

DEJAN LAZIĆ

PIANO

**'A powerhouse performer
whose playing combines
strength with beauty.'**

– The Guardian

Wednesday 2 March 2016

7:30pm – Elisabeth Murdoch Hall

6.45pm – Pre-concert talk by Leigh Harrold

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This concert is being recorded for broadcast
on ABC Classic FM

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DURATION:

Two hours including one

20-minute interval

PROGRAM

CARL PHILIP EMMANUEL BACH

(b. Weimar, Germany, 1714 – d. Hamburg, Germany, 1788)

Fantasia in D (*Allegro*), Wq117/14 (1763)

Character piece, 'La Böhmer' (Murky. *Prestissimo*), Wq117/26 (1755)

Sonata in D minor, Wq69 (1747)

I *Allegro*

II *Andante*

III *Allegretto* (Theme and variations)

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

(b. Lowestoft, UK, 1913 – d. Aldeburgh, UK, 1976)

Holiday Diary, Op.5 (1934)

I Early morning bathe (*Vivace ma non troppo presto*)

II Sailing (*Andante comodo*)

III Funfair (*Allegro brilliantissimo*)

IV Night (*Molto lento e tranquillo, sempre rubato*)

INTERVAL: 20 MINUTES

DOMENICO SCARLATTI

(b. Naples, Italy, 1685 – d. Madrid, Spain, 1757)

Sonatas (1720-1757)

Sonata in D minor, K9 (*Allegro*)

Sonata in D, K430 (*Non presto ma a tempo di ballo*)

Sonata in E, K135a (*Allegro*)

PROGRAM

BÉLA BARTÓK

(b. Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary, 1881 – d. New York City, USA, 1945)

Mikrokosmos Volume Six (1939), Nos. 148-153: Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm

DOMENICO SCARLATTI

Sonata in E, K380 (*Andante comodo*)

Sonata in C, K420 (*Allegro*)

Sonata in F, K82 (*No tempo indication*)

BÉLA BARTÓK

Funeral March from *Kossuth* (transcribed for piano solo by the composer) (1905)

Rondos on Slovak Folk Tunes (1927)

I *Andante – Allegro molto*

II *Vivacissimo – Allegro non troppo*

III *Allegro molto – Meno mosso*

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Innovate, Assimilate, Educate

In any artistic pursuit, innovation and education seem to follow each other as day follows night. Whenever I think about the evolution of art, I imagine three people cartoonishly marching along a straight road in single file towards some unreachable destination. The leader (let's call her the 'Innovator') repeatedly says things like, 'Wow, I just drilled some holes in a buffalo antler and blew through the end and discovered it makes a cool sound. Hey, I think I just invented the horn.' She passes it back to the second-in-line – the 'Assimilator' – who examines it and says 'Awesome. I could play some rocking tunes on this but it'll take a bit of work. I think I'll devote nine hours a day to getting really good at it.' At this point, the third of the trio – the 'Educator' – examines the diameter of the horn's holes and the positions of the player's fingers and codifies it all in a manual. Later, the Innovator sticks three horns together which she can rapidly alternate between by using a complex system of valves and declares 'This isn't just a horn, it's the French horn'; the Assimilator is both delighted and despairing at the added range of notes he has at his disposal and the added time it will take him to master them; and the Educator frantically adds appendices to her manual discussing valve technique and chromatic scales.

And on it goes. We need to remember that everything needs time to develop. The Steinway Grand didn't magically appear fully-formed, seductively beckoning composers to write for its lush, resonant tone and whiplash-fast action. Instead, it evolved piecemeal as composers from Bach to Beethoven to Debussy began to write music that contained a message not realisable through the existing keyboard instruments of the day. Likewise, 'sonata form' emerged quite organically through a process of trial-and-error as composers worked out which musical structures held the greatest rhetorical power – its 'rules' were only standardised well after there were thousands of practical examples to reference.

The real excitement – the nexuses of music history, if you like – comes when the three roles of Innovator, Assimilator and Educator are present in the same extraordinary human being. In tonight's recital, Mr Lazić presents us with the music of four composers, each of whom embodied all three of these roles. Domenico Scarlatti and Carl Philip Emanuel Bach from the 18th century, together with Benjamin Britten and Béla Bartók from the 20th century, were not just masterful keyboardists – they were highly intelligent and inquisitive men who fully assimilated their musical lineage as good students, and then set about bending (and sometimes breaking) the rules they had learned in order to keep their art alive and constantly evolving. In choosing to showcase a myriad of miniatures from these composers tonight (25 short pieces in all), Lazić is presenting us with what amounts to a master class in compositional innovation – a multi-faceted sampler-pack containing bite-sized nuggets of genius.

Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach

(1714-1788) was the fifth child of Johann Sebastian and his first wife Maria Barbara. Carl's brother Wilhelm Friedmann and half-brothers Johann Christoph Freidrich Bach and Johann Christian were also composers of note. C.P.E.'s music forms a bridge between the Baroque and Classical eras, and is distinguished by its bold harmonies, unpredictable changes of mood and instrumental virtuosity, hallmarks of the *empfindsamer Stil* (roughly 'the style of emotive sensibility').

Moto perpetual: perpetual motion, pieces featuring fast, even, unbroken strings of notes.

The 'Wq' followed by a number appended to C.P.E. Bach's work refers to the thematic catalogue compiled by Belgian musicologist Alfred Wotquenne (1867-1939).

While J.S. Bach has earned his peerless place in musical history through perfecting musical forms that were considered archaic even in his own lifetime, his most famous son's fame rests on almost precisely the opposite approach.

C.P.E. Bach's music, while sometimes imperfect, takes us on a wildly experimental ride through new structures, new forms and, indeed, a whole new way of approaching composition, where heightened emotion and rhetoric narrative overrides considerations of proportion and refinement.

As if to illustrate this approach at its most extreme, Lazić presents us tonight with not just three different pieces by C.P.E. Bach, but three very different (and differently titled) approaches to form and structure. The **Fantasia in D**, Wq117/14 is a perfect curtain-raiser to tonight's recital – through a series of connected free-form gestures the pianist gets to know the keyboard and we, in turn, get to know the pianist. From no fixed meter to unyieldingly fixed meter we jump straight into the virtuosic, *moto perpetuo* whirl of the **Character Piece, 'La Böhmer'**, Wq117/26. Each of C.P.E. Bach's character pieces bears the name of an individual with whom he had shared intimate conversation. The subtitle 'murky' appended to *La Böhmer* is neither a slight on Böhmer nor on the nature of their chat, but rather refers to the 17th and 18th-century keyboard practice of writing a bass-line in broken octaves. Finally, the large scale **Sonata in D minor**, Wq69 specifically composed for a double-manual harpsichord, looks both forwards and backwards. In having the structural weight of the piece anchored towards the finale (which is longer than the first two movements

Chaconne: a work built upon a repeating (ostinato) bass line.

Domenico Scarlatti

(1685-1757) was the exact contemporary of J.S. Bach and Handel, and, like them, a virtuoso keyboard player and composer of great originality. He was also uniquely well-travelled for his time: from Naples to Rome, to London, Lisbon, Seville and finally Madrid. The music that he heard there colours his music: guitar-like figurations and tangy dissonances, folk scales and Spanish dances give his many sonatas their energy, wit and pathos.

combined), it pays homage to his father's own violin partita in D minor which ends with a monumental *chaconne*; however, the 'double-variation' form of the finale is an entirely new innovation (at least as far as using it to end a keyboard sonata goes), and points the way forward for composers such as Mozart who used an exact blueprint of this three-movement layout for his early 'Dürnitz' Sonata, K284.

Domenico Scarlatti and C.P.E. Bach both had to shoulder the burden of having famous dads. While Alessandro Scarlatti was a pioneer in the world of large-scale opera, his arguably now-more-famous son channelled his energies into the small, over and over and over again. With a profligacy that is almost unbelievable, his lasting legacy to the musical world is (at least) 555 single-movement works for solo keyboard. Labelled 'sonatas', their unceasing invention is astonishing – they now stand as a catalogue of the very latest innovations in harmonic exploration at the time, as well as showcasing a huge variety of textures and playing techniques in-line with the constantly evolving keyboard instruments of the day.

The 'K' numbers (after Ralph Kirkpatrick, Scarlatti's most committed scholar) sort this immense body of work into a rough chronological order. Although the exact compositional date of each individual sonata is not entirely clear, it's likely that the bulk of them were composed as a result of Scarlatti's devotion to the keyboard education of Princess Maria Barbara of Lisbon, later the Queen of Spain, which lasted from 1720 right through to his death in 1757.

Pastorale: a Baroque and Classical style in compound metre (usually in 6. 9 or 12 quaver beats to a bar) with a swaying, tender and rustic quality evocative of the shepherd's pipe and an idealised life in the fields, often with sustained bass notes imitating the drone of a bagpipe. The most famous pastoral work is, of course, Beethoven's Sixth Symphony.



Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) remains one of England's most important composers, particularly in the field of opera where he left a profound and lasting legacy. His operas and songs are cornerstones of the 20th-century repertoire, especially in English-speaking countries. His non-vocal works demonstrate an acute ear for the colour and idiom of the instrument, animated by the same sense of drama that makes his operas so compelling.

