

Melrose Music Society

SCOTTISH CHARITY NO. SC005891

Sunday, 16th November 2025, 3pm

Robert Creimerman, piano



Ludwig van Beethoven:	<i>32 Variations in C minor</i>
Johannes Brahms:	<i>6 Klavierstücke, Op.118</i>
Sergei Prokofiev:	<i>Sonata no. 3 in A minor, op. 28</i>
	Interval
Claude Debussy:	<i>Prélude - Feux d'artifice</i>
Franz Liszt:	<i>Sonata in B minor, S. 178</i>

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) – 32 *Variations in C minor*

This is arguably Beethoven's most enigmatic and paradoxical work: in his signature key of C Minor, but in a style and form elsewhere quite foreign to him: hence, perhaps, his "disowning" decision to publish it, early in 1807, without an opus number. Near the end of his life, he called it a "a piece of folly", exclaiming, "Oh, Beethoven, what an ass you were in those days!" Yet, in "those days" of 1806, he had also composed his violin concerto, fourth symphony, and Razumovsky quartets. It is an intriguingly terse, yet expressive, pastiche of the baroque with an original theme (ironically?) imitating the *chaconne*, the ceremonial triple-time dance over a ground bass popular at the court of Louis XIV. Most of the variations derive from the bleak eight-bar harmonic pattern rather than the melody, showcasing a remarkably wide range of keyboard techniques and textures for such a short work. It fascinated Schoenberg and his circle, inspiring, for example, both the works by Skalkottas we programmed this year, and influenced the new complexity of Dillon and Fernyhough.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) - 6 *Klavierstücke, Op.118*

Intermezzo in A minor: Allegro non assai, ma molto appassionato;

Intermezzo in A major: Andante teneramente; Ballade in G minor: Allegro energico;

Intermezzo in F minor: Allegretto un poco agitato; Romanze in F major: Andante;

Intermezzo in E♭ minor: Andante, largo e mesto

Brahms' penultimate work, composed in 1893 and dedicated to Clara Schumann, is poignant, introspective, searching. While his first *intermezzi* linked the *capricci* in the 8 Pieces of 1878, in the later sets, we wonder what they are supposed to be between: Johannes and Clara, now and the past, life and death, everything? The first is sweeping, expansive, with dramatic eruptions of emotion, building in intensity as it shifts from A minor to end in the major, which is the key of the next. Probably Brahms' most famous and frequently performed work for piano, that begins with a restrained lyrical melody, which modulates heartbreakingly into a yearning canon in F sharp minor, before the gentle, consoling chorale. Despite being titled a *Ballade*, the third piece is more like a rhapsody, with fiery virtuosic outer sections enclosing a radiant central section in B major. The mysteriously shadowy fourth *intermezzo* in F minor is relentlessly contrapuntal, the hands continually echoing each other but in the haunted stasis of the middle section they are disquietingly out-of-phase. Here, the "betweenness" is extreme, otherworldly, reminding me of Mathew Arnold's lines: "Wandering between two worlds, one dead, The other powerless to be born, With nowhere yet to rest my head, Like these, on earth I wait forlorn." The contrasting, warm bright *Romanze* has a central section in D major to increase its optimistic glow. However, hope is dispelled utterly by the final funereal *intermezzo* with its solemn march and ghostly arpeggios.

Sergei Prokofiev (1891-1953) – *Sonata no. 3 in A minor, op. 28*

*Allegro tempestoso – Moderato – Allegro tempestoso – Moderato –
Più lento – Più animato – Allegro I – Poco più mosso*

Prokofiev gave the première of his third sonata in Saint Petersburg on 15 April 1918, during a week-long festival of his music sponsored by the Conservatory. Russia was in a state of revolution, of course, and the rest of Europe still paralysed and traumatised by the senseless slaughter of WWI. If we sense socio-political turbulence in the spiky, driving energy of this, the shortest of his ten sonatas, we should also remember that it bears the subtitle, "From the Old Notebooks", and is based on material he composed as a teenager about ten years earlier. The violent mood swings, the self-proclaimed tempestuousness, could be merely hormonal surges or youthful experimentation. Structurally, however, it seems a radical compression of the Liszt sonata, which we will hear after the interval, with the development of the lyrical 2nd theme functioning as a slow movement. The sonata opens with a blasting E major chord before stating the leaping melody of the first theme. A third theme, like a brief *scherzo*, features blasting, fortissimo chromatic harmony and a driving in D minor melody with quirky rhythmic motifs alternating between the hands, leading to the final manic march.

