

Programme

BACH/KEMPF

Siciliano, BWV 1031

HAYDN

Sonata in E minor, Hob XVI/34

SCHUBERT/LISZT

Ständchen

SCHUBERT/LISZT

Erlkönig

LISZT

Transcendental Étude No 10 Appassionata, S 139

LISZT

Transcendental Étude No 11
Harmonies du Soir, S 139

LISZT

Spanish Rhapsody, S 254

George Harliono

Born in London in 2017, George became the youngest student ever to take up a scholarship at the Royal College of Music.

In 2019, George was a prize winner at the YCAT (Young Classical Artists Trust) International Auditions at Wigmore Hall and the only British pianist to be selected for the Tchaikovsky Competition.

Previous awards include top prizes at the Grand Piano Competition in Moscow (2016), the Gina Bachauer (Utah 2016), Aarhus (Denmark) and Dinu Lipatti (Bucharest) Competitions.

As soloist, George has appeared with the Marinsky Orchestra conducted by Valery Gergiev, the Moscow State, Tatarstan National, Sochi Symphony, Tyumen Philharmonic and New Millennium Chicago Orchestras. He has given recitals in the Scherzo series in Madrid, Berlin Philharmonie and Royal Albert Hall and collaborated with Lang Lang and Denis Matsuev.

Highlights over the last year include recitals at the Konzerthaus Vienna, Duszynski Chopin Festival, Russian Academy of Arts and Wimbledon Festival. He appeared as soloist with the Musica Viva Orchestra (Moscow), Jurmala Festival Orchestra (Latvia) and Firebird Orchestra (London).

This season George returns to Wigmore Hall and gives recitals in the UK, Russia, the Netherlands and France.

George is YCAT's inaugural Duet Group Artist.

Harliono has already appeared with the Mariinsky Orchestra under Gergiev, so he has already been making waves. Harliono seemed to be savouring each separate note, taking all the time in the world to stress the composer's melodic train of thought and poetic line.



Programme Notes

J S Bach (1685-1750) / Wilhelm Kempff (1895-1991) **Siciliano, BWV 1031**

The music of J S Bach has been a rich source of inspiration for countless composers whose numerous arrangements have brought both his choral and instrumental works to a wider audience. Liszt's piano and organ transcriptions were to have a marked influence on the Italian composer Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924), whose highly individual approach to Bach's keyboard music became so popular during his lifetime that his wife was once introduced as Mrs Bach-Busoni!

Arrangements became increasingly fashionable during the 1920s and include Elgar's splendid orchestral arrangement of Bach's Fantasia and Fugue in C minor, BWV 537 and Leopold Stokowski's 'blood and thunder' arrangement of the renowned Toccata and Fugue in D minor (BWV 565). The celebrated English pianist Myra Hess reached new audiences following her 1926 transcription of 'Jesus Joy of Man's Desiring' from Bach's Cantata No 147.

During the same decade, there appeared Wilhelm Kempff's transcriptions of Bach's organ chorales. Amongst his other Bach arrangements – with doubts regarding the authorship of this Siciliano, some suggesting it's by the composer's son C P E. Bach – is this exquisite movement belonging to his Flute Sonata No 2. Dedicated to the eminent Bach scholar Albert Schweitzer, this arrangement is an essay in restraint, the haunting beauty of the original melody underpinned by a gentle accompaniment. Kempff deftly anchors the bass line by octave doubling and adds a three-bar introduction. A repeat allows us to relish the sublime melody one more time.

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) **Sonata in E minor, Hob XVI/34**

- 1 Presto
- 2 Adagio
- 3 Vivace molto

'When we speak of Joseph Haydn', wrote the 18th century lexicographer Ernst Ludwig Gerber, 'we think of one of our greatest men; great in small things and even greater in large; the pride of our age. Always rich and inexhaustible; forever new and surprising, forever noble, even when he seems to laugh.' This generous appreciation can be directed without hesitation towards many of Haydn's sixty-two piano sonatas, works conceived over a thirty year period

from the early 1760s. They exhibit an extraordinary melodic invention, harmonic resource and emotional reach and the finest sonatas rank with the best before Beethoven's works stole the limelight.

Yet, the pioneering Haydn established the medium's present form and influenced Beethoven's creative processes. But it is only in the last sixty years or so that we have begun to recognise the significance of Haydn whose stature – according to the composer and musicologist Robin Holloway – is still 'a well-kept secret'.

His E minor Sonata was one of three published by Beardmore & Birchall in London in 1783, although it is likely to have been conceived in the late 1770s. The first of its three movements is occupied by a terse main theme, its playful energy only briefly subsiding for a more relaxed secondary theme in G major. Momentum is sustained throughout with the almost obsessive use of the principal theme's driving rhythms and 6/8 metre.

A courtly elegance inhabits the *Adagio*, a movement encrusted with melodic decoration that concludes with a passage of quasi-operatic recitative. Playfulness returns to the finale, its *innocentemente* marking fully realised in Haydn's folk-like tune. Alternate major and minor tonalities provide distinct outlines to the movement's amalgam of rondo and variation form, the recurring E major episodes closely related to the E minor main theme.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) / Franz Liszt (1811-1886) **Ständchen**

Franz Liszt was arguably the greatest 19th century keyboard virtuoso, who extended the parameters of piano technique in a vast range of formidable and in many senses, ground-breaking pieces. His legendary playing earned him fame far beyond his native Hungary and won for him the adoration of many aristocratic women – two of whom became important companions.

