

The music

Ludwig van Beethoven Piano sonata op2 no3 in C major
Alexander Scriabin Piano sonata no6 op62
Guirlandes op73 no1
Vers la Flamme op72

INTERVAL

Franz Liszt Sonetto 123 del Petrarca
Transcendental Études
nos12, 5 and 10
Les Cloches de Genève
Rhapsodie Espagnole

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Piano sonata op2 no3 in C major (1795)

1 Allegro con brio ~ 2 Adagio ~ 3 Scherzo. Allegro - Trio ~ 4 Allegro assai

Beethoven’s opus 2 sonatas were published in 1796 and dedicated to Haydn, with whom Beethoven had studied for a year before the latter departed for London. All three sonatas were written on a grand scale, with four movements rather than the three which were the norm at the time, four being reserved for symphonies and string quartets. The symphonic – and certainly concerto-like – nature of the sonata’s outer movements has indeed been frequently noted, with quieter solo-like playing interspersed with quasi-orchestral *tutti*s. Both first and fourth movements also have closing cadenzas.

The *con brio* attached to the **first movement** *Allegro* is evident from the outset, its vigorous opening theme played with a flourish. But alongside the forceful elements there are others of great delicacy and melodic invention. The length of the movement allows it to breathe, developing a number of different themes but always returning to the first.

The *Adagio* couldn’t be more different – slow, serious and serene with the rests an important part of the structure, sadly questioning. Soon after the start there’s an unexpected move into the minor and a more ghostly atmosphere. The mood is broken twice by stern interventions but these fail to overcome the overall tone of quiet thoughtfulness. The *Scherzo* ups the tempo, with waterfalls of notes and trills, especially in the trio, allowing the performer to show off their full range of technical skills before the final coda steps down to nothingness. The *fourth movement* *Allegro assai* is a spirited *rondo*, similar to the first in its cheerful humour. The

main theme is bright and airy, with multiple variations built around it, before the movement ends with a profusion of trills leading into a few bars of hesitation before a resounding conclusion.

Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) Piano sonata no6 op62 (1911)

Modéré: mystérieux, concentré

Scriabin reportedly never played this sonata in public because it was ‘nightmarish, murky, unclean and mischievous’. Why did he write it then, you may well ask, and we might suspect that he was playing with us – trying to enhance its reputation through exaggeration. But whatever his motives, it nevertheless remains a strange work and almost entirely atonal.

The performance directions are surreal: ‘Expansion of mysterious forces... all becomes charm and sweetness... winged, swirling... the Terrifying One arises, she joins in the delirious dance.’ In the final pages of the score, which sometimes uses three staves, Scriabin writes ‘the terror arises and joins the delirious dance’ as trills in the extreme high register of the piano require a top D outside the highest reach of the keyboard.

The piece is certainly shadowy and dreamlike, but whether it’s a good dream or a nightmare might depend on what’s in the listener’s mind to start with.

Scriabin Guirlandes op73 no1 (1914)

The two *danses* comprising his *opus 73* were Scriabin’s penultimate work, which he described as having ‘sweetness to the point of pain’. The first, *Guirlandes*, is an ethereal piece, evoking for the composer ‘crystalline and at the same time iridescent figures...’ which form and re-form in an endless dance.

Scriabin Vers la Flamme op72 (1914)

According to Horowitz, who played for the composer when he was only 11, Scriabin was an early prophet of global warming – believing that the world was inexorably growing hotter (moving ‘towards the flame’) and would eventually burst into fiery conflagration.

The piece is one long ineluctable build-up. As the publishers Henle put it: “The *poème* opens with static, rough chords and then slowly but steadily rises from the depths to the bright light above. Diverse levels of sound in changing

rhythms gradually move above one another and create a suction-like tension. At the close, tremolos and fanfares tower up to a blazing conflagration of orchestral intensity.”

Franz Liszt (1811-86) Sonetto 123 del Petrarca (1839-46)

Liszt wrote the first two of the three books which comprise his *Années de pèlerinage – Suisse and Italie* – between 1846 and 1855 and the third (no country name attached) much later between 1867 and 1877. He placed these works firmly in the Romantic tradition, following in the wake of Goethe’s two *Wilhelm Meister* volumes, and writes in his introduction:

“Having recently travelled to many new countries... the phenomena of nature and their attendant sights... stirred deep emotions in my soul, and between us... an undefined but real rapport, an inexplicable but undeniable communication.”

Sonetto 123 del Petrarca comes in the second book of the *Années*. In the first line of the poem (*i’vidi in terra angelici costumi - I saw angelic virtue on earth*) the poet sees a vision of his idealized Laura and marvels at the way the whole of nature is in awe of her qualities. The music wonderfully reflects this sense of wonder and a lover’s yearning for the probably unattainable.

