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STEPHEN HOUGH - PIANO

Saturday 22 January, 7.30pm
Djanogly Recital Hall, Lakeside Arts

PROGRAMME

Bagatelles

Allegro

Allegretto

Presto non assai

Lento

Alan Rawsthorne
(1905-1971)

Born in Haslingden, Lancashire, Rawsthorne made a couple of false starts, studying dentistry then architecture for a time, before taking up a musical career. As his friend and fellow-composer Constant Lambert famously remarked in a radio broadcast, referring to his dental training, “this is something he no longer practices, even as a hobby, or so he tells me.”

Rawsthorne composed these Bagatelles in 1938, during a holiday at the home, in Norfolk, of the composer Patrick Hadley. There are dedicated to his friend and fellow piano student – at what is now the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester – Gordon Green (Stephen Hough's teacher). Green gave the first performance in a broadcast for Oslo Radio in August 1942.

No.1 is mostly forthright and sturdy, with brief passages of rhythmic waywardness in the middle. It leads without a break into the second piece, which is permeated by the gently rocking rhythm of the dance known as the siciliana. No 3 is a shadowy, flickering scherzo, after which the slow, melancholy fourth Bagatelle, the longest of the set, comes as a something of a surprise.

Kreisleriana, Op.16

Äußerst bewegt

Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch

Sehr aufgeregt

Sehr langsam

Sehr lebhaft

Sehr langsam

Sehr rasch

Schnell und spielend

Robert Schumann
(1810-1856)

In April 1838 Schumann wrote to his future wife Clara Wieck, “Since my last letter I have finished another whole book of new things. You and one of your ideas are the principal subject, and I shall call them *Kreisleriana* and dedicate them to you...you will smile so sweetly when you discover yourself in it.” But he withdrew the original dedication to her, either because of an angry reaction on her father's part (he had opposed their relationship from the word go), or because Clara was afraid of one; Schumann eventually dedicated the work to Chopin (whose only recorded reaction was to admire the art-work on the cover).

He took the title from one of the stories that make up ETA Hoffmann's *Fantasiestücke* (Fantasy Pieces) published in 1814. Fantasy-writer, composer and music critic, Hoffmann was not only among Schumann's favourite reading, but also had a powerful influence on his music. Johannes Kreisler, one of Hoffmann's most striking characters, is an eccentric musician with whom Schumann identified – both were subject to frequent mood swings, and they shared an admiration for Johann Sebastian Bach – and who was, he believed, based on someone he knew personally.

Kreisleriana was published with the sub-title 'Fantasies for piano-forte'. Each of the eight pieces, which do not have individual titles, is a multi-sectioned structure marked by contrasting moods and tempos, in which Schumann revels in complex textures and rhythms; Clara actually begged him to tone down some of the complexity, saying that it hurt her when people did not understand him.

The first piece is full of racing energy, with a quieter, more gentle middle section. No.2, the longest and most complex, begins in a quietly introspective mood, but with two lively episodes, each headed 'Intermezzo'. The third piece is fast and agitated, with a slower middle section. When the opening returns it ends with a section marked 'faster still'. The fourth is slow, with left-hand phrases that reach into the depths of the keyboard; the middle section is rather quicker. In the skittish No 5, marked 'very lively', the contrast is in terms not of tempo but of a lighter, more open texture. The tempo slows again for No 6, whose withdrawn mood is broken by a series of powerful, declamatory phrases. The slightly quicker second section seems carefree to begin with, but settles back into the withdrawn mood and a recollection of the opening. The seventh piece is very fast, propelled by running figures that don't let up for a moment. The music becomes faster still, then suddenly slows down for the enigmatic ending. The final piece is permeated by a constant galloping rhythm. As in No 5, the contrast is one of character, in a section marked 'with full force'. The earlier music returns but the ending is unsettlingly off-hand, as it simply runs quietly down to the bottom of the keyboard, and stops.

