Paul Lewis Piano Recital

HAYDN
Piano Sonata in C major, Hob. XVI:50

I. Allegro
II. Adagio
III. Allegro molto

BEETHOVEN
Six Bagatelles, Op. 126

I. Andante con moto
II. Allegro
III. Andante cantabile e grazioso
IV. Presto
V. Quasi allegretto
VI. Presto – Andante amabile e con moto – Tempo I

INTERMISSION

BRAHMS
Sechs Klavierstücke, Op. 118

I. Intermezzo
II. Intermezzo
III. Ballade
IV. Intermezzo
V. Romanze
VI. Intermezzo
HAYDN

Piano Sonata in G major, Hob. XVI:40

I. Allegretto innocente
II. Presto

Programme Notes

Haydn – Piano Sonata in C major

By 1788 Haydn had spent over a quarter of a century in the service of the Esterházy family, living in relative isolation at the remote former hunting lodge in the hills and forests of western Hungary which served as the family’s residence. His reputation as a composer might have spread across Europe but, according to one press report of the day, he lived in “a miserable apartment in the barracks, in which are his bed and an old spinet” and received “a pittance which the most obscure fiddler in London would disdain to accept”. That year he received a visitor from London, one Gaetano Bartolozzi, a London-based art dealer, who informed Haydn that his music was both greatly admired and very popular in England. Hearing this, Haydn expressed a wish to visit England, but it was not until Prince Nikolaus Esterházy died in 1790 and his successor had immediately dismissed Haydn from his service, that Haydn was in a position to accept an invitation from Johann Peter Salomon. Haydn arrived in England for the first of two extended visits on 1st January 1791.

Acknowledging Bartolozzi’s role in attracting Haydn to London, Salomon had invited him to Haydn’s first London concert, and the two men quickly developed a warm friendship which saw Haydn act as witness to Bartolozzi’s wedding. This took place on 16th May 1795 at St. James’ Church, Piccadilly, during Haydn’s second visit to London, the bride being Therese Jansen, a piano pupil of Muzio Clementi. Writing in 1934, Oliver Strunck observed that although Clementi regarded Therese as one of his three best pupils (the others being John Field and J B Cramer), “she seems never to have appeared in public”. Strunck noted that “so far as musical biography is concerned, she is an unknown quantity”, and set about finding as much as he could about her. He learnt, for example, that Bartolozzi and Therese had met for the first time less than four months’ earlier at “a musical party at Colonel Hamilton’s, and the proposed match proved immediately acceptable to all concerned”, and that under the
patronage of “Earl Spencer and Lord Mulgrave, [she] began teaching that beautiful and graceful art. Several of the very highest families benefitted by her instructions, and she was eminently successful; so much so, indeed, that she and her brother, Mr. L. Jansen realized rather more than two thousand pounds per annum”. All the same, the musical world might well have forgotten all about Therese Jansen-Bartolozzi had it not been that Haydn wrote two of his last three Piano Sonatas for her. (It was believed until recently that all three were for her, but current research suggests that Sonata No.61 was written for a certain Maria Hester Park, a London-based engraver.)

The outer movements of the Sonata in C, no.60, were composed in 1795 but the central Adagio was written somewhat earlier and published as a stand-alone work in Vienna in June 1794. The whole Sonata, which was not published until 1800, carries a dedication to “Mrs Bartolozzi née Jansen”, and while the Haydn scholar H C Robbins Landon has given a long and fascinating account of the political and legal problems surrounding the Sonata’s publication, its delay seems down to the fact that, outside England, no piano was physically able to play the work. For Haydn was writing for the English pianos made by John Broadwood which possessed a much wider keyboard range and numerous devices that did not exist on continental instruments until at least 1805. Haydn was one of the first people to import one Broadwood’s pianos to Vienna.

The 1st movement establishes the C major tonality through some spiky little jumping figures and some hefty chords. Haydn also makes, for the only time in any of his 62 keyboard Sonatas, an instruction to use the pedal, to create a mysterious effect powerfully contrasting the spikiness of the opening. Robbins Landon suggests Haydn wanted the una corda pedal here, a device which only existed on English pianos at the time. The 2nd movement features a generously embellished melodic line over a sparse chordal accompaniment. Surprising harmonic twists and turns add spice to this otherwise innocent and meditative movement. The 3rd movement is anything but innocent and meditative; it has been described variously as “the most subversively comic piece Haydn ever composed” and a “minuet gone mad”. Venturing into the high range unique to the Broadwood pianos, this music seems determined to confuse and astonish in equal proportion, and the sudden pauses along with heart-stopping breaks in momentum, all create a movement which, far from acting as a retrospective of all that had gone before (this was, after all, Haydn’s very final essay in the keyboard sonata genre), seems to be looking well into the future both technologically and musically.
Beethoven – 6 Bagatelles

Beethoven’s last numbered compositions for solo piano appeared in April 1825 as his Op.126. They had been composed the previous year (between April and June) and carried the collective title Bagatelles. “The last years of his life”, writes Barry Cooper, “coincide with an interest in miniature forms”, and while we might associate these years with such large-scale works as the Ninth Symphony and the last five string quartets (he had also begun work on a 10th symphony and a string quintet, and was contemplating a second opera), so far as the piano was concerned, miniaturisation was certainly Beethoven’s principal focus – in 1825 he wrote four short dances which were published without opus number.

