

The music

Frédéric Chopin *Barcarolle op60*
Grażyna Bacewicz *Sonatina*
Sergei Rachmaninov *Études-Tableaux op33*

INTERVAL

Leoš Janáček *In the Mists*
Co-created by participants at HMP Featherstone with Michael Betteridge – *Shattered Freedom, Shards of Hope*
Earl Wild *Three Virtuoso Études after Gershwin*
Igor Stravinsky (arr. Agosti) *The Firebird Suite*

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849) *Barcarolle op60* (1845-6)

The *Barcarolle op60* is one of the most admired of Chopin's works, characteristic of his late period and saturated with the influence of the *bel canto* operatic style. Taking the voice as his primary inspiration, Chopin writes soaring melodic lines, often lavishly ornamented, doubled in sixths or thirds, above a gentle, arpeggiated left-hand accompaniment. He combines the simplicity of this folk idiom, the song of Venetian *gondolieri*, with the polyphonic richness and depth of classical counterpoint.

The barcarolle, with its typically lilting rhythm in 12/8, became a popular trope in 19th-century art song, appearing in the music of Schubert, Mendelssohn and Rossini among others, yet Chopin's *op60* is perhaps the best known. Intimate in character, it is more suited to the salon than to grand concert halls. Chopin himself performed it on a number of occasions, including during his visits to England and Scotland in 1848. It was reportedly one of Debussy's favourite pieces, while Ravel described it as "the synthesis of the expressive and sumptuous art of this great Slav... always there is the hidden meaning which is translated into poetry of intense despair".

Grażyna Bacewicz (1909-1969) *Sonatina* (1955)

Allegro non troppo ~ Melodia ~ Oberek

Prolific in her output, and notable also as a concert violinist, Bacewicz easily ranks among the major Polish composers of the 20th century. Initially encouraged by Szymanowski, she studied at the Warsaw Conservatoire and then with Nadia Boulanger at the École Normale de Musique in Paris. During the Second World War, Bacewicz continued to compose and perform secretly in underground concerts in Warsaw, leaving the city after the Warsaw Uprising. She led a dual career as

composer and performer until 1954 when injuries sustained in a car accident forced her to give up performing and devote herself entirely to composition.

Preoccupied with issues of musical structure, Bacewicz wrote to her brother in 1947 that "I walk quite alone, because I mainly care about the form of my compositions. It is because I believe that if you place things randomly or throw rocks on a pile, that pile will always collapse. So in music there must be rules of construction that will allow the work to stand on its feet". Although this *Sonatina* is a short work, it bears the hallmarks of Bacewicz's style. With Neoclassical elements, the first movement displays her fantastical wit, the second a beautifully simple and plangent melody, while the third is an 'oberek', a lively Polish folk dance in triple time with vigorous offbeat accents.

Sergei Rachmaninov (1873-1943) *Études-Tableaux op33* (1911)

Allegro non troppo (no1) ~ Allegro (no2) ~ Grave (no3) ~ Moderato (no5) ~ Non allegro: Presto (no6) ~ Allegro con fuoco (no7) ~ Moderato (no8) ~ Grave (no9)

The *opus33* set of *Études-Tableaux* was written during the summer of 1911 at the country estate, Ivanovka, to which Rachmaninov returned frequently before his emigration in 1917. While essentially Romantic in style, they hint at a more angular, modernist approach. 'Études-tableaux' translates as 'study-picture', and Rachmaninov had images in mind for each, yet he did not disclose what these were, preferring instead to allow the listener to "paint for themselves what [the music] most suggests".

Rachmaninov initially wrote nine études, withdrawing three (nos3-5) just before publication. No4 was reworked and published in his *Études-Tableaux op39*, while nos3 and 5 were published posthumously in the Soviet Union. Since then, pianists have habitually included these two when performing the entire set.

Each étude is characterised by a single thematic idea and is highly concentrated motivically. Rachmaninov stated in a 1941 interview with the journal *The Etude* (Philadelphia), that "I have often found that a short piece for the piano has always given me much more pain... than a symphony or a concerto... I am at the mercy of my thematic idea which must be presented concisely and without digression." These études are essentially miniatures, yet the set as a whole presents a wide variety of ideas, vividly painted, alternating pyrotechnic virtuosity with deep emotion.

Leoš Janáček (1854-1928) *In The Mists* (1912)

Andante ~ Molto adagio ~ Andantino ~ Presto - Meno mosso

This is the last of Janáček's major piano works and bears full witness to the breathtaking originality of his musical language, unique approach to rhythm, and striking emotional depth. With utmost economy of means and profound simplicity, he creates music simultaneously of searing passion and childlike naiveté. Desolation, grief and premonitions of death co-exist with poignant hope and nostalgia.

Janáček was an enthusiastic student of folk music, and made many expeditions to every corner of Moravia to record folk songs with ethnomusicologist Frantisek Bartos. While he never seeks to mimic folk melodies, his use of short motifs, distinctive, asymmetrical rhythms, modal scales, and broken or interrupted phrases permeates every level of the musical structure. Much of this piece is improvisatory in character, while the opening cimbaloms and wild dance of the fourth movement transport us to the heart of the Moravian countryside.

In The Mists was written in 1912, at a time when Janáček was in poor health and unable to secure performances of his operas. His biographer, Bohumir Stedron, describes the pieces as "a long fight waged against resignation and the recurrences of suffering", a battle that Janáček conducts with rare humanity and grace.

Co-created by participants at HMP Featherstone with Michael Betteridge — *Shattered Freedom, Shards of Hope* (2025)

Shattered Freedom, Shards of Hope depicts a prisoner's journey. Regardless of our situation, freedom is fragile. Once it is shattered, it takes work to rebuild a life from the shards.

