

Ronald Farren-Price

with tenderness, with fire



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The solo recital has always occupied a special place in music, for no other performance is as personal. Works played by a solitary musician can have an intimacy sometimes lacking in chamber or orchestral music. In the solo recital, we are taken in to the performer's confidence, invited to share their inner world. When the recital is given on the piano, it is not only the delicate and the gentle which can find expression, but also the stormy and the furious, for no other instrument approaches the piano in orchestral power, harmonic richness, or sheer variety of textures. From the sublime beauty of a Beethoven Adagio to the thundering splendour of Prokofiev's Toccata, the piano expresses its soul both with tenderness and with fire.

1 Enrique Granados (1867-1916): *Quejas, o La Maja y El Ruiseñor* No.4 from *Goyescas*

Of the seven characteristic piano pieces that make up the *Goyescas* collection, *Quejas, o La Maja y El Ruiseñor* (Lament: The Lover and the Nightingale) is among the most sublime. Composed in 1911, it is dedicated to Granados' wife Amparo. A delicate folk song, to be played *andante melancolico*, forms the basis of the work. Its melody is personal, introspective, and intensely beautiful. The nightingale makes its delightful entrance towards the end of the piece in a sparkling cadenza. Granados was particularly proud of this composition, calling it "a work for all time".

2 Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757): Sonata in G minor K476 L340

Scarlatti's career began in the lack-lustre world of Neapolitan opera, but after 1719 he entered the employ of the Infanta Maria Barbara, first as the *mestre* of the patriarchal chapel in Lisbon, and after 1728 as one of her retainers at the Spanish court in Madrid. In her service he composed over five hundred sonatas for solo keyboard. These works provided a greater freedom to experiment than had been his in the stylistically confined operatic world, involving, in Scarlatti's words, "an ingenious jesting with art". The Sonata in G minor follows the single movement binary form common to virtually all Scarlatti's keyboard works. Marked *Allegro* in 3/8, the insistent quavers which introduce the work soon give way to rapid semiquavers. The pace

is unrelenting, the momentum continuous. Even the silent pauses which appear in the second half do little to stem the flow, and the work hurries inevitably to its conclusion.

3 Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847): *Lieder ohne worte* Op.30 No.3 in E major

Mendelssohn wrote in all 48 *Songs without Words*, and they have become among his best-loved pieces. The concept of composing a song melody without a specific text in mind was new in Mendelssohn's day, and met with some uncertainty from contemporary critics. Mortiz Hauptmann, a leading theorist of the time, wrote to the singer Franz Hauser about the new works, asking "Is it possible? Does Mendelssohn mean it seriously?" But the enthusiasm with which the pieces were taken up by musical society left no doubt as to their credibility. The works are exquisitely fashioned exemplars of pianistic grace. The third song of Op.30 begins with a brief ascending flourish as a prelude, then embarks on a folk-like melody in a chordal setting. The phrases move from solemnity to tenderness, finally concluding with a postlude which balances the opening gesture.

4 Felix Mendelssohn: *Lieder ohne worte* Op.38 No.6 in A flat major (*Duetto*)

Mendelssohn made his position on the relative expressive power of music over words quite clear in a letter to Marc André Souchay in 1812. His statements sum up the position of many Romantic composers,

and refer directly to his *Lieder ohne worte*. He said "To me, the music I love does not express thoughts too indefinite to be put into words, but too definite". He elaborates regarding the choice of "Lieder ohne worte" as a title: "If I had a specific word or specific words in mind, I should not like to give them these titles, because words do not mean the same to one person as they mean to another". Music, therefore, is less ambiguous, in Mendelssohn's opinion, than words. In Op.38 No.6 there is certainly no doubt as to his intention. A duet sounds between a high voice and a lower one, both expressed against a rippling accompaniment. There is no argument between them, but simply an exchange. The high voice grows more ardent as it progresses, adopting a somewhat worried tone, but the low voice gives a reassuring answer, bringing the work to a confident close.

