

Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

12 April 2015– 4pm

Ji Liu Piano

PROGRAMME NOTES by John Woollard

Frédéric (Fryderyk Franciszek) Chopin (1810 – 1849)

Prelude in D flat Major, Op. 28, No. 15 ("Raindrop")
Nocturne No. 20 in C-sharp minor, Op. posth.

Ji Liu's recital starts where we left off at the close of our last concert – the work of one of the greatest pianists of all time – Chopin, and one of his most well-known and characteristic works, the "Raindrop" Prelude.

Some, though not all, of Opus 28 was written during Chopin and George Sand's stay at a monastery in Valldemossa, Majorca in 1838. In her autobiography, Sand told how one evening she returned from Palma in a terrible rainstorm and found a distraught Chopin who exclaimed, "Ah! I knew well that you were dead." While playing his piano he had had a dream:

"He saw himself drowned in a lake. Heavy drops of icy water fell in a regular rhythm on his breast, and when I made him listen to the sound of the drops of water indeed falling in rhythm on the roof, he denied having heard it. He was even angry that I should interpret this in terms of imitative sounds. He protested with all his might – and he was right to – against the childishness of such aural imitations. His genius was filled with the mysterious sounds of nature, but transformed into

sublime equivalents in musical thought, and not through slavish imitation of the actual external sounds"

Sand did not say which prelude Chopin played for her on that occasion, but most music critics assume it to be no. 15, because of the repeating A flat, with its suggestion of the "gentle patter" of rain. Peter Dayan, however points out that Sand accepted Chopin's protests that the prelude was not an imitation of the sound of raindrops, but a translation of nature's harmonies within Chopin's "génie". So, as is so often the case with such stories on the names given to great music, there is no clearly accepted account of the origin of the name.

The Nocturne No. 20 in C-sharp minor, Op. posth., was written in 1830. Chopin dedicated this work to his older sister, Ludwika Chopin, with the statement: "To my sister Ludwika as an exercise before beginning the study of my second Concerto". First published 26 years after the composer's death, the piece is usually referred to as *Lento con gran espressione*, from its tempo marking. It is sometimes also called *Reminiscence*. The piece was famously played by Holocaust survivor Natalia Karp for the Nazi concentration camp commandant Amon Goeth, with Goeth being so impressed with the rendition, that he spared Karp's life.

Franz Schubert (1797 – 1828)

Fantasie in C major, Op. 15 (D. 760)

1. Allegro con fuoco
2. Adagio
3. Presto
4. Allegro

The Fantasie, popularly known as the Wanderer Fantasy, is a four-movement fantasy for solo piano composed by Franz Schubert in November 1822. It is widely considered Schubert's most technically demanding composition for the piano. Even Schubert himself said "the devil may play it," in reference to his own inability to do so properly.

Schubert composed this work in late 1822, just after breaking off work on the Unfinished Symphony while

sketching its incomplete scherzo. It was written for and dedicated to Carl Emanuel Liebenberg von Zsittin, who had studied piano with Johann Nepomuk Hummel, and Schubert hoped for some remuneration from the dedication. It is not only a technically formidable challenge for the performer, but also a structurally formidable four-movement work combining theme-and-variations with sonata form. The whole work is based on one single basic motive, from which all themes are developed. This motive is distilled from the theme of the second movement, which is set in C-sharp minor and is a sequence of variations on a melody taken from the lied *Der Wanderer*, which Schubert wrote in 1816. It is this set of variations from which the work's popular name is derived.

----- Interval -----

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827)

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

1. Grave – Allegro di molto e con brio
2. Adagio cantabile
3. Rondo: Allegro

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. Beethoven dedicated the work to his friend Prince Karl von Lichnowsky. Although commonly thought to be one of the few works to be named by the composer himself, it was actually named *Grande sonate pathétique* (to Beethoven's liking) by the

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publisher, who was impressed by the sonata's tragic nature.

