



Tamara Stefanovich: The Art of the Étude

Sunday 10 November 2019,
Milton Court Concert Hall

2.30pm

Part 1: From the past

4pm

Part 2: In the present

7pm

Part 3: When two worlds collide

Tamara Stefanovich piano

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50 Études

Sun 10 Nov

Milton Court Concert Hall

2.30pm

Part 1: From the past

Szymanowski 12 Études, Op 33

Scriabin Études Nos 2 and 3, Op 42

Roslavets No 3 from Three Études

Debussy 'Étude pour les huit doigts' and 'Étude pour les arpèges composés' from Études

Laurié 'Étude' from Daytime Routine

Bacewicz Nos 4, 5 and 8 from 10 Études

Bartók No 2 from Three Études

Messiaen 'Île de feu I' from Quatre Études de rythme

Tamara Stefanovich piano

4pm

Part 2: In the present

Milica Djordjević Role-playing 1: strings attached (world premiere: commissioned by the Barbican)

Unsuk Chin Étude No 6 'Grains'

Yihan Chen Étude I 'Evocation'

John Woolrich Étude

Steingrimur Rohloff Étude 'Evening Cool'

George Benjamin 'Relativity Rag' from Three Studies

Hans Abrahamsen 'Rivière d'oubli' and 'Arabesque' from 10 Studies

Vassos Nicolaou Nos 1 'Anodos', 4 'Chimes', 6 'Animadóttir', 7 'Entrap', 8 'Point de jonction', 10 'Filter' and 15 'Tamara' from Études

Tamara Stefanovich piano

7pm

Part 3: When two worlds collide

Rachmaninov Étude-tableau in F minor, Op 33 No 1

Ligeti Étude No 3 'Touches bloquées'

Rachmaninov Étude-tableau in C major, Op 33 No 2

Ligeti Étude No 10 'Der Zauberlehrling'

Rachmaninov Étude-tableau in C minor, Op 39 No 1

Ligeti Étude No 15 'White on White'

Rachmaninov Étude-tableau in B minor, Op 39 No 4

Ligeti Étude No 8 'Fém'

Rachmaninov Étude-tableau in D minor, Op 39 No 8

Ligeti Étude No 2 'Cordes à vide'

Rachmaninov Étude-tableau in D major, Op 39 No 9

Ligeti Étude No 13 'L'escalier du diable'

Tamara Stefanovich piano

Welcome

A warm welcome to today's concerts, in which the remarkable pianist Tamara Stefanovich presents a veritable workout for fingers and mind in the form of 50 *études*.

It was Chopin who first truly elevated the study from the practice room to the concert hall, bringing a musical depth to what previously had often been little more than exercises in vapid virtuosity. His examples offered inspiration to composers as varied as Liszt and Ligeti.

Today Tamara asks the question 'what is an *étude*?' and explores what happens when you juxtapose unlike with unlike, as she does in the last of today's concerts, in which Rachmaninov's *études-tableaux* and Ligeti's *études* rub shoulders; though their sound-worlds couldn't be more different, they have in common the idea that *études* can tell stories and evoke images.

Part 1 transports us back in time to the early and mid 20th century, where the heady colours of Scriabin, Szymanowski and Roslavets form a contrast with the extreme demands of Bartók and late Debussy. From here we move post-war to the glittering rhythmic worlds of close contemporaries Bacewicz and Messiaen.

Tamara Stefanovich is well-known for her interpretation of contemporary music so it's fitting that Part 2 should bring us to modern times. As well as pieces written expressly for her – by Yihan Chen, Steingrimur Rohloff, John Woolrich, Vassos Nicolaou and Milica Djordjević (the latter work a Barbican commission) – she also performs studies by George Benjamin, Hans Abrahamsen and Unsuk Chin.

It promises to be a thrilling day: I hope you enjoy it.

