

Pianist Bobby Chen entered the Yehudi Menuhin School as a pupil of Ruth Nye in 1991. During his time at the School he participated in masterclasses with eminent pianists and teachers such as Fanny Waterman, John Lill, Charles Rosen, Rolf Hind, Nikolai Demidenko and Krystian Zimerman. Further masterclasses in Salzburg with Dimitri Bashkurov culminated in a solo recital at the Mozarteum. In 1996 Bobby Chen was selected as a soloist in a CD issue on the Classic FM label entitled 'Yehudi Menuhin's Young Virtuosi' and toured Britain with Lord Menuhin and the Warsaw Sinfonia performing Beethoven's Triple Concerto. 1997 saw an appearance at the Royal Festival Hall playing the 4th Prokofiev Sonata as part of the South Bank Prokofiev Festival.

In recent years Bobby Chen has travelled extensively giving recitals and concerto performances. Following his concerto début in 1998 with the Singapore Symphony playing Rachmaninov's Paganini Variations, he received a further invitation to play Beethoven's 2nd Concerto. Other performances included a two-recital event with the renowned Russian pianist Nikolai Demidenko and a concert in Kuala Lumpur with the Academy of St Martin in the Fields under Sir Neville Marriner, with Beethoven's Concerto no. 1. So successful was this concert that he was invited back to Malaysia to give two performances with the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra of Rachmaninov's Concerto no. 4, plus further solo recitals in May 2003, a tour which prompted the Malaysian Press to hail Bobby Chen a "Musical Genius". In January 2003, he made his début appearance at London's Wigmore Hall.

In his four years at the Royal Academy of Music, where he studied with Ruth Nye, Bobby Chen won no fewer than eight coveted awards, including that for the best final recital, and graduated with first class honours. Other awards include a Yamaha European Foundation Scholarship, Royal Overseas League Prize and, most recently, he won both the Musicians' Benevolent Fund Music Education Award 2002/03 and the Making Music's Philip and Dorothy Green Award for Young Concert Artists 2003, as well as inclusion in the Countess of Munster Musical Trust Recital Scheme. He is also currently supported by the John Lewis Partnership. His solo début recording on the Jaques Samuel label was followed by a further CD of virtuoso works with the cellist Leonid Gorokhov on the Cello Classics label, and a solo disc of his Wigmore concert, all available on their website (www.jspianos.com).



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STOUR VALLEY ARTS & MUSIC

53rd Season: 2003-2004

Bobby Chen, Piano

Friday 12 December 2003 at 8pm

Constable Hall, East Bergholt

PROGRAMME

Sonata in A minor, Op.164 **Franz Schubert**
(1797 -1828)
Allegro ma non troppo *Allegretto quasi andantino*
Allegro vivace

Variations Sérieuses in D minor, Op. 54 **Felix Mendelssohn**
(1809-1847)

Notturmo **Benjamin Britten**
(1913 -1976)

INTERVAL

Préludes **Claude Debussy**
(1862 -1918)
La Sérénade Interrompue *La Cathédrale Engloutie* *Minstrels*
La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin

Sonata in B minor, Op.58 **Fryderyk Chopin**
(1810-1849)
Allegro maestoso *Scherzo-Molto vivace* *Largo*
Finale - Presto non tanto

Supported by the Countess of Munster Musical Trust

PROGRAMME NOTES

During 1816, **Schubert** ended his brief career as a schoolmaster and took up lodgings with his friend Franz von Schober. Supported and encouraged by a small circle of artistic companions, he was now a freelance composer – possibly the first musician in history who did not write ‘to order’. Amongst his projects for 1817 were at least five piano sonatas, a genre chosen probably to prove something to himself about his compositional powers. It had been brought to a high point by Beethoven, whose work Schubert both venerated and feared: he needed to believe that he could write sonatas that were different from those of his hero. A clue to the nature of his conception is to be found in his tempo markings. ‘Allegro non troppo’ and ‘Allegro moderato’ are typical of these early sonatas, whereas in the whole of Beethoven’s piano works the word ‘moderato’ never once appears. The latter’s musical arguments build short motifs into longer paragraphs, whereas Schubert’s preference is to present more extended themes, usually of a pronounced lyrical quality, whose nature is best served by a relaxed tempo. The A minor was the first of his 1817 efforts to be completed, and remains the most interesting. A magnificent first movement, alternately fierce and poetic, is followed by two others of lesser significance, although the finale sustains an unusual degree of intensity.

