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BENJAMIN GROSVENOR
piano



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PROGRAMME

Chopin

Nocturne in C sharp minor, op posth

Chopin

Barcarolle in F sharp major, op 60

Liszt

Piano sonata in B minor S178

INTERVAL

Liszt

Berceuse, S174 (first version)

Chopin

Piano sonata no. 3 in B minor, op 58

PROGRAMME NOTES

FREDERIC CHOPIN
(1810-1849)

Nocturne in C sharp minor
op posth

Dedicated to his sister Ludwika ‘as an exercise before [you begin] the study of my second concerto’ but not published until 21 years after the composer’s death, the Nocturne number 20 combines suppressed passion with a haunting wistfulness. A quiet introduction leads to the main theme, a dreamy, continuous melody which shifts into a *pianissimo* before ending in C sharp major. The Nocturne has moving associations with the Second World War. The Polish pianist Natalia Karp played it to the notorious commandant of the Palszow concentration camp, Amon Goth, who was so impressed that he spared her life. The Nocturne was the last piece of music broadcast on free Polish radio in September 1939. The performer was Władysław Szpilman, who, several years later when a fugitive from the SS in the ruins of Warsaw, played the Nocturne to a German officer who then sheltered Szpilman, as depicted in Roman Polanski’s 2002 film, *The Pianist*.

Last performance at ICC 11/05/1983

Duration: approx. 6 minutes

FREDERIC CHOPIN
(1810-1849)

Barcarolle in F sharp major, op 60

A *barcarolle* (Italian *barcarola* or *barcaruola*, from *barca* 'boat') is a composition in the style of Venetian gondoliers and is characterized by a rhythm reminiscent of the gondolier's stroke, almost invariably in 6/8 time at a moderate tempo. When Chopin completed his *Barcarolle* in 1846, he had already begun to suffer from the pericarditis (a rare complication of chronic tuberculosis) which would kill him three years later. Notwithstanding the technical difficulties of the piece, the ailing composer included it in the last

concert in his beloved Paris in February 1848. The *Barcarolle* reveals Chopin's affinity to the *bel canto* operatic style of Bellini and Donizetti. Double notes in the right hand along with a spare arpeggiated accompaniment in the left hand explicitly imitate the style of the great arias and scenes from the *bel canto* repertoire. The writing for the right hand becomes increasingly florid as multiple lines spin filigree and ornamentation around each other.

Last performance at ICC 11/05/1983

Duration: approx. 9 minutes

FRANZ LISZT (1811-1886)

Piano sonata in B minor S178

By the time he completed his extraordinary B Minor Sonata in 1853, Liszt was settled in Weimar and had largely abandoned his career as a virtuoso for that of a full time composer. The Sonata unfolds across thirty minutes without a break. While it contains distinct sections, the entire work (marked throughout by a remarkable economy of thematic material) is encompassed within a single overarching sonata form (exposition, development, and recapitulation) making it effectively a sonata within a sonata. Some commentators have identified in the Sonata's dramatic contrasts a Manichaean struggle between Good and Evil or even a musical précis of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The unique structure of the Sonata is such that scholarly debate as to whether the Sonata comprises three or four movements remains unresolved. There is, however, no mistaking the splendid slow movement, marked *Andante sostenuto*, which stands at the work's centre.

Perhaps on account of its startling originality, it was not until the 20th century that the Sonata became firmly established in the popular repertoire. Contemporaries of Liszt divided into two familiar camps: progressives, such as Richard Wagner, who greatly admired the work, and the more conservative inheritors of the Classicism of Mozart and Beethoven. Clara (wife of the dedicatee, Robert Schumann) refused to play such 'blind noise' whilst the

critic Eduard Hanslick (a close friend of Brahms) remarked that ‘anyone who has heard it and finds it beautiful is beyond help’.

First performance at ICC

Duration: approx. 30 minutes

INTERVAL

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

FRANZ LISZT
(1811-1886)

Berceuse, S174 (first version)

The word *berceuse* is indicative of its use as a lullaby. It derives from the French *bercer* (‘to rock’) and ultimately from the Old French *bers* (‘cradle’). Tonally, most *berceuses* are very simple, often merely alternating tonic and dominant harmonies; since the intended effect is to put a baby to sleep, wild chromaticism or dissonance would be inappropriate. The most notable examples are those composed by Chopin, Brahms and Liszt, who published two versions of tonight’s piece, the first in 1854 and a second in 1862. The rocking tempo is gentle but several times the mood becomes more agitated suggesting a restless or perhaps reluctant sleeper. Finally, slumber is achieved and the cradle rocker exits very quietly.

