

World Tour 2016 - Vienna

MOTOKI HIRAI piano

In Aid of the 2011 and 2016 Japan Earthquakes

Do. 28 April 2016
19.30 Uhr

Wiener Konzerthaus
Schubert-Saal



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PROGRAMME

Beethoven

Piano Sonata No.27 in E minor, Op.90

- I. Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus mit Empfindung und Ausdruck
- II. Nicht zu geschwind und sehr singbar vorzutragen

Schubert

Piano Sonata No.21 in B-flat, D.960

- I. Molto moderato
- II. Andante sostenuto
- III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace con delicatezza - Trio
- IV. Allegro, ma non troppo - Presto

- Interval (20 mins) -

Motoki Hirai

Tone Poems on 'Hyakunin Isshu' (2016) [Vienna première]

(Commissioned and Selected by Kimiko Reizei)

Motoki Hirai

Grace and Hope (2011) [Vienna première]

- Dedicated to the Victims and Survivors of the Earthquake and Tsunami

Chopin

Mazurka No.41 in C-sharp minor, Op.63-3

Chopin

Nocturne No.4 in F, Op.15-1

Chopin

Scherzo No.2 in B-flat minor, Op.31

PROGRAMME NOTES

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Piano Sonata No.27 in E minor, Op.90
I: Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus mit Empfindung und Ausdruck
II: Nicht zu geschwind und sehr singbar vorzutragen

Beethoven's Sonata in E minor, published as his Opus 90 in 1815 (it was written the previous year), has long been regarded as a landmark in his output and in the history of solo piano music. Several factors point to this conclusion: the Sonata is in two movements, other than the usual three or four (it is only the second two-movement such work in Beethoven's output) and is the first in which he wrote indications in his native German, suggesting that he no longer felt bound by 'traditions', either of structure or in the use of the universal Italian language to indicate tempos and nuances in the music.

Charles Hallé was the first pianist to perform all of Beethoven's Piano Sonatas in this country, in a series of recitals in London in 1876. For his recital at St James's Hall on June 16th Hallé wrote: 'by those who divide the sum-total of Beethoven's artistic production into three styles, Opus 90 is generally accounted the last pianoforte sonata belonging to 'Period No 2'. Almost 140 years later, Sir Andrés Schiff claims the E minor Sonata is 'the work that introduces Beethoven's last period, already [having] one foot in the past and one foot in the future.' In agreeing with Hallé and Sir Andrés, we may look askance at the claim of Beethoven's friend Anton Schindler that the Sonata depicted a love affair between its dedicatee Count Moritz Lichnowski and an actress.

Many of Schindler's 'first-hand recollections' are known to be misrepresentations, but as Lord Justice Goddard said, 'A man may be a proven liar, but in some instances he could be telling the truth', and in seeking extra-musical justification for Beethoven to abandon established norms in this work, Schindler may have been right. Beethoven's preceding Sonata, 'Les Adieux', which appeared in 1810, was unquestionably inspired by parting, absence, and return. By the time of whatever inspiration fired the composer's creativity to begin his Opus 90, Beethoven's 'second period' was drawing to an end.

Hallé even constructed a programme of the Count's affair from the Sonata's two movements, but his imagination does not explain the Sonata's musical subtleties. These reveal Beethoven's genius at its height regarding continuous variation within an evolving individual structure, stemming from the opening phrase and the myriad developmental nature of its unique treatment across both movements. Beethoven's German indications go some way to explain: 'Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus mit Empfindung und Ausdruck ('With liveliness and with feeling and expression throughout'), followed by 'Nicht zu geschwind und sehr singbar vorgetragen' ('Not too swiftly and with a singing manner'). There is an implied programmatic thread, which Schindler may have embroidered, but the subtle intimacy of the Sonata's expression cannot be wholly explained away, the inherent nature of which has been described on more than one occasion as Schubertian.

