and upbringing were affected by the Soviet regime in ways that were part of the whole society, and to some extent still are today,’ he says. ‘The impact of that time is still very evident in society there today.

‘Of course 1940, when Prokofiev wrote this sonata, was a terrible time, with Stalin’s regime and the Second World War. What I experienced in my childhood cannot compare, but at least there was something strong that I could hold onto in order
to come a little closer to the essence of Prokofiev’s music.

In the music, says Gavrylyuk, you can hear the stomp of Nazi jackboots, you can feel the suffering of individual souls, and you can also enjoy a little black humour as Prokofiev mocks the Soviet system.

‘But actually,’ he reflects, ‘we don’t have to go back to the Second World War to find what inspired the sixth sonata. When I play it, I also think about the many horrors of today. Terrible things keep happening.

There could hardly be a greater contrast, he agrees, than Mozart’s sonata K330.

‘The word combination “unconditional love” comes to mind when I think about Mozart. I think somehow he had one foot in heaven when he wrote this music; it’s a miracle without which the world would be a much more grim place.’

Liszt’s transcription of the ‘Lacrymosa’ from Mozart’s Requiem moves the concert gradually towards a darker world. It is Mozart viewed through Liszt’s prism – neither quite one composer nor the other.

‘The fact that it’s not Mozart actually gives one a little bit more freedom in interpreting this famous piece,’ says Gavrylyuk. ‘I think we can allow a little bit of Lisztian legato and phrasing, although it’s very important not to leave out the brackets of the correct style of playing Mozart.’

Liszt’s Tarantella, with its Neapolitan origins and dual implications of courtship and spider bites, forms the bridge between the concert’s two halves.

‘I’m curious to see whether the second part of the concert with throw light on the innocence and beauty even more – and vice versa,’ Gavrylyuk says. ‘I wonder if reflections of the very best we can find in human expression can emphasise the horror in Prokofiev’s sixth sonata.’

Though he says that he tries to remove himself from the equation as far as possible when he performs, Gavrylyuk is keenly interested in what happens when the audience listens closely.

‘I think that every piece of music has a heartbeat. My aim as an interpreter is to be selfless; I try to dissolve into that world. The space between the notes makes all the difference. If there is complete conviction and engagement, that creates a very special connection to the audience. If I succeed I enter this zone, a state of mind where music manifests itself. There’s a feeling of unity in the impulse, almost a feeling of nirvana.

‘Not even an army of diplomats can create unity amongst a group of people. But music can do that.’
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An intriguing quality of music is its abstract nature, a pivotal question resting on whether it can specifically ‘mean’ anything. Is music, as Schopenhauer wrote, ‘an entirely universal language’? Can it express ‘that which cannot be said’, as Victor Hugo argued? Or might it have no subject, as claimed by Eduard Hanslick, music ‘speaking nothing but sound’? Various views have arisen through history, yet the debate has never been settled. Might music, therefore, be impossible to understand fully, or can a composer’s intentions offer us a clue?

We know with certainty, for example, that Robert Schumann did not intend to write music for children in Kinderszenen (Childhood Scenes), Op.15. Rather, he wrote music for adults that reflected remembrances of childhood innocence. Written in his late 20s, the work comprises 13 smaller pieces, a ‘compilation’ structure also used in Papillons, Op.2, and Carnaval, Op.9. Writing to his future wife, Clara Wieck, in 1838, Schumann signalled completion on 17 March, yet he continued to hone and arrange the individual components, eventually finishing the composition in mid-May. Typically for the early Romantic period, the pieces were given descriptive titles, further suggesting ‘meaning’. However, these literary markers were added later and define, perhaps less than hoped, the composer noting they were ‘merely gentle hints’ as to the interpretation of the work as a whole.

Schumann’s genius for simplicity is encapsulated in the opening number (Of Foreign Lands and Peoples) yet, by contrast, its title seems esoteric and intangible. Glimpses of youthful games (A Curious Story, Blind Man’s Bluff) and more domestic reflections (Pleading Child, Happy Enough) consolidate in a festive mood (An Important Event), before the pace is calmed by Träumerei (Dreaming), perhaps Schumann’s best known composition.

The tranquil mood is sustained (At the Fireside), before an allusion to childhood toys (Knight of the Hobbyhorse) leads to a more fragmentary and distant scene (Almost too serious). Darkness underpins a glance into the vulnerable imagination of a child (Frightening), while also capturing the serenity of sleep (Child Falling Asleep), the transcendent portal to dreamland represented by a shifted tonic chord at the close.
Finally, the composer steps out personally from the music in a moment of profound declamation (The Poet Speaks), the simple chorale melody broken only by a gentle, almost improvisatory, cadenza. Schumann would later write that ‘music is the spiritual language of emotion, which is hidden more secretly than the soul’, and in Kinderszenen the truth of these words is revealed.

By contrast, the Classical age was less concerned with hidden languages and meaning, the pragmatic utility of music often its chief value. As with Mozart’s childhood keyboard works and their place in his early career, practical intentions were behind many of his adult works, such as the piano concertos written for subscription performances in Vienna. He similarly viewed publication as a viable means to financial independence, the Sonata in C, K330, being published as the first of three incorporating his Opus 6 in 1784.

The sunny disposition of the Allegro moderato potentially masks a more complex structure: given that ‘sonata form’ movements typically contain two main themes, it is notable that Mozart here includes no fewer than six. Renowned for his innovative style, he returns to none of them in the development section, where a new melody weaves through a variety of keys. The aria-like outer sections of the Andante cantabile establish F major as the emotional core of the

This unfinished portrait of Mozart by his brother-in-law Joseph Lange, dating from around 1782–83, would have shown the composer seated at the piano

MOZART
Sonata in C, K330
Allegro moderato
Andante cantabile
Allegretto
sonata, and the operatic quality is intensified through an abrupt shift to the minor tonality in the central section, further heightened through moments of sparse counterpoint and dissonant chromaticism. The melancholic theme is transformed through its restatement in the tonic major in the brief coda, bars perhaps added as an afterthought as they are missing from the autograph score. The final Allegretto is the sonata’s most virtuosic movement, the passagework forming a vibrant contrast to its carefree themes. As with the opening movement, Mozart avoids a return to principal melodies in the development, again preferring the free invention of his mind.

A mythology arose around Mozart after his death, prompting many to search for added ‘meaning’ in his works. The most prominent example is the Requiem, K626, and the popular misconception of a sinister plot in the final weeks of his life. The myth was quickly established, as an article from the Salzburger Intelligenzblatt (7 January 1792) shows:

Some months before, he received an unsigned letter, asking him to write a requiem and to ask for it what he wanted... So Mozart had to write it, which he did, often with tears in his eyes, constantly saying: I fear that I am writing a requiem for myself.

Yet he almost certainly knew the identity of Count Franz von Walsegg-Stuppach, who had commissioned the work, and the composer’s final illness was sudden and unexpected. The Lacrymosa ends the Dies irae sequence, and while only eight bars of vocal parts and the opening orchestral counterpoint appear in the manuscript, sketch material would have been known to Franz Xaver Süssmayr, who completed the score.

That so much of Franz Liszt’s creative output consists of arrangements of music by others might seem anomalous in modern times. In some works it appears his intention was to maximise the degree of difficulty for calculated effect, as with the transcriptions of Paganini’s already demanding Caprices. However, Liszt was also a forward-thinking artist in his own right, his originality influencing both his peers and later generations. Before the advent of recording technology, large works – operas, symphonies, masses – could be heard less frequently, and it was an act of both promotion and preservation to create piano versions for domestic use, as with the Lacrymosa from Mozart’s Requiem (S550).

By contrast, the Tarantella from Venezia e Napoli (S162) is designed for virtuosic effect. Historically associated with the
poisonous bite of the tarantula, the Italian dance melodies of Guillaume-Louis Cottrau were originally combined by Liszt in the early 1840s, at the height of his concert career. In 1858, after his retirement from the stage, he created the version heard in this recital, its substantial reworking also revealing his quest for ideal forms for his music. A notoriously difficult work, the revision is in fact easier than the original through the removal of octaves in the main theme, thereby allowing scope for even more exhilarating speeds.

