

Wethersfield Chamber Concerts

5 June 2022 – 4pm

IYAD SUGHAYER

Piano

PROGRAMME NOTES *by John Woollard*

Helen Ottaway: *Levantina* for solo piano (2021)

Helen Ottaway is a composer, pianist, installation artist and curator. While a student at Goldsmiths', University of London in the 1980s, she studied briefly with John Cage and up to 1998 worked as a performer, musician and composer with experimental music and theatre groups, touring nationally and internationally. In 1999, with arts administrator Steve Ehrlicher, she formed Artmusic to promote and produce collaborative, site-specific and participatory work.

In Helen's words: A while ago the young Jordanian Palestinian pianist Iyad Sughayer suggested to my sister Frances, with whom he was lodging, that I might write a new piece for him. He had enjoyed playing through my 'Suite of Somerset Apples' written for harpsichord. So it was Frances who made the commission on Iyad's behalf.

Given my interest in folk music and the informal description of me as a 'folk-minimalist' we decided that the new piece would be inspired by a folk song from the Levant – hence the title *Levantina*.

Levantina is based on a folk song which is known by various names but that I know as *The Lovers Hymn*. The story Iyad tells me, and which I wanted to hear more about, is that this is a chant sung by women who want to get messages to their husbands and lovers who are away at war. The messages are in code and carried on the wind. This idea of melodies hidden in and carried on the wind has very much inspired the way the piece works with the main tune gradually emerging from inside the texture.

Haydn (1732 – 1809): Sonata No.38 in F, Hob.XVI.

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Adagio
- III. Finale (Presto)

One of Haydn's few pre-London sonatas to have entered the popular repertoire is the F major, No 38, from the set

of six published by the Viennese firm of Artaria in 1780. The sonatas were dedicated to the talented sisters Franziska and Maria Katherina von Auenbrugger, whose playing in aristocratic salons drew the admiration of both Leopold Mozart—never one to dish out compliments lightly—and Haydn himself.

Schubert (1797 – 1828): Three Impromptus, D899, Op.90

- Impromptu No. 2 in E flat major. Allegro
- Impromptu No. 3 in G flat major. Andante
- Impromptu No. 4 in A flat major. Allegretto

It really isn't fair that such weighty compositions as the four pieces contained in Franz Schubert's Op. 90 (D. 899) were given the rather inappropriate title "Impromptus" by their publisher when the first two went to press in late 1827; it wasn't until 1857 that Op. 90, Nos. 3 and 4 appeared in print. These are not just pieces of higher-grade musical meat than the average short piano piece of the 1820s. These are pieces of considerable length, three of them even spanning more than 200 bars, each a well thought-out expression of pianism that creates no sense of improvisation. The four Impromptus D899 were probably composed at least in part during the composer's stay in Dornbach in the summer of 1827; they seem all to have been put to paper by the time Schubert arrived in Graz in September.

There is something etude-like about the far-flung, continuous eighth notes in Op. 90, No. 2 in E flat

major/minor. During the middle section of this "da capo" piece these eighth Schubert breaks the eighth notes up a bit to set up some powerful sforzandos. Somewhat surprisingly, the piece veers into the minor mode during its ever-faster coda and never escapes back into the major mode.

If you took the Adagio cantabile of Beethoven's *Pathétique* Piano Sonata and mated it with any of a dozen Chopin Nocturnes you'd probably come up with something very like the Andante in G flat major, Op. 90, No. 3. In fact, Schubert lifted the cadential gesture of this lovely melody straight from that heavenly Beethoven movement.

