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Motoki Hirai Piano Recital

In Aid of the Japan Society Tohoku Earthquake Relief Fund

Wednesday 25 May 2011



PROGRAMME £2.00

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PROGRAMME

J.S.Bach: French Suite No.2 in C minor, BWV813

- I. Allemande
- II. Courante
- III. Sarabande
- IV. Air
- V. Menuet
- VI. Gigue

Schumann: Arabeske in C, Op.18

Schumann: Sonata No.2 in G minor, Op.22

- I. So rasch wie möglich
- II. Andantino. Getragen
- III. Scherzo. Sehr rasch und markiert
- IV. Rondo. Presto – Etwas langsamer –
Prestissimo (Quasi Cadenza)

INTERVAL

Motoki Hirai: Valse Pathétique (1993)

Motoki Hirai: Three Recollections (UK première)

- Recollection No.1
- Recollection No.2
- Recollection No.3

Motoki Hirai: Hommage à Chopin (1999)

Chopin: Polonaise in C sharp minor, Op.26-1

Chopin: Mazurka in A minor, Op.67-4

**Chopin: Lento con Gran Espressione, Op. posthumous
(Nocturne in C sharp minor)**

Chopin: Scherzo No.3 in C sharp minor, Op.39

J.S.Bach (1685-1750)

French Suite No.2 in C minor, BWV813 (c.1722)

- I. Allemande
- II. Courante
- III. Sarabande
- IV. Air
- V. Menuet
- VI. Gigue

The centenarian musicologist Nicolas Slonimsky once memorably described Johann Sebastian Bach as ‘the great lawgiver of music’, a profound observation which has more than the ring of truth to it. But Bach would not have so regarded himself: a teacher, perhaps, especially of his many surviving children (and of his second wife, Anna Magdalena), but above all he would have thought of his work as being that which provided the city of Leipzig with the music it needed for over a quarter of a century.

None the less, Bach was certainly aware of what he attempted, and succeeded, in doing, and the range of his achievement continues to astonish us today: from the ‘48’ of ‘The Well-Tempered Clavier’ and the Goldberg Variations, at one level, to the ‘Anna Magdalena Notebook’ at another, and from the Passions of St Matthew and St John and the Mass in B minor, to the short secular arias of the ‘Coffee’ and ‘Wedding’ cantatas.

Yet Bach never remained a provincial composer, cut off from the latest developments: he was always interested in the latest music (especially from Italy, that of Antonio Vivaldi) and in the development of new instruments: of his generation, he was one of the first composers in German-speaking Europe to possess the new fortepiano, and as he was also an inveterate transcriber of his own and other composers’ music for new instrumental combinations, he would have been fascinated by ‘trying out’ his earlier harpsichord or clavichord music on his new piano.

But Bach’s music remains the same, no matter in what form, and on which instruments, we hear it. In his keyboard music, especially in the suites, which either predate or coincide with his move to Leipzig in 1723, it was the Italian influence in terms of structure which doubtless set off his creative imagination: the putting together of a work made up almost entirely of dance movements – in his case more subtly so, in terms of key relationships (despite all of the movements in a particular suite being in the same key) and in melodic cross-quotations, so that the results remain forever among the highest combinations of technique and feeling in the history of keyboard music.

Bach’s keyboard suites may comprise dance movements, but they were not meant to be danced to: perhaps that is what gives this music such wonderful inner life, and its eternal fascination. We can experience that in those works of his which are called English or French suites. The titles were not given by Bach himself to these works, although he first published them as Suites pour le clavessin (‘Suites for harpsichord’, with a fashionable title in French).

If the ‘French’ title was first applied 12 years after his death by Friedrich Marpurg, it is useful in differentiating between them, and has for 250 years been universally applied. The C minor French Suite is one of the greatest of them all (in terms of style, it is perhaps more Italian than French, apart from in one or two instances, but no matter). It opens with a stately Allemande, always rather processional in character and here expressively florid. This is followed by a lively, flowing, Courante, in turn succeeded by a slow and dignified Sarabande, in this suite almost as a beautifully expressive song without words.