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Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
Piano Sonata No.21 in B-flat major, D.960
I. Molto moderato
II. Andante sostenuto
III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace con delicatezza - Trio
IV. Allegro, ma non troppo - Presto

Any consideration of Schubert's piano music might begin by saying his sonatas mark the end of the first great era of the genre, the culmination of a line that began with Haydn and continued through Mozart and Beethoven. Schubert's approach to large-scale sonata structure was outwardly traditional – his sonatas are almost exclusively four-movement works (notwithstanding several important exceptions) - in significant contrast to the late works of Beethoven, particularly his last five piano sonatas and quartets.

Nor should we forget that Schubert was just 31 when he died: had he enjoyed a life-span such as Beethoven's 56 years there can be little doubt that his later works would have evolved into quite different structures, more so had he heard music of Berlioz and Liszt - or Wagner's Tannhäuser, Lohengrin or Die Walküre - which he could well have done.

Biedermeier Vienna in the 1820s was, of course, much smaller than it soon became, dominated musically by the presence of Beethoven, who had lived in Vienna for more than thirty years. Schubert, revering the older genius, would frequent the same coffee-and eating-houses Beethoven patronised, supping at a table a few feet from the master. Beethoven's profound deafness was common knowledge and, after 1818, became total:

they could never have conversed normally, and, in such circumstances, Beethoven's social graces were confined to eating, almost always with long-standing friends, before returning to his rooms to continue with his music.

Schubert and Beethoven did eventually meet. Beethoven was mortally ill when Schubert and Anselm Hüttenbrenner visited him. When asked whom he wished to see first, Beethoven replied 'Schubert may come first... You, Anselm, have my mind, but Franz has my soul.'

Although doubts remain concerning Schindler's recollections of Schubert's meetings with Beethoven, Schubert undoubtedly sought the older man's music whenever he could. Beethoven's manner of composing was continuous refinement, or workings-out, as shown by his numerous musical sketchbooks, Schubert's expression appears less hard-won, a natural sense of flow that appears as a continuous creative stream. Alfred Brendel has said, 'Schubert relates to Beethoven, he reacts to him, but he follows him hardly at all.' Nor should we forget that Schubert was a pall-bearer at Beethoven's funeral, and on considering the vast amount of work the younger man left, it would seem that there was never a time when Schubert was not thinking about music, pondering how best to express his unstoppable inspiration in structural terms.

By September 1828 Beethoven had been dead a year and a half when Schubert possibly resigned himself to his own fate, as death was also to claim him within two months. In less than six weeks, Schubert composed his last three piano sonatas, all three equal masterpieces as were Mozart's final symphonies. The Sonata in B flat major is the last of all, as Robert Simpson claimed, 'a measured and compassionate utterance of complete and profoundly sublime beneficence.'

The first movement is one of Schubert's most magnificently sustained compositions, weighty yet subtle, as well as being surpassingly beautiful in sound, yet founded upon the finest architectural strengths. The slow movement is a beautiful barcarolle in C sharp minor, with a superbly masculine middle section that seems to fill the whole world with its courageous melody. The Scherzo is the most beautiful Schubert ever wrote, full of limpid freshness, and the finale unites pathos and humour with an all-pervading melodic grace coming from the same mood that informed the first. This masterpiece has the capacity to renew and refresh the listener with every hearing, a testament to human creativity as valid today as when the composer vouchsafed it to us - one of the greatest and most serene piano works since Beethoven.

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)
Mazurka No.41 in C-sharp minor, Op.63-3
Nocturne No.4 in F major, Op.15-1
Scherzo No.2 in B-flat minor, Op.31

When Schubert's final piano sonatas were first published, almost ten years after his death, the publisher added a posthumous dedication to Schumann, who, in 1831 had greeted Chopin's Opus 2 Variations on 'La ci darem' with the famous phrase: 'Hats off, gentlemen, a genius.'

Chopin's genius may have been apparent to Schumann, but it remains almost unique in that he wrote virtually for one instrument, the piano. Although from around the middle of the 17th-century almost all composers were proficient keyboard players, for Chopin the solo piano represented something unique, the essence of his originality shown in combining tradition and newness - as Beethoven similarly achieved in his Opus 90 Sonata.