Regardless of the specific intentions of their music, Schumann, Mozart and Liszt enjoyed the freedom to write as they pleased. In Soviet Russia after 1936, however, the Party’s pursuit of ideological control removed this liberty through forced adherence to contradictory doctrines, such as that of ‘Socialist Realism’. In fact, charges of ‘formalism’ levelled at composers like Sergei Prokofiev and Dmitri Shostakovich were predictable reactions against dissonance, yet perceptions of resistance to authority have led many to similarly search for ‘meaning’ in their music.

As a young man, Prokofiev had been fortunate to leave Russia in 1918, working for periods in North America and Europe. Almost uniquely, though, he chose to return to his homeland in the 1930s. He may have been naïve, as some have suggested, yet he was also seduced by promises of ‘special arrangements’ made at the highest level, including private accommodation, a car and, importantly, an assurance he would retain his passport. Subsequent to the ‘great purge’ and the government’s denunciation of writers and musicians, however, the falsity of these arrangements became clear to Prokofiev, who – feted as the prodigal son returned – found that he and his family were unable to leave.

Surprisingly, World War II proved advantageous to Russian composers, there being little time for surveillance of ‘suspect’ art, a ludicrously subjective and partisan task in any event. Accordingly, some of Russia’s most celebrated masterpieces date from this time, including Prokofiev’s ‘war sonatas’, a collection of three works for piano of which the Sixth Sonata, Op.82, is the first.

Dynamism is present from the opening bar, the enigmatic and dissonant theme crystallising the inherent tensions between major and minor. Freed from writing purely tonal music, Prokofiev utilises the entire keyboard through a range of often violent textures. The Allegretto offers respite, the dance-like outer sections enclosing a reserved and contrapuntal core. The ‘waltz’ of the third movement works
on two levels, its 9/8 time signature allowing a slow three-in-a-bar feeling, while three smaller waltz measures form on each beat. A fiery toccata closes the sonata, its motoric drive hurtling toward a seemingly inevitable reprise of the opening motif, its dissonance still unresolved. A lengthy working out of the material, heightened by ominous repeated triplet figures, leads at last to a decisive conclusion.

Prokofiev’s sonata seems infused with forceful and persuasive rhetoric, yet to what extent can one surmise any intention of ‘meaning’? While music might not, as Hanslick suggested, possess a subject, would the composer not have recognised the context of what he wrote? Could not the final resolution of dissonance represent a victory against foes? (And, if so, which ones?) Optimism might be sadly misplaced in this interpretation, however: even though Russia prevailed militarily, Prokofiev’s music was soon suppressed, and he died an exhausted and broken man. Whether we might agree with certain philosophies about music, or whether we follow our deeper instincts, interactions between composers, performers and listeners remain a central aspect of our society. Ultimately, abstractness might be music’s greatest advantage: even if we think we know what a composer might have been saying, it seems we can never prove exactly what was said.

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LUKÁŠ VONDRAČEK IN RECITAL

JOSEPH HAYDN (1732–1809)
Piano Sonata in C major, Hob.XVI:50
Allegro
Adagio
Allegro molto

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF (1873–1943)
Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op.42

INTERVAL

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833–1897)
Klavierstücke (Piano Pieces), Op.118
Intermezzo (Allegro non assai, ma molto appassionato)
Intermezzo (Andante teneramente)
Ballade (Allegro energico)
Intermezzo (Allegretto un poco agitato)
Romanze (Andante)
Intermezzo (Andante, largo e mesto)

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891–1953)
Piano Sonata No.7, Op.83 (War Sonata No.2)
Allegro inquieto – Andantino
Andante caloroso
Precipitato

This recital will be recorded for broadcast on ABC Classic FM.

Pre-concert talk by David Larkin at 6.15pm in the First Floor Reception Room.
Visit sydneysymphony.com/talk-bios for speaker biographies.

Estimated durations:
18 minutes, 20 minutes, 20-minute interval, 22 minutes, 19 minutes
The recital will conclude at approximately 8.55pm.
Lukáš Vondráček
in conversation

Seven years ago, Lukáš Vondráček made his Australian debut, performing the Paganini Rhapsody in the Vladimir Ashkenazy’s Rachmaninoff festival. He was just 21 years old, honoured to work once again with ‘such a natural musician’ whom he’d always admired for his humble personality. He returns this season with more Rachmaninoff under his belt: the third piano concerto for concerts with Alexander Lazarev, and the Corelli Variations, added to his repertoire since that previous visit.

Also since then, Vondráček has settled in the United States, making Boston his home and completing an artist diploma at the New England Conservatory. He’s released a second solo recording and his engagements have taken him as far afield as London and Japan, Brazil and South Africa. He’s no longer the teenager who was discovered by Ashkenazy in 2002, so perhaps it’s appropriate he brings to Sydney a recital program of musical maturity: four composers, each represented by a late work – not through conscious design so much as happy instinct.

The Haydn sonata (Hob.XVI:50) is the creation of a composer in his 60s, on tour in London and exposed to the English pianos with their extra keys and very different mechanisms. ‘This sonata is quite extravagant,’ says Vondráček, ‘and you can tell he enjoyed himself a lot when he composed it.’ Vondráček is attracted by the sunny character and humour of the music, but also by the way it sometimes ‘feels like an improvisation’.

There is something of an ‘improvisational’ spirit behind the well-known story of Rachmaninoff and his Corelli Variations. We laugh at the thought of the composer being guided by the coughing during his own performances of the piece, leaving out...
MUSIC ON MY MIND

‘When I’m performing I don’t think there’s anything on my mind other than the music itself. Obviously you have to prepare and know what you want to communicate with your audience even before you step on that stage, but there has to be a spontaneous quality as well. And of course the audience plays a big part in the overall experience. It’s not as if they’re just listening to me, they’re actively involved in the whole musical experience and I take energy from them and inspiration, and every night it will be something different – but overall I really try to focus on the music.’

LV

variations if the audience seemed too restless. But the question goes unasked whether this is something a modern recitalist might be tempted to do too!

For Vondráček, the appeal of Rachmaninoff’s music lies in the way he ‘went to the core of human emotion’. It bothers him when people describe Rachmaninoff’s music as ‘kitsch’ – ‘I don’t see it that way at all,’ he says. He characterises the Corelli Variations as complex and demanding. ‘There’s this tendency to wander around a little bit – the harmonic changes are sometimes quite difficult to grasp. Of course, when you spend time working on the piece you get a better understanding, but then you have to find a way to present it to the audience so they will be able to comprehend:’ This, he explains, often boils down to phrasing and dynamic contrasts.

Contrast is one motivation behind Vondráček’s choice of Brahms’s Opus 118 piano pieces. ‘The interesting thing about Brahms,’ he says, ‘is that he only focused on piano at the very beginning and the very end of his career.’ He’s played the early F minor sonata (Opus 5) for quite a while; these late miniatures are very different, much more intimate and touching. ‘I don’t know a better word, but when you play this music you feel he was such an honest man…With Brahms it’s never about virtuosity, it’s about expressiveness and the strength of emotions.’

Which brings us to Prokofiev and a very different, but equally strong, set of emotions. The War Sonatas were composed in the 1940s, long before Vondráček was born, but even so, he can draw on personal experience. ‘I was born in 1986, only three years before the communist regime ended. But growing up I listened to many stories from my parents and grandparents telling me how difficult those times were, and I think you can easily hear that in Prokofiev’s music…In the three War Sonatas he really let himself go and expressed his deep anger and all those emotions he’d been keeping inside. You can tell this music came from the heart.’

The result is aggressive at times, and not always easy to listen to, but fantastic music just the same. ‘I love the second movement,’ says Vondráček, ‘which is so Romantic, like a song, but then has these violent outbursts. And the last movement is amazing. Maestro Ashkenazy always says it reminds him of a plane taking off on a runway. It’s so exciting, like rock and roll, and a lot of fun to play!’

