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John Davis

23|24 SEASON

 UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

presents

Artist in Focus:

ISATA KANNEH-MASON, piano

Inaugurating the Performing Arts Center's 2023 Hamburg Steinway D Piano

THURS, OCT 12, 7:30 pm

Hodgson Concert Hall

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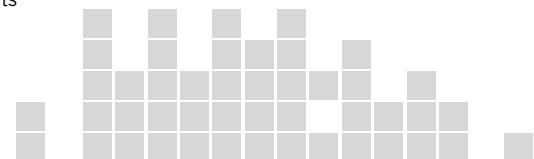
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PROGRAM

JOSEPH HAYDN (1732-1809)

Piano Sonata No. 60 in C major, Hob. XVI/50 [16:00]

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio
- III. Allegro molto

FANNY MENDELSSOHN HENSEL (1805-1847)

Easter Sonata [22:30]

- I. Allegro assai moderato
- II. Largo e molto espresso - Poco più mosso
- III. Scherzo: Allegretto
- IV. Allegro con strepito

INTERMISSION

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)

Kinderszenen, Op. 15 [19:00]

- I. *Von fremden Ländern und Menschen* (Of Foreign Lands and Peoples)
- II. *Kuriose Geschichte* (A Curious Story)
- III. *Hasche-Mann* (Blindman's Buff)
- IV. *Bittendes Kind* (Pleading Child)
- V. *Glückes genug* (Happy Enough)
- VI. *Wichtige Begebenheit* (An Important Event)
- VII. *Träumerei* (Dreaming)
- VIII. *Am Kamin* (At the Fireside)
- IX. *Ritter vom Steckenpferd* (Knight of the Hobbyhorse)
- X. *Fast zu ernst* (Almost Too Serious)
- XI. *Fürchtenmachen* (Frightening)
- XII. *Kind im Einschlummern* (Child Falling Asleep)
- XIII. *Der Dichter spricht* (The Poet Speaks)

FRYDERYK CHOPIN (1810-1849)

Piano Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 58 [27:00]

- I. Allegro maestoso
- II. Scherzo: Molto vivace
- III. Largo
- IV. Finale

Program is subject to change.

PROGRAM NOTES

By Laurie Shulman ©2023

Sonata No. 60 in C Major, Hob.XVI:50

Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Haydn's last three piano sonatas date from his second trip to London in 1794. He composed them for Therese Jansen, a pupil of Muzio Clementi who was much admired for her technical skill and musicianship. Haydn also composed three superb piano trios for her. Collectively, those trios and sonatas are his most demanding keyboard works.

The C major Sonata is a classic example of Haydn's monothematicism. The witty opening gesture generates nearly all the material of the first movement, including the second theme and much of the transitional material. Haydn's imagination and inventiveness in embellishing this simple gesture is marvelous to hear. From the sparsest of means, he expands the idea, first in big rolled chords, then in all manner of variants and decoration.

Haydn was knowledgeable about the mechanics of instruments. He was eager to explore new developments in English pianos. This sonata calls for 'open pedal' in one passage, by which Haydn intended *sopra una corda*—a pedal to quieten the sound. The device was not yet available on his Viennese piano, but in this sonata he took advantage of the new English invention.

The technical demands of the first movement are legion: chains of parallel thirds, extended octave passages and a generally dense texture. These traits attest to Jansen's command of the piano—and indicate that Haydn also

wanted to maximize the beefier sound possible with the larger English pianos.

While the rhetorical argument of the sonata is concentrated in the opening Allegro, the central Adagio in F major is also impressive. Haydn apparently wrote this movement in Vienna (Artaria published it there in June 1794) and decided to incorporate it into the C Major Sonata. The structure is like a free *fantasia*, with intricate rhythmic detail and dramatic dynamic contrasts that foreshadow Beethoven.

Haydn concludes the Sonata with an Allegro molto that pushes the idea of a minuet to the edge of scherzo. His use of silences, sudden stops and starts, and anticipation of "wrong" key changes all fulfill the promise of humor in the first movement's initial motive.