First performance at ICC

Duration: approx. 10 minutes

FREDERIC CHOPIN
(1810-1849)

Piano sonata no. 3 in B minor
op 58

Allegro maestoso

Scherzo: Molto vivace

Largo

Finale: Presto non tanto

The last of Chopin's three piano sonatas, the B minor, looks both forward and backwards. One of the most technically difficult of his compositions, the Sonata manages to combine the classical structure of Mozart and Beethoven (the first movement, the most substantial of the four, is a classic sonata allegro, the last a *rondo*, and the middle movements take the form of a dance with trio and an instrumental song) whilst simultaneously capturing the essence of Romanticism in music; the first and last movements are *ballades*, a new form pioneered by Chopin and the third a *nocturne*, a post-classical form at which Chopin excelled. The work opens in martial mood, heavy chords and filigree giving way to a more melodic second theme. Motifs of the original theme emerge in the development, which, unconventionally, returns to the second theme (as opposed to the first) for the B major recapitulation which then leads to a powerful coda. Although the quicksilver second movement pauses for a more sombre reflective second subject, it lasts barely two minutes. The *Largo* enters solemnly but soon melts into what has been described as an 'aria of the night'. The mood is serene but also uneasy and questioning. In the *Finale*, uncertainty gives way to frenzy; the galloping of wild horses in the main theme is unmistakable. A confident B major coda brings the movement to a close.

Whilst the Sonata was not at first universally well received (Liszt did not like it whilst some early critics thought the Finale indecently exuberant) it is now widely regarded as the culmination of Chopin's achievement as a composer. The critic Arthur Hedley considered that 'its four movements contain some of the finest music ever written for the piano.'

First performance at ICC

Duration: approx. 39 minutes

(c) C. N. Lane

BENJAMIN GROSVENOR piano

It is a pleasure to be able to welcome British pianist, Benjamin Grosvenor, back to Ilkley for the second time. Benjamin is internationally recognized for his sonorous lyricism and understated brilliance at the keyboard. His virtuosic interpretations are underpinned by a unique balance of technical mastery and intense musicality. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* has praised his ‘astounding technical gifts, the freshness of his imagination, intense concentration, the absence of any kind of show, and the unmistakable sense of poetic immersion directed solely at the realisation of music’. He is undoubtedly one of the most important solo pianists to emerge in recent decades, with *Gramophone* recently acknowledging him as one of the top 50 pianists ever on record.

Benjamin started his musical education with lessons from his mother at home in Essex. His twenty-year career took off when he won the keyboard section of the BBC Young Musician competition in 2004. Following studies at the Royal Academy of Music, he graduated in 2012 with the ‘Queen’s Commendation for Excellence’ as best all-round student in his year and in 2016 he was awarded a RAM Fellowship. From 2010 to 2012 he was also a member of BBC Radio Three’s prestigious New Generation Artists scheme. He was invited to perform at the First Night of the 2011 BBC Proms with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and has since become a regular there over the last decade including at the Last Night of the Proms with Marin Alsop and the BBC Symphony in 2015 and most recently in 2021 with Sir Mark Elder and the Hallé Orchestra in Beethoven’s Piano Concerto no. 4.

Benjamin Grosvenor first appeared at ICC in November 2011 with a programme that included Albeniz, Beethoven and Liszt. In that same year he had signed to Decca Classics, becoming the youngest British musician ever, and the first British pianist in almost 60 years, to sign to the label. The renewal of his partnership with Decca in 2021 coincided with the release of Benjamin’s album ‘Liszt’, which contained his recording of the Liszt piano sonata we shall hear tonight. His most recent release in March 2023 of ‘Schumann and Brahms’ featuring Kreisleriana was praised as a ‘masterpiece’ (*Le Devoir*), selected as Gramophone Editor’s Choice and Diapason d’Or. Released in 2020, his second concerto album featuring Chopin’s piano concerti, recorded with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra under the baton of Elim Chan received both the Gramophone Concerto Award and a Diapason d’Or de L’Année, with Diapason’s critic declaring that the recording is ‘a version to

rank among the best, and confirmation of an extraordinary artist’.

