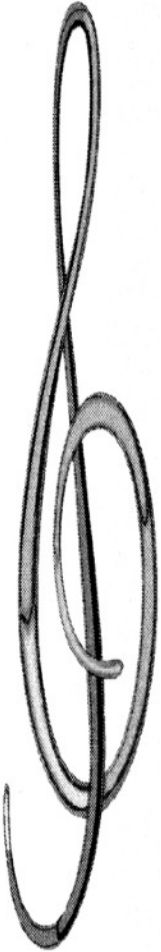


Christopher's Classics - Series XXVIX 2024

Otis Prescott-Mason



2024 Christopher Marshall Concert

sponsored by Dame Adrienne Stewart and Professor Jack Richards

Presented by
Sunday Classics Inc

Elizabeth Ball Trust

Tuesday, May 14th, 2024, 7:00 PM

The Piano, 156 Armagh St, Christchurch



The busiest lives deserve beautiful music.

Programme

Beethoven (1770-1827) – *Piano Sonata No. 4 in E flat major, Op. 7*

Chopin (1810-1849) - *Andante Spianato et Grande Polonaise, Op. 22*

Interval

Mozart (1756-1791) - *Adagio in B minor, K. 540*

Liszt (1811-1886) – *Piano Sonata in B minor, S. 178*

Pianist **Otis Prescott-Mason** is the 2024 Christopher Marshall Young Performer. Wellington-born, he began his piano studies at the age of 5. He is currently studying under Dr. Jian Liu at New Zealand School of Music, Te Kōkī.

In 2022 Otis was awarded first prize, Best Performance of a Classical Sonata and the Audience Choice Award at the Lewis Eady National Piano Competition and later the same year he was awarded first prize at the PACANZ National Piano Competition. Otis was also awarded 1st prize at the 2020 New Zealand Junior Piano Competition.

Otis has performed in many music festivals in New Zealand and abroad including the Whakatipu Music Festival, At World's Edge Festival, New Zealand International Music Festival and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. He has also collaborated with several orchestras in New Zealand such as the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, Orchestra Wellington, Wellington Chamber Orchestra, and Kapiti Concert Orchestra.

In 2023 he became an AWE Fellow and was awarded a ROSL Pettman Scholarship designed to assist future study and career opportunities for emerging NZ musicians showing exceptional career promise.

Programme Notes

Beethoven *Piano Sonata No. 4 in E flat major, Op. 7 (1796-97)*

- I. *Allegro molto e con brio*
- II. *Largo, con gran espressione*
- III. *Allegro*
- IV. *Rondo: Poco allegretto e grazioso*

Composed in the years of 1796-1797, this sonata is the most ambitious and substantial of Beethoven's early period: Telling is the fact that of the first seven Beethoven sonatas it is the only one to be given its own opus number. In fact, his much later 'Hammerklavier' sonata, Op. 106, is the sole sonata exceeding Op. 7 in length.

The work is in four movements with each movement contrasting intensely with the others in terms of character and emotional content. The first movement is marked 'Allegro molto e con brio', meaning 'very fast and with spirit', and in character is very lighthearted. The tonality (Eb major) combined with the fast repeating notes evokes the sound of a horn and the image of a hunt. This is juxtaposed by a simple but beautiful singing second subject. After a development containing more serious material (perhaps a member of the hunt has become separated and fallen down a bank with his horse) the exposition arrives and lightheartedness returns. The movement ends triumphantly and with a smile.

Deep and contemplative are two words that well describe that character of the second movement which is marked 'Largo con gran espressione', meaning 'very slow and broad with great expression'. In this movement the silences are at least as important as the notes, perhaps more important.

As if awakening from a meditative state, induced by the depth and contemplation of the second movement, the third movement opens with a gentle and pastoral character. This is contrasted starkly in the trio section: Suddenly, pastoral Eb major turns into the darkness of Eb minor. Huge and abrupt accents, marked 'ffp', punch through the undulating pianissimo texture. Before long, however, the gentle first section returns and ends the movement.

The last movement, marked 'Poco Allegretto e grazioso' or 'fairly quick and graceful' is in Sonata-Rondo form. Its 'A' section is a gorgeous, tender and singing melody that makes genius use of appoggiaturas (putting to bed the accusations that Beethoven was not a great melodist). The development of this Sonata-Rondo movement erupts in a C minor outburst, written in a style so deliberately primitive, brazen, and unsophisticated that it is reminiscent of a toddler throwing a tantrum. Eventually the toddler is pacified (or runs out of energy) and the outburst seems to evaporate, leaving only enough energy to fall back into the tender melody's return. This movement, and by consequence the entire sonata, ends with a coda of touching sincerity: It sounds as if a heartfelt goodbye is being wished to a dear friend. Perhaps after the 30 minute journey of this sonata Beethoven felt that a listener (or more likely in his time somebody playing it for only themselves) would have grown close to the music and such a goodbye was fitting...

