Programme Notes
Olivia Sham

FRANZ LISZT
(1811-1886)

Années de pèlerinage Book II – Italie
1. Sposalizio
2. Il pensiveoso
3. Canzonetta del Salvator Rosa

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770-1827)

Andante Favol. WoO57

CARL VINE
(b.1954)

Piano Sonata no.1

~ Interval ~

OLIVIER MESSIAEN
(1908-1992)

Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jésus
11. ‘Première communion de la vierge’

CLAUDE DEBUSSY
(1862-1918)

Préludes Book II
10. Canope
6. General Lavine – Eccentric

FRANZ LISZT

Années de pèlerinage Book II – Italie
4. Sonetto 47 del Petrarca
5. Sonetto 104 del Petrarca
6. Sonetto 123 del Petrarca
7. Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata

Franz Liszt in 1839
(Translation by Adrian Williams)

Before embarking on a touring career that would cement his reputation as the greatest of piano virtuosí, the young Franz Liszt travelled in Switzerland and Italy between 1837 and 1839 with his lover, the Countess Marie d’Agoult. He began then the first two books of the Années de Pèlerinage (Years of Pilgrimage), and the second volume of pieces, inspired by his time in Italy, was eventually published in 1858. Liszt’s pieces for these cycles could be seen as musical postcards; the Swiss volume marries natural impressions with literary allusions, while the Italian volume draw upon Italian art and poetry. As programme music the pieces are vividly descriptive, but they are not merely aural snapshots, for the extra-musical subjects offered Liszt a medium through which to convey his own musicianship and personality, by delving into the universal themes found in the great works of art that inspired him.

Liszt wrote in 1839 that the universality of great art meant that the Italian masters were for him inextricably linked to the genius of composers like Mozart and Beethoven, and that art could heighten the understanding of music. This recital programmes Liszt’s cycle alongside pieces by other composers as disparate as Beethoven, Debussy, Messiaen and Carl Vine. In doing so, it is hoped that the relationships between these pieces and the complex intertwining of their musical and extra-musical inspiration can lead to a heightened understanding of Liszt’s own artistic place.

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The next piece is markedly different to the glorious exultation of ‘Sposalizio’. ‘Il penseroso’ (The Thinker) was a statue designed by Michelangelo for the tomb of Lorenzo de’Medici, the Duke of Urbino, in the Medici Chapel. The large statue is of an armoured man lost in thought, brow furrowed, and with a bat, the symbol of melancholia, adorning the cashbox on his knee. Liszt published the piece alongside the following verse, also by Michelangelo although originally attached to another statue, La Noite (The Night). Liszt’s ‘Il Penseroso’ has an almost funereal march-like tread, and its air of meditative gloom would increasingly haunt the music of his later years.

The ‘Canzonetta del Salvator Rosa’ (Song by Salvator Rosa) is an abrupt contrast, jauntily defiant in its music and text, which Liszt had printed over the score:

Salvator Rosa was a seventeenth-century artist, but was also known as a satirical poet and a musician. Rosa was believed to have taken part in the popular uprising against the Spanish in Naples, and his rebellious, individualistic character clearly attracted Liszt, who transcribed the song. Ironically, it has since been discovered that Rosa did not in fact compose this popular song, which is now attributed to Giovanni Battista Bononcini.

The next pieces in Liszt’s cycle are piano settings of Petrarch’s romantic sonnets, and in the Andante Favori by Beethoven, composed many years earlier in 1804, a similar beautiful lyricism can be found, possibly also inspired by a beloved. The Andante Favori was originally intended as a slow movement for the ‘Waldstein’ Sonata op.53, but its substantial length resulted in its removal for separate publication. It proved so popular that it earned its name—‘favourite Andante’. The piece is a varied rondo, and the lyrical theme that continually returns seems to premeditate Beethoven’s most famous song cycle of 1816, An die ferne Geliebte op.98 (To the distant Beloved), where the slightly modified melody frames the cycle. The closing lines of the song cycle are as follows:

