



Motoki Hirai Piano Recital

In Aid of the Japan Society Tohoku Earthquake Relief Fund

Saturday 29 October 2011



PROGRAMME £2.00

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PROGRAMME

Motoki Hirai: Scenes from a Native Land (2005)

Mozart: Sonata in B-flat, K.570

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegretto

Schumann: Fantasiestücke, Op.12 (excerpts)

- No.3: Warum?
- No.4: Grillen
- No.6: Fabel
- No.5: In der Nacht

INTERVAL (15 minutes)

Liszt: Hungarian Rhapsody No.5 in E-minor, S244 'Héroïde-élégiaque'

Litany S562 No.1 after Schubert

The Wish S480 No.1 after Chopin

Chopin: Waltz in C-sharp minor, Op.64 No.2

Prelude in D-flat, Op.28 No.15 'Raindrop'

Albeniz: Rumores de la Caleta (Malagueña), from 'Recuerdos de vioje'

Op.71 No.6

Motoki Hirai: Grace and Hope (World Première)

A week ago, October 22, saw the bicentenary of the birth in the small Hungarian market town of Doborján of Franz Liszt, an event commemorated in the world of music throughout 2011. Liszt was surely the greatest pianist who has ever lived, but he was much more besides. No truly great composer lived a more colourful life than he, and of no other great composer can it be said – as it can in his case – that 135 years after his death the full achievement of such an incredibly complex man remains unknown in its entirety, a man generous in giving of his time in the cause of others. Such humanitarian principles as Liszt frequently espoused are echoed in the stimulus given to Motoki Hirai by the disastrous Tohoku earthquake earlier this year, and his desire to aid the relief of the catastrophe which befell his fellow-countrymen.

Liszt's influence with regard to the development of a transcendental piano technique was immediate and lasting – that part of his achievements has always been acknowledged – yet it is only in comparatively recent years that his influence as a composer has come to be appreciated. No-one, even today, can afford to ignore Liszt in terms of writing for the piano, and whilst his music forms but a part of tonight's recital, we may observe aspects of his influence still, in the piano music of our contemporaries, and which stand behind the two works by Motoki Hirai that open and close his programme and which he himself introduces in these notes.

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Motoki Hirai (b1973) Scenes from a Native Land (2005)

This piece reflects my concern with a number of issues which affect us today. Composed in 2005 which marked the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, I thought it was an appropriate time to pause for thought. After 60 odd years of relative peace, there are still many conflicts as well as natural disasters which affect the lives of vast numbers of people from all over the world. I now offer this composition as a memorial to the past and hopes for lasting peace and stability of the world for the future.

As it was originally composed for a concert held at St. John's, Smith Square in London on Europe Day as part of 2005 EU-

Japan Year of People-to-People Exchanges, an EU-wide initiative to promote a greater mutual understanding of European and Japanese society and culture, I, as a Japanese person, have drawn on images evocative of my native land and its rural life past and present in all its forms, including landscapes, tranquility, folk festivals, even religious themes and legends.

The piece itself consists of several sections of varying lengths played continuously, representing scenes from Japanese rural life including sounds of nature, children at play, dancing and singing in a small village, and traditional instruments such as bamboo flute and Taiko drum. Another section is based on the Okinawa pentatonic scale which consists of five notes, uniquely skipping the second and sixth of the octave. Although some motifs have been influenced by Japanese folk styles, I have not used any particular source for my composition.

As music is a live art, I have focused on improvisation whilst composing this piece in order to make the performance more spontaneous. With this in mind, I hope the audience will let their imagination run freely and just enjoy what they hear.

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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) Piano Sonata No.17 in B-flat major K 570 (1789)

- I Allegro
- II Adagio
- III Allegretto

It may be difficult for us to imagine that in the mid 19th-century, and for no little time thereafter, Mozart's music was by no means as fully appreciated as it is today. The transcriptions Liszt made of Mozart's music were, therefore, exceptional – the 'Lacrymosa' from the *Requiem*, and the paraphrases on *Don Giovanni* and *The Marriage of Figaro* are prime examples – and his organ work, the *Evocation à la Chapelle Sixtine*, S658/R400, quotes from Mozart's late motet *Ave Verum Corpus*.

