

Programme curation

While we do not always associate the music of 20th century composers with that of the romantics, it's easy to forget that most composers of the 20th century would have been familiar with and studied extensively the music of all major composers who came before them. Perhaps with the help of the hindsight of the evolution of music from medieval through to romantic music and new kinds of popular music, the 20th century was when some composers began to find real freedom in their musical approach.

What can be of particular interest, however, is when these composers used this freedom to place their own constraints on their compositions, or to look back to emulate past composers (although there is a considerable temporal overlap between the 'romantic' and '20th century' composers - Debussy met Liszt, Ravel was 23 when Brahms died).

Schumann and Ravel is a programme based on a great cycle from each composer, interspersed with some of their shorter works. Although Ravel's *Miroirs* is harmonically revolutionary, perhaps the idea of a set of movements (but not a dance suite) related primarily by hidden thematic material was related to Schumann's concept of the idea. One can only wonder what Ravel's lost work, *Variations on a Theme by Schumann*, could have sounded like.

Schumann's *Humoreske* and the related *Arabeske* and *Blumenstück* that he was working on at the same time are examples of his experiments in form and expression. Perhaps they are pure poetry, but one could imagine images or stories behind these works just as those that Ravel makes explicit in his own.

Brahms 3rd and Prokofiev 2nd violin sonatas are both works championed by the great David Oistrakh, and they share many similarities. First of all, the eerily similar violin openings provide material for consideration - is it a reference (conscious or unconscious), mark of respect, or just a coincidental and independent discovery of a similar concept by two very different composers? While Prokofiev explored new avenues in harmony, the retention of the 4-movement form shows a trust based in that which has worked before, and Brahms seems to look forward with the usual minimal textures in the first movement of his sonata, and the extremely inventive 3rd movement.

Emulation and Pastiche

This programme is based on works where 20th century composers explicitly took on elements of older styles, perhaps for a compositional challenge, or even their own amusement. It's a kind of compositional response to the question, 'what if I wasn't me?', but even when composers try their hardest to hide themselves, we almost inevitably find a trace of something we recognise from their other music.

Wigmore Hall: Schumann and Ravel -

Schumann - *Arabeske* op. 18 (7')

Ravel - *Jeux d'eau* (5')

Schumann - *Blumenstück* op. 19 (8')

Ravel - *Miroirs* (27')

Interval

Schumann - *Humoreske* op. 20 (28')

Ravel - *La Valse* (12')

Lunchtime chamber music

Brahms - Violin sonata no. 3 in d minor, op. 108 (25')

Brahms - Scherzo from the FAE sonata (6')

Prokofiev - Violin sonata no. 2 (23')

Themed programme - Emulation and pastiche

Prokofiev - Symphony no. 1, op. 25 (arranged by the composer for piano solo) (17')

Ravel - À la manière de Borodine/Chabrier (4')

Ravel - Tombeau de Couperin (26')