

SUNDAY 17 MARCH 2019 / 2.45PM

Barry Wordsworth

Conductor

Steven Osborne

Piano

Chabrier

Joyeuse Marche [4]

Rachmaninov

Piano Concerto No.3 in D Minor Op.30 [39]

Interval 20 minutes

Berlioz

Symphonie Fantastique Op.14 [50]

The timings shown are not exact and are provided as a guide only.

THE PLAYERS

Steven Osborne

Piano

Steven Osborne is one of Britain's most treasured musicians whose insightful and idiomatic interpretations of diverse repertoire show an immense musical depth. His numerous awards include The Royal Philharmonic Society Instrumentalist of the Year (2013) and two Gramophone Awards. His residences at London's Wigmore Hall, Antwerp's deSingel, the Bath International Music Festival and

most recently with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra are a testament to the breadth of his interests and the respect he commands.

Concerto performances take him to major orchestras all over the world including recent visits to the Deutsches Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Salzburg Mozarteum, Oslo Philharmonic, Finnish Radio Symphony, Danish National Radio, London Symphony, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony, Australian Chamber Orchestra, St Louis Symphony, Aspen Music Festival and Mostly Mozart Festival at Lincoln Center. He has enjoyed collaborations with conductors including Christoph von Dohnanyi, Alan Gilbert, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Stéphane Denève, Ludovic Morlot, Juanjo Mena, Sakari Oramo, Andrew Litton, Ingo Metzmacher, Vladimir Jurowski, Jun Märkl, Ed Gardner and Jukka-Pekka Saraste.

In 2017 his 14th performance at the Proms saw Steven give the world premiere of Julian Anderson's piano concerto *The Imaginary Museum* which was written for, and dedicated to, him. Further performances followed with the co-commissioners Bergen Philharmonic/Ed Gardner and Sidney Symphony/Ludovic Morlot. Reflecting his eclectic musical taste, the current season includes concertos ranging from Beethoven, Brahms and Mozart to Britten, Falla, Messiaen, Shostakovich and Tippett.

Steven's recitals of carefully crafted programmes are publicly and critically acclaimed without exception. He has performed in many of the world's prestigious venues including the Konzerthaus Vienna, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Philharmonie Berlin, de Doelen Rotterdam, Palais des Beaux Arts Brussels, Suntory Hall Tokyo, Kennedy Center Washington, Carnegie Hall and is a regular guest at London's Wigmore Hall. His chamber music partners include Alban Gerhardt, Paul Lewis, James Ehnes, Dietrich Henschel and Alina Ibragimova.

Recent highlights include performances with the Bergen Philharmonic/Gardner, Danish National Symphony/Mena, Radio Sinfonieorchester Wien/ Cornelius Meister, Gulbenkian Orchestra/Mena, Ensemble Orchestral de Paris, Sydney Symphony/Morlot and BBC Symphony/Vedernikov. Recitals also took him to Rome, Mexico, Sydney, Wigmore Hall London and to the US including a performance of Messiaen's *Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jesus* at Lincoln Center.

Marking his 19th year as a Hyperion recording artist, 2017 saw the release of solo music by Debussy. His 26 releases have accumulated numerous awards in the UK, France, Germany and the USA including two Gramophone Awards, three Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik Awards and a Choc in *Classica Magazine* in addition to a clutch of Editor's Choice in *Gramophone* and Recordings of the Year from *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Times* and *Sunday Times*. His recordings span a wide range of repertoire including Beethoven, Schubert, Debussy, Ravel, Liszt, Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Rachmaninov, Medtner, Messiaen, Britten, Tippett, Crumb and Feldman.

Steven won first prize at the prestigious Clara Haskil Competition in 1991 and the Naumburg

International Competition in 1997. Born in Scotland he studied with Richard Beauchamp at St Mary's Music School in Edinburgh and Renna Kellaway at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. He is a Visiting Professor at the Royal Academy of Music and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in March 2014.

www.stevenosborne.com

THE WORKS

Joyeuse Marche

Emmanuel Chabrier (1841 – 94)

Chabrier, who was born in Ambert, France, in 1841, studied law and then worked for the Ministry of the Interior for some 18 years. He was also a gifted musician and composed two operas while working at the Ministry. He was profoundly moved by hearing *Tristan and Isolde* in Munich in 1879, and decided to devote himself full time to music.

