

## Inside the Concert with Albert Combrink Daniel Ciobanu – 22 November 2022

### Robert Schumann (1810-1856): Kreisleriana Op.16

Central to this famous work, rumbles the turbulent love-affair of Robert Schumann and Clara Wieck. Signs of Robert's mental illness were quickly picked up by Friedrich Wieck, who was both Clara and Robert's piano teacher in addition to being her father. He had refused to bless their engagement and was doing everything legal to forbid the two from pursuing a romance, and what followed was a flood of passionate letters, music, suicide threats, feverish study of the Bach 48 Preludes and Fugues, and a masterpiece called *Kreisleriana*.



E.T.A. Hoffman chronicled the adventures and misadventures of a fictional conductor Johannes Kreisler in a novel "Kreisleriana". Robert fell under the spell of this eccentric, wild and witty man who was obsessed by J.S. Bach but forced to play frivolous dance music for his employer. Hoffman paints a colourful portrait of a man capable of ecstasy when playing the Bach Goldberg Variations, followed by suicidal despair resulting from a hopeless infatuation with his employer's niece.

Schumann feverishly wrote short pieces and ideas in a notebook, and then would write a loveletter to Clara explaining how the sections reflected her nature and mannerisms and his love for her. Incredibly composed in just 4 days in April 1838, the *Phantasien für das Pianoforte* as it was subtitled, was Schumann's favourite of his own works. Like the kaleidoscopic fictional artist Kreisler, each number has multiple contrasting sections, resembling the imaginary musician's manic-depression, and recalling Schumann's own Florestan and Eusebius, the bipolar duo of mood entities Schumann used to indicate his own contrasting impulsive and dreamy sides.

Schumann's inventiveness in creating this series of mood-swing pieces is astonishing. Each is a psychologically compelling portrait of a distinct temperamental state, enriched and made whole by embracing its opposite.

He wanted to dedicate the work to Clara but she refused, fearing that it would only incur the ire of her father more, and make it difficult to programme the work in her own concerts. She immediately knew this would be one of Schumann's most important piano compositions and she suggested a loftier dedicatee: Frederic Chopin. When Chopin received his copy, however, he merely remarked that the cover illustration was "rather nice".

Robert said it best himself, in a letter to Clara "It is a very wild love, in a few movements".

### Keith Jarrett (1945 -): Tokyo Encore



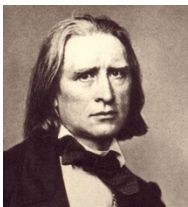
Keith Jarrett is a classical and jazz pianist who started his career with Art Blakey and went on to play with such important names as Miles Davis. His 1975 album, *The Köln Concert*, became the best-selling piano recording in history. The *Sun Bear Concerts* is a multi-concert album compilation of performances by Jarrett during his 1976 tour of Japan. Each programme would contain two main improvised pieces of 30 to 45 minutes in length, and depending on Jarrett's state of mind, a shorter encore.

In a 1979 interview, Jarrett stated: "I was involved in a very searching period of time when we recorded that, and the music itself was almost a release for the search. I've been thinking - *Sun Bear* is the only thing I've recorded that runs the gamut of human emotion. I think that if you got to know it well enough, you'd find it all

in there someplace." Jarrett explained the origins of the title as follows: "On a Japanese tour I saw a sun bear in the zoo, a small bear which really looked friendly and doesn't exist anywhere outside Japan. The next day I asked our Japanese sound engineer about this animal because I remembered its face, a really friendly small face, and he replied, 'Yes, it's a beautiful bear but if you get near enough to him he will knock you three blocks down the road'. I simply liked the idea of an animal that looks as if it would be nice to get near to and which, when you do so, shakes your whole conception of life."

