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LEON McCAWLEY



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Wednesday 4th December 2019



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TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME

Haydn

Sonata in G major, Hob XVI:40

(Last performance at ICC 02/10/2002)

Schubert

Sonata in C minor, D958

(Last performance at ICC 17/04/1996)

Schumann

'Abegg' variations, op 1

(First performance at ICC)

INTERVAL

(Coffee, tea and bar facilities available in the Winter Garden)

Gál

nos. 5 & 6 of 24 Fugues, op 108

(First performance at ICC)

Brahms

Vier Klavierstücke, op 119

(Last performance at ICC 28/08/1946 – Concert 1 Season 1)

Chopin

Polonaise-Fantaisie in A flat major, op 61

(Last performance at ICC 03/10/2001)

Ilkley Concert Club

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The Club records its appreciation of the invaluable assistance and support given by the City of Bradford Metropolitan Council.



PROGRAMME NOTES

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN
(1732-1809)

Sonata in G major, Hob XVI:40

Allegro innocentemente
Presto

Haydn wrote more than sixty keyboard sonatas chiefly for the harpsichord and clavichord and did not begin writing solely for the forte-piano (precursor of the modern pianoforte) until the mid-1780s. However, from the late 1770s and 1780s, the sonatas, published by Cramer between 1784-1785, reflect an instrumental transition period combining features of the earlier instruments while not yet exploiting the full capabilities of the forte-piano; that was left to Beethoven.

Both movements of XVI:40 are in variation form. The first movement has a lilting pastoral metre but soon becomes anything but *innocentemente* with off-beat *sforzando* accents (shocking enough to be erased in 19th century editions), broken phrases and a strong harmonic structure. The finale, with its irregular phrasing, is full of major-minor contrasts and rhythmic interest.

(Duration: approx. 8 minutes)

FRANZ SCHUBERT
(1797-1828)

Sonata in C minor, D958

Allegro
Adagio
Menuetto: Allegro – Trio
Allegro

Schubert's three piano sonatas D958, D959 and D960 are his last major compositions for solo piano, written during the last months of his life (spring-autumn 1828) but not published until ten years after his death. Although during the nineteenth century they were considered inferior to the sonatas of Beethoven, they are now recognised as showing a unique mature style in design, texture and emotional expression. The three last sonatas are interconnected in their structural, harmonic and melodic elements and are frequently regarded as a trilogy. Particularly noticeable in D958 is the virtuosic final movement which is in a relentless rhythm with frequent hand-crossings and leaps across the keyboard.

(Duration: approx. 30 minutes)

ROBERT SCHUMANN
(1810-1856)

'Abegg' variations, op 1

Theme
Variations
energetico
basso parlando
corrente
cantabile
Finale alla fantasia

Many stories have been woven around the inspiration for Schumann's 'ABEGG' variations. However, the most likely is that the young and impressionable Schumann was attracted to a Fraulein Meta Abegg whom he met at a ball, although why he then dedicated his set of variations of 1831, based on the five-note theme A - B flat - E - G - G (i.e. 'ABEGG'), to a fictitious 'Pauline, Countess of Abegg' remains unclear. The theme occurs both forwards and backwards over four variations and a sparkling finale. According to one biographer, Schumann intended the work to be 'conventional, entertaining and pleasing', but, given its level of virtuosic difficulty, it was almost certainly not written for amateur or domestic performance.

(Duration: approx. 12 minutes)

INTERVAL

(Coffee, tea and bar facilities available in the Winter Garden)

HANS GÁL
(1890-1987)

24 Fugues, op 108 (1980)

no. 5 in D major (allegretto)
no. 6 in D minor (andantino)

The Austrian composer Hans Gál was born near Vienna. In 1929, he became Director of the Mainz Conservatoire, but his works were banned following the Anschluss and he fled Austria in 1938, to settle finally in Edinburgh. Gál obtained a post in the music faculty at Edinburgh University and was closely

involved with the Edinburgh Festival. However, he and his music remained firmly grounded in the great Austro-German tradition and he was never fully assimilated into Scottish musical culture.

Gál was a prolific composer in many genres, including the piano for which he composed continuously from about 1910. The 24 Preludes of 1960 and 24 Fugues of 1980 (which he wrote as a ninetieth birthday present to himself) demonstrate his affinity with the two giants of the prelude and fugue forms for keyboard, Chopin and Bach.

Tonight's soloist, Leon McCawley, is a distinguished exponent of Gál's music and has recorded his complete works for piano.