Huw Humphreys, Head of Music, Barbican

Sun 10 Nov: The Art of the Étude

2.30pm: From the past

Karol Szymanowski (1882–1937)

12 Études, Op 33

Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915)

Études, Op 42 – Nos 2 and 3

Nikolay Roslavets (1881–1944)

Three Études – No 3

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

Douze Études – Nos 6, 'Pour les huit doigts'
and 11, 'Pour les arpèges composés'

Arthur Lourié (1891–1966)

Daytime Routine – Étude

Grażyna Bacewicz (1909–69)

10 Concert Études – Nos 4, 5 and 8

Béla Bartók (1881–1945)

Three Études, Op 18 – No 2

Olivier Messiaen (1908–92)

Quatre Études de rythme – 'Île de feu I'

Playing a musical instrument is one of the most difficult things we can do. Many of us make a start; precious few achieve mastery, and then only at the end of lengthy training, sustained by hours of daily practice. Hence the need for study material – for *études*, to extend and maintain muscular and mental agility. Henry Purcell's widow published *A Choice Collection of Lessons for the Harpsichord or Spinnet* in 1696, soon after her husband's death. Another century passed, however, before production took off, in response to the growing popularity of the piano. Chopin, in the 1830s, made the *étude* an art form, poetic as well as instructive, to be emulated in that by countless composers since.

Tamara Stefanovich plunges into this history halfway, with a bevy of *études* most of which date from around the time of the First World War. Perhaps at such a time the keyboard study, inviting concentration on a defined task, had a particular value. Perhaps, as the next programme might suggest, it does now.

We begin with Szymanowski in 1916 – a bumper year for him, one that also saw the composition of his Third Symphony and First Violin Concerto. These *études* are on a quite different scale, the 12 of them lasting not much more than the same number of minutes, most being fast or very fast. Szymanowski asked that they be played continuously, hurtling on, through a few moments of stillness (every third one is slow, from No 2 onwards, and the capricious No 9 settles for a short while). Wholeness is further established by common features, especially the twinkling harmonies and the ostinatos, maintained in different ways through the set's changes of character. No 5, which is said to date from an earlier period (1908) is the only piece with a key signature, that of E flat, though it strains at the leash of tonality as much as anything else here, and its final chord sounds like an afterthought. Nos 10 and 12 between them wrap the cycle up, around a last look at the stars.

With Scriabin's Op 42 we go back to 1903. The second and third numbers in the set are among the shortest, each a minute long. No 2 manages

to be at once melancholy and humorous, with a song, in F sharp minor, that eventually escapes its incessant quintuplet semiquavers only to come to a halt, at which point the pattering bounces back at top speed. No 3 has humour, too, in the neat trills that have given it the nickname of 'Mosquito'. The key here is Scriabin's favourite F sharp major, which he saw as intense blue.

Yet out of this hothouse some would carry a red flag, seeing in Scriabin the signpost to music in tune with revolution. Among such unexpected followers was Nikolay Roslavets, though his *Three Études* of 1914 find him not yet so far away from Scriabin. The last of the set, a much longer piece than any we have heard so far, has restless swirls alternating with passages in which a melody, sometimes naked, sometimes richly harmonised, is offset against streaming triplets. Eventually it makes its re-entry *con entusiasmo*. The enthusiasm, however, peters out.

Debussy, initially ill, and then unsettled by the outbreak of war, wrote nothing in this year of 1914. The following summer, however, at Pourville, on the Normandy coast, he 'relearned' music, as he put it in a letter to a friend, and discovered a new abstraction. His book of 12 *Études* was one product. The study 'for the eight fingers' is all water, made mostly of quick four-note scales taking the hands in contrary directions or the same, and subject to splashes. Near the end, a simple song begins to make itself heard in the droplets. Another is revealed within the lustrous 'written-out arpeggios' of the 11th *étude*, around a middle section recalling the music-hall numbers of the composer's preludes. Finally the two sorts of music get to address one another.

