

Seaford Music Society

Sunday 26th November at 3.00 pm

Cordelia Williams, Piano

Polish-Welsh-English pianist Cordelia Williams is recognised for the poetry, conviction and inner strength of her playing and the depth of her interpretations. She has performed all over the world, including concertos with the English Chamber Orchestra in Mexico City, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as recitals at Wigmore Hall, Royal Festival Hall and Beijing Concert Hall. She broadcasts regularly for BBC Radio 3.

Cordelia has become particularly known for her remarkable understanding of the music of Schubert and Schumann. Her recordings to date have focused on both these composers, as well as a 2018 album interweaving the music of Bach and Arvo Pärt: “a superb concept... brilliantly realised” (*International Piano*, 2019). Her 2021 album *Nightlight* received rave reviews across the board and was awarded Critics’ Choice by *International Piano*, and Recording of the Year by *MusicWeb International*. “Williams finds astonishing beauty in these pieces that had me shaking my head in wonder. Consummate artistry... touching real greatness” (*MusicWeb International*, 2021). *Cascade* was released in September 2023: “defiantly original, boldly expressive, a myriad of colours” (*All About the Arts*, 2023). She enjoys introducing the music she plays, as well as using imaginative programming to shed new light on well-known works and to tell new stories.

Cordelia is dedicated to forming unusual collaborations and creating innovative projects with other musicians and across disciplines. Alongside her performing career she gained a First in Theology from Clare College, Cambridge. Her curiosity towards humanity and faith led to her year-long project, *Between Heaven and the Clouds: Messiaen 2015*. In partnership with award-winning poet Michael Symmons Roberts, former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord Rowan Williams and artist Sophie Hacker, this ambitious series of events and performances explored the music and context of Messiaen’s *Vingt Regards sur l’Enfant-Jésus*. She is currently developing two unique cross-discipline collaborations which will reach the stage in 2024, and also enjoys a flourishing duo partnership with violinist Tamsin Waley-Cohen.

A former Piano Winner of BBC Young Musician of the Year, Cordelia welcomed her first son in 2017. He has accompanied her on several concert tours and was joined by a brother in 2019. Her first book, *The Happy Music Play Book*, was published in 2021 and received Book of the Year at the Presto Music Awards. It is written for parents of young children who, like her, want to make music a joyful part of everyday family life. In 2021 Cordelia spent time performing, teaching and filming in Kenya. Her documentary-film *On Being a Pianist in Kenya* (available on YouTube) explores the challenges facing young aspiring classical musicians in Nairobi; one of the pianists Cordelia mentors has since taken up a scholarship at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire (the first Kenyan to study piano at a European conservatoire). Together they featured on a BBC Radio 4 series this October, called *How to Spot Potential*. Cordelia can be found on YouTube at youtube.com/CordeliaWilliams, where she shares practice insights and videos about performing life.



Seaford Music Society gratefully acknowledges the support of Newberry Tully Estate Agents

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Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Six Bagatelles, Op.126

- I *Andante con moto cantabile e compiacevole*
- II *Allegro*
- III *Andante cantabile e grazioso*
- IV *Presto*
- V *Quasi Allegretto*
- VI *Presto: Andante amabile e con moto*

The name *Bagatelle* means a trifle, short and unpretentious, or, in the composer's own description, *Kleinigkeit*. Beethoven wrote three sets of *Bagatelles*, this final set dating from 1824, at about the same time as the *Ninth Symphony*. Typical of his late period, there is, however, no hint of the Romantic style which was becoming evident in the short piano pieces of Schubert. The pieces are longer and more difficult than those of the previous sets, but only these of Op.126 were intended from the beginning to be an entity, as evidenced by a note in his sketches where they are described as a "cycle". The set has a definite key scheme. The first two pieces are in G major and minor, and then they descend in intervals of a major third, or the enharmonic equivalent, through E-flat, B minor, and G major to E-flat. There are wide spacings between the hands in the first piece and suggestions of writing for strings. Fiery eruptions characterise the second and fourth, although the latter also has a long, musette-like trio. No. 3 is rich and sonorous. In comparison, the fifth piece is rather lightweight, and the final *Andante* is warm and expressive, beginning and ending with a humorously brusque *Presto*.