Tonight we will hear a wide-ranging cross-section of the **sonatas**, beginning with a bracket that displays three different takes on the concept of 'triple-time': **K9** is a gently lilting *pastorale*; **K430** is a lively dance – perhaps a waltz or a racy fandango, while **K135** is an exercise in constant triplet motion which also showcases a variety of ornaments, hand-crossings and spicy dissonances. After interval comes two weightier entries – **K380** with its *maestoso* (majestic) dotted rhythms, and **K420** beginning with the unmistakable *rat-a-tat-tat* of a military snare drum. Lazić's final selection from Scarlatti's catalogue is also his most brief – **K82** returns to the playfulness of the earlier bracket, but with a virtuosity that burns through from first note to last, with overlapping entries of the melody in a breathless game of catch.

Like Scarlatti's sonatas, **Britten's *Holiday Diary*** (1934) and Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* both sprang out of a marvellous marriage of innovation and education. For Britten, it was a nod backwards to his piano teacher at the Royal College, the composer Arthur Benjamin, to whom the first edition of the work is dedicated. Composed around the same time as the much-loved *Simple Symphony* Op. 4, *Holiday Diary* is a suite of four small-scale movements as unpretentious and sparkly as the title suggests, although there are several hints (particularly in the concluding 'Night') of the compositional heavyweight Britten was to eventually become. Hauntingly, 'Night' reprises fragments of the themes we heard earlier, in sleepy, nostalgic recollection.

Béla Bartók (1881-1945) is a key figure in 20th-century music, refreshing the late-Romantic, expressionist style of composers like Schoenberg and Stravinsky with the rhythmic and harmonic vigour of Hungarian folk music (rural peasant music as distinct from the commercial 'gypsy' music popular in urban areas). As a scholarly collector of folk tunes he pioneered the field of ethnomusicology while further assimilating the forms, scales and spirit of folk music into his own. His later works – the ones most frequently performed – represent a synthesis of modernist western classical music with eastern European folk traditions.



Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* may have started out as small-scale, but perhaps no-one realised the hugely important, large-scale work it would eventually become. While Britten wrote *Holiday Diary* as a gift from student to teacher, here Bartók gives a gift from teacher to student – and, as posterity would have it, to all piano students since. The original recipient of the first *Mikrokosmos* pieces was Bartók's young son Peter. The pieces began life as impromptu scribbblings composed *in situ* by Bartók to reinforce concepts covered in Peter's early piano lessons and, indeed, one could walk away from their very first piano lesson being able to play piece No.1 in *Mikrokosmos* – a cute little eight-bar exercise where the right and left hand are in unison throughout and don't go outside the basic five-finger position. As Peter got better, the pieces got harder, and now the complete *Mikrokosmos* – spanning 153 pieces divided into six volumes – stands as one of history's great progressive piano methods.

The final six pieces (**Numbers 148 to 153**) featured tonight, subtitled '**Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm**' are an ebullient and buoyant collection of six miniatures in which Bartók also incorporates the fruits of his exhaustive research into the folk music of his native Eastern Europe. With their driving ostinati, complex time signatures (No.152's quirky metre comes from its groupings of 2+2+2+3 quaver beats per bar), dense counterpoint and rapid traversals of the entire keyboard, these concluding Bulgarian Dances are firmly the territory of professional pianists and designed for the concert hall – we have indeed moved a long way away from the basic five-finger position!

Lajos Kossuth (1802-1894) was a Hungarian lawyer, journalist and politician who led the country as Governor-president during the revolution of 1848-9, the beginning of a war of independence from the Austrian Hapsburg Empire. Forced into exile, Kossuth died in Turin, Italy, his body taken to Budapest and buried amid the mourning of the nation. Bartók's symphonic poem sketches episodes from Kossuth's life, including the battle between the Austrians and the Hungarians.

The dances are individually untitled, headed-up only with metronome marks; it is as if in this final group of pieces, Bartók felt he had achieved a pure distillation of his late style, free of clutter and distracting detail. In this respect, *Mikrokosmos* is not just a piano tutor – it is a very public diary tracing Bartók's compositional maturation.

Lazić's recital ends tonight with two earlier entries from Bartók's catalogue. If in *Mikrokosmos* he is the Educator, then in *Kossuth* Bartók is the Assimilator. We don't hear much these days of Bartók's compositional efforts before he began his musicological forays into Eastern European folk-music, but his early politically-charged symphonic poem *Kossuth* shows a full absorption of the expressionistic techniques of his mentor Richard Strauss. His own piano transcription of the **Funeral March** from the work is dense and brooding, with a Romantic sensibility not often associated with his later works. Remarkably, most of the complex textures of Bartók's original orchestration remain preserved, making life incredibly difficult for the pianist who often has to play entire inner melodies with just the right-hand thumb. The work also owes a debt to earlier Russian masters such as Mussorgsky with its circular motifs of grief, exploitation of ancient modes and a dense exploration of the lower half of the piano keyboard.