Before the final movement, Bach would insert differing dance movements – in this instance, an attractive Minuet, although he also used the Gavotte, Bouree or Polonaise from time to time – and the suites invariably ended with a lively Gigue. This one is certainly French in character, of a type called ‘canarie’ because its fast-moving 3/8 tempo style originated in the Canary Islands. It ends the suite in a brilliant manner.

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Robert Schumann (1810-56)

Arabeske in C, Op.18

Sonata No.2 in G minor, Op.22

- V. So rasch wie möglich
- VI. Andantino. Getragen
- VII. Scherzo. Sehr rasch und markiert
- VIII. Rondo. Presto – Etwas langsamer – Prestissimo (Quasi Cadenza)

There is no doubt that Schumann’s love for Clara Wieck provided the inspiration for the greater part of his solo piano music, much of which dates from the years of their courtship in the late 1830s. His Arabeske was written in 1838, two years before their long-delayed marriage, and contains hints of a falling five-note figure that came to be associated in Schumann’s mind with Clara (it had formed part of a theme of hers he had earlier borrowed as the subject of the variations movement in his F minor Piano Sonata). The Arabeske is in a rondo form, with a suitably florid

Programme Notes

theme in C major alternating with minor-key interludes and culminating in a coda in a slower tempo.

For all the Romantic poeticism that imbues the bulk of his piano music, Schumann maintained a yearning for Classical purity of form which led him to that most abstract of instrumental forms, the piano sonata. In the mid-1830s he wrote three such works almost concurrently. The G minor, which was eventually published as No. 2, goes back the earliest, to June 1830, when Schumann began the slow movement, basing it on his 1828 song to Kerner's poem 'Im Herbst' (In Autumn). Next, two summers later, came the first and third movements and, in October 1835, the finale. But it did not quite end there: Schumann was persuaded to rewrite the finale three years later at Clara's request – his then fiancée found the original 'much too difficult'. 'You are right about the last movement of the sonata,' Schumann wrote back. 'It displeases me to such a degree (with the exception of certain passionate moments) that I have discarded it altogether.'

For all the evident struggles with this work, it is the most successful of Schumann's three sonatas and the one in which he came closest to mastery of first-movement sonata form, here in a movement marked 'As fast as possible' and with its thematic material derived, as in so much of his music during his courtship, by the descending theme of Clara's that also appears in the Arabeske. The songful Andantino provides a lyrical interlude before the return to fast and furious music in the scherzo and finale, which, like the first movement, culminates in a race for the finishing line marked 'always faster and faster'.

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Motoki Hirai (1973-)

Valse Pathétique (1993)

I will be playing five of my own compositions this evening, with one common theme - which is 'hommage'.

The Japan Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami that occurred on 11th March 2011 (which as a sad coincidence happened to be my birthday) took the lives of and left eternal scars on many of my friends and acquaintances, leaving a huge sense of loss within me. I would like to dedicate tonight's performance to the victims and those left behind to suffer.

'Valse Pathétique' was originally dedicated to my best friend, Masato David Yoshimatsu who died in the summer of 1993 at the tragically early age of 21.

On the day of his funeral I composed and improvised it at the piano during the ceremony at the church in Tokyo.

As its title suggests, this piece is a kind of Waltz with the third beat of the left hand missing, and through that, a sense of loss may be subtly felt.

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Three Recollections (1991)

The Japanese title of the piece is slightly different, with the exact translation being 'Prelude Reminiscence' which was in fact how I had originally named Recollection No.1. I later adjoined Recollections No.2 and No.3 with No.1 as a set of three pieces for the solo piano, renaming it 'Recollections'.

In hindsight, a large number of my works is based on what I call the 'Music Diary' which I kept as a teenager. In the Music Diary I kept my impressions, inspirations, feelings and at times illusionary images which I had or created from my everyday life and recorded as poetic fragments. Recollections No.1 and No.2 were both based on such fragments of composition from my Music Diary.

Recollection No.1 was used in the film 'The Emperor's Tragic Girls' (2005) which, coincidentally, is a film depicting the tragedy surrounding the atomic bombs in Hiroshima in August 1945 at the very end of World War II.

Recollection No.2 had originally been named 'Dialogue' or 'Echo'. It was composed as an image of a dialogue taking place in the mythical world, where the left hand denotes the young man who pursues the goddess symbolized by the right hand.

