

bach
chopin
janáček
kapustin

yasmin|rowe
piano



Yasmin Rowe

the | music

This recital unites four seemingly disparate composers through the shared ground of the keyboard instrument. Johann Sebastian Bach was, of course, a colossus among keyboard players; although he lived before the pianoforte's rise to popularity, his work has naturally been adopted for the instrument and arguably enhanced by its expressive qualities. Leoš Janáček, if not perhaps recognised as an equally "great" composer, was nonetheless a significant composer and performer whose keyboard works, though less numerous than Bach's, offer a comparable richness of invention and expressive potential. In Frédéric Chopin, we find a composer who favoured the piano above all else, featuring the instrument as the sole (or primary) constituent of every single work and taking full advantage of its lyrical nature. Nikolai Kapustin has been working along similar lines, although he infuses established classical forms with 20th century idioms, particularly jazz.

The Italian term *partita* ("division") was originally used to signify variation of a theme and in that sense was practised by many of the great keyboard composers of the 17th century, including Girolamo Frescobaldi whose compositions were studied throughout Europe. However, by the end of the 17th century in Germany, composers were using the term to describe a dance suite. One such composer was Johann Kuhnau, Kantor of the Thomaskirche in Leipzig from 1684 until his death in 1722; his successor in that role was JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH who continued to espouse the partita as a dance suite. In 1725, Bach began work on six partitas for solo harpsichord, completing them by 1731 and overseeing their publication as *Klavierübung I* - the first of four works carrying such a title (meaning "keyboard practice"), the others being the Italian Concerto and French Overture, the "German Organ Mass" and the *Aria mit verschiedenen Veränderungen*, more commonly known as the *Goldberg Variations*. The partitas are sometimes referred to as *German Suites*, although this is little more than a means of distinguishing them from the *English Suites* (BWV 806-811) and *French Suites* (BWV 812-817) which were composed earlier. PARTITA No.2 (BWV 826) is in the key of C minor, notably used by Bach for the tragic final choruses of his Passions. The opening *sinfonia* is in three sections: dramatic rhetorical gestures and possibly French-inspired rhythms give way to a more disciplined *andante* with an ornate melody over a steady walking bass, becoming a *fugato* duet in triple time for the last section. This paves the way for an *allemande*, with steady tempo and even rhythms exemplifying the description of this dance form by Johann Mattheson, music critic and Bach's contemporary, as the representation of 'a contented mind that delights in order and calm.' The *courante* displays more French influence, with its richer texture, triple-time pulse and harmonic changes driving the music from the third beat of

one bar to the first beat of the next. In the *sarabande*, the emphasis is more on the second of three beats in every bar within a generally calm atmosphere, whilst the ensuing *rondeau* is more effervescent, with syncopated interplay of two voices. The *capriccio* brings the work to an exciting conclusion, making much of angular leaping melodies, again treated fugally with an energetic bass to accompany them.

Half-French, half-Polish and living for over half his life in Poland, FRÉDÉRIC (originally FRYDERYK) CHOPIN was an original, even unique, talent amongst composers of the Romantic era. A recitalist from an early age, Chopin owed his technique and musical understanding to studies of Bach's keyboard works, but was also influenced by the folk music of his native country and by the *bel canto* melodies of Italian opera. His compositional output certainly reflects his skill as a pianist, and in terms of emotional impact it can be said to reflect his life's story, depicting (whether deliberately or subconsciously) his travels as a concert artist around the opulent cultural centres of Europe, his troubled relationships with women, his feelings about the Russian occupation of his homeland, and his ultimately futile battles with failing health. Devoted to the piano as a vehicle for composition, he capitalised on the ephemeral nature of the instrument's tonal qualities: the diminishing sound of a note when struck, together with the rapid responsiveness and sensitivity to touch allowed him to explore the potential for melodic effect. With the aid of the sustaining pedal, he also experimented with harmony and texture, resulting in a style that embraces intensity and delicacy, almost poetic in its effect.

The nineteen NOCTURNES ("night pieces") are among his most atmospheric and popular works, so much so that his name is almost synonymous with the term, although it was the Irish composer John Field who pioneered the use of a *cantabile* melody with a discreet accompaniment and inspired Chopin to adopt such an approach for his most intimate pieces. Two of these are included in this programme. The posthumously-published C sharp minor Nocturne has a slow arching melody and arpeggiated accompaniment, amongst the most recognisable in the entire piano literature, framed with a chorale-like introduction and ending with a highly decorated variant of the primary theme. The Nocturne in C minor, the first of two making up Opus 48, is altogether more complex. Dedicated to one of Chopin's pupils, Laura Duperré, it features considerably more development of material, with its sinuous and seductive opening melody giving way to a slower hushed chorale figure in C major, out of which increasingly tempestuous chromatic octave motifs emerge, paving the way for a restatement of the opening theme over a densely-textured triplet figure, producing