Dedicated to Vincent D'Indy, who was one of many literary friends in the Parisian artistic avante-garde, this is Chabrier's second most popular orchestral work, the first being the rhapsody *España*. Both were written in the same year, and were first presented at a concert conducted by Chabrier in Angers, France, in 1888.

The score was conceived at the piano, originally as a sight-reading exercise entitled *Marche Francais* for the Bordeaux Conservatory; Chabrier was an excellent pianist. When it was found too difficult for the budding pianists, Chabrier orchestrated it and changed its title to *Joyeuse Marche*.

This syncopated march is full of humour and light orchestration and is believed to describe the progress homewards of several drunk musicians after an evening's revelry. The work opens with a boisterous orchestral flourish, followed by a sprightly theme for oboe, describing the halting advance of the drunks. The second theme, in the violins, depicts their happy care-free condition. It is vintage Chabrier, being typically exuberant and melodious.

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Piano Concerto No.3 in D Minor Op.30

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873 – 1943)

Allegro ma non tanto

Intermezzo: Adagio

Finale: Alla brev

“Music is enough for a whole lifetime”, Rachmaninov once said to an interviewer, “but a lifetime is not enough for music.” In his very full lifetime he was known not only as a composer, but also as a conductor and concert pianist of great distinction.

As such, among his predecessors, he can only be compared to Liszt. Yet the travelling and concert-giving Rachmaninov was still undertaking in his 70th year had been abandoned by Liszt when he was hardly more than half that age. Following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, he spent the remaining 25 years of his life in exile from his native Russia, finally settling in America.

Before departing on his first visit to America in 1909 for a tour of 20 concerts, he spent the summer as usual at Ivanovka, an estate deep in the Russian countryside. Here, tranquillity and the companionship of family and friends combined to produce the ideal situation for composition. The vast majority of his works written in Russia owe something to its peaceful surroundings.

The distinction between composing and writing was a necessary one for Rachmaninov. At Ivanovka he would compose complete works in his head before putting pen to paper. One of his cousins recalled,

“In moments of creative inspiration he would stand concentrated and pensive, as if far away... He would walk, head bowed, drumming his fingers on his chest and sort of singing to himself.” That summer, the music going round in his head was the piece that he was composing for the tour, the *Piano Concerto No.3 in D Minor*.

He arrived in the United States at the end of October, taking with him the score of the new concerto. In view of the tightness of the schedule, Rachmaninov practised assiduously on a dummy keyboard during the Atlantic crossing. The premiere of the new concerto took place in New York on 28 November, but for many it was the performance on 16 January 1910 at Carnegie Hall that really launched the work into the wider world. The orchestra was the New York Philharmonic, and the conductor was its newly appointed Musical Director, Gustav Mahler. Rachmaninov admired Mahler greatly, as well as his insistence on rehearsing the orchestral accompaniment to the point of perfection. As both men were great composers as well as great conductors, it was a rare meeting of musical minds.

The first audiences for the concerto were enthusiastic. The critics were not so easily impressed,

complaining of its length – a cause for concern for Rachmaninov himself. But what he had already achieved with the symphony, symphonic poem and piano sonata, he now achieved with the concerto – a great instrumental work on the largest possible scale.

The first movement introduces a daring innovation: after the two main themes (both given to the piano) an immense two-pronged development section follows. The first is orchestral, and the second takes place in the piano's cadenza, the longest and most technically demanding he ever wrote. The slow movement is a set of variations on the first subject of the first movement, and includes an amazing scherzando section. The *Finale* is heroic and Cossack-like, containing a succession of tableaux combining a variety of moods within the same basic tempo, increasing in volume and excitement until the climax is reached in an expansive version of the movement's lyrical second theme.