Recollection No.3 had originally been named 'Prelude "Illusion"'. The ocean-like arpeggio by the left hand marks the tranquil start of the piece, which gradually gains momentum eventually leading to the dramatic climax.

In contrast to No.1 and No.2, Recollection No.3 was completed almost instantly in my mind, and naturally configured itself into a single piece of music.

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Hommage à Chopin for solo piano (1999)

Since my childhood, I have had the greatest respect and affection for the music of Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849) alongside Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann.

The core part of 'Hommage à Chopin' was composed while I was still a teenager; about ten years later in 1999, I added the Introduction and Coda to complete the work, commemorating the 150th anniversary of Chopin's death.

Thereafter, to celebrate Chopin's bicentennial in 2010, I took great pleasure in paying tribute to his genius through the publication of the sheet music of 'Hommage à Chopin' for both solo and piano duet versions. (The piano duet version was arranged in 2008 and revised two years later for the publication.)

The composition is structured in traditional ABA form with an Introduction and Coda. At the end of the piece, a reflection of the theme appears reminiscently, incorporated with a short Cadenza.

There are in fact no direct references to any of Chopin's compositions in the piece at all, but I am hoping to convey aspects of the spirit of his music together with an impression of

the elegant and liberal atmosphere of the era in which he lived. I hope that by performing this piece, the pianist will be reminded to 'make the piano sing', transcending the confines of the instrument, as Chopin was greatly influenced by singers and operatic works.

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Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)

When, at the age of 18, Chopin left Warsaw and first visited Vienna, settling in Paris two years later, the impact of those European musical capitals upon him must have been considerable. Although, by then, Chopin had composed around twenty works, they were written, as it were, in isolation, for he had barely encountered the music of Mozart or Beethoven at that time, although (unusually for the period) he had studied several of Bach's keyboard works, which were then by no means as familiar as they became in the 19th-century. In Chopin's famous set of 24 Preludes, the influence of Bach may be more readily discerned, but his first contact with the teeming musical world of the Vienna of the lately-deceased Beethoven and Schubert and the Paris of Rossini's *William Tell* (premiered there in 1829) and that opera's immediate influence upon Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* (1830), were revelations for Chopin. He could hardly remain aloof from such influences, yet – confining himself to his own instrument, the pianoforte, on which he was one of the greatest exponents then living – he remained true to himself in terms of style and musical character.

The essence of Chopin's genius lies in his combination of tradition and newness. He was sympathetic to the early Romantic faction in music, then at the height of its flowering. Whilst being a Romantic in temperament and in other aspects of his art, Chopin never relied upon extra-musical explanations for his work. If his ideas more readily lent themselves to shorter forms it would be wrong to consider him only as a miniaturist. His mature Sonatas, *Ballades*, *Scherzos* and the *Fantasia* in F minor show his mastery of larger forms. Taking from the past and from the present those elements he needed, Chopin showed his work to be a continuation of aspects of the classical tradition, at the same time as undoubtedly embracing the expressive nature of the new Romanticism, through which he developed existing forms afresh, especially in his *Impromptus*, *Polonaises*, *Études (Studies)* and *Nocturnes*.

Polonaise in C sharp minor, Op.26-1 (1834)

The Polonaise is an old aristocratic dance from Poland, one of the forms that attracted Chopin from an early age – as we have noted, Bach himself had incorporated the dance in his keyboard suites. The C sharp minor in tonight's programme is the first of a pair that make up Chopin's Opus 26, and is an intensely dramatic composition. Marked *Allegro appassionato*, it begins in declamatory fashion, a peremptory gesture, fully extended before a contrasting middle section, in the enharmonic equivalent of D flat major, *Meno mosso*, reveals the material in a different light, a calming influence that carries the music through to the end.

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Mazurka in A minor, Op.67-4 (1836)

For many people, Chopin's Mazurkas, of which he composed no fewer than 63, lie at the heart of his output. The dance itself, like the Polonaise, is quintessentially Polish; it comes from a region in that country which embraces Warsaw – so it is likely that Chopin must have been familiar with the genre from boyhood. The dance is in three-four time, with the emphasis largely falling on the second or third beat. In this piece, Chopin understates the emotion, not wearing his heart as it were on his sleeve; here is a more intimate statement, perhaps, but marked *Moderato animato* – so the inner life of this delightful piece (which was not first published until after Chopin's death) reveals this truly great and original composer at his most immediately distinguishable.