Easter Sonata

Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel
(1805-1847)

The eldest of Abraham and Leah Mendelssohn's four children, Fanny Mendelssohn was three and a half years older than her brother Felix. She was equally gifted as a pianist and composer, but was discouraged by her father from pursuing a professional career in music. Felix supported her composition efforts, but disapproved of her publishing any of her pieces. (Ironically, several of her songs were published under Felix's name in the 1820s.)

Fanny married the artist Wilhelm Hensel in 1829. Hensel was court painter to the Prussian king. He had a more progressive view with respect to his wife's talents, and encouraged her to continue composing. Under Fanny's stewardship, their Berlin home became a favored spot for house concerts; she

was the salon hostess *par excellence*. The majority of Fanny's more than 300 compositions were songs and piano miniatures, but she did produce some larger dramatic pieces in the 1830s. In the 1840s, contravening her father's and brother's wishes, she began to publish her music. Her works were starting to garner critical acclaim when she died of a massive stroke in May 1847. She was 41.

The Sonata Ms. Kanneh-Mason performs this evening has a remarkable story. It was not published during Mendelssohn Hensel's lifetime. The manuscript was discovered in 1970 in a Paris bookshop by Henri-Jacques Coudert, a collector and record producer. He purchased it and, believing it to be by Felix because it was signed "F. Mendelssohn," arranged for it to be recorded as a newly discovered work.

In 2010, Angela Mace Christian, a doctoral candidate in musicology at Duke University, was granted access to the manuscript, still held in Coudert's private collection. Her research determined that Fanny, and not Felix, was the composer. Her conclusion was not based solely on stylistic evidence. Dr. Mace determined that the numbers on the manuscript pages tallied with those missing from the manuscript collection of Hensel's compositions in a Berlin archive. Further, she pinpointed an entry in Fanny's diary, written at the time of Felix's departure for his first trip to England in April 1829. Fanny expressed sadness at his departure and summarized her activities for the day, including the comment, "I played my *Easter Sonata*."

Dr. Mace's subsequent research yielded further evidence supporting her attribution. For Christmas 1827, Felix had given Fanny a copy of the Lutheran

chorale "Christe du Lamm Gottes," often referred to as the German Agnus Dei. The chorale figures prominently in the last movement of Fanny's sonata. Further, the manuscript is dated 6 April 1828, which was Easter Sunday that year. The Sonata was first performed with its correct attribution to Fanny on International Women's Day in 2017 at London's Royal College of Music.

The *Easter Sonata* comprises four movements that reveal the strong influence of both Beethoven and Carl Maria von Weber. Its subtext is the Passion of Christ, whose programmatic threads are particularly evident in the second and final movements. Surprisingly, each movement is in a different (though related) key. Personal touches found in Fanny's other piano music include passages of thirds in contrary motion, triplets, and a more intimate approach to both harmony and drama. The first movement, a sonata form in A major, persuades with elegance, not ferocity. That stated, the coda is quite demanding technically, ending in a swirl of arpeggios.

Her Largo e molto espressivo in E minor is binary: essentially a Romantic era prelude and fugue, the latter in four parts. (We may think of it as an ecclesiastical fugue, adhering to strict rules of counterpoint.) While richly chromatic, the textures remain spare and transparent, and reveal Hensel's sturdy foundation in polyphonic writing. At the same time, she makes the rigorous contrapuntal texture sound improvisatory. It is an impressive achievement.

The Scherzo is a sparkler that vacillates between E major and A major. It requires a feather-light touch and great agility. The pianist dances

delicately all over the keyboard, often with rapid leaps. Hensel's texture becomes more chromatic and somewhat calmer in the trio section—which is so smoothly embedded that it does not feel like a separate section. Presently the scampering resumes, and the two contrasting ideas fuse together for a surprise ending.

The A minor finale, marked Allegro con strepito (Fast and with a roar) is a bonanza of dramatic outbursts, broken rapid-fire octaves, and rapid passage-work in both hands. Scholars have hypothesized that Hensel's thunderous development represents the moment of Christ's death as related in Matthew 27:51. "And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom, and the earth shook, and the rocks were split." A moment of silence occurs as Jesus perishes. At this point she introduces the chorale—the one that Felix had given her for Christmas the previous year—"Christe du Lamm Gottes." Its phrases restore the home tonality of A major and assert the miracle of the Resurrection.