5 Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849): Etude Op.10 No.3 in E major

Although called *Etudes*, Chopin's pieces with this title are not mere technical studies in the manner of earlier composers such as Clementi, Czerny or Hummel. They mark a new wave of nineteenth century works dedicated not only to technical mastery, but also to musical integrity. Schumann observed that "with Chopin difficulty is only a means to an end, and when he makes the greatest use of it, it is only because the desired effect requires it. Great means, great meaning, great effect—in Chopin we nearly always find them united." The Etudes

of Op.10 were composed from 1829-31 and dedicated to Liszt. The third in E major is a study in expression, exploring the possibilities of the newly emerging Romantic language. Chopin initially marked it *vivace* but revised this to *lento ma non troppo* for publication. It opens with a gentle melody of great beauty, then grows more ardent as the harmonies are filled out. Dance rhythms take over, becoming wild and thundery, but the music soon returns to its original calm.

6 Fryderyk Chopin: Etude Op.25 No.1 in A flat major

Most of the etudes of Op.25 were composed at the same time as those of Op.10, the exceptions being the first and last of the set. No.1 dates from 1836. According to Kleczynski, Chopin once remarked that he imagined in the work "a little shepherd who takes refuge in a peaceful grotto from an approaching storm. In the distance rushes the wind and the rain, while the shepherd gently plays a melody on his flute." Upon hearing Chopin play Op.25 No.1, Schumann said "When the etude was ended we felt as though we had seen a lovely form in a dream, and, half awake, we strove to seize it again; but such things cannot be described, still less can they be fitly praised." The etude has been called the "Aeolian Harp" due to the gentle arpeggios of its accompaniment. A simple, expressive melody floats above these rippling figures, unfolding in a seemingly endless manner without ever losing sight of its origin.

7 Fryderyk Chopin: Etude Op.10 No.12 in C minor (*Revolutionary*)

Liszt said of Chopin's etudes "the compositions which are thus modestly named are none the less types of perfection in a mode which he himself erected and stamped as he did all his other works with the deep impress of his poetic genius. Written when his career was only just beginning, they are marked by a youthful vigour not found in some of his later works, even when they are more elaborate." In the "Revolutionary" etude, Op.10 No.12, the youthful vigour to which Liszt refers reaches its emotional boiling point, giving rise to some of the wildest, most turbulent music Chopin ever produced. Composed in 1831, the etude may have been Chopin's patriotic response to the Russian invasion of his native Warsaw, which took place that year. It begins with a crash, then plunges down the keyboard. A rolling, knotted accompaniment supports the striving figures of a heroic melody, the whole charging heedless along in a rage of tumultuous motion. As the close draws near, a sense of triumph begins to dawn, but it is unfulfilled and the work ends abruptly with a final dramatic plunge.

8 Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827): *Adagio* from Sonata in C minor Op.13 *Pathétique*

The *Pathétique* Sonata in C minor is one of the few to bear an appellative actually supplied by Beethoven. The work, composed in 1798, is arguably the most mature sonata of Beethoven's

early period. By the late 1790s he had absorbed the elements of the Viennese style into his music, and was enjoying great success both as a composer and as a virtuoso pianist. Although he had probably experienced temporary bouts of deafness at this time, he was unlikely to have realised their significance. The Adagio from Op.13 is one of Beethoven's most beautiful themes, its gentle, singing quality infused with an uplifting grace. In rondo form, the first episode is elaborate and richly ornamented. After the return of the theme, the agitated second episode begins, turning from passionate song into darker utterance before the theme reappears once more, now enlivened with triplets borrowed from the preceding section. The tension has abated, however, and a peaceful, untroubled coda closes the movement.

9 Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750): Prelude and Fugue in C minor, Book 1 BWV 847

Bach composed the majority of the 24 Preludes and Fugues of Book 1 in his Cöthen period, around the year 1722. Although only performable on instruments tuned to even temperament, Bach's intention in these works was not simply to write in all keys, but to explore the possibilities of remote modulations and harmonies which had previously been impractical. Although the Preludes and Fugues have a didactic aspect, their musical worth takes them well beyond this realm. The Preludes belong to the improvisatory tradition central to the organist's skill, and no two have exactly

the same form. The Fugues, while more highly structured, are by no means academic exercises in counterpoint for its own sake, and are always conceived musically. The C minor Prelude is based on a single figure which moves with an unrelenting, toccata-like storminess, culminating in a brief recitative passage before the return of the *allegro* material. The subject of the Fugue is paired with two counter-subjects, and it is these which generate most of the contrapuntal interest in the piece. At the close, extra parts are added to enrich the harmonies.

