

LAUREN ZHANG (piano)

Winner of BBC Young Musician Competition, 2018

THURSDAY MARCH 17TH, 2022

in Penrith Methodist Church

Beethoven	Sonata no.18 in E flat major, op.31 no.3 (<i>The Hunt</i>)
Liebermann	Gargoyles, op.29
Schubert/ Liszt	Auf dem Wasser zu singen

Beethoven	Sonata no.4 in E flat major, op.7
Liszt	Réminiscences de Don Juan, S.418

We warmly welcome Lauren Zhang as guest artist for our second piano recital of the season. This evening's programme continues to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's death with two sonatas from the early period of his life. Liszt's spectacular *Reminiscences de Juan*, his arrangement of Schubert's *Auf dem Wassen du singen* and Liebermann's *Gargoyles* complete a varied and demanding programme.

A reminder that we still have two more concerts to take place, Junior Musicians of the Royal Northern College of Music will be making a welcome reappearance in two days time on Saturday March 19th (2.30pm) and the Barbican String Quartet will be giving their concert, postponed from January, on Thursday April 21st. Both concerts are included in the membership subscription.

The interval will last 15 minutes. We are sorry that we are unable to provide interval refreshments at this time.

Sonata in E flat major, op.31 no.3 (The Hunt)

BEETHOVEN
(1770-1827)

Allegro

Scherzo: Allegretto vivace

Minuetto e Trio: Moderato e grazioso

Presto con fuoco

Beethoven wrote this sonata in 1802, the same year as his second symphony and at a time when he was still enjoying a successful career as a solo pianist, a situation that was soon to change as he was affected by increasing deafness. Twenty of his 32 piano sonatas had been written by this time. It is an exuberant work, full of intricate finger work and a lightness of touch that has its origins in the style of his former teacher, Haydn.

The first two of the sonatas that form op.131 only have three movements, but in this final sonata of the group Beethoven reverts to the four-movement structure of many of his earlier sonatas. Unusually, however, the E flat sonata has no slow movement – the second movement is a Scherzo and the third movement is a Minuet and Trio. In most of his music after this time the Scherzo was becoming seen as a replacement for the Minuet. The sonata is sometimes known as *The Hunt* – an early listener thought that one of the themes was reminiscent of a hunting call. As in the *Moonlight* sonata the title was not of Beethoven's choosing.

The **first movement** (*Allegro*) is written in the usual sonata form. The opening theme is unusual in its questioning nature and the home chord of E flat is not reached until the eighth bar. The rhythmic pattern of the opening bar and the harmonic subtleties of the opening bars are explored extensively throughout the movement. The second main theme offers a light and jocular contrast.

The **second movement** (*Scherzo*) is in A flat major and is unusual for being in 2/4 rather than the usual 3/4 time. It is also written in sonata form rather than the expected ternary (ABA) plan. Despite this, it still contains many of the characteristics of a *Scherzo* with its playful nature and unexpected pauses.

The **third movement** (*Minuetto*) goes back to the home key and is in the expected ABA form. Beethoven's indication *Moderato e grazioso* underlines its gentle and tender approach - a traditional serious movement in contrast to the others.

The **fourth movement** (*Presto con fuoco*) does not have the fire and tempestuousness of the finales of some of Beethoven's later piano sonatas but it is an exuberant, rollicking movement in 6/8 time, in the style of an Italian tarantella. Incessant patterns of quavers, arpeggios and cross hand passages drive the music forward, scarcely pausing for breath.

Gargoyles, op.29

LIEBERMANN
(b.1961)

Presto
Adagio semplice ma con molto rubato
Allegro moderato
Presto feroce

Born in New York, Lowell Liebermann studied at the Juillard School of Music and performed his first piano sonata in Carnegie Hall at the age of 16. As well as being an accomplished pianist, he has written a large number of compositions, including concerto for piano, trumpet and violin, opera and ballet music, chamber music and orchestral works, including two symphonies and *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* for piano and orchestra. He is currently a member of the composition faculty at Mannes College - The New School for Music, and is the director of the Mannes American Composers Ensemble.