Chopin *Andante Spianato et Grande Polonaise, Op. 22* (1830-34)

Though Chopin was only half Polish by heritage (his father was from North-Eastern France and at sixteen immigrated to Warsaw to work as a clerk or book-keeper in a tobacco factory) he very much thought of himself as a Pole. Some of the first music that the boy Chopin heard were simple Polonaises for the piano, then in vogue, by Prince Michal Kleofas Oginski and Marya Szymanowska. In fact, due to this influence, Oginski-inspired Polonaises were the 7 year old Chopin's first attempt at composition. Chopin left Warsaw for Vienna on November 1st, 1830 and was initially welcomed and saw success (he had spent a short time in Vienna the year previous and had been welcomed warmly then, aiding his initially warm 1830 reception). However, only four weeks after Chopin left Warsaw revolution broke out there in the November Uprising. Now that everyone he knew and respected in Warsaw was engaged in a fight for survival Chopin, who had never previously expressed serious interest in national or political issues, felt personally involved. However, the Viennese generally sided against the Polish in their revolution against monarchy as they themselves were ruled by a monarchy and were wary of revolution having witnessed the last 50 years of French political chaos. Chopin's uncompromising and, to the Viennese, objectionable sentiments towards the uprising were largely responsible for the 'drying up' of his success in Vienna. He became very isolated: Chopin had no contact with anybody in Warsaw and was increasingly shunned from high Viennese society. His only encouragement was that the revolution had shown initial promise on the fighting front. It was in this context that Chopin, in Vienna from 1830-1831, composed the Polonaise from what, in 1836, would be published as his Op. 22. From this point on the Polonaise became a medium through which Chopin expressed his concern and homesickness for, but also faith in, his country.

Mozart *Adagio in B minor, K. 540* (1788)

Mozart entered his Adagio in B minor, K. 540, into his catalogue of works in late 1788 making this year most likely to be the one in which it was written. Containing only 57 bars it is a remarkably compact and well crafted piece in Sonata form. In such a short work Mozart explores a rich palette of character and expression: Desolation, despair, and hopelessness are contrasted with warmth, intimate cantabile melodies, and faith. As is always the case in Mozart's music, the operatic influence is clear: One can hear, for instance, pulsating strings accompanying lines that are surely vocal in conception and intention.

Liszt *Piano Sonata in B minor, S. 178* (1853)

In the year 1848 Franz Liszt, thundering virtuoso of unparalleled renown and technique, was at the height of his career ('reign' may be a more fitting word). It therefore came as a shock when he rather suddenly decided to retire from the concert stage. Whether intentional or not, by stepping away from concertising in his thirties and at the peak of his powers, Liszt immortalised the legend of his playing and kept untarnished the transcendental aura that had come to surround him throughout the previous two decades. One possible contributing factor to Liszt's decision to retire is composition: Liszt's compositional output by this point in his life consisted mostly of pianistically brilliant but musically shallow operatic paraphrases and fantasies. He was undoubtedly the king of piano, but not of composition. Liszt was determined to change that.

The following year saw him begin sketches for what would become arguably his greatest work ever and perhaps the most important post-Beethoven sonata to this day: his *Sonata in B minor, S. 178*. The importance and innovation of this work lies in many aspects of its construction, however the two most critical are its structure and a technique called 'thematic transformation'. With regard to structure, the entire 30 minute work exists simultaneously in a one movement structure and also in a four movement structure. This was an innovation of Liszt's that was later called 'Double-Function form'. With regard to thematic transformation (a method, also innovated by Liszt), in which a motif or theme is developed by presenting the original theme, more or less unchanged, surrounded by a radically different context. The sonata opens in a very matter of fact way: Three of the four central themes of the work are presented, immediately following each other, with no accompaniment. This opening section concludes with the first true B minor chord so far, the tonality of the piece. It is highly unusual to hear the primary tonality of a piece so far into it. The next 30 minutes are an immense journey with those themes (along with the fourth which is introduced not long after the first three). Liszt makes of them a Shakespearean play: The characters are introduced, and then the story unfolds. He applies to them just about every trick in the book, so to speak. In the sonata Liszt goes to every conceivable emotional place, and plenty of inconceivable ones: From the darkest depths of nihilistic despair to the brightest heights of spiritual faith, and everything in between. It is a work of shattering profundity and breathtaking genius. Each listening is the journey of a lifetime. The work was completed in 1853 published in 1854. It inspired many of his contemporary composers, who recognised and admired the work's genius, to emulate his innovations in their own way. Double function form, and especially thematic transformation, would go on to become hugely important compositional devices. From Brahms, to Scriabin, to Debussy, to Prokofiev, the shockwaves that radiated from this work influenced music to come for almost two centuries and counting.

Christopher's Classics Next Concert:

Aroha Quartet with Oleksandr Gunchenko



performing **Boccherini, Onslow, Webster** and **Dvorák**

Tuesday 21st May 2024, 7:00 PM

at **The Piano** 156 Armagh St.

Tickets: Door Sales: \$40 (students **\$15**) by cash
\$42 (students **\$17**) by credit card/EFTPOS.

On-Line Sales: www.eventfinda.co.nz (all charges to purchaser)

For general concert information
email: treasurer.christophers.classics@gmail.com
or visit our website www.christophersclassics.nz

Acknowledgements:
Elizabeth Ball Trust, The Piano, Gloria Street,
and private donors — thank you all