

# The quest for individuality in self expression through the centuries

## Programme notes by Simone Damiani

### **Mozart (1756 – 1791): Adagio in B minor K.540**

Composed in 1788, this single movement work has been frequently described by Mozart scholars as mysterious and enigmatic.

The music presents itself with a very dramatic, almost tragic character, since the very first notes which capture the listener's attention.

Despite the generally dramatic atmosphere, the Adagio also presents episodes of tender simple melodies, typical of Mozart's charming writing.

The piece ends with a surprising optimistic modulation to B major, which is stated twice at the end of the composition: the first time showing a little hesitancy, then finally bright and hopeful.

### **Beethoven (1770 – 1827): Sonata op.53 in C major (Waldstein)**

The Sonata op.53 was dedicated by Beethoven to Count Ferdinand Ernst Gabriel von Waldstein, and with good reason. The count made possible for Beethoven to move from the provincial reality of Bonn to Vienna in 1792.

The count wished for Beethoven that in Vienna, considered the capital of cultured music at the time, the composer could "receive Mozart's spirit from Haydn's hands".

The first movement of this Sonata, marked 'Allegro con brio', shows aspects reminiscent of traditional Viennese detached and rhythm-driven style.

The second movement, a short but evocative 'Adagio molto', serves the composer as a suspenseful and atmospheric introduction to the impetuous, shimmering Rondo, where Beethoven experiments with pedalling effect and extreme dynamic contrasts, ending the Sonata with a breathtakingly fast and exciting coda.

### **Scriabin (1872 – 1915): Sonata op.19 n.2 in G sharp minor**

Scriabin graduated from Moscow Conservatory in 1892, having studied there as a classmate of fellow composer Sergei Rachmaninoff.

Despite later works, characterised by experimentation, mysticism and sparse emblematic motives, the early works of Scriabin are equally representative of his personality, while carrying the heritage of Chopin, Liszt and the great romantic composers.

The Second Sonata was inspired by Scriabin's first encounter with the sea, as described by the composer himself: “.. the first movement represents the quiet of a southern night on the seashore; the development is the dark agitations of the deep, deep sea. The E major middle section shows caressing moonlight coming after the first darkness of the night. The second movement, Presto, represents the vast expanse of ocean stormily agitated”.

### **Busoni (1866 – 1924): Arr. Bach Chaconne in D minor BWV 1004**

Ferruccio Busoni is considered one of the greatest pianists to have ever lived, and he greatly contributed to the music world as a composer, pedagogue and conductor.

Busoni had a strong fascination towards transcribing and had his own idea of the true meaning of transcription: his aim was not as much to be as faithful as possible to the original score, but to portray a clear picture of the composer's original idea. As described by Sara Davis Buechner “for Busoni, all music was a transcription of the composer's original artistic idea anyway”.

It is not surprising then that, when transcribing Bach's Chaconne for solo violin into a piano arrangement, Busoni created a composition which, in the romantic spirit of the time, pushed the limits of his instrument of choice, exploring all registers and expressive possibilities, presenting to the performer an incredibly difficult challenge, technically and musically.

Sheer difficulty and vast emotional scope are in fact at the core of Bach's Chaconne nature, considered at its time and still today as a pinnacle of writing for solo violin and as one of the most challenging pieces in the repertoire.

### **Ligeti (1923 – 2006): Musica Ricercata I, II, III, IV, V**

Musica Ricercata is a set of 12 Pieces first published in 1953 by Hungarian composer György Ligeti.

The word ‘ricercata’ in the title of the work refers to the Italian ‘ricercare’, meaning ‘searching for’.

This choice of words is a statement by Ligeti about his intention to express himself through a very personal style, built and searched for from scratch.

In Musica Ricercata the composer starts with using a pitch class of only two pitches in the first piece, then adding a pitch to every class in each following piece of the set: by the 12<sup>th</sup>, the composer is using a twelve-pitch class system as his expressive device.

The first five pieces presented in the programme not only showcase already the compositional intent of Ligeti in this work, but they are perfect examples of the composer's wit and versatility.