YVONNE FRINDLE, SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA © 2014
ABOUT THE MUSIC

Mature Voices

Although he didn’t become aware of it until after the fact, in this recital program Lukáš Vondráček has assembled four works that represent their composers in their maturity. Haydn, the most famous composer of the 18th century, didn’t visit London until he was in his 60s; his ‘London’ sonatas for an English virtuoso are among the fruits of his tours there. Rachmaninoff was in his late 50s when he composed his final work for solo piano, in 1931. Like Haydn, Brahms was in his 60s when he composed his Op.118 piano pieces. Unlike Haydn, he turned to intimate, miniature forms rather than the exuberant and public-spirited virtuoso sonata. Prokofiev also gives us an exuberant or, more accurately, fierce sonata, composed during World War II after he had made his return from the West to the Soviet Union.

Haydn’s notebook from his first visit to London (1791–92) lists the pianists and composers active in London, including Muzio Clementi, father of the London piano school, Jan Ladislav Dussek and Johann Nepomuk Hummel. Therese Jansen – a student of Clementi’s and a pianist of technical and expressive accomplishment – also appears in Haydn’s list. Later – in May 1795, towards the end of his second London visit – Haydn was a witness to her marriage to Gaetano Bartolozzi.

It was during this second visit to London that Haydn turned to the piano, revealing the influence of the English manner of playing and the instruments themselves. The most important of the resulting works were dedicated to the new Mrs Bartolozzi: at least two of the three ‘English’ or ‘London’ sonatas, and his final set of piano trios.

The Grand Sonata for the Piano Forte (Hob.XVI:50) was begun in 1794 and an early version of the slow movement was released by Viennese publishers Artaria in June. The complete work was not published until 1800, however, and then only in London, partly because the sonata called upon the extended compass and pedalling techniques of the English pianos.

Two styles of instrument could hardly have been more different than the Viennese and English pianos of the late 18th century. Haydn especially favoured the light touch of the instruments of Viennese maker Wenzel Schantz, ‘on which everything is better expressed’. In contrast, the massive English pianos possessed ‘rounder sounds and a somewhat heavier touch’, encouraging a grand style of playing and generous use of pedal.
of the damper pedal. Dussek was reported to have ‘kept the dampers almost constantly raised when he played in public’.

It is in the Allegro of this sonata that we find the only indications for pedalling to appear in Haydn’s keyboard music. The instances where Haydn makes explicit use of the damper pedal (for he may well have employed it elsewhere in this and other works) are notable for their hushed and delicate figurations and their extremes of register, grumbling bass and ethereal treble. Although this was surely a response to the English school of playing, this effect must have enjoyed some popularity in Vienna too, for it was described by the piano maker Nanette Streicher in 1801:

\[ \text{In fortissimo, through the raising of the dampers, [the true musician] leads us to believe that we hear an organ, the fullness of an entire orchestra. Now in pianissimo, through the same means, he creates the most tender tone of the glass harmonica. How pure, how like a flute, the treble notes sound while the left hand plays consonant chords against them!} \]

Streicher could almost have been referring to the aural mirage Haydn creates in the first movement of his C major sonata, especially when she goes on to warn that the true musician ‘introduces such beauty sparingly, so that too frequent use does not spoil its effect’. Such restraint is, of course, entirely in step with both the mood and the technique of the Allegro: the dry brilliance of its laconic opening leading to a bravura display of monothematic development, at once sparkling and rigorously intellectual.

The improvisatory character of the Adagio is underpinned by a careful structure. And while the movement owes much to the fantasia style of CPE Bach, the meticulously written-out ornamentation (effectively providing ‘varied repeats’) reveals a preoccupation with formal design that is more classical than baroque.

After the reflective Adagio, the finale returns to the humour of the first movement in a brief but striking scherzo. Regardless of the instrument at hand, Haydn’s wit is irrepressible.

Rachmaninoff’s Variations on a Theme of Corelli is a late work, dedicated to Fritz Kreisler, the violinist with whom Rachmaninoff gave many concerts and made several recordings. The composer himself premiered the Variations in Montreal on 12 October 1931.

The music is organised as a set of 20 variations with an Intermezzo placed after Variation XIII. Although each of the

![Haydn – portrait by Thomas Hardy, 1792](image)

![Rachmaninoff at a Steinway piano](image)
variations is short and to the point (only a page or so in the sheet music), with a clearly delineated character, the cumulative result is substantial and it is clear from the composer’s markings and his comments at the time that he was concerned with condensation and brevity. Two of the variations may be optionally deleted and in a letter to fellow pianist-composer Nikolai Medtner, Rachmaninoff writes of omitting variations ‘on the fly’ during performances:

Not once have I played these all in continuity. I was guided by the coughing of the audience. Whenever the coughing increased, I would skip the next variation. Whenever there was no coughing, I would play them in proper order. In one concert... the coughing was so violent that I played only 10 variations. My best record was in New York, where I played 18 Variations...

As in his better-known variations, the Rhapsody on a theme of Paganini, Rachmaninoff was drawn here to an old theme with very simple outlines, upon which he then builds increasingly complex figurations. And as in the Paganini variations, the softest and most memorable melodic moment is in the key of D flat major, heard in Variations XIV and XV. The central Intermezzo weakens the strong D minor tonality of the preceding variations. The Coda returns to the original simplicity of the theme, and the work ends quietly and simply, after the virtuosic variations and deviations encountered throughout.

The Corelli Variations were received in a fairly lukewarm fashion by the critics. Joseph Yasser, the Russian theorist, wrote more enthusiastically about the work in Novoye Russkoye Slovo, but also pointed out that the theme was not by Corelli and had been used before Corelli by 17th-century composers. Rachmaninoff actually took Corelli’s name off the cover when the work was published, but kept it inside! The La Folia theme, as it is now known, is also used by Liszt as a basis for his Variations in the Spanish Rhapsody.

In Rachmaninoff’s Corelli Variations the intermezzo movement sits at the centre of the work, functioning quite literally as an interlude, a moment of transition, in the words of Lukáš Vondráček, ‘between one thing and another’. After interval, Brahms’s Klavierstücke, Op. 118 offers a work that is nearly all ‘interludes’: four of the six pieces are called ‘intermezzo’. If these are transitions they must sit in imaginary frames. Each of the pieces has its own character, says Vondráček, some are quite passionate, and others very tender. But what unites them is a spirit of intimacy and reflection.

**RACHMANINOFF**

**Corelli Variations, Op.42**

Theme (Andante)

I  Poco più mosso
II  L’istesso tempo
III  Tempo di menuetto
IV  Andante
V  Allegro ma non tanto
VI  L’istesso tempo
VII  Vivace
VIII  Adagio misterioso
IX  Un poco più mosso
X  Allegro scherzando
XI  Allegro vivace*
XII  L’istesso tempo
XIII  Agitato

Intermezzo (a tempo rubato)

XIV  Andante (come prima)
XV  L’istesso tempo
XVI  Allegro vivace
XVII  Meno mosso
XVIII  Allegro con brio
XIX  Piu mosso. Agitato*
XX  Piu mosso

Coda (Andante)

* Rachmaninov says in the score ‘This variation may be omitted’

**BRAHMS**

**Piano Pieces, Op.118**

Intermezzo

Intermezzo

Ballade

Intermezzo

Romanze

Intermezzo
Opus 118 is a late work, composed in 1893, around the time of Brahms’s 60th birthday and completed in his summer home at Bad Ischl. This was the period in which Brahms had returned to the piano – his own instrument – and devoted himself to miniature forms: ballades, capriccios, romanzes and intermezzos. Together, the solo medium and the small-scale conception allow an unexpected level of intensity and profound feeling. After receiving the Op.118 and 119 sets of piano pieces from Brahms, the elderly Clara Schumann wrote in her diary:

_It really is marvellous how things pour from him; it is wonderful how he combines passion and tenderness in the smallest of spaces._

Although these may seem like independent pieces (and on its own the second Intermezzo enjoys the greatest popularity of the six), they have clearly been conceived as a set. The key centres of the pieces move down by steps (A minor/A major, G minor, F minor/F major, E flat minor). And where two pieces share the same tonic note, they form a contrasting pair with urgent and unsettled music followed by more lyrical music.