Since these improvisations are such an important peek into the mind of a creative genius such as Jarrett, a veritable transcription-factory exists globally: pianists and transcribers attempt to write down live concert improvisations, and swap or sell, editing and re-editing. There is no "Jarrett-Edition" as such, but KeithJarrett.org – the self-proclaimed unofficial website of the pianist – list a large number of Keith Jarrett PDFs which feature transcriptions of a wide variety of material. In February 2018, Jarrett suffered a stroke and has been unable to perform since. Since a second stroke, in May 2018, left him partially paralyzed and unable to play with his left hand, we have to rejoice in the documents we do have that chronicle this extraordinary man's work.

### **Franz Liszt (1811-1886): Hungarian Rhapsody no.12 S.244/12 in C-Sharp Minor**



The largest and best-known portion of Liszt's music is his original piano work. During the Weimar period, he composed 19 Hungarian Rhapsodies, themselves revisions of his own works which pay tribute to the gypsy music (*Magyar Dalok* and *Rhapsódiák*) of his native Hungary. They are like museum-exhibits where modern audiences are allowed to eavesdrop on the dramatic, improvisatory performance style of the migrant "Romani" musicians whom Liszt heard as a boy growing up in the small village of Raiding. It is to these campfire music-evenings which Liszt returned first, 18 years later, having become in the meantime Europe's most celebrated concert-pianist.

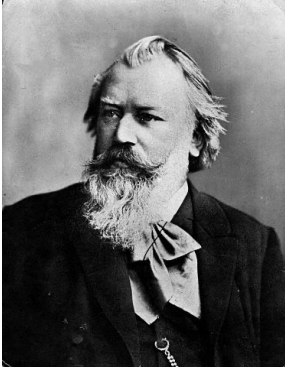
There are 19 rhapsodies in all, the first 15 composed in the period between 1846 and 1853. Fundamental to the form of each rhapsody is a two-part division into a slow, introductory *lassan* followed by a quick, dancelike *friss*. In the soulful and brooding *lassan*, a handful of folk melodies are repeated over and over, trancelike, in varied forms, blooming from time to time into dazzling cadenza-like flourishes of keyboard sparkle and colour. The *friss* is sectional, presenting a series of impish dance tunes that in an accelerating pattern of frenetic activity inevitably drive the work to a barn-storming conclusion.

Liszt's genius lies in how he manages to reproduce the "sonic surface" of the gypsy band. In these works we hear the highly ornamented "will-o'-the-wisp" ornamentation style of the gypsy violin, the contralto richness of the low clarinet (when Liszt places the tune in the mid-register, played by the thumbs) and the heartbeat-racing thrum of the *cimbalom* (Hungarian dulcimer) in textures bristling with repeated notes.

Dedicated to violinist Joseph Joachim, the 12<sup>th</sup> Rhapsody opens with a dramatic declaration as an old gypsy starts to spin a dark and dramatic fireside tale under the stars. Free Cadenzas alternate with thunderous chords to create a rousing and dramatic scene. Five melodies form the basis of a complex structure: Sources for the tunes used in this rhapsody include a *csárdás* by Márk Rózsavölgyi, a melody from the manuscript collection *Nagy potpourri*, Beni Egressy's *Fantázia*, and a portion of *A Csikós*.

Like its 18 counterparts, No.12 is filled with acrobatics and melancholy and ends in a rousing dance with flying dulcimers before the work ends in a dramatic full-circle, with the opening melody wrapping up the storytelling of the evening in a dramatic twirl of the cape.

## Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) - Hungarian Dances for Piano, Four Hands, WoO 1, 4 Selections



To this day, Brahms' Hungarian Dances number among his most popular works although he claimed that he had not even written them! As he expressly noted on the title page of the first edition, he "only compiled them for piano duet." What he meant was that he had taken Hungarian dance tunes, made arrangements to fuse them into a larger entity and then had the results published, first in an arrangement for piano duet, since the performance of such duets was extremely popular back then. The first two volumes containing the Dances 1-10 were printed in 1869, and two further volumes with the Dances 11-21 were added by Brahms in 1880. Brahms, and other composers, later orchestrated these melodies. Some of these were in fact original compositions by Brahms, written "in the style of..." , but they are virtually indistinguishable from the actual folk songs.