Arthur Lourié was another composer who saw no contradiction in being at once a Scriabinist and a Leninist, serving as head of the music division of the People's Commissariat for Education during the years immediately after the October Revolution. His short suite *Daytime Routine* comes from a little earlier, from the same year as the Debussy *études*, but was published only in 1918, with an ink-wash Cubist portrait of the composer on the cover. A minute-long study, which Lourié

dedicated to his conservatory piano teacher Maria Barinova, is the first of the five pieces. Its main substance is clangorous: open fifths in the right hand with mostly diminished fifths in the left, both hands stuck in the middle register. There is a steady crescendo and rising tension, to the point where a bass chord slams in and sends the music scurrying in circles. It will happen again.

There were, of course, women poets, novelists and painters in the springtime of modernism, but for notable women composers we have to await the next wave, soon after the Second World War. Grażyna Bacewicz was born into a musical family and studied composition with Nadia Boulanger, besides training as a violinist. Her works include seven string quartets and the same number of violin concertos, but she also wrote notably for the piano, especially in her *10 Concert Études* of 1956 – a crucial year for new music in Poland, when the Warsaw Autumn festival was instituted. The fourth piece in the set is a *moto perpetuo*, the fifth a slow movement plodding in the shadows to gain in power and determination before returning whence it came. Also in ternary form, but with the middle section briefly brought back at the end, No 8 moves for the most part in small circles of luminous uncertainty.

The second of Bartók's *Three Études*, Op 18, takes us back again to the First World War period, dating from 1918. All three pieces in this set stand

out from the rest of the composer's piano music by virtue of their bright-dark spangled harmonies (we are not so far from Szymanowski territory) and their virtuoso rhetoric. Bartók confessed later that he could no longer play them, and they are indeed formidably difficult. The right-hand arpeggiation here, over broken double octaves in the left, has something in common with the water music of Debussy and Ravel, as well as Szymanowski, but this is a torrent rushing underground. The hands switch functions, and there is a cadenza, unbarred, in which the water has frozen into chunks of ice. A reprise is attempted, but cannot be kept going.

The programme ends with another piece from the post-1945 era, by a contemporary of Bacewicz: Olivier Messiaen. In 1949 he wrote two movements under the title 'Île de feu', this 'Fire Island' being Papua New Guinea, whose fire dances were in his mind; he combined the pieces with two of a more abstract cast to make *Quatre Études de rythme*. A strongly rhythmic theme keeps recurring, in different settings – first, at the start, in the bass with a deeper bass-drum-style accompaniment, soon after in a higher register with a birdsong above it, and so on – interspersed with other material that only intensifies the excited state, everything crashing in and out without warning. In two minutes it is all over.

Programme note © Paul Griffiths

4pm: In the present

Milica Djordjević (born 1984)

Role-playing 1: strings attached
(Barbican commission: world premiere)

Unsuik Chin (born 1961)

Étude No 6 'Grains'

Yihan Chen (born 1994)

Étude I 'Evocation'

John Woolrich (born 1954)

Étude

Steingrímur Rohloff (born 1971)

Étude 'Evening Cool'

George Benjamin (born 1960)

Three Studies — No 3 'Relativity Rag'

Hans Abrahamsen (born 1952)

10 Studies — Nos 8 'Rivière d'oubli' and 3 'Arabesque'

Vassos Nicolaou (born 1971)

Études — Nos 1 'Anodos', 4 'Chimes', 6 'Animadóttir',
7 'Entrap', 8 'Point de jonction', 10 'Filter' and
15 'Tamara'

All the *études* in the second part of Tamara Stefanovich's programme are by living composers, in most cases by composers writing expressly for her. The pieces by Unsuk Chin, George Benjamin and Hans Abrahamsen are exceptions, and these are also the only items that dip back into the 20th century.

From the remarkably inventive Serbian composer Milica Djordjević comes an *étude* unlike any other, a piano study in which the performer's fingers never touch the keyboard. Dexterity and fine attention to sonority are exercised, rather, inside the instrument, and the result is a soundscape of glowing harmonies, unearthly conjurings from the far bass, and eventually fragments of metal melody in the upper treble. To bring these into being the pianist has to operate four Ebows (electronic devices, intended for use on guitars, to produce the effect of bowing on a string continuously), draw on threads woven around strings in the bottom register, and use finger picks or a plectrum to scrape along bass strings or pluck higher ones, all the while keeping the sustaining pedal down so that the sounds produced can come to fullness and drift away.