That a loving heart receive,
what a loving heart has consecrated. (Translation by William Kindermann)
The sonata is a form that has become a cornerstone of the piano repertoire. Early keyboard sonatas of the seventeenth-century evolved into the canonic works of Beethoven, Mozart and Haydn. It held its sway over the nineteenth century, and this has continued even into the present. Carl Vine (born in 1954) is an Australian composer who has so far composed three solo piano sonatas. His Piano Sonata no.1 was composed in 1990, and is cast in two movements of roughly equal length. It can be hard to immediately discern this sonata’s Classical origins; more striking perhaps is its rhythmic drive, evocative textures, and effective pianism (it is interesting to note that while originally commissioned for the Sydney Dance Company, the piece has gone on to become a staple—relatively rare for contemporary pieces—amongst young pianists, and was a set piece in the 1996 Sydney International Piano Competition). It owes much to the nineteenth-century conception of the piano sonata in its virtuosity, even despite Carl Vine’s performance instruction that “Romantic interpretation… should be avoided wherever possible.” The piece’s structural integrity and intricate thematic manipulation clearly references sonata form, even while firmly inhabiting a contemporary sound world.

~ Interval ~

Messiaen’s intense Catholicism frequently manifested itself in his music, and the most well-known expression of this on solo piano can perhaps be found in his immense cycle, the Vingt regards sur l’enfant-Jésus (Twenty contemplations on the infant Jesus). In the eleventh piece of the set, the ‘Première communion de la Vierge’ (First communion of the Virgin), Messiaen wrote that he composed: “A picture of the Virgin on Her knees, at night, in contemplation of her own body—a halo of light hanging over Her womb. With eyes closed, She worships the fruit that is hidden inside Her. This happens between the Annunciation and the Nativity: the first and most noble of communions.” (Translation by Peter Hill.) Messiaen paints his own musical picture, which he clearly describes in the work’s preface: “The Theme of God, in delicate spirals, in stalactites, in an internal embrace… An ecstatic Magnificat. Distinctive chords…beneath which deep pulsations represent the heartbeats of the Child in his Mother’s womb. The Theme of God dissolves into silence.”

Messiaen said to pianist Peter Hill that: “Though I am a French composer, I am not a French impresionist.” It is interesting that Debussy, perhaps the poster boy of French musical impressionism, should also deny this label: “I am trying to write ‘something else’—realities, in a manner of speaking—what imbeciles call ‘impressionism.’” It is not through blurred lenses that Debussy offers a view of the world in his Préludes. The highly colourful piano writing sharply evokes his subjects—whether real, imagined, or straddling the fine line between. The prelude ‘Canope’ takes as its title the Etruscan burial urns that usually bore a likeness of the head of Osiris, the ancient Egyptian God of the dead. Debussy kept one on his writing desk, and while the still opening of the prelude is suggestive of the object’s solid physical state (as opposed to being full of movement, like many of the other preludes), there is also a hint of the funereal—of slow ceremonies, chants, and an inconclusive contemplation on death. General Lavine – Eccentric, on the other hand, is almost brutally comic. The American clown, Edward Lavine, appeared in Paris in 1910, announced as “General” Lavine, the “Man Who Has Soldiered All His Life,” and his comic act parodied the soldier’s life. Debussy marks the prelude ‘dans le style et la Mouvement d’un Cake-Walk’ (in the style and tempo of a cakewalk), a ‘dance’ of nineteenth-century African American origin, but it is a caricature of a dance, broken up with mock-military fanfares and clownish gestures. There is no minstrel dance and no military general—only a parody of both.