To his publisher, Brahms described these dances as "genuine gypsy children, which I did not beget, but merely brought up with bread and milk." Most were elaborations of the tunes he had heard over the years, for Brahms had assimilated the style well. The Dances were enormously popular and inspired what amounted to a virtual cottage industry of musical transcriptions. Brahms soon prepared a version for solo piano. Other composers, including Dvořák, orchestrated them. Brahms's friend, the violinist Joseph Joachim, transcribed them for violin and piano. Every version was a hit, providing handsome incomes for both Simrock and Brahms.

Hungarian Folk music is a very broad genre, which is home to a colourful blend of aural histories of Hungarians as well as Hungarian-minority groups living in Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Moravia, Croatia, and other neighbouring nations.

The catalyst for Brahms' own contribution to this subset of classical music was two-fold: during the mid to late 19th century, piano works for four-hands (requiring two players to sit side-by-side as their hands flashed and dashed across the keys) were reaching peak popularity, and compositions highlighting the sounds of these newly emigrated minority cultures were in high-demand in taverns across Europe. Brahms was known for enjoying a pint at the tavern, and spent many evenings after concerts, enjoying the company of his friends and co-musicians, one of whom was the virtuoso Hungarian violinist Ede Reményi. It was the violinist who introduced Brahms to the genre, and it appears that they even played a few of these traditional songs, first as slightly inebriated improvisations at the tavern, or later as encore material for their recitals.

Within his Hungarian Dances, Brahms captured the lilting and jubilant energy of the *csárdás* and *verbunkos*, traditional Hungarian folk dances characterized by dramatically varying tempos, lively rhythms, and whirling virtuosic passages.

The *Csárdás* includes quite a large range of Hungarian folk dances found in different ethnic areas: Variations in name, structure or performance, may happen in different parts of the country. Men and women dance together and the climax is usually wild, whirling of white skirts.

The *verbunkos* has links with the 18th century Hungarian military tradition. The term *verbunk* is derived from the German verb *werben* (to recruit). Part of the Hungarian military's enlisting strategy was a grand party with food, drink, and – you guessed it – dancing. Officers, led by their sergeant, would take turns in a great display of stomps, high kicks, spur-clicks and heel slaps. "Prospective recruits would gather in increasing numbers and, with the energy of the *verbunkos* reaching a fever pitch, were often pulled into the dance and effectively enlisted by the errant shake of a hand." (californiasymphony.org Staffwriter, December 2019)

## Antonín Leopold Dvořák (1841 – 1904): Slavonic Dances Op.56 and Op.72 for Piano, Four Hands – 3 selections



Dvořák was a Czech composer, who frequently employed rhythms and other aspects of the folk music of Moravia and his native Bohemia, following the Romantic-era nationalist example of his predecessor Bedřich Smetana. Dvořák's style has been described as "the fullest recreation of a national idiom with that of the symphonic tradition, absorbing folk influences and finding effective ways of using them"

In the 1870's, Dvořák was unknown: a Bohemian musician working in and around Prague, who played organ in church, played violin in the local orchestra, and taught as many private students as he could, to make ends meet and support his young, growing family. Johannes Brahms was on the panel for the *Austrian State Composition Prize* and was suitably impressed with Dvořák's 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> entry, that he invited the young to meet his publisher and various impresarios.

Following the advice of Brahms, Dvořák put forth his own *Slavonic Dances* in 1878. As Brahms had predicted, the Four-Hand Piano-Duets flew off the retailers' shelves. Requests for arrangements and orchestrations came quickly, and Simorck and Dvořák made a fortune.

Unlike that Brahms set, the Dvořák set does not include actual folk melodies. All the melodies are Dvořák originals, but the character is authentic enough to give the impression of "good times on the village green". Dvořák incorporates several recognisable dance-types from across the Slavic world, from the bold and brash "Furiant", to the melancholic "Dumka", a dance which Dvořák returned to often in his music. Scholars can identify also the polka, the sousedská, the skočná, the mazurka, the odzemek, the špacírka, the kolo and the polonaise and even a variant of the Ukranian Dumky.