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Symphonie Fantastique Op.14

Hector Berlioz (1803 – 69)

Rêveries – Passions: Largo – Allegro agitato e appassionato assai – Religiosamente

A Ball. Valse: Allegro non troppo

Scene in the Country: Adagio

March to the Scaffold: Allegretto non troppo

Dream of a Witches' Sabbath: Larghetto – Allegro

In 1827 Berlioz saw a performance of *Hamlet*. The play hit him like a thunderbolt, as did the beauty of the leading lady, the Irish actress Harriet Smithson. It was to be the start of a lifelong addiction to Shakespeare and an equally intense, if less durable, passion for Miss Smithson (they married in 1833 and separated nine years later). During the first five months of 1830 – having in the interim attended a revelatory series of Beethoven concerts in Paris – Berlioz composed his *Symphonie Fantastique*, a huge orchestral piece in which he attempted to sublimate his passion for the actress. The work's subtitle, 'Episodes in the life of an artist', betray an autobiographical element that was never far from the surface of Berlioz's music.

The *Symphonie Fantastique* was written only three years after Beethoven's death, yet takes several

leaps beyond his symphonic structures. For one thing, this is the first symphony to make thorough use of the *idée fixe*, a single melody that reappears in different guises throughout the work – a concept that is the forerunner of the leitmotifs in Wagner and Richard Strauss. Furthermore, although composers had written descriptive music before, none had used instrumental music to present so specific a narrative drama. In short, this symphony is an opera without words. The symphony depicts the course of Berlioz's passion for Harriet Smithson, with the composer identifiable as the central hero of the drama.

Berlioz's own programme note for the *Symphonie Fantastique* sets out not to describe the music but, as in opera, to prepare the listener for it by supplying its context. By giving the movements titles and drawing on his own intense personal experience, Berlioz saw himself as continuing the work of Beethoven in bringing music's inherent expressivity further into the open. Yet whatever extra-musical ideas went into the composition, music remained sovereign. It could describe the course, from dream to nightmare, of one man's idealistic, hopeless love for a distant beloved, and still be, to use Beethoven's words, "an expression of feeling rather than painting". It is not the literary programme that Berlioz wrote for the first performances that holds the work together, but the music itself. In it we have a timeless record of the ardours and torments of his young, fevered imagination.

The first movement's slow introduction suggests the general emotions and feelings of a young artist (Berlioz), whose state of yearning creates an image of the ideal woman, represented by the *idée fixe*. This is heard at the outset of the main *Allegro* section, appearing subsequently in various emotional states, exalted at one moment and dejected the next. At the end it comes to rest on a series of solemn chords.

The second movement takes place at a ball, at which the beloved is present. The principal theme is a waltz melody that suggests not so much the mood of a party, as it does the very sound of the party itself. Near the middle of the movement, a now transformed *idée fixe* appears before a reprise of the main dance tune.

An introduction to the *Scene in the Country* imitates the piping of shepherds, with a duet between an offstage oboe and an onstage English horn. The main theme is a long serene melody, offset by a stormy contrasting section, meant to depict the intrusion of thoughts of the beloved. The *idée fixe* later appears in a more tranquil form, without the characteristic sighing interval. Dusk falls, distant thunder is heard and the shepherd now pipes alone.

The dreams of the first three movements are intensified into nightmare in the *March to the Scaffold*. The full orchestral forces are deployed for the first time. Berlioz adds to the end of the march a reference to the *idée fixe* – a final reminiscence of the beloved. It appears *pianissimo* on solo

clarinet in its original form but truncated by an abrupt G minor chord from the full orchestra – a gesture clearly meant to represent the falling blade of the guillotine. There follows an additional gruesome element as *pizzicato* strings imitate the dropping of the severed head.

In the *Dream of a Witches' Sabbath*, the executed lover witnesses his own funeral. It begins with the strange noises and groans of the assembled sorcerers mentioned in Berlioz's programme. The music continues with the arrival of the beloved, come to join the black mass. Her new trivial and grotesque character is captured by the most drastic transformation of the *idée fixe* in the entire symphony. A series of episodes correspond closely to the programme, calling attention to a "funeral knell, burlesque parody of the *Dies irae*, Sabbath round-dance, [and] the Sabbath round-dance and *Dies irae* combined".

Especially effective is Berlioz's use of *col legno* (a direction to string players to use the wood of the bow) to imitate the rattling of bones. The movement as a whole is a tour-de-force of rhythmic and orchestral virtuosity.

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