

CAL PERFORMANCES
AT HOME

Streaming Premiere – Thursday, December 3, 2020, 7pm

Leif Ove Andsnes, *piano*

Filmed exclusively for Cal Performances
at Håkon's Hall, Bergen, Norway,
on September 23, 2020.

PROGRAM

- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) Fantasy in C minor, K. 475 (1785)
- Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor, Op. 13,
Pathétique (1798)
Grave – Allegro di molto e con brio
Adagio cantabile
Rondo: Allegro

INTERMISSION

- Leoš Janáček (1854–1928) Selections from *On an Overgrown Path*,
Book 1 (1911)
1. Our Evenings
2. A Blown-Away Leaf
3. Come with Us!
4. The Madonna of Frydek
- Antonín Dvořák (1841–1904) Selections from *Poetic Tone Pictures*,
Op. 85 (1889)
1. Nocturnal Route
2. Toying
4. Spring Song
6. Reverie
7. Furiant (Folk Dance)
9. Serenade
10. Bacchanal
13. On the Holy Mountain

*Leif Ove Andsnes records exclusively for Sony Classical and
is managed by Enticott Music Management in association with IMG Artists.*

*Note: following its premiere, the video recording of this concert
will be available on demand through January 3, 2021.*



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Fantasy in C minor, K. 475 (1785)

It's disheartening to consider that the bulk of the world's music is irretrievably lost. But there it is. By its very nature, music cannot persist; sounds arise, linger briefly, then dissipate. We have conserved a trifle of humanity's music-making via notation, a smidgen more via recordings. But that's it. Everything else—the sound of people singing and playing over the ages—is gone forever. Short of cobbling together a time machine, there's no retrieving all that music.

Which makes those reports of Mozart's extraordinary improvisational abilities all the more tantalizing. "What a wealth of ideas! What variety!" gushed German critic Johann Friedrich Schink in 1785. Apparently Mozart was so good that, having neglected to write down the solo piano part to a new concerto, he played the premiere as a quasi-planned improvisation, faking it with a sheath of blank manuscript paper placed on the piano. (According to one account, Emperor Joseph II spotted the dodge and called him out for it.) We can only imagine what an unbuttoned and spontaneous Mozart might have been like, his astounding musical fertility let off the notational leash, free to wander, ramble, and explore.

At least we have a few hints hither and yon, among them the Fantasy in C minor, K. 475, a free-form (as the name implies) affair with a distinctly improvisatory vibe. At the same time, this is Mozart and not some glib hack, so we may expect a certain dramatic arc to the thing. The opening section (in C minor) is possibly the most spontaneous, its constantly sighing figurations and frequent interruptions savoring of the *empfindsamkeit* (sensitive or tender style) of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. Inner sections are both more organized and upbeat: a D-major passage is borderline chipper and a subsequent extended section in F major savors of Mozart's best aria style. Eventually the resigned mood of the opening re-asserts itself, and the work ends in a sudden upwards burst, almost as if Mozart had acknowledged the need to close things off. Even if he could have kept playing all night!

Ludwig van Beethoven

Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor, Op. 13, *Pathétique* (1798)

It takes a licking and keeps on ticking, claimed spokesman John Cameron Swayze regarding a Timex watch. (You'll need to be certain age to catch the reference!) The same can be said for Beethoven's ubiquitous *Pathétique* sonata, school-recital piece *par excellence*, hapless victim of inadvertent muggings from student pianists who make up in ardor for what they may lack in insight.

Yet the *Pathétique* soldiers on, sublimely indifferent to whatever indignities might befall it. The odds of it ever becoming some tired old chestnut calculate somewhere between minimal and nil. It's that good, that innovative, and that unbreakable, an early instance of Beethoven in C-minor mode: storm and turbulence, supercharged drama that may or may not culminate in triumphant resolution. Think Fifth Symphony. Think Third Piano Concerto. Think that astounding final Op. 111 piano sonata.

There's a story floating around that the *Pathétique* title originated with Beethoven himself, but the honor actually goes to the publisher, albeit with Beethoven's approval. It's an apt label, redolent of pathos, deep feeling, and tragedy. But not pity. Beethoven had no truck with pity. "The *Pathétique* is, first of all, music of the will," writes Kenneth Drake in *The Beethoven Sonatas and the Creative Experience*. "The sound of primitivism in this work is the language of someone reaching into the unknown."