The generic title “Bagatelle” to imply a short, inconsequential, piece of music, first appeared in Paris around the end of the 17th century - François Couperin included one in his second book of harpsichord pieces in 1717. It was not until 1797 that the title came to be used in Germany, and just six years later, Beethoven first applied it to a set of seven short pieces written, he claimed, between 1782 and 1802. He used it again for a set of 11 published in 1823, five of which were written for a piano tutor published by his friend Friedrich Starke. But what makes his third set of Bagatelles special is not just that they are more technically and musically challenging than any previous Bagatelle, but that, from the outset, Beethoven conceived them as a set organised by key, speed and musical character. He told his publisher that he considered them “quite the best pieces of their kind that I have written”.

No.1 in G major opens with a disarmingly straightforward theme which flows easily through changing time-signatures, surprisingly adventurous harmonies, some fanciful trills and across an unexpectedly wide range of the keyboard without ever seeming to lose its fundamental charm. No.2 in G minor is a vigorous toccata clearly influenced by Beethoven’s great musical hero, Handel, yet with alternating passages of calm and a sense of unfolding drama which is wholly Beethovenian in character. There is a certain nobility about No. 3 in E flat major which moves gradually across the whole range of the keyboard. No.4 in B minor has an almost Schubertian character as the breathless, contrapuntal opening gives way to passages of glittering jollity and a central section in which a high right hand indulges in melodic reflection over a low, drone-like left hand. No.5 in G major exudes calm and gentle expressiveness despite the continually flowing triplets in the right hand of the outer sections and the syncopated writing of the central episode. No.6 in E flat major opens with a riotous
burst of notes before lurching into a much more poised and stable section. This final piece is a study in contrasts, and as such can be seen as something of summation of all that has gone before; something Beethoven famously did in the Ninth Symphony which had been completed and performed just a matter of days before Beethoven embarked on these Bagatelles.

**Brahms – Sechs Klavierstücke**

While Beethoven had made the title “Bagatelle” very much his own, Brahms followed suit with the “Intermezzo”. There are 24 piano pieces by Beethoven with the title “Bagatelle”, while Brahms’ catalogue includes 18 Intermezzi. They belong very much to the final years of Brahms’ life, the earliest having been composed in 1871, but the majority are contained in three consecutive publications which appeared as opp. 116, 117, 118 and 119 between 1891 and 1893. These were to be Brahms’s final piano works; although his very last keyboard work was a set of 11 chorale preludes for organ, which he completed on his death bed.

The origins of the title “Intermezzo” lie in opera, where it effectively began life as an interlude to cover scene changes often in the form of a self-contained mini comic-opera performed between the acts of a bigger opera. (Richard Strauss famously wrote an entire opera called *Intermezzo*, using the title for its comic allusions.) For Brahms, however, an *Intermezzo* was anything but comic, and the origins of the title as he used it seem to stem from the early 19th century English music historian Charles Burney, who described the inner movements of Haydn’s symphonies, quartets and sonatas as “intermezzi between the serious business of his other movements”. 19th century composers began to call the middle movements of larger instrumental works “Intermezzo”, but Brahms seems to have been the first major composer actually to write stand-alone piano pieces called *Intermezzo*. What he meant by the term was suggested by his friend Philipp Spitta who, on receiving a copy of the Six Pieces published in 1893 as Op.118, wrote to Brahms: “They are the most varied of all your piano pieces and perhaps the most rich in content and depth of meaning. Ideally they are to be absorbed slowly and in silence and solitude, and they are appropriate not only for meditative afterthought but also for contemplative forethought. I believe that I have understood you correctly when I suggest this is what you meant by the term *Intermezzo*.”
Contemplation and meditation seem to be at the very heart of these six pieces - Malcolm MacDonald has described them as “the most personal piano music ever written” – but somewhat perversely, the opening *Intermezzo in A minor* is stormy and passionate. Rolling arpeggios envelope a theme presented in octaves, rather as if it is a ship making heavy weather of turbulent seas. The second piece – *Intermezzo in A major* – conforms much more closely to Spitta’s description of a Brahms *Intermezza*, and for many this is possibly Brahms’s most heartfelt and endearing creation. A tender, introspective theme descends with great poise over an arpeggiated accompaniment which turns the turbulence of No.1 into profound and still reflection. While we credit Chopin with creating the piano *Ballade* in 1836, Brahms wrote four of his own as early as 1854, returning just once to the genre with the *Ballade in G minor*. Heroic and proud at the start, built over powerfully surging chords, a more reflective and lyrical central passage seems to ponder lovingly over the piece’s main theme, returning to the opening material only reluctantly. *Intermezzo in F minor* has an enigmatic quality about it, the simple repeating triplet figure moving back and forth between the hands driving the music onwards as a continual canon, abruptly interrupted by a more tranquil middle section which is largely made up of isolated chords and notes, plumbing the very depths of the piano keyboard. It was Brahms’s friend and mentor, Robert Schumann, who effectively devised the piano *Romanze* and in his memory the fifth piece is titled *Romanze in F*. Expansive in character and rich in texture, this is an affectionate tribute either to Schumann himself or his widow, Clara, with whom Brahms had a close lifelong relationship (and to whom Brahms presented these six pieces before their publication). The last piece of the set is the *Intermezzo in E flat minor* which is built around a theme strongly reminiscent of the ancient plainchant *Dies Irae* associated with death. The piece is dark and brooding at the start, and becomes increasingly introspective before snapping itself out of this depression with a burst of heroic posturing which dissolves to end with tranquil resignation.