The sixth and last (so far) of Unsuk Chin's *études* is a borderline case in this respect, for though it was finished in 2000, and given its first performance here in London by Rolf Hind that year in a recital of pieces dedicated to Pierre Boulez on his 75th birthday, revision followed in 2003. At the start comes one note in the high treble, followed by a jump up to another, and the stage is set for a fantasy of extreme registers – except that a G sharp in the middle of the piano keeps making its presence felt. The piano progressively comes alive with pinpoints, splashes and tiny figures, but this insistent note will not be silenced, even when there arrives a cannonade of two-part counterpoint. As everything fades, it is still there.

Yihan Chen, who moved as a teenager with his family from China to the United States, is the youngest composer here, and himself a pianist. He wrote this *étude* in February 2017, and by October that year had added four more to make a set evocative of his native city of Changzhou. 'The misty rain that veils all that one's eyes can see,' he writes, 'and the myriad of bridges that grace the tapestry of canals along which stand the waterside homes with the walls white and roof tiles black, thus the scene unfolds when I dream in my sleep during my years away from home.' We

may all perhaps sense this in the rapid right-hand tremulation at the top of the keyboard, around which the left hand must work other figures, and the growing ways of harmony in the middle register. The quick pattering shifts in position, just as rain will make different sounds depending on what surface it strikes.

John Woolrich's *Étude*, from 2013, is a concatenation of fragments, each somewhere between half a minute and a minute long. They start out fast, studies in speed and rhythmic definition, and, in the case of the second and third pieces, dialogue. At the start comes a right-hand study, revisited in the fourth piece – which might seem to wrap things up, except that there is a fifth element, changing the game.

Steingrímur Rohloff, born in Reykjavík but resident in Germany since he went there to study, wrote a set of three *études* for Tamara Stefanovich to play at the 2016 Aldeburgh Festival. 'Evening Cool', the second of them, begins cool indeed – wandering harmonies supporting a lazy melody, played 'quasi jazz' – and quiet. What was ornamental at this stage comes to take over, and the dynamic level gradually increases with the whirling, which draws the hands apart and then back together again. A little postlude brings back the chords and the intimacy.

Composed in 1984, and first performed that year in Cardiff by the composer, 'Relativity Rag' was one of three piano studies George Benjamin produced in 1982–5. Elemental ideas – notably a lusciously harmonised ragtime step and a cheeky cadence – quickly form themselves into a piano rag, and then unform themselves again. As Benjamin puts it: 'Phrases are cut up like bits of film, the tempi of the hands separate, the harmony distorts and eventually the rag is transformed beyond recognition.' At one point it draws near the birdsong pieces of Benjamin's teacher Messiaen. The elements, however, remain recognisable, ready to gel into the rag once more and be whisked away. Time dilation, one might say, is going on, and on several levels. The clocks to which the hands keep time draw apart; tiny ticks of time, in the elements, stick around; and in five minutes the piece executes a five-decade fast-forward from Poulenc to Benjamin.

It is curious that in this Benjamin piece, as also in Hans Abrahamsen's 'Arabesque', dating from the same period, we have pre-echoes, in terms

of piano sound and fractal thinking (having music grow in infinite repetition and variation of minuscule elements) of Ligeti's first book of *études*, which came out in 1985 and has pretty much defined all examples since, certainly including the others Ligeti himself was to compose as well as those of his pupils, who include both Abrahamsen and Unsuk Chin.