The last impromptu of D. 899 is an Allegretto in A flat minor/major that more or less assumes the form of a scherzo and trio (Schubert even goes so far as to call the less-frantic middle section a "trio"). At the start of the piece, all attention is fixed on the cascading sixteenth note arpeggios, but midway through the "scherzo" portion -- which is of course reprised "da capo" after the trio -- Schubert inserts a delightfully swinging melody into the upper voice of the left hand.

~~~ Interval ~~~

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## Sibelius (1865-1957): 6 Impromptus, Op.5

The Finnish composer Jean Sibelius is most well known for his music for orchestra. The seven symphonies he composed from 1900-1924 remain in the repertoire of many modern orchestras and have had a profound effect on composers. But he wrote music in many other genres as well, including music for solo piano.

Most of his solo piano works are in sets, like the six Impromptus of opus 5. Sibelius wrote music for solo piano throughout his composing career, and the fact that it isn't very well known is no reflection of the quality of it. The popularity and grandeur of his symphonies tend to outshine them. Sibelius was a fine piano composer, and while not a virtuoso pianist (his instrument of choice was

the violin), he could play the instrument very well, as commented upon by his contemporaries. His skill at improvising on the instrument was good, and no one could have guessed that he was not an eminent pianist.

The opus 5 set was published in 1893, about the time of his set of orchestral tone poems Kullervo and the Karelia Suite. Sibelius wrote his piano music at a time when a composer could earn extra money by writing salon pieces for piano. Sound recording was still in its infancy, so many people learned to play the piano for entertainment. Sibelius' music for piano is well written, and very musical. Some of it looks quite simple, but there are hidden beauties in these miniatures.

## Schumann (1810 – 1856): Faschingsschwank aus Wien, Op.26

Faschingsschwank aus Wien (Carnival Scenes from Vienna or Carnival Jest from Vienna), Op. 26, is a solo piano work by Robert Schumann. He began composition of the work in 1839 in Vienna. He wrote the first four movements in Vienna, and the last on his return to Leipzig. The work is in five movements:

*Allegro: Very lively (Sehr Lebhaft), B♭ major*

Marked *very lively*, this is the longest and one of the more virtuosic movements, notable for its innovative rhythms and its brief quote of "La Marseillaise". Of all the pieces of Faschingsschwank, this one is the least single-minded in its structure, introducing entirely new themes occasionally, only to be brought back repeatedly to two repeated motifs from the beginning. The piece comes to a crashing close with almost dissonant septuplet arpeggios.

*Romanze: Pretty slow (Ziemlich Langsam), G minor*

Probably the least virtuosic of the works, taking only a page of music. Despite its shortness and apparent ease, this is undoubtedly the saddest piece in the set. Despite the fact that most of the work is in G minor, the final measure brings a resolution into G major.

*Scherzino, B♭ major*

Much as the title suggests, this work is a playful respite between two sombre movements. A syncopated rhythm, with a melody based almost entirely on notes of the major

chord, keeps the movement light and bouncing throughout, with the possible exception of the last run, a progression of octaves into a quick and bright cadence.

*Intermezzo: With the greatest energy (Mit Größter Energie), E♭ minor*

The Intermezzo is marked by its flowing sound, created by keeping a steady stream of right-hand notes in the background, interspersed with melody notes. The piece, almost entirely based on transpositions, appears difficult at first due to its speed. The background notes are mostly suited to the shape and position of the hand, despite a few leaps of the melody; in the end, the left hand takes a modified, E-flat major version of the E-flat minor melody, under the right hand. The work is a melancholy and emotionally charged display of a pianist's capability to convey feeling.

*Finale: Highly vivid (Höchst Lebhaft), B♭ major*

The "extremely lively" Finale begins with triumphant announcements in B-flat octaves, interspersed with brilliant moving thirds. This section is the second longest, lasting about half the length of the first movement. The patterns seen in the Finale are somewhat reminiscent of Beethoven's compositional style, using a melody that moves in both hands, while both hands also play unchanging notes beneath the melody. The energetic runs of the final bars bring the set to a dramatic close

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Chosen as 'One to Watch' by International Piano Magazine, Iyad's debut album - Khachaturian Piano Works for BIS Records was released in November 2019 to critical acclaim. The album was described by Gramophone as 'exhilarating and delivered with perfect clarity' and 'an outstanding debut' by BBC Music Magazine.

In 2021 Iyad was a prize-winner at the Young Classical Artists Trust (YCAT) International Auditions. That autumn he recorded his second CD for BIS with the BBC National Orchestra of Wales conducted by Andrew Litton including Khachaturian's Piano Concerto and Masquerade.

As soloist Iyad has appeared with leading orchestras including the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, Manchester Camerata, European Union Chamber Orchestra, the Cairo and Amman Symphony Orchestras.

He has given recitals at Wigmore Hall, Bridgewater Hall & Stoller Hall in Manchester (broadcast by BBC Radio 3), Leeds Town Hall, the Laeishalle (Hamburg), Festival Musique D'Abord (France), Steinway Hall (New York), Castleton Festival (Virginia) and Kings Place in London, among many others.

Recent highlights include an invitation to contribute to the BBC Arabic documentary 'London Lockdown', in which he took part as a character and recorded the soundtrack for the music.

Born in Amman, the Jordanian-Palestinian pianist Iyad studied at Chetham's School of Music, the Royal Northern College of Music and Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance where he won the College's prestigious Gold Medal.

He completed his International Artist Diploma at the RNCM in 2019 with Murray McLachlan, Martino Tirimo and Graham Scott and in the same year became a City Music Foundation Artist.

**We hope that you will join us at our concerts on 2 April, 16 April and 7 May 2023**