BRITTEN PEARS ARTS

Nobuyuki Tsujii
Sunday 07 August | 7:30pm
Snape Maltings Concert Hall

Total performance time: approximately 100', including an interval of 20 minutes

Nobuyuki Tsujii: Moonlight and more

Nobuyuki Tsujii piano

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
Piano Sonata No.14 in C sharp minor, Op.27 No.2 'Moonlight' (1801) *15'*
i *Adagio sostenuto*
ii *Allegretto*
iii *Presto agitato*

Franz Liszt (1811–1886)
Concert Paraphrase on Verdi's Rigoletto, S.434 (1859) *8'*

Consolation No.3 in D flat, S.172 (1849) *4'*

Méphisto-Waltz No.1, S.514 (1859) *12'*
'Der Tanz in der Dorfschenke' ('The Dance in the Village Inn')

INTERVAL

Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)
Barcarolle in F sharp, Op.69 (1845–6) *9'*

Sonata No.3 in B minor, Op.58 (1844) *26'*
i *Allegro maestoso*
ii *Scherzo: molto vivace*
iii *Largo*
iv *Finale: presto non tanto*

Two very different sonatas bookend tonight's recital, both in their own ways rule-breakers. **Beethoven's Op.27 No.2** is a case in point. It has become almost blighted by its popularity, due in large part to its nickname, 'Moonlight'. It was Ludwig Rellstab, indifferent poet and self-styled music critic, who inadvertently altered the sonata's history when he wrote: 'A boat visiting, by moonlight, the primitive landscapes of Lake Lucerne'.

Beethoven directs that the opening movement, with its slow-moving harmonies, to be played 'with extreme delicacy and without dampers', ie with the sustaining pedal, which would have created a haloed effect on a piano of 1801, but following that instruction precisely on a modern instrument would create more of a pea-souper than a delicate mist. Next, a fleeting intermezzo ('A flower between two abysses', as Liszt evocatively put it) before the music erupts into a finale of great fire, borne away by unstoppable arpeggios, replete with explosive *fortissimo* chords. So lulled are we by the quiet beauty of the opening that we scarcely realize we're witnessing a revolution: rather than the traditional sonata form, with most of its musical heft borne by the first movement, Beethoven instead creates an emotional and literal crescendo from first movement to last. This sonata is so much more than the sum of its parts: it's nothing less than a harbinger of the extreme experimentation that was to bear such sublime fruit in Beethoven's late works.

Chopin's Sonata No.3 is every bit as challenging in terms of received wisdom as Beethoven's 'Moonlight'. Indeed, it's one of the most defiantly dramatic in the repertoire. Chopin was for a long time misunderstood when it came to larger-scale structures, with his unorthodox approach seen as incompetence rather than innovative genius.

The first movement is characterized by an outpouring of themes, their sheer number threatening to destabilize the form itself. That sense of urgency is continued in the brief second-movement scherzo, a fireball of whispered energy calmed fleetingly by a gentle trio. This is followed by an extended Largo which, after a gruffly rhetorical opening, becomes nocturne-like, with a silvery melody that never loses its gravity, even as Chopin toys with it, winding it sinuously around a rocking accompaniment. Contrast comes with a consoling middle section. The finale begins as rhetorically as the first and third movements, this time with weighty, rising chords that take command of the entire instrument, ending tantalizingly on a dominant 7th chord – classically waiting for resolution. But Chopin leaves us hanging, instead introducing a nervously energetic idea, and it is this theme, counterbalanced by a ringing motif in B major accompanied by mercurial scales, that dominates the movement, culminating in one of the most affirmative conclusions to be found in any piano sonata.

Chopin's ability to take established forms and make them very much his own is illustrated time and again, from preludes to nocturnes, mazurkas to waltzes. He left only a single **Barcarolle**, but elevates this late work from the form's origin in the songs of the *gondolieri* of the Venetian canals in several striking respects. For a start, it is not in the traditional lilting 6/8 rhythm, but a more sinuous 12/8. The composer commands our attention immediately, with a sonorous octave C sharp heralding a churning passage that leads to a calmly rocking idea in consonant 3rds and 6ths. This melody is subjected to dazzling harmonic and melodic reinvention, while the contrasting central section soon reveals a more obsessive side, brought to a halt by a trill that leads to the reprise of the opening. Except that instead of a straight repetition, Chopin transforms the opening idea with powerful octaves. He also thwarts our expectations when he reintroduces the gentle melody of the middle section, now used to form the Barcarolle's climax,. As so often with his later works, the way he draws together the various strands of the music is breathtaking.

Temperamentally, Chopin and **Liszt** could be seen as opposites, and the former once waspishly described Liszt as 'an excellent binder who puts other people's work between his covers … a clever craftsman without a vestige of talent'. How he might have revised that opinion if he'd lived to hear what Liszt produced in his remaining 37 years!

Liszt was a figure whose generosity was legendary, and that included his many paraphrases and transcriptions of pieces by others. In a pre-recording era these were an important way of disseminating new music, not least the latest hits in the opera house. His contributions to this genre fall into two types: transcriptions, which are relatively faithful to the original, and paraphrases, which take key aspects from a work and reimagine them for the keyboard. The **'Rigoletto' Paraphrase** falls clearly into the latter category and takes as its starting point the quartet from Act 3, 'Bella figlia dell'amore' (Beautiful daughter of love), and transports it out of the opera house – where it had been premiered a mere eight years earlier – and transforms it into a stand-alone piece elaborated with the most stunning of figuration, yet without ever appearing gaudy.

Almost contemporary with this is his first **Méphisto-Waltz**. This again shows Liszt as a born storyteller: Mephistopheles arrives at a village inn with Faust, discordantly tunes up his violin (heard at the start by the interval of a 5th, representing the instrument's open strings) and whirls the assembled company into a frenzy. Meanwhile, Faust takes one of the girls out of the inn and into the wood (a melting melody, marked *espressivo amoroso*, complete with the evocation of nightingales), though presumably it's not bird-spotting that concerns him. After a virtuoso development Liszt combines the melting melody with references back to the first theme, combined into a devilish horse-ride. The nightingale is heard alone before Liszt plunges us into a defiant, thunderous coda.

We experience a very different side of Liszt in the set of Six **Consolations**. The name 'Consolation' derives from a collection of poems by Joseph Delorme that Liszt had read soon after its publication in 1830. Arguably No.3, in D flat, is the masterpiece among the set, so it's ironic that this is in fact a replacement for Liszt's original piece. He sets an ardent, arching melody reminiscent of Chopin over a flowing accompaniment, which he then proceeds to enrich, varying register and voicings to sublimely beautiful effect.