At the centre of the set – the real ‘interlude’ in this set of intermezzos – is the Ballade (Allegro energico). This introduces an assertive, even heroic character, with the overall vigour of the piece offset by a gentler middle section with an unexpected shift of key from G minor to B major. Although it is tiny, just a few minutes long, it shares the spirit of Chopin’s ballades: assuming a narrative posture without telling any particular story.

A feature of the set is the use of three-part or ternary form. The opening ideas return after a contrasting section, but with this difference: the moment of return is used, writes Peter McCallum, ‘to create an expanded and varied final section which amalgamates and transforms the first two’.

The fifth piece is a romanze, which, like the ballade, is a genre with literary overtones. The mood is idyllic, and the drone bass of the filigreed central section suggests a pastoral character, both simple and whimsical.

The final piece, and the last of the intermezzos, is one of the longest pieces in the set and the most complex in its organisation. Like a fantasia or prelude from an earlier century, it has an improvisatory character, with half-voiced musings from right hand and left as if the composer is finding his way into the music. The moment eventually arrives with vigorous chords and octaves, before the piece slips away, bringing the set to an autumnal close.

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**CORELLI’S FOLIA**

_**La Folia**, sometimes known as ‘the Follies of Spain,’ was originally a 15th-century Portuguese dance. The name, which implies madness or idiocy, might be related to the mounting frenzy of the dancers – or perhaps their habit of cross-dressing for the occasion. The Folia that Corelli knew (and Rachmaninoff in turn) can be traced to Jean-Baptiste Lully, who gave the theme its characteristic sarabande rhythm. The theme is just 16 bars long. Although it is usually in a minor key, a modal inflection to the relative major gives it a slightly plaintive quality. Corelli’s variations on La Folia are found in his Sonata for violin and continuo, Op.5 No.12, published in 1700 and reprinted some 42 times in the next century.
Sergei Prokofiev had burst on the scene in Russia, just before the revolutionary upheaval of 1917, as an enfant terrible of music. He shocked listeners with aggressive, even percussive pianism, projecting his daringly avant-garde music, as when he played his First Piano Concerto for his graduation from the conservatorium. Soon his career took him to live in Western Europe and the USA.

Prokofiev was frustrated that he was accepted as a pianist, while his music was rejected as too challenging. Then, to the surprise of some, Prokofiev returned to Russia, and the music he composed there during the 1930s seemed to be aiming at a more ready acceptance (think Peter and the Wolf, and the lyrical qualities of the ballet music for Romeo and Juliet). But the war brought back some of the ‘old’ Prokofiev, especially in a trilogy of ‘war’ sonatas for piano (Nos. 6, 7 and 8). Prokofiev himself premiered No.6, which was immediately taken up by the young Sviatoslav Richter. Richter in turn premiered Sonata No.7 early in 1943, learning it in four days!

In those dark hours for Russia, the violent contrasts and aggressive pianism were back, in what has become Prokofiev’s most famous, and most demanding, sonata. According to Prokofiev’s second wife, Mira Mendelssohn, who was with him as he composed, Prokofiev was reading Romain Rolland on Beethoven. The French novelist had described Beethoven’s ‘Appassionata’ sonata as ‘a torrent of fire in a bed of granite’.

Prokofiev’s sonata – in a musical language Beethoven would have found startling – makes much the same effect. Much of the music is edgy, angular and uncomfortable. But, like Beethoven, Prokofiev allows respite – in the lyrical slower music (Andantino) following the obsessive disquiet of the opening, and in the ‘warm’, almost Romantic Andante middle movement. This sonata combines all the elements of Prokofiev’s musical style as he described them in his autobiography: classical, modern [brutal?], motoric and lyrical.

Then Prokofiev’s expressionistic ‘torrent’ returns in the headlong chase of the last movement, a formidable moto perpetuo, which has been described as a ‘wrist toccata’. Watch and listen! There are many perils and pitfalls along the way, and both performer and listener need to fasten their seatbelts for the duration.

Adapted in part from notes by YVONNE FRINDLE (Haydn), LARRY SITSKY (Rachmaninoff) and DAVID GARRETT (Prokofiev)
STEPHEN HOUGH IN RECITAL

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862–1918)
La plus que lente – Valse
Lent (Molto rubato con morbidezza)

Estampes (Engravings)
Pagodes (Pagodas)
La Soirée dans Grenade (Evening in Granada)
Jardins sous la pluie (Gardens in the Rain)

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810–1849)
Ballade No.2 in F major/A minor, Op.38
Ballade No.1 in G minor, Op.23

INTERVAL

CHOPIN
Ballade No.3 in A flat major, Op.47
Ballade No.4 in F minor, Op.52

DEBUSSY
Children’s Corner
Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum
Jimbo’s Lullaby
Sérénade for the doll
The snow is dancing
The little shepherd
Golliwogg’s cake-walk

L’Isle joyeuse (The Isle of Joy)

This recital will be recorded for broadcast on ABC Classic FM.
Pre-concert talk by Robert Curry at 6.15pm in the First Floor Reception Room.
Visit sydneysymphony.com/talk-bios for speaker biographies.

Estimated durations:
4 minutes, 13 minutes, 7 minutes,
9 minutes, 20-minute interval,
7 minutes, 12 minutes, 15 minutes,
7 minutes
The recital will conclude at approximately 8.55pm.
Stephen Hough has no compunctions about dividing Chopin’s four ballades between two halves of a concert, with an interval in between.

‘They were never conceived as a set, and I think Chopin would have been extremely surprised to see them played one after another,’ he explains. ‘It’s nice to be able to see them as pieces by themselves, with their own life. They are small masterpieces; each one of them is a structural miracle. They’re like mini operas.’

The idea of assembling a series of works in one musical form and performing them as a set postdated Chopin significantly; Alfred Cortot, Hough thinks, was the first pianist to begin performing the ballades as a set. Complete sets of symphonies and string quartets by various composers grew in popularity – ‘great as a catalogue, but not always great in concert,’ he cautions.

Concert formats have changed enormously since the days of Debussy and Chopin, when programs tended to be far longer and more varied in content.

‘Today, I can listen to anything I want instantly from the sky. They didn’t have hi-fi systems or the internet. You’d go to a concert, and it would be like a feast – and you hadn’t eaten since the last concert. So if you went to hear Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, yes, you’d need all the repeats, and yes, you’d encore one movement, and you’d hang hungrily onto every note, because you’d probably never hear it again.

‘I think that’s the single most important thing you can teach students – to never, ever become jaded. Pieces like the G minor ballade on this program are so often played, but it’s just one of the great pieces of Western art. You should never lose that excitement; you need to keep that hunger for music alive.’

With hunger comes spontaneity, a feeling which, says Hough,
you need to be able to create no matter how well you know Chopin’s music.

‘He was a great improviser, according to the sources. There’s a wonderful quote from someone saying, “Yes, the ballades are amazing, but you should have heard him improvising ballades! They were even more amazing!”

‘I think this is a very important part of how you should play Chopin. You shouldn’t play as if it’s fixed in stone. It should sound and feel as if you’re creating it on the spur of the moment.’

There is a very direct link between Debussy and Chopin, since the former edited the latter’s scores for the French publisher Durand. That, says Hough, cannot have been an easy task.

‘There were three different editions of most of his work published during his lifetime. He would send his compositions to a German publisher, a French publisher and an English publisher — I think to make extra money — and each time the publishers returned it he would make different changes. So the idea of an original Chopin score is impossible, because he was so fluid in the way he thought of his music.’

Unlike Ravel, who was precise about everything, from the way he parted his hair to the exact dynamic markings on his manuscripts, Debussy was a sensualist, encouraging freedom in the performance of his music.

‘He is finicky about his notation, but there is some kind of core imprecision in his sound. It’s a little bit like the paintings of Monet; he’s creating waves of sound where you can’t actually see the shapes so clearly.