'Rivière d'oubli', or 'River of Oblivion', is one of two studies with which Abrahamsen completed his set of 10 in 1998. Both have French titles, and evoke the piano music of Debussy and Ravel, not least in their watery subject-matter (the other in this pair is 'Cascades'). Remembering this repertoire from almost a century before, and remembering also itself as it proceeds, 'Rivière d'oubli' nevertheless now and then slips away into soundless tunnels in keeping with its title. For Ancient Greeks, the river of oblivion was Lethe, one of the five rivers of the underworld, from which the dead must drink in order to forget their lives above.

'Arabesque' was one of the four pieces with which Abrahamsen began his sequence of studies, these four all having titles in German and recalling the German piano, especially the Romantic German piano. An arabesque is a geometrical pattern of leaves and tendrils; Abrahamsen achieves the same effects of infinity and curve with a small group of notes. 'Arabesque' was also the title Schumann used for his Op 18 piano piece, and perhaps that piece is somewhere in the background.

The Cypriot composer Vassos Nicolaou has been a productive force this century not only in the domain of the piano *étude* but also in piano music generally, his works including two four-hand pieces written for Tamara Stefanovich and Pierre-Laurent Aimard: *scene* (2010) and *Frames* (2017). His first five *études* were commissioned for the 2008 Ruhr Piano Festival, and were followed by three for the 2013 festival and more beyond. 'In each piece', he has written, 'I focus mostly on a specific way of playing, on basic acoustic matters (such as the instrument's resonance) or on geometric-choreographic movements of the hands. Several numbers are studies in rhythm, and extra-musical ideas have inspired me as well.' The notes below quote him further.

'I am fascinated by how our minds try tirelessly to recognise forms and figures in the night

sky, the clouds, or on the surface of an old wall. When I started composing the first *étude*, "Anodos", I created a starry sky with notes and then tried to make heard the forms and figures I observed. The piece begins in the lowest register of the piano and ends in the highest (*anodos*=upwards). Having regard to psychoacoustical phenomena described in Albert S Bregman's *Auditory Scene Analysis*, I tried to achieve, from a single line, an illusory polyphony.

'The poetic idea behind the fourth *étude* is that of Aeolian chimes, played by the wind, in an imaginary very slow pace. They sound "natural" because the tone material is projected onto harmonic spectra – and also reverse harmonic spectra – to create something like major–minor duality. Notated on up to six staves, this is also a study in reading.

'No 6 concerns melodies in the baritone register accompanied by higher gestures, both kinds of music enriched by an aura of sympathetic resonance. The higher gestures accelerate into a trill, causing the initial rubato to change into chordal bursts.

'In "Entrap", a steady left-hand ostinato is combined with much freer and flowing music for the right hand, creating illusory speeds. The hyper-virtuosic musical text traps the pianist, who finds herself with crossed hands and legs at the end of the piece.

'"Point de jonction" is composed on several levels regarding dynamics and ways of creating direct or indirect resonance. It starts gently but soon a "trigger" causes a series of disruptions and the music erupts into wild gestures across the keyboard.

'The 10th *étude* is perhaps the calmest. Releases of notes within chords are not synchronised, as though a filter has been activated.

'Technically, No 15 has many similarities with No 1, but all the elements and their development are more complex. A "machine" that regenerates material forms itself, based on two illusory canons in complementary rhythms, with intuitive freedoms taken during the process of composition.'

Programme note © Paul Griffiths

7pm: When two worlds collide

Sergey Rachmaninov (1873–1943)

Étude-tableau in F minor, Op 33 No 1

György Ligeti (1923–2006)

Étude No 3 'Touches bloquées'

Sergey Rachmaninov

Étude-tableau in C major, Op 33 No 2

György Ligeti

Étude No 10 'Der Zauberlehrling'

Sergey Rachmaninov

Étude-tableau in C minor, Op 39 No 1

György Ligeti

Étude No 15 'White on White'

Sergey Rachmaninov**Étude-tableau in B minor, Op 39 No 4****György Ligeti****Étude No 8 'Fém'****Sergey Rachmaninov****Étude-tableau in D minor, Op 39 No 8****György Ligeti****Étude No 2 'Cordes à vide'****Sergey Rachmaninov****Étude-tableau in D major, Op 39 No 9****György Ligeti****Étude No 13 'L'escalier du diable'**