Partita

Overture

Capriccio

Canción y Danza I

Canción y Danza II

Toccata

Stephen Hough
(born 1961)

My Partita was commissioned by the Naumburg Foundation for Albert Cano Smit. Having written four sonatas for piano of a serious, intense character I wanted to write something different - something brighter, something more celebratory, more nostalgic. Written in 2019 it is in five movements. The outer, more substantial bookends have an 'English' flavour and suggest the world of a grand cathedral organ. The first of these alternates between ceremonial pomp and sentimental circumstance, whereas the final movement, taking thematic material from the first, is a virtuosic toccata - a sortie out of the gothic gloom into brilliant Sunday sunshine. At the centre of the work are three shorter movements each utilising the interval of a fifth: a restless, jagged Capriccio of constantly shifting time signatures, and two *Cançon y Danzas*, inspired by the Catalan composer Federico Mompou.

© Stephen Hough

Ballade No.3 in A flat, Op.47

Frédéric Chopin
(1810-1849)

The popular image of Chopin as the archetypal Romantic composer conceals more of the truth than it reveals. If we accept an overt association with other arts, particularly literature and painting, as one of the defining characteristics of 19th-century Romantic music, Chopin emerges as one of the least romantic composers of his generation. Unlike Schumann or Liszt, he never spelled out any connection between his music and non-musical sources. Fanciful titles like the 'Raindrop' Prelude, or the 'Winter Wind' Study were added after the event by publishers, or by commentators looking for a poetic image to convey their experience of the music.

Chopin's use of the title 'Ballade' for Op.47 and its three companions clouds the issue slightly. It seems to suggest links with the narrative poems set to music by Schubert and others, even hinting at a story-line behind Chopin's own music. Folk ballads were enormously popular throughout Europe at the time, and Schumann suggested that Chopin's Ballades were prompted by the work of the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz. The extent of the connection has been a subject of debate ever since.

Ballade No.3 dates from 1841, towards the end of that productive phase of his career which coincided with the time when his relationship with novelist George Sand (pseudonym for Baroness Aurore Dudevant) was at its happiest. Dedicated to Pauline de Noailles, a member of a French aristocratic family, it is, to start with at least, the most relaxed and genial of the four. The first two of its three main themes are deceptively easy-going, but the third steers the music into more turbulent waters, while the final pages bring out a heroic quality in the first, which originally seemed so unassuming.

Nocturne in F sharp, Op.15 No.2; Nocturne in E flat, Op.9 No.2

In 1812 the Irish composer John Field (1782-1837) published a group of three small-scale lyrical piano pieces, the first such pieces to be given the title 'Nocturne'. They made an impression on several composer-pianists of the next generation, but it was Chopin who took Field's unpretentious new genre to heights of melodic and harmonic subtlety. Chopin's nocturnes were among his most popular works during his lifetime, doing much to establish his reputation in fashionable Paris salons after he settled there in 1831, and have remained so ever since.

It is the Nocturnes, particularly, that show how strongly he was influenced by the *bel canto* style of vocal writing in contemporary Italian opera, by Bellini above all. This is something he shared with other contemporary piano composers, but it influenced his melodic style at a particularly deep level, not only in his handling of long, lyrical melodic lines but in the kind of ornamentation he used, as if directly translating the techniques of leading opera singers into pianistic terms.

The two we hear this evening are among the best-known of Chopin's Nocturnes. The three that make up Op.15 were written between 1830 and 1832. No 2 illustrates perfectly how, in his hands, ornamental flourishes are no longer merely surface decoration but have become essential to the music's expressive power. The three that make up Op.9, composed between 1830 and 1832, were Chopin's first to be published; they are dedicated to Marie Pleyel, wife of the leading Paris piano manufacturer. No.2 combines the characteristics of both a Chopin nocturne and one of his waltzes.

Scherzo No.2 in B flat minor, Op.31

"How is gravity to clothe itself if humour wears such dark veils?" Schumann's famous comment on the first of Chopin's four Scherzos suggests how much the apparent incongruity between title and music must have puzzled the work's first audiences.