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Claude Debussy (1868-1918) – *Prélude - Feux d'artifice*

The last of Debussy's 24 preludes, *Feux d'artifice* is the most technically challenging. Composed in 1912 and published the next year, it depicts a spectacular Bastille Day fireworks display over Paris. Sweeping runs, outlining two major thirds a semitone apart, suggest the anticipation of the audience, while isolated tones, like little points of light, sound in the upper register of the piano. The texture of the piece grows ever thicker and more complex as the harmonies, figurations and dynamics change to represent the wondrous display of streaking rockets and their colourful explosions in the night sky and their reflections on the sparkling waters of the Seine. At its close, over a bass tremolo, a brief quote from *La Marseillaise* is heard before the last flashes of colour.



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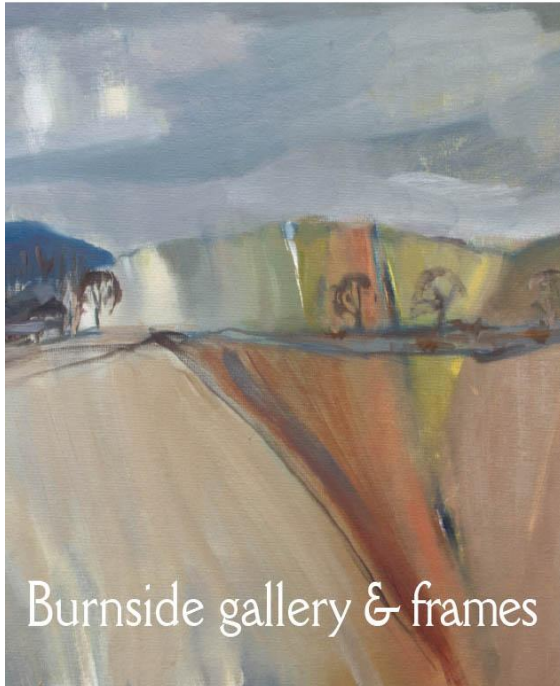
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Franz Liszt (1811-1886) – *Sonata in B minor, S. 178*

When is a sonata not a sonata? When it is “*quasi una fantasia*”, perhaps, like Beethoven’s two opus 27 pieces, the second, of course, famously renamed “the moonlight” by a publisher keen to boost sales with a catchy tagline. Having begun work on it at least as early as 1849, Liszt completed his only work unequivocally – if provocatively - entitled “sonata” in Weimar in February 1853, yet its relationship to the sonata form is richly ambiguous and nuanced. Published in 1854 and premiered by Liszt in 1857, it was dedicated to Robert Schumann, who a decade earlier had dedicated his *Fantasie* to Liszt. That three-movement work *was* in sonata form and intended to raise money for a monument in Bonn to honour Beethoven, which Liszt eventually funded and oversaw. Liszt seems to have ironically answered Schumann’s *fantasie* in sonata form with a sonata in the form of a *fantasie*. To complicate matters further, its composition overlaps with his own *Après une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata*, completed in 1849 and likewise in one movement. The intricate interrelationship between Liszt’s two “sonatas” has led many scholars to speculate about allegorical meanings: depictions of Faust, Satan, Hell, God, Eden, Death – Liszt does specify an ominous *Hammerschlag* (hammer-blow) motif... On the other hand, this *sonata quasi una fantasia* might just be sublime pure, if highly emotionally charged, music, reaching out to his troubled friend Schumann and paying tribute to their dead hero Beethoven, who never had any moonlight in mind. Sadly, Schumann’s mental health had deteriorated too much for him to recognise the gesture.