‘Debussy would compose on a Bechstein upright. He would cover it with many cloths to muffle the sound, so he created blurred textures.’

There is a great deal of mystery in Debussy’s music, Hough says.

‘The second piece in Estampes is so extraordinarily evocative. We’re told that Debussy never went to Granada. But he wrote a piece that describes it and its feeling more extraordinarily than anybody else. What amazes me about Debussy is that in just a few bars, or even a bar, he is able to create an atmosphere that takes your breath away.’

Despite its deceptive title, says Hough, Children’s Corner is one of the most difficult works he has ever performed.

‘It’s extremely hard to get the sounds right. There are many, many articulation markings, and it’s a complex thing to look back at the mind of a child — this magical world disappears as we become adults. But I think it’s often for artists to try to reclaim that.’

SHIRLEY APTHORP © 2014
ABOUT THE MUSIC

Sketches, Impressions and Ballads without Words

Debussy at the piano

This recital begins with a fleeting impression of a waltz: La plus que lente, literally ‘even more slowly’. Debussy gives more guidance before the pianist can begin: Lent (Molto rubato con morbidezza). Slowly, yes, but also with great rhythmic flexibility and with extreme delicacy or ‘softness’.

The initial impression is one of nostalgia and charming melancholy, in the vein of ‘La Valse lente’, popular in Paris in the early 20th century. Then the music turns impulsive (Appassionato), and whimsical.

Not a Slow Waltz, then, but an Even Slower... Waltz – with his humorous title Debussy winks at a popular tune. The sly harmonies, the earnest sentimentality and frivolous shifts of tempo all combine to suggest a sophisticated joke. Then again, as Robert Schmitz suggests in his study of Debussy’s piano works, this music stops short of parody. While the title might have been intended to raise a smile, there is no grotesqueness or ridicule in the music. Instead, Debussy maintains a sensitive balance and a charming subtlety of gesture. Perhaps he is winking at us, but he never loses sight of the dancing spirit of the waltz and nor should we.

Debussy’s Estampes (1903) was the first of his picturesque piano suites and confirms his reputation as a composer of evocative music, emerging from the world of its titles. ‘Estampes’ are engravings or prints, a title that suggests not just postcard images and Debussy’s mania for Japanese prints, but the idea of impressing or stamping on the memory. These vividly characterised pieces place the listener in the shoes of the travelling tourist, yet there is also a pervasive sense of nostalgia and fantasy.

Debussy was fascinated by the Javanese gamelan music he heard at the Paris Exposition in 1889 and 1890 – he loved the tuneful percussion sound, intricate textures and gapped scales. This is the sound world of Pagodes – floating and sensuous, with the outlines of its arabesques thought to evoke the outlines of a pagoda roof.

Debussy had never visited Spain when he composed Estampes. Nonetheless he brilliantly captures the colours and rhythms of Spanish dance. His Evening in Granada brings the effect together with a nocturnal mood, underpinned by compelling repeated rhythms taken from the habanera.

Spanish composer Manuel de Falla gave Debussy the finest
compliment when he described it as ‘characteristically Spanish in every detail’, conjuring ‘the effect of images mirrored by moonlight upon the limpid waters of the large albercas adjoining the Alhambra’.

The final movement, *Gardens in the Rain*, brings the music home to France and suggests the world of childhood with two French nursery songs woven into the rippling, toccata texture: ‘Nous n’ironis plus au bois’ and ‘Do, do, l’enfant do’. For one writer it brings to mind the picture of a child looking out the window at the rain, which sometimes patters, sometimes dashes furiously against the glass. Or perhaps the plaintive character of the nursery tunes will convey a very grownup nostalgia and regret.

In its insight into the world of childhood, Debussy’s *Children’s Corner* (1908) has few peers. The pieces are too demanding for children to play, but they evoke a child’s world and were affectionately dedicated to Debussy’s four-year-old daughter Chouchou ‘with her father’s apologies for what follows’. He needn’t have apologised – their charm and ease of comprehension quickly put them among his most popular music.

*Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum* refers to the title of Clementi’s graded studies, the bane of budding pianists. Debussy aims ‘a little humour’ at old Clementi – ‘a kind of progressive, hygienic gymnastic exercise to be played every morning’. On this particular morning the child began with brave determination, but was soon distracted, slowed down, and wandered into reverie, then firmly and to make up for having strayed, imposed a brilliant end on the exercise.

Jimbo (Debussy’s mistake for Jumbo) was Chouchou’s felt elephant. Cortot imagines the four-year-old Scheherazade turning the lullaby into a story, evoking the elephant’s exotic jungle homeland. For Debussy, orientalism comes naturally with pentatonic then whole-tone scales. Who drops off to sleep at the end – the elephant, the child, or both?

Debussy’s title for the third piece, as his French version reveals, should be ‘serenade to the doll’. There’s a suggestion of guitar music and the rhythms are a little Spanish, but, says Debussy, ‘with none of the passion of a Spanish serenader’.

In *The snow is dancing*, the child, warm inside, looks out through the window as the snow falls. ‘A mood picture as well as a tone picture,’ Debussy told an interpreter, ‘it should be misty, dreary, monotonous.’

The shepherd who improvises on his pipe is a toy. His melody recalls *The Girl with Flaxen Hair*, from Debussy’s preludes, and more distantly his *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*.

The cakewalk was danced to the syncopated marches of
ragtime, an American craze just beginning to be known in Europe. As part of his love-hate relationship with Wagner, Debussy ‘hid’ in the middle of this piece a quotation of the famous opening bars of Tristan und Isolde. The mechanical and jerky rhythms imitating ragtime make an ironic context for the Wagner quote, marked ‘with great feeling’ – Debussy said ‘don’t be afraid to overdo it here’.

In the summer of 1904 Debussy put his wife Lilly on a train to visit her parents and eloped to Jersey with the soprano Emma Bardac. (Emma was to be the mother of Chouchou.) In the end he didn’t find the domestic bliss he anticipated – Lilly attempted suicide, Emma became a possessive and demanding wife – but for a brief idyll, Jersey was Debussy’s own ‘Isle of Joy’. During that dramatic summer L’Isle joyeuse took shape.

Added to the inspirational mix was Watteau’s ‘Embarkation for Cythera’ (1717), introducing classical mythology (Cythera was the birthplace of Venus) as a parallel to the affair with Emma on the island of Jersey. The connection is perhaps ominous, since it’s thought that Watteau’s painting shows lovers departing from the island – a representation of the brevity of love.

L’Isle joyeuse sounds brilliant to the ear, right from the trills of the opening, and it is difficult music. As Debussy wrote to his publisher: ‘My God! It’s hard to play...This piece seems to me to bring together every different way of striking the piano, since it unites force and grace.’ For a composer whose revolutionary use of the piano is more commonly associated with the pursuit of sonority and colouristic effect, L’Isle joyeuse makes an uncharacteristic departure into the realm of virtuoso display.

The structure is unorthodox, combining a three-part form and rondo form; cheerful, rocking sections provide a foil for more lyrical and romantic gestures. Viewed from a dynamic and textural perspective, however, L’Isle joyeuse follows a wedge shape similar to Ravel’s Boléro, beginning with a single-line texture, played quietly, and mounting to a combined climax and resolution in the coda.

Chopin’s Ballades: Ballads without Words

Before 1836 there was no such thing as an instrumental ballade. Composers had been writing ballads (or ballades) for centuries, but these were for voice, uniting music and poetry within rich traditions of storytelling.

And there lies the key to the ballad: it is a narrative song. And it is the dramatic ballads that stick in the imagination. Like the best short stories, they begin eruptively at the moment of crisis – the father riding through the windy night with his
child clasped in his arms, or the mother confronting the son who bears a dripping sword. There is little back-story or scene-setting, just the crucial events, essential dialogue, and perhaps a refrain that gains significance as we go along. The climax is the conclusion: the child is dead; the son has murdered his father...at his mother's behest!

