

Ashley Fripp

PIANO

J. S. BACH

THOMAS ADÈS

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN



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PIANO

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH (1685-1750)

English Suite No.2 in A minor, BWV807

- | | | |
|----|------------------|------|
| 1. | I. Prélude | 4.21 |
| 2. | II. Allemande | 3.44 |
| 3. | III. Courante | 1.45 |
| 4. | IV. Sarabande | 3.28 |
| 5. | V. Bourées 1 & 2 | 4.10 |
| 6. | VI. Gigue | 3.14 |

THOMAS ADÈS (B. 1971)

Concert Paraphrase on Powder Her Face

- | | | |
|-----|------|------|
| 7. | I. | 5.39 |
| 8. | II. | 1.30 |
| 9. | III. | 8.12 |
| 10. | IV. | 1.58 |

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)

- | | | |
|-----|---|------|
| 11. | Berceuse in D flat major, Op.57 | 4.35 |
| 12. | Barcarolle in F sharp major, Op.60 | 8.20 |

Andante Spianato et

Grande Polonaise Brillante, Op.22

- | | | |
|-----|----------------------------|------|
| 13. | Andante spianato | 4.29 |
| 14. | Grande Polonaise brillante | 9.10 |

Total time 64.45

J. S. BACH

During his lifetime, Johann Sebastian Bach was known more widely for his exceptional gifts as a performer, and less for his work as a composer. His published works were but a small fraction of his output. A considerable portion of his compositions for harpsichord were written when he was not in full-time employment in churches and is therefore secular. Whilst Bach himself did not distinguish the English and French Suites with such titles, there are distinct differences between them – the French being generally more lyrical and intimate, doing without the grand opening preludes and possibly even conceived for the clavichord, and the English notably more virtuosic, complex and tempestuous in their nature and certainly written for the more experienced, technically proficient player. One theory as to the nomenclature of the English Suites is that a copy of the now lost manuscript made by one of Bach's sons bears the subtitle "written for the English". Bach's biographer J. N. Forkel claimed that the Suites were composed for an Englishman of rank, but he does not provide any verifiable source for this information. With the exception of the finishing gignes (also a feature of the French Suites) there is nothing particularly English about them. Dating the composition of the Suites is also challenging, but they are generally considered to have been written before the French Suites and the mature Partitas, possibly whilst he was still living in Weimar around 1715, or into the early 1720s when based in Köthen.

The ***English Suite No.2 in A minor, BWV 807*** opens with a dramatic and extended *Prélude*. Rich with imitative counterpoint, harmonic invention and an almost relentless semi-quaver motion, it is a magnificently bold tour de force and a fantastically daring introduction to the work. As with all of Bach's keyboard Suites, the remaining movements are all in various dance forms – many of which were obsolete by that time, however

these works were never intended to be danced to. Rather, the general characteristics of the dances inform the mood of the music which was to be played and heard for its own sake. The *Allemande* was a 16th Century German dance (*Allemande* being derived from the French word for "German") in duple meter with a moderate tempo. It was essentially a serious and ceremonious dance which was usually performed with the dancers forming a line, extending their paired hands and parading the length of the room pacing three steps, then balancing on one foot. Meaning "running", the *Courante* was a lively Baroque dance in triple time, characterised by fast, jumping steps and this example is surely one of the most electric of all his Courantes. The *Sarabande* is a slow dance in triple time that originated in Spanish colonies in Central America, before heading across the Atlantic to Spain. Performance of this intimate dance was actually banned in 1583 for its 'obscurity'. This particular Sarabande is marked by a recurring falling, sighing gesture and melodic writing of almost pained expression with a wealth of harmonic dissonances. The two *Bourées* show contrasting aspects of this lively French dance in double time which was especially popular in the Auvergne and Biscay regions. The first, crisp and energetic, with its exciting rhythms and harmonic tension is set against the second in A major, suggestive of horns and triumphant winds. The *Gigue* is a British dance and often formed part of the entertainment in English Baroque theatre. It is a lively dance in compound time. Here, Bach does away with the sophisticated counterpoint found elsewhere throughout the suite, with the hands often playing in parallel tenths. With the emphases placed on rhythm and with so many rising scales and embellishments, there is a centrifugal force about the movement which brings the suite to a blazing conclusion.

THOMAS ADÈS

Thomas Adès's intoxicating first opera, ***Powder Her Face***, was written in 1995 when the composer was just 24 years old. Its subject in all but name is the life of the salacious Duchess of Argyll, paying particular attention to her sexual exploits which were the scandal of Britain in the 1960s, as well as her pitiful decline into moral disrepute and dwindling wealth after her divorce. This is all represented through flashbacks from the Duchess's residence at London's Grosvenor House Hotel in her later years. The reminiscing nature of the opera, extravagance of its subject and instrumental virtuosity – so resemblant of the Duchess's glamour and opulent lifestyle – has lent itself to a brilliantly flamboyant ***Concert Paraphrase*** in which Adès quotes and extemporises on a number of key scenes.