Chopin was equally attuned, as was Schumann, to burgeoning Romanticism - in the 1830s, at the height of its early flowering. In taking from the past and from the present those elements he needed, Chopin frequently developed existing forms to new heights, as we find in his sets of Mazurkas, Waltzes, Impromptus, Polonaises, Etudes and Nocturnes. The earliest of his Mazurkas - of almost 60 he eventually composed - date from 1825, when Chopin was 16.

That was five years before he left his native Poland to settle in Paris. The Mazurka is a Polish folk-dance in three-four time, the accent in each bar falling on the last beat (occasionally the second). Chopin never returned to Poland but equally never forgot his native land; his Mazurkas appeared at various intervals throughout his life; the three comprising his Opus 63 appearing in 1847, two years before his death at the age of 39.

Chopin did not invent the solo piano Nocturne, but he raised the form to an unparalleled and perfect degree. In Chopin's Nocturnes, short pieces of lyrical or elegiac character, we find a combination of Italianate melody, a recreation of the popular bel canto style in pianistic terms which contains the hallmarks of extemporisation (in which Chopin, it seems, was a master) - the whole having a strong structural sense. Tonight's F major Nocturne is the first of three composed between 1831-33, demonstrating a common shape; beginning with a flowing, lyrical theme in the right hand, softly embroidered, there is a contrasting middle section followed by a return to the opening theme - somewhat more embroidered than at the beginning, in which peaceful mood the piece concludes.

It was Beethoven who expanded the Minuet and Trio movement of classical sonata form into the Scherzo, and within the ten years following his death the concept of free-standing individual movements had spread from the orchestra to the piano. Chopin's Scherzo in B flat minor Opus 31 appeared in 1837, and greatly impressed Schumann, who said it reminded him of a poem by Lord Byron. There is speed (it is marked Presto), tension, eruptive power and lyrical contrast (this last in the contrasted main central section)—the whole subsumed into a wholly original masterpiece, as thrilling today as when it first appeared.

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**Motoki Hirai (1973-)
Tone Poems on 'Hyakunin Isshu' (2016)
(Commissioned and Selected by Kimiko Reizei)**

I composed this piece on the back of a fantastic opportunity presented to me in 2015 by Kimiko Reizei (1947-), who is a direct descendant of Fujiwara no Teika (1162-1241), whose family 'Reizei-ke' has specialized in waka (traditional Japanese poetry) for a thousand years. Kimiko kindly selected ten contrasted works from the Hyakunin Isshu and encouraged me to write music for piano solo on her selection which was a highly prestigious yet challenging task.

The Hyakunin Isshu is an anthology of one hundred waka, each written by a different poet from a vast period spanning 7C-13C, featuring poems by monks, high-ranking court officials and members of the imperial family including Emperor Tenji (626-671) and the Retired Emperor Juntoku (1197-1242). It has been beloved by generations of Japanese since its compilation in the 13th century. Many of the current Japanese population know several of these poems by heart through playing the popular card game version of the anthology since childhood (typically played on New Year's Day). I am not an exception and enjoyed playing it as a child, even though I was too young to understand the profound meaning of each poem.

It was Fujiwara no Teika, a well-known waka poet, novelist, and scholar, who compiled the Hyakunin Isshu (more precisely called 'Ogura Hyakunin Isshu') at the Ogura mountain villa in Kyoto. Teika, together with his father Fujiwara no Shunzei (1114-1204) was known to be a master of expressing 'yugen' (meaning subtle grace, hidden beauty or elegant simplicity) in his profound world of poetry, eventually influencing other forms of Japanese art such as Noh theatre and tea-ceremony for centuries.

Each waka (or tanka) consists of five lines of 5-7-5-7-7 syllabic units. For a few pieces I have tried to transfer the syllabic numbers into music, whilst others were freely composed based on my intuition and imagination. As music is a live art, I have left leeway for improvisation whilst composing in order to make the performance more spontaneous. I hope the members of the audience will let their imagination run freely and just enjoy what they hear.