We may be sure that Liszt played Mozart's piano music, if not publicly, and amongst Mozart's greatest achievements in

Programme Notes

the genre of solo piano music, tonight's Sonata in B-flat stands alongside the D major (K 576) as being without peer. They were composed in Vienna in 1789, and the B-flat major begins with a simple theme in octaves – so simple, in fact, to catch the unwary listener – but which expands and flowers in a wonderfully organic manner to reveal ever new aspects of the theme. Mozart appears unwilling to bid his theme goodbye, as it evolves into an expansive and lyrical coda. The slow movement, in E-flat major, is in great contrast, the music displayed with greater harmonic support and colouring, made up of relatively short, almost variation-like, phrases which nonetheless flow and evolve as the first movement had. Here is Mozart trying something new, and in the finale he releases the tension with a wonderful set of lively rondo-variations, seamlessly woven into a delightful keyboard tapestry such as would have caused Liszt to smile knowingly in appreciation.

Robert Schumann (1810-1856) **Fantasiestücke Op.12 (c1832-1837)**

No.3: Warum?

No.4: Grillen

No.6: Fabel

No.5: In der Nacht

Schumann dedicated his great Fantasie Op.17 to Liszt, who in return inscribed his Sonata in B minor to the German genius. Schumann was a noted writer on music as well as being a fine pianist and a great and original composer, and during the years in which he fought for his musical ideals as editor of (and prolific contributor to) the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* two characters, Florestan and Eusebius, were his literary masks, through whom he argued in an imaginary literary dialogue. Argued they may have done, but they were united in their admiration of great art and were immortalised in music as members of the league of David (Davidbündler) in Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze*, Op.6. This composition was his first great solo piano work wherein he expressed the different facets of his own complex personality, but on the other hand, in the broadly contemporaneous *Fantasiestücke*, the inner tensions afford us a direct insight into Schumann's dreams. As in his Op.6, we find here an apparently completely independent succession of single pieces, already typically Schumannesque, which – if isolated – can be performed on their own, a group from which the individual pianist can select at will.

Franz Liszt (1811-1886) **Hungarian Rhapsody No.5 in E minor S244/5** **'Héroïde-élégiaque' (1847)**

The subtitle of this work, 'Heroic Elegy', which was given by Liszt himself, indicates that it is to be considered to lie somewhat apart from others in the collection of 19 such works in which it appears. As with Chopin, Liszt left his native

land, Hungary, when he was about 11 years old, not returning until 1839. This re-engagement led him to investigate Hungarian gypsy music, depicting a national musical identity, as Chopin had done with his Mazurkas and Polonaises. Liszt's re-engagement is especially found in his Hungarian Rhapsodies; essentially falling into two halves of the gypsy dance: first slow (Lassan) then fast (Friska), became the plan for grand stylisations, expressed through virtuosity of – at times – breathtaking difficulty. But in the Hungarian Rhapsody No.5 in E minor, marked Lento, con duolo, there is no mistaking that this work is, as Leslie Howard has said, 'a deeply-felt elegy with proud but restrained grandeur'. As with the Third Hungarian Rhapsody, the Fifth lacks a faster concluding section. The work clearly had some special significance for Liszt, who later made versions for two pianos and for orchestra. The main second theme first appears in G major, after the solemn funereal opening, and much of the second part of the work is in a consoling E major, before E minor returns for the brief coda.

Schubert/Liszt: Litany S562/1

From the complete Beethoven Symphonies to single songs, including fantasias on themes from operas and other theatre music, Liszt was driven by a desire to make music which he felt was unjustly neglected better known, and to place within the hands of pianists orchestral music that, for one reason or another, was infrequently encountered. In the case of transcriptions of songs by other composers his discriminatory approach to their selection and the care and taste with which he showed betokened a recreative artist of the highest calibre.

Some idea of the importance which Liszt considered his self-imposed task of transcribing songs by Schubert, and the care he lavished upon them, is indicated by the fact that he made exactly one hundred such Schubert transcriptions – sometimes more than one version of the same song. We should remember that Liszt was 17 years old when Schubert died (14 years his senior), and regarded Schubert as a slightly older contemporary (which he was). These songs – familiar to us today in their original vocal versions – only became known to the wider musical world when Liszt himself was in his early maturity. The *Litany for All Souls' Day* is a requiem prayer setting, treated by Liszt with beautiful simplicity.

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)/Liszt: **'Six chants polonaises' S480 (1847-60)** **The Wish (1837)**

Liszt and Chopin (just a year older) held each other in great mutual respect – Liszt going so far as to become Chopin's first biographer. The Hungarian's generosity of spirit

Programme Notes

extended to making solo piano versions of six of Chopin's Polish songs – the only area of his output which was (and still is) neglected. Liszt's captures the essence of the lyrics of these songs admirably, *The Wish* depicting, in ornamented variation form, the longing of a young girl ready to change to whatever appearance necessary for her to declare her love.

