

Information for Tauranga Musica

Program

JS BACH Prelude and Fugue in Ab Major, Book 2 (BWV 862-863)

HAYDN Variations in F Minor, Hob. XVII/6

CHOPIN Fantasy in F Minor, Op. 49

~Interval~

GERSHWIN/WILD Selections from 7 Virtuoso Etudes
Lady Be Good, The Man I Love, Embraceable You

LISZT Sonata in B Minor, S. 178

Program Notes

This recital surveys a range of keyboard literature that conveys both lyrical beauty and virtuosic prowess.

The Preludes and Fugues by J.S. Bach are well known to every pianist and student. Conceived as training pieces to understand piano technique, they also cover a wide range of musical character and possibility through the diversity of rhythm, melody, and harmony that Bach deploys. In Michael Houstoun's recent recording of the 48 Preludes and Fugues, the pianist offers character descriptions for each piece, akin to Debussy's evocative titles at the end of his Preludes. For the A-flat major prelude from Book II, Houstoun writes 'Eloquence' for the prelude and 'Human Perfection' for the fugue. This, I feel, perfectly sums up the piece.

Haydn's F minor Variations is an innovative keyboard work. It represents the music (or perhaps the struggle) between light and dark—the piece takes the form of a double variation, with a main theme in a minor key and another in a major key, both of which are transformed in the ensuing variation movements. The coda resolves this struggle as the piece concludes with material in the minor key, initially rapid and expressive, before ultimately descending into a small, quiet ending.

Continuing within the realm of F minor, Chopin's Fantasy unfolds in a single continuous movement, exploring contrasting moments of lyricism and dramatic abandon. The opening march (beginning on F and C, the composer's initials) is introspective and wistful, before giving way to an agitated middle section filled with tempestuous passages. The final section returns to the opening theme (though transformed) and concludes with a sense of grandeur and resolution.

Earl Wild was a prolific American pianist who (in my opinion) stands as a unique figure among 20th-century pianists. He was the first pianist to perform live on television and the first to stream a performance over the internet. Well known for his performances of Rachmaninoff and Liszt, Wild was also celebrated for his arrangements and transcriptions, such as these Gershwin songs. In his set of seven ‘virtuoso études,’ Wild creates piano images of the songs in a way that fully exploits the instrument’s assets without departing too far from the original forms of the songs.

Liszt’s B minor Sonata is a monumental work to perform and to hear. Cast in a single continuous movement, it pushes the limits of both the piano and the performer. I see this work as a vehicle for expression—an opportunity for the pianist to explore color, sound, and the full capabilities of both themselves and the instrument.

Biography

Liam Wooding is a pianist renowned for his “chameleon-like ability with keyboard colour” (Radio New Zealand) and celebrated for his innovative and eclectic performances of both classical and contemporary music. After completing his piano studies at the Australian National Academy of Music and furthering his education in the United States as a Fulbright Scholar, Liam now performs and teaches all across Australia and his native Aotearoa New Zealand.

With a dynamic and diverse musical practice, Liam’s work encompasses both solo piano and chamber music. He finds great pleasure in exploring the piano repertoire and curating recitals that evoke feeling and inspire ideas. His 2021 recital program *Reflection and Connection*, broadcast on Radio New Zealand, was praised by Elizabeth Kerr for its “flowing pianism and thoughtful curation” (Five Lines).

In recent years, Liam has collaborated with distinguished artists such as percussionist Steven Schick, soprano Stephanie Acraman, violinist Akiko Mizawa, and his own chamber ensemble, Morton Trio. Albums featuring Acraman (The Complete Cabaret Songs of William Bolcom) and Morton Trio have garnered attention from leading outlets, including Limelight Magazine, Seesaw Magazine, and MusicWeb International.

A passionate advocate for contemporary music, Liam has championed works by composers such as John Psathas, Stuart Greenbaum, Lachlan Skipworth, and Janet Jennings. He performed the memorable six-piano epic *Voices at the End* by John Psathas in 2021 and that same year premiered Stuart Greenbaum’s piano sonata *Journey into Darkness*. More recently, he premiered Lachlan Skipworth’s *Cello Sonata* and will soon debut a set of preludes celebrating the Māori occasion of *Matariki*, composed by David Hamilton.