

# **James Cook**

**MU3115 Major Project (Performance) /  
Performance 3: Final Recital – Piano**

Tuesday 1 June 2021, 19:00

Student registration: 180017085

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## Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)

Frédéric Chopin was a Polish composer of the Romantic era who wrote mainly for the solo piano. He was a leading musician of his era and worked to poetic genius which was 'based on a professional technique that was without equal in his generation.'

### Étude Opus 10 No.12 (1831)

3 min

Known as the 'Revolutionary Étude', Étude Opus 10 No.12 in C minor is the final piece of Chopin's first set of études. It is inspired by the 1831 Russian attack on Warsaw during the November 1830-31 Uprising, which occurred around the same time as the étude's publication. Poland were defeated by the Russians during the event, thus haunting Chopin upon writing the étude. The ending piece is befitting in portraying a much intensified battle, with its fast tempo and fiercely loud dynamics, for accented notes and chords in particular. The Romantic traits of thickening textures and changes to different keys in rapid succession are raised emphatically in the étude that is the father of exercises for the left-hand.

## Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Robert Schumann was a German composer and pianist. He was widely regarded as one of the greatest composers of the Romantic era, yet a quiet man and perhaps was better at communicating through his music than in words. Emotionally frail and some say suffered from bipolar disorder.

### Carnaval Opus 9 (1834-1835)

Dedicated to his friend Karol Lipiński, Carnaval was one of Schumann's famous works. It depicts a Carnival or a Grand Masquerade Ball on Ash Wednesday, a Western Christian festive season before Lent. At the time of writing Carnaval his private and personal lives were in turmoil as the work replicates his emotional state and his feelings. Its 21 pieces reflecting 'the story of an ultimately abandoned love affair while intimating the rebirth of a new and yet earlier one'. Embedded in Carnaval are hidden codes and cryptograms weaved in with personal information, as well as movements representing different characters who were masked guests at the Grand Masquerade Ball: characters from the Italian improvised theatre Commedia Dell'Arte, of Schumann's made-up dual personae (Eusebius and Florestan) and even real-life characters Chopin and Paganini.

### Préambule

2 min 45 sec

The opening movement, Préambule was initially unmeant to belong in the immense work of Carnaval. Schumann was an admirer of Franz Schubert as the opening section of the piece was taken from the incomplete Variations on a theme of Schubert — *Sehnsuchtswalzer* Op 9/2 D 365. Not only did he write the 'Schubert Variation' as a tribute, he was also disappointed with the work of his highly regarded friend Ludwig Schuncke on the same theme and possibly wanted to showcase his own idea at the time. This introductory movement suits in creating the atmosphere of a grand entrance to a ball for the festivities, with the heavy chords, enriched textures and increases to faster tempi accompanying the frequent uses of counterpoint, cross-rhythms/hemiolas and loud dynamics.

### Pierrot

3 min

This is the second movement of Carnaval, representing the character Pierrot, a sad, wanton clown from Commedia Dell'Arte. In E flat major, the movement must thus output a melancholic feel. It is overshadowed by an emphasised, recurring three-note motif which is the consequent for every antecedent, before dominating in the codetta. One of Schumann's melodic mottoes appears in the

opening/returning melody: an **A**, an E flat (known as Es, a homophone with **S**), a **C** and a B (**H** in German); spelling out ASCH. This cryptogram is found in Schumann's full name (Robert **A**lexander **S**chumann), among other reasons, and is also heard in other movements of Carnival.

### **Arlequin**

**1 min**

This movement follows up from Pierrot and represents the light-hearted clown Arlequin, another character of Commedia Dell'Arte, ideally to contrast with Pierrot. It is the second movement that the ASCH motto appears in, this time, in particular, the first four notes of the piece. As Arlequin is a more excitable character the movement is rich in light, staccato notes and highly angular jumps within the melody, and processed with an energetic Vivo tempo.

### **Eusebius**

**1 min 45 sec**

Eusebius is the character which represents the one side of Schumann: dreamy and introspective. The fifth movement of Carnival, it is to be played with utter sweetness and divine lyricism. It is dominated with quintuplets, triplets and septuplets against a 2/4 metre and is written in ABA form in terms of tempo, pedalling rules and texture. Despite this form, however, the melodic material remains in the alternating sections, only it is elaborated by those mentioned features.