complex rhythms that create an unsettled, agitated atmosphere. Chopin engages in similar techniques, albeit on a much grander scale and presenting far greater technical challenges for the player, in his four **BALLADES** of which No.4 in F minor (Opus 52) is presented here. It is said to have been inspired by *The Three Budrys*, a poem by Chopin's compatriot Adam Mickiewicz, describing the adventures of three brothers seeking their fortune in the world and ultimately returning home having each taken a Polish bride. The primary theme, a Russian-sounding melody, is developed whilst being simultaneously intertwined with a secondary theme. The music thus displays hallmarks of sonata form and variation form all at once, with contrapuntal development used to build momentum, halted only towards the end by a dramatic pause and a quietly optimistic chord progression before a virtuosic torrent is unleashed, with the melody only just audible above it, bringing the work to a powerful conclusion.

Chopin's **ÉTUDES** ("studies") were published in two groups as Opus 10 and Opus 25. The concept of a musical work designed expressly to develop or test some aspect of keyboard technique was far from new in the 19th century, but Chopin was among the first composers to impart significant artistic value to such music and render it worthy of concert performance. Whilst clearly reflecting his work as a teacher, Chopin's *Études* testify to his relationship with Franz Liszt, the great Hungarian pianist and composer who was living in Paris when Chopin settled there in 1831. The two musicians performed together on a number of occasions and were appreciative supporters of each other's playing. Indeed, in 1833 Chopin dedicated the Opus 10 set of *Études* to Liszt and was privately jealous of the latter's virtuosic performances; as he wrote to his friend Ferdinand Hiller, "I should like to rob [Liszt] of the way he plays my studies." No. 8 from Opus 10 has been nicknamed as the *sunshine étude*, most likely on account of its joyous F major tonality, and requires the player to sustain a rapid sequential semiquaver figure in the right hand, descending and ascending across the keyboard whilst the left hand brings out the primary melody. This is developed - and the challenge for the player increased - by the addition of contrary-motion counterpoint in the central section, after which the opening material is reasserted, ending with a coda in which the semiquaver figures are slightly tinged with chromaticism and the dynamics are gradually quietened before an exciting parallel motion flourish in both hands to conclude. In complete contrast, from Opus 25, the **ÉTUDE No. 7** in C sharp minor (nicknamed the '*cello étude*') promotes development of a *cantabile* style in the player's left hand: following an opening recitative passage, a sorrowful melody unfolds slowly beneath ostinato quavers in the right hand, which also carries an imitative (albeit less ornate) countermelody. As the music progresses, the left hand melody becomes increasingly passionate, wide-ranging and ornate - qualities normally found in Chopin's writing for the right hand.

In light of his humble origins as the son of a Moravian schoolmaster in Hukvaldy, his study of Russian culture and language, and his later musical studies in Vienna and Leipzig, it is not surprising that LEOŠ JANÁČEK developed a keen interest in nationalistic and naturalistic elements in music, particularly the intonations common to folk song and speech. He explored such material extensively in his operas, including *Jenůfa*, *Káťa Kabanová* and *The Cunning Little Vixen* for which he is probably best remembered along with such works as the *Sinfonietta*, the *Glagolitic Mass* and the symphonic poem *Taras Bulba*. Throughout his mature works, Janáček displays an overt, at times overwhelming personality. Even more explicitly than Chopin, he used much of his music to document, or allude to, momentous events of his life and the emotional impact they had upon him: for instance, his two searingly passionate string quartets ("*Kreuzer Sonata*" and "*Intimate Letters*") refer to his attempted love affair with Kamila Stösslová, a married mother of two who was nearly four decades his junior.

Janáček's piano works are less familiar but no less emotionally potent. 'I. X. 1905, FROM THE STREET' commemorates a 30 year-old carpenter, František Pavlík, who was killed on 1st October 1905 whilst attending a demonstration supporting the establishment of a Czech university in Brno, where Janáček lived and worked. Outraged by the death, Janáček immediately began composing a sonata, which was finished just three months later and premièred in Brno by Ludmila Tučková on 27th January 1906. Janáček was initially dissatisfied with the work, which originally had three movements - *Předtucha* ("Foreboding"), *Smrt* ("Death") and *Smuteční pochod* ("Funeral March") - the last movement was cut before the premiere and the composer later destroyed the whole manuscript, although he came to regret doing so. (Fortunately, Tučková had saved her copy of the work, which she revealed again in 1924.) The surviving movements are both in the grief-stricken key of E flat minor, although there is more than a hint of modality in the melodic material and accompanying harmonies. Janáček evokes the spirit of folk music and sets it amidst short muscular motifs, sometimes rhythmically distinct and at other times acting as an ostinato accompaniment. There are also vivid and dramatic contrasts between quiet and loud dynamics, with extremes sometimes being called for within the space of two bars. *Předtucha* follows the outline of a standard sonata-form first movement, opening with a wistful theme over gently arpeggiated chords. A more rhythmic falling countersubject appears shortly afterwards, becoming an intrinsic accompaniment that builds beneath the theme and eventually overwhelms it, although it reappears towards the end of the development section; thereafter, the two ideas coexist more harmoniously. The appropriately sedate *Smrt* is preoccupied with a single rhythmical figure, including offbeat dotted notes leading to a relaxed second beat of

each bar; the effect is of a slow but decorated chorale. A climactic central section features passionate outbursts and relentless dotted rhythms; after a further searing statement of the opening material, the temperature is cooled and, through a chromatically-tortuous unwinding of the theme, the movement comes to a resigned conclusion.

