

# Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

29 March 2015– 4pm

## Alexander Ullman Piano

### PROGRAMME NOTES

#### Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750) Prelude and Fugue in C sharp minor, BWV849

The work is one of a collection of pieces now known to all musicians as The Well-Tempered Clavier. Bach gave the title to a book of preludes and fugues in all 24 major and minor keys (1722), composed "for the profit and use of musical youth desirous of learning, and especially for the pastime of those already skilled in this study". Bach added a second book of the same kind in 1742 and the forty eight works are now considered to make up a single work, and are generally regarded as being among the most influential works in the history of Western classical music.

By 1720 Bach's son Wilhelm Friedrich was ten years of age, and both he and his younger brother Carl Philipp Emanuel were both showing a marked musical talent. Father wanted to train their minds and fingers in keyboard playing and set about compiling a graded course of teaching material. Thereafter Bach used the work as teaching material with many of his pupils. One, H.N. Gerber left an account with his own son of his recollections as a student with Bach between 1724 and 1727.

*"...the first lesson he set his inventions before him. When Gerber had studied these to Bach's satisfaction, there followed a series of suites (probably first the French Suites, then the English), and finally The Well Tempered*

*Clavier. This latter work Bach played through altogether three times for him with his matchless art, and my father counted these among his happiest hours, when Bach, under the pretext of not feeling in the mood to teach, sat himself at one of his fine instruments and thus turned hours into minutes."*

To satisfactorily explain the adjective 'well-tempered' is to tread on dangerous ground. Treatises have been written on the subject, and even today the debate continues. Tuning a keyboard instrument always has to be a compromise, because the intervals of a perfect fifth and a perfect third are incompatible with each other and with a pure octave.

Bach's work in the eighteenth century is this and other works had a major influence not only on style and content but also on the major/minor key system which later composers relied on to compose and describe their symphonies, piano music and chamber works, as the rest of our programme demonstrates.

It is perhaps surprising that although the works circulated widely in manuscript, it was not until 1801 that the music was first published.

#### Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827) Piano Sonata No. 6 in F major, Op. 10 No. 2

By the time Beethoven came to write this early piano sonata, just 70 years after the Well Tempered Clavier, music had evolved through the full extent of Bach's work, and on through Bach's sons and Mozart. One particular composer, Haydn, now perhaps a little overshadowed by his contemporaries, but still well known for his 104 symphonies, was largely responsible for the development of the sonata form, and doubtless both Mozart and Beethoven were very influenced by his 62 piano sonatas, the last of which was written in 1794.

Like Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier, Beethoven's thirty-two piano sonatas are at the very centre of the piano repertoire, and taken together are a major performance cycle beloved by pianists.

This afternoon's work written in 1796 - 1798 and dedicated to Countess Anne Margarete von Browne. Her husband, Count von Browne-Camus, was an officer (of

Irish descent) in the Russian Imperial Service in Vienna and himself a generous patron of Beethoven's between 1797 and 1803.

He received a number of dedications of his own and, following the gift of these sonatas to his wife, he presented the composer with a handsome riding horse.

Beethoven rode the animal a few times but soon characteristically forgot all about it and, worse than that its food also. His servant, who soon noticed this, began to hire out the animal for his own benefit, and in order not to attract Beethoven's attention to it, hid from him all the bills for fodder. At length he received a large bill which he had difficulty in paying

Op. 10 No. 2 is the shortest among Beethoven's early sonatas. He dispenses with a slow movement, instead dividing a Haydnesque first movement and a mock fugal finale with an Allegretto that has the characteristics of a minuet, for all its minor-key earnestness.

#### Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840 – 1893) Theme and Variations in F major, Op.19 No.6

Tchaikovsky completed six solo piano pieces in Moscow in 1873, which were later published as a set as his Opus 19. The Theme and Variations was the last in the sequence, and had gained a far more widespread reputation. It was

performed by Hans von Bülow in Moscow in 1874, and he later gave the work again in London in November of that year, representing the earliest-known performance of any of Tchaikovsky's works outside Russia.