### **Florestan**

**1 min 30 sec**

The other side of Schumann, bold and impetuous, Florestan follows up and contrasts with Eusebius. It must be performed in a passionate, forceful manner, yet some traces of Eusebius can be present in brief sections. The ASCH motto, once more, appears as the first four notes of the movement and in other places, while there is also a reference to Schumann's earlier work Papillons Opus 2 included in the melody. Dynamics in the piece is generally loud with the use of diminished 7th chords sounded on a frequent basis. Moreover the movement ends on an imperfect cadence, likely to lead into the next movement.

## **Leoš Janáček (1854-1928)**

Leoš Janáček was a Czech composer and folklorist who is considered one of the most important Czech composers alongside Antonín Dvořák and Bedřich Smetana. Janáček's early works were influenced by Dvořák among other contemporaries, while his later musical output was inspired by Moravian and other Slavic music incorporated with his older musical taste.

### **V mlhách (In The Mists) (1912)**

The piano cycle In The Mists is the last of Janáček's more substantial solo works for the piano. It is divided into four movements, all of which are mostly written in 'misty' keys with five or six flats. A main characteristic of the cycle are the frequent changes in metre. The cycle is compared with Impressionism works due to its similar atmosphere.

### **Movement I**

**3 min**

The beginning movement opens with uncertainty and ambiguity followed by jeopardising palpability and resolution. It is dabbled with sudden changes of tempo and character, ergo chaotic moments of erratics. Irregularity plays a key role in this movement as recurring motifs and accompanimental ostinati begin on irregular beats. With this constant turbulence combined with resolving relief it suggests that the mist has appeared and come to engulf the adhering experiencers.

## **Movement III**

**3 min**

The third movement is the ringleader for acting a tribute to Janáček's daughter who died years before the cycle was written. This movement appears the most regular and stable out of the four in the cycle, inheriting a more tonal sense of which Janáček takes advantage to express powerful emotion from the chords he has given. Unusually the movement does not end in a perfect cadence, while the performer is also given three options on how the final section will be repeated.

## **Claude Debussy (1862-1918)**

Claude Debussy was a French composer for Impressionist music. Made Chevalier of the Legion of Honour in 1903 he was one of the most influential composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who influenced many later composers who followed.

### **Prélude No. 12 (Book 2) Feux d'artifice (1913)**

**5 min**

Translated to 'Fireworks', *Feux d'artifice* is the final piece of Debussy's second book of *Préludes*. It was dedicated to a certain French festival during which fireworks were involved, and a hint of the French national anthem is also included within the piece. It is dominated with the cloudy blurriness of sustained notes in rapid runs of broken chords as heard in other previous Debussy *Préludes*. Most of those runs crystallise to cluster-chords capable of shaping glossily polished melodies, other runs centre about whole-tone scales, both types gestate ambiguity and auspiciousness. In addition Debussy has dotted a brief midsection with non-functional French augmented sixth chords to possibly express his patriotism towards the French fatherland.

## **Piece composed during the last 30 years**

### **Sound Recording #1 ('transcribed' for piano), by James Cook (2021)**

**2 min 15 sec**

This modern piece is a kind of transcription, into a traditional score for piano, derived from a two-minute audio of fragments from two recorded soundwalks. The original recording is themed with environmental sounds which include those of moving vehicles, birds, industrial hits and the jingling of metal, all of which the performer must 'mimic' and re-perform the entire recording via piano on the whole. The reason that this piece cannot be considered wholly a transcription is because of the unpitched noises in the recording, which emphasise every frequency and the piano can only sound a discrete collection of them. The performer is required to play the piece in the way of how it is sounded in the recording, but at the same time a character of a conventional piano performance should remain. The score also contains made-up notations for percussive pedal sounds: downwards and upwards triangles, meaning 'push pedal down' and 'lift pedal up' respectively, lying on the pedal line, often sounded to depict the footsteps heard in the recording. No time signature is found on the score as the recording does not convey a most specific metre: the signature would frequently change for no purpose. Every initial sound is obtained from the city and its transcription to music mirrors Olivier Messiaen's idea with birds and nature.