Programme note by John Dalton, courtesy of Making Music

Claude DEBUSSY (1862-1918)

Des Pas sur la Neige from Préludes Book 1, L.117 (No.6)

This is the sixth piece in the composer's first book of *Préludes*, written between late 1909 and early 1910, and is in the key of D minor. The title translates to "Footprints in the Snow". Along with *Danseuses de Delphes*, it was one of the preludes Debussy believed should be played "entre quatre-z-yeux" (literally "between four eyes") meaning intimately, as if privately.

The origin of the title is not known, but it has been suggested that it could have stemmed from a painting depicting a snowy landscape. This was an extremely popular backdrop among Impressionist artists like Claude Monet or Alfred Sisley; the latter painted *Snow at Louveciennes*. Furthermore, Debussy's inspiration from Russian composer Modest Mussorgsky is evident in this piece through his utilisation of a "block-like dissonant chord" just before the middle part of the piece.

Debussy dated this prelude December 27, 1909. The piece was first published in April 1910, along with the rest of his preludes from Book 1. It premiered later that year at the Salle Érard in Paris, with Debussy himself performing the work:

The piece begins with a three-note motif based around the tonic pedal of D, rising to E and then F, constantly shifting between dissonance and resolution. It has been suggested that the D–E and E–F pattern throughout the prelude symbolizes the footprints made in the snow by the right and left foot in alternating fashion. The middle section sees the utilization of complex dissonant chords leading up to the climax of the piece, which evokes a sense of sorrow. The opening motif then repeats itself with increased dissonance, before arriving at a new passage where the ascending melody withdraws from the "sighing" chords. Although the melody at the end is firmly rooted in G minor, the last chord is in the tonic of D minor. Coupled with the *morendo* and *piano pianissimo* dynamic markings, this gives the impression that the prelude simply flickers off without resolving itself.

Johannes BRAHMS (1833-1897)

Drei Intermezzi, Op.117

- I *Intermezzo in E-flat major (Andante moderato)*
- II *Intermezzo in B-flat minor (Andante non troppo)*
- III *Intermezzo in C-sharp minor (Andante con moto)*

At the very end of Brahms's composing career, a succession of piano pieces, Opp.116-119, appeared, over which glows the same mellow light found shining through the late clarinet works. We become aware of a change from the Brahms of the large-scale compositions; here he is confidential, almost sentimental, the memories softened by the years, as he speaks to us gently and wisely in a voice that he has not used before. Brahms had not written anything for solo piano since the Op.79 *Rhapsodies* of 1879. Now, in 1892-93, he is no longer haunted by the shadow of Beethoven but can let his style evolve naturally and trust his instinct to see that every detail finds its proper place.

Three *andantes* in a row may seem an unprofitable sequence for a listener, but Brahms provides adequate variety of treatment of his material so that each movement is sufficiently different. The first, in E-flat, is a lullaby with a rare poetic superscription from a folk-song collection: "Sleep softly, my child, in sweet repose. It grieves me to see you weep." The melody is effectively placed in an inner part. Then a slower, more thoughtful section in a minor key leads to a simple return of the opening tune. A serious atmosphere permeates the second piece, with a melody implied rather than revealed in the opening shadowy arpeggios. These yield a theme in the middle section that is cast in a warm D-flat major. After this the arpeggios return, spiralling down to a pedal-note F, which gives stability to the ending. In the final piece, in C-sharp minor, the colours are even darker. There is both an air of mystery and an undercurrent of anxiety. The middle section, in A major and marked *piu moto*, brings us into a crepuscular world lit by fitful glimmering half-lights. Then the darker music returns to draw the piece to an uneasy close.

Programme note courtesy of Making Music

COMFORT BREAK 15 MINUTES

There are toilets in the lobby at the back of the church, and downstairs via the stairs beside the stage. If you are not already a member of Seaford Music Society and would like to join, please see our Treasurer at the desk at in the entrance lobby. The cost of your ticket today will be credited towards your annual membership subscription.