The remaining pieces in Liszt’s Italian Années de pèlerinage focus on the literary works of two early Italian writers – Francesco Petrarca (Petrarch) and Dante Alighieri. The Tre Sonetti di Petrarca are settings of three sonnets by Petrarch in which the fourteenth-century poet describes his love for the unattainable Laura. Liszt originally wrote them as songs for tenor, but soon wrote early piano versions that were in fact published first. He later revised them both for piano (as included in this cycle), and more radically for baritone. The piano settings are unabashedly lyrical, infused with elements of Italian bel canto operatic writing. The texts to the sonnets are printed below. (Translation by Lionel Salter.)

**Sonnet no.47 Benedetto sia ’l giorno**

Benedetto sia ’l giorno, e ’l mese, e l’anno,  
E la stagione, e ’l tempo, e l’ora, e ’l punto  
E ’l bel paese e ’l loco, ov’io fui giunto  
Da duo begli occhi che legato m’hanno;

**Blessed be the day**

Blessed be the day, the month, the year,  
The season, the time, the hour, the moment,  
The lovely scene, the spot where I was put in thrall  
By two lovely eyes which have bound me fast.
E benedetto il primo dolce affanno
Ch’i’ ebbi ad esser con Amor congiunto,
E l’arco e la saette ond’ i’ fui punto,
E le piaghe, ch’infino al cor mi vanno.

Benedette le voci tante, ch’io
Chiamando il nome di Laura ho sparte,
E i sospiri e le lagrime e ’l desio.

E benedette sian tutte le carte
Ov’ io fama le ac

Sol di lei, si ch’altra non v’ha parte.

Sonn. no.104 Peace non trovo
Pace non trovo, e non ho da far guerra,
E temo, e spero, ed ardò, e son un ghiaccio:
E volo sopra ’l cielo, e giaccio in terra;
E nulla stringo, e tutto ’l mondo abbraccio.

Tal m’ha in priggin, che non m’apre, nè serra,
Nè per suo mi ritien, nè scioglie il laccio,
Nè non m’accide Amor, e non mi sferra;
Nè mi vuol vivo, nè mi trahe d’impaccio.

Veggio senz’occhi; e non ho lingua e grido;
E bramo di perir, e cheggio aita;
Ed ho in odio me stesso, ed amo altrui:
Pascomi di dolor; piangendo rido;
Egualmente mi spiace morte e vita.

In questo stato son, Donna, per Voi.

Sonnet no.123 I’ vidi in terra
I vidi in terra angelici costumi,
E celesti bellezza al mondo sole;
Tal che di rimembrar mi giova, e dole:
Che quant’io miro, par sogni, ombre, e fumi.

E vidi lagrimar que’ duo bei lumi,
Ch’han fatto mille volte invidia al sole;
Ed udì sopraendo dir parole
Che farian gir i monti, e stare i fiumi.

Amor! senno! valo r, pietate, e doglia
Facean piangendo un più dolce concento
D’ogni altro, che nel mondo udir si soglia.

Ed era ’l cielo all’armonia s’intento
Che non si vedea in ramo mover foglia.
Tanta dolcezza avea pien l’acer, e ’l vento.

And blessed be the first sweet pang
I suffered when love overwhelmed me,
The bow and arrows which stung me,
And the wounds which finally pierced my heart.

Blessed be the many voices which have echoed
When I have called Laura’s name,
The sighs and tears, the longing;
And blessed be all those writings
In which I have spread her fame, and my thoughts,
Which stem from her and centre on her alone.

Peace not found
I find no peace, but for war am not inclined;
I fear, yet hope; I burn, yet am turned to ice;
I soar in the heavens, but lie upon the ground;
I hold nothing, though I embrace the whole world.

Love has me in a prison that he neither opens nor shuts fast;
He neither claims me for his own nor loosens my halter;
He neither slays nor unshackles me;
He would not have me live, yet does not relieve me from my torment.

Eyeless I gaze, and tongueless I cry out;
I long to perish, yet plead for succour;
I hate myself, but love another.

I feed on grief, yet weeping, laugh;
Death and life alike repel me;
And to this state I am come, my lady, because of you.