***Kinderszenen*, Op.15 (Scenes from Childhood)**

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

There is an old saying among musicians that Mozart is too easy for children, and too difficult for adults. The same observation could be made about Schumann's *Kinderszenen*. This collection is one of those beloved works that every gifted piano student works on as a child—and returns to as an adult. The sheer poetry of these miniatures makes them favorites, even to families who are living through the learning process as a resident daughter or son navigates through the inner voices of *Träumerei* or the lightness required for "Blindman's Buff." Beauty,

expressiveness, and emotional appeal keep *Kinderszenen* in the repertoire of many virtuoso pianists.

The miracle of this collection is its staying power. No one who has studied *Kinderszenen* will ever view a rocking horse again without thinking of the lurching rhythms of *Ritter vom Steckenpferd* and the sheer glee that Schumann captured in his few miraculous bars.

Although these thirteen short pieces are far less difficult than Schumann's larger works, they can be pure poetry in the hands of a gifted pianist. Fond memories of childhood viewed from an adult's perspective are burnished with the patina of time. Nostalgia and memory are the fodder for Schumann's imagination, begging for a caressing, affectionate touch from the interpreter. Schumann said it best, in a letter to his future wife, Clara Wieck, in March 1838.

Before I forget it, let me tell you what else I have composed. Whether it was an echo of what you said to me once, "that sometimes I seemed to you like a child," anyhow, I suddenly got an inspiration, and knocked off about thirty quaint little things, from which I have selected twelve [sic] and called them Kinderszenen. They will amuse you, but of course you must forget that you are a performer . . . Well, they all explain themselves, and what's more they are as easy as possible.

Each movement is a masterpiece of eloquence, rather like the perfect appetizer: delicious and just enough to leave you hungry for more. So beautifully planned is this menu of *tapas* that, at the end, we feel we have dined superbly.

Piano Sonata No. 3 in B minor, Op. 58

Fryderyk Chopin (1810-1849)

One of Chopin's universally recognized works is his funeral march: the slow movement to the Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor, Op. 35. Because of that movement's disproportionate familiarity and the popularity of the Second Sonata, the Third Sonata has taken something of a back seat to its older sibling. Among pianists and musical connoisseurs, however, the B minor sonata is much beloved and an undisputed masterpiece of Chopin's final years. It dates from 1844—just five years before he succumbed to tuberculosis—and ranks with other late masterpieces such as the Berceuse, Op. 57 and the Barcarolle, Op. 60.

At nearly half an hour, this sonata is the largest scale of Chopin's solo compositions. Like the B-flat minor sonata, it is cast in four movements of widely varying length and content. As in that sonata, Chopin places the scherzo second and invests the slow movement with considerable rhetorical power and emotional weight. This later work, however, shows advances in Chopin's style, particularly in his integration of the pianistic filigree and the imagination of its musical episodes. In April 1844, the German poet and critic Heinrich Heine, who lived in Paris, wrote:

I am forced to keep repeating that there are only three pianists worthy of serious notice; these are, in the first place Chopin, the enchanting poet-musician, who has unfortunately been very ill this winter, and is seldom visible to the public. [The other two, in his estimation, were Liszt and Thalberg.] . . . When I am near

Chopin, I quite forget his mastery of piano technique, and plunge into the soft abysses of his music, into the mingled pain and delight of his creations, which are as tender as they are profound.

The Third Sonata has every quality Heine mentions, from its anguished opening declamation to the sublime second theme, which becomes the dominant melodic idea of the first movement. The rich textures of the Allegro maestoso show Chopin's absorption of broken chord techniques reminiscent of Carl Maria von Weber and piano figuration from contemporary virtuoso works like Schumann's *Carnaval* and *Davidstänztänze*.