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)

Waltz in C-sharp minor Op.64 No.2 (c1847)

This – one of the most famous of all Chopin's Waltzes – is the companion to the other waltz comprising the composer's Opus 64 – that which is known popularly as the 'minute' waltz (although even the most virtuosic of pianists could not play the work within 60 seconds); but the C-sharp minor is a great contrast to its companion: it is much more lyrical, gently melodic, and founded upon no fewer than three unforgettable themes, of such original beauty that it is difficult to decide which is the most attractive.

Prelude in D-flat major 'Raindrop' Op.28 No.15 (1838)

The set of 24 Preludes by Chopin, dedicated to Johann Kessler (who had earlier dedicated a similar set to Chopin) appeared in 1838, having been commissioned by the Pleyel piano company. They are essentially miniatures, but Liszt saw much more than brevity in them, as he said: "Chopin's Preludes are compositions of an order entirely apart... they are poetic preludes, analogous to those of a great contemporary poet". The D-flat major, No 15, is one of the most well-known of all of Chopin's shorter piano works: marked *Sostenuto*, the remarkable innovation of a repeated D-flat acting both as a spur and as a support for the music, is just one example of Chopin's uniquely original genius.

Isaac Albéniz (1860-1909)

Rumores de la Caleta (Malagueña), from 'Recuerdos de viaje' Op.71 No.6

Isaac Albéniz was, like Mozart and Liszt, an extraordinary keyboard prodigy, giving his first public recital (not as extensive a programme as we are used to perhaps) at the age of four. His life thereafter was a succession of triumphs, as pianist and composer, and in 1880 (at the age of 20), Albéniz travelled to Budapest to become one of Liszt's pupils, but he was misinformed as to Liszt's whereabouts; the two eventually met in Weimar, and later in Rome. Albéniz became a noted pupil of Liszt, who was one of the

first 'outsiders' so to speak to adopt the Spanish idiom in several of their works.

But for Albéniz, of course, the unmistakable inflexions of the 'Spanish style' were second nature, and many of his shorter pieces were soon transcribed for guitar: although his life was, like those of Mozart and Schumann, cut short, in his set of six 'Hojas de Album' (Album Leaves) in 1890 he achieved his first truly international success in terms of what he was later to describe as 'music of youth, with its little sins and absurdities that almost point out the sentimental affectation...[it] appears to me like the carvings in the Alhambra, those peculiar arabesques that sway nothing with their turns and shapes, but which are like the air, like the sun, like the blackbirds or like the nightingales of its gardens.' Malagueña means 'the woman from Malaga', and the title has become synonymous with a gentle dance, the piece itself traversing through several moderate tempos.

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Motoki Hirai

Grace and Hope (World Première)

It has been over seven months since the devastating Earthquake and Tsunami, with the ensuing nuclear fall-out, hit my native country of Japan on the 11th of March (which, by a sad coincidence, happened to be my birthday). I have so far organized / participated in 11 charity concerts to raise funds for the rebuilding of lives and livelihoods, through which I feel that the path to full recovery could be extremely long though disaster relief is definitely underway.

I composed this piece following the 3.11 disaster, not only as a prayer for the victims and the survivors, but also hoping that such a tragedy would never happen again. My main goal was to come up with a universal and simple melody that can be shared among people not only in Japan but across the world, to reflect my sincere wish that the world will be a better, more peaceful place to live for us all.

Whilst I am performing the piece on solo piano today, it can easily be transcribed for choir, orchestra or solo instrument as it is ultimately a simple song (though at the moment it's still a 'Lied ohne Worte'). I have always been hearing the theme through human voices whilst composing or playing on the piano since I conceived it at the very beginning. If it could be performed repeatedly to give people hope and courage, as the composer it will give me sheer delight.

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Profile: MOTOKI HIRAI – Pianist & Composer



“a most brilliant and sensitive musical talent both as pianist and composer”

THE GUARDIAN

Widely acclaimed as one of the most imaginative and sensitive pianists of his generation, Motoki Hirai has appeared in the music capitals of the Far East, America and Europe, performing regularly in London's prestigious venues including the Wigmore Hall, St. John's, Smith Square and the Southbank Centre. In March 2011, Motoki gave a hugely successful recital in Carnegie Hall in New York. During recent seasons, Motoki has performed in Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, UK, USA and Japan.

