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

Sunday April 18, 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.)

Petr Limonov plays Robert Schumann

- **Kinderszenen, op15 (“Scenes from Childhood”)**
- **Vogel als Prophet (“Bird as Prophet”) from Waldszenen (“Forest Scenes”), op 82**
- **Humoreske in B flat major, op 20**

Winner of Nikolai Rubinstein International Piano Competition, Russian-British pianist and conductor Petr Limonov frequently appears in the UK and Europe as a soloist or in collaboration with, among others, Nicola Benedetti, Laura van der Heijden, Jennifer Pike, the Van Kujik Quartet, Leonard Elschenbroich and Liana Isakadze. He has recorded for Decca, Onyx, Deutschlandfunk and Champs Hill, and has made notable appearances at La Roque d’Antheron Festival (Boris Berezovsky’s Carte Blanche, broadcast by Radio France Musique); Wigmore Hall; iTunes Festival; Cadogan Hall; St Martin-in-the-Fields; Southbank Centre; the Great Hall of Moscow Conservatory; and the Duke’s Hall (for HRH Prince Charles).

Petr has made television appearances for BBC Proms Extra and Russia’s “Culture” channel, and broadcasts regularly for BBC Radio 3. In 2017, his arrangement of Auld

Lang Syne (issued on Decca in 2014 as a part of Nicola Benedetti’s best-selling “Homecoming” album) was performed in the Albert Hall at the BBC Proms. His repertoire stretches from Orlando Gibbons to Arvo Pärt.

Born in Moscow, Petr started playing the piano at the age of five. He entered the prestigious Central Music School in Moscow a year later to study under the guidance of Siavush Gadjiev, Valery Piasetsky and Andrei Pisarev. After winning first prize at the 1998 Nikolai Rubinstein International Piano Competition in Paris, he began giving concerts throughout Europe and Russia, supported by the Vladimir Spivakov International Charity Foundation. Petr went on to study with Hamish Milne and Alexander Satz at the Royal Academy of Music in London on a full scholarship, followed by a year at the Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris Alfred Cortot, where his

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teachers were Ramzi Yassa and Wolfram Schmitt-Leonardy.

In 2010 Petr returned to London to commence postgraduate studies at the Royal College of Music with Dimitry Alexeev, obtaining his Masters degree in 2012. During his studies, Petr participated in masterclasses

with Alfred Brendel, Stephen Hough, Vitaly Margulis and Stephen Kovacevich. He also studied conducting under Peter Stark. In November 2013, Petr made his conducting debut at Cadogan Hall with the London International Chamber Orchestra performing works by Glazunov and Rachmaninov.

More information: <https://www.petrlimonov.com/>

Kinderszenen, op15 (“Scenes from Childhood”) by Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

- 1. Of foreign lands and people; 2. A strange story; 3. Catch me if you can; 4. Pleading child;**
- 5. Completely happy; 6. An important event; 7. Dreaming; 8. By the fireside;**
- 9. The hobby-horse knight; 10. Almost too serious; 11. Frightening;**
- 12. Child falling asleep; 13. The poet speaks.**

In March 1838, Schumann wrote to his bride-to-be, Clara Wieck: “whether it was an echo of what you said to me once, ‘that sometimes I seemed to you like a child’, anyhow, I suddenly got an inspiration, and knocked off some thirty quaint little things from which I have selected twelve and called them *Kinderszenen*”. (There are, in fact, thirteen pieces in all.)

A devoted father, Schumann delighted in the company of his own and other people’s children. These pieces show just how closely he was able to identify with a child’s view of the world, something he shared with later composers like Mussorgsky, Ravel and Britten. Unlike *Album for the Young*, composed in 1848, which is intended for children to play, the pieces that make up *Kinderszenen* are not. They are, as he said himself, “an adult’s recollections, for adults”.

Each of the pieces distils a mood or idea relating to a common childhood experience, although Schumann insisted that the individual titles only suggested themselves

after each piece was written. ‘Of foreign lands and people’ has the air of a tale from a favourite storybook. ‘A strange story’ moves to a springy, mazurka-like rhythm. Rapid figures race around the keyboard in ‘Catch me if you can’. ‘Pleading child’ is deliberately left open-ended (so we do not know whether the wheedling succeeded). ‘Completely happy’ is a picture of total contentment, while the proud rhythms of ‘An important event’ contrast with the lazily circling melody of ‘Dreaming’, the best-known piece from the collection.