Franz SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Piano Sonata in A Major, D959

- I *Allegro*
- II *Andantino*
- III *Scherzo: allegro vivace*
- IV *Rondo: allegretto*

Schubert wrote some twenty piano sonatas, some unfinished, and they are testimony to his great skill at writing for the keyboard. His three late masterpieces, of which this is the second, were all written in his last year, 1828, and were published posthumously in 1839. This is a pianistically challenging work of unusually wide emotional range. Its moods run the gamut from the heroic to the playful, featuring outbursts of musical vehemence that alternate with moments of poetic reflection. This span of emotional states is at its widest in the slow movement, which constitutes the dramatic centrepiece of the sonata.

The *Allegro* opens with an assertive theme featuring a climbing bass pattern beneath an immovable treble. No sooner has this theme been stated than Schubert begins to vary it. His second theme is a simple, soothing melody that also finds itself wandering immediately into developmental territory, thanks to a chromatically rising bass line figure that keeps interrupting the proceedings. The real development section, by contrast, is a chiming music box of steadily pulsing harmony chords shadowing the lyrical second theme as it wanders through an enchanted forest of harmonic modulations. The recapitulation is unremarkable except for its thoughtful coda and the poetic washes of harmonic colour with which it ends.

The *Andantino* second movement begins as a sad little barcarolle. Its shockingly spare texture and fretful obsession with the same few notes gives a hypnotic quality to its melodic self-absorption. After some 70 bars of harmonic stasis in the key of F-sharp minor, it drifts into a fantasy world, as rhythmically free and melodically wide-ranging as the opening section was monotonously repetitive and claustrophobically contained in scope. Musical violence, of a sort unprecedented in Schubert's previous piano works, then rages forth to create the image of a terrifying hallucination. Calm returns when the sad opening tune reappears, shadowed now with a pathetic echo in the treble above.

The following scherzo, *Allegro vivace*, is an acrobatic tour de force of register hops that mixes the dancelike character and graceful charm of a Chopin waltz with a mischievous sense of fun most evident in the cascading runs that unexpectedly interrupt the proceedings at regular intervals. The trio, however, is on its best behaviour, the soul of harmonic stability. But perhaps this civility is only tongue-in-cheek, its gentle hand-crossings a witty parody of the register hops of the main section of the scherzo.

The opening theme of the fourth movement sounds like a solemn processional hymn from a previous age, and indeed in harmonic layout and dignity of tone it echoes the well-known *St. Anthony Chorale* attributed to Haydn. In this context, its subsequent elaboration in florid counterpoint, with the melody in the tenor, comes as no surprise. The second theme, however, is a songful pianistic creation that delights in the rhythmic bounce of its repeated notes. Schubert's inventiveness in creating ear-tickling piano textures is extraordinary in this movement. Extraordinary as well is the dramatic series of chords that echo the harmonies of the first movement's opening bars.

Do come and join us downstairs after the concert for a cup of tea or coffee

Our next concert

Sunday 4th February 2024, 3.00 pm, at Seaford Baptist Church, Belgrave Road, Seaford

Acclaimed actor, playwright and director **Tama Matheson**, with members of the **London Mozart Players**, in a musical drama about Ludwig van Beethoven, '**I Shall Hear in Heaven**'.

Membership of the Society grants you free entry to this and all the remaining concerts this season without additional charge. Children and young adults (under 26) may also attend without charge (children under 14 must be accompanied by an adult). If you are not a member, you can purchase your concert ticket (costing £17.50) in advance from Newberry Tully Estate Agents in Church Street; Seaford Tourist Information Centre; online through TicketSource; or from our Treasurer, Paul Moore. Or, of course, you can become a member! To join, see Paul at the desk in the entrance foyer.

Additional benefits for members of Seaford Music Society

Receive a £3 discount on your ticket when attending Uckfield Music Club, Haywards Heath Music Society and Nicholas Yonge Society concerts. Simply produce your Seaford Music Society membership card when you pay at the door. Details of the concerts can be found on each organisation's website.

Uckfield Music Club (www.uckfieldmusicclub.uk): tickets £15 instead of £18 (subject to review)

Haywards Heath Music Society (www.haywardsheathmusicsociety.org.uk): tickets £12 instead of £15

Nicholas Yonge Society (www.nyslewes.org.uk): tickets £17 instead of £20