



**PROGRAMME  
NOTES  
28th October 2017**

## **Michael McHale (Piano)**

### **Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

#### **Sonata in C sharp minor, Op. 27, No. 2 (Moonlight Sonata)**

The Moonlight Sonata, originally entitled *Sonata quasi una fantasia* (Sonata almost a fantasy) and dedicated to Countess Giulietta Guicciardi, is one of Beethoven's most popular piano compositions. The name comes from the remarks made in 1832 by the German music critic Ludwig Rellstab, who likened the effect of the first movement to that of moonlight shining upon Lake Lucerne. Within ten years, the name Moonlight Sonata (*Mondscheinsonate*) was being used in all publications. This Sonata, particularly the third movement, is thought to have been the inspiration for Frédéric Chopin's *Fantaisie-Improptu*, which was actually a tribute to Beethoven.

The first movement (*Adagio sostenuto*) in C flat minor opens with an octave in the left hand and a triplet figuration in the right. A melody that Hector Berlioz called a "lamentation" is played mostly by the right hand against an accompanying ostinato ("obstinate" or repeated) triplet rhythm. It was already very popular in Beethoven's day, to the point of exasperating the composer himself, who remarked to Czerny, "Surely I've written better things." The second movement (*Allegretto*) is a scherzo and trio, a moment of relative calm written in D flat major. The stormy final movement (*Presto agitato*) in C flat minor in sonata form is the weightiest of the three, and has many fast arpeggios (or broken chords) and strongly accented notes, and an effective performance demands lively and skilful playing. Beethoven's heavy use of *sforzando* (suddenly with force) notes, with just a few strategically located *fortissimo* passages, creates the sense of a very powerful sound in spite of the predominance of piano markings throughout.

## **Frédéric François Chopin (1810- 1849)**

### **1. Waltz in C sharp minor, Op. 64, No. 2 (1847)**

Chopin dedicated this piece, the second in Op. 64 and the companion to the Minute Waltz (No.1), to Madame Nathaniel de Rothschild. It consists of three main themes. Theme A tempo is giusto chordal with a walking pace feel. Theme B, *più mosso* (faster), is a theme stated in running eighth notes, with all harmony in the left hand. Theme C, *più lento* (slower), is a *sostenuto* in the parallel key of C flat minor. The overall layout of the piece is A B C B A B. In an orchestrated version, it forms part of the ballet *Les Sylphides* (a short, non-narrative *ballet blanc*).

### **2. Mazurka in A minor, Op. 67, No. 4 (published in 1855)**

The last of the four Mazurkas in Opus 67 begins in the key of A major. It is comprised of three major sections and an ending that repeats the first two, suggesting a waltz like feel. However, in his typical “improvisatory-sounding” fashion, Chopin avoids the dance feel, instead playing with the tempo like taffy. Although this piece is rather short, it is still very beautiful but has much repeated material, forcing the performer to use much creativity to prevent repetition and boredom to set in.

### **3. Ballade in F Minor, Op. 52, No. 4 (1843)**

This piece, dedicated Madame Rothschild, is considered the greatest of Chopin’s four ballades and generally the epitome of romantic music. The ballade was said to be inspired from Mickiewicz’s “*Budri*”, a story of a father sending his sons to fight the enemy but ending up with three wedding feasts. The main Slavic theme in F minor is so haunting and mysterious, yet a little bit sad, and is slightly modified and repeated before a calming and serene octave section. The fieriest passage of rolling arpeggios concludes this most dramatic ballade with a ‘triple forte’ bass F and four massive ending chords.

#### **4. Nocturne in E flat major, Op. 9, No. 2 (1832)**

This piece, dedicated to Madame Camille Pleyel, is regarded the most famous of Chopin's three nocturnes. It is in rounded binary form (A, A, B, A, B, A) with coda, C. It opens with a legato melody, mostly played piano, which is heard again three times, and also includes a subordinate melody, which is played with rubato. It is reflective in mood until it suddenly becomes passionate near the end. The new concluding melody begins softly but then ascends to a high register and is played forcefully in octaves, eventually reaching the loudest part of the piece, marked fortissimo. After a trill-like passage, the excitement subsides, and the nocturne ends calmly.