In ‘By the fireside’ the child appears to be both relaxed and alert, before the play-acting bravado of ‘The hobby-horse knight’. ‘Almost too serious’ is a moment of introspection. ‘Frightening’ is mostly quiet and furtive, with quicker sections suggesting a bogeyman appearing. ‘Child falling asleep’ has a gently hypnotic quality. The poet of the final piece is clearly Schumann himself, looking back with the complete lack of sentimentality or nostalgia of someone who still retains a child’s direct way of experiencing life.

Vogel als Prophet (“Bird as Prophet”) from *Waldszenen* (“Forest Scenes”), op 82

Waldszenen was Schumann’s last important cycle of piano pieces. He began it on 29 December 1848 and completed it on 6 January, though he continued making revisions until the following September.

Schumann originally gave each of the pieces a poetic preface. However, he removed all but one of them before the collection was published.

Forest imagery had a potent hold on the German romantic imagination, expressed across a range of art forms. The forest could be a friendly, almost cosy, place, but it could also be creepily sinister. *Waldszenen* explores every aspect of this ambiguous setting.

‘Vogel als Prophet’ is a strange, slowly pirouetting dance, occasionally played as a standalone piece.

Humoreske in B flat major, op 20

1. Einfach; 2. Hastig; 3. Einfach und zart; 4. Innig

Humoreske is the most substantial of three works which Schumann composed in the winter of 1838-9, during a visit to Vienna (the others are his *Arabesque*, op 18, and *Blumenstück*, op 19). He had gone to explore the possibility of settling there with Clara Wieck, once they were finally able to marry, and in particular of transferring there the music journal which he had helped found in 1833 and had been editing since its early days. Although the trip turned out to be fruitless as far as his future career was concerned, he managed to complete the three new piano works, “hoping to elevate myself to the front rank of favourite composers of the women of Vienna.”

He wrote to Clara in March 1839 to tell her about *Humoreske*: “I have been all week at the piano, composing, writing, laughing and crying, all at once.” He described the work to another friend as “not very cheerful and perhaps my most melancholy.” ‘Humoreske’ (or ‘humoresque’) was originally a literary term meaning a piece dealing with a specific human character trait or mood (the original meaning of the word ‘humour’). Schumann was the first to use it in a musical context, to signify a short

humorous or capricious piece. The sequence of miniatures making up *Humoreske* in fact covers a wide range of moods, from introspective to playful. They coalesce into five larger pieces (though these are not separately designated as such), with an introduction and closing section, the whole to be played continuously to convey the impression of a large, single-movement work.

The gentle opening, headed ‘Einfach’ (simply), leads to a quick scherzo-like piece – ‘Sehr rasch und leicht’ (very fast and light) with an even faster middle section. After the quick music returns, there is a brief recollection of the start to the whole work.

The second piece – ‘Hastig’ (hastily) – begins quietly. An unusual feature of the written score is an extra middle staff contains an ‘Innere stimme’ (inner voice, though perhaps ‘hidden melody’ better conveys Schumann’s intentions). This is not to be played, but it draws the pianist’s attention to the ghost of a melodic line embedded in the right-hand figuration. Again, there is a quicker, stormier middle section, which appears to run out of

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energy and become almost completely immobile, before the opening music comes back, leading to a quiet, slow ending.

'Einfach und zart' (simply and sweetly) is the heading for the third piece, which is gently lyrical, with a swifter-running Intermezzo. An altered version of the opening leads, again, to a withdrawn last few bars.

'Innig', the heading of the fourth piece, is a word for which there is no exact English equivalent; it describes an intensely withdrawn, introspective mood. This is the shortest of the five main

pieces, quietly confiding, but interrupted by a faster, more playful section beginning with the two hands bouncing complex rhythmic patterns off each other.

The fifth piece, 'Sehr lebhaft' (very lively), starts fast, then twice accelerates, culminating in an absolute torrent of notes, which is then stopped in its tracks by a silent pause. A march-like section, slow but not funereal, follows. Headed 'Mit einigem Pomp' (with a certain amount of pomp), it is full of strutting rhythms, which continue even as the music fades to nothing.

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