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Stahl Theatre - 8.00 pm

William Fong - Piano Recital

The Programme

32 Variations in C minor Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

The idea of a single theme as the basis of a series of short pieces of varying character is found throughout musical history for all kinds of instruments. Beethoven used variation form in a number of works: two better known examples are the *Diabelli Variations* and the second movement of the Piano Sonata in C minor, Op 111. The chief interest of Beethoven's original, 8-bar theme in the present work is the questioning, hesitant character of its harmonic movement by way of the ambiguous chromatic chord of the augmented sixth. All the variations are the same length except for the extended final one, and Beethoven plays all the usual tricks: the harmonic progression is variously decorated with arpeggios, scales, oscillating triplets and many other ingenious devices.

Adagio in B minor, K 540 W A Mozart
(1756-1791)

This is an isolated piece, composed in March 1788. It falls into two parts plus a coda, though it has an improvisatory quality and shares an atmosphere of restrained melancholy with other works dating from Mozart's last years. Telling harmonic inflections give the piece its poignant edge.

The Maiden and the Nightingale Enrique Granados
(1867-1916)

Granados composed mostly for the piano. Harold Schonberg said of his music that "it is the scent of Spanish rhythms, Spanish melodies and Spanish life that makes it memorable". The present work is one of a series of pieces inspired by the paintings and etchings of Goya. Listen for the birdsong!

Sonata in B flat minor Frederic Chopin
Grave/doppio movimento - Scherzo -
Marche Funèbre - Finale presto
(1810-1849)

This is the second of Chopin's three sonatas. It has four movements (one more than usual), the third being the famous funeral march, written earlier as a separate piece. The music opens with a contrast between an agitated three-note figure and a slower-moving, hymn-like phrase. The two are heard together in the central development section. A scherzo follows, full of harmonic ambiguities and chromatic scales. The finale is remarkable: a quiet swirl of octave triplets, without harmony or rhythmic variation. The music pauses once before a fortissimo chord closes the work abruptly.

Interval - drinks on sale in the foyer

Polonaise-Fantasia, Op 61 Frederic Chopin

Composed in 1845-6, the title suggests a free expansion of a Polish dance in 3/4. The opening alternates between fragments of polonaise rhythm and quasi-improvisatory arpeggios that perhaps recall those beginning the D minor Fantasia of Mozart, one of the few composers Chopin admired. The opening returns later at a slower speed, but the predominant impression is of a brilliant and unpredictable display based on the elements of the dance.

Three Hungarian Folk Tunes

Béla Bartók
(1881-1945)

Bartók was another nationalist composer, although he transformed his native folk music more extensively than Granados or Chopin, using its elements as the basic materials of an acerbic modern idiom. The first of these three short pieces, all of which have modal tunes, is a good example, where the tune is heard twice against different, shifting chromatic backgrounds. The second uses a similar idea, and there is rhythmic interest in the alternation between 2/4 and 3/4. The final piece has a chorale-like melody, and in the middle breaks briefly into grand, diatonic, arpeggiated chords.

Gaspard de la Nuit
Ondine - Le Gibet - Scarbo

Maurice Ravel
(1875-1937)

Ravel spent most of his life in Paris. *Gaspard*, written in 1908, harks back to the virtuosic tradition of Liszt, and is atypical of Ravel's output for the piano. The three pieces, based on lines of Aloysius Bertrand inscribed on the score, are *Ondine*, a water-sprite, *Le Gibet*, a gibbet from which a corpse hangs and *Scarbo*, a hobgoblin. They emphasise respectively the elements of melody, harmony and rhythm. Particularly striking is the constantly recurring octave B flat in *Le Gibet*, tolling like the bell in the text, against the exotic harmonies.

The Performer

Born in the United States in 1964, William Fong entered Chetham's School of Music in 1975, where he furthered his studies with Polish pianist Ryszard Bakst. In 1982 he moved on to the Royal Northern College of Music, where he held several scholarships. Since graduating with honours in 1986, he has been studying privately with Ronald Smith.

William Fong has given many concerts throughout Britain and has appeared on television and radio in several European countries. A recent review in *El País* said "His performance breathed vitality and moved one also by his profound shaping of the works, in which he managed to establish a fascinating interplay of expressive tension." His London South Bank debut was made at the Purcell Room in 1986, and in 1989 he made his London concerto debut with the Philharmonia. Last year he won prizes at both the Busoni and Iturbi International piano competitions, and toured Russia, giving performances in Moscow and St Petersburg. He has recently appeared as a soloist with the Brodsky Quartet, and at the Wigmore Hall.

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