

RIPON
CONCERTS

Chamber music with passion



Leah Nicholson – Piano

Monday 9 January 2023, 7.30pm
Holy Trinity Church, Ripon

Programme

www.riponconcerts.co.uk

Patron: Julius Drake

Welcome

Welcome to our first concert of 2023. I hope everyone has had a good Christmas and New Year, has great memories of our three autumn concerts and is ready for more wonderful live chamber music to take us through to spring.

Leah Nicholson, tonight's pianist, is at the very start of her career and it is appropriate that we should begin the second half of our season looking to the future, which, in terms of burgeoning talent, is bright. We are very fortunate to have so many young musicians coming through the music academies and conservatoires. The pandemic was a major challenge for many but having weathered the storm they are anxious to be given the opportunity to perform in front of real audiences.

Music societies such as ours are a springboard to launch careers, which may end up in fame and performance at prestigious venues such as Wigmore Hall and the great concert halls. Many will remember Ian Bostridge's memorable performance of *Wintereise* in Ripon before he rose to become one of the UK's leading

tenors. The converse is also true; Roderick Williams, now one of our best-known baritones, is happy to return, in the middle of a busy international schedule, to his roots in recognition of the platform he was given at the start of his career.

There is a large network of music societies throughout the country and Ripon Concerts belongs to a loose grouping of societies in the North and North East, in places such as Wakefield, Skipton, Richmond, Ilkley, Darlington, Teesside, Alnwick, Carlisle and Penrith. We meet annually to share feedback on the musicians we have promoted and also try and do some collaborative planning to enable artists to do a "Northern Tour" – this saves time and travelling expense. Rachel Podger, who performs for us in March, is also playing the same repertoire at Hexham, Alnwick and Darlington as well as venues in Scotland over a three-week period.

I look forward to sharing truly amazing music and performances with you tonight and in our last two concerts.

Roger Higson, Chairman

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Leah Nicholson – piano

Programme

Domenico Scarlatti Keyboard Sonata in D minor L.108
(1685–1757)

Andante moderato

Ludwig van Beethoven Piano Sonata in E major, Op. 109
(1770–1827)

Vivace ma non troppo – Adagio espressivo

Prestissimo

Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung. Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo

Leoš Janáček (1854–1928) Sonata 1.X.1905

Con moto

Adagio

- interval (refreshments) -

Dmitri Shostakovich Piano Sonata No. 2 in B minor, Op. 61
(1906–1975)

Allegretto

Largo

Moderato

Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915) Fantasie in B minor, Op. 28

Moderato

About the music

Scarlatti - Keyboard Sonata in D minor, L.108

Domenico Scarlatti's evolution as a composer was unusual. For the first 33 years of his life, under the influence of his father well known for Neapolitan operas, he wrote nothing of importance. He was then appointed mentor to the eight-year-old Infanta of Portugal, who was an outstanding harpsichord player. She later married into the Spanish royal family and became Queen. She asked Scarlatti for a regular supply of sonatas, and, now aged 50, he responded by composing no fewer than 555 of them. Admittedly very short in duration, they nevertheless had a profound influence on the future of keyboard music, drawing on Baroque counterpoint but also anticipating the phrasing and harmony of Haydn and Mozart. This D minor example is known as "The Lover", perhaps because of its melancholy character.

Beethoven - Piano Sonata in E major, Op. 109

After the monumental *Hammerklavier* Sonata, Beethoven apparently expressed the intention of writing "a small new piece" for piano; as Denis Matthews commented, "there was no need to conquer Everest twice". But, Beethoven being Beethoven, what emerged was in no sense (not even key signature) a minor composition. The first of his last three sonatas, indeed, is strikingly innovative in its harmonies and structure, diverging from the traditional sonata form. It is not known who gave the first public performance, or when, but it was famously taken up by Franz Liszt whose advocacy established it into the repertoire.

The first movement which lasts only a few minutes contains a sharp contrast between

fast and slow themes, and unusually there is no transition between them. Nevertheless, the dramatic interplay between the themes ends with a mesmerising coda adding just a hint of pathos. The second movement follows without a break and overturns the contemplative mood with a bold, even aggressive, *prestissimo*. The most original third movement is about twice as long as the first two combined, much of it written in a slow tempo which generates intensity. It is a set of variations on a beautiful, intimate melody which opens the movement. Variation 1 has a waltz-like bass; variation 2 is a *moto perpetuo*, alternating light semiquavers with a heavier counterpoint, while the Bach-inspired counterpoint in variation 3 is more vigorous. Variation 4 offers a warm, spacious interpretation of the theme; then comes variation 5 which is fugal in character. The final variation involves a sharp change in mood and tempo. An accumulation of scales and trills eventually gives way to a simple restatement of the theme.