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Lento con Gran Espressione, Op. posthumous (Nocturne in C sharp minor)

The first works to be given the title of 'nocturne' were written by the Irish composer John Field (1782-1837), but in taking over the name, Chopin transformed the form and made it very much his own, bringing to it his particular melodic distinction and harmonic imagination. The Nocturne in C sharp minor (not to be confused with the piece in the same key from Op. 27) remained unpublished in his lifetime and appeared in 1857 as a *Lento con gran espressione*, though it has subsequently become one of the nocturnes in all but its official name. It was composed in 1830, at about the same time as the Op. 9 and Op. 15 sets of nocturnes, and fulfils all the expectations of the genre – pensive, atmospheric and dreamlike.

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Scherzo No.3 in C sharp minor, Op.39 (1839)

It is to Beethoven that we owe the evolution of the Scherzo as a single movement in a large-scale work, yet in the (eventual) four works to which Chopin gave the title, it is to the Polish master that we should ascribe the development of the Scherzo into a single, self-contained composition. Chopin's first Scherzo, in B minor, was drafted in 1831-32, and tonight's Third Scherzo came in 1839, two years after No 2. In these works, we find some of Chopin's boldest music – not just in dramatic intensity, or of technical virtuosity, but in harmonic daring. This Scherzo is far away from the relatively brief Mazurka preceding it in tonight's programme, and must have seemed when it appeared as an astonishingly modern composition, with the juxtaposition of chordal writing and florid descending phrases – contrasted yet so fully worked out through the inherent organic unity of this, in its way, quite revolutionary work. The astounding demands Chopin makes on the pianist and the total fusion of expressive content place the four Scherzos among the very greatest of his works.

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Profile: Motoki Hirai – Pianist & Composer



“a most brilliant and sensitive musical talent”

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 South Bank Centre. In March 2011, Motoki gave a hugely successful sold-out recital in Carnegie Hall in New York. During recent seasons, Motoki has performed in Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Romania, Spain, USA and his native Japan. Highlights of the 2011/2012 season and beyond include concerto performances with orchestras such as Czech Virtuosi, solo recitals in venues including Wigmore Hall, Cagodan Hall (London); Queen's Hall (Edinburgh) and Carnegie Hall (NY), 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, South Bank Centre, Chelsea Flower Show, Chelsea Festival 2008, Dulwich Festival 2010 (London), St.

George's (Bristol), Smetana Hall (Prague), Maison de la culture du Japon à Paris (Paris), Auditori Pau Casals (Barcelona), Carnegie Hall (NY), Tokyo Opera City and NHK Hall (Tokyo). His music has also been used in films such as 'Voice' (2004) and 'The Emperor's Tram Girls' (2005).

In 1994, he was the guest artist at the Piano Convention in Nagano, Japan, where he gave a recital with a programme exclusively of his own works. As part of 2005 EU-Japan Year of People-to-People Exchanges, Motoki gave a highly successful recital on Europe Day at St. John's, Smith Square in London, where he included the world première of his own composition 'Scenes from a Native Land', which was repeated in Tokyo the following year, supported by European Union. In celebration of Chopin's bicentennial in 2010, Motoki Hirai published his piano composition 'Hommage à Chopin' (both solo and duet versions), through the publisher 'Chopin Corp.' (Tokyo).

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 the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and 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, 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.

As an artistic emissary of the Japanese government, Motoki has visited France, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, UK, 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 – Storytelling, 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), supported by Steinway & Sons, which has received much critical acclaim.

www.motoki-hirai.com

REVIEWS

"Consistent musicality"

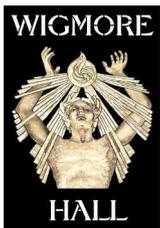
"Being a composer himself has endowed the performer [Motoki Hirai] a special insight into the works of others, enabling him to capture the essential character of each composition."

THE SUNDAY TIMES

"his musicianship is incomparable"

"He plays piano with such an extraordinary sensitivity of touch, such delicate variations of tone, such extremes of dynamic"

THE GUARDIAN



Motoki Hirai Piano Recital

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