10 Johann Sebastian Bach: Concerto in the Italian Style (1st Movement) BWV 971

The two greatest influences on German music in Bach's day were the Italian concerto, as typified by Vivaldi, and the French overture or suite. In his Clavierübung of 1735 Bach acknowledged the significance of these genres by composing a work for harpsichord in each form. Part I of the Übung is the Concerto in the Italian Style, and Part II is the Overture in the French Style. The idea of composing a concerto entirely for solo keyboard, rather than its customary orchestral setting, was not new in 1735, but Bach's Italian Concerto far surpasses any of its precedents. Although the work follows the form of an orchestral concerto perfectly, with tutti and solo passages for the most part clearly demarcated, it was conceived from the start as a keyboard work, rather than a transcription. In the First Movement, the "solo" part is initially quite distinct from that of the "orchestra", and would originally have been played

on the upper manual of the harpsichord, leaving the lower one primarily for the tutti passages. The movement is in ritornello form, the main thematic idea stated brightly in the outer sections of the movement, and in fragmentary reappearances during the course of the piece, where its return separates the contrasting solo episodes.

11 Claude Debussy (1862-1918): *The Little Shepherd (Children's Corner Suite)*

The *Children's Corner Suite* was composed in 1908 for Debussy's four-year old daughter Claude-Emma, alias Chouchou. The dedication reads "To my dear little Chouchou, with her father's affectionate apologies for what follows." The suite is a private, personal offering from the composer at a time of uncertainty and financial hardship for he and his family. The pieces comprising it are largely inspired by Chouchou's toys, her elephant, the doll, the golliwog and the shepherd. Their English titles may derive from the fact that Chouchou had an English governess. The penultimate work in the suite is *The Little Shepherd*, the most serene of the collection. The simple, enchanting melody with which the piece begins is reminiscent of Debussy's other famous "pipe" tune, from *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune*. The melody gains a fuller harmonisation as it develops, but continually returns to the unadorned phrases of the opening.

12 Claude Debussy: *Danse*

In this early work, composed 1890, one

can see the elements of Debussy's mature style. Its original title was *Tarentelle Styrienne*, for its rhythm is inspired by the national dance of the Neapolitans (although the particular tarantella Debussy had in mind came from further north, in Austria). His attraction to pentatonic melodies is made clear at the beginning of the work. Already at this early stage of his career he was seeking an alternative to traditional goal-directed melodies. The opening texture was reused in the song *L'échelonement des haïses* in 1891. Its generally brilliant character reflects the original intention of the tarantella as an energetic dance to counteract the stupefying effects of tarantula bites. The central section of *Danse* shows Debussy's desire to suspend traditional harmonic processes, for it avoids arriving at a cadence for 36 bars. Its delicate, filigree texture predicts that of *Masques* (1905).

13 Franz Liszt (1811-1886): *Transcendental Etude No.3 Paysage*

The 12 *Transcendental Etudes* by Liszt known today date from 1851, but they had been through a number of incarnations before arriving at their final form. They were first issued as Liszt's Op.1 in 1827, when the composer was just 16 years old, but he later withdrew them. After extensive revisions they appeared again in 1839, but Liszt was still not satisfied and so they were withdrawn once more. Further revisions lead to the *Etudes* of 1851. These works were largely intended as a ferocious demonstration of Liszt's technique, designed to scare off would-

be challengers for his exulted position as principal piano virtuoso of the age. The technical difficulties of the *Etudes* are not solely confined to problems of velocity and accuracy; matters of sonority and expression are also addressed. This is particularly the case in *Paysage*, the third and most lyrical of the *Etudes*. The constancy of the rhythm has a soothing effect, like a peaceful journey through a beautiful landscape.

14 Franz Schubert (1797-1828): Scherzo from Sonata in A major D959

During Schubert's life he was principally known as a composer of songs, and this lyrical impulse is never far away in any of his works. His symphonies and piano sonatas were rarely performed in his life time, and only became famous posthumously. But Schubert had a strong desire to succeed as a composer of Classical instrumental music, particularly after Beethoven's death in 1827. The Sonata in A major, composed in 1828, is one of the products of this resolve. Schubert never shared Beethoven's concern for tightly controlled structure, preferring a more spontaneous approach to form. The Scherzo from the Sonata in A major, however, shows a definite Beethovenian influence. The playful leaps of the body of the movement recall the style of the older composer in similar contexts, as does the stormy central section which briefly interrupts the prevailing calm.

