



# Andreas Ottensamer and Yuja Wang in recital

Thursday 21 November 2019 7.30pm,  
Milton Court Concert Hall

**Debussy** Première Rhapsodie

**Brahms** Clarinet Sonata No 1

**interval** 20 minutes

**Mendelssohn, arr Ottensamer** Songs without Words: Op 67 No 2; Op 30 No 6; Op 102 No 1

**Brahms** Clarinet Sonata No 2

**Andreas Ottensamer** clarinet

**Yuja Wang** piano

**Part of Yuja Wang Artist Spotlight**

**Part of Barbican Presents 2019–20**

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Programme produced by Harriet Smith;  
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# Welcome

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Welcome to tonight's concert, featuring a formidable double-act: clarinetist Andreas Ottensamer and pianist Yuja Wang.

Andreas Ottensamer, still only 30, became Principal Clarinet of the Berlin Philharmonic eight years ago; two years later he became the first-ever solo clarinetist to be signed by DG. It's perhaps not surprising that he should hail from a family of musicians, but it's striking that it was only following early studies on the piano and cello that he picked up the clarinet as a teenager.

Yuja Wang is one of the most compelling musical personalities of our time and is the focus of an Artist Spotlight here at the Barbican this season. On Monday she gave the London premiere of John Adams's new piano concerto *Must the Devil Have All the Good Tunes?* and she

returns in 2020 for a chamber recital with cellist Gautier Capuçon on 13 January and as a solo recitalist on 31 March.

Tonight's concert is built around the two clarinet sonatas written by Brahms, who was famously coaxed out of retirement by the mellifluous playing of Richard Mühlfeld. Debussy tests both technique and tone in his *Première Rhapsodie*, which entirely transcends its original purpose – as a test piece for students at the Paris Conservatoire. Andreas Ottensamer offers his own arrangements of three of Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words*, their lyricism translating superbly from piano to clarinet.

I hope you enjoy the concert.

Huw Humphreys  
Head of Music

# Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

## Première Rhapsodie for clarinet and piano (1910)

In 1910, Debussy was asked to sit on the jury for the final competition of the clarinet class at the Paris Conservatoire, and to provide a short sight-reading test and a more extended test piece. The latter was named *Première Rhapsodie* (although there was never to be a second). Debussy arranged it the following year for clarinet and orchestra, but it was also published in its original form with piano accompaniment. The composer described it as one of his ‘most amiable’ works.

Like the many other wind pieces written for Conservatoire competitions, the *Rhapsodie* tests the player’s expressive and technical capabilities in a mixture of slow and fast

tempos. There are several sections in the ‘dreamily slow’ tempo of the opening, which carry most of the statements of the work’s two main thematic ideas – the first gliding over repeated piano patterns, the second oddly Brahms-like in its swooping thirds and sixths.

In contrast to these sections are a number of faster episodes, most of them strung together to form a middle section, each with its own material but sharing a *scherzando* (‘playful’) character, created by the clarinet’s insect-like darting runs and biting grace-notes. The general dynamic level is subdued, but the ending, after a reprise of the two main themes followed by one of the *scherzando* ideas, is stridently declamatory.

# Johannes Brahms (1833–97)

## Clarinet Sonata No 1 in F minor, Op 120 No 1 (1894)

- 1 **Allegro appassionato**
- 2 **Andante un poco Adagio**
- 3 **Allegretto grazioso**
- 4 **Vivace**

Brahms had announced his intention to retire from composition when in March 1891 he heard a concert by the touring Meiningen Orchestra. He was greatly impressed by the playing of its principal clarinetist Richard Mühlfeld, whom he later described as ‘the greatest artist there is on the clarinet’; and he started discussing the technique of the instrument with him.

That summer, in his favourite lakeside resort of Ischl, he composed for Mühlfeld both his Quintet for clarinet and strings, and his Trio for clarinet, cello and piano. And three years later, again at Ischl, he wrote the two sonatas for clarinet and piano, his last chamber works. These were first performed by Mühlfeld and Brahms in Vienna in January 1895 and published the same year. (It is an indication of the small size of the market for

domestic wind music at the time that Brahms provided a part for viola as an alternative to the clarinet, and later reworked both sonatas for violin and piano.)

