

# RYAN DRUCKER

PIANO

Monday 8 July 11.15am – 12.15pm

St John's Church

Belgian pianist Ryan Drucker, based in Manchester, won a number of prizes at the RNCM including the Piano Recital Prize. He was a prizewinner in the 2013 RNCM concerto competition and subsequently played Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1, Op. 23 with the RNCM Symphony Orchestra in the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester in June 2014. Ryan was awarded second prize in the 2012 Moray Piano Competition held in Scotland. He was also a recipient of the Yehudi Menuhin English Speaking Union Scholarship.

## Ballades Op. 10, Nos 3 and 4

*Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)*

It seems to have been Chopin who first gave the title 'Ballade' to an instrumental piece. Folk-ballads, particularly those from the Scottish border region, had become extremely popular in Europe in the early nineteenth-century, but Chopin never spelled out any implied narratives – if, indeed, there were any. Similarly, although Brahms chose the same title for the four pieces of Op. 10, the fact that he so rarely even hinted at any non-musical inspiration behind his work should put us on our guard against imposing any specific imagery on the music.

He wrote his four Ballades in 1854. No. 3 is a scherzo and trio in outline, though there is nothing at all playful about the urgent, driving music of the outer sections. The central passage is calmer, placed high on the keyboard and with something of an ethereal quality. The fourth Ballade is the most introspective of the set. After the gently flowing, lyrical opening, a darker, more melancholy section follows. The return of the opening music has a light, dancing quality, though this does not last long, and it is the music of the withdrawn second section that brings the work to an end.

## Winterreigen (Winter Round-dances) Op. 13

**Ten Bagatelles: 1. Widmung (Dedication); 2. Marsch der lustigen Brüder (The Merry Brothers' March); 3. An Ada (To Ada); 4. Freund Viktor's Mazurka (Friend Viktor's Mazurka); 5. Sphärenmusik (The Music of the Spheres); 6. Valse aimable (Amiable Waltz); 7. Um Mitternacht (At Midnight); 8. Tolle Gesellschaft (Great Company); 9. Morgengrauen (Dawn); 10. Postludium (Postlude).**

*Ernö Dohnányi (1877-1960)*

Dohnányi was the first significant Hungarian musician to complete his training at the Budapest Academy of Music instead of studying abroad. One of the leading pianists of his day, he was appointed music director of Hungarian Radio in 1931, and in 1934 became Director of the Budapest Academy. He was a friend and champion of Bartók and Kodály, giving the first performances of a number of their works, as either pianist or conductor.

In 1905 he accepted an invitation from the violinist Joseph Joachim to teach at the Music High School in Berlin. *Winterreigen*, the first work he composed there, recalls happy times in Vienna. Apart from 'Widmung' and 'Postludium', each piece is dedicated to one of his Viennese friends.

After the gently-flowing 'Widmung', 'Marsch der lustigen Brüder' is as hearty as you would expect. 'An Ada' repeats the notes A-D-A continuously in the upper right-hand part. 'Freund Viktor's Mazurka' is marked 'With Humour'. 'Sphärenmusik' is clearly a tongue-in-cheek title, since this doesn't refer to ideas about the natural harmony of the cosmos. Instead, it recalls a hot-air balloon ride Dohnányi made with a friend. 'Valse aimable' is exactly what it says, but 'Um Mitternacht' clearly evokes 'the very witching-hour of night', with all sorts of mischief going on. 'Tolle Gesellschaft' ('tolle' = 'great', in the colloquial sense, as we use it today) is a second uninhibited get-together. 'Morgengrauen', by contrast, is calm, with long stretches of almost static harmony. 'Postludium' is based on the notes A-D-E, which begin the right-hand part, and form the upper notes of the final three chords. Above them,



Dohnányi literally spells out their significance, 'Ade' being the German for 'farewell'.

## Fantasia on an Ostinato

*John Corigliano (b. 1938)*

New York-born John Corigliano is probably best known for his score for the film *The Red Violin*. *Fantasia on an Ostinato* was commissioned as a test-piece for the semi-final rounds of the 1985 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in Forth Worth, Texas, and given its first performance by Irish pianist Barry Douglas.

An ostinato is a short musical phrase – melodic, rhythmic or harmonic, as the case may be – constantly repeated. In this case, the ostinato in question is taken from the second movement of Beethoven's Symphony No. 7: the rhythmic pattern – long-short-short – underlying the opening theme, and continuing through much of the rest of the movement.

Corigliano said that his 'desire to write a piece in which the performer is responsible for decisions concerning the durations of repeated patterns, led to my first experiment in so-called minimalist techniques'. This was in spite of his misgivings about aspects of the techniques used by composers such as Philip Glass and Steve Reich. Much of the piece is built from short sections to be repeated; it is left to the pianist to decide how many times each one is played. Eventually, the ostinato's origins become clear, as the rhythm emerges complete with Beethoven's original melody and harmonies.

## Künstlerleben (An Artist's Life), Op. 316

*Johann Strauss II (1825-1899), transcribed by Leopold Godowsky*

*Künstlerleben* is one of the pieces Strauss contributed to Vienna's 1867 carnival season. It was written for the Vienna Artists' Association known as 'Hesperus'; Strauss and his two brothers, Josef and Eduard, were all members.

Polish-born Leopold Godowsky (1870-1938) was one of the great piano virtuosos of his day. As well as his own original compositions, he transcribed a large number of pieces by other composers. His transcription of *Künstlerleben* is one of three published in 1912 as *Symphonic Metamorphoses on Themes by Johann Strauss*. As the title indicates, these are free paraphrases of the originals, rather than exact transcriptions.