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

Sunday February 28, 2021 at 11:15

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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.)

Tim Horton (piano)

- **Brahms: Ballade in B major, op 10 no 4**
- **Schubert: Piano Sonata no 21 in B flat major, D 960**

One of the leading chamber pianists of his generation, Tim Horton studied at Chetham's School of Music with Charles Hopkins and Heather Slade-Lipkin and graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge in 1995. In the same year he replaced Alfred Brendel at short notice in two performances of Schoenberg's Piano Concerto with the CBSO and Sir Simon Rattle at Symphony Hall, Birmingham and at the Royal Festival Hall, London. Since then he has played with the RLPO, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group and Trondheim Symphony Orchestra.

In 2005 Tim was chosen as the scholar of the Klavier Festival Ruhr at the recommendation of Alfred Brendel, an honour that included a recital at the Festival and a bursary. Tim has a duo partnership with cellist Adrian Brendel with whom he has given tours of Spain, Germany, Italy and the UK, including concerts at the Wigmore Hall, London. In 2011 they made their debut at the Enescu

Festival in Bucharest. He has played regularly at the Plush, Aldeburgh, Bath and Elverum Festivals and has collaborated with many leading chamber musicians including Paul Lewis, Peter Cropper, the Elias Quartet, the Vertavo Quartet and the members of the Kungsbacka Piano Trio.

Tim has been playing with violist Robin Ireland since 2008 and they have toured Britain extensively. Their Nimbus Alliance disc of works by Shostakovich and Prokofiev was highly acclaimed on its release. They have also released a disc of the Brahms Sonatas and the Schubert Arpeggione Sonata.

Along with violinist Benjamin Nabarro and cellist Gemma Rosefield, Tim is a founder member of the acclaimed Leonore Piano Trio as well as Ensemble 360, and has been a regular guest pianist with the Nash Ensemble.

More information:

<http://www.timhortonpianist.co.uk/>

Ballade in B major, op 10 no 4 by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Brahms wrote his four Ballades, op 10, in 1854. Apart from the stand-alone Scherzo in E flat minor, op 4, his previously published music for solo piano consisted of three big sonatas, and a set of variations. The Ballades are part of a wider trend – that includes such pieces as Beethoven's Bagatelles, Schubert's Impromptus and Mendelssohn's Songs Without Words – away from large-scale, multi-movement structures towards smaller, self-contained pieces, each one concentrating on a more focussed range of material and mood.

It seems to have been Chopin who first gave the title 'Ballade' to an instrumental piece. Folk-ballads, particularly those from the Scottish border region, had become

extremely popular in Europe in the early nineteenth-century, but Chopin never spelled out any implied narratives – if, indeed, there were any. Similarly, although Brahms chose the same title for the four pieces of op 10, the fact that he so rarely even hinted at any non-musical inspiration behind his work should put us on our guard against imposing any specific imagery on the music.

The fourth Ballade is the most introspective of the set. After the gently flowing, lyrical opening, a darker, more melancholy section follows. The return of the opening music has a light, dancing quality, though this does not last long, and it is the music of the withdrawn second section that brings the work to an end.

Piano Sonata in B flat major, D 960 by Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

**1. Molto moderato; 2. Andante sostenuto; 3. Scherzo. Allegro vivace con delicatezza;
4. Allegro, ma non troppo.**

Schubert's great ambition in his last years was to establish himself as a successor to his hero, Beethoven, and he directed much of his energy in this period towards large-scale instrumental works. In March 1827 Beethoven died, and about the same time Schubert met Johann Nepomuk Hummel, then at the height of his fame as a pianist and composer. These two events seem to have re-awakened Schubert's ambitions to compose large-scale instrumental music, and during the last few months of his life he set himself an astonishing work-load, producing his last three piano sonatas and the String Quintet, as well as working on sketches for a projected Tenth Symphony.

The manuscript of the three sonatas is dated September 1828 but sketches indicate that Schubert worked on them over a period of several months. He seems to have regarded them as a group, to be published as a set of three, as Beethoven had done with some of his piano sonatas. He intended to dedicate them to Hummel, but by the time his publisher, Anton Diabelli, got round to issuing them, in 1837, not only Schubert but Hummel, too, had died; Diabelli dedicated them instead to Schumann.

The three sonatas are all very different in character. The B flat Sonata, the last of the set, is an expansive work on a broad scale

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and, of the three, is the one that most reveals Schubert's experience as a songwriter.

The first movement is characterised by its broad, singing opening theme, which goes on its unhurried way apparently indifferent to the disturbing trills low in the bass and the sudden pauses which surround it. If the repeat of the opening section is observed, in the bars leading back to the opening the low trill suddenly looms out, played loudly for the first and only time. As the movement proceeds the music repeatedly moves in and out of unexpected keys, to marvellously spacious effect.

The slow movement is one of Schubert's most profound meditations, full of tender resignation and a sense of time suspended. It is followed by one of his lightest, most

gracefully airborne scherzos. It is marked to be played delicately, with characteristic shifts from major to minor and back. After a sombre trio section, the opening returns with the most wonderful sense of release.

The last movement is a relaxed but far from trivial rondo, with a main theme which hovers, again, between major and minor. Subsidiary themes tilt the emotional balance towards a sometimes hearty geniality, until pulled up short by a powerful outburst in F minor. But this, too, subsides to leave a lightly skipping dance rhythm. After this music returns at the end, Schubert takes snatches of the opening theme and suddenly whips them up into a brisk, almost defiant, presto coda, rounding off his last and greatest piano sonata with a flourish.

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