The simple title, therefore, - and even the key signature - invites, or challenges, the listener to detect a structure that the piece itself, in its seamless flow of evolving ideas, frustrates or problematises, which is part of its dramatic force. It certainly confounded Clara Schumann, who flatly refused to play it, hearing “only blind noise – no more healthy thoughts, everything is confused, one cannot see any clear harmonies!” Indeed, various musicologists have been able convincingly to divide it into three or four movements, beginning and ending at disputed points, nor is there complete agreement over where the exposition(s), development(s), recapitulation(s) or coda(s) may begin or end, nor is the number of themes unanimously agreed. I found this gem of a sentence on Wikipedia: “The recapitulation opens with a fugue in B-flat minor, that can also function as a *scherzo*.” Yes, quite: Liszt was breaking boundaries, not just in terms of technical virtuosity, but structurally, formally, harmonically and contrapuntally. He represented the new complexity of the mid-C19th. The piece begins and ends in a desolate mist with a descending, tonally ambiguous bass scale: between is an intricately woven fantasy, in which pretty much each bar is related to every other bar, and can be interpreted as a development of the preceding or an anticipation of the forthcoming. Unravelling and rediscovering its mysterious unity is one of the great experiences in music.



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Born in Bucharest, **Robert Creimerman** graduated from the George Enescu National Music School under the guidance of Mihaela Zamfirescu, winning numerous prizes at national and international competitions, including the Ada Ulubeanu Piano Competition and the Scottish International Youth Piano Competition. In 2020, he composed the score for the German feature film *Purpur*, directed by Isabelle Konrad, and began studying at Royal Conservatoire of Scotland under the tutelage of Graeme McNaught. He won the Governor's Prize in 2024, thus making a tour of Scotland, including this recital, possible. Robert is now a master's student at the Brussels Royal Conservatoire, studying under Gabriel Teclu. As well as mastering the classical piano repertoire, he composes in many styles and genres, and produces arrangements for ensembles ranging from jazz trio to full symphony orchestra.

Our Next Concert

Friday, January 23rd – The Intesa Duo: Bass Viols and Voice

We are grateful to the Tunnell Trust for facilitating this recital by two new stars of early music. Lucine Musaelian and Nathan Giorgetti will perform some pieces dating back more than a thousand years. Their programme is inspired by the Venetian island, San Lazzaro degli Armeni, where the monks of the Mekhitarist monastery preserved and disseminated Armenian, Latin, and Italian music. The duo will feature works by Grigor Narekatsi (c. 950-1007), Nerses Shnorhali (1102-1173), Adrian Willaert (c. 1490–1562), Orlando di Lasso (1532-1594), Giulio Caccini (1551-1618), Luca Marenzio (1556-1599), Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), Tobias Hume (1569-1645), Alfonso Ferrabosco II (1575-1628), Michael East (c. 1580-1648), Francesca Caccini (1587-1640), Barbara Strozzi (1619-1677) and Marin Marais (1656-1728).



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Our Next Piano Recital

Sunday, April 26th 3pm - Alina Horvath, Piano

In celebration of György Kurtág's 100th birthday, his compatriot will juxtapose the great Hungarian composer's homages and extrapolations with the classics that inspired them. This recital, therefore, presents an enchantingly varied sample of beautiful and thrilling masterpieces and scintillating miniatures.

Domenico Scarlatti:	<i>Sonata in D major K. 119</i>
György Kurtág:	<i>Hommage à Domenico Scarlatti, Eight Piano Pieces, Op. 3</i>
W.A. Mozart:	<i>Sonata in G major KV 283. No. 5</i>
György Kurtág:	<i>Szálkák, Op. 6d</i>
Franz Liszt:	<i>Hungarian Rhapsody No. 16 in A minor</i>
György Kurtág:	<i>... feuilles mortes ...</i>
Joseph Haydn:	<i>Sonata in E minor Hob.XVI:34</i>
György Kurtág:	<i>Perpetuum mobile (objet trouvé)</i>
Claude Debussy:	<i>Pour le Piano</i>
György Kurtág:	<i>couple égyptien en route vers l'inconnu</i>

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