The first scene, "*Ode to Joy*" (Joy, by Jean Patou being the Duchess's perfume) is seductive and slinky and features a maid and an electrician parodying the Duchess, wearing her clothes and applying her make-up whilst preparing her suite. The humiliated Duchess, walks in on them, dismisses them, and is then joined by an unknown male figure at the close. The second scene, "*Is Daddy Squiffy?*", features the Duke with a mistress who suggests that the Duchess's serial seductions are already the gossip of London. The third movement encapsulates two scenes: "*Fancy Being Rich!*", showing the waitress fantasising about what it is like to be so abundantly rich, but bored, and then "*It is too Late*" in which the dead Duke appears as the Hotel Manager to evict her for her staggering arrears in rent. This is the most emotionally devastating movement of the paraphrase; it erupts with elemental ferocity and darkness revealing the decay beneath the glitz and glamour of her life. Sunk into moral turpitude and with nothing left to her name, the Duchess leaves the hotel (not without an attempt to seduce the Manager). The work closes with an erotically charged tango, with the maid and electrician appearing from beneath the bed to make up the suite for the next day.

In the same way that the opera represents the Duchess reflecting on her own life, Adès's *Concert Paraphrase on Powder Her Face* is his personal reminiscence on his score. Adès embraces the themes of vanity and indulgence from the opera and unites them with the pianistic excess and virtuosity inherent to much of the operatic paraphrase tradition. By altering the chronology of the opera scenes in the paraphrase, Adès stays true to the 19th Century Lisztian operatic reminiscence models, but with a contemporary musical language and subject creating a fresh and visionary example for the 21st Century.



FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN

Chopin's lifelong adoration for the greatest singers of his day and composers for the human voice may, at first, seem rather at odds with his comparatively small output for the medium. However, his innate ability to make the piano sing with such naturalness unlike any other is one of the many pervasive qualities of exquisite refinement throughout his entire piano literature. Often writing melodies combining huge tessituras and impossibly expansive breaths, his writing somehow succeeds in sounding more authentically sung, more *cantabile*, at the piano than were it performed by a singer. During the first half of the 19th Century, the construction and design of pianos were developing at such a rate and composers were working tirelessly, exploiting the capabilities of the new instruments to emulate the voice. The extraordinary boom in operatic pot-pourri, paraphrases and song transcriptions is one aspect that testifies to this. Pianist-composer Sigismund Thalberg even wrote a preface to a collection of his transcriptions with eleven rules for successful cantabile playing on the piano! However, Chopin was perhaps the most successful in this aspect of his musical pursuits.

Although composers such as Liszt, Ravel, Debussy and Balakirev wrote Berceuses, Chopin's ***Berceuse in D flat major, Op.57*** is arguably the defining example of the genre. Largely composed during the summer of 1843 in Nohant, it is an hypnotic cradle-song, a lullaby, narrated over a constant, slow rocking motion in the left hand. Originally titled "*Variations*", but altered ahead of publication, it is indeed in variation form with the mellifluous right hand becoming increasingly embellished throughout with ornate filigree passagework. The manuscript of the first sketch was among the possessions of Pauline Viardot, and various musicologists have suggested that the *Berceuse* might have been inspired by her young daughter, Louisette, who may have aroused memories of

Chopin's own childhood when his mother would sing folk tunes to him. The opening melody on which the variations are based bears some resemblance to the Polish folk song "Już miesiąc zeszedł, psy się uśpiły" [The moon has now risen, the dogs are asleep].

The **Barcarolle in F sharp major, Op.60** seems to spring so naturally from the D-flat major close of the *Berceuse* that it is difficult to comprehend the vast gulf between the two – namely the magnificent *Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 58* and the set of three *Mazurkas Op. 59*. The barcarolle is an instrumental or vocal work imitative of a Venetian gondolier's song in 6/8 time (Chopin employs the broader 12/8 signature), usually with a double-stranded melodic line above a lilting accompaniment, suggestive of the gentle rocking of the boat. Mendelssohn and Fauré included several barcarolles among their compositions, but Chopin's single example is by the far the most famous. Although Chopin never visited Venice, he would have been very familiar with the operatic barcarolles by Rossini and Auber. Under the guise of the barcarolle idiom and the radiance of the Mediterranean, we find one of his most mature compositions, with exceptional structural cohesion, pianistic refinement and harmonic inventiveness. Written between 1845 and '46, when his relationship with his mistress George Sand was becoming heavily strained and his health was in rapid decline, the work also carries a distinctly Autumnal, wistful tone. The various sections of the composition are marked by different forms of undulating left hand waves, over which the melody sings, soars, shimmers and glistens. Before the final reprise of the opening melody there is a remarkable moment of complete stasis where the left hand abandons its paddling motion altogether. Marked *dolce sfogato*, the music relishes its hazy reverie, and attention seems given almost entirely to the fresh, fragrant air, rather than the gentle lapping water.

