

MURRAY MCLACHLAN

The Stoller Hall
Wednesday 18 November
7.30pm

www.stollerhall.com



PROGRAMME

BEETHOVEN

Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor, Op. 13 'Pathétique' (20')
Grave - Allegro di molto e con brio
Adagio cantabile
Rondo. Allegro

Piano Sonata No. 21 in C major, Op. 53 'Waldstein' (27')
Allegro con brio
Introduzione: Adagio molto
Rondo: Allegretto moderato – Prestissimo

Interval (15')

Piano Sonata No. 26 in E-flat major, Op. 81a 'Les adieux/Das Lebewohl' (20')
Das Lebewohl: Adagio - Allegro
Das Abwesenheit: Andante espressivo
Das Wiedersehen: Vivacissimamente

Piano Sonata No. 32 in C minor, Op. 111 (30')
Maestoso – Allegro con brio ed appassionato
Arietta: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile

Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor, Op. 13 'Pathétique'

Ludwig van Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor, Op. 13, commonly known as Sonata Pathétique, was written in 1798 when the composer was 27 years old and was published in 1799; it is the most important of the early Sonatas. Dedicated to his friend Prince Karl von Lichnowsky, it has remained one of his most celebrated compositions. For the first time Beethoven uses a slow introduction, and an introduction of such weight you know something truly significant is going on. The opening chord breaks once and for all with Haydn and Mozart; you are in Beethoven's world now.

Among Beethoven's few close friends in Vienna were the piano-building couple, Andreas and Nanette Streicher. The 'Pathétique' demanded a wider keyboard than ever before, the sheer power of the chords demanded a stronger piano frame, and more resilient strings. The Streichers started building pianos to accommodate Beethoven's needs. The title page references this in a practical 18th century point, specifying that the work could be performed on either harpsichord or piano. Thus we owe the beginning of the development of the modern concert grand to Beethoven.

If you are in any doubt of the sheer versatility of Beethoven's music, listen to the beautiful simplicity of the second movement of the 'Pathétique' – a theme so perfect it is as if it emerged from Beethoven fully formed; none of the struggle we usually associate with him. It impressed a modern musician too. Billy Joel put words to it, and it is one of the tracks on his best-selling album, *An Innocent Man*. The track is 'This Night', and on the sleeve it says Words by B. Joel, music by L. van Beethoven.

Piano Sonata No. 21 in C major, Op. 53 'Waldstein'

The nineteenth-century Beethoven biographer Wilhelm Lenz, whose *Beethoven et ses trois styles* was the first substantial study of the composer to divide his output into three stylistic periods, described the 'Waldstein' Sonata Op 53 as 'a heroic symphony for piano'. Certainly, it is among the most dazzlingly brilliant of all Beethoven's middle-period works.

The sonata's opening movement is largely based on the opposition between a toccata-like main subject and a broad second theme in the style of a chorale. Beethoven had tried a similar juxtaposition some seven years earlier in his Sonata Op 7, but the 'Waldstein' brings into play a new element of contrast: the second subject occurs in the radiant, and comparatively distant, key of E major. The remoteness of the chorale theme's key lends it an expressive serenity it would not otherwise have achieved.

Beethoven first conceived the 'Waldstein' as a large-scale work in three discrete movements, but he eventually removed the middle movement, and in its place wrote a concentrated and dramatic introduction to the

finale. The removed movement became an instant hit with the amateur pianists of Vienna. It was published under the title *Andante grazioso*, but was nicknamed *Andante favori* by Beethoven himself, who said: 'I wish I had never written the piece. I cannot walk down a street without hearing it coming through some window or other.'

The introduction with which Beethoven prefaces the 'Waldstein' Sonata's rondo ends with a sustained, accented note G—the pitch around which the rondo theme itself is to oscillate. Underpinning that theme, and sounded before it begins, is a low C in the left hand, so that the theme's top G is heard almost as an overtone of the bass note. Beethoven's interest in exploiting the piano's resonance is further shown by his pedal markings for the rondo's theme, which require the player to hold the sustaining pedal down not only through changes of harmony, but also through alternations between major and minor.

An even more ethereal sonority seems to be indicated in the movement's *Prestissimo* coda, where similar pedal markings accompany an appearance of the theme shrouded in trills. As if the trills were not enough, Beethoven brings another virtuoso device into play: *pianissimo* glissandos in octaves for both hands, moving in opposite directions. The effect was relatively easy to bring off on the pianos of Beethoven's day, with their narrower keys and shallower action, but on a modern concert grand it is much less feasible to play the passages in question without a discreet redistribution of notes between the hands. In the final bars Beethoven sets the piano's strings in vibration one last time, with a triumphant series of fanfares.

Piano Sonata No. 26 in E-flat major, Op. 81a 'Les adieux'/'Das Lebewohl'

While a number of Beethoven's piano sonatas have titles (authentic or otherwise), Op. 81a is the only one to have a concrete extra-musical inspiration: the flight from Vienna of his patron the Archduke Rudolph (along with the entire nobility and their entourages) in anticipation of the French invasion of the city. In the light of the political situation, Beethoven was understandably indignant when his publisher, with an eye on the international market, insisted on giving it the French title, 'Les adieux', rather than his own German 'Lebewohl'.