**Haydn – Piano Sonata in G major**

The numbering of Haydn’s keyboard Sonatas is, as with just about all of Haydn’s music, problematic. When Anthony van Hoboken drew up his catalogue in 1934 assigning the Keyboard Sonatas the section numbered (in Roman numerals) XVI, he knew of 52 Sonatas and believed a further eight to have been lost. He numbered the surviving ones according to what he believed was their sequence of composition. When Christa Landon prepared her urtext edition of the complete Haydn Sonatas in 1963, she knew of 62 (of which seven, mentioned in Haydn’s own catalogues, had been lost), and in his catalogue of 1976, H C
Robbins Landon had placed these in what he believed to be a more accurate chronological sequence. The story does not end there, and since Robbins Landon’s death, numerous other Haydn scholars have dug around and identified errors and omissions in that catalogue. So while this Sonata was No.40 for Hoboken and no.54 for Landon, all that modern research can be sure of is that it is a relatively late Sonata, composed in 1784.

As such, we can be sure it was intended for the piano, rather than the harpsichord or organ (the instruments for which most of his as earlier Sonatas were intended). However, unlike the Sonata with which Paul Lewis opened this recital, in this case the piano would have been one of the lighter, more delicate Viennese instruments made by Johann Stein. Haydn’s first encounter with a piano had been in 1770 when Stein had exhibited his latest instruments in Vienna, and from about 1776 onwards Haydn wrote more specifically with the piano in mind. As James Taggart points out, “harpischord idioms are predominant in at least the first 28 Sonatas, but continue right through to the very last one”, and he goes on to describe these idioms as “melodic expression through fastidious and refined articulation, dynamics sharply delineated by phrases or periods including echo effects, and ornamentation which enlivens long notes”.

These idioms certainly appear in this G major Sonata, which was dedicated to Princess Maria Hermenegild, whom Nikolaus Esterházy (grandson of Haydn’s employer) had married in 1783; the Sonata (along with two others) was Haydn’s wedding gift to her. (Interestingly, when Nikolaus became head of the family in 1794, he immediately reinstated Haydn, who had been dismissed by his father, Prince Anton.) The fact that Maria was just 15 at the time, and that Haydn’s music is surprisingly complex makes even more ridiculous the comment in Rosemary Hughes’s book on the composer that these are “trivial works made for an elderly lady’s light relaxation”. It just shows you can never believe what you read, even when it has been through the filters of distinguished editors.

What may well have blinded Hughes to the qualities of the Sonata (and its companions) is the fact that this group of Sonatas each has just two movements apiece, and that the 1st movement of the G major Sonata is marked “Allegretto innocente”. Certainly the theme stated simply at the start is a model of innocence, if not downright naivety, but it is then subjected to a sequence of variations which alternate between major and minor tonality and become ever more musically ornate and complicated. There is a suggestion that Haydn intend
this music, in part at least, as a pedagogical exercise for the Princess, and certainly this first
movement runs through the gamut of various playing techniques. The 2nd movement is a
brisk and lively exercise in crisp and clean finger articulation, with some surprisingly agile
leaps across the keyboard and a darker central passage in the minor key. Witty and athletic,
and with a startingly abrupt ending, this is anything but relaxing music for elderly ladies.

*Programme notes by Marc Rochester*