



YST

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A piano recital

YST Concert Hall

26 November 2024 2pm

Bach

English Suite no.2

Beethoven

Sonata no.12, op. 26

Brahms

Variations on a theme of Schumann, op. 9

English Suite No.2 in A minor, BWV807

J.S Bach

The English suites of Bach are thought to be the earliest of his 19 suites for Keyboard. A set of six, composed between 1710-1720, Bach originally wrote the suites for harpsichord. Interestingly, it is rather unknown why the suites are called English, as the suites are rather dissimilar to the Baroque English style. As a matter of fact, this set is rather similar to his French suites in terms of structure and organisation.

Consequently, Bach's English Suite No.2 begins with a long prelude, typical of French suites. This prelude resembles a Bach invention, and the theme is passed along between voices, creating a polyphonic texture. An energetic prelude, it starts the suite in a passionate flurry.

Following the fiery prelude is the elegant and poised allemande, meaning "German dance". Bach experimented in the writing of the allemande, using a quadruple metre instead of duple metre and including contrapuntal lines as well. As of the typical dance style, the allemande is paired with a courante, a short, lively dance in triple meter.

The fourth movement, sarabande, is expressive and lyrical. This is followed by bourrée, a quick and lively dance with French origins. Bourrée II imitates a musette and has the character of a stately ballroom dance. This piece ends with a gigue; confident and outspoken, it ends the suite in a majestic way.

Sonata No.12 in Ab major, Op.26 “Funeral March” Ludwig van Beethoven

Beethoven Sonata No.12 was written in 1800-1801, dedicated to Prince Lichnowsky of Woschütz. This sonata was the only sonata by Beethoven that Chopin performed regularly.

This sonata has a rather unusual structure, starting with a slow movement in the form of a theme and variations instead of sonata form. The second movement is written in a scherzo and trio, while the third movement is written in a funeral march. This is in contrast with Beethoven's other four movement sonatas, where the second movement is slow and in a different key, while the third movement is in ternary form. Chopin greatly admired this sonata and repeated this structure in his own sonata in Bb minor.

In the first movement, there is one theme and five variations. The theme starts with a lyrical melody in Ab major, known to be an expressive and warm key for Beethoven. The first variation is lighter, with a swinging effect made with the use of sforzandos on the weak beats. The second variation skips along in half time, with the theme mostly in the left hand. The third variation begins in Ab minor, the parallel minor key, creating a tense and ominous atmosphere. This key is also used in the funeral march. The fourth variation is playful and charming, while the fifth variation is elegant and peaceful.

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This is followed by the quick and energetic scherzo second movement. Sforzandos in this movement capture the lively spirit of the scherzo. The trio is calm and peaceful, featuring a duet between the right and left hand. We then return to the fiery scherzo to end this movement.

The third movement, titled “Funeral march on the death of a Hero”, is the only movement from Beethoven’s sonatas that is arranged for orchestra. The person who this funeral march is written for remains a mystery. This movement is solemn, symbolising the inevitable hands of death. The sforzandos in this movement are dramatic, painting the image of how powerful death can be.

If the third movement speaks about death, the fourth movement speaks about life. This movement shows off the vigor and the zest of life. With quick semiquavers accompanying a tuneful melody, it is an exciting and dynamic way to end the piece.

Variations on a theme of Robert Schumann Op.9

Johannes Brahms

The core of piece lies in the relationship between Robert Schumann, Clara Schumann and Brahms. Brahms was in his early 20s, and a student of Robert Schumann when Schumann attempted suicide and was placed in a mental asylum in February 1854. Brahms then supported the Schumann family, taking care of Clara Schumann and her 8 children. In response to this tragic situation, Brahms wrote this set of 16 variations, based on Robert Schumann's theme in Brunt Batter, Op.99. He presented a cleaned-up manuscript to Clara Schumann, who this work is dedicated to, 4 days after the birth of her youngest son.

In this manuscript, we could see how Brahms thought of this work in relation to Schumann's theme. Variations 4,7,8,14 and 16 are signed 'B', while 5,6,12,13 are signed 'Kr'. Kr refers to Johannes Kreisler junior, an alter ego that Brahms had created after E.T.A. Hoffmann's character. This models after the two alter egos that Robert Schumann had created for himself, "Eusebius", the more passionate and outgoing side and "Florestan", the more withdrawn side. Variations marked 'B', standing for 'Brahms' were notably more lyrical and Brahmsian, while variations marked 'Kr' were more ardent and further removed from the theme.

Variations on a theme of Robert Schumann Op.9

Johannes Brahms

The theme starts in an ABA form, similar to most variations in F# minor. It is simply written yet exhibits a deep melancholy and sadness. The first 5 variations portray a similar, wistful mood, which is then broken by variation 6, the first variation to be signed “Kr”. Variations 1-7 can be thought of a structural unit, with variation 6 as its climax, while variation 8 reintroduces the theme in its original shape, in a serene atmosphere. The first variation to be in a major key is variation 10, a song like variation in D major. This variation serves as a tribute not only to Robert Schumann, but Clara Schumann as well, which quotes the “theme of Clara Wieck” which Robert Schumann used for his Op.5 impromptus. This set of variations end with the 16th variation being a funeral like coda, ending in the extremely rare *ppp*, conveying regret and sorrow.