As Tamara Stefanovich is well aware – her title for the programme indicates as much – this is a provocative combination that brings her tally of *études* for the day to 50. On the one side we have Rachmaninov maintaining the glory and the glitter of 19th-century Russia through the first whirlwind of modernism, on the other Ligeti picking up the magic dust left when all the whirlwinds are over. What can these two say to one another? Well, they agree decisively on construing the *étude* as a picture, as an *étude-tableau*, in Rachmaninov's coinage. We might find, too, that Rachmaninov's tonality, disintegrating but stabilised, is not so far from Ligeti's, reintegrating but destabilised. Also, Richard Steinitz, in his essential study of Ligeti, tells us that in the late 1970s, when the composer was in the habit of spending an hour a day at the piano, his repertory included Bach, Chopin, Schumann, Debussy and, yes, Rachmaninov.

One might wonder if he ever tackled Rachmaninov's first *Étude-tableau*, from the set dating from August to September 1911 and published as Op 33, for this F minor piece is a study – or a picture – of stairways, and stairways within stairways, generally descending. (We will be invited to complete the comparison with Ligeti right at the end of the evening.) Chromaticism and dotted rhythms complicate the steps Rachmaninov takes, together with the imbalance caused by the incursion of irregular time signatures: jolts to 5/4, 2/4, 6/4 or 3/4 out of the basic four-beat metre. C major – like blue sky – is very briefly glimpsed, twice, and perhaps provides encouragement for the final escape into completely consonant and luminous territory, the stairways now just a bad memory.

Ligeti's piano practice bore fruit in 1985, when he published a first book of six *études*. So much other than intimate acquaintance with the instrument feeds into these pieces: all his earlier experience of composing and of Central European folk music, the surviving diatonic light in Debussy, and newer enthusiasms that included fractal patterning (whereby similar images are multiplied on one another infinitely),

African music and the complex crossed rhythms of Conlon Nancarrow, all helping him create the illusion of several simultaneous layers moving at different speeds. In the third study, 'Touches bloquées' (Blocked Keys), the right hand's notes are interrupted when it tries to strike a key the left is holding down and thereby blocking, so that its even rhythm is hobbled. In a typical Ligetian tactic, the music descends into the bass and then reappears in the high treble – strikingly transformed, as it turns out, though the right hand's halting race is then briefly resumed.

If one wanted an image, a tableau, for the item from Rachmaninov's Op 33 collection in the clearest key, C major, it might be of somewhere near water, where a woman and a man are in conversation. The two characters have their own registers, of course, and their own themes, but it is clear that each responds to the other. What speaks most, though, is the arpeggiating water.

Ligeti, meanwhile, is moving on. Having started writing piano *études*, he found it impossible to stop, and over the next 16 years produced a dozen more: eight to form a second book and four to begin a third, the last of them his final composition. 'Der Zauberlehrling', from his second book, took what was an appropriate subject for him: the Goethe story musically retold in Dukas's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Instead of the multiplying brooms in Walt Disney's interpretation of the latter in *Fantasia*, we have a simple ostinato constantly on the move rhythmically and harmonically, turning at the main crisis point into an A flat Phrygian scale.

Rachmaninov's second set of *Études-tableaux* was the last major work he completed in Russia, in 1917, and the last he completed at all for almost a decade, so that the dialogue he opened here with other recent Russian piano music, that of Scriabin and of Prokofiev, was curtailed. We may sense touches of both those other composers in the C minor tornado that opens the set, not so much in the main material, where triplet semiquavers in

the right hand swirl around the left's utterances in octaves, as in the episodes at the centre of the three-minute piece: twinkling cascades in the whole-tone scale and other non-traditional modes, for instance, or heavyweight ostinatos and mechanical rhythms.

