



Tuesday 20 January 2009

5.30pm-6.30pm

The Haldane Room

North Cloister, Wilkins Building

18-19-20

**THREE CENTURIES OF EUROPEAN
PIANO MUSIC**

J. S. Bach (1685-1750)

Partita No 2 in C minor (BWV 826), 1727

Sinfonia | Allemande | Courante | Sarabande | Rondeau | Capriccio

Donat Bayer

Ferenc Liszt (1811-86)

Vallée d'Obermann (S. 160), 1855

from *Années de pèlerinage - Première année: Suisse*

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Feuilles mortes, 1913

from *Préludes* (Book II),

Christopher Pluntke

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1913)

Valse Suite : Three-Fours (op. 71), 1909

Allegro Molto | Andante | Allegro Moderato | Andante | Allegro assai

Andrew Tait

J. S. Bach (1685-1750) *Partita No 2 in C minor* (BWV 826) 1727
Sinfonia | Allemande | Courante | Sarabande | Rondeau | Capriccio

For approximately one hundred years, from the late 16th century, the term *partita* was used in music not only to describe a set of variations on a theme but also to describe a suite, i.e. a collection of separate pieces. As a term to indicate variations, *partita* was already redundant by Bach's day but was still used to refer to a suite of pieces, and is considered by some to have been the most popular harpsichord genre of the time, mixing alternately fast and slow dance-inspired movements with so-called 'galanteries'. Such galanteries - 'burlesca', 'capriccio', etc. - do not appear in Bach's other great works for harpsichord, the *English Suites* and the *French Suites*. In addition, as in Bach's *English Suites*, his six *Partitas* all begin with a large-scale movement, each differently titled and each in a different style; here the opening movement is titled 'sinfonia' and is in three distinct, successively faster sections.

This partita belongs to a set of six that were published by Bach between 1726 and 1730. In 1731 all six appeared as Bach's opus 1, under the title *Erster Teil der Clavier-Übung*, 'keyboard practice – part one'. Thus Bach inaugurated what would become a series of four volumes published during the next ten years under the general title *Clavier-Übung*, which in addition to the *Partitas* contained some of his other best known keyboard works, such as the 'Italian' concerto (BWV 971), and the 'Goldberg' variations (BWV 988). The purpose of the *Clavier-Übung* was to represent the most popular and fashionable keyboard styles then known, and Bach was specific about the instruments he was writing for; volume 1 for a one-manual harpsichord; volumes 2 and 4 for a two-manual harpsichord; volume 3 for organ. Despite the *Partitas*' eighteenth-century origin as music for harpsichord they are now a staple feature in the repertoire of every serious pianist.

L. Donat Bayer was born in Istanbul in 1977. He studied piano at the Istanbul University State Conservatory from where he graduated in 1998. He completed his BA in piano at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University in 2003 under the supervision of Professor Hulya Tarcan, winning the Yamaha *Best Piano Performance* prize in 1999. In 2006 he received an MA degree in piano from the same university. During 2005-06 he was a staff member in the Music Department in Bogazici University. In 2006, he started a second Master's degree in music at City University London, completed with distinction in September 2007. He is currently a doctoral student at City University, under the supervision of Dr Christopher Wiley. His thesis is a study of women, performance and music, with particular emphasis on historically significant female author-functions in popular music.

Ferenc Liszt (1811-86) *Vallée d'Obermann* (S. 160) 1855, from *Années de pèlerinage - Première année: Suisse*

Années de pèlerinage, 'Years of Pilgrimage', is the overarching title given to three volumes of piano pieces that Liszt composed between 1835 and 1877. Book I *Première année: Suisse*, comprises a set of nine pieces (largely a revision of an earlier volume called *Album d'un voyageur* published in 1842). Each of the nine pieces was inspired by scenes or moods associated with Liszt's Swiss travels made between 1835 and 1839 with his then lover, Marie d'Agoult, a writer with the *nom de plume* Daniel Stern.

Of all the music in Book I, *La Vallée d'Obermann*, 'Obermann's Valley', is possibly the most serious in tone. Obermann is the eponymous hero of the epistolary novel of 1804 by Etienne Jeane Senancour, an imaginary collection of letters written by the melancholy Obermann who,

recognising his own inability to be and do what he wishes, is living in isolation in a lonely valley of the Jura Alps.

Printed with the music are quotations from the novel, as well as this, from Byron's *Childe Harold*:

Could I embody and unbosom now
That which is most within me, --could I wreak
My thoughts upon expression, and thus throw
Soul, heart, mind, passions, feelings, strong or weak,
All that I would have sought, and all I seek,
Bear, know, feel and yet breathe --into one word,
And that one word were Lightning, I would speak;
But as it is, I live and die unheard,
With a most voiceless thought, sheathing it as a sword. (Canto III 97)

The music moves from sadness and introspection at the outset to a brighter, if not quite radiant mood at the close, reflecting a philosophical rather than an emotional resolution of Obermann's inner turmoil

Franz Liszt was the only contemporary whose music Richard Wagner gratefully acknowledged as an influence upon his own. His lasting fame was created by extraordinary technical dexterity, an unbounded musical imagination, and a supreme instinct for garnering international publicity; hailed as a musical star and reviled as a scandalous libertine. Even today opinion is often sharply divided between those who consider Liszt to have been a profound visionary, and others who see him as a purveyor of excess. While the arguments rage, Liszt's music remains a cornerstone of the virtuoso 19th-century piano repertoire.