The outline of Schubert’s career had several similarities to that of **Mendelssohn**. Each produced masterpieces during their teenage years, and went on to complete a surprisingly large body of work before an early death. Mendelssohn’s gifts were phenomenal. He was a good painter, had wide literary knowledge, and wrote brilliantly. He was a superb pianist, a good violist, an exceptional organist, and an inspiring conductor. He had an amazing musical memory. He was generous to other musicians, and keen to raise standards of popular taste. His formative influences were Bach and Mozart and his allegiance was to the Classical era – he himself often noted how different he felt from his famous Romantic contemporaries Berlioz, Chopin and Wagner. His music does at times exhibit the passionate tendencies typical of the period, though usually restrained by a strong sense of form. Schumann regarded him as “the Mozart of the nineteenth century, the most illuminating of composers, who sees more clearly than others through the contradictions of our time and is the first to reconcile them”. The popularity of his work in the nineteenth century was followed by a severe reaction, caused in part by a feeling that his life had been too comfortably easy. The pendulum has since swung back, and the best qualities of his music – its craftsmanship, restraint, poetry, and melodic freshness – are now highly valued. The *Variations sérieuses* were completed on 4 June 1841 and published in 1842. The four-part writing of the theme is reminiscent of a church chorale – some of the variations carry the associations of this into an almost baroque contrapuntal inventiveness, whilst others are more purely romantic. There is a fugato in variation 10, several scherzandos, and an example of ‘Schumann shorthand’ in variation 11 (a curtailed outline of the theme’s melody), but overall most of the variations stay close to the harmonically quixotic theme.

Night Piece, **Britten**’s last published work for piano solo, was composed in 1963 as a test piece for the first Leeds International Piano Competition, which was won by the

seventeen-year-old pupil of Fanny Waterman, Michael Roll. The idea behind this composition was to put musicianship rather than mere virtuosity to the test. It is a quiet three-part design, very challenging in touch, legato melody and subtle use of pedal. It employs a gently falling motif from an earlier piano movement entitled *Sailing* as a secondary theme. The prevailing flow is broken by a cadenza of bird-song before the final coda. The piece has been compared to the night musics of Bartók – a composer not without influence on Britten. But Britten’s own special feeling for night created a world of its own, and here is a miniature pendant to the preoccupations of the *Serenade*, the *Nocturne* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. While we may regret that the projected piano piece for Sviatoslav Richter never materialized, *Night Piece* makes a characteristic envoi.

Debussy’s last sets of piano pieces range widely in mood and feeling. They are entitled *Préludes* and arranged in two groups of twelve – these four come from the first group, which was published in 1910. Each has an evocative title, and a specific atmosphere, which is immediately created by melodic, harmonic, or, quite often, rhythmic means in short self-contained musical ‘cells’. Unity and formal structure is achieved by combining and varying several such cells. Certain ideas and images recur in Debussy’s output: one is the Spain of his imagination, captured here in the guitar effects of ‘La sérénade interrompue’ (‘interrupted serenade’). Another is water: ‘La cathédrale engloutie’, with its echoes of medieval organum in its parallel fourths, fifths, and octaves, was inspired by the cathedral which, according to Breton legend, lies sunken under the waves at Ys. The blurred outlines here call to mind those of Monet’s paintings of Rouen cathedral – their effective realisation calls for extremely sensitive pedalling. ‘Minstrels’ hints at the new syncopated music that had lately begun to arrive from America in its suggestion of energetic physical movement. ‘La fille aux cheveux de lin’ (‘The girl with the flaxen hair’) takes its title from an 1852 poem by Leconte de Lisle. The varying treatments of its smooth opening melody summon up a beguiling range of piano sonorities.

Chopin’s third and last piano sonata dates from 1844 – his last year of relative happiness with the writer George Sand (Aurore Dudevant) before disagreements about her children and his own failing health began to take serious toll of his creative energy. The structure of the sonata is easy to follow – an initial movement contrasting a heroic first idea with a broad lyrical second subject; a quicksilver *Scherzo* with a thoughtful *Trio* section; a slow movement, and a *bravura* finale. Each movement demands virtuosic performance capabilities, though never merely in for show. In an age when spectacular and forceful playing were greatly admired, Chopin achieved most of his effects through a more subtle and restrained style. The Daily News of 10th July 1848 put it thus: ‘He accomplishes enormous difficulties, but so quietly, so smoothly, and with such constant delicacy and refinement that the listener is not sensible of their real magnitude. It is the exquisite delicacy, with the liquid mellowness of his tone, and the pearly roundness of his passages of rapid articulation which are the peculiar features of his execution?’.