(Duration: approx. 10 minutes)

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Vier Klavierstücke, op 119

Intermezzo in B minor

Intermezzo in E minor

Intermezzo in C major

Rhapsody in E flat major

Together with three other collections of smaller piano pieces (op 116, op 117 and op 118) the four-character pieces comprising op 119 were published in 1892-1893 towards the end of Brahms' life; the E flat Rhapsody was his last piece for solo piano. The complete set was given its first London performance in 1894. Brahms used the words 'intermezzo' and 'rhapsody' rather loosely and more as umbrella terms although, as in op 119, his rhapsodies are usually more passionate and capricious than the intermezzi; indeed, he originally intended the title 'Capriccio' for the Rhapsody op 79 no.1.

Brahms described the prevailing mood of the B minor Intermezzo in 1893 in a letter to Clara Schumann: 'The little piece is exceptionally melancholic ... as if one wanted to suck melancholy out of each and every one [bar and note]'. Despite this description, Clara loved the work, calling it 'a grey pearl'. The second Intermezzo is wistful, yet playful, with a central section in the style of a graceful *Ländler*, while no. 3 is a quicksilver Intermezzo beginning with a cross-accented tune in the right hand played simultaneously beneath upper

chords. Throughout op 119, Brahms experimented with rhythm and phrase lengths. This is particularly apparent in the E flat Rhapsody, where he maintains 5-bar phrases for sixty bars and constructs the second theme from eight-bar phrases divided into 3-2-3 rather than the conventional 4-4.

(Duration: approx. 14 minutes)

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)

***Polonaise-Fantaisie* in A flat major, op 61**

The *Polonaise-Fantaisie* in A flat major op 61 was Chopin's last extended work, published in 1846, three years before his death. This uniquely-constructed, exploratory and original work bewildered many of his contemporaries including Liszt, who found its harmonic complexity and intricate form 'unfathomable'. Indeed, judging from the chaotic manuscript, its composition caused Chopin much difficulty.

Following an *Allegro maestoso* introduction, the distinctive rhythm and melodic style of the *Polonaise* characterises the opening theme. This comes and goes before segueing into the Fantasy, which combines the mood of a nocturne with rhapsodic improvisation. Stylistic parallels with Chopin's earlier F minor Fantasy op 49 include the work's overall tonality (A flat), the key of its slower middle section (B major) and the motif of the descending fourth.

Commentators have suggested that the *Polonaise-Fantaisie* represents a change in Chopin's style, from his 'late' to a 'final' period, citing the unconventional ambiguities of the work, its extreme difficulty and its stylistic innovations, such as the impressionistic use of the sustaining pedal. In the climax of the final pages, Chopin uses triplets and dotted rhythms played simultaneously, a notation frequently used by Bach and Schubert but rare in the works of Romantic composers.

(Duration: approx. 15 minutes)

Programme notes © Ann Keith and C.N. Lane

LEON McCAWLEY

No stranger to Ilkley, **Leon McCawley** was last here in 2012 when, with Lucy Gould and David Pyatt, he performed both the Brahms and the Ethel Smyth Horn Trios. He was also the duo partner for cellist Adrian Brendel in 2009. In both those concerts he delighted us with some lesser known solo contributions. We heard the Nocturne op 33 by Samuel Barber in 2012, and in 2009 Leon introduced us to the piano music of Hans Gál performing his Three Sketches for piano solo op 7. Tonight, we are to hear more of Hans Gál's music, a composer whose work Leon has championed for many years.

Born in 1973 in the village of Croft in Cheshire, Leon's talent was recognised at an early age and encouraged by his primary school. He took advantage of performing opportunities that were presented to him such as playing the organ for the local church. By the age of ten he was studying at the RNCM Junior School and Chetham's School, Manchester, with Heather Slade-Lipkin. Later he continued his musical studies at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia with Eleanor Sokolof. At sixteen Leon was the winner of the Piano Section in the 1990 BBC Young Musician of the Year competition. In 1993 he won the International Beethoven Piano Competition in Vienna, the prize being a Bösendorfer Concert Grand Piano! The same year he won second prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition, which launched his career. Since then his concert appearances and extensive discography have established him as a pianist of great integrity and variety in Classical, Romantic and 20th century repertoire.

Notable recitals in past seasons include: London Piano Series at Wigmore Hall, four invitations to the International Piano Series at London's Southbank Centre, New York's Lincoln Center, Hong Kong Arts Festival and Phillips Collection in Washington DC. He can frequently be heard on BBC Radio 3 both in performance and interview with recent broadcasts including In Tune, the Wigmore Hall Lunchtime Series and Performance on 3.

As a concerto soloist Leon has performed with many of the leading British orchestras. He made his 6th appearance at the BBC Proms in August this year performing John Ireland's Piano Concerto with the BBC Concert Orchestra under Bramwell Tovey. This was televised on BBC4. Further afield he has performed concertos with the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Cincinnati, Dallas, RTÉ National and St Petersburg Symphony Orchestras and the Malaysian and Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestras.