This piece was co-created by participants at HMP Featherstone over four workshops with composer Michael Betteridge and Clare Hammond in May 2025. Publicly funded by the National Lottery through Arts Council England, it also received grants from The Gloucestershire Piano Trust, The Marchus Trust and Leigh Day Solicitors. We're grateful to Staffordshire Prison Libraries, Changing Tunes, Storybook Dads, and Theatre in Prisons and Probation for their support and encouragement.

Clare is performing this piece in 12 prisons and 7 concert venues across the UK in the 2025/26 concert season. You can find out more about her work bringing live music into prisons at www.gloucestershirepianotrust.org.uk

Earl Wild (1915-2010) *Three Virtuoso Études after Gershwin* (1973)

*no7 Fascinatin' Rhythm ~ no4 Embraceable You ~
no6 I Got Rhythm*

Earl Wild was one of the great American pianists of the 20th century and performed at the White House to six consecutive Presidents, from Herbert Hoover to Richard Nixon. Born in Pittsburgh, he studied with the Dutch pianist Egon Petri, performed Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* under Toscanini in 1942, and served as a musician in the US Navy during World War II.

Following in Liszt's tradition, Wild made numerous arrangements of Romantic music, including works by Berlioz and Rachmaninov. He is best known, however, for his compositions on George Gershwin's music, which include the *Grand Fantasy on 'Porgy and Bess'* and *Improvisation on 'Someone to Watch Over Me'*.

The *Seven Virtuoso Études*, of which three will be performed today, are both song transcriptions and studies. Each addresses specific technical difficulties and is challenging to play, yet virtuosic demands never dominate. *Fascinatin' Rhythm* preserves the wit of the original with staccato syncopation, while *Embraceable You* is lush in its expansive arpeggiated textures. *I Got Rhythm* uses syncopation and jazz polyrhythm to create a joyous finale.

Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) *Suite from L'Oiseau de Feu (The Firebird)*, transcribed by Guido Agosti (1928)

Danse infernale ~ Berceuse ~ Finale

The Firebird was commissioned by the great impresario, Sergei Diaghilev, for the Ballets Russes and premiered at the Paris Opéra in June 1910 with choreography by Michel Fokine. Stravinsky was not Diaghilev's first choice of composer. Tcherepnin was initially involved in the project but withdrew, then Lyadov was engaged, but was unable to meet the deadline. Diaghilev considered Glazunov until, with time running short, he asked Stravinsky. The young composer seized this valuable opportunity and the premiere was a triumph.

The ballet is based on a Russian fairy tale where a miraculous bird, "all gold and flames", is pursued through the forest by Prince Ivan. He captures her but agrees to set her free in return

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Festival Patron: David Matthews

Grateful acknowledgements

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Next Year's Festival

The 2027 Little Missenden Festival will run from Friday 8th to Sunday 17th October.

Festival Website little-missenden.org

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Programme Notes

CLARE HAMMOND
Into the Modern Era



3pm, Sunday October 4th, 2026
Little Missenden Church

66th Little Missenden Festival

for a magic feather. Prince Ivan then stumbles into the realm of Koschei the Immortal, a demonic magician who is holding 13 princesses captive. Koschei threatens to turn Ivan into stone but is prevented by the arrival of the Firebird who enchants Koschei. She renders harmless the attacks of his demons, who are forced instead merely to perform an ‘Infernal Dance’. Afterwards, Koschei falls asleep from exhaustion and the Firebird sings a lullaby (the ‘Berceuse’). Ivan destroys an egg said to contain Koschei’s soul, and Koschei dies. His captives are released and celebrate in the ‘Finale’, as dawn breaks.

The ballet was a decisive early success for Stravinsky and established his reputation on the international stage. While he created a number of piano suites based on the work, the most widely played today is that by Italian pianist and composer, Guido Agosti. He preserves the colour, vitality and élan of the orchestral version while fully exploiting the virtuosic possibilities of the piano.

Notes by Clare Hammond

The artist

Clare Hammond *piano*

Acclaimed as a “pianist of extraordinary gifts” (*Gramophone*) and “immense power” (*The Times*), Clare Hammond is recognised for her imaginative playing, visionary programming, and communicative performance style. She won the Royal Philharmonic Society’s Young Artist Award in 2016 and an Edison Klassiek Award in 2024.

2024 saw her debuts at the BBC Proms, Konzerthaus Berlin, and Salle Bourgie in Montreal, and return visits to Wigmore Hall, London’s National Gallery, and Raritäten der Klaviermusik in Husum. In 2025/26, she made her debuts at the Royal Albert Hall with the Philharmonia and at the Klavier-Festival Ruhr; premiered concertos by Ninfea Cruttwell-Reade and George Stevenson with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and Britten Sinfonia; and returned to give recitals at Wigmore Hall and Fundación Juan March in Madrid.

Contemporary music is at the core of Clare’s work. She’s given over 50 world premieres, including those of major works by Arlene Sierra, Robert Saxton, Jeffrey Mumford and Michael Berkeley, and her discography includes world premiere recordings of over 20 pieces.

She’s also made eight recordings for the *BIS* label, most recently releasing an album of concertos by Walton, Britten and Tippett with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. *The Times* praised her “crisp artistry” while *Gramophone* described her “exquisitely variegated tonal palette, deft touch and quiet authority” as “truly things of wonder”. Clare’s next disc for *BIS*, of music by Ravel, Tailleferre, Bonis, Barraine and Chaminade, will be released next year.

Community engagement forms an increasingly important part of Clare’s work. She recently founded the Gloucestershire Piano Trust to support her ongoing work in schools and prisons, which reaches around 4,000 schoolchildren and 300 prisoners each year.

clarehammond.com

Visit www.little-missenden.org