'White on White', with which Ligeti opened his third book, of course goes even further afield from traditional tonality. The study presents a slow chorale-canon proceeding entirely on white keys in the treble register, though out of these restricted means come harmonic inclinations that are crooked and unstable: progressions (in this case triads are rare, and chords are generally unrepeated) often seem to be pulling in two or more directions at the same time. Then this all turns into a typical play of asymmetrical melody on asymmetrically grouped running quavers, but still only on the white notes until very near the end.

It may not be too much of a stretch to compare this combination of simplification and sophistication with Rachmaninov's in his B minor piece, though occasioned in this case by a model: that of an 18th-century gavotte, at once fussy and elegant (if also frequently switching metre). The form is that of a dance movement, too, with two repeated sections, both ending with the same question, which is answered in the coda.

Ligeti's 'Fém' (Metal) is a hocket in even rhythmic values, alternately loud and soft, locked into close registral spaces, and moving from fifths and triads to more complex chords: the sound is harsh, clangorous, indeed metallic, and indeed also luminous. (Close to the Hungarian word for 'metal' is that for 'light': *fény*.) In a quiet coda, some of the territory is gone over again at one-third speed.

Sunny in tone for the most part, the D minor instalment of Rachmaninov's Op 39 is based on a brief wave of gentle harmonic fluctuations moving along a larger wave between diatonic simplicity and richer, more emphatic realms of expression. This *étude-tableau*, like the very first, is one of the more Ligetian inventions, in its translucent fifths

and, even more so, the changes it constantly rings on its initial right-hand pattern. (Sadly, Ligeti did not return the compliment, none of his *études* sounding particularly Rachmaninovian.)

We return to Ligeti's first book, whose members all display generative construction from simple elements, imprints from folk music, and harmony and metre in states of bewilderment or veiling. This piece is a study in fifths, hence the title's reference to the tuning of string instruments: 'Cordes à vide' (Open Strings).

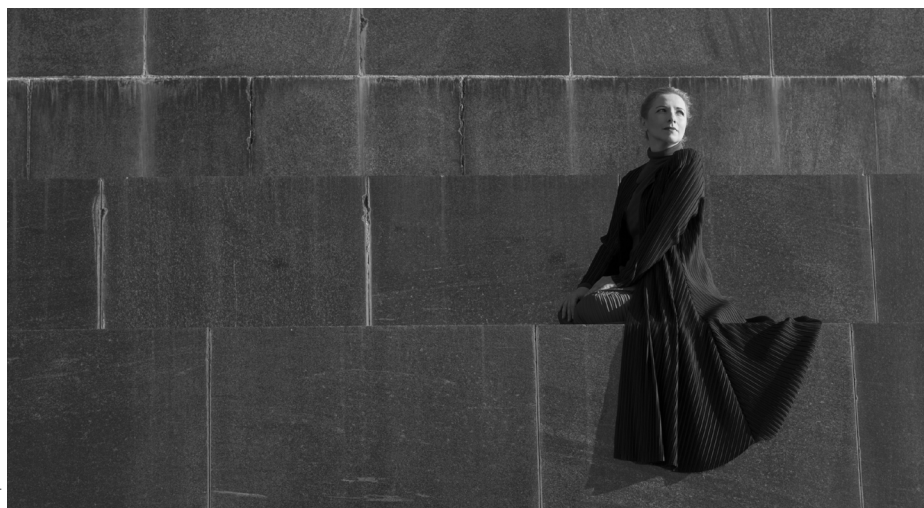
The last number in Rachmaninov's Op 39 – the only one in this set in a major key, though this difference is not so marked, given the opalescence of Rachmaninov's harmony (as of Ligeti's) – is a march. Unwary marchers might be wrongfooted by the middle section, in shifting metres, but once a *scherzando* interlude has brought back the main material, everything is on course for a triumphant close.

