

Licentiate of the Royal Schools of Music

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PROGRAMME NOTES

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Johann Sebastian Bach and his music form one of the most important chapters in musical history. Generations of composers have looked back to Bach's music in a search for that ideal that made his music "so right". His 48 preludes and fugues are stunning explorations into the individual character and colour of each chromatic key. They have influenced and shaped the styles of practically every great composer, from Beethoven to Chopin. The latter paid homage to Bach with his own 24 preludes.

The first book of 'The Well Tempered Clavier' was completed around 1722, while Bach was musical director to Prince Leopold of Anhalt Cothen. Like his inventions the work was partly written for the instruction of his children (four of whom became eminent composers themselves). However, its principal intention was to exhibit the merits of the, then novel, tuning practice of equal temperament. Although early performances would almost certainly have been on the clavichord or harpsichord, the term "Clavier" did not refer to any explicit keyboard instrument. It is interesting how well the modern pianoforte (a "Clavier" Bach never heard himself) corresponds to the idiom of 'The Well Tempered Clavier'.

The toccata like prelude is built upon a series of explorations through C sharp major. The opening phrase is a harmonic progression through the tonic key – rising and falling as if to feel it entirely. This is sequentially repeated in the dominant, the supertonic minor and the relative minor. If this opening section explores the harmonic qualities and relations of C sharp major, the next section scrutinizes the melodic and textural possibilities of a chromatic keyboard. The hands engage in a contrapuntal 'question and answer' session while traversing the keys. In the final section, Bach revels in rhythmic complexity, balancing upon the black keys.

The fugue is in three voices, entering in descending order with the nimbly rhythmic subject. It is uniquely non-technical – it has no strettis, nor does it contain common fugal devices such as augmentation, diminution, inversion and pedal point. Bach relies solely on shape, form and some very original keyboard writing to create what is an amazingly lively, even dramatic piece. As in the prelude, Bach uses sequences to create movement and tension, especially in the episodes between the utterances of the subject. He also uses voices in Brandenburgian instrumental roles: a flute in the soprano, above a tenor cello, for example. Interestingly, the form of the fugue bares a surprising similarity to sonata form. The final section is almost a recapitulation of the exposition, while the unusually long episode that precedes it is uncannily developmental.

Sonata in F minor ('Appassionata'), Op. 57

Beethoven (1770-1827)

Allegro assai

Andante con moto

Allegro ma non troppo

Ludwig van Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas epitomize a personal voyage, both musical and spiritual. They revolutionized pianoforte repertoire by demonstrating its orchestral power. They also reveal the boundless flexibility with which Beethoven expanded the sonata as a musical structure. Being highly representative of Beethoven's own turbulent character and existence, and spanning a period of 26 years, they symbolize, what is for many people, the autobiography of the greatest composer ever.

Op. 57, set in the dark key of F minor, grew out of the most tempestual episode of Beethoven's life. It depicts the violent inner struggle with which Beethoven confronted his crippling deafness and recall the many moments of utter despair that frustrated his epic search for inner peace. The sonata was published in 1807 (sketches date back as late as 1803) and was dedicated to Beethoven's friend and patron, Count Franz von Brunswick. The title 'Appassionata' was the invention of the publisher Kitz, who later published a transcription of the original masterpiece for four-hands.

The first movement *Allegro assai* opens with a short characteristic theme based on the tonic triad. The doubling of the melody two octaves apart reveals Beethoven's almost prophetic insight into the sonorities of the piano. This also creates a sinister intensity that is only heightened by the innocuous trill and the silence that follows. The 'quick- quick- quick - slow' motive that follows is strikingly similar to the immortal 'fate' motive of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (first performed an year after Op. 57 was published). The lyrical theme of the second subject beautifully extracts the piano's almost orchestral sonorities and idiomatically anticipates Beethoven's later melodic writing. Interestingly, this is based on an inversion of the sinister opening theme –forecasting the *idée fixe* of Berlioz and the *leitmotiv* of Wagner. Revolutionary as it may seem, Beethoven did use a similar device in his very first sonata (Op. 2 No. 1), coincidentally in the same F minor. The recapitulation begins with repeated quavers on the dominant below the opening theme, not unlike the opening of Schubert's song *Erlking*. Like Goethe's poem of the supernatural, upon which the song is based, the effect is indeed menacing. The over 50 bar long coda, is almost a second development. A dramatic rally of kaleidoscopic arpeggios lead to the *Piu allegro* section, that for the first time quotes the lyrical second subject theme in an agitated minor. Pressing syncopated chords follow in conclusion, before dying away suddenly. The first movement is the perfect example for the manner in which Beethoven fused drama into a classical form, while flawlessly preserving its almost Mozartian contour.

Sheltered between the two stormy *Allegros* is the *Andante* with its variations. It is highly spiritual and organic, rising from simple origins to plane heavenly proportions. The theme, a simple harmonic progression, set in a solemn, low register, conveys both harmonic and melodic overtones. It resembles soft wind instruments softly singing out a peacefully nocturnal air. The three variations induce a process of rhythmic division. The first variation contemplates in a simple walk like meditation, with the left hand following the right hand half a beat later. In the second, the left hand sings a cello like melody below peaceful semi-quaver broken chords in the right. The third variation cascades in demi-semi-quavers and builds to a divine high before

leading to an echoing recollection of the theme, scattered between two registers. After almost dying away, the final *Allegro ma non troppo* is embarked upon, furiously.