Claude Debussy (1862-1918) *Feuilles mortes*, 1913, from *Préludes* (Book II)
Lent et mélancolique

Although Debussy published his twenty-four *Préludes* in two sets (1910 and 1913) he never intended these relatively short pieces to be performed in a series. The music abandons traditional musical structures, to rely on the rhapsodic evolution of a simple melodic or harmonic idea. Each has its own sub-title, sometimes a word, sometimes an epigram, which is at once both certain and – on reflection - uncertain, e.g. *Voiles*, 'Sails/Veils'; *Le vent sur la plaine*, 'The wind on the plain'; *Des pas sur la neige*, 'Footprints in the snow'; *Brouillards*, 'Mists'; *Feuilles mortes*, 'Dead leaves'. These, when combined with the music itself, permit an imaginative rather than a purely intellectual or emotional response, typical of much of Debussy music - hence the oft-applied description to it of 'impressionist'. That said, the music itself is technically demanding and requires of the performer the utmost attention to detail.

Nowadays, Debussy must be regarded as being among the most important and influential musical figures of the early twentieth century.

Christopher Pluntke was born in 1982. He first took piano lessons at the age of 6 and organ lessons at the age of 14. His teachers were amongst others Thorsten Göbel (organ) and Professor Martin Dombrowski (piano). He worked as a church and concert organist and as a harpsichordist in various chamber music formations. In 2002, he began his studies at the Musikhochschule (College of Music) Wuerzburg where he studied music theory with piano as the main instrumental subject in the class of Professor Dr. H.C. Zsolt Gardonyi. In 2003, he founded the student

chamber choir *Vox Humana* (www.vox-humana-wuerzburg.de) which he conducted from 2003-08 performing up to five concerts per year throughout the whole of Germany. He graduated from the Wuerzburg College of Music with his *Diplom* in 2007. Christopher is currently a UCL doctoral student in the department of Electrical & Electronic Engineering.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1913) *Valse Suite : Three-Fours* (op. 71), 1909
Allegro Molto | Andante | Allegro Moderato | Andante | Allegro assai

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was born in Holborn, London, the illegitimate son of an African father (then in London from Sierra Leone to train as a doctor at Kings College), and an English mother. Recognised as a gifted musician from an early age, he enrolled at the Royal College of Music, London, aged just 15, where his composition teachers included Sir Charles Villiers Stanford and Sir Hubert Parry. Both men subsequently championed his work, and he was much admired by Elgar, being seen as the most talented young British composer of his generation. He was much sought after as a conductor at home and abroad, and was a teacher of composition at the Trinity College of Music and at the Guildhall School of Music.

Coleridge-Taylor died from pneumonia at the age of 37, and a sign of his national recognition can be deduced from the fact that King George V awarded his widow a sizeable annual pension, £100 per annum. Sadly, it was only after Coleridge-Taylor's death that his music reached its widest audience. The cantata *Hiawatha* (perhaps today his only remembered work) became something of a national obsession during the inter-war years, and was much loved by choral societies across the English-speaking world. This was due in part to an annual season of spectacularly staged performances that played to packed houses at the Royal Albert Hall in London between 1928 and 1939, in which Malcolm Sargent conducted the Royal Choral Society and orchestra - and 200 dancers! Now Coleridge-Taylor and his music languish in almost total obscurity.

Valse Suite is – as the title suggests – a series of triple-time movements inspired by the waltz. In the original piano version, heard here tonight, *Valse Suite* has no known performance history, except that parts of it, orchestrated by others, appeared in concert programmes during the 1920s.

Andrew Tait was born in Manchester, and studied for his undergraduate degree (piano, with organ and viola) at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London, followed by a postgraduate year of piano studies at the Franz Liszt Academy, Budapest, under Gyogy Kurtag. Indeed, Andrew has been remarkably fortunate to benefit from a distinguished line of piano teachers: Gordon Fergus-Thompson, James Gibb, Phyllis Sellick, Jean-Louis Steuerman and Edith Vogel. Andrew recently completed 'with distinction' an MMus (Piano Performance) degree at Trinity College of Music, London, where his teachers were Hilary Coates and Mikael Kazakevitch. Andrew is now preparing to begin doctoral research at Trinity in September 2009 on the piano music of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor.

Apart from his studies Andrew has a varied professional music career: as a school music teacher; as a member of the music staff at Morley College, London; as a much sought-after piano and organ accompanist; as an orchestral viola player. Andrew also runs a very successful private piano-teaching practice.