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PIANO EXPLORED

London Mozart Players
Howard Shelley: Piano

ONLINE: from 18 February 1:05pm

SAINT-SAËNS Piano Concerto 2 in G minor, Op.22
MENDELSSOHN Capriccio Brillant in B minor, Op.22

ONLINE: from 18 March, 1:05pm

MOZART Piano Concerto No.21 in C major, K.467

ONLINE: from 22 April, 1:05pm

HUMMEL Piano Concerto in E, Op.110

CONCERT: Wednesday 26 May, 1:05pm

ONLINE: Wednesday 26 May, 1:05pm

MOZART Piano Concerto No.6 in B-flat major, K.238

MOSCHELES Piano Concerto No.1 in F major, Op.45

Tickets:

Online concerts: £8.

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londonmozartplayers.com/piano-explored

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Concerts will be on demand from go-live date for 6 months.



A message from Julia Desbruslais Executive Director, London Mozart Players

We are so pleased that after a very sad and difficult time caused by the pandemic, LMP is finally able to proceed with our ever-popular Piano Explored series. We have a wonderful range of piano works lined up for this, our seventh series, and both LMP and our great friend Howard Shelley OBE are looking forward to gathering at St John's Smith Square (under Covid guidelines) to perform for you.

If you are new to Piano Explored, it has long been a firm favourite with London's lunchtime concert-goers. LMP's Conductor Laureate Howard Shelley directs proceedings, giving an entertaining and insightful introduction to one or two famous or not-so-famous works for piano and orchestra, before performing them with the London Mozart Players. This season we'll be performing a couple of the best loved virtuosic classics of Mozart and Saint-Saëns, a favourite work by Mendelssohn, and relatively unknown pieces by Hummel and Moscheles.

This series will be performed under different circumstances than the usual lunch hour gatherings of the past. The four-concert series will go ahead with concerts every month from February to May. Concerts will be performed under Covid guidelines without an audience (until audiences are permitted to attend) and will be filmed for online viewing, with the films broadcast shortly after filming, except for the final concert which will be livestreamed.

Piano Explored is a real jewel in our crown and for the players, these concerts are some of our most enjoyable musical experiences. We know that our audience really adores this series, whether they know everything or nothing about individual pieces. Howard's insightful and witty introductions throw fresh light onto these much-loved works, paving a way in for newbies to the piano repertoire. We cannot wait to perform this exceptional concert series for you, whether in person (eventually), or via the internet.

How to enjoy Piano Explored concerts

To attend a LIVE concert at SJSS:

When audiences are permitted to attend, tickets will be on sale via the St John's Smith Square website. www.sjss.org.uk

How to Buy & Watch our Piano Explored films online

- Visit: londonmozartplayers.com/piano-explored
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- You can play the video as many times as you like.

Howard Shelley OBE

Piano

'The journey which the London Mozart Players and I have taken with our audiences at St John's Smith Square in London over the past six seasons has been wide-ranging and exhilarating; and we have illustrated and performed over forty piano concertos. From the time of Mozart on, the development of the piano, and its ability to engage dramatically and powerfully with the orchestra, has inspired composer after composer to write some of their greatest works, and it is a true joy to continue our exploration again this season, even if, for the time being, this must be done online. We very much hope, however, that this distinctive way of presenting a treasure-trove of wonderful works will attract many more friends and listeners from around the world, and we warmly welcome all who join us.'

Howard Shelley

As pianist, conductor and recording artist Howard Shelley has enjoyed a distinguished career since his acclaimed London debut in 1971, performing with renowned orchestras around the world. He has been closely associated with the music of Rachmaninov and has performed and recorded complete and award-winning cycles of that composer's solo piano works, concertos and songs. Most of his current work is in the combined role of conductor and soloist. This is reflected also in his discography which now exceeds 180 CDs, all highly praised.

As conductor he has worked with all the major London orchestras and many other orchestras in the UK and abroad including the Hong Kong Philharmonic, Singapore Symphony, Seattle Symphony, City of Mexico Philharmonic, Munich Symphony and Nuremberg Symphony. He has toured to Australia for over 35 consecutive years, and has performed with all the orchestras there, particularly the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, with whom he has recorded over 20 volumes for Hyperion's Romantic Piano series.

Howard has a special relationship with the London Mozart Players with whom he has worked closely for 45 years. They have given hundreds of concerts and made many recordings and overseas tours together. In recognition of this the orchestra appointed Howard their Conductor Laureate. In March 2020, to mark Howard's 70th birthday, he performed all Beethoven's piano concertos with LMP in a single day at St John's Smith Square, London.

Howard Shelley is married to Hilary Macnamara and they have two sons. An Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Music, he was awarded an OBE for his services to classical music in 2009.

'[an] aristocratic command of the glittering keyboard pyrotechnics.' *Daily Telegraph*

'How he manages to play with such conviction and apparent ease while conducting from the keyboard with such precision and sensitivity is one of the musical marvels of the age.' *Gramophone*



Concert one

Saint-Saëns and Mendelssohn

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS

(1835–1921)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in G minor, Op.22

- I Andante sostenuto
- II Allegro scherzando
- III Presto

Camille Saint-Saëns was one of the most precocious musicians ever, beginning piano lessons with his aunt at two-and-a-half and composing his first work at three. At age seven, he studied composition with Pierre Maledin. When he was ten, he gave a concert that included Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 and Mozart's B-flat Concerto K.460, along with works by Bach, Handel, and Hummel. In his academic studies, he displayed the same genius, learning languages and advanced mathematics with ease and celerity. He would also develop keen, lifelong interests in geology and astronomy.

