

# Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

30 March 2014 – 4pm

**Ji Liu** *Piano*

## PROGRAMME NOTES

### Frederic Rzewski (b.1938)

#### Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues

Social consciousness has long influenced American composer Frederic Rzewski's works. He addresses the issue of labour rights in North American Ballads, a set of four pieces based on union songs. The text of Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues comments on the harsh working conditions in the textile mills of North Carolina in the 1930s. Aggressive hammering clusters in the bass register of the piano open the work, mimicking the relentless, noisy environment the workers had to endure. The influence of the blues jazz idiom contrasts this mechanical soundscape. Rzewski comments, "I took as a model the chorale preludes of Bach, who in his contrapuntal writing consistently derives motivic configurations from the basic tune."

*Programme note by Huang Zeng (2004)*

### Debussy

#### Suite Bergamasque

- Prélude
- Menuet
- Clair de lune
- Passepied

Debussy's "Suite bergamasque" (made of four movements) is one of his most fascinating works for piano, not only for its rich, impressionistic qualities, but also for its somewhat mysterious creation. It's believed that Debussy began composing the "Suite bergamasque" in 1890, while he was still studying music. However, in 1905 he revised the works and published them under the title "Suite bergamasque." It is unknown how much of the work was completed in 1890 and/or 1905.

### Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)

#### Danse Macabre

Danse macabre, the third of Saint-Saëns's four symphonic poems, was premiered in 1874. Saint-Saëns was one of several young musicians who received significant encouragement and artistic support from Franz Liszt. Like Liszt, Saint-Saëns began his chain of symphonic poems in his middle thirties, drawing some of his material from his own earlier works in other forms. Liszt himself made a virtuoso transcription of the Danse macabre shortly after the work's premiere in 1874.

Saint-Saëns depicts the fantastic tale of Death's frenzied dance beginning with the tolling of midnight

bells, after which Death, portrayed as a fiddler, tunes up and commences his waltz. A second theme evokes the roused skeletal celebrants who become increasingly energetic until, with the cock's crow, they disperse and vanish.

*Programme note by Lorn Terry Martell (2002)*

### Frédéric Chopin

#### Nocturne, Op.9 No.2

The **Nocturnes, Op. 9** are a set of three nocturnes written by Frédéric Chopin between 1830 and 1832, published that year, and dedicated to Madame Camille Pleyel. The second nocturne of the set is widely regarded as Chopin's most famous piece, and was written when he was in his early twenties.

### Frédéric Chopin

#### Fantaisie-Improptu in C sharp minor, Op.66

*Fantaisie-Improptu* in C-sharp minor, Op. posth. 66, was composed in 1834 and dedicated to Julian Fontana. Some aspects of this piece are similar to Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*, which is also in C-sharp minor. Two measures after the melody begins, an abrupt run up and down has exactly the same notes as the cadenza in the third movement (*Presto agitato*) of that work. The climax on a six-four chord is similar in both pieces, and the *Fantaisie-Improptu's* middle part and the second movement of the *Moonlight Sonata* are in D-flat major. The first and third movements are in C-sharp minor.

### Léon Clément Doucet (1895 – 1950)

#### Chopinata

Clement Doucet was born in Brussels in 1895 and studied piano formally at the local conservatoire. Between 1920-1923 was in the USA where he developed a considerable talent as a jazz pianist. On returning to Europe he became the house pianist at the Parisian cabaret *Le Boeuf sur le Toit*, where he succeeded Jean Wiéner. *Le Boeuf sur le toit*, was the melting pot of Parisian and international culture in the 1920s. Its name – meaning 'the ox on the roof' – was appropriated by the cabaret's owner, Louis Moysès, from the composer Darius Mihaud, who had used it for a celebrated orchestral score, written after a visit to Brazil and filled with syncopated dance rhythms. Clement Doucet and Wiéner went on to form a piano-duo partnership which lasted 14 years. *Chopinata* is a jazz tribute to several of the great works of Chopin.