Rondo: a form with a repeating refrain alternating with contrasting thematic material.

Finally, we are presented with Bartók the Innovator. The **Three Rondos on Slovak Themes** are tiny experiments in virtuosity, representing one of his first brilliant syntheses of so-called 'low' folk-music with 'high' art music. Like tonight's C.P.E. Bach Sonata, it is a work that stands at a crossroads – it is a departure from the comforting, familiar language of *Kossuth*, while sowing the seeds for the as-yet-unrealised masterpiece *Mikrokosmos*.

And so tonight's rapid tour through musically innovative genius ends, perhaps appropriately, with a cliff-hanger. These three unassuming rondos can in some ways symbolise the latent potential in all art and, indeed, the wide range of potential choices that are available to all of us whenever we reach a fork in life's road. We can be grateful tonight, at least, that when presented with such a fork, these four composers always chose the road less travelled.

© Leigh Harrold 2016

Leigh Harrold is a Melbourne-based concert pianist currently on the faculty of the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM); he enjoys writing about music almost as much as playing it.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

‘A brilliant pianist and a gifted musician full of ideas and able to project them persuasively.’

GRAMOPHONE MAGAZINE

Dejan Lazić



Dejan Lazić's fresh interpretations of the repertoire have established him as one of the most unique and unusual soloists of his generation. He appears with such orchestras as the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, NDR Sinfonieorchester Hamburg, Netherlands Philharmonic, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic, Swedish Radio, Danish National, Chicago Symphony, Atlanta Symphony and the Australian, Netherlands and Basel Chamber Orchestras. Lazić enjoys a significant following in the Far East appearing with NHK Symphony, Yomiuri Nippon, Sapporo Symphony, Seoul Philharmonic and Hong Kong Philharmonic, amongst others. He has built close collaborations with some of the most sought after conductors including Giovanni Antonini, Lionel Bringuier, Iván Fischer, Andris Nelsons, Vasily Petrenko, Robert Spano, John Storgårds, Krzysztof Urbanski and Osmo Vänskä.

Recent highlights include Lazić's return to play with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, a two-week period at Indianapolis Symphony performing both Brahms concerti, concerts and recordings with NDR Sinfonieorchester Hamburg, BBC Philharmonic, a return to Trondheim Symphony and, further afield, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, Auckland Philharmonia and Adelaide Symphony. In 2016 Lazić returns to perform with the Helsinki Philharmonic giving the world premiere of a new concerto by Jaakko Kuusisto, and he performs his arrangement of Brahms' Violin Concerto as a piano concerto with Düsseldorfer Symphoniker. He also makes his debut with Boston Symphony at Tanglewood Festival, under Andris Nelsons.

As a recital artist, he will appear at such venues as Wigmore Hall, Gilmore Festival, Le Poisson Rouge in New York and here at Melbourne Recital Centre. He has also undertaken trio performances with Sol Gabetta and Martin Frost in 2015, including at Schubertiade Hohenems.

With Channel Classics he has released a dozen recordings, including his critically acclaimed Liaisons series; the latest of which couples together C.P.E. Bach and Britten. His live recording of Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No.2 with London Philharmonic Orchestra/Kirill Petrenko received the prestigious German Echo Klassik Award 2009. A recording of the Beethoven Triple Concerto was also recently released to critical acclaim, for Sony Music. Lazić's next release will be a solo recital disc of works by Franz Liszt, for Onyx Classics.

Selected discography

'Liaisons', Volume 3

C.P.E. Bach & Britten
Channel Classics CCSSA
31611

Beethoven

Piano Concerto No.4,
Sonatas Nos.14 & 31
with Australian Chamber
Orchestra / Richard Tognetti
Channel Classics CCSSA
30511

Brahms Arr. Lazić

Piano Concerto No.3 in D
after Violin Concerto, Op.77
with Atlanta Symphony
Orchestra / Robert Spano
Channel Classics CCSSA
29410

'Liaisons', Volume 1

Scarlatti & Bartók
Channel Classics CCSSA
23407

Dejan Lazić's compositions are receiving increased recognition, and he was recently signed as a composer by Sikorski Music Publishing Group. His arrangement of Brahms' Violin Concerto as a piano concerto was premiered with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra in 2009 and has enjoyed much ongoing success, at BBC Proms, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Hamburg Easter Festival, Chopin Festival Warsaw, in both Americas and in Japan. Lazić is performing his 'Piano Concerto in Istrian Style' (2014) twice more this year and will have his first orchestral work, a tone poem, premiered in 2016/2017.

Born into a musical family in Zagreb, Croatia, Lazić grew up in Salzburg, Austria, where he studied at the Mozarteum. He now lives in Amsterdam.

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