

Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

3 April 2016 – 4pm

Martin James Bartlett Piano

PROGRAMME NOTES

BEETHOVEN (1770 – 1827): Sonata in E flat, Op.31 No.3

1. Allegro
2. Scherzo (Allegretto vivace)
3. Menuetto (Moderato e grazioso)
4. Presto con fuoco

The three piano sonatas of Op. 31 are commonly held to mark the onset of Beethoven's middle period, characterised in particular by a more explicit turn of dramatic expression with a consequential increase in the range of the forms. What is more, a tendency (always apparent in Beethoven's piano music in particular) to surprise and tease, is given greater rein.

This is obvious (although not at all in a hammer-and-tongs way) in the quiet start of the first movement. It is seemingly introductory with questioning phrases and two pauses, but this is actually the main subject matter. The secondary subject is also made slightly mysterious by

passages for right hand alone. This apart, the movement seems to take an orthodox course, but when the recapitulation is apparently over the questioning begins again, leading to a page of resolution by way of tailpiece.

More unorthodox music follows – a Scherzo, not in the accelerated three-time that Beethoven had established as his own, but in a gentle two-time, not without more hesitations, but also employing a fast and persistent tick-tock. There is thus room, as the nearest approach to a slow movement, for a proper minuet whose suave lines are diversified by the whimsical hopping-about of the chords of the trio. At last the sonata climaxes in a grand finale, the more remarkable for being “presto with fire”; in effect it is an irresistible tanrante.

Programme note provided by Ivor Keys, February 2011, via Making Music

LISZT (1811-1886): Vallee d'Obermann (No.6 from Annees de pelerinage, premiere annee)

One of the greatest of piano virtuosos, Liszt brought his own prodigious technique to bear in his innumerable piano compositions and was inspired by the picturesque and often melodramatic traits of the Romantic movement. Many of his pieces are descriptive. This is the case with this piece, reflective of the grandeur of nature. It is a beautiful evocation of an alpine valley and was composed in 1835-36 during his stay in Geneva, where he taught at the recently founded Geneva conservatory and lived with his mistress and cultural mentor, the Countess Marie d'Agoult. Vallee d'Obermann is one of the pieces in Liszt's “Album d'un Voyageur”, a group of lyrical piano solos

descriptive of Swiss scenes. Liszt later transformed this set into the first book of his “Annees de Pelerinage (Years of Pilgrimage)”, a musical journey inspired by travels he made in Switzerland and Italy between 1835 and 1839. It was an important time for Liszt, during which he wrote essays and composed some of his finest music, discovering the extent and potential of his abilities and asserting his status as an artist.

Programme notes provided by unknown, March 2011, via Making Music

----- Interval -----

SCHUBERT (1797-1828): Impromptu no. 2 in E flat major, Op. 90, Impromptu no. 3 in G flat major, Op 90, Impromptu no. 4 in A flat major, Op. 90

Franz Schubert's Impromptus are a series of eight pieces for solo piano composed in 1827. They were published in two sets of four impromptus each: the first was published in the composer's lifetime as Op. 90, and the second was published posthumously. They are considered to be among the most important examples of this popular early 19th-century genre.

The Impromptus are often considered companion pieces to the Six moments musicaux, and it has been said that Schubert was deeply influenced in writing these pieces by the Impromptus, of Jan Václav Voříšek and by the music of Voříšek's teacher Václav Tomášek.

Programme notes provided by John Woollard

BARBER (1910-1981): Piano Sonata Op. 26

“When I write an abstract piano sonata or concerto, I write what I feel. It is said that I have no style at all, but that doesn't matter. I just go on doing, as they say, my thing. I believe this takes a certain courage”

Samuel Barber 1971.

Barber started early as a composer writing a short opera (which he performed with his sister) before entering the Curtis Institute for his academic musical training, aged 14. Here he also developed his singing voice and for a while thought of pursuing a singing career. But he was

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already an assured composer, winning prizes that enabled him to travel to Europe. The slow movement of his 1936 String Quartet brought him instant success after he orchestrated it as the "Adagio for Strings", and while he wrote many songs and orchestral pieces, his output of chamber music and works for solo instruments was more limited.