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----- Interval -----

## Frédéric (Fryderyk Franciszek) Chopin (1810 – 1849)

1. Ballade No. 4 in F minor, Op. 52
2. Mazurkas, Op. 24
3. Etude Op. 10, No. 5
4. Etudes Op. 25, Nos. 5 and 11

Chopin was a Polish composer and virtuoso pianist of the Romantic era, who wrote primarily for the solo piano. He gained and has maintained renown worldwide as one of the leading musicians of his era, whose "poetic genius was based on a professional technique that was without equal in his generation." Chopin was born in what was then the Duchy of Warsaw, and grew up in Warsaw, which after 1815 became part of Congress Poland. A child prodigy, he completed his musical education and composed many of his works in Warsaw before leaving Poland at the age of 20, less than a month before the outbreak of the November 1830 Uprising.

At the age of 21 he settled in Paris. Thereafter, during the last 18 years of his life, he gave only some 30 public performances, preferring the more intimate atmosphere of the salon. He supported himself by selling his compositions and teaching piano, for which he was in high demand. Chopin formed a friendship with Franz Liszt and was admired by many of his musical contemporaries, including Robert Schumann. In 1835 he obtained French citizenship. After a failed engagement to a Polish girl, from 1837 to 1847 he maintained an often troubled relationship with the French writer George Sand. A brief and unhappy visit to Majorca with Sand in 1838–39 was one of his most productive periods of composition.

In his last years, he was financially supported by his admirer Jane Stirling, who also arranged for him to visit Scotland in 1848. Through most of his life, Chopin suffered from poor health. He died in Paris in 1849, probably of tuberculosis.

All of Chopin's compositions include the piano. Most are for solo piano, though he also wrote two piano concertos, a few chamber pieces, and some songs to Polish lyrics. His keyboard style is highly individual and often technically demanding; his own performances were noted for their nuance and sensitivity. Chopin invented the concept of instrumental ballade. His major piano works also include sonatas, mazurkas, waltzes, nocturnes, polonaises, études, impromptus, scherzos, and preludes, some published only after his death. Many contain elements of both Polish folk music and of the classical tradition of J. S. Bach, Mozart and Schubert, the music of all of whom he admired. His innovations in style, musical form, and harmony, and his association of music with nationalism, were influential throughout and after the late Romantic period.

Both in his native Poland and beyond, Chopin's music, his status as one of music's earliest superstars, his association (if only indirect) with political insurrection, his love life and his early death have made him, in the public consciousness, a leading symbol of the Romantic era. His works remain popular, and he has been the subject of numerous films and biographies of varying degrees of historical accuracy.

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

The Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in Moscow is one of the most prestigious in the world, and past winners have included Vladimir Ashkenazy, John Lill, John Ogdon, Barry Douglas and Mikhail Pletnev.

One only has to look at the make up of the jury to appreciate just how important an event it is. Michel Béroff, Boris Berezovsky, Peter Donohoe, Barry Douglas, Vladimir Feltsman, Denis Matsuev, Vladimir Ovchinnikov, Menahem Pressler, and Alexander Toradze, are among those who will decide on the winner this year.

Amongst the final competitors will be Alexander Ullmann, this afternoon's soloist, and our programme is a very special preview of the solo recital he must give for the First Round of the competition.

Born in 1991 in London, **Alexander Ullman** studied at the Purcell School of Music with William Fong, and at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia with Leon Fleisher, Ignat Solzhenitsyn and Robert McDonald. In 2014 he was selected for representation by Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) and he completes his Masters in performance at the Royal College of Music with Dmitri Alexeev.

During his studies Alexander has won numerous awards at international competitions including 1st Prize at the International Competition in Memoriam Ferenc Liszt (2012), the Lagny-sur-Marne International Competition (2013), the Tunbridge Wells International Young Concert Artists Competition (2012), and 2nd Prize at the Isidor Bajic Memorial International Competition (2014).

He has given concerts throughout Europe, Asia and America, taking him to venues and festivals in Italy, France, Spain, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark and India. Recent engagements include a tour of China and recitals at the Leipzig Gewandhaus, Archive Nationales (Paris), Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (Copenhagen), Auditorio de la Diputación de Alicante, the Festival Pontino & Teatro Rossini (Italy), La Jolla Arts Festival (California), and concerts in the UK, Spain, Germany and France with the Dover Quartet.

**Our next concert is Ji Liu on Sunday 12 April at 4pm.**

For more information on the artists and on future concerts, please visit [www.wethersfieldchamberconcerts.org.uk](http://www.wethersfieldchamberconcerts.org.uk)