A more startling influence is a significantly earlier composer, however: Johann Sebastian Bach. Chopin freely acknowledged that Bach and Mozart were his principal models. Before composing the B minor sonata, he had spent weeks poring over counterpoint treatises by Luigi Cherubini and Jean-Georges Kastner. Always, he studied Bach. His preoccupation with dense polyphony and imitative counterpoint found an outlet in the development section of the first movement.

Chopin's scherzo is brilliant and fleet, requiring an evenness of touch. Its understated, Mendelssohnian atmosphere only partly masks the tumultuous harmonic journeys. The slow movement shows a kinship to the first movement through its brief, dramatic introduction, followed by a nocturne-like texture in the dominant lyric theme. The Largo's extended middle section is vocal, specifically the caressing *bel canto* style of Bellini. As Charles Rosen has observed, "Here, for the only time in Chopin, the accompaniment is a literal pastiche

of Italian opera orchestration—a pastiche full of affection and admiration."

The finale is both dramatic and virtuosic, with dazzling passagework to balance the quasi-military principal theme. Chopin sustains momentum through his adaptation of the rondo form, which allows him to alternate romantic passion with bravura display. The mood is at once epic and

driven, culminating in a triumphant B major flourish.

Chopin completed the Third Sonata in autumn 1844. The Parisian house of Joseph Meissonier published it in June 1845 with a dedication to Comtesse Emilie de Perthuis, a friend and pupil who was the wife of the royal aide-de-camp. Chopin also dedicated his Op. 24 Mazurkas to her.

ABOUT THE ARTIST


ISATA KANNEH-MASON

Pianist Isata Kanneh-Mason is in great demand internationally as a soloist and chamber musician. She offers eclectic and interesting repertoire with recital programs encompassing music from Haydn and Mozart via Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann, Chopin and Brahms to Gershwin and beyond. In concerto, she is equally at home in Felix Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann (whose piano concerto featured on Isata's chart-topping debut recording) as in Prokofiev and Dohnányi.

Highlights of the 23/24 season include performances with the Philadelphia Orchestra, National Arts Centre Orchestra Ottawa, London Mozart Players, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra on tour in the USA and Germany, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Cleveland Orchestra, Toronto Symphony, and Stockholm Philharmonic. With her cellist brother Sheku, she appears in recital in Japan, Singapore, and South Korea in addition to an extensive European recital tour. Isata also gives a series of solo recitals on tour in the USA and Canada as well as at London's Wigmore Hall, the Lucerne Festival, and across Germany.

In 2022/23 Isata made successful debuts at the Barbican, Queen Elizabeth and Wigmore halls in London, the Philharmonie Berlin, National Concert Hall Dublin, Perth Concert Hall and Prinzregententheater Munich. As concerto soloist, she appeared with orchestras such as the New World Symphony Miami, City of Birmingham Symphony, Barcelona Symphony, Geneva Chamber Orchestra and Los Angeles Philharmonic and was the Artist in Residence with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Isata is a Decca Classics recording artist. Her 2019 album, *Romance — the Piano Music of Clara Schumann*, entered the UK classical charts at No. 1, Gramophone magazine extolling the recording as "one of the most charming and engaging debuts." This was followed by 2021's *Summertime*, featuring 20th century American repertoire and including a world premiere recording of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's Impromptu in B minor. And 2023's endearingly titled album *Childhood Tales* is a tour-de-force showcase of music inspired by nostalgia for youth.



In 2021, she also saw the release of her first duo album, *Muse*, with Sheku Kanneh-Mason, demonstrating the siblings' musical empathy and rapport borne from years of playing and performing together. Isata and Sheku were selected to perform in recital during the 2020 BBC Proms, which was a vastly reduced festival due to the Covid-19 pandemic and they performed for cameras in an empty auditorium. This year saw her BBC Proms solo debut, this time to a fully open Royal Albert Hall, alongside Ryan Bancroft and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

Isata was an ECHO Rising Star in '21-'22 performing in many of Europe's finest halls and she is also the recipient of the coveted Leonard Bernstein Award, an Opus Klassik award for best young artist, and is one of the Konzerthaus Dortmund's Junge Wilde artists.

www.isatakannehmason.com