I beheld on earth
I beheld on earth angelic grace,
And heavenly beauties unmatched in this world,
Such that to recall them rejoices and pains me,
And whatever I gaze on seems but dreams, shadows, mists.

And I beheld tears spring from those lovely eyes,
Which many a time have put the sun to shame,
And heard words uttered with such sighs
As to move the mountains and stay the rivers.

Love, wisdom, valour, pity and grief
Made in that plaint a sweeter concert
Than any other to be heard on earth.

And heaven on that harmony was so intent
That not a leaf upon the bough was seen to stir,
Such sweetness had filled the air and winds.

The final piece in the cycle, ‘Aprés une lecture du Dante’ (After a reading of Dante), is the most epic in scale. The piece opens with tritones (musically associated with the devil), before Liszt unleashes his virtuosic prowess to evoke the Inferno, Purgatorio and Paradiso as described in Dante’s Divine Comedy (Divina Commedia). This single-movement piece is fantastically programmatic, but a tight structure nevertheless underpins it; Liszt subtitled it ‘Fantasia quasi Sonata’ (a fantasy, like a sonata), referencing the op.27 Sonatas (Sonata quasi fantasia) of Beethoven, whose sonatas are one of the pillars of the piano repertoire. Most striking is Liszt’s technique of thematic transformation; the consistent use of a few themes serves to unify the piece, although they are constantly transformed to
suggest highly different characters. The themes for the Inferno and the Paradiso sections are therefore the same, despite sounding completely removed from one another. Through this, Liszt, like Victor Hugo in his poem of a similar title, offers his personal response and commentary on Dante's work by intermingling his theological beliefs with his musical representation of them.

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Liszt to Hector Berlioz, 2 October 1839
Having nothing to seek in present-day Italy, I began to scour her past; having but little to ask of the living, I questioned the dead. A vast field opened before me. The music of the Sistine Chapel, that music which is gradually deteriorating, wearing away from day to day with the frescoes of Raphael and Michelangelo, induced me to undertake research of the highest interest… In this privileged country I came upon the beautiful in the purest and sublimest forms. Art showed itself to me in the full range of its splendour; revealed itself in all its unity and universality. With every day that passed, feeling and reflection brought me to a still greater awareness of the secret link between works of genius…

_Sposalizio_ (Raphael, in Milan) – Betrothal of the Virgin Mary and Joseph. Raphael’s painting is based on a parable recounted by St Jerome in the apocryphal “Protevangelium” and in Jacobus of Voragine’s 13thC _Legenda Aurea_. The story: “tells of the day when Mary came of age to wed. The high priest ordered all the unmarried male descendants of David to bring a wooden rod to the temple of Jerusalem. When they arrived, the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove and caused Joseph’s rod to blossom, a sign that he had been chosen to become Mary’s husband.”

_Il penseroso_ (Michelangelo, in Florence) Tomb designed for Lorenzo de’Medici, the Duke of Urbino, in the Medici Chapel (nephew of Giuliano de’ Medici, the son of Lorenzo the Magnificent; one of two (the other being for Giuliano de’ Medici, his father). Giuliano symbolized the active, extroverted personality, while Lorenzo was the contemplative introspective one.

**Caro m’è il sonno, e più l’esser di sasso**
Mentre che’l danno e la vergogna dura.
_Non veder; non sentir m’è gran ventura;_
Però non mi destar; deh! parla basso!

Dear to me is sleep; and more dear to be made of stone
As long as there exists injustice and shame,
Not to see and not to hear is a great blessing to me;
Therefore, do not disturb me! Speak softly!

Verse originally associated with Michelangelo’s figure _Notte_.

**Vado ben spesso cangiando loco**
Ma non si mai cangiar desio.
_Sempre l’istesso sarà il mio fuoco_
_E sarà sempre l’istesso anch’io._

Oftcn I change my location
But I shall never change my desire.
The fire within me will always be the same
And I myself will also always be the same.