15 Franz Schubert: Impromptu in A flat major Op.90 No.4 D899

The title "Impromptu" was first used by the Czech composer Tomásek, whose pupil Vorísek was a friend of Schubert's. Such was Schubert's command of small, intimate piano forms that his compositions in this style set a new standard for all who came after him. In their improvisatory spontaneity, their clarity of expression and their economy of means, Schubert's Impromptus have few equals. Op.90 No.4 has the ternary form characteristic of its genre. The outer sections feature sparkling passages over a melodic, waltz-like accompaniment. The flowing rhythm displays one of Schubert's chief passions: music for the dance. The central trio, in C sharp minor, conveys an urgent song, Schubert's melodic impulse coming to the fore.

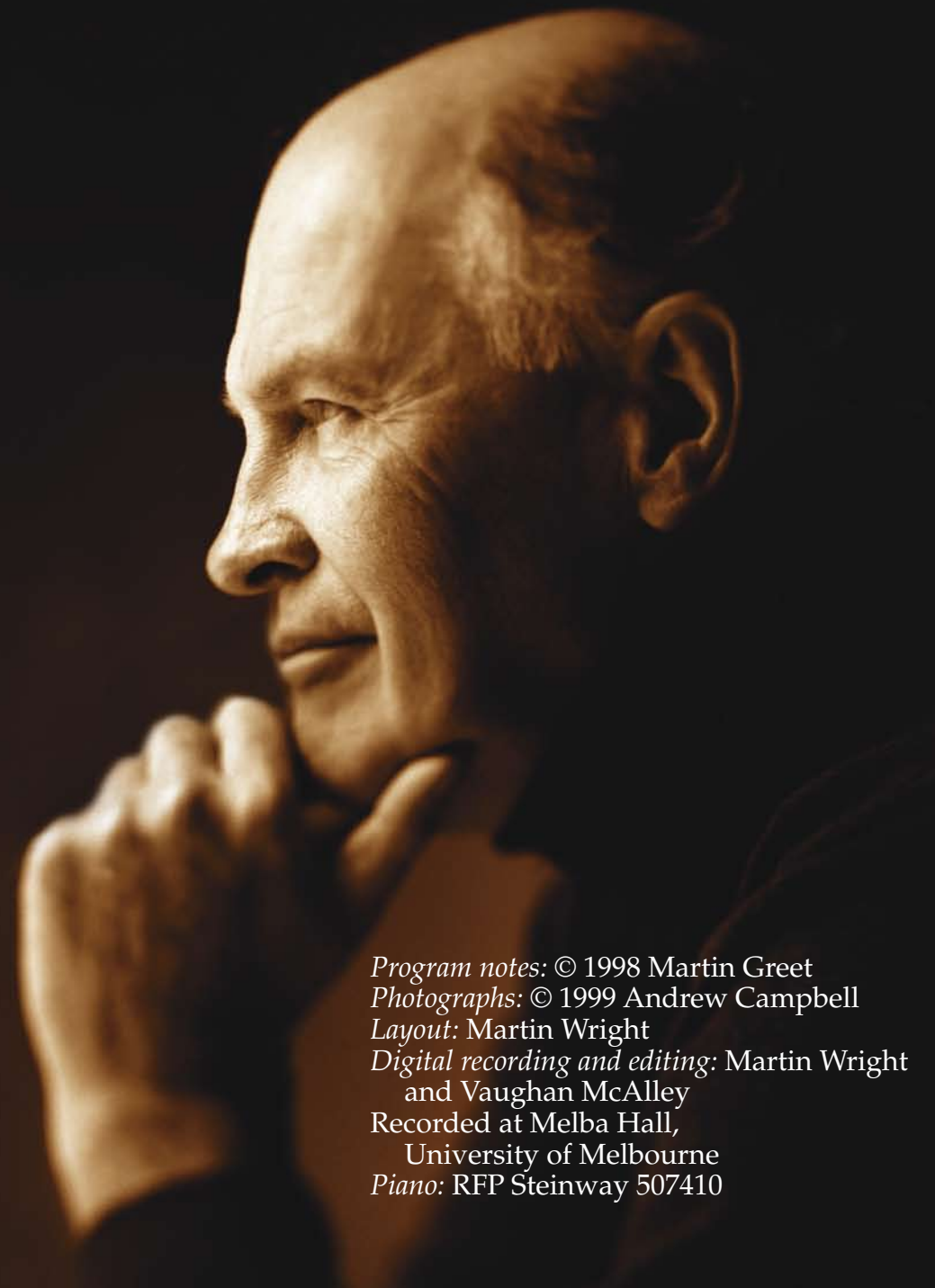
16 Maurice Ravel (1875-1937): *La Vallee des Cloches* from *Miroirs*