The First Sonata is the more conventional of the two in its four-movement layout. The opening *Allegro appassionato* is for the most part urgent and forward-thrusting, with the clarinet matched in its undemonstrative virtuosity by the piano – not least, in the recapitulation, in some of Brahms's most complex cross-rhythms. But the second subject offers moments of repose; and the *Sostenuto ed espressivo* coda ends quietly, with the clarinet's only statement of the piano theme which opens and punctuates the movement. This ending prepares the ground for an A flat major slow movement of remarkable

calm: one factor which contributes to the trance-like atmosphere is that, in all the varied piano accompaniments to the main theme, there is never a strong down-beat in the bass. The third movement, also in A flat, is a *ländler*-like *Allegretto grazioso*, gentle at first but with a sturdy contrasting idea at the double-bar, and with some magically floating piano textures in the trio section. The F major finale is essentially a rondo: but the 'official' main rondo theme, a clarinet melody of alternating *grazioso* and *leggiero* character, turns out to be no more important than the piano's introductory idea, and especially the three repeated notes with which it opens.

**interval** 20 minutes

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## Felix Mendelssohn (1809–47), arr Andreas Ottensamer (born 1989)

### Songs without Words

**F sharp minor, Op 67 No 2: Allegro leggiero**

**F sharp minor (Venetian Gondola Song), Op 30 No 6: Allegretto tranquillo**

**E minor, Op 102 No 1: Andante un poco agitato**

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Felix Mendelssohn composed a Sonata for clarinet and piano in his prodigious teenage years, and later wrote two short Concert Pieces for clarinet and basset horn with piano. Andreas Ottensamer has added to the repertoire for clarinet and piano a number of arrangements from Mendelssohn's series of *Lieder ohne Worte*, or 'Songs without Words', for piano (there are seven of them on his recent recording with Yuja Wang, *Blue Hour*). The texture implied by Mendelssohn's title is one of melody with accompaniment, which naturally lends itself to the arrangements, with the melody line allocated to the clarinet or occasionally shared between the clarinet and the pianist's right hand.

Op 67 No 2 was written in April 1839 and published in 1845 in the sixth book of half a dozen *Songs without Words* (the last that

Mendelssohn saw through the press): the arrangement highlights the separation between the staccato accompaniment and the smooth melody that floats above it.

Op 30 No 6 was written into the album of a Leipzig amateur pianist named Henriette Voigt, and included in the second book of 1835; it takes the form of a Venetian Gondola Song, or barcarolle, accompanied by an undulating ostinato figure suggesting the rocking of the boat on the waters of the lagoon city.

The final piece in this group, Op 102 No 1, was written during a stay in London in 1842, and published posthumously in the last of the eight books; again, the arrangement lifts the expressive melody clear of the restless accompaniment.

# Johannes Brahms

## Clarinet Sonata No 2 in E flat major, Op 120 No 2 (1894)

**1 Allegro amabile**

**2 Allegro appassionato – Sostenuto – Tempo 1**

**3 Andante con moto – Allegro – Più tranquillo**

This is the second of Brahms's two sonatas for Richard Mühlfeld – 'the nightingale of the orchestra', as the composer dubbed him – and so his final chamber work. It has an unconventional three-movement plan. It begins with an *Allegro amabile* ('amiable'), in which the contrasts inherent in sonata form are smoothed out in favour of an almost uninterrupted flow of melody, restrained in its dynamic levels (with nothing above *forte*) and unified by thematic cross-references. The central movement is an E flat minor scherzo of urgent, agitated phrases and sudden piano outbursts; the B major trio is based on a broad, noble arch of melody, introduced by the piano and played finally by

the clarinet in its low chalumeau register; there is then a varied reprise of the scherzo. This is followed by an *Andante con moto* consisting of a sequence of variations subtly embroidering a reflective theme in 6/8 time with, in turn, winding syncopations, delicate triplet arpeggios, *grazioso* demisemiquavers and hushed off-beat piano chords. The fifth variation, an *Allegro* in 2/4 and in the minor key, seems to be launching a kind of vestigial finale, but a hymn-like *Più tranquillo* soon intervenes, restoring the major mode before the brilliant conclusion.

Programme notes © Anthony Burton

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# About the performers

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Kirk Edwards



Yuja Wang

## **Yuja Wang** piano

Critical superlatives and audience ovations have continuously followed Yuja Wang's dazzling career. The Beijing-born pianist, celebrated for her charismatic artistry and captivating stage presence, is set to achieve new heights this season, which features recitals, concert series and extensive tours with some of the world's most venerated ensembles and conductors.

Last summer she performed John Adams's *Must the Devil Have All the Good Tunes?* – a work written for her – with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Gustavo Dudamel at the Hollywood Bowl. She toured throughout Europe, including a recital with Leonidas Kavakos at the Lucerne Festival in August. Engagements this season include concerts with the Staatskapelle Dresden, NDR Hamburg, Vienna and New York Philharmonic orchestras, the Boston and San Francisco Symphony orchestras and the Cleveland Orchestra.