It could be that very primitivism that has always drawn young pianists to the sonata. "The novelty of its style was so attractive to me," reminisced august 19th-century pianist Ignaz Moscheles about his youthful first encounter with Opus 13. "I became so enthusiastic in my admiration of it, that I forgot myself so far as to mention my new acquisition to my teacher, who reminded me of his injunction, and warned me not to play or study any eccentric productions until I had based my style upon more solid models." That warning is not likely

to resonate with modern piano teachers, who view the *Pathétique* as solid, blue-chip repertory; but back in the day, reactionary types viewed it with apprehension, if not downright alarm.

From that stern opening chord—which hovers tantalizingly in the air to kick off an extended slow introduction that might remind listeners of the Mozart C-minor Fantasy—through the blazing Allegro di molto con brio, the first movement is an E-ticket ride, constructed out of a few basic ideas from which Beethoven extracts spectacular variety. A second-place Adagio cantabile offers listeners a really fine (and popular) melody from a composer not usually noted for lyrical effusion. The concluding Allegro restores the heat of the opening movement but adds a technical *tour de force* by way of its brilliant use of sonata-rondo form, an excessively repetitive structure prone to stupefying tedium but here transformed into edge-of-the-seat drama.

The seven piano sonatas preceding the *Pathétique* are superlative creations worth any amount of hearing and study, but Opus 13 marks a new stage in Beethoven's evolution. By way of its emotional range, technical wizardry, innovative pianism, and sheer strength of character, it prefigures the barrage of thunderbolts soon to come, as Beethoven enters his middle period and transforms music forever.

Leoš Janáček

Selections from *On an Overgrown Path*, Book 1 (1911)

On an Overgrown Path is a rarity in the piano literature as having started out on the harmonium, with five pieces that by 1911 had grown to 15 miniatures for the piano spread across two volumes. The work of a composer mostly associated with opera, orchestral music, and choral works, the pieces comprising *On an Overgrown Path* are anything but abstract *Klavierstücke* in the Brahmsian mold; rather, they are Schumannesque—personal, confessional, positively seething with extra-musical meanings, whether subconscious or not. In that sense they are true Romantic piano miniatures—intimate *morceaux*, the piano's equivalent of the art song.

Janáček tells us that these pieces “contain distant reminiscences. Those reminiscences are so dear to me that I do not think they will ever vanish.” No doubt they refer back to his childhood in the mountains and woods around the Moravian village of Hukvaldy, and while the memories might be dear, not all are by any means fond. Janáček was a melancholic man, moody, touchy, prone to irritable outbursts at trifling provocations. As of 1911, he had suffered through a distressing series of difficulties, particularly the lingering death of his daughter Olga at the tender age of 21. Fortunately, *On an Overgrown Path* does not lapse into unmitigated bitterness or wallow in its shadows; there is exquisite poetry here, captivating plays of light, affectionate glimpses of country life, and above all, a fascination with the natural world and its inhabitants. “I know a large fountain—nearly a small lake, choked by the darkness of ages.... There are no angels in this eternal darkness,” wrote Janáček in 1922.

The Schumann heritage is particularly marked in the opening “Our Evenings,” with its aphoristic style in which a brief melodic cell is repeated numerous times with modest variation. Hearing it is akin to picking up a lovely small object and turning it around while observing it from different angles and orientations. “Our Evenings” not only invites, but really requires, thoughtful input on the performer's part; playing it merely as written will not do.

“A Blown-Away Leaf” is an exquisite bit of Romantic nature-painting à la Grieg, a whiff of folk-ish melody in a quasi-improvisatory setting. The tempo increases steadily through its three main sections, followed by a *da capo* return that restores the original pensive quality. A walking, almost marching quality permeates “Come with Us!,” with hints of the dance adding a certain insouciance and lightness. To close, “The Madonna of Frydek” intones a reverent chorale-like passage that sets off a clean-lined but remote melody. Gradually we approach the source of the sound, as the markings change from *lontano* (far off) to *da più vicino* (closer) to *da vicino* (close), periodically contrasted by the chorale, ending in a somber and utterly traditional cadence.

Antonín Dvořák
Selections from *Poetic Tone Pictures*,
Op. 85 (1889)

It might seem like damning with faint praise to describe Antonín Dvořák as a nice man, but in so many ways that's precisely what he was—a truly decent human being who was blissfully free of the neuroses, depressions, angers, and egomaniacal posturings that infest—like so many unpleasant weeds—biographies of major composers. That's not to say that Dvořák was just some regular Joe who happened to write music: he was indubitably among the great ones, and he had his strengths and weaknesses just like everybody else. For one thing, he was a very heavy drinker, verging on alcoholism, which led to problems in his professional and personal life. On the brighter side, he was an ardent pigeon fancier. And he loved trains and steamships.