His celebrity lifestyle, divided between that of a travelling virtuoso and a composer seemed at odds with both his unfulfilled marital yearnings and his lifelong spiritual leanings. In 1861, he settled in Rome in semi-retirement and as he withdrew from the outside world, his compositions began to reveal an increasingly religious preoccupation.

Earlier in his career there had been an evangelising zeal for piano transcription, with arrangements of operatic arias and overtures and entire symphonies all grist to his mill. Of 150 songs Liszt transcribed, more than a third were by Schubert. Whilst most of these occupied him for some ten years from 1836, his admiration for the Viennese composer was lifelong. In addition to nearly sixty song transcriptions, Liszt made several orchestral arrangements including the 'Wanderer' Fantasy and edited two volumes of Schubert's piano sonatas in 1880. His Lieder were transformed into vividly reimagined concert pieces, which brilliantly demonstrate Liszt's heightened response to poetic imagery and resourceful use of keyboard sonorities.

'Ständchen' belongs to Schubert's last group of songs, its posthumous title *Schwanengesang* given by the commercially minded publisher Tobias Haslinger in the spring of 1829. Liszt's transcription of the song underlines the melody's compassionate melancholy, its heart-easing warmth glowing over a guitar like accompaniment. If its rising melodic curves suggest hope, by the end it's clear all confidence has drained away, and the poet's dreams remain unfulfilled. Beauty and sadness are perfectly fused.

Franz Schubert/Franz Liszt Erlkönig (S 558/4)

In what is probably Schubert's best-known setting of words by Goethe published in 1821 as his Opus 1 and nearly six years after its conception, *Erlkönig* is amongst the composer's greatest songs. Clearly appealing to Liszt's theatrical instincts, the four characters of Goethe's text – narrator, terrified father, dying child and seductive erlking – are skilfully differentiated by adroit changes in register. No gymnastic finger exercise, but a cinematic concert piece of Gothic horror inspired by a composer to whom Liszt considered 'the most poetic musician who ever lived'.

Arranged in 1838, *Erlkönig* is the fourth song in his *Zwölf* Lieder and was to become a much-requested recital piece for the keyboard virtuoso across Europe.

Franz Liszt

Transcendental Étude No 10 in F minor, S 139 'Appassionata'

Transcendental Étude No 11, S 139 'Harmonies du Soir'

Liszt's Transcendental Études belong to the beginning of his career when, in 1824, he planned the first volume of a projected cycle of forty eight exercises (in the manner of J S Bach) in all the major and minor keys. Working to a strict tonal plan, beginning with C major, then A minor, F major and D minor etc. only twelve pieces were originally completed.

Extensively revised and renamed in 1852 under the title *Études d'exécution transcendante*, they count among the most fiendishly virtuosic of all piano compositions. Each has a title, some descriptive (Vision, Eroica, Chasse-neige), while some relate to tempo or form.

Within these tender essays there are an astonishing variety of technical skill and melodic invention from a young composer barely fifteen years old. Exploring thirds, sixths, octaves and arpeggios, Liszt adds his own poetic eloquence. Launched by a perilous cascade of chords, the 'Appassionata' is a study examining changing hand positions and a sparkling use of triplet figurations.

Harmonies du Soir ('Evening Harmonies') is the eleventh of the set and its demands include broken chord patterns in quick succession, octave leaps and interlocking hands. Little wonder that Robert Schumann considered the fearsome demands of these works as 'studies in storm and dread for, at the most, ten or twelve players in the world'.

Franz Liszt

Rhapsodie Espagnole, S 254

Liszt's *Rhapsodie Espagnole* belongs to 1863, the same year he entered Rome's monastery of the Madonna del Rosario and two years before he took up minor religious orders. Far from there being any religious impulse to this work, *Rhapsodie Espagnole* is a musical portrait of Spain and Portugal where, over twenty years earlier, he had begun a six-month tour performing in Lisbon, Madrid and Seville.

Two traditional melodies associated with the Iberian Peninsula are central to this demanding work and both are named in the work's subtitle: 'Folies d'Espagne et Jota Aragonesa'. These melodies provide the basis for a virtuoso work built on the variation principle, their thematic transformation a world away from their Renaissance sources.

After a grand opening flourish, a first group of variations begins, in the manner of a passacaglia, on 'La Folia' – a courtly dance with an accent on the second beat – each variation being surpassed by the next in imagination and resourcefulness. The final variation, identified by rapidly ascending scale figures, merges into the sparkling 'Jota Aragonesa', sidestepping from C sharp minor to D major. This faster idea appears initially over a drone accompaniment (evoking castanets and swirling skirts) heard mostly in the piano's upper register.

After a pause, what appears to be a third theme, with its halting rhythm, is actually the beginning of another group of variations on 'La Folia', now exploring far-reaching harmonic territory and concluding with a grand reprise of the 'Jota', its homicidal octaves played *Molto vivace*. A brief cadenza, in chromatic thirds, heralds a concluding section where Liszt alternates both themes culminating in a final and triumphant re-appearance of 'La Folia.'