The sonata's opening movement begins like a snarling old beast let out of its cage, its bold dotted rhythms and chromatic lines unleashed in fury. Although these ideas are pervasive throughout the movement (constructed on classical sonata form lines) they are not dominant and the mood quickly becomes more lyrical ascending to upper registers dissolving into rapid runs. Repeated chords emerge which have the effect of taming the wild beast so that the development starts with the opening material, but now marked pianissimo and misterioso. What follows is more in the way of variations often improvisatory in feel, of all the ideas presented in the exposition until the dramatic opening returns for the recapitulation. The

repeated chords usher in the coda that hold the promise of a quiet ending, but the wild beast returns for an abrupt end.

The second movement is bi-tonal (written in two keys simultaneously) giving a piquant flavour to this quicksilver perpetuo moto scherzo with a little waltz ticked in as a trio. The Adagio uses the baroque device of a passacaglia with its repeated ground bass (either as a single line or chords, and moving sometimes into the right hand). Over this a long sweeping melody, based on a restrained form of serialism emerges, richly decorated.

The last movement is a four-part fugue with a jazzy feel. Its toccata like brilliance, demonstrating the technical skill of both composer and performer, make it a challenging piece to play and bring the whole sonata to a triumphant conclusion.

Programme note provided by Janet Upward, January 2012, via Making Music

WILD (1915-2010) / GERSHWIN (1898-1937): Virtuoso Etude No.4 'Fascinating Rhythm'

Earl Wild was an American pianist, renowned as a leading virtuoso of his generation. Harold C. Schonberg called him a "super-virtuoso in the Horowitz class". He was well known for his transcriptions of classical music and jazz, and he was also a composer. Wild created numerous virtuoso solo piano transcriptions: 14 songs by Rachmaninoff, and works on themes by Gershwin. He

also wrote Seven Virtuoso Études on Popular Songs, based on Gershwin songs such as "The Man I Love", "Fascinating Rhythm" and "I Got Rhythm", and Theme and Variations on George Gershwin's "Someone to Watch Over Me" (1989).

Programme notes provided by John Woollard

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

At the age of 17, Martin James Bartlett was awarded the title of BBC Young Musician 2014. His winning performance of Rachmaninov's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, with conductor Kirill Karabits and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, received overwhelming acclaim from Edinburgh's Usher Hall audience and from those tuning into the live recording broadcast on BBC4 and BBC Radio 3.

Martin began his piano studies with Emily Jeffrey at the Royal College of Music Junior Department when he was 8 years of age, and then at the Purcell School also some 5 years later. This autumn, he commenced his undergraduate studies with Vanessa Latache at the Royal College of Music, notably as a coveted Foundation Scholar. Martin also previously studied the bassoon and the recorder, achieving Grade 8 Distinction on all three instruments by the age of 12.

Throughout these formative years, Martin enjoyed considerable success in numerous competitions and festivals. During his time at the Royal College of Music Junior Department, Martin won the Gordon Turner Competition, the Teresa Carreño Competition, the Angela Bull Competition and the Peter Morrison Concerto Prize. He was several years running a top prize winner also in the Jaques Samuel Junior Department Piano Festival. In 2012, Martin was granted a Tsukanov Scholarship, which generously supported his final years of study at the RCMJD. During his time at the Purcell School, Martin won the Middle School Concerto Competition, the Freddy Morgan Competition, the Wigmore Competition (both solo and chamber) and the Senior School Concerto Competition. At the end of his studies at both RCMJD and Purcell, Martin was honoured to be awarded the prestigious Leaver's Prize for Outstanding Musical Contribution, the Esther Coleman Prize and the Rosemary Rapaport Prize.

Just this past September, Martin made his debut at the BBC Proms, performing Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue with the Ulster Orchestra at the "Last Night" celebrations, which were broadcast live from Belfast on the internet as well as BBC Radio Ulster. Martin has also very recently performed with the BSO in Bournemouth Pavilion as soloist in the opening concert of their 2014/15 Season.

Most recently, Martin was one of 27 international artists, including Elton John, Stevie Wonder, Nicola Benedetti and Alison Balsom, to be chosen by the BBC to record a cover of the Beach Boys classic 'God only Knows'. The song was first aired on the 8th October on all BBC TV and Radio channels and later was released as the BBC Children in Need single with the first ever collaboration between Warner, Sony and Universal music.

Martin made his Royal Albert Hall debut with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in April 2015.

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