## Ludwig van Beethoven

### Piano Sonata No.14 in C sharp minor, Op.27 No.2 Moonlight

- Adagio sostenuto
- Allegretto
- Presto agitato

**The Moonlight Sonata** was composed in the summer of 1801 in Hungary, on an estate belonging to the Brunswick family. The composition was published in 1802 and was dedicated to Beethoven's pupil and passion, the 17 year old Countess Giulietta Gucciardi.

The original title of the sonata is "Quasi una fantasia" (Italian: *almost a fantasy*). The popular title of Moonlight Sonata had its origins in remarks made by the German critic Ludwig Rellstab in 1832 who described the sonata's famous opening movement as being akin to moonlight flickering across Lake Lucerne

Beethoven, unusually opens with a slow, hypnotic set of arpeggios, instead of the traditional fast-slow-fast pattern of movements which were standard at the time. The storm and drama are in the second movement, which audiences would have expected to be reflective and calm, and the final movement is marked Presto agitato.

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1990, Ji Liu studied at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. In 2005 and 2006 he took part in the Verbier Festival & Academy in Switzerland where he received the Tabor Piano Award and CUBS Prize from the UBS Bank. He went on to study with Dmitri Bashkirov at the Escuela Superior de Musica Reina Sofia in Madrid and the Royal Academy of Music with Christopher Elton completing his Masters on piano and composition (the latter with Ruth Burchmore) in 2013. He was selected for representation by Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) in 2013.



From a young age Ji has appeared as soloist at major venues and festivals internationally including Wigmore Hall, Royal Festival Hall, Concertgebouw, Auditorium du Louvre, Salle Cortot, Carnegie Hall (Weill Recital Hall), 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y (New York), Rachmaninoff Hall (Tchaikovsky Conservatory, Moscow), Salle Garnier Opéra de Monte-Carlo, Hong Kong Town Hall, the Shanghai Oriental Art Centre and Stavanger Chamber Music Festival. He has performed JS Bach's *Goldberg Variations* at the Gstaad Festival and the complete piano music of Isang Yung at the Tongyeong Music Festival in South Korea.

Engagements during 2013/14 include his debut with the Philharmonia Orchestra, performances of Liszt's *Totentanz* at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Rachmaninov Concerto No.2 at the Barbican, Beethoven 4 at the Royal Festival Hall, and recitals at Wigmore Hall, Purcell Room, The Sage Gateshead, the Nottingham and Leeds International Series. His debut CD *Piano Reflections* was released by Classic FM in January 2014 and immediately went on to become No.1 in the classical charts.

A hugely creative artist, Ji has worked on cross arts collaborations, particularly with visual art, including film and sand animation. Over the next few years he will be exploring the complete Schubert Sonatas and working on a multi-media approach to Schubert's unfinished works.

As a concerto soloist Ji's performances have included the Ravel Concertos with the Xiamen Philharmonic Orchestra and the French Republic Guard Orchestra (Canada), Rachmaninov's *Concerto No.2* with the Academy Concert Orchestra conducted by Tadaaki Otaka, Mozart's *Concerto K.488* with the London String Ensemble and Beethoven Concertos with the Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra. In 2010 he recorded Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* for the Royal Academy of Music's own label.

During his studies Ji won numerous prizes and awards including 1st Prize in the 2010 Sheepdrove Competition, 1st Prize in the Brant Competition in Birmingham, the Audience Prize of the Friends of the RAM Wigmore Hall award, the Martin Musical Trust, Yamaha Music Foundation and the Hattori Foundation's Debut Prize. Further afield Ji won 1st Prize in the 2003 Pinault Competition in New York, 1st Prize in the Ludmila Knezkova-Hussey Competition in Canada and 2nd Prize in the 2004 Jeunesses Musicales Competition in Bucharest.

Ji has received invaluable guidance from Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Leif Ove Andsnes, Boris Berman, Paul Badura-Skoda, Imogen Cooper, Barry Douglas, Claude Frank, Richard Goode, Setephen Hough, Zoltán Kocsis, Fou Ts'ong, Lilya Zilberstein, Ida Kavafian, Pamela Frank, Yuri Bashmet and Salvatore Accardo.

**Our next concert is The Villiers Quartet on Sunday 13 April 2014 at 4pm**

followed by **Retorica** on Sunday 18 May at 4pm