

7th SPRING CONCERT

Presentation

THE PIANO: BETWEEN CREATION AND MUSICAL INTERPRETATION

The works of Schubert (1797-1828) are perhaps the most sensitive pieces ever composed for the piano, in addition to those of Chopin and Beethoven, framed as they are within a kind of romanticism of personal expression that manifests itself within the form but which it transcends in expressiveness. And, unlike the great maestro of Bonn, whom he admired, Schubert's music is brimming over with themes that connect immediately, and where the main concern lies in highlighting them, rather than in the device of the variation. We can see this in the Sonata in E Flat Major, in the second theme of the opening Allegro, which follows on from an introduction of a classical nature, disturbed by semiquavers played by the left hand which stimulate expression. It is a movement that is easy for listeners to grasp if they listen carefully, as each of these sections is repeated. The playful air at the beginning is tinged with a certain melancholy in the Andante, which aims to create an introspection that is immediately diluted (this is a youthful work), and expresses itself with greater density in the final movement, in which the ideas are manifested with greater freedom by allowing them to speak simultaneously, in a work that is formally simple and quite diaphanous. Written in 1817, the Sonata en E Flat Major originally explored this complex tonality, though an editor of the time attempted to transpose in order it to make it less difficult and more approachable for amateurs who – with their informal musical get-togethers – were the ones that kept the music publishing business afloat financially. The piece was finally published after the composer's death.

The piano has been a central pillar in the work of Joan Guinjoan (Riudoms, 1932), given that it is his instrument, to which he has dedicated much of his energy and artistic imagination, first as a musician and later on as a composer, using it as a basis and a resource for his creative work. And his music cannot be separated from the circumstances of his time (everything is captured within it, not only the aesthetic references and trends of the time, but also his yearnings and the reflections of the age), which are inevitably imbued with popular resonances. His earliest published works (for example in Suite moderna, 1960) contain references to jazz, the sonorities of Mompou and the rhythms of Stravinsky. Form and the way in which he uses it are manifested in counterpoint, fugal constructions (i.e. Prelude no. 1), harmonic projection and Catalan sonority in El pinell de dalt, while in 1962 he composed Chez García Ramos, which presents an entire reference to Guinjoan's productive stays in Paris, where he studied at the prestigious Schola Cantorum, in what is an exercise in contrasts and a nod to the modernity of those years. This work, however, is very different to the distillation and profundity of language that Guinjoan began to adopt on the piano from the 1980s onwards, right up to the stunning Verbum, which was first played in the same hall in which we now hear this salute to Chez García Ramos. In fact, we could call this auditorium Guinjoan's own musical house, as in the near future it will be the venue for the premiere of his great symphony in honour of the recently-inaugurated scientific headquarters of the synchrotron.

The four short pieces by Bartok in this programme were composed by the Hungarian musician in 1909, taking as his inspiration Romanian songs of mourning, collecting popular songs in Eastern Europe having been one of his great passions. Travelling in that region, he absorbed forms, modes, rhythms and scales that inspired many of his works, transforming them in masterly fashion. In the piece in question, the four pieces

employ simple harmonies and melodies that are barely containable in a modal exercise. In the Adagio we can clearly see his interest in octatonic scales, so typical of Eastern Europe, and which are deployed in different ways to mark the technical resources of the piece.

Rachmaninov takes up the largest part of this programme (on paper, at least), despite the fact that his stature in the history of music cannot be compared to Schubert's. Sergei Rachmaninov was born in Russia at the height of the success of the school that would characterise his country's vocal, symphonic and operatic music, with the famous group of The Five, and his sensitive ear was attracted by the works of Tchaikovsky and Rimsky-Korsakov, those true innovators and maestros of orchestral and pianistic composition.

His career was meteoric, effective and brought great public acclaim. By the early 1920s (when Stravinsky was dazzling the world with his three ballets for Diaghilev (The Firebird, Petrushka and Rites of Spring), Rachmaninov had already composed a number of significant works, including the 13 Preludes, op. 32 (1910), the Études-tableaux, op. 33 (1911), and his Second Piano Sonata (1913).

A great social and political crisis was approaching: in 1914 the First World War broke out, and soon social changes led to the 1917 Russian revolution, which changed his country for virtually the whole of the rest of the 20th century. Rachmaninov left his homeland for Sweden, which he then left for New York. He had distanced himself from any critical comments on his country's political situation, but in 1931, some of his opinions brought a response from the Soviet regime, which banned his works for a while. It was in the summer of that year that he not only revised his Second Sonata, he also composed his final work for solo piano: the Variations on a theme by Corelli.

These were times when neoclassicism was already strongly established in Europe, and one which had fascist roots in Italy. These Variations referred to a theme ("La folia") that Corelli used in one of his sonatas for violin, and the free nature of the construction enables him to create a refined rhythmic work, in addition to significant chromatic elaboration with a wider variety of expressive and timbre-related aspects that alternate in striking contrasts throughout the piece.

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