Beginning with a succession of diminished sevenths and characterized by violent agitation throughout, the *Allegro ma non troppo* is arguably the most impassioned movement in the 'Appassionata'. It is almost completely based on a single theme of a gyrating, cyclonic nature, and consequently pursues a single mood from start to finish. It is heard in various transforms: between melodic echoes, as a principal melody and in canonic counterpoint. The rising and falling nature of the storm manifests in scalar passages, sequential fragments and revolving octaves. The superhuman determination that was so distinctive of Beethoven's character manifests throughout, but particularly in the frenzied coda with its stubborn repetition and repetitive perfect cadences.

To Frederic Chopin, the pianoforte was more than a musical instrument. A vehicle for expressing his most inner feelings and thoughts, it was as much an ear as it was a voice. Born into an age when the virtuoso was king and the piano his sword, Chopin succeeded in unifying virtuosity with individuality and poetism to an extent few have since emulated. Being principally technical works and yet perfect examples of the pianistic miniature that Chopin perfected so well, his 27 etudes are perhaps some of the best examples of this unity. Each emphasizes some particular aspect of pianoforte technique and are as innovative as they are instructive.

The 12 etudes of Op.10 were completed in 1833. Unlike many volumes of 'finger exercises' that were abundantly available in Chopin's day, they belonged more to the concert hall than to the classroom. A more flamboyant composer such as Liszt would have certainly titled Op.10 as *Etudes de concert* (Concert Studies). Interestingly, the set was indeed dedicated to Franz Liszt, who described them as 'Marvellous'. Chopin returned the compliment by wishing that he could execute them as Liszt did.

Finished in mid 1833, the Etude in E major was among the last etudes of Op.10 to be completed. Its opening section is a study of cantabile, legato and shape. Arch like and irregular in phrase structure, the bar by bar building of melody is narrative and adds to its story like lyricism. The opening theme was one of Chopin's personal favourites. He once confessed, "Never have I written a more beautiful melody.". On another occasion, when his pupil Gutman was studying it, the master is said to have clasped his hands and cried passionately, "O, my fatherland!". The more animated middle section is a study of sixths and triads. It relies on texture and shape, rather than harmony for character. It is also surprisingly futuristic, even to the extent of foreseeing the dissonant colours of Wagner. It is also a reflection on Bach, with its long-range resolutions and dissonant counterpoint.

The Etude in G flat major, appropriately nicknamed the 'Black Keys' or the 'Black Note Etude', emphasizes balancing the right hand on the black keys. Completed around 1830, it was one of the first in the set to be completed. Like many of Chopin's *bravura* works, it possesses a novel flow, punctuated by the novel fingering technique that the composer pioneered, or at least revived. It personifies brilliance in every possible way – from its bouncing opening, right through to the pentatonic descent at the end. It is full of cross rhythms and dialogues evocative of the Italian opera that Chopin delighted in. The hands have individual and contrasting characters that help create the momentum and colour, characterized in the *vivace* marking. Like No.3, many aspects of No.5, especially its *moto perpetua* (perpetual movement) and harmonic style, seem to have been influenced by Bach's keyboard writing. Unlike No. 3, No. 5 was not one of Chopin's personal favourites. He thought it 'The least interesting of the set.'. It is, however, one of his most popular works. Essentially as it is elegant, witty and as Von Bulow aptly described it, 'A Sal6n Piece'.

Inspired by nationalistic trends and his native Argentine folklore, Alberto Ginastera is arguably one of the true great nationalistic composers. The *Danzas Argentinas* composed in 1937, when the composer was 21, effectively communicates this. The three dances, *Danza del viejo boyero*, *Danza de la moza donosa* and *Danza del gaucho matrero*, set in the Argentine Pampas, depict the spirit of three pastoral characters: an oxen herder, a melancholy country maiden and a renegade cowboy, respectively.

Danza del gaucho matrero, like many of Ginastera's toccata like dances, is based on the *Malambo*, a rapid, energetic gaucho dance in compound-duple time. Its highly programmatic nature is characterized by some very colourful pianistic effects. For example, in the opening, Ginastera uses chromaticism and parallel effects to create a vivid picture of pounding hooves punctuated with metallic pulses. Soon after, he uses irregular chord clusters to mimic wild gunshots. He then depicts frenzied leaps with glissandos. Many aspects of gaucho dance manifest in the shape of percussive foot tapping and guitar effects. Ginastera's parallel major triad melodies also bear a striking resemblance to panpipe tunes that lay at the core of Amerindian music. (Coincidentally, gauchos were of mixed ancestry – European and native Amerindian)

Like many 20th Century composers, Ginastera was strongly influenced by many of the modern 'isms' that characterized the music of the period. The serialistic sequences in, especially the dramatically climaxing sections, paint a vibrant picture of the violent surroundings of the *gaucho matrero*. Bitonality, expressionism and time signature changes, themselves once considered sacrilegious, enhance the rebellious nature of the dance. The extreme and sudden dynamics, not least the savage fortissississimo that concludes the dance, firmly imprint in the listener's mind the truly renegade spirit, that Ginastera wishes to portray.