

Ian Pace (piano): *The Beethoven Project*, Saturday 5 April 7.30pm, Unitarian Chapel

Beethoven: Sechs Lieder von Goethe (transcribed by Franz Liszt)

Liszt collected his Beethoven Goethe settings from two different sets of songs and from the incidental music to *Egmont*, opus 84. These are imaginative transcriptions which depart from Beethoven's text only to avoid fussiness or to supply variety with repeated verses—to excellent effect in the 'Song of the Flea'. Mignon's Song (from *Wilhelm Meister*) has been set too often to require much introduction: 'Do you know the land where the lemons blossom ...'. 'With a Painted Ribbon' exploits the conceit of a ribbon of flowers and leaves in the wind contrasted against the bond of love. 'Joyful and Sorrowful' (—a text which, like 'Mignon's Song', Liszt also set—is the second of Clara's songs from *Egmont*, saying that happiness can only come from love. 'Once upon a time there was a King'—Mephistopheles' 'Song of the Flea' from *Faust* Part I—deserves to be as well known in Beethoven's setting as it is in Mussorgsky's. 'Bliss of Sadness' extols the tears of eternal love, and 'Strike the Drum'—Clara's first song from *Egmont* sings of her wish to be a man so that she could join her beloved in battle.

Leslie Howard

Michael Finnissy: English Country-Tunes (I-III)

Michael Finnissy's music is intricate in texture but strongly built on the basis of clearly perceptible and well-proportioned contrasts between the aggressive and the restrained. *English Country-Tunes* was composed in 1977, when Finnissy was 31, and its style may strike listeners weaned on Xenakis, or the earlier Boulez and Stockhausen, as conforming almost too uncritically to the expressionistic precepts of these masters. Anyone anticipating Graingerish essays in flamboyant folkishness will soon realize that they have been led up the garden path but, with luck, they won't mind too much. The tunes identified by Finnissy's titles—"Green meadows", "The seeds of love", and so on—might ultimately be revealed if every one of the layers of transformation were stripped away. But there remains a certain Satie-esque spirit in the association of such evocative labels with such uncompromising music.

Arnold Whittle

Ian Pace will be playing the first three movements: *Green Meadows*; *Midsummer Morn* and *I'll give my love a garland*.

Steve Crowther: *Three Musical Tributes*

Rock with Stock – the title references the influence of Karlheinz Stockhausen on The Beatles, who included his face on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. But the content is loosely derived from the rhythmic blueprint of his early compositional marker, *Kreutzspiel*.

A Study in Glass – a short homage to the great minimalist composer Philip Glass.

Louis' Angry Blues is not a musical tribute to the legendary Louis Armstrong. While it's true that the groundbreaking 1925 and 1928 Hot Five and Hot Seven sessions were undoubtedly revolutionary, capturing the raw, everyday crudities of blues and infusing New Orleans Street humour into song, as described by Catherine Russell. (Listen to *Potato Head Blues*, featuring the peerless Johnny Dodds on clarinet.) The tribute is actually to the great Louis Andriessen, a composer who doesn't do *Blues* but certainly does *angry*. A radical with Marxist sympathies, I recall a Late Music Ensemble performance of his iconic *Workers Union* (1975). This melodically indeterminate piece, "for any loud-sounding group of instruments," is raw, energetic, and undeniably angry. Steve Crowther

Interval

Beethoven Symphony No. 6 (transcribed by Franz Liszt)

Liszt had a great success with the Sixth Symphony from the beginning. It was probably the first of the Beethoven symphonies that he set himself to transcribe, and he played at least the last three movements at many a public concert. Beethoven completed the work at about the same time as the previous symphony, in 1808. The historical details – and the title-page – of Liszt's transcription are more or less identical to those for the Fifth Symphony. The greatest problem facing the interpreter of Liszt's transcription is the preservation of outward peace when the hands are being put through contortions, frequently involving the quiet stretching of elevenths. But that said, the Sixth remains perhaps the most congenial of all of Liszt's symphonic transcriptions from a pianistic point of view.

In the 'Awakening of joyful feelings upon arrival in the countryside' (Liszt gives only French titles in the first version) one revels in the joy of finding all of Beethoven's textures so faithfully reconceived in such grateful writing. And not a ripple or birdsong is missed in the 'Scene by the Brook' – to the extent of some dangerous left-hand stretches simultaneous with combined trills and melodies in the right hand. And tranquil athleticism is the only way to describe the requirements at the recapitulation with its added clarinet and violin arpeggios.

Liszt apparently told Berlioz that he played the second eight bars of the 'Happy gathering of the country folk' slightly slower because they represented the old peasants – in contrast with the young peasants at the opening. Few conductors would gamble their reputations upon such a risk in performance, but it seems like an excellent idea to have in mind whilst performing the piece. High points of the transcription include the wonderfully mad bit with the fiddle ostinato, the oboe melody and the artless bassoon – quite a challenge at the keyboard – and the whole 2/4 section which imitates the bagpipe and brings the flute counterpoint into much finer prominence than most orchestral balance usually achieves.

'The Thunderstorm' is an inspired piece of virtuoso writing. Just as Beethoven extends the demands on his orchestra in the interest of special effects, so does Liszt mirror them in equivalent pianistic devices, and the relief when the storm subsides is almost tangible in both cases.