The genesis of the ***Andante Spianato et Grande Polonaise Brillante, Op.22*** is a slightly unusual one. The polonaise was originally composed for piano and orchestra between 1830-31, making it one of his last compositions written in Poland. The *Andante Spianato* - a beautifully rippling, improvisatory introduction - was written in 1834 or 1835 once he had settled in Paris and added later. Written for use as a warhorse for himself to perform and display his own pianistic gifts with orchestra, he later arranged it for solo piano in the version presented here. The *Andante Spianato* (meaning smooth, or evenly) is nocturnal and dream-like in its character with its mesmerising accompaniment and right hand melodies and arabesques. Interspersed with the faint suggestion of a Mazurka - a glance back to his beloved Polish homeland - it is magnificently interrupted by blaring trumpets with a rousing fanfare. The heroic polonaise dance begins, teeming with elaborate virtuosity and nobility of spirit. The polonaise rhythm is never too distant beneath the right hand narrative, with its bravura, verve, elegance and exhilarating freshness. A combination of refrain-based rondo form and dance-with-trio form (the trio having several sections and themes), the work delivers a manifest of pianistic pyrotechnics, from glittering passagework, thundering octaves, scales and arpeggios in double-notes. Whether by design or coincidence, the *Grande Polonaise Brillante* was his heroic farewell to Poland, and the performance he gave in Paris in April 1835 was also his farewell to the large concert hall stage and to this *Style Brilliant* fashion of writing. Virtuosity became wholly subservient to musical expression as he entered his mature phase. This work can therefore be considered a remarkable culmination of many personal and professional factors and the pinnacle of an important phase of his work as a composer. With its combination of aristocratic elegance, charm, refinement and overtly performance-based nature, it has become one of his most popular compositions.

Ashley Fripp

British pianist Ashley Fripp has performed extensively as recitalist, chamber musician and concerto soloist throughout Europe, Asia, North America, Africa and Australia in many of the world's most prestigious concert halls. Highlights include the Carnegie Hall (New York), Musikverein (Vienna), Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), the Philharmonie halls of Cologne, Paris, Luxembourg and Warsaw, the Bozar (Brussels), the Royal Festival, Barbican and Wigmore Halls (London), the Laeiszhalle (Hamburg), the Megaron (Athens), Konzerthaus Dortmund, the Gulbenkian Auditorium (Lisbon) and the Konserthus (Stockholm).



He has won prizes at more than a dozen national and international competitions, including at the Hamamatsu (Japan), Birmingham and Leeds International Piano Competitions, the Royal Over-Seas League Competition, the Concours Européen de Piano (France) and the coveted Gold Medal from the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. In 2013, Ashley won the Worshipful Company of Musicians' highest award, The Prince's Prize. Ashley Fripp was chosen as a 'Rising Star' by the European Concert Hall Organisation (ECHO), and has also performed in the Chipping Campden, Edinburgh, Brighton, Bath, City of London and St. Magnus International Festivals as well as the Festival Pontino di Musica (Italy). A frequent guest on broadcasting networks, Ashley has appeared on BBC television and radio, Euroclassical, Eurovision TV and the national radio stations of Hungary, Spain, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Belgium and Portugal. He has collaborated with orchestras including the Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra, the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, the Milton Keynes City Orchestra and the Kammerorchester der Universität Regensburg (with whom, in 2012, he recorded Chopin Piano Concertos Nos. 1 & 2). He has worked with conductors including Semyon Bychkov, James Judd, Vasily Petrenko, Robertas Šervenikas, Hilary Davan Wetton, Jonathan Bloxham, Graham Buckland and Peter Stark.

Ashley Fripp studied at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama with Ronan O'Hora. He is currently studying with Eliso Virsaladze at the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole (Italy) and undertaking doctoral studies into the piano music of Thomas Adès at the Guildhall School.

A photograph of a park with a winding path, trees, and a person walking. The scene is captured in a warm, golden-brown color palette, suggesting autumn. The path curves through a grassy area with several trees, some of which are bare. A person is walking along the path in the lower left corner. There are three black lampposts visible: one in the foreground on the left, one in the middle ground, and one in the background on the right.

Recorded at 24-bit 192KHz

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