In 1848, he entered the Paris Conservatory and studied organ and composition. By his early 20s, following the composition of two symphonies, he had won the admiration and support of Berlioz, Liszt, Gounod, Rossini and other notable figures. From 1853 to 1876, he held church organist posts; he also taught at the École Niedermeyer (1861–1865).

During his long and prodigiously creative life Saint-Saëns composed five piano concertos between the ages of 20 and 61. He created the Second (and enduringly most popular) hurriedly in the spring of 1868 after the Russian pianist/ composer/ conductor Anton Rubinstein asked him to arrange a Paris concert. Because the Salle Pleyel was solidly booked and, therefore, not available for three more weeks, Saint-Saëns proposed that he himself write a new piece for the occasion. On 6 May, with Rubinstein conducting, he introduced the Second Concerto, although not with much success. There had not been time to practice it sufficiently, and a portion of the

audience reacted negatively to the work's stylistic swings.

The Second Concerto might be regarded as a different kind of tribute to Liszt, one that reflects the senior musician's influence rather more directly, while at the same time showing a sense of individuality. The form, as in Liszt's own concertos, is unusual for its time. The first movement opens with a cadenza and has only minimal participation by the orchestra, by way of punctuating or marking off various sections as they succeed one another, in this sense reminiscent of the Italian Baroque concertos (a field of special interest to Saint-Saëns) with their alternation of solo and tutti passages in place of any substantive dialogue. It is a forthright and effective showcase for the pianist.

There is no 'slow movement' where one might have been expected. Having begun with an elaborate Andante sostenuto, the Concerto has for its middle movement a quicksilver Allegro scherzando. Its opening with drumbeats leads quickly to a mischievously playful theme stated first by the piano and then taken up by the winds; this is contrasted with a broadly expansive lyric theme which the piano shares with the strings, the soloist echoing the drumbeat figure here and there as the two themes alternate.

The finale, a glittering Presto, outdoes the scherzo in terms of sheer drive. The orchestra is a full partner in this grand tarantella, which brings the work to an exhilarating conclusion.

© Elizabeth Boulton

Howard's Verdict:

"From Bach to Offenbach" has been jokingly said of this viscerally attractive piece, but what delights we enjoy along the way, especially the dancing and virtuosic second movement scherzo and whirling third movement Tarantella.'

Available on CD:

Chandos [CHAN10509]
Schumann/ Grieg/Saint-Saens: Piano Concertos: Howard Shelley & Opera North Orchestra

'The fact that Howard Shelley directs these inspirational performances from the piano is nothing short of remarkable. In his hands, sparkling virtuosity and interpretative ease combine to form a perfect musical marriage...Best of all is Saint-Saëns Concerto No. 2, which receives its finest recording since Rubinstein's classic made nearly half a century ago.' *Classic FM Magazine*

'The fine rapport between pianist and orchestra is captured expertly'
International Piano

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

(1809-1847)

Capriccio brillant, Op. 22 for piano and orchestra

Andante – Allegro con fuoco

Mendelssohn's Capriccio brillant is one of three single-movement works he wrote for piano and orchestra. Mendelssohn was himself a fine pianist, as well as being a composer and conductor, and he gave the first performance of this work here in England, at a Philharmonic Society concert in London in May 1832. The British public had already taken Mendelssohn to its heart, following his debut tour in 1829 when he performed several of his astonishingly precocious early compositions, and many of his subsequent works received their first performances in England, including such masterpieces as Elijah and the D minor Piano Concerto.

Although in just one movement, the Capriccio brillant is in two distinct sections, with a slow introduction preceding the main Allegro con fuoco ('Lively, with fire').

The Andante has a lyrical theme, with the piano accompanied by delicately plucked strings, in B major, while the Allegro is in B minor, and is suitably fiery. There are two main themes, which Mendelssohn cleverly combines in the middle section, before a return to the opening theme leads into a vigorous coda. The whole work lasts a little over ten minutes.

© Ian Lush

Howard's Verdict:

'I love the typically energetic but elegant Mendelssohnian romp which makes up the major part of this piece. It's set off by a soulful introduction where the piano almost strums the opening theme like a guitar.'

Available on CD:

Chandos [CHAN9215]
Mendelssohn: Piano Concertos: Howard Shelley & London Mozart Players

'With his slower spread chords and more expansive melodic line in the introduction, plus springier rhythms in the ensuing fun and games, Shelley does just that little bit more for the engaging Capriccio brillant'
Gramophone

'This is marvellous playing in every respect. For many collectors this will be a first choice'. *Penguin Guide to CDs*



Concert two

Mozart

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

(1756-1791)

Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major, K.467

- I (Allegro maestoso)
- II Andante
- III Allegro vivace assai

After Mozart moved to Vienna in 1781, much of his income was derived from public concerts in which he played his own music. Mozart had already written about a dozen keyboard concertos. A number of these had been written for pianists other than Mozart himself. Then in Vienna he wrote three new concertos (Nos. 11-13) for his own use in the 1782/83 season and in 