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5. Sarumaru Dayu (ca. 7th century)

Okuyama ni Momiji fumiwake	In the mountain depths, Treading through the crimson leaves,
Naku shika no Koe kiku toki zo Aki wa kanashiki	Cries the wandering stag. When I hear the lonely cry, Sad (how sad!) the autumn is!

12. Sojo Henjo [Monk Henjo] (816-890)

Ama tsu kaze Kumo no kayoiji Fuki toji yo Otome no sugata Shibashi todomen	O ye Winds of Heaven! In the paths among the clouds Blow, and close the ways, That we may these virgin form Yet a little while detain.
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15. Koko Tenno [Emperor Koko] (830-887)

Kimi ga tame Haru no no ni idete Wakana tsumu Waga koromode ni Yuki wa furi tsutsu	It is for thy sake That I seek the fields in spring, Gathering green herbs, While my garment's hanging sleeves Are with falling snow beflecked.
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28. Minamoto no Muneyuki Ason (?-939)

Yama-zato wa Fuyu zo sabishisa Masari keru Hitome mo kusa mo Karenu to omoeba	Winter loneliness In a mountain hamlet grows Only deeper, when Guests are gone, and leaves and grass Withered are— so runs my thought.
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36. Kiyohara no Fukayabu (ca. 10th century)

Natsu no yo wa In the summer night,
Mada yoi nagara While the evening still seems here,
Akenuru o Lo! The dawn has come.
Kumo no izuko ni In what region of the clouds
Tsuki yadoruranQ Has the wandering moon found place?

37. Funya no Asayasu (ca. 10th century)

Shiratsuyu ni In the autumn fields,
Kaze no fukishiku When the heedless wind blows by
Aki no no wa O'er the pure-white dew,
Tsuranuki tomenu How the myriad unstrung gems
Tama zo chiri keru Everywhere are scattered round!

73. Saki no Chunagon Masafusa [Oe no Masafusa] (1041-1111)

Takasago no On that distant mount,
Onoe no sakura O'er the slope below the peak,
Saki ni keru Cherries are in flower—
Toyama no kasumi May the mist of hither hills
Tatazu mo aranan Not arise to veil the scene.

77. Sutoku-In [Retired Emperor Sutoku] (1119-1164)

Se o hayami Though a swift stream be
Iwa ni sekaruru By a rock met and restrained
Takigawa no In impetuous flow,
Warete mo sue ni Yet, divided, it speeds on,
Awan to zo omou And at last unites again.

83. Kotaigogu no Daibu Toshinari [Fujiwara no Shunzei] (1114-1204)

Yo no naka yo From this world I think
Michi koso nakere That there is nowhere to escape.
Omoi iru I wanted to hide
Yama no oku ni mo In the mountains' farthest depths;
Shika zo naku naru But there I hear the stag's cry.

97. Gon-Chunagon Sadaie [Fujiwara no Teika] (1162-1241)

Konu hito o Like the salt sea-weed,
Matsuho no ura no Burning in the evening calm.
Yunagi ni On Matsuo's shore,
Yaku ya moshio no All my being is aflame
Mi mo kogare tsutsu Awaiting one who does not come.

*Translated by Clay MacCauley in his book
'Hyakunin-Isshu: Single Songs of a Hundred Poets'
(Kelly and Walsh, 1917)

Motoki Hirai (1973-)

Grace and Hope (2011) - dedicated to the victims and survivors of the earthquake and tsunami

It has been five years since the devastating Earthquake and Tsunami, with the ensuing nuclear fall-out, hit my native country of Japan on the 11th of March. I have so far organized and participated in over 30 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 would be a better, more peaceful place to live for us all. I premièred the piece at my piano recital at the Wigmore Hall, London in October 2011 and gave its Japan première in Shichigahama, Miyagi (epicentre of the Tsunami) the following month. Since then, I have revisited Tohoku a few times, and most recently I performed it in Iwate prefecture.