* Drawing on the lithe beauty and contrapuntal elegance of the Elliot Carter Piano Sonata (1946), the Piano Sonata by Carl Vine is a work characterised by intense rhythmic drive and building up layers of resonance. These layers are sometimes delicate and modal, achieving a ‘pointed’ polyphony by the use of complex cross-rhythm, at other times being granite-like in density, creating waves of sound which propel the music irresistibly towards its climax.

The scheme is similar to the Carter Sonata - two movements, with the slow section built into and defining the faster portions of the first movement. The second movement is based on a moto perpetuo which soon gives way to a chorale-like section, based on parallel fifths.

In discussing the work, Vine is reticent about offering explanations for the compositional processes involved, feeling that these are self-evident, and indeed the work is definitely aurally 'accessible' on first hearing. However one of the main concerns in this sonata is the inter-relationship between disparate tempi, which is the undercurrent of the work and its principle binding element.

The work is dedicated to _Michael Kieran Harvey_ and was commissioned by the Sydney Dance
Company to accompany choreography by Graeme Murphy. The first dance performance of Piano Sonata was in the Drama Theatre of the Sydney Opera House in May, 1992.

* Information from Siglind Bruhn’s book, Images and Ideas in Modern French Piano Music

General Lavine – Eccentric

The caption of this prelude makes reference to a performance artist who appeared during the summer of the year 1910 at the Théâtre Marigny in Paris: the American comedian, or clown, Edward Lavine whom the publicity campaign announced as “General Lavine,” alluding to the supposition that he had spent his entire life as a soldier. His eccentric performance included impersonations of a wooden puppet, tightrope walking, playing the piano with his toes, fighting a duel with himself, etc…

The introduction (bars 1–10) might be heard as a commanding, military-band percussion motif [of drums and cymbals and trumpet fanfares].

Dans le style et la Mouvement d’un Cake-Walk = in the style and tempo of a cakewalk. This dance of nineteenth-century black American origin was popularized and disseminated primarily through imitations of its black-face minstrel shows… More rhythmically moving parody than actual dance, the cakewalk did not prescribe any particular steps. Common elements were a couple’s strutting parade, bows backward and forward, salutes to the spectators, high kicks etc. The material upon which Debussy bases his cakewalk is simple and reminiscent of jazz settings… Thus what we have here is three-layered: an intentionally comic “dance” of black American origin, parodied by a white American performing clown, in the musical representation of a French composer…

The heading of the cake-walk section “spirituel et discret” bespeaks the original tongue-in-check pose of traditional cake-walk dancers who pretend to be all elegance and grace but cannot help bursting out into ostentatious gestures that are anything but spiritual and discreet.

Canope

A “canope” is an Etruscan burial urn, typically one wit a lid bearing a likeness of the head of Osiris, the ancient Egyptian God ruling over the realm of the dead. Debussy is known to have had two such urns on his writing desk. The connotations are thus threefold: first, a vase… second, times long past… finally, a solemn occasion, a funeral.

* Première communion de la Vierge

Après l’Annunciation, Marie adore Jésus en elle… mon Dieu, mon fils, mon Magnificat! — mon amour sans bruit de paroles… After the Annunciation, Mary in adoration of Jesus within her… my God, my son, my Magnificat!—my love untroubled by the sound of words…

A picture of the Virgin on Her knees, at night, in contemplation of her own body — a halo of light hanging over Her womb. With eyes closed, She worships the fruit that is hidden inside Her. This happens between the Annunciation and the Nativity: the first and most noble of communions. The Theme of God, in delicate spirals, in stalactites, in an internal embrace. A recollection of the theme of ‘La Vierge et l’Enfant’, from my La Nativité du Seigneur. An ecstatic Magnificat. Distinctive chords…beneath which deep pulsations represent the heartbeats of the Child in his Mother’s womb. The Theme of God dissolves into silence. (Messiaen)

From Peter Hill’s liner notes.