

Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

8 April 2018 – 4pm

Martin James Bartlett Piano

PROGRAMME NOTES *by John Woollard*

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685 – 1750): Partita No. 2 in C minor, BWV 826

While this partita and the four that followed appeared after 1726, all were written during that year, a year that saw publication of the B flat major piece first. Bach published a new partita each year until 1731, when all six appeared together. Each of these works consists of dances -- typically an Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, and Gigue -- and other pieces, forming a whole that could just as easily have been called a suite. They generally show Bach's lighter side, though there is a fair share of serious music here, too. All the partitas have seven movements except for this C minor effort, which comprises six. Another unusual aspect is its exclusion of a Gigue at the close, where Bach substituted a Rondeau and Capriccio.

This suite opens with a Sinfonia which, speaking of serious music, achieves a depth of expression to rival much of Bach's more profound keyboard music. It is in three sections, the first ponderous and dramatic, the succeeding two having progressively faster tempos. The theme in the second section has a soothing serenity in its animated

nonchalance, while the final part is lively and light in its variant of this theme, and brims with Bach's deft counterpoint and rhythmic subtlety.

The Allemande that follows is somewhat subdued but features an undercurrent of contrapuntal activity with many delicious details that often come refreshingly to the foreground. The remaining four numbers are much shorter and lighter in expressive content. Best among them may be the ensuing Courante, a sunny, graceful piece whose contrapuntal elements seem to blend rather than conjure, imply rather than articulate.

The ensuing Sarabande is slow, almost hymn-like in its solemn yet soothing manner. The lively Rondeau that follows is jumpy and full of playfulness, while the closing Capriccio is meatier, both in its muscular first section and in the inversion of material from the opening that comes in the latter half. It is also quite a challenging finale for the performer.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827): Piano Sonata No. 18 in E \flat major, Op. 31, No. 3

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

The work dates from 1802. The sonata was given the nickname The Hunt by a third party due to one of its themes being reminiscent of a horn call. A playful jocularly is maintained throughout the piece. However, as with many of Beethoven's early works, the 'jocular' style can be heard as a facade, concealing profound ideas and depths of emotion. This was the third of a group of piano sonatas with which Beethoven took another large step forward in the genre he ultimately revolutionised. This one was last of the 32 works to have a minuet movement, clearly a holdover from the eighteenth century that the composer subsequently felt compelled to abandon. The so-called "Hunt" Sonata's first movement, marked Allegro, begins with a three-note motif which seems to gently demand the listener's attention. From this fragment and the vigorous bass response of four chords, Beethoven ingeniously builds the first theme group. A fast, jaunty melody launches the second subject and keeps the mood light and relatively calm. The material is repeated and the development ensues, based mainly on the themes in the first group, though Beethoven uses all the previous material. The rhythmic appeal at the outset of the development section owes much to the composer's deft transformation of the bass response to the opening motif. The recapitulation follows and a brief coda closes the movement.

The second movement is an unorthodox Scherzo marked Allegro vivace. It is unorthodox because it lacks a trio section, features substantial thematic development, and is in 2/4 (instead of triple) time. The main theme is fast-paced and optimistic, forming a double-arch pattern. A secondary idea here sounds almost like humorous commentary on the main material. Another theme, frantic and breathless, turns the mood toward the manic and ecstatic. The material is then developed, with much humour emerging as the music slides and slips via colorful glissando-like effects. The recapitulation features ingenious changes in the themes, and the movement closes with a brilliant, short coda. The third movement (Menuetto: Moderato e grazioso) is charming and without doubt the most traditional panel in the sonata. Clearly it hearkens back to the previous century, and perhaps, after the rather "modern" Scherzo, the composer intended it as a contrast. An elegant main theme leads to vigorous, almost disruptive, secondary material. The themes are repeated and a coda closes the movement. Beginning with a rush of energy, the finale Presto con fuoco features a spry descending melody with left-hand accompaniment. Another theme, likened by some to a "horn call" (thus giving this sonata its rather inappropriate nickname) appears, and the narrative unfolds unrelentingly. There is much playfulness in this rhythmic music: the "horn call" theme, for instance, seems to bounce all over the sonic landscape and the energetic, buoyant mood never flags. After the exposition repeat, there is some development of the materials, and a new theme appears. After the reprise, a brief coda closes the sonata.