Whilst I am performing the piece on piano solo today, it can easily be transcribed for choir, orchestra or solo instruments as it is ultimately a simple song. 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, it will give me sheer delight as a composer.

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PROFILE

Acclaimed worldwide for his imagination and sensitivity, Motoki Hirai has appeared in the music capitals of the Far East, US and Europe, performing regularly in prestigious venues including Wigmore Hall in London, Royal Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, and Carnegie Hall in New York. During recent years, Motoki has performed in Austria, Belgium, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Malaysia, Norway, Oman, Palestine, Panama, Portugal, Romania, Senegal, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Tanzania, UK, USA and his native Japan.

Highlights of the current season and beyond include solo recitals in Carnegie Hall (NY), Barbican Centre (London), Royal Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), Wiener Konzerthaus (Vienna), St Martin-in-the-Fields (London), La Folle Journée 2016, Ginza Oji Hall and Kioi Hall (Tokyo) and concerto performances with orchestras such as Czech Virtuosi Chamber Orchestra as well as concert tours across Europe, Africa, South America and Japan.

Whilst being a leading interpreter of the standard repertoire for piano solo, Motoki is equally at home with chamber music and lieder, shedding an inspiring and personal light on music from all periods. Since 1991, Motoki has collaborated with artists including Vilnius String Quartet, Michael Cox, Kalman Berkes, Barry Craft, Doudou N'Diaye Rose and his father, the celebrated cellist Takeichiro Hirai, whom Pablo Casals once 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 premiered in venues such as Carnegie Hall (NY); Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre, Barbican Centre, Cadogan Hall, St. John's Smith Square, Dulwich Festival, Unicorn Theatre, Chelsea Flower Show (London); Brookes Festival 2014, Pegasus Theatre (Oxford); St. George's (Bristol); Eden Project (Cornwall); Lincoln Cathedral (Lincolnshire); Canongate Kirk (Edinburgh); Smetana Hall (Prague); Cultural Summer Festival (Bratislava); Maison de la culture du Japon à Paris (Paris); Expo Milan 2015 (Milan); Auditori Pau Casals (Barcelona); Cameri Theatre of Tel Aviv, Auditorium in Haifa Museum of Art (Israel); Al-Kasaba Theatre (Palestine); Théâtre National Daniel Sorano (Dakar); as well as La Folle Journée 2015, Tokyo Opera City, and NHK Hall (Japan). His music has also been used in films such as 'The Emperor's Tram Girls' (2005).

Born in Tokyo in 1973 into a highly gifted musical family, Motoki Hirai studied piano and composition with his grandfather, the eminent composer Kozaburo Y. Hirai (who studied with Mahler's noted disciple and conductor Klaus Pringsheim), 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.

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 Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation, Japan Society, Motor Neurone Disease Association, Red Cross, Royal Marsden Cancer Charity, UNESCO and UNICEF. In 2010 Motoki was invited to Lithuania to give a charity concert, commemorating Sempo (Chiune) Sugihara who saved the lives of over 6000 Polish Jews during World War II.

Since the Earthquake and Tsunami devastated Japan on 11 March 2011 (which, by a sad coincidence, was his birthday), Motoki has organized and participated in over 30 charity concerts across the UK, Europe, US and the most affected areas in Japan, raising over €120,000 so far.

As an artistic emissary of the Japanese government, Motoki has visited numerous countries since 1994. He has also been involved in fascinating educational programmes to promote Japanese art and culture across the world, such as the 'World of Japanese Picture Books – brought to life through Reading and Music' project (2007-) as artistic director and composer. Motoki has broadcast internationally on radio and television (Classic FM, BBC, ITV, and NHK) and has made a number of recordings on CD.

REVIEWS

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

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

“. . . superbly performed, technically perfect and infused with keen intelligence”

MUSICAL OPINION

“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

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Francis Nijenhuis, frenz.nl

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*Proceeds from programme and CD sales will be sent to “Call for 2016 Kumamoto Earthquake Donations” at the Kumamoto prefectural office.