Ligeti, of course, goes for triumph of a different kind. 'L'escalier du diable' (The Devil's Staircase), placed in sinister 13th position among his *études*, is the most imposing and alarming of them. Its stairs are chromatic steps, in rising scales braided together, but crabbed, because each scalar note is divided from the next by one or two foreign notes. After a page of this furious, driven but irregular music, the right hand terrifyingly breaks free, but is still bound into chromatic-scale figures. The inexorable upward stairways seem to be able to continue forever, because when one of them reaches the top of the keyboard another two or more will still have room ahead. Eventually, however, both hands are crammed into the far treble and the uneven steppings stop. Chords now appear alone, as if peering around in an emptied musical space, but the rule of upward chromatic motion soon reasserts itself and, despite the wild ringing of bells, the music returns towards its former condition, compelled to go on rising.

Programme note © Paul Griffiths

About the performer

Olja Radmanovic



Tamara Stefanovich

Tamara Stefanovich piano

Tamara Stefanovich is acclaimed worldwide for her highly elaborate recital programmes, as a chamber musician and as a concerto soloist with leading international orchestras. She has an unusually broad repertoire, ranging from Bach to contemporary music, and has performed with the Cleveland Orchestra, the Bamberg, Chicago and London Symphony orchestras, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, among others.

She appears at the world's major concert venues, including Suntory Hall, Tokyo, the Royal Albert Hall and Wigmore Hall. She has performed at international festivals such as La Roque d'Anthéron, the Salzburg Festival and Beethovenfest Bonn.

This season she appears at Hamburg's Elbphilharmonie, here at the Barbican Centre, Vienna's Konzerthaus and Brussels's Flagey. She also appears with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra under Kirill Petrenko, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra under Pablo Heras-Casado

and the Philharmonia Orchestra under Karl-Heinz Steffens, among others.

Highlights last season included her debut with the hr-Sinfonieorchester, giving the world premiere of Zeynep Gedizlioglu's new piano concerto, alongside returns to the Stavanger and Danish National Symphony orchestras for performances of Hans Abrahamsen's *Left, alone*.

Other recent engagements have included performances with the Tokyo Symphony Orchestra, MDR Sinfonieorchester Leipzig, WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln, Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Orquestra Sinfônica do Estado de São Paulo. She also undertook an extensive recital tour of the USA to mark the 90th birthday of Pierre Boulez, to great critical acclaim.

She has worked with composers such as Pierre Boulez, George Benjamin, Hans Abrahamsen and György Kurtág. Her chamber music partners include Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Matthias Goerne and she regularly works with conductors such as Esa-Pekka Salonen, Vladimir Jurowski and Susanna Mälkki.

Her award-winning discography includes a recording of Kurtág's ... *quasi una fantasia* ... and his double concerto with Asko|Schönberg Ensemble and Reinbert de Leeuw and Jean-Guihen Queyras for ECM. That album received an Edison Award, and her recording of Bartók's Concerto for two pianos, percussion and orchestra with Pierre-Laurent Aimard and the London Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Boulez (DG) was nominated for a Grammy Award. Following her first solo recording, of works by Bach and Bartók, her second album *Influences*, released on Pentatone in March, explores music by Ives, Bartók, Messiaen and Bach.

Tamara Stefanovich regularly leads educational projects at the Barbican Centre, Kölner Philharmonie and Klavier-Festival Ruhr, such as the innovative online project of interactive pedagogical analyses of Boulez's *Notations*: www.explorescore.org. She was co-founder and curator of Portland Piano International's 'The Clearing' Festival. She studied in Belgrade, at the Curtis Institute and at Cologne's Musikhochschule.

barbican

Pianists at the Barbican

2019–20

18 Nov, 21 Nov 2019
& 13 Jan, 31 Mar 2020

Yuja Wang

26 Jan, 13 Feb, 19 Feb, 7 Apr 2020

Igor Levit

Fri 6 Dec 2019

Arcadi Volodos

Thu 6 Feb 2020

Evgeny Kissin

Tue 25 Feb 2020

Simon Trpčeski

Mon 4 Apr 2020

Lang Lang

Tue 21 Apr 2020

Murray Perahia

Sun 7 Jun 2020

Hélène Grimaud

Fri 12 Jun 2020

Jeremy Denk



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