Gargoyles was commissioned by the Tcherepnin Society for the pianist Eric Himy, who gave the first performance in New York in 1989. The four movements of the suite portray four gargoyles of the type found in the stonework of many cathedrals. The brief opening movement begins with an arresting three note "signal" and moves forward with percussive perpetual motion rhythms. The following picture is a complete contrast – haunting and melancholy, the melody line meandering over patterns based on two alternating chords. The third Gargoyle floats a songful theme over a luminous accompanying texture and the fourth's demonic galloping rhythms offer an increasing feeling of menace as the textures grow steadily more dense and the virtuoso gestures ever more flamboyant.

Auf dem Wasser zu singen

SCHUBERT/ LISZT

Schubert wrote the song *Auf dem Wasser zu singen* (To sing on the water) five years before his premature death in 1828. The song describes a scene on the

water from the perspective of the narrator, who is in a boat, and explores the narrator's reflections on the passing of time.

As well as being the greatest virtuoso pianist of his time and a prolific composer, Liszt had a particular penchant for writing piano transcriptions of the works of other composers. This arrangement of *Auf dem Wassen* was the second of 12 Lieder by Schubert, which Liszt transcribed in S.588. Liszt cleverly incorporates the lieder melody into the flowing texture of the accompaniment.

Sonata in E flat major, op.7

BEETHOVEN
(1770-1827)

Allegro molto e con brio
Largo, con gran espressione
Allegro
Rondo. Allegretto e grazioso

Beethoven's first three piano sonatas (the op.2 group) were written in 1795-6 and were dedicated to Haydn, Beethoven's teacher at the time. Encouraged by new developments in the power and range of the piano, Beethoven was already beginning to move away from the style of Haydn and the Eb major sonata, written at the end of 1796 on a visit to Keglevich Palace in Bratislava, moves a step further. It was dedicated to his student, Babette, Countess Keglevics. Beethoven named it *Great* (or *Grand*) *Sonata* because it was published alone, which is unusual for the time. It retains the four-movement structure that had been used in the op.2 group of sonatas. Eb major was a favourite key of Beethoven and he often used it for music with a majestic feel, such as the *Eroica* Symphony (1803) and the *Emperor* Piano Concerto (1809).

The **first movement** (*Allegro molto e con brio*) begins quietly but there are early indications that Beethoven is going to explore the dynamic range and powerful chords which were now possible on the piano of this time. The second theme is a gentle passage of chords. The movement is in a lively 6/8 time, filled with joyous passages of scales, and written in the usual sonata form.

The **second movement** (*Largo, con gran espressione*) is in the unexpected key of C major. A simple chordal theme forms the basis of a tenderly-written movement marked by occasional dramatic moments and some delicate ornamented passages. It is written in ternary form with a spacious central theme in Ab major and an extended coda.

The **third movement** (*Allegro*) is a light-hearted scherzo with a darker middle section Trio in the minor key, in which the general feeling of suppression occasionally rises to the surface.

The **fourth movement** (*Rondo*) is a relatively gentle Finale. The rondo theme itself is imaginatively treated throughout. A powerful minor key episode creates a striking contrast before the ending restores the gentler mood of the start.

Réminiscences de Don Juan

LISZT
(1811-1886)

Liszt was one of the most colourful figures in the history of music. Born in Hungary, he then lived in Paris, Weimar and Rome, had the acquaintanceship of many of the most significant artistic figures in Europe, and enjoyed a prolific career as a pianist of prodigious technique and flamboyant virtuosity, achieving the kind of adulation that is now reserved for pop groups.

Considering the demands of the concert platform, high society and an adventurous private life, it is amazing that he also found time to write an incredible amount of music, mostly for the piano, but also including symphonic poems, concertos and church music. His piano works include a large number of original pieces, many of them descriptive, and an even larger number of arrangements of pieces by other composers.

Réminiscences de Don Juan, written in 1841, is an opera fantasy on themes from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1787). It is considered to be one of the most taxing and technically demanding of all Liszt's piano works.

The piece begins with music sung by the Commendatore, taken from both the graveyard scene where he threatens Don Giovanni and the finale where he condemns Don Giovanni to Hell. The love duet of Don Giovanni and Zerlina follows, with two variations on this theme. An extended fantasy on the Champagne aria then leads to a finale based on the Commendatore's threat.

Programme notes by Colin Marston