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----- Interval -----

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873 - 1943): From Preludes, Op. 32

1. Prelude in B minor, Op. 32, No. 10
2. Prelude in G major, Op. 32, No. 5
3. Prelude in G sharp minor, Op. 32, No. 12

Like Chopin, Rachmaninov wrote preludes for piano in all the major and minor keys. The series started with the C sharp minor (Op. 3, No. 2). He added the ten preludes of Op. 23 and the series was completed with the 13 preludes of Op. 32. In this latter set he developed his technique of

forming a piece from tiny melodic or rhythmic fragments, often a simple dotted note figure, as in Nos. 10, 11 and 13. No. 10 in B minor is probably the finest of all the preludes. Its close-knit structure is based entirely on the opening figure, and the G sharp minor (No. 12) is characterized by an ambiguous haze. The Op. 32 set dates from 1910 and was first performed publicly by Rachmaninov himself in December 1911.

Sergei Prokofiev (1891 – 1953): Piano Sonata No. 7 in B-flat major, Op. 83. "Stalingrad"

1. Allegro inquieto (in B-flat major)
2. Andante caloroso (in E major)
3. Precipitato (in B-flat major)

On 20 June 1939 Prokofiev's close friend and professional associate, the director Vsevolod Meyerhold, was arrested by the NKVD just before he was due to rehearse Prokofiev's new opera Semyon Kotko; he was shot on 2 February 1940. Although his death was not publicly acknowledged, let alone widely known until after Stalin's reign, the brutal murder of Meyerhold's wife, Zinaida Raikh, less than a month after his arrest was a notorious event. Only months afterwards, Prokofiev was 'invited' to compose Zdravitsa (literally translated 'Cheers!', but more often given the English title Hail to Stalin) (Op. 85) to celebrate Joseph Stalin's 60th birthday.

Later that year, Prokofiev started composing his Piano Sonatas Nos 6, 7, and 8, Opp. 82–84, widely known today as the "War Sonatas." These sonatas contain some of Prokofiev's most dissonant music for the piano. Biographer Daniel Jaffé has argued that Prokofiev, "having forced himself to compose a cheerful evocation of the nirvana Stalin wanted everyone to believe he had created" (i.e. in Zdravitsa) then subsequently, in these three sonatas, "expressed his true feelings". It was therefore ironic (most especially because it has been pointed out that the opening theme is based on Robert Schumann's Lied, 'Wehmut' ('Sadness', which appears in Schumann's Liederkreis, Op. 39) that Sonata No. 7 received a Stalin Prize (Second Class).

The first time the sonata was played was in Moscow on January 18, 1943 by Sviatoslav Richter.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

In May 2014, at the age of 17, Martin James Bartlett was awarded the title of BBC Young Musician. 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.

Recent highlights included Martin's BBC Proms debut performing Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Eric Whitacre. He performed Rachmaninov with Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and opened the Cheltenham Festival with the BBC Concert Orchestra. Upcoming concerto appearances include touring with the European Union Chamber Orchestra, and performing with Lara Melda and Aurora Orchestra at Kings Place as part of their complete Mozart piano concerto cycle.

As part of the Chinese State visit last year, Martin performed a private concert for the First Lady of China, Peng Liyuan and other dignitaries. He also recently performed at Her Majesty The Queen's 90th Birthday thanksgiving service, which was broadcast live on BBC One from St. Paul's Cathedral.

We hope that you will join us for our concerts next year - on 14 & 28 April, 13 May 2019