Similarly, the 'Shepherds' Song. Joyful, thankful feelings after the storm' finds Liszt at one with Beethoven's spirit. In the matter of the text there is one serious blip at bar 225

where Liszt has mistakenly mis-transcribed the harmony (the mistake carries over unnoticed into both the later editions of the work): he has a simple dominant seventh where he ought to have an F instead of an E. (The F is restored in the present reading.) There are many differences of varying importance between the first and final versions of this transcription, far too many to detail here, but at least two in the finale deserve pointing out: Liszt's conscious decision to make a clean final cadence and sacrifice the last falling semiquavers of the basses is only found in the final version; and the problems raised by the transcription of the last full statement of the main theme from bar 133 produced several quite different solutions, although this first one is the closest to Beethoven's score.

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Biographies

Ian Pace is a pianist of long-established reputation, specialising in the farthest reaches of musical modernism and transcendental virtuosity, as well as a writer and musicologist focusing on issues of performance, music and society and the avant-garde. He was born in Hartlepool, England in 1968, and studied at Chetham's School of Music, Queen's College, Oxford and, as a Fulbright Scholar, at the Juilliard School in New York. His main teacher, and a major influence upon his work, was the Hungarian pianist György Sándor, a student of Bartók.

Based in London since 1993, he has pursued an active international career, performing throughout Britain, Europe and the US. His absolutely vast repertoire of all periods focuses particularly upon music of the 20th and 21st Century, including a wide range of works by contemporary British, French, German and Italian and other composers as well as the 'classics' of modern music by composers such as Boulez, Stockhausen, Barraque, Xenakis, Ligeti, Nono, Kagel and Cage. He has given world premieres of over 100 pieces for solo piano, including works by Richard Barrett, Luc Brewaeys, William Brooks, Aaron Cassidy, James Clarke, James Dillon, Gordon Downie, Pascal Dusapin, Brian Ferneyhough, Michael Finnissy (whose complete piano works he performed in a landmark 6-concert series in 1996), Christopher Fox, Volker Heyn, Wieland Hoban, Hilda Paredes, Alwynne Pritchard, Horatiu Radulescu, Frederic Rzewski, Thomas Simaku, Howard Skempton, Gerhard Stäbler, Serge Verstockt, Jay Allan Yim and Walter Zimmermann. He is renowned for ambitious and ingenious programming, and for his ability to surmount the most transcendental of pianistic challenges.

Michael Finnissy was born in Tulse Hill, London in 1946. He was a Foundation Scholar at the Royal College of Music, London, where he studied composition with Bernard Stevens and Humphrey Searle, and piano with Edwin Benbow and Ian Lake. Afterwards he studied in Italy with Roman Vlad.

Finnissy created the music department of the London School of Contemporary Dance and has been an associated composer with many British Dance Companies, including London Contemporary Dance Theatre, Ballet Rambert, Strider and Second Stride. He

has taught at Dartington Summer School, Winchester College, the junior department of the Royal College of Music and Chelsea College of Art and is guest lecturer at many colleges and universities. He has also been musician in residence to the Victorian College of Arts and to the City of Caulfield in Australia and for the East London Late Starters Orchestra. He continues to teach at the Royal Academy of Music in London and has recently been appointed to the Chair in Composition at the University of Southampton.

He is a prolific composer and his exploration of a wide range of music (especially folk music) is combined with a fascination for mathematical structures. This interplay between ideas, on the one hand symbolizing the innocent, unconditional response to music-making and the other rigorous, intellectual processes, frequently creates an emotional quality in his work that has been described as "a happy melancholia". The shifts in balance between these two aspects has given rise to a variety of works ranging from the "complex" pieces where rhythmically independent melodies are piled on top of each other, fragmented and decorated, to compositions which focus on the quality of a single line given the simplest of accompaniments.

Finnissy has been featured composer at the Bath, Huddersfield and Almeida Festivals and his works are widely performed and broadcast worldwide. In February 1999 a Festival at Harvard University in Boston was devoted to his music and several world premieres are taking place at the 1999 Music Factory Festival in Bergen. As a pianist he is particularly associated with the commissioning and performing of new British work: composers who have written pieces specially for him include Elizabeth Lutyens, Judith Weir, James Dillon, Oliver Knussen, Nigel Osborne, Chris Newman, Howard Skempton and Andrew Toovey.

‘What's striking about the music is its feeling of utter spontaneity, and its incredible emotional power . . . the remarkable thing about Finnissy's music is that despite its frequent sorrow and anger, it has a marvellous power to affirm.’

Ivan Hewett, *The Telegraph*

Steve Crowther

www.stevcrowther.co.uk

Ludvig van Beethoven

“Simply the Best”

ABOUT LATE MUSIC

Late Music has been programming concerts of new music in York for over 20 years. It was founded in 1984 as Soundpool, by composers Michael Parkin, Anthony Adams and Ian Taylor. The organisation was soon augmented by composer/performers Nick Williams and Tim Brooks plus conductor and trombonist Barrie Webb. In 1991 composers Steve Crowther and David Power formed the acclaimed Late Music Festival,

which, with David Lancaster, became Late Music. Under the stewardship of the Director Peter Boardman, Late Music developed into an annual series of eight evening concerts, plus a selection of lunchtime recitals, on the first Saturday of the month between October and June

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