She is also the focus of an Artist Spotlight this season here at the Barbican with a series of four concerts: the London premiere of *Must the Devil Have All the Good Tunes?*, chamber concerts with clarinetist Andreas Ottensamer and cellist Gautier Capuçon, culminating in a solo recital.

Last season she was featured as an Artist-in-Residence at three of the world's leading venues: New York's Carnegie Hall with a season-long 'Perspectives' series, the Vienna Konzerthaus with a 'Portrait' series and the Luxembourg Philharmonie. Highlights included concerts with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra at Versailles, as well as the Summer Night Concert at the Schönbrunn Palace with Gustavo Dudamel. In spring 2019 she embarked on a tour of Los Angeles, Seoul and Tokyo with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra to give the first-ever performances of *Must the Devil Have All the Good Tunes?*, as well as reuniting with frequent collaborator Gautier Capuçon for a major tour of the USA.

Yuja Wang received advanced training in Canada and at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music under Gary Graffman. Her international breakthrough came in 2007 when she replaced Martha Argerich as soloist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Two years later, she signed an exclusive contract with DG and she has since established her place among the world's leading artists, with a succession of critically acclaimed performances and recordings, including, most recently, a Gramophone Award for *The Berlin Recital*.

Stefan Hoderath/DG



Andreas Ottensamer

### Andreas Ottensamer clarinet

The Austrian clarinetist Andreas Ottensamer has captivated audiences and critics alike with the singular beauty of tone that he coaxes from the instrument.

He performs as a soloist in the major concert halls around the world, with orchestras such as the Berlin, Rotterdam, Seoul and Vienna Philharmonic orchestras, Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Tokyo Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestre Métropolitain and the Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic, working with leading conductors, including Mariss Jansons, Sir Simon Rattle, Andris Nelsons, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Alan Gilbert and Lorenzo Viotti.

As a chamber musician he has performed with Yuja Wang, Leonidas Kavakos, Janine Jansen, Lisa Batiashvili, Nemanja Radulović, Nicolas Altstaedt and Sol Gabetta. In 2005 Ottensamer founded the clarinet trio The Clarinotts with his father Ernst and brother Daniel.

He is also artistic director of the Bürgenstock Festival in Switzerland, together with pianist José Gallardo, and the Artström Festival in Berlin.

In 2013 he entered into an exclusive recording contract with DG – the label's first-ever signing

with a solo clarinetist. His second album, *Brahms – The Hungarian Connection*, won him ECHO Klassik's Instrumentalist of the Year Award in 2015. He went on to record *New Era* on the Decca Classics label, featuring repertoire of the Mannheim school with Emmanuel Pahud, Albrecht Mayer and the Kammerakademie Potsdam.

Last season saw the release of his latest DG album – *Blue Hour*, a collaboration with Yuja Wang, Mariss Jansons and the Berlin Philharmonic featuring works by Weber, Brahms and Mendelssohn.

In the 2017–18 season he was Artist-in-Residence with both the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and the Kammerakademie Potsdam, as well as being the Menuhin Heritage Artist at the Gstaad Menuhin Festival and Junger Wilder at the Konzerthaus Dortmund. In May this year he was Artist-in-Residence at the Schwetzingen Festival. Other highlights of last season include guest solo performances with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and the Adelaide, National Taiwan and Western Australia Symphony orchestras, as well as at the Aix-en-Provence Easter Festival and the Salzburg Festival. He performed in the Utzon Recital series at Sydney Opera House and made his solo Carnegie Hall debut with Yuja Wang. In February 2020 he performs the Mozart Clarinet Concerto at the Salzburg Mozartwoche.

Andreas Ottensamer was born in 1989 in Vienna. He comes from an Austro-Hungarian family of musicians and was drawn to music early, receiving his first piano lessons when he was 4. At the age of 10 he began studying cello at the Vienna University of Music and Performing Arts, switching to the clarinet in 2003.

In 2009 he interrupted his Harvard undergraduate studies to become a scholar of the Orchestra Academy of the Berlin Philharmonic. Since March 2011 he has been Principal Clarinet with the Berlin Philharmonic.

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# Yuja Wang: Artist Spotlight

Mon 18 Nov

**LA Phil/Dudamel  
with Yuja Wang**

Thu 21 Nov

**Andreas Ottensamer  
and Yuja Wang in recital**

Mon 13 Jan

**Gautier Capuçon  
and Yuja Wang**

Tue 31 Mar

**Yuja Wang in recital**

**'An artist with  
poetry as well as  
fire in her soul'**

*Financial Times*