Given the importance of narrative to the sung ballad, you might expect an instrumental ballade, especially one composed in the 19th century, to be essentially program music. But for Chopin – inventing a new genre – a 'ballade' meant something different. ‘We use sounds to make music,’ he said, ‘as we use words to make language.’ His ballades for the piano are ‘narrative songs’ that have no plot and lack a specified scenario – although many have applied stories to them after the fact.

Instead the ballades adopt what Carl Dahlhaus calls a ‘narrative posture’. It is as if we were to listen to a tale in a language we didn’t understand. The characters and events would be a mystery to us, but the storyteller’s tone and style of presentation, the shaping of dialogue and the listeners’ reactions would all signal that a story was being told. We recognise the narrative posture, the narrative tone, even where there is no narrative.

Chopin’s contemporaries would have recognised it too, from the musical gestures he adopted. One of these is the moderate six-beats-to-the-bar metre, the musical equivalent, perhaps, of present tense. That often hypnotic pulse underpins passionate music with a dramatic effect that far outweighs the brevity of the music. Another is the musical version of the rhetorical question: phrases that don’t resolve but leave us hanging. And the carefully judged use of repetition; the juxtaposition of contrasting personalities. Then there are the abrupt transitions and surprises, the sudden changes of mood – bold gestures that have the same sensational effect, and suspense, whether they occur in words or music.

Chopin effectively created ‘ballades without words’ (some were even published under this title in early editions: Ballade ohne Worte). This novel approach to music – implying stories in sound without spelling them out – was of its time, but, as Robert Schumann pointed out in 1842, although Chopin was the first to use the word ‘ballade’ for instrumental music, ‘only the word...seems new to us; the thing can already be found in Beethoven and Schubert’.

Chopin’s ballades made a huge impression. Other composers took the genre in new directions, often writing ballades that were program music of the type Chopin had specifically avoided. Some such as Liszt followed the narrative tradition, Brahms brought a more lyrical perspective, Grieg turned to folk-
song, Fauré composed a fantasia-like ballade for piano and then turned to the ballade-as-concerto. The tradition of the orchestral ballade can be heard in pieces such as Dukas’ Sorcerer’s Apprentice, a ‘scherzo after a ballad of Goethe’ that does follow a detailed narrative, as do Dvořák’s symphonic poems on ballads by Erben.

The ballade genre is not constrained by rigid form but is malleable. It can embrace poetic atmosphere and narrative drive. The title ‘ballade’ does not so much determine the structure of the music as shape our response to the music and therein lies its power.

**Ballade in F major/A minor, Op.38**

*Andantino – Presto con fuoco – Tempo I –
  Presto con fuoco – Agitato*

‘We have yet to note the Ballade [Op.38] as a remarkable piece,’ wrote Schumann in a review. ‘Chopin has already written one under that title, one of his most daring and characteristic compositions. The new one is quite different, inferior to the first as a work of art, but hardly less fanciful and imaginative. The passionate intermediate episodes appear to be afterthoughts. I remember very well when Chopin played it here and closed in F major; now he closes in A minor.’

The question of key remained an issue even once Chopin had settled on his conclusion in Majorca in 1839. The ballade begins unambiguously in F major and ends equally so in A minor. The two key centres are not so close harmonically, but – for a pianist – they are physically close: the two chords share two of their three notes. Musically, the harmonic shift is so inexorable that Brahms, who edited the Breitkopf & Härtel edition of the ballades, referred to Op.38 without question in his correspondence as ‘the A minor ballade’.

This was Chopin’s favourite. Sometimes he would play just the lilting and gracious opening, but the drama of the piece – as well as its fearsome difficulties – comes from the *Presto con fuoco* and *Agitato* sections. These play frenzied passions against the serenity of the *Andantino* – a contrast of opposites and without softening transitions, leading Busoni to say that it was ‘remarkably badly composed’!

**Ballade in G minor, Op.23**

*Largo – Moderato – Meno mosso – Presto con fuoco*

Chopin begins this first work in a novel genre by leaving his listeners in the dark. The opening *Largo* gesture, briefly imposing, is harmonically ambiguous to its final chord, only resolving with the beginning of the tender, waltz-like main idea.

Schumann described Chopin’s Op.38 ballade as ‘perhaps his most personal if not most finished’. It was dedicated to him, yet it left him with mixed feelings – perhaps because the music so powerfully mirrors the manic-depressive shifts that plagued both composers.
This in turn is back to front, with the musical phrases organised as Answer!–Question? The lyricism soon turns to epic virtuosity and this ballade has often been linked to ‘Conrad Wallenrod’, a fiery and patriotic ballad by Adam Mickiewicz, despite all lack of evidence of a direct relationship between the poem and the music. In fact the Polish poet provided inspiration rather than models, as Robert Schumann reported a few years later: Chopin ‘told us the how he was prompted to his ballades by poems of Mickiewicz.’

Ballade in A flat major, Op.47

*Allegretto*

Completed and published in 1841, the third ballade is the most gentle and elegant of the four. Some of that refined elegance and subdued passion is captured in the frontispiece that Aubrey Beardsley drew for an early publication: it shows a woman in plumed riding habit on a Lipizzaner stallion – perfectly poised on its hind legs in the classic *levade* of the Spanish riding school.

Chopin had an enduring passion for the music of Bach and as a young man he had made a thorough study of baroque counterpoint. But the results are exquisitely buried – as in the intricacies of this ballade – within Chopin’s unique style. The third ballade shares many qualities of the first two, not least in the way it sets contrasting themes in confrontation. But, as Schumann wrote, it ‘is distinguished from his early ones in form and character...its poetic fragrance cannot be further analysed.’

Ballade in F minor, Op.52

*Andante con moto*

The final ballade, composed in 1842 and published the following year, did not enjoy much popularity in Chopin’s lifetime, although it has since been recognised as a masterpiece.

As in the second ballade, the main theme unfurls from ‘almost nothing’, easing us into the narrative mood. The rhythmic framework is a waltz but the character is introverted and sophisticated, with long, intricately built phrases and richly developed harmonic ideas.

This ballade is the longest of the four, and its uninterrupted span of music sustains a compelling momentum – less through tempo juxtapositions, as in the other ballades, and more through ever-increasing complexity of melodic and rhythmic detail.

Adapted from notes by

YVONNE FRINDLE and DAVID GARRETT (*Children’s Corner*)
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JEAN-EFFLAM BAVOUZET IN RECITAL  

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)  
Piano Sonata No.22 in F major, Op.54  
In tempo d’un Menuetto  
Allegretto  
Piano Sonata No.24 in F sharp major, Op.78 (Für Therese)  
Adagio cantabile – Allegro ma non troppo  
Allegro vivace  
Piano Sonata No.25 in G major, Op.79  
Presto all tedesca  
Andante  
Vivace  
Piano Sonata No.26 in E flat major, Op.81a (Les Adieux)  
Das Lebewohl (Farewell). Adagio – Allegro  
Abwesenheit (Absence). Andante espressivo  
Das Wiedersehen (The Return). Vivacissimamente  

INTERVAL  

BRUNO MANTOVANI (born 1974)  
Le Livre de Jeb (The Book of JEB)  
AUSTRALIAN PREMIERE  

MAURICE RAVEL (1875–1937)  
Miroirs (Mirrors)  
Noctuelles (Night Moths)  
Oiseaux tristes (Sad Birds)  
Une Barque sur l’océan (A Barque on the Ocean)  
Alborada del gracios (Morning Serenade for the Jester)  
La Vallée des cloches (The Valley of the Bells)  

PRESENTING PARTNER  

This recital will be recorded for broadcast on ABC Classic FM.  
Pre-concert talk by David Garrett at 6.15pm in the First Floor Reception Room.  
Visit sydneysymphony.com/talk-bios for speaker biographies.  
Estimated durations:  
12 minutes, 10 minutes, 11 minutes,  
18 minutes, 20-minute interval,  
14 minutes, 27 minutes  
The recital will conclude at approximately 9.10pm.
Jean-Efflam Bavouzet attributes his first visit to Sydney, in 2011, to the influence of Vladimir Ashkenazy, with whom he is ‘honoured to have a strong and inspirational ongoing musical collaboration’. This is something of a pattern in this year’s recital series, with Alexander Gavrylyuk and Lukáš Vondráček also first appearing in SSO concerts through the endorsement or encouragement of the orchestra’s former principal conductor. ‘I was impressed by the highly receptive audience and the energy of this town and its musical life,’ recalls Bavouzet. On this return visit he brings his wife so she, too, can ‘discover the richness of Sydney’.