❧ ❧ INTERVAL ❧ ❧

## **Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky (1839-1881)**

### **Pictures at an Exhibition (1874)**

This work in ten movements was inspired by a visit to an art exhibition, each movement representing one of the drawings or artworks on display, interspersed with a recurring “Promenade” theme, or intermezzo, that represents a visitor, the composer himself strolling through the exhibition. It was a memorial to his friend, the Russian artist Viktor Hartmann, who had died in 1873 at age 39. He completed this lengthy and fiendishly difficult suite for solo piano in 1874, but at the time of Mussorgsky’s death in 1881 from alcoholism, the piece had been neither performed nor published. His friend Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov tidied up the manuscript and had it printed in 1886.

After the opening “Promenade,” the first four movements, are: “The Gnome,” a depiction of an awkward dwarf conveyed through irregular rhythms and forceful outbursts; “The Old Castle,” a solemn and lyrical portrayal of a medieval troubadour singing on the grounds of a grand castle; “Tuileries,” a sprightly sketch of children playing in the Tuileries Gardens in Paris; and “Cattle,” a ponderous characterization of the lumbering of a large Polish ox cart. The fifth movement, “The Ballet of Unhatched Chicks in Their Shells,” represents a costume design by Hartmann for a children’s ballet. The sixth scene evokes an image of “Two Jews: One Rich, One Poor” through the interplay of a strident melody in the lower register and a twittering chant-like theme in the upper. The folksy and cheerful quality of the seventh movement, “The Market at Limoges,” is neutralized by the eighth, “The Catacombs,” which casts an eerie shadow with ominous chords and variations on the recurring intermezzo. The last two scenes are the most renowned. “The Hut on Fowl’s Legs” is a nightmarish portrayal of the cackling witch Baba-Yaga looking for her prey. She charges, bounding in a virtuosic passage in octaves, right into the tenth and final picture, “The Great Gate of Kiev.” With a depiction of Hartmann’s sketch of a proposed city gate topped by cupolas in which carillons ring, Mussorgsky brings the piece to a majestic close.

## **Musician**

Born in Belfast in 1983, Michael McHale started learning the piano at age seven, followed by cello lessons at the City of Belfast School of Music. He had a varied education at Cambridge University and the Royal Academy of Music.

He has established himself as one of Ireland's leading pianists, and has developed a busy international career as a solo recitalist, concerto soloist and chamber musician. He has performed as a soloist with many orchestras including the Minnesota, Hallé, Moscow Symphony and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestras, and all five of the major Irish orchestras, and at the Tanglewood Festival, Wigmore Hall in London, Berlin Konzerthaus, Suntory Hall in Tokyo, Lincoln Center in New York, Symphony Hall in Boston and Pesti Vigadó in Budapest.

His critically acclaimed solo album, *The Irish Piano*, was released in 2012 by RTÉ lyric fm and selected as 'CD of the Week' by the critic Norman Lebrecht. His many other solo releases include *Schubert: Four Impromptus on Ergodos*, *Miniatures and Modulations on Grand Piano*, and a first orchestral album, *Irish Piano Concertos*, Delos, Nimbus Alliance, Champs Hill, Lorelt, Louth CMS and seven duo recital albums on Chandos with clarinetist Michael Collins

Winner of the Terence Judd / Hallé Award in 2009, Michael was also awarded the Brennan and Field Prizes at the 2006 AXA Dublin International Piano Competition, the 2005 Camerata Ireland/Accenture Award, and in 2016 a Major Individual Award from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

Michael collaborates regularly with Sir James Galway, Michael Collins, Patricia Rozario, Dame Felicity Lott, the McGill/McHale Trio and Camerata Pacifica.

**This concert was sponsored by Gill Smyth  
and is dedicated to the memory of Antony  
Copley who died in July 2016.**

**He greatly enjoyed attending our concerts  
and was a good friend of Whitstable  
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