Highlights of the 2011/2012 season and beyond include concerto performances with orchestras such as Czech Virtuosi, chamber music with Vilnius String Quartet amongst others, and solo recitals in venues and festivals including Carnegie Hall (NY), Wigmore Hall, Cadogan Hall (London), Castle Festival (Bratislava), National Cherry Blossom Festival (Washington D.C.), La Folle Journée (Tokyo) as well as concert tours across Europe and Japan.

Whilst being a leading interpreter of the standard repertoire for piano solo, Motoki is equally at home with

chamber music and lieder, shading an inspiring and personal light on music from all periods. Since 1991, Motoki has collaborated with artists including Michael Cox, Kalman Berkes, Barry Craft, John Pearce and his father, the celebrated cellist Takeichiro Hirai, whom Pablo Casals designated as his successor.

As a composer, Motoki has been commissioned to write new works for international artists in various fields which were performed and premièred in venues such as Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre, Cadogan Hall, Chelsea Festival, Dulwich Festival, Unicorn Theatre, Chelsea Flower Show (London), St. George's (Bristol), Canongate Kirk (Edinburgh), Smetana Hall (Prague), Cultural Summer Festival (Bratislava), Maison de la culture du Japon à Paris (Paris), Auditori Pau Casals (Barcelona), Tokyo Opera City, NHK Hall (Tokyo) and Carnegie Hall (NY). In celebration of Chopin's bicentennial in 2010, Motoki Hirai published his piano composition 'Homage à Chopin' (both solo and duet versions), through the publisher 'Chopin Corp.' (Tokyo). His music has also been used in films such as 'Voice' (2004) and 'The Emperor's Tram Girls' (2005).

Born in Tokyo into a highly gifted musical family, Motoki studied piano and composition with his grandfather, the eminent composer Kozaburo Y. Hirai, and violin with his grandmother. Since his first professional appearance at

the age of 13 playing his own piano works to great critical acclaim, he has been highly active in both performance and composition. After reading philosophy and aesthetics at Keio University in Tokyo, Motoki came to London in 1996 to study at the Royal Academy of Music, and later at City University. His teachers have included Frank Wibaut, Dominique Merlet, James Gibb, Patsy Toh and Joseph Seiger.

Over the years, Motoki Hirai has performed for the promotion of world peace and for people in need worldwide in association with organizations such as the Red Cross, Japan Society, Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation, Motor Neurone Disease Association, UNICEF and UNESCO. In 2010 Motoki was invited to Lithuania to give a charity concert, commemorating Sempo (Chiune) Sugihara who saved the lives of 6000 Polish Jews during World War II.

Since the earthquake and tsunami devastated Japan in March 2011, Motoki has been giving a series of charity recitals for fundraising, supported by Steinway & Sons, across the UK including London, Edinburgh, Lincoln, Bristol and Somerset, as well as in Europe and Japan. As an artistic emissary of the Japanese government, Motoki has visited France, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Romania, Sri Lanka and Malaysia amongst others since 1994. He has been honoured with a number of awards, including the Sir Jack and Lady Lyons Performance Award.

He has also been involved in fascinating educational programmes to promote Japanese art and culture across the world, such as the "Picture Books – Reading, Images and Music" project (2007) as artistic director as well as composer. Motoki has broadcast internationally on radio and television (Classic FM, BBC, ITV and NHK) and has made a number of recordings on CD. His most recent release is of works for solo piano 'Motoki Hirai Piano Works' (2006/2010), which has received much critical acclaim.

www.motoki-hirai.com

Reviews

"a superb pianist... his musicianship is incomparable"

THE GUARDIAN

"Consistent musicality... Being a composer himself has endowed the performer [Motoki Hirai] with a special insight into the works of others, enabling him to capture the essential character of each composition."

THE SUNDAY TIMES

"His interpretation was refined and left a strong impression on the audience. It was as though the doors to the most sublime music of our time were being opened note by note right before our eyes."

EL MUNDO

"Mr. Hirai's unhurried approach and ample breathing between phrases brought to mind a great singer or string player... warm lyricism and a uniquely improvisatory feeling"

NEW YORK CONCERT REVIEW

"... superbly performed, technically perfect and infused with keen intelligence"

MUSICAL OPINION

In Association with The Japan Society

*All proceeds from this concert will go to the Japan Society Tohoku Earthquake Relief Fund, for the rebuilding of lives and livelihoods through local projects in the most affected areas.



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