Concerto highlights in this 23/24 season include his much-anticipated debuts with DSO Berlin and Iceland Symphony Orchestra featuring Busoni’s Piano Concerto in the composer’s anniversary year. He also performs with the Gurzenich Orchestra and Elim Chan (Prokofiev 3), the Scottish Chamber Orchestra with Maxim Emelyanychev (Mendelssohn 1) in their 50th anniversary season and with the CBSO, Hallé Orchestra, Washington National, Indianapolis and Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestras. Summer Festivals in 2023 included European touring with the EUYO with Manfred Honeck (Prokofiev 3), the Helsingborg Piano Festival, Festival Berlioz and Summer at Snape.

In much demand as a recitalist, Benjamin takes the programme he plays for us tonight to the Bridgewater Hall on the 12th and at the Gjørvik Resonans Festival Norway on the 14th of January, giving some indication of his working life. The Liszt and Chopin sonatas also form part of his debut programme at ‘Le Piano Symphonique’ the Lucerne Symphony Piano Festival, where his programme also features a World Premiere by Brett Dean, which later receives US and UK premieres at the Chicago Symphony Master series and the Wigmore Hall respectively. His visit to the US in March also contains further performances of the Liszt sonata in Santa Fe and at Duke University, North Carolina. A keen chamber musician, he tours Japan with violinist Sayaka Shoji and the Modigliani Quartet in a programme featuring Chausson’s Concerto for Violin, Piano and String Quartet – including his debut at Suntory Hall, Tokyo. He also tours with his Piano Quartet including regular collaborators Hyeyoon Park, Timothy Ridout and Kian Soltani – with whom he appears at numerous venues including the Royal Concertgebouw, Amsterdam and Laeiszhalle, Hamburg.

Benjamin Grosvenor has received Gramophone’s ‘Young Artist of the Year’, a Classical Brit Critics’ Award, a UK Critics’ Circle Award for Exceptional Young Talent and a Diapason d’Or Jeune Talent Award. He has been featured in two BBC television documentaries, BBC Breakfast, Front Row, as well as in CNN’s ‘Human to Hero’ series. In 2016, he became the inaugural recipient of The Ronnie and Lawrence Ackman Classical Piano Prize with the New York Philharmonic.

Benjamin is an Ambassador of Music Masters, a charity dedicated to making music education accessible to all children regardless of their background, championing diversity and inclusion.

CLUB NOTES

Welcome to new committee members

The final new committee member to introduce is Cath Rudman, who recently joined the committee as Hospitality coordinator. Cath and her husband, Clive, have lived in Ilkley for nearly 40 years. She has worked at Airedale Hospital and in the local community rehabilitation team. Since retiring they have both been volunteering with ICC as hosts for the musicians.

As our Hospitality coordinator, she liaises with the musicians or their agents about a month prior to each concert to ensure we have everything in place for their arrival; coordinating with the Kings Hall staff; arranging meals and overnight stays. On the day of the concert Cath and Clive meet and greet, provide refreshments, and make sure the musicians meet up with their hosts, if they are staying overnight.

Would you like the opportunity to meet with our artists?

Members of the Club regularly act as overnight hosts for our artists after their concerts. They all report what a stimulating and pleasurable experience this has been.

Being on the accommodation rota has been a pleasure – the performers really seem to appreciate having the chance to stay in a family home!

We have a list of several hosts so that we do not need to call on anyone too often, but we are anxious to recruit a few more as we shall need extra bed & breakfast accommodation during this season and next.

If you have a spare guest room and would like to join our list of hosts, we would love to hear from you. We aim to call on hosts only once a season and try to match hosts with performers as closely as possible. We pay a small amount to cover the cost of any evening refreshment and breakfast.

To find out more about the system or to speak to one of our regular hosts please contact Cath Rudman (cathrudman@outlook.com or 07806 609194).

Chris Skidmore, Chair

NEXT CONCERT

WEDNESDAY 14 FEBRUARY 2024

Concert 7:30pm

LUMAS WINDS

wind quintet



Barber

Summer Music, op 31

Sally Beamish

The Naming of Birds

Danzi

Wind Quintet in G minor, op 56 / 2

Reicha

Two Andantes and an Adagio

Elizabeth Maconchy

Wind Quintet

Mozart

Overture from *The Magic Flute*

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