The five pieces which constitute *Miroirs* were composed from 1904-5, during one of Ravel's most productive decades. Contemporary with his Sonatine and with Debussy's first set of *Images*, *Miroirs* helped establish the piano as a conveyor of orchestral colour. They also provide evidence of Ravel's evolution as a composer, for they went well beyond anything he had written previously. He recognised this himself, saying "they represent such a considerable change in my harmonic development that even musicians who were accustomed to my manner up to then were somewhat

disconcerted." The most successful piece in the collection is the last, *La Vallee des Cloches*, of which Calvocoressi said in the first review of the work "there is such a great depth of feeling, of intimate feeling, totally devoid of grandiloquence." In this piece, Ravel is known to have been inspired by the many church bells of Paris which toll at noon. The fourths in the work create the illusion of bells, following as they do the bell's harmonic series. All manner of them can be heard, both large and small, sounding from across the valley.

17 Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953): Toccata in D minor Op.11

Writing of his progress as a composer, Prokofiev noted that five principal elements made up his outlook. They were the Classical, the expressively harmonic, the lyrical, the whimsical and the motoric. Of this last characteristic, he said its importance to him was "perhaps due to the powerful impression Schumann's Toccata made on me when I first heard it." His own Toccata in D minor is the clearest examples of this motoric impulse. Composed in 1912, it came hard on the heels of the uproar his first Piano Concerto had caused at its premiere in Moscow. Rather than be discouraged, Prokofiev redoubled his experiments with daring harmonies and driving rhythms, the results evident in the devilishly difficult music of the Toccata. The pace is frantic and unrelenting, the phrases angular and pounding. The work demands the extremes of virtuosity, and formed a regular part of Prokofiev's own recitals for some time.

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- 1** GRANADOS *Quejas o La Maja y El Ruisenir* (The Lover and the Nightingale) No 4 from *Goyescas* **6'25"**
 - 2** SCARLATTI *Sonata in G minor* K476 L340 **3'50"**
 - 3** MENDELSSOHN *Lieder ohne worte* (Songs without Words) Op 30 No 3 in E major **2'13"**
 - 4** MENDELSSOHN *Lieder ohne worte* (Songs without Words) Op 38 No 6 in A flat major Duetto **3'13"**
 - 5** CHOPIN *Etude* Op 10 No 3 in E major **4'16"**
 - 6** CHOPIN *Etude* Op 25 No 1 in A flat major **2'28"**
 - 7** CHOPIN *Etude* Op 10 No 12 in C minor 'Revolutionary' **2'42"**
 - 8** BEETHOVEN *Adagio* from *Sonata in C minor* Op 13 'Pathetique' **5'00"**
 - 9** BACH *Prelude in C minor* Book 1 BWV 847 **1'38"**
BACH *Fugue in C minor* Book 1 BWV 847 **1'40"**
 - 10** BACH *Concerto in the Italian Style* (1st movt) BWV 971 **3'50"**
 - 11** DEBUSSY *The Little Shepherd* (Children's Corner) **2'57"**
 - 12** DEBUSSY *Danse* **5'25"**
 - 13** LISZT *Transcendental Etude* No 3 *Paysage* **5'09"**
 - 14** SCHUBERT *Scherzo* (*Sonata in A major* D959) **5'20"**
 - 15** SCHUBERT *Impromptu* in A flat major Op 90 No 4 D899 **7'22"**
 - 16** RAVEL *La Vallee des Cloches* (The Valley of Bells) from *Miroirs* **5'50"**
 - 17** PROKOFIEV *Toccata* in D minor Op 11 **4'45"**

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