Although the term 'scherzo' (Italian for 'joke') appeared in a variety of musical contexts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was, first, Haydn (in his Op.33 string quartets), then Beethoven, who used it as the title for a movement – forming part of a longer instrumental work – that was generally light-hearted, even humorous, in quick triple time and with a contrasting central section, usually designated a 'trio'. In developing the scherzo as a separate genre in its own right Chopin retained the last two characteristics (though integrating the central section more subtly with the rest of the work), but in every other respect he considerably expanded its expressive range and power.

Scherzo No.2, written in 1837, leaves a turbulent overall impression. The opening section is built from terse, explosive gestures full of emotional tension. But the work moves through kaleidoscopic shifts of mood from lyrical to delicate, to robust and stately, before arriving at its vehement, highly charged ending.

STEPHEN HOUGH - PIANO

Named by *The Economist* as one of Twenty Living Polymaths, Stephen Hough combines a distinguished career as a pianist with those of composer and writer. He was the first classical performer to be awarded a MacArthur Fellowship and was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the New Year's Honours 2014.

In the 2021/22 season he will perform with the Royal Concertgebouworkest, Orchestre National de France, London Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Dallas and Atlanta Symphony orchestras, Dortmunder Philharmoniker and Tonkünstler-Orchester Niederösterreich. Hough is the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra's 2021/22 Artist in Residence, while in Spring 2022 he returns to the Far East to perform with the China Philharmonic, Guangzhou Symphony and Singapore Symphony orchestras. Recent concerto highlights include the New York Philharmonic, Minnesota and Toronto Symphony, Wiener Symphoniker, Finnish Radio Symphony, City of Birmingham Symphony, Philharmonia and Royal Philharmonic orchestras.

Hough is a regular guest at festivals such as Salzburg, Mostly Mozart, Edinburgh, La Roque-d'Anthéron, Aldeburgh, and the BBC Proms, where he made his 29th appearance in 2020 with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. In June 2020 he returned to Wigmore Hall to give the UK's first live classical music concert in a major venue since the nationwide lockdown earlier that year. Recital highlights in 2021/22 include a return to London's Royal Festival Hall as well as Caramoor, Toronto, Tallinn, Gstaad and Manchester's Bridgewater Hall.

Hough's extensive discography of around 70 CDs has garnered international awards including the Diapason d'Or de l'Année, several Grammy nominations, and eight Gramophone Awards including Record of the Year and the Gold Disc. Recent releases include Beethoven's complete piano concertos (with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra under Hannu Lintu), 'The Final Piano Pieces' of Brahms, a Schumann recital, and Elgar's Violin Sonata with Renaud Capuçon (for Warner Classics). Upcoming releases include the complete Chopin Nocturnes and the Brahms Clarinet Sonatas with Michael Collins. His award-winning iPad app The Liszt Sonata was released by Touch Press in 2013.

As a composer Hough's String Quartet No.1 *Les Six Rencontres*, commissioned for the Takács Quartet, will receive its world premiere by them in Costa Mesa, California in December 2021 followed by a recording for Hyperion Records and the European premiere in January 2022 at Wigmore Hall. He has written the commissioned work for the 2022 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, to be performed by all 30 competitors in May/June 2022 He has been commissioned by Musée du Louvre, London's National Gallery, Westminster Abbey, Westminster Cathedral, the Genesis Foundation, Gilmore International Keyboard Festival, the Walter W. Naumburg Foundation, the Cliburn Foundation, Orquesta Sinfónica de Euskadi and the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Quintet. His music is published by Josef Weinberger Ltd.

As an author, his collection of essays *Rough Ideas: Reflections on Music and More*, published by Faber & Faber in August 2019, won a 2020 Royal Philharmonic Society Award and was named one of *Financial Times*' Book of the Year 2019. Hough's first novel, *The Final Retreat*, was published by Sylph Editions in March 2018. He has been published by *The New York Times*, *The Telegraph*, *The Times*, *The Guardian* and the *Evening Standard*. Hough is an Honorary Bencher of the Middle Temple, an Honorary Member of the Royal Philharmonic Society, a Visiting Fellow at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford University, a Visiting Professor at the Royal Academy of Music, the International Chair of Piano Studies at the Royal Northern College of Music (of which he was made a Companion in 2019), and is on the faculty of The Juilliard School in New York.

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