

28 January | Thursday

Elizabeth Low

Piano Recital

PROGRAMME

SCHUBERT

Piano sonata No.13 in A major, D. 664

I. Allegro moderato

II. Andante

III. Allegro

ALBENIZ

Suite Ibera Book I

I. Evocación

II. El Puerto

BEETHOVEN

Sonata in A-flat major Op. 31, No. 110

I. Moderato cantabile molto espressivo

II. Allegro molto

III. Adagio ma non troppo – Allegro ma non troppo

SCRIABIN

Fantasia in B minor, Op. 2

SCHUBERT

Piano sonata No.13 in A major D. 664 (1819) (16 min)

Schubert, a composer reputable for his composition of lieds (songs), features this prominently in the sonata. The lyrical theme in the first movement suggests innocence and joy, and its momentary shift in harmonic hues only suggests the faintest of doubt.

Being in the same key as the hefty late Piano Sonata No. 22 in A major, D 959, it is regarded by many pianists as the “little” A major piano sonata because of its relative brevity, however the substantiality of this work does not deviate far off from his other larger works, each embracing of its individual complexities. The beauty of this sonata lies in the intricacy of its simplistic writing and the subtlety of its nuances each time the same theme repeats.

In the second movement, the rhythmic motor provides a rowing momentum that underpins the music, paused only during the long held notes, where one senses the contrasting effect of glide after a firm push of the oar.

The last movement is populated by celebratory melodies and joyous splashes of arpeggios. The radiant and charming characters, further animated through colourful use of articulations and surprise dynamics changes, are sure you keep you entertained!

ALBENIZ

Suite Ibera Book I. (10 min)

Iberia, a suite of piano works, was composed in a series of four books (1905-1909), each consisting of three works. Being one of Albeniz’s largest and most significant contribution to the collection of masterpieces for piano, its intricate writing undoubtedly highlights the extensive capabilities of sound that a single instrument can artistically produce. Additionally, aided by his inspiration from French composers Debussy and Ravel, these prolific set of pieces demonstrates and marks the immense shift of his compositional style.

I. Evocación

Evocación, which translates to evocation and remembrance, is the very first piece that introduces the cycle of pieces. Greeted by a sunbaked landscape in the middle of Spain by the exotic modal harmonies, the movement emerges with a constant ostinato offbeat rhythm imposing on itself, elegance and suaveness. However, the

sophistication imperceptibly dies off whenever the music suggests a temporary halt in its flow, in turn creating a hypnotic feel.

II. El Puerto

A juxtaposition from the first movement, El Puerto depicts a bustling port. At the same time, the rhythmic motif provides this movement with a dance feel to it, a correspondence to a flamenco dance. Albeniz, being a prominent composer for guitar repertoire, evidently still incorporates such features into his piano works. Comprising articulations on the piano that resembles the strumming effect of the guitar and plucking of the low strings creates an instrumental quality to the piece.

BEETHOVEN

Sonata in Ab Major Op.31 No.110 (1821) (20 min)

The warm and prayerful opening of the three movement work gracefully welcomes us with an innocent and sympathetic melody. A tune so divinely written and developed throughout the first movement, it returns again in the last movement in a form of a fugue and yet once again as an inversion in the recapitulation of the fugue — after the second lamenting aria. In the first movement, Beethoven then introduces glorious arpeggios that effortlessly floats up and down the keyboard. In the recapitulation, it enwraps the first theme, luxuriating it with depth and warmth.

The emotional journey that Beethoven creates then starts to transition into the second movement, where he introduces humour and mischief. This, in many ways, completely disregards the maturity and reflectiveness established in the previous movement. Additionally, there is no coincidence in its attempts of creating a raucous and comedic character as Beethoven derived the featured melodies from two popular German songs, *Ich bin lüderlich, du bist lüderlich* (I am a dissolute slob, and so are you), and *Unsa Kätz häd Katz'ln g'habt* (Our cat has had kittens).

The third movement consists of several sections, each alternating twice between operatic heart-throbbing laments and fugues that sprouts rays of light and hope. With each alternation, its sonority becomes darker and the laments are filled with greater remorse and grieve in comparison to the first time. The fugue possesses a bolder quality, radiating with more optimism and nobility as it reaches the end of the piece, eventually flourishing with arpeggios, concluding with triumph and virtuosity.

SCRIABIN

Fantasie in B minor, Op. 28 (1900)

Despite the implications that a 'fantasy' is entailed to freedom and improvisation, Scriabin's masterpiece suggests otherwise, an effortless sonata-allegro form. The simple identification of the lyrical melodies does not do justice to the complexity of the piece, as the profoundness of it lies within the virtuosity of its writing and the endless overlapping meanderings of the inner voices. In fact, this Fantasy alone features some of Scriabin's most complex writings. The extremely dense textures competing against single line melodies, the collision between the two hands and voices, and the simultaneous displacement of notes both in the accompaniment part and the melody. The complexities of the piece are often difficult to grasp — Scriabin himself took an ambiguous amount of time to complete this work, and according to Leonid Sabaneyev, a musicologist who worked closely with Scriabin, forgot the existence of this work for a certain period of time.

The equivocal introduction of this piece is the perfect set up that bleeds into one of the most breathtaking and heartwarming melodies ever written, only repeating twice throughout the entire piece — the second time with undercurrents leading to an explosion of colours, accompanied by the trembling basses and repeatedly clamouring chords. Towards the end of the piece, an elaboration of the main theme builds up to the final surges and heroic crashes of chords, much like heroic waves crashing onto ferocious rocks of a grand canyon.