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A “virtual” Coffee Concert recorded at the Holywell Music Room, Oxford

Sunday February 14, 2021 at 11:15

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the Oxford Coffee Concerts or make a donation to help support our virtual
concerts, please get in touch with us via the contact page at coffeeconcerts.com.**

Virtual Coffee Concerts are pre-recorded at the Holywell Music Room in Oxford and are
streamed from our YouTube channel at 11:15 on Sunday mornings. (These recordings are
available for a limited time after release but, of course, there will be more to come.)

Lauren Zhang (piano)

- **Beethoven: Symphony no 9 in D minor, op 125
(transcribed for solo piano by Franz Liszt)**

Young American pianist Lauren Zhang began piano lessons at the age of four with Madeline Ignazito. On moving to the UK, Lauren attended King Edward VI High School for Girls in Birmingham and studied as a pupil with Dr Robert Markham in the Junior Department at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. She also began taking lessons with Professor Christopher Elton in 2017. Lauren has participated in masterclasses or lessons with Joaquín Achúcarro, Sergei Babayan, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, Fabio Bidini, Peter Donohoe, Peter Frankl, Kenneth Hamilton, Klaus Hellwig, Angela Hewitt, Stephen Hough, Yoheved Kaplinsky, Pascal Nemirovski, Marios Papadopoulos, Menahem Pressler, Boris Slutsky and John Thwaites.

In 2016, Lauren won first prize at the 15th Ettlingen International Piano Competition in Germany. Among other achievements, she was a prize-winner at the Wales International

Piano Festival (2016) and the Young Pianist of the North International Competition (2015).

Lauren won the BBC Young Musician Competition at age 16 performing with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra to widespread critical acclaim. Highlights since then include her debut at the BBC proms and appearances as soloist with the London Mozart Players, European Union Chamber Orchestra, China National Symphony Orchestra and Sinfonia Varsovia Orchestra in Warsaw. Lauren has also performed in the Tonhalle in Zürich and at Klavier-Festival Ruhr in recent years. She gave recitals across the UK, as part of the Ryedale, Lichfield and Wooburn Festivals, amongst many others. Her performances have been broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 and 4, TVN24 in Poland, and Deutschlandfunk in Germany. She also attended the Verbier Festival Academy and was accepted to the Curtis Institute of Music.

In 2020, Lauren was invited to debut with the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra in Australia and with the Orchestra of the Swan, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and Brno Philharmonic. Recitals at Nottingham Royal Concert Hall, Birmingham Town Hall, the Herkulesaal in Munich, at Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival in Germany, and at

Sydney Town Hall were also planned. Lauren is grateful for the support of YCAT through their aftercare scheme for BBC Young Musician finalists.

More information:

<https://www.ycat.co.uk/lauren-zhang>

**Symphony no 9 in D minor, op 125
(transcribed for solo piano by Franz Liszt)
by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

- 1. Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso; 2. Molto vivace;
3. Adagio molto e cantabile/ andante moderato;
4. Presto – Allegro assai – Allegro assai vivace. Alla marcia – Andante maestoso – Allegro energico, sempre ben marcato – Allegro ma non tanto – Prestissimo.**

One of the most remarkable aspects of Liszt's career was his tireless championship of earlier composers he felt were under-appreciated by his contemporaries. In particular, he worked ceaselessly on Beethoven's behalf. He had first got to know the piano sonatas as a boy, studying with Beethoven's own pupil Carl Czerny. In his adult career he promoted Beethoven's cause by performing works often regarded by audiences, and even by some professional musicians, as incomprehensible, or which were completely unknown. His first concert as conductor, in 1840, included Beethoven's Choral Fantasy, and he went on to conduct performances of the symphonies. And he contributed to a complete edition of Beethoven's music published between 1857 and 1861 with volumes devoted to the piano sonatas and string quartets.

His piano transcriptions of Beethoven's symphonies were conceived in the same spirit. In 1837 he produced solo piano versions of Symphonies Nos 5, 6 and 7, and six years later the Funeral March second

movement of the 'Eroica' Symphony (No 3). Between 1863 and 1864 he revised these and added the others. In 1851 appeared his transcription for two pianos of the Ninth ('Choral') Symphony (a version admired even by Brahms and Clara Schumann, who played it together, in spite of their general antipathy to Liszt's original compositions); later (1878-9) he made two-piano versions of the Third, Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos.

Beethoven worked on his Ninth Symphony between 1817 and 1823, initially in response to an invitation from the Philharmonic Society in London to visit the capital, together with a commission for two new symphonies for the occasion. For a long time, he envisaged the Ninth would have an instrumental conclusion. It was only in September 1823, eight months before the first performance, that he decided on the vocal finale, realising his intention to make a setting of the ode 'To Joy' by the poet Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), a project he had first considered in the 1790s. Just as Beethoven had hesitated, so did Liszt. For some time, he had thought that a solo piano

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transcription of the finale would be impossible, intending originally to publish just the first three movements.

The first movement emerges from near-silence, with two-note fragments coalescing into an overwhelmingly powerful unison theme. It proceeds to a climax of colossal force and ends in a coda which is unmistakably tragic in tone. Many writers have resorted to cosmic imagery in discussing this movement, to convey the sheer magnitude and power of Beethoven's thinking.

The scherzo is propelled by its unremitting, almost obsessive, rhythmic figure. The presto trio section offers a glimpse of D major radiance which looks forward to the end of the symphony, but when it returns a second time it is abruptly cut short. The adagio is a set of variations on two alternating themes, both warmly lyrical and both overlaid with increasingly florid ornamentation.

The tense, dissonant fanfare-like music which opens the finale is followed by the rejection, in turn, of quotations from the first three movements, each one preceded by a passage, for cellos and basses in the original score, to be played like a vocal recitative. The

great 'Joy' theme is launched almost as though it had been stumbled on by accident. But then the dissonant fanfare breaks out again. "O friends, not these sounds" sing the bass soloist in the original, and Beethoven launches his great Schiller setting. The poem's imagery of mankind united by both an awed contemplation of the heavens and of the Creator, and the conviviality of public celebrations appealed to Beethoven's own ethical, social and religious outlook, and he responded with an extraordinary juxtaposition of the sublime and the absurd, religious devotion and raucous carnival exuberance.

Liszt's transcriptions are remarkable for the way they combine faithful indications of Beethoven's original scoring and observance of his phrase structures with imaginative freedom in re-creating his orchestral sonorities in piano terms. In his preface to the complete set of Beethoven symphony transcriptions, published in 1865, Liszt stated:

"My aim has been attained if I stand on a level with the intelligent engraver or the conscientious translator who comprehend the spirit of a work and thus contribute to the knowledge of the great masters and to the formation of an appreciation of beauty."

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