His compositional catalog runs the gamut of genres, but posterity has fastened more on the symphonies, chamber music, and (to a lesser extent) operas than on his choral or solo piano music. The reason for that latter's relative obscurity isn't all that puzzling. Dvořák just wasn't a pianist and his keyboard writing lacks the innate affinity for the instrument characteristic of virtuosos such as Chopin or Liszt. Not surprisingly, Dvořák was at his best when writing for piano four-hands, a medium that can approximate orchestral sonority—consider his marvelous Slavonic Dances, known in their orchestral guise at least as well as their piano-duet originals. That said, his solo piano music is well worth exploring beyond the few lightweight *Humoresques* and *Album Leaves* that have slipped through the cracks and onto the occasional recital program.

The *Poetic Tone Pictures* of 1889 mark a shift in Dvořák's overall musical thinking, from the purely abstract realms of symphonic forms to the pictorial and programmatic. It would not be long before he would be creating his late orchestral tone poems *The Noon Witch*, *The Water Goblin*, *The Golden Spinning Wheel*, *The Wild Dove*, and *A Hero's Song*. Each of the *Poetic Tone Pictures* evinces an exploratory side to a composer who is generally associated with careful development and structural organicism rather than flights of narrative fancy. "This time, I am not only an absolute musician, but also a poet" wrote Dvořák of the cycle. "Each piece will have its own title and is meant to express something; thus, as it were, this is program music!"

Each of the *Poetic Tone Pictures* conjures up its own particular ambience, from the slightly gloomy and serious "Nocturnal Route" through the meltingly affectionate "Serenade" and gently rocking "Reverie" to the "Bacchanal," which could double as a symphonic scherzo. Dance rhythms pop up hither and yon, likely ("Furiant") or not ("Spring Song"). Dvořák's piano writing generally eschews virtuoso display, but both "Toying" and the aforementioned "Furiant" call on the pianist for some solid octave technique, while the multi-hued sweep of the concluding "On the Holy Mountain" savors of Lisztian grandeur.

Like a good book of short stories, *Poetic Tone Pictures* offers something for everybody, listener and performer alike. Sometimes moody, other times exuberant, kaleidoscopic in their variety and highly effective in concert, they're worthy candidates for restoration to the active repertory, late Romantic fantasies from one of the era's most renowned masters.

—Scott Foglesong

ABOUT THE ARTIST

The *New York Times* calls **Leif Ove Andsnes** "a pianist of magisterial elegance, power, and insight," and the *Wall Street Journal* names him "one of the most gifted musicians of his generation." With his commanding technique and searching interpretations, the celebrated Norwegian pianist has won acclaim worldwide,

playing concertos and recitals in the world's leading concert halls and with its foremost orchestras, while building an esteemed, extensive discography. He is the founding director of the Rosendal Chamber Music Festival, was the co-artistic director of the Risør Festival of Chamber Music for nearly two decades, and has

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served as music director of California's Ojai Music Festival. A *Gramophone* Hall of Fame inductee, he holds honorary doctorates from Norway's University of Bergen and New York's Juilliard School.

Andsnes recently partnered with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra for "Mozart Momentum 1785/86," a major multi-season project exploring one of the most creative and seminal periods of the composer's career. This marks the pianist's second artistic partnership with the orchestra, following the success of their "Beethoven Journey." An epic four-season focus on the composer's music for piano and orchestra, this saw Andsnes give more than 230 live performances in 108 cities across 27 countries, as chronicled in the documentary *Concerto—A Beethoven Journey* and captured on an award-winning Sony Classical series. Now recording exclusively for that label, the pianist recently received his eleventh Grammy nomination and has been recognized with no fewer than six

Gramophone Awards. His other accolades include the Royal Philharmonic Society's Instrumentalist Award, the Gilmore Artist Award, and Norway's Peer Gynt Prize and Commander of the Royal Norwegian Order of St. Olav. He has been honored as the first Scandinavian to curate Carnegie Hall's "Perspectives" series, served as a pianist-in-residence of the Berlin Philharmonic and artist-in-residence of the New York Philharmonic, and been the subject of a London Symphony Orchestra Artist Portrait Series.

Leif Ove Andsnes was born in Karmøy, Norway in 1970, and studied at the Bergen Music Conservatory. He is currently an artistic adviser for the Prof. Jiri Hlinka Piano Academy in Bergen, where he lives with his partner and their three children.

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