

# Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

27 October 2013 – 3.30pm

## Alexandra Dariescu *Piano*

### PROGRAMME NOTES *by John Woollard*

#### J S Bach (1685-1750)– Prelude and Fugue in B minor, BWV 893

Bach's keyboard works were originally written for organ, clavichord, and harpsichord, and are among the most important and well-known of his compositions. Widely varied and ranging over the entire span of his lifetime, they are a central part of the modern repertoire for keyboard.

Bach was himself a prodigious talent at the keyboard, well known during his lifetime for both his technical and improvisational abilities. Many of Bach's keyboard works started out as improvisations.

Bach's two series of 24 Preludes and Fugue written for the keyboard are generally considered to be amongst the most influential works in the history of Western classical music. Bach gave the title, 'The Well-Tempered Clavier' (Das Wohltemperierte Klavier) to a collection of solo keyboard music, a book of preludes and fugues in all 24 major and minor keys, dated 1722, composed "for the profit and use of musical youth desirous of learning, and especially for

the pastime of those already skilled in this study." Bach later compiled a second book of the same kind, dated 1742, with the title "Twenty-four Preludes and Fugues." The two works are now considered to make up a single work, The Well-Tempered Clavier, or "the 48," and are referred to as The Well-Tempered Clavier Book I and The Well-Tempered Clavier Book II respectively. This afternoon's work is the very last of the two series.

Both sets were widely circulated in manuscript, but printed copies were not made until 1801, by three publishers almost simultaneously in Bonn, Leipzig and Zurich. Bach's style was considered old-fashioned in the early Classical period at a time when music had neither contrapuntal complexity nor a great variety of keys. However by the 1770s the Well-Tempered Clavier began to influence the course of musical history, with Haydn and Mozart studying the works closely.

#### Shostakovich (1906-1975) – Preludes Op. 34, Nos. 1-12

No. 1, in C major	No. 7, in A major
No. 2, in A minor	No. 8, in F sharp minor
No. 3, in G major	No. 9, in E major
No. 4, in E minor	No. 10, in C sharp minor
No. 5, in D major,	No. 11, in B major
No. 6, in B minor	No. 12, in G sharp minor

By the time the 26 year old Shostakovich came to compose his 24 Preludes Op. 34 for piano in 1932-1933 the genre of the prelude had become very important as a means of expression for the piano composition. Shostakovich absorbed the stylistic features of the earlier music of the genre.

In the mid-19th century, Frédéric Chopin created his 24 Preludes, Op. 28 as independent concert pieces. He was the first composer who liberated the genre of prelude from its original introductory purpose (as in the Well Tempered Clavier). They are also written in the 24 major and minor keys but proceed through the circle of fifths (i.e. No. 1 C major, No. 2 A minor, No. 3 G major, etc.). At the end of the 19th century (1896), the Russian composer Scriabin in his 24 Preludes Op. 11 followed the same tradition. Shostakovich was the next composer who followed the same pattern – in his Preludes op. 34.

The 24 Preludes Op. 34, written in the early period of Shostakovich's life, are a crystal-clear reflection of the later, mature Shostakovich's compositional style. They provide a glimpse into the young Shostakovich's personal life and cover an emotional range from sardonic humour and playfulness to excruciating pain and sombreness. With the composer's infamous Pravda denunciation three years away - late 1932 and early 1933 was a period of great compositional success for the young man. He composed these preludes at almost a pace of one every two days. They were likely designed to show off his virtuosic capabilities, as he was embarking on a career as a concert pianist. Following the model of Bach, Chopin and Scriabin the preludes traverse all the keys, but they are far from academic exercises and more like "psychological sketches". The pieces are short but extremely technically challenging. As might be expected from Shostakovich, the lines are jagged; with leaps of up to two octaves between notes.

Shostakovich revisited the genre in the 1960s with 24 Preludes and Fugues more consciously based upon Bach's compositions.

#### Beethoven (1770-1827) - Piano Sonata No. 6 in F major, Op. 10, No. 2

1. Allegro
2. Allegretto
3. Presto

Beethoven's three Piano Sonatas, Op. 10 were sketched and composed between 1796 and 1798. They appear to

have one foot in the eighteenth century, and the other in the nineteenth, bridging the gap between the formal classical elegance of Haydn and Mozart, and an altogether more exploratory romanticism. A public and accessible utterance becomes private and individual, a long way from accepted taste and convention. As early as 1796

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Beethoven was increasingly affected by his developing deafness. The three sonatas together demonstrate the start of a seismic change of style, perhaps in response to his own life and its problems.