Prominent musicologists debate whether or not the Pathétique may have been inspired by Mozart's piano sonata K. 457, since both compositions are in C minor and have three very similar movements. The second movement, "Adagio cantabile", especially, makes use of a theme remarkably similar to that of the spacious second movement of Mozart's sonata. However, Beethoven's sonata uses a unique motif line throughout, a major difference from Haydn or Mozart's creation.

The pianist and composer Ignaz Moscheles discovered the work in 1804, when he was ten years old; unable to afford to buy the music, he copied it out from a library copy. His music teacher, on being told about his discovery, "warned

me against playing or studying eccentric productions before I had developed a style based on more respectable models. Without paying heed to his instructions, however, I laid Beethoven's works on the piano, in the order of their appearance, and found in them such consolation and pleasure as no other composer ever vouchsafed me."

Anton Schindler, a musician who was a friend of Beethoven in the composer's later years, wrote: "What the Sonate Pathétique was in the hands of Beethoven (although he left something to be desired as regards clean playing) was something that one had to have heard, and heard again, in order to be quite certain that it was the same already well-known work. Above all, every single thing became, in his hands, a new creation, wherein his always legato playing, one of the particular characteristics of his execution, formed an important part."

George Gershwin (1898 – 1937)

Three Virtuoso Preludes (arr. Earl Wild)

1. The Man I Love
2. Embraceable You
3. I Got Rhythm

Gershwin's parents arrived in New York at the end of the nineteenth century, refugees from pogroms in Russia. They met and married in 1895 in Brooklyn, and brothers Ira and George were born in 1896 and 1898. They lived in many different residences, as their father changed dwellings with each new enterprise he became involved with. Mostly, the boys grew up around the Yiddish Theater District. They frequented the local Yiddish theaters, with George running errands for members and appearing onstage as an extra.

George lived a usual childhood existence for children of New York tenements - running around with his boyhood

friends, roller skating and misbehaving in the streets. Remarkably, he cared nothing for music until the age of ten, when he was intrigued by what he heard at a friend's violin recital. He started piano lessons, and eventually embarked on training as a classical musician whilst earning a living after the age of 15 as a song plugger in Tin Pan Alley.

His first published song bore the snappy title "When You Want 'Em, You Can't Get 'Em, When You've Got 'Em, You Don't Want 'Em", but his work fusing the traditions of jazz and classical music, and his growing collaborations with his brother Ira and others made his name in the 1920s as the composer of musicals.

Earl Wild, an American child prodigy pianist arranged these three virtuoso preludes for his own recital use, basing the works on some of Gershwin's greatest songs.

Franz Liszt (1811 – 1886)

Waltz on Themes of Gounod's "Faust"

Franz Liszt held a lifelong fascination with the Faust legend, beginning with his idolization of Niccolò Paganini, the great violin virtuoso who himself had garnered a Faustian reputation, to his Mephisto Waltzes and grand Faust Symphony. It is no wonder then that Liszt admired Charles Gounod's operatic treatment of the legend and paid his respects with a piano transcription of two numbers from the opera.

Based on a French play, which in turn was loosely on Goethe's Faust, Gounod's five act grand opera premiered in Paris at the Théâtre Lyrique on March 19, 1859.

Initially ill-received by the Parisian public, it nevertheless was taken on tour through Germany, Belgium, Italy and England. A few years later, in 1862, it was staged again in Paris to great success and eventually became one of the most oft-performed works at the Paris Opéra and a staple of the repertoire.

Composed in 1861, near the culmination of his time in Weimar, Liszt's transcription is in the manner of his earlier concert paraphrases of selections from Verdi's operas. Based on the waltz scene that concludes Act I and the love-duet, O nuit d'amour between Faust and Marguerite in Act II, Liszt freely borrows from Gounod's music and combines it with his own musical tangents.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

In 2014 Ji's debut CD Piano Reflections was released by Classic FM and immediately went on to become No.1 in the classical charts. Born in 1990, Ji Liu studied at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. From a young age Ji has appeared as soloist at major venues and festivals internationally. During his studies Ji won numerous prizes and awards including 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.

Our next concert is The Villiers Quartet on Sunday 26 April at 4pm.

For more information on the artists and on future concerts, please visit www.wethersfieldchamberconcerts.org.uk