Highlights of the 2018/19 season included return engagements with the Royal Philharmonic at Cadogan Hall and Orquesta Sinfonia del Principado de Asturias in Oviedo and Gijón. Celebrating 25 years since his debut there Leon performed Beethoven's three late sonatas at Wigmore Hall and also at the new Stoller Hall in Manchester.

A keen chamber musician Leon has collaborated with a range of ensembles and musicians including the Belcea, Brodsky and Emperor Quartets; cellists Steven Isserlis and Adrian Brendel and horn player David Pyatt at the BBC Proms Chamber Series, BBC Radio 3 Lunchtime Series at Wigmore Hall, as well as the Aldeburgh, Brighton, Cheltenham, Edinburgh, Galway and Westport Festivals.

An acclaimed exponent of Mozart, for the 250th Anniversary of Mozart's birth, Leon performed and recorded the complete cycle of Mozart Piano Sonatas. According to International Piano magazine 'There's absolutely no vanity in his playing, which is bright clean and unfailingly communicative. In his hands the Mozartian oeuvre emerged with striking vividness.'

Many awards have been bestowed on Leon's impressive discography including Gramophone magazine's Editor's Choice for his recordings of both Schumann's piano music and the Complete Works of Hans Gál; a Diapason d'Or for the Complete Mozart Piano Sonatas and a Critic's Choice from Gramophone for the recording of Barber's piano music. His recording of Brahms' Piano Music was selected as Classic FM's CD of the Week. Together with John Lenehan and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra he has recorded the Vaughan Williams Double Piano Concerto which was awarded five stars by BBC Music magazine and announced that the work had 'not been better served on record before'.

Leon is currently recording the complete piano sonatas of Haydn. He has completed 2 volumes so far, the second of which was released in September this year. BBC Music Magazine reported that 'The sparkle of McCawley's touch is instantly apparent...most impressive throughout the disc is McCawley's command of subtle nuance and rubato without ever sounding self-conscious or mannered. This collection should stand high on any list.' The third volume will be available soon.

Leon is professor of piano at the Royal College of Music. He is married to the painter Anna Hyunsook Paik.

Biographical notes compiled by Sarah Warnes

CLUB NOTES

PROGRAMME ADVERTISERS

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NOVEL ACTIVITIES IN THE 75th SEASON!

One of the highlights of next season will undoubtedly be the concert in January 2021 when we are to host the unique collaboration between Rachel Podger, the virtuoso baroque violinist, and the a cappella singing group Voces8. 'A Guardian Angel', as this joint project is called, grew out of a CD of Rachel's in which she included a performance of the Passacaglia from Heinrich Biber's collection of 'Mystery' or 'Rosary' sonatas for solo violin, which is itself linked to the feast of the guardian angel. As well as the Biber, Rachel will be playing solo violin works by Bach and Mattheis and Voces8 will be singing choral works featuring angels from Monteverdi to Mendelssohn. Finally, they will be combining forces to perform pieces by Sir James Macmillan and Owain Park for the unusual combination of violin and voices.

As if that were not sufficient novelty, we shall be experimenting by presenting two add-on activities in association with the concert. The first will be a vocal workshop in the afternoon at which members of the club and of other local choirs can enjoy singing together with members of Voces8. Then before the concert there will be an opportunity to hear Rachel Podger and Barnaby Smith from Voces8 in conversation discussing their experience of musical collaboration. If these are successful, the Committee will be encouraged to look for other opportunities to encourage wider appreciation of music in addition to our usual concerts.

Chris Skidmore (Chairman of ICC)

RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

Haydn: Leon McCawley has embarked on a cycle of the Haydn Sonatas, and the first 2 volumes are excellent. Tonight's work is featured on SOMM0602 at full price, and 5 other Haydn Sonatas complete the disc.

Schubert: Alfred Brendel is at his best in these 1970s recordings of the last three Schubert Sonatas, including D958, and 3 *Klavierstücke*, D946. The 2-disc set, Decca 438 7032, is at medium price.

Schumann: A fairly new CD from Imogen Cooper has had excellent reviews, and also includes 2 Novelletten, the *Davidsbündlertänze*, and Variations on an Original Theme, from Chandos 10874 (full price). A good medium price alternative comes from Idil Biret on Naxos 8.571251, coupled with the Piano Sonata no.2, Fantasia in C & Toccata in C.

Gál: Mr McCawley has very successfully recorded all Gál's Piano Works on a 3 Avie CD set (AV 2064) at medium price.

Brahms: Murray Perahia plays these pieces superbly on Sony 88697727252 with the Handel Variations and 6 *Klavierstücke* op 118. The disc is at full price but has a very long duration.

Chopin: 7 Polonaises are conveniently included on DGG 457 7112 (medium price). I am not always enthusiastic about Pollini's Chopin playing, but these performances are splendid.

Raymond Waud. rayward@gmail.com

NEXT CONCERT – WEDNESDAY 15th JANUARY 2020 AT 8PM

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