Liszt Transcendental Études (1852)

no12 Chasse-neige
no5 Feux Follets
no10 (*allegro agitato molto*)

The twelve 1852 *Transcendental Études* were revisions of an earlier 1837 set, with the addition of the word ‘Transcendental’ and titles given to all except two (nos2 and 10). Liszt’s original intention had been to write studies in all 24 of the major and minor keys, but only achieved this first half, using natural and flat key signatures.

Chasse-neige begins gently, slowly building until we feel the full intensity of a snow storm. Busoni described the work as “a sublime and steady fall of snow which gradually buries landscape and people.” The title of *étude no5, Feux Follets* (*will o’ the wisps*) says it all. Generally reckoned the most technically demanding of the 12 (which is saying something), the notes fly from the piano like quicksilver. *Étude no10* is more melodic – passionately so at times (*tempestoso* is the marking) – and with a hair-raising dash to the finish.

Liszt *Les Cloches de Genève* (1848-54)

This, the final item in *Book I* of the *Années de pèlerinage* (Suisse), is prefaced by lines from Byron's *Childe Harold* 'I live not in myself, but I become/Portion of that around me' and was dedicated to Liszt's first daughter, Blandine, who was born in the city. Gentle early morning bells chime first, later joining with others as a background carillon at the heart of the piece – a passionate *cantabile* melody which then fades gently to a distant tolling.

Liszt *Rhapsodie Espagnole* (1858)

The *Rhapsodie* was inspired by Liszt's memories of his earlier 1844-45 visit to Spain and Portugal. It's a bravura piece for the pianist and a real test of a piano's resilience.

Opening with a grand flourish, the familiar *La Folia* tune is introduced formally and then with increasingly elaborate variations. Just when they're reaching their peak, as if on a musical-box a *jota aragonesa* dance appears. This is developed in its turn even more ingeniously – indeed, to such an extent that the piano almost runs away with itself. The two themes come together at the end in a thunderous and triumphant conclusion.

Notes by Dick Ware

The artist

Aidan Mikdad *piano*

"... this calling card will do very well and Aidan Mikdad's name will be filed under 'One to Watch'." *Jeremy Nicholas, Gramophone*

Born in 2001, Aidan has from a very young age competed in international piano competitions. At age 11 he won first prize in the Koninklijk Concertgebouw Competition and in 2014 another first prize in the International Piano Competition at Lagny-sur-Marne. In 2017 he won the prestigious Royal Concertgebouw Young Talent Award, and received the Tabor Foundation Piano Award from the Verbier Festival in recognition of his exceptional potential. In 2018 he won the Pnina Salzman Memorial Prize at the Tel Hai International Piano Masterclasses in Israel, and in June 2023 first prize at the Royal Academy of Music Bicentenary Competition.

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Grateful acknowledgements

We thank all those who have helped with the Festival or supported us financially and in other ways. Special thanks to the funding bodies, sponsors and supporters listed below, without whose generous help there would be no Festival.



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Programme Notes

AIDAN MIKDDAD

Romantic Virtuosity



8pm, Tuesday October 8th, 2024
Little Missenden Church

64th Little Missenden Festival

In July 2023 Aidan was awarded 'The Queen's commendation for excellence' at his graduation ceremony from the Royal Academy of Music and received a Master of Arts in Performance with Distinction. In addition, he was awarded DipRAM after an outstanding mark (97/100) in his final recital.

While at the Royal Academy he'd studied with Professor Joanna MacGregor, where he was awarded the prestigious Bicentenary Scholarship for graduate studies. Before that, in June 2021, he'd graduated from the Amsterdam Conservatory with Professor Naum Grubert where he received a Bachelor's degree in Music with a perfect score (10/10) and the highest honour "summa cum laude". Since 2023 he's resumed lessons with Professor Grubert at the Conservatory.

Over the years, he's received guidance from Sergei Babayan, Dmitri Bashkirov, Nelson Goerner, Richard Goode, Klaus Hellwig, Martin Helmchen, Claudio Martinez Mehner, Ferenc Rados, Sir András Schiff, Jean-Yves Thibaudet, Igor Levit and Arie Vardi. He's also given recitals in Belgium, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Liechtenstein, Spain, the United States and Switzerland.

"Aidan Mikdad at the Wigmore Hall astonished and amazed in Scriabin as he entered completely into a world of mystery, passion and, above all, colour." *Christopher Axworthy*

aidanmikdad.com