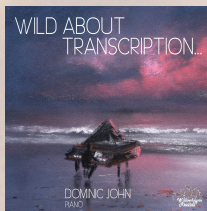
Nikolai Kapustin was born in Gorlovka, Ukraine, in 1937, and graduated from the Moscow Conservatory in 1961. He had a classical musical training which exposed him to a great deal of Russian virtuoso piano music. However, as a young man, jazz became a major influence in his life. He formed a jazz quintet, played in a Moscow Big Band and toured with the Oleg Lundstrem Jazz Orchestra within the Soviet Union.

To date, his musical output numbers over 160 works, including 20 piano sonatas, 6 piano concertos, numerous solo piano and chamber works and a significant number of compositions for orchestra and big band.

The Concert Étude No.6 which has the title of 'Pastorale' might well lead the listener to expect a gentle lilting piece, depicting quiet bucolic scenes. This could not be further from reality, for the light, bouncy motif which dances from start to finish, via the central minor section demands virtuosic keyboard agility. It is an étude in the classical sense, demanding the player to focus on semi-quaver groups throughout, but it is also resplendent with jazz-like syncopations and harmonic progressions. The ending quickly, but quietly descends to low octave B flats which mark the conclusion of the final semi-quaver "exercise".

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British pianist Yasmin Rowe performs as solo recitalist, chamber musician and concerto soloist throughout the UK and overseas. She studied at Chetham's School of Music with Bernard Roberts and Murray McLachlan and at the Royal Northern College of Music with both Murray McLachlan and Stephen Savage, where she gained a BMus. with first class honours, MMus. with Distinction and the prestigious International Artist Diploma.



Photo: Ian Dingle

Yasmin has won numerous competitions and awards throughout her career, including the EPTA UK Piano Competition, the Moray International Piano Competition, the Maisie Lewis award by the Worshipful Company of Musicians (of which she is now a Yeoman), the Myra Hess award (administered by Help Musicians UK) and the 2015 Antena 2 prize in Portugal.

She made her BBC Radio 3 début in a live broadcast from the Imperial War Museum in Manchester, performing Vaughan Williams' *On Wenlock Edge* with tenor Nick Pritchard and the Zerkova Quartet in January 2014.

Solo appearances have included concerts in the Wigmore Hall and St John's, Smith Square, as well as a performance of Mozart's Piano Concerto No.9, K. 271 with Manchester Camerata.

Equally adept as a chamber musician, Yasmin frequently plays as Y-Squared with 'cellist Yelian He. Noted for their dynamic yet sensitive partnership and creative programming, they have won awards from the Kirkman Concerts Society and the Tunnell Trust. In 2014 they were made London City Music Foundation Artists. In November 2016 they will return to Australia for a series of trio recitals with violinist Wilma Smith.

yasmin|rowe

piano

	Partita No.2 in C minor, BWV 826	JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)	19:48
1	I. Sinfonia		4:21
2	II. Allemande		4:38
3	III. Courante		2:31
4	IV. Sarabande		3:09
5	V. Rondeaux		1:34
6	VI. Capriccio		3:35
7	Nocturne in C sharp minor, Op. posth.	FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)	4:39
8	Étude in C sharp minor, Op.25 No.7	FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)	4:58
9	Nocturne in C minor, Op.48 No.1	FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)	6:26
10	Étude in F major, Op.10 No.8	FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)	2:40
11	Ballade No.4 in F minor, Op.52	FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)	11:07
	Sonata 'I. X. 1905, From the street'	LEOŠ JANÁČEK (1854-1928)	12:15
12	I. Předtucha (Forboding) - Con moto		5:39
13	II. Smrt (Death) - Adagio		6:36
14	Concert Étude in B flat major, Op.40 No.6 'Pastorale' NIKOLAI KAPUSTIN (b. 1938)		2:29
		TOTAL TIME:	64:29

"After listening to this new CD of Yasmin Rowe, it is refreshing to hear music played with conviction, love and authenticity. We can therefore enjoy the pure beauty of these masterpieces under her inspired fingers. Her playing calls for respect." - Jean-Efflam Bavouzet

Recorded at 24-bit 192KHz

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