Beethoven began the first movement of his E flat major Sonata in May 1809, just after the Archduke had left and a matter of days before Vienna was besieged by Napoleon's forces. During the siege he sheltered in a cellar with a pillow over his head to protect his already diminishing hearing. The other two movements were written in January 1810, following the Archduke's return. The published dedication reads: "On the departure of his Imperial Highness, for the Archduke Rudolph in admiration" - though his private dedication in the sketches refers to the Sonata as being "writ-

ten from the heart".

The first movement, 'The Farewell', is dominated by a short motto of three descending notes, over which in the first bar Beethoven writes the three syllables Le-be-wohl. This motif furnished the material for both the first and second subject groups of the main Allegro, and while it adds an obviously programmatic element to the music it is, as he explained of the Pastoral Symphony, "not painting, but the expression of feeling". This can, in fact, be seen as the principle behind the whole Sonata.

The second movement, 'The Absence', expresses moods of both loss and consolation with its two contrasting themes, leading straight into the joyful 'Reunion' of the finale. This movement is in sonata form and contrasts a dynamic first subject and a more relaxed second subject with a distinctive bridge passage that alternates four-bar phrases of G flat major and F major, first in simple forte arpeggios and then in a more decorated piano form. Finally, a poco andante version of the first subject leads into an exhilarating coda.

Piano Sonata No. 32 in C minor, Op. 111

In his last sonata, Beethoven seems to have found the ultimate solution to the unity of form by resolving in one movement the conflicts of the other. The two movements contrast on several planes: major/minor, Allegro/Adagio, appassionato/semplce, sonata form/variation form, turmoil/ecstatic serenity, earthly/spiritual. The perfection of this two-movement form was not, however, immediately realised by everyone when it was written in 1822. Beethoven's publisher assumed a rondo-finale had got lost in the post when he received a sonata ending in a long Adagio. Later, when Beethoven's friend and biographer Anton Schindler questioned him, Schindler was given the reply that he 'had not had time to write a third movement', which was conceivably true in that a sketch for an Allegro finale was apparently abandoned in order to complete the Missa solemnis. But most probably Beethoven came to the decision that another movement would have disrupted the character of the sonata as it already stood.

The Maestoso introduction, with its double-dotted chords, prepares the way for the energy and conflict of the main Allegro. Here the semiquaver movement is relentless, with only occasional dramatic pauses and poco ritenente interrupting the constant tossing about of fragments of themes between all registers of the piano. The movement finally comes to rest in a pianissimo C major - and that, in effect, is where the music remains through most of the Arietta. Here there is no conflict - tension is exchanged for sublimity. The simplest of themes is subjected to ever more complex subdivisions of metre, until by the third variation the calm of the original is transformed into euphoric abandonment (with

an uncanny foreshadowing of 20th-century boogie-woogie). The fourth variation returns to a more static representation of the theme over a demisemiquaver bass pedal. The fifth variation that follows an episode of trills, with the only real excursion away from C major in this movement, uses the theme in its original form over a busier accompaniment. In the sixth and final variation the theme moves into the uppermost register, intertwining itself around a continuous trill on the dominant, G, the whole becoming ever more ethereal, followed by a short coda ending in a mood of calm contentment.

MURRAY MCLACHLAN

Since making his professional debut in 1986 at the age of 21 under the baton of Sir Alexander Gibson, Murray McLachlan has consistently received outstanding critical acclaim. Educated at Chetham's School of Music and Cambridge University, his mentors included Ronald Stevenson, David Hartigan, Ryszard Bakst, Peter Katin and Norma Fisher.

His recording career began in 1988 and immediately attracted international attention. Recordings of contemporary music have won numerous accolades, including full star ratings, as well as 'rosette' and 'key recording' status in the Penguin Guide to CDs, and 'Disc of the month' and 'Record of the month' in 'Music on the Web' and 'The Herald'. In 2019 he recorded the Ruth Gipps concerto with the RLPO under Charles Peebles for SOMM.

McLachlan's repertoire includes over 40 concertos and 25 recital programmes. He has given first performances of works by many composers and has appeared as soloist with most of the leading UK orchestras. His recognition has been far-reaching, bringing invitations to perform on all five continents.

McLachlan teaches at the Royal Northern College of Music and at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester where he has been Head of Keyboard since 1997.

As well as performing and teaching Murray McLachlan is well known internationally for his numerous articles on Piano technique and repertoire. His three books on technique 'The Foundations of Technique', 'Piano Technique in Practice' and 'The Psychology of Piano Technique' were published by Faber, have been reprinted several times and received wide international acclaim.

His latest recording on Naxos of the complete Edward Gregson piano works was recorded in The Stoller Hall last January and has already received glowing reviews, including 'CD of the month' status in Pianodao