Janáček - Sonata I.X.1905

There could hardly be a more dramatic background to the composition and performance of this work. Leoš Janáček, a stout Moravian in more than one sense, was appalled when he learned of the death of a carpenter, bayoneted by German-speaking activists, during a demonstration on 1st October 1905 promoting the creation of a Czech language university in Brno. In tribute to the victim, he set to work on a three-movement piano piece. The premiere took place in Brno on the 27th January of the following year, but while it was being rehearsed on that day, the composer lost confidence in the work and destroyed the last movement. Although the performance

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of the first two movements went ahead, the still doubting Janáček threw the remaining manuscript into the river Vltava. The work was assumed to be lost and it was only in 1924 that the pianist who had given the premiere admitted that she had taken a copy of the two-movement piece and the now remorseful composer consented to its publication.

The piece, subsequently called a sonata with a designation referring to the date of the fatal demonstration, is written in the composer's familiar style, with passages of melodic lyricism interrupted by sudden angular interjections. The first movement, headed "Presentiment", begins with a beguiling melody doubtless intended to reflect the calm before the incipient storm, but it is soon disturbed by unsettling rhythmic outbursts. A contrasting serene theme subsequently attempts to restore the equanimity of the opening idea. The second movement, entitled "Death", is appropriately inaugurated by a sparse, five-note phrase deployed seemingly without emotion. However, from this, anger and resentment develop as the music intensifies in mood. The main theme returns, accompanied by bass chords (the last traces of an expiring life?). The ending is pure pathos: notes disappearing to nothingness, save for the sound of a funeral bell.

Shostakovich - Piano Sonata No. 2 in B minor, Op. 61

We do not stray far from the subject of death in the next item in the recital. It was written shortly after the composer's favourite piano teacher had passed away and dedicated to his memory. But it was composed also during the 900-day siege of

Leningrad by the Nazi forces, responsible for many fatalities. Shostakovich wrote two symphonies as a response to these events and, in between them, his Second Piano Sonata. This is very different from his First Sonata, dating from 1926, and reflecting the young composer's exploration of contemporary developments in chromaticism and expressionism. The later work is more traditional in approach, has a strong tonal basis and is relatively subdued in mood.

The first movement communicates anxiety and foreboding. The opening theme is restrained and sad; what follows, almost a parody of a Soviet propagandist march, is more unsettling. The second movement also has a satirical dimension, an unsteady waltz motif, briefly interrupted by a sarabande. The last, extensive, movement is a set of variations on a simple melody, played by a single hand and suggesting loneliness and desolation. Some of the variations are energetic; others sombre and gloomy. And, towards the end, we are offered a variation which one commentator describes as "probably the most powerful and graphic depiction of death – of actual dying and death – in music."

Scriabin - Fantasie in B minor, Op. 28

Alexander Nikolayevich Scriabin was an oddity among composers. That he began writing in a late romantic, highly expressive, melodic style to move later to an atonal, even avant-garde, approach might not be that unusual – think of Schoenberg. This evolution was combined with a philosophical, mystic belief in the power of music, as well as other arts, to change the world.

The ambitious Fantasie in B Minor, a single sonata-form movement composed in 1900,

comes midway in these developments, looking forward to chromatic freedom, as well as backward to Wagnerian romanticism. It begins with a descending line in the bass and a motif that, in jagged outbursts, rises and then falls. The second subject which follows is an attractive melody, treated initially canonically and subsequently transmuting into a grand, rhythmic restatement. There is a recapitulation of both subjects, the first with arpeggios in both hands, the second intensifying the grandeur of the melody. The concluding coda appears to be almost improvisatory but ends reassuringly with an exultant passage reminiscent of Wagner's *Liebsteid* from *Tristan und Isolde*.

Notes by Anthony Ogus

With grateful thanks to the following members for their generous support:

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About Leah



Leah Nicholson was born in 2001 and began studying with Galina Sandovskaya in St Petersburg, Russia, before continuing her musical education at Chetham's School of Music in Manchester with John Gough and Dr Murray McLachlan.

In 2018 Leah was awarded a Fellowship of the Royal Schools of Music in Solo Piano Performance Diploma (FRSM with Distinction) and has since won a scholarship to further her studies at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where she is studying with Professor Tessa Nicholson.

She has won top prizes at numerous competitions internationally and throughout the UK, including the 2014 International Chopin Festival in Mazovia, Poland, Polyphonica International Competition in St. Petersburg, Russia, the Scottish International Youth Piano Competition, the Loretto James Waterhouse Piano Competition, EPTA Piano Competition UK and Chetham's Bösendorfer Piano Competition. Leah is also the youngest ever winner of the Keldwyth Young Musicians Award.

Leah frequently performs in concerts and has appeared in many venues across Europe including the Wigmore Hall in London, Steinway Hall (UK), The Sage Gateshead, Bridgewater Hall and Stoller Hall in Manchester, Petrikirche in St. Petersburg, Russia, and Kadriorg Palace in Tallinn, Estonia.

As a result of winning the Chetham's Concerto Competition, she performed Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2 with Chetham's Orchestra conducted by David Chatterton, and has also performed Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 and Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 3 under the baton of conductors such as Ryan Bancroft and Leon Reimer.

As a developing artist, Leah has performed in masterclasses for renowned artists such as Christopher Elton, Sir Stephen Hough, Noriko Ogawa, John Gough, Ory Shihor, Peter Frankl, Eugen Indjic, Pascal Nemirovsky, Leon McCawley, Martin Roscoe, Anthony Hewitt, Piers Lane and others.



North Yorkshire Music & Arts Events Diary

Visit www.st-cecilia.org.uk for full details of Music & Arts events in the Ripon area.



St Cecilia Orchestra

Winter Concert

Holy Trinity Church, Ripon
28 Jan 2023, 7.30pm

Harrogate Philharmonic Orchestra

Winter Concert

St Mark's Church, Harrogate
11 Feb 2023, 7.30pm

Ripon Concerts

Piatti Quartet & Michael Collins – clarinet

Holy Trinity Church, Ripon
13 Feb 2023, 7.30pm

Paulinus Singers

Spring Concert

St John's Church, Sharow
25 Feb 2023, 7.30pm

Jervaulx Singers

Banalités

St John's Church, Sharow
4 Mar 2023, 7.30pm

Harrogate Choral Society

Puccini and Gounod

Royal Hall, Harrogate
11 Mar 2023, 7pm

Ripon Concerts

Rachel Podger – The Virtuoso Violin

Holy Trinity Church, Ripon
13 Mar 2023, 7.30pm

Richmondshire Concerts

Coco Tomita – Violin

Influence Church, Richmond
15 Mar 2023, 7.30pm

Chapter House Choir, York

Spring Concert

Chapter House of York Minster
18 Mar 2023, 7.30pm

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22nd April – 7.30 pm
Ripon Cathedral
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10th June – 7.30 pm
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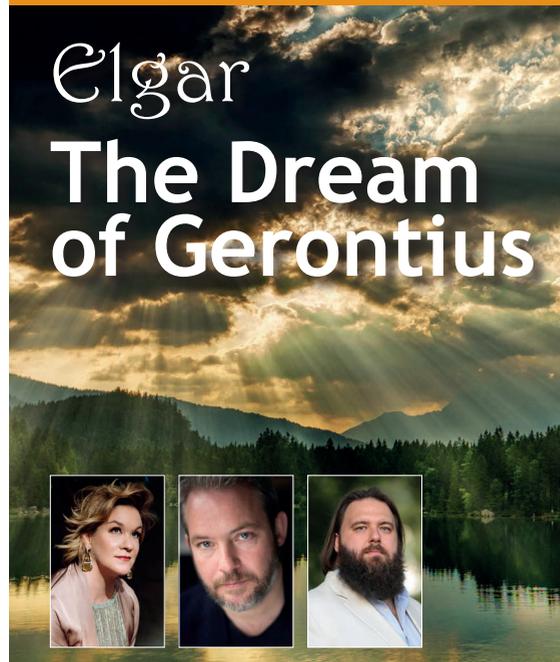
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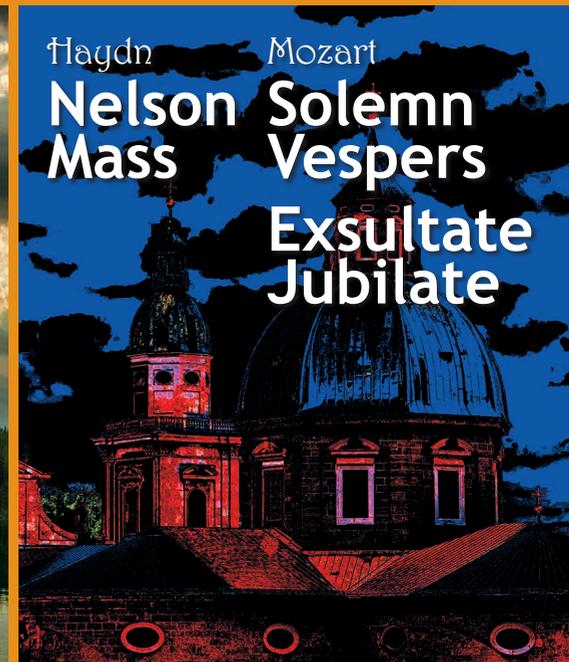
Elgar
**The Dream
of Gerontius**



Saturday 25 March 2023, 7.30pm

John Dunford - conductor
Alice Coote - mezzo-soprano
Robert Murray - tenor
James Platt - bass
St Peter's Singers
Orchestra D'Amici

Haydn Mozart
Nelson Mass **Solemn Vespers**
Exultate Jubilate



Saturday 17 June 2023, 7.30pm

John Dunford - conductor
Jane Burnell - soprano
Heather Jill Burns - mezzo-soprano
Austin Gunn - tenor
Phil Wilcox - bass-baritone
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Piatti String Quartet with Michael Collins – Clarinet

13 February 2023

Smetana String Quartet No. 1
in E minor, 'From my life',
Mozart Clarinet Quintet and
Shostakovich
String Quartet
No. 10



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Programme: Helen Tabor, helentaborcreative.com

