



Wednesday July 12th - 1:10pm

Jo Giovani (piano)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)	Piano Sonata No. 21 in C major, Op. 53 'Waldstein'
Claude Debussy (1862-1918)	Ballade
Leos Janacek (1854-1928)	Zdenka Variations
Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)	Improvisations (no. 12, 13, 14, 15)

Presented in association with the Guildhall School of Music and Drama

Suggested donation £5



St James's Church would welcome a donation of £5, or any amount that you feel able to give. Donations can be made in cash in the basket on your way out, or by tap donation at the machines at our exits.

Jo Giovani: born in Indonesia, Jo studied at Methodist Charles Wesley Music School and later attended the Royal Academy of Music under the tutelage of Amandine Savary. Her previous teachers have included Prof. Dr. Johannes Sebastian Nugroho and Feirst Tan. She was generously supported by the Alice Payne Scholarship during her studies at the Academy and graduated with first class honours in 2019. She subsequently pursued her postgraduate studies with Philip Jenkins at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, receiving the Concert Recital Diploma for exceptional performance in her end of year exam and graduated with first class honours in 2021. Jo is now undertaking the Artist Diploma course at the same institution, studying with Prof. Joan Havill. She is generously supported by the Guildhall School Scholarship and her dear sponsors Dorothy and Peter Tigg.

Jo is a previous Derek Butler Award holder of the Munster Musical Trust and an award winner of the Help Musicians UK charity. She also won the highest award from the Craxton Memorial Trust in 2019. She has performed in concert venues such as Southwark Cathedral, St Martin-in-the-Fields, Barbican Conservatory, Milton Court, and Craxton Studios. Her competition successes include First Prize in the 2013 Semarang Open Piano Competition and the Veranza Piano Competition in both 2007 and 2012.

She is also the second prize winner of the 3rd Asia International Piano Competition, the fourth-prize winner of the 3rd International Alberti Piano Competition in 2012 and she recently won the 2022 Guildhall School's Romantic Piano Prize. It has just been confirmed that she will return as a Piano Junior Fellow at the Guildhall School for the academic year 2023-2024.

She has had masterclasses with Boris Berman, Bengt Forsberg, Kathryn Stott, Steven Osborne, and Daniel Blumenthal. In addition to her work as a soloist, she is also a keen chamber musician and is especially interested in woodwind + piano ensembles. Jo is particularly fascinated by the piano music of Leoš Janáček (having performed all his solo piano works) and Francis Poulenc! She is also a champion of contemporary music, most recently performing in the world premiere of Errollyn Wallen's Piano Concerto (version for two pianos) with American pianist Sarah Cahill in the Barbican Conservatory.

PROGRAMME NOTES

Piano Sonata no. 21 in C major, Op. 53 'Waldstein' (1804) Ludwig van Beethoven

Named after its dedicatee, Count von Waldstein, this quasi-symphonic sonata is one of Beethoven's grandest works for the piano. The composer sets fierce demands on both the instrument and performer, using an expanded keyboard range and bursting with technical demands such as extended pedal trills and an infamous octave glissando. The piece begins to throb with pianissimo C major chords, an energetic impulse which persists unto the end of the first movement, interrupted only by occasional reflections which are inevitably drowned out by a return of the inexorable rhythm. A stark introductory second movement (presaging both the Fourth Piano Concerto and the late piano sonatas) stops the sonata in its tracks. At last, this brief moment of stillness melts into the heavenly warmth of the beginning of the rondo which has earned the piece a second title of 'L'Aurora' or 'Dawn'. This final movement explodes with vitality, exploring multiple iterations of the theme before hurtling towards the end in a dazzling prestissimo romp.

Ballade (Slave) (1891, revised 1903) **Claude Debussy**

In the early 1890s, Debussy had yet to develop the highly personal style of piano writing and economy of means which would result in masterpieces such as *Estampes*, *Images*, and the two books of *Preludes*. Unfortunately, this has led to the woeful neglect of many early piano pieces in favour of their more recognisably Debussyan successors. One such work, now rarely seen on the concert platform, is the *Ballade Slave*. Although Debussy would remove the 'Slavic' epithet in 1903, the piece is nevertheless imbued with certain Russian tinges, betraying an inspiration from Balakirev and experiences from the time the composer spent in Russia in the household of Madame von Meck, the sponsor and close friend of Tchaikovsky. Although more Romantic in style than his later pieces, certain harmonic inflections betray what is to come, and the lightness of pedalled textures reveal a growing obsession with what he called 'the art of turning the pedal into a kind of breathing'.

Zdenka Variations **Leoš Janáček**

A far cry from the experimental style of *Vzpomínka*, this set of variations is the composer's first extant complete piece. He described it as his first Opus and enthusiastically dedicated it to his former piano student Zdenka, who would later become his long-suffering wife. The melody of the theme, Schumannesque in its simplicity, undergoes various transformations; gracefully lilting in the first variation, rushing with muscular vitality in the second, and playfully bounding in the third. In the fourth, fifth, and sixth we are introduced to far greater harmonic complexity and an almost Brahmsian solemnity before a whimsical seventh variation bring us back to the opening theme and Janáček's first piano work finishes with an air of youthful energy and triumphant grandeur.

Improvisations 12-15, Fifteen Improvisations **Francis Poulenc**

Written over a period of 27 years, each of the Fifteen Improvisations abides by its own arbitrary rules of harmony, melody, structure, and style. Together, they offer a remarkable insight into the composer's musical world, most eschewing titles in favour of personalised dedications to people whom Poulenc admired. The twelfth improvisation doubles both as a dedication to Edwige Feuillère, an actress with whom Poulenc collaborated, and as a jolly tribute to the great Schubert himself. Written much later, the pensive numbers thirteen and fourteen are given to Madame August Lambiotte, a close friend of Poulenc, and Henri Hell, Poulenc's first biographer. Finally, the last improvisation of the set pays homage to Edith Piaf, the great French chanteuse; throughout this movement, snatches of her famous standard 'Autumn Leaves' can be heard sung with heartfelt devotion. Poulenc was a great admirer of popular music, often stressing the importance of staying true to 'one's small personal song'. With these improvisations, he seems to have achieved just that.