No. 6, the middle of the group dates from 1797, two years after Beethoven's first public appearance in Vienna. Not only did he appear in many benefit concerts during that time (one of which was in aid of Mozart's widow, Constanze, at which Beethoven played her husband's 20th Piano Concerto), but he also took part in several pianistic duels with other Viennese and visiting virtuosos, each of whom had their own fan camp.

Beethoven dedicated the three sonatas of his Op. 10 to the Countess Anna Margarete von Browne. Her husband,

Count von Browne-Camus, was an officer (of Irish descent) in the Russian Imperial Service in Vienna and himself a generous patron of Beethoven's between 1797 and 1803. He received a number of dedications of his own and, following the gift of these sonatas to his wife, he presented the composer with a riding horse, which Beethoven characteristically forgot until he received a large bill for fodder.

Op. 10 No. 2 is the shortest among Beethoven's early sonatas. He dispenses with a slow movement, instead dividing a Haydn-esque first movement and a mock fugal finale with an Allegretto that has the characteristics of a minuet, for all its minor-key earnestness.

----- Interval -----

## Chopin (1810-1849) – 24 Preludes, Op. 38

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|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Agitato – C major                 | 13. Lento – F-sharp major                            |
| 2. Lento – A minor                   | 14. Allegro – E-flat minor                           |
| 3. Vivace – G major                  | 15. Sostenuto – D-flat major<br>("Raindrop Prelude") |
| 4. Largo – E minor                   | 16. Presto con fuoco –<br>B-flat minor               |
| 5. Molto allegro – D major           | 17. Allegretto – A-flat major                        |
| 6. Lento assai – B minor             | 18. Molto allegro – F minor                          |
| 7. Andantino – A major               | 19. Vivace – E-flat major                            |
| 8. Molto agitato –<br>F-sharp minor  | 20. Largo – C minor                                  |
| 9. Largo – E major                   | 21. Cantabile – B-flat major                         |
| 10. Molto allegro –<br>C-sharp minor | 22. Molto agitato – G minor                          |
| 11. Vivace – B major                 | 23. Moderato – F major                               |
| 12. Presto –<br>G-sharp minor        | 24. Allegro appassionato –<br>D minor                |

We return to the theme of this afternoon's concert for our last work, half way between the worlds of Bach and Shostakovich. Chopin's 24 Preludes, Op. 28, are a set of short pieces for the piano, one in each of the twenty-four keys, originally published in 1839. The French edition was dedicated to the piano-maker and publisher Camille Pleyel, who had commissioned the work for 2,000 francs

(equivalent to nearly £20,000 in present day value). The German edition was dedicated to Joseph Christoph Kessler, a composer of piano studies during Chopin's time. Ten years earlier, Kessler had dedicated his own set of 24 Preludes, Op. 31, to Chopin. Although the term prelude is generally used to describe an introductory piece, Chopin's stand as self-contained units, each conveying a specific idea or emotion.

Chopin wrote them between 1835 and 1839, partly at Valldemossa, Majorca, where he spent the winter of 1838–39 and where he had fled with George Sand and her children to escape the damp Paris weather.

The brevity and apparent lack of formal structure in the Op. 28 preludes caused some consternation among critics at the time of their publication. No prelude is longer than 90 bars (No. 17), and the shortest, No. 9, is a mere 12 bars. Robert Schumann said: "They are sketches, beginnings of études, or, so to speak, ruins, individual eagle pinions, all disorder and wild confusions." Franz Liszt's opinion, however, was more positive: "Chopin's Preludes are compositions of an order entirely apart... they are poetic preludes, analogous to those of a great contemporary poet, who cradles the soul in golden dreams..."

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Pianist Alexandra Dariescu is fast becoming one of the most recognised pianists of her generation, winning international competitions and performing to sell-out audiences at venues throughout the world.

Named BBC Music Magazine's Rising Star in June 2011, the Romanian graduated from the RNCM in 2008 and was chosen for representation by the Young Classical Artist Trust (YCAT) in the same year. She's also one of the first musicians to take part in the Philip Langridge Mentoring Scheme which pairs young professional musicians with leading stars of the classical world. For this, Alexandra is mentored by international pianist Imogen Cooper.

Committed to chamber music, Alexandra has collaborated with the Belcea, Elias, Idomeneo and Sacconi Quartets, and violinist Alina Ibragimova at venues including Wigmore Hall and the City of London Festival. Further afield she has given recitals in the USA, Italy, France, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, Moldavia and Argentina, broadcast for BBC Radio 3 and Classic FM, radio and television stations across Romania, Manx Radio, Isle of Man and Nevada Radio in California.

In June Alexandra made her début at the Royal Albert Hall.

**Next Concert – Sunday 3 November – Morgan Szymanski (Classical Guitar) & Harriet Mackenzie (Violin)**

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