Those who were at Bavouzet’s 2011 recital will no doubt remember the richness of his programming, finding connections between Beethoven and Liszt, Wagner and Debussy. ‘I love building programs around one composer,’ he says, ‘or with a kind of “pedagogic” demonstration of whatever musical statement I want to make. But I also love to be guided only by my hedonistic pleasure.’

There’s a sense of indulgent pleasure in the first half of this year’s program, with not two (as originally programmed) but four Beethoven sonatas! But perhaps there’s an element of pedagogic demonstration as well, since three are from the same brief period of Beethoven’s life (1809–10).

Over the past two years, Bavouzet has been recording the complete Beethoven sonatas and, unlike some pianists, he has chosen to record them in more or less chronological order. ‘It is a fascinating journey through Beethoven’s evolution,’ he says, ‘that of his mind and that of the sonata form as such. Not many composers evolved so drastically in their lifetime. Liszt, Bartók...’ Later he observes that Beethoven is a composer with whom he had an instant and deep affinity, but also that the interpretation of his music ‘goes through more important
changes throughout one’s life than that of most others.”

Bavouzet will be recording the sonatas we hear in this recital for the third volume in his Beethoven cycle; like many artists, he performs works in concert before recording them ‘so as to bring closer together the two different worlds’ of the stage and studio. Recording, he says, has changed stage performance for the better and for worse. ‘Artists as well as audiences face now completely different expectations in the concert situation.’ Recordings are supposed to be technically perfect (flawless playing, perfect acoustic conditions) but this is more difficult to achieve in live performance – ‘thus artists tend to be more careful, disadvantaging the risk-taking so essential for great interpretation’.

After interval, the program jumps forward a century (and then another!) to give us Ravel’s Miroirs and a fairly new piece, Le Livre de Jeb (The Book of JEB) by Bruno Mantovani. The shared connection here is the dedication of music to friends. Miroirs was dedicated to five of Ravel’s friends in the ‘Club’ des Apaches – artistic ‘street ruffians’, determined to turn Paris on its head. The Book of JEB was written for Bavouzet, the ‘JEB’ of the title.

Bavouzet met Mantovani’s music before he met the man himself: ‘I completely fell in love with his quintet, The Blue Girl with Red Wagon’. They then met in Rome and later were invited to the same festival. ‘We have never been far away from each other, musically speaking, ever since. I cherish this ten-year friendship with Bruno tremendously!’

Bavouzet tells me that when Mantovani gave him the score of The Book of JEB he said, ‘This is for you and it is you!’ If you want, he says, you can hear it as a musical portrait. It even begins with a chord (from the Blue Girl… quintet) that had fascinated Bavouzet’s wife and which ‘became totally associated with her, so it had to be in this portrait piece.’ He goes on, ‘My slightly overexuberant character comes through truthfully (she says). To play it is like looking in a mirror, with pleasure and slight disbelief: is it really how I am? Or is it more how others see me? Probably both.’

Mirrors, and musical portraits. And there’s a hidden link: Miroirs is one of Mantovani’s favourite pieces. This might be one of those programs guided as much by the performer’s hedonistic pleasure as by musical statements, in which case we’re in for an inspirational evening.

YVONNE FRINDLE, SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA © 2014
Sonatas and Mirrors

Four Beethoven Sonatas

In this recital, Beethoven the heroic personality and mighty pianist is revealed to have an intimate, personal side. The four sonatas in Jean-Efflam Bavouzet’s selection are modest in scale, unusual in form and character, and often introspective in tone.

The Sonata No.22 in F major, Op.54 is an almost freakish anomaly nestled between the monumental Waldstein and Appassionata sonatas. Completed in 1804, it doesn’t demonstrate the ‘heroic’ vein of 1803–08 in the way its more substantial neighbours do. The remaining three sonatas in this recital, Op.78, Op.79 and Op.81a (Les Adieux or Das Lebewohl) were all composed in the period 1809–10 and mark Beethoven’s return to the piano sonata after a gap of four years. They also mark a new phase, more introspective, even lonely, in which Beethoven was reaching for a new style.

The Op.54 Sonata in F major from 1804 seems out-of-character for the ‘heroic’ Beethoven of popular imagination. It is, unusually, in two movements rather than three or four, a feature only shared with a handful of Beethoven’s sonatas. But it lacks the straightforward and light tone of Beethoven’s earlier two-movement sonatas. Instead it is almost experimental in character, extraordinarily compact and with what Charles Rosen describes as a ‘radical simplicity’.

Throughout its history it has prompted puzzled reactions. Adolf Bernhard Marx (a friend of Mendelssohn) called it ‘a strange production’; the 19th-century Beethoven biographer Wilhelm von Lenz found it ‘bizarre’:

First there is a minuet which is not a minuet, and of which the motif, if it is a motif, makes a noise for a moment in the lowest basses before losing itself in a forest of octaves...The Allegretto must have fallen from the pen of the master when he was in God knows what kind of a mood; when he wasn’t even thinking...

The first movement – which, as Lenz correctly observes, is ‘in the tempo of a minuet’ rather than a strict minuet – combines the style and structure of the dance with something approaching sonata principle. The murmuring second movement (Allegretto) is an exercise in perpetual motion, but one that is marked dolce (sweetly), suggesting that even fleeting fingers can be poetic too.
The Sonata in F sharp, Op.78 was written in 1809 and, like the Op.54 sonata in this recital, has only two movements. They are curiously contrasted too, since the *ma non troppo* (‘not too much’) indication, suggesting moderation, might be understood to apply to all aspects of the movement, while the *Allegro vivace* movement, far from being moderate, is extremely manic.

The opening of the first movement leads us to think we are in for a long adagio introduction, but it gives way after only four bars to the calm principal theme of the first movement. (This tiny Adagio turns out to have been the only slow music in the sonata.) The writing is principally melodic, even the semiquaver passages demanding a lyrical touch. These semiquaver passages are also unusually written, as they can be heard as counterpoint.

Although the second movement is in the same prickly key as the first (F sharp major), Beethoven manages to avoid noticing this for quite a long time, and there are many traps for the ear (and the hand as well!) in the ‘Scotch snap’ figurations. Even Czerny thought that this second movement was awkward to play.

Beethoven claimed that the work was a special favourite of his, saying that it was much better than the *Moonlight Sonata* which everyone loved. The nickname ‘Für Therese’ refers to the dedication to one of his beloved piano students, Therese von Brunswick, who must have been a fine player to have mastered it.

There was a time when, because of the music’s surface simplicity and relative ease of playing, the Op.79 Sonata in G major was assumed to be an early production of Beethoven’s, trotted out for much later publication out of expediency. There are, however, sketches from around 1809, for what is essentially the opening of the first movement under the heading ‘Sonata Facile’. And Beethoven himself originally suggested that it be published as a ‘sonatina’ (little sonata). Where the Beethoven of the *Waldstein* sonata was pushing technical boundaries, here he seems to be catering to an amateur market.

In this respect, however, the Op.79 sonata is misleading. While the second and third movements would not tax a competent amateur, the first movement is more difficult. It’s a *Presto alla tedesca*: as fast as possible and in the German style, the latter a reference to the German precursor to the waltz. The result is a breathless triple-time movement, good humoured and lilting, but not without its challenges!

The *Andante* movement also lilts, taking the form of a gentle barcarolle, and the *Vivace* makes for a rollicking finale.
The Sonata in E flat major, Op.81a, *Das Lebewohl*, is the only one of Beethoven’s sonatas to bear a definite program or narrative. (It was his publisher who translated the title into French, *Les Adieux*, against his wishes.) Its three movements mark the *Farewell*, the *Absence* and the *Return* of Beethoven’s patron Archduke Rudolf, himself a fine pianist and Beethoven’s only composition student.

The *Farewell* (and the reason for preferring the nickname in its German form) is marked by a simple *Adagio* introduction, with the syllables ‘Le – be – wohl’ written over the first three notes, a striking ‘horn call’ motto that takes on a life of its own, turning up in fresh harmonic and expressive transformations. The horn call, as Charles Rosen points out, was in 1810 a well established poetic symbol of distance, isolation and memory.

The slow movement, marked *Andante espressivo*, begins with a questioning idea and a feeling of disquieting pathos. The music seems to drift, as if in resigned acceptance of loss, before the finale breaks in, revealing the movement to have been one, long upbeat. The finale (*Vivacissimamente*, the ultimate in liveliness!) conveys the unalloyed delight at the return of a dear friend. The thematic ideas are joyous and they are given a brilliant, irrepressible treatment.

Music for Friends

Pianist Jean-Efflam Bavouzet describes his friend Bruno Mantovani’s music as being like the music of Haydn or Stravinsky: it makes him feel cleverer when listening to it! (Many theatre-goers have the same reaction to Tom Stoppard’s plays.) But, Bavouzet emphasises, ‘it reaches also my heart. I was moved to tears at the premiere of his Concerto for two violas.’ Bavouzet first encountered Mantovani’s music through the piano quintet *The Blue Girl with Red Wagon* and it remains his most cherished work of the composer’s: ‘In the quintet his use of jazz idioms is one of the most brilliant and inspired I can recall.’

Bruno Mantovani was born in 1974 at Châtillon-sous-Bagneux and studied first at the Paris Conservatory, before completing a master’s degree in musicology at the University of Rouen and courses at Royaumont Abbey and Ircam. Since then, his compositions have been performed in the major concert halls of Europe and North America and he collaborates with leading performers and ensembles, his projects including violin concertos for Renaud Capuçon and Frank-Peter Zimmermann and orchestral works for Ensemble Modern.

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**BEETHOVEN**

Sonata No.26 in E flat, Op.81a (*Les Adieux*)

Das Lebewohl (Farewell)
Adagio – Allegro
Abswesenheit (Absence)
Andante espressivo
Das Wiedersehen (The Return)
Vivacissimamente

**BEETHOVEN TO HIS PUBLISHER,**
**BREITKOPF & HäRTEL:**

‘I have just received the ‘Lebewohl’ and so forth. I see that after all you have published other copies with a French title. Why, pray? For ‘Lebewohl’ means something quite different from ‘Les Adieux’. The first is said in a warm-hearted manner to one person, the other to a whole assembly, to entire towns. As you have had my works reviewed so abominably, you too must suffer for it....Well, let us say, basta–’
(Pierre Boulez) and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra (Riccardo Chailly). In addition to Le Livre de Jeb (commissioned by the Festival Piano aux Jacobins, Toulouse in 2009), he dedicated his Fantaisie for piano and orchestra to Jean-Efflam Bavouzet. Since 2010 he has also been headmaster of the Paris Conservatory.

The title of Le Livre de Jeb (The Book of JEB) is a play on words. It brings to mind Job of the Old Testament but in fact does not refer directly to this mythical figure from the Euphrates region. Rather, it is a portrait of its dedicatee, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet (JEB).

The composer writes...

This wonderful virtuoso and I have long been accomplices both in music and in friendship....Many features of the music were suggested by characteristics of Jean-Efflam’s playing. His past as a percussionist, notably, turns up the central section, where alternating hands allow complex rhythmic figures to emerge. By contrast, his marvellous pearly sound, heard especially in his Debussy playing, made me want to resort several times to high-pitched textures, vivacious and airy.

But Jean-Efflam’s influence on my score is also linked to our friendship and the path we have travelled together for several years now. On the occasion of a concert where he was playing my quintet with piano Blue Girl with Red Wagon, my comrade told me how much he and his wife Andrea loved a chord stated in the first bars of that work. Remembering this strong emotional reaction, I decided to use this chord again at the beginning of Livre de Jeb. This recurring chord has an important function in shaping the work. My musical materials here are by no means abstract – they serve to pay homage
to one of the major pianists of our time, and to a faithful and generous friend.

* * * * * *

Ravel’s five-movement suite *Miroirs* (Mirrors) of 1904–5 was dedicated to five different friends and colleagues – his intention seems to have been in part to ‘mirror’ aspects of the dedicatees themselves. The dedicatees were, like Ravel, members of the avant-garde group of artists known as the Apaches, which also included the poet Tristan Klingsor and composers Falla and Stravinsky. *Miroirs* would soon find a sad pendant in the suite *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, six movements dedicated to friends who had died in World War I.

‘Noctuelles’ are moths; their flitting back and forth is clear from the beginning although the slower music which soon intervenes does not seem to serve any programmatic purpose. *Noctuelles* is dedicated to Léon-Paul Fargue (1876–1947) and the title derives from a rather cryptic line of his poetry (‘Les noctuelles d’un hangar partent d’un vol cravater d’autres poutres’ – ‘The moths in a hangar fly off to collar other beams’).

In *Oiseaux tristes* a lonely birdsong, ringing out from start to finish, is joined by others along the way. Its tristesse springs not so much from the birdsongs themselves as from their musical context, in particular the hypnotically flowing

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**RAVEL**

**Miroirs (Mirrors)**

*Noctuelles* (Night Moths)
*Oiseaux tristes* (Sad Birds)
*Une Barque sur l’océan* (A Barque on the Ocean)
*Alborada del gracioso* (Morning Serenade for the Jester)
*La Vallée des cloches* (The Valley of the Bells)
accompaniment. The piece is dedicated to the Catalan pianist Ricardo Viñes, who premiered many important solo works from this period, including Ravel’s *Jeux d’eau* and *Gaspard de la Nuit*. Ravel reportedly found it amusing to dedicate to such a pianist ‘a piece that was not in the least “pianistic”’.

*Une Barque sur l’océan* again allows its composer to display his skill at imitative effects. Depicting a boat on the water by means of arpeggios in the bass under slower music in the treble has a long and distinguished tradition and Ravel does not disappoint, although the transformations to which he subjects his materials soon render programmatic interpretation not only difficult but superfluous. Tristan Klingsor wrote in an obituary of the dedicatee, painter Paul Sordes, that he could have been ‘une sorte de Ravel de la palette’, but also that as a pianist he was capable of sight-reading the most subtle of modern inflections and harmonies.

*Alborada del gracioso* is dedicated to the writer Michel Dimitri Calvocoressi, who had provided the folk texts for Ravel’s *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques*. It shows the Spanish influence which was fundamental to Ravel’s music throughout his career, and which was important to many other French composers of the time, although Ravel’s identification with the Basque region of his birth made it in his case a little closer to home. The ‘gracioso’ (clown or jester) of the title begins the work with a virtuosic guitar prelude; his ‘alborada’ (aubade or serenade) takes the form of several recitative-like passages in the tenor register of the keyboard. He does acrobatics as well, not to mention castanet solos, rendered for the piano in virtuosic repeated notes. The light action of Ravel’s own Érard piano would certainly have facilitated the aspects of technique (not only repeated notes but frequent glissandos as well) which are given pride of place here.

*La Vallée des cloches*, dedicated to the composer Maurice Delage, offers even more opportunities than *Un Barque...* for imitative music – but again the best of this music begins where the title stops, from the broad melody which emerges from the piano’s middle register through to the unresolved chords with which the work and the cycle end. It seems apt that a cycle whose penultimate movement ends so emphatically, and which calls upon so much imagery and virtuosity, should conclude in such an enigmatic mood – it is after all what lies beneath the surface that gives *Miroirs* such a hold on the imagination.

Adapted in part from notes by STEPHEN McINTYRE (Beethoven, Op.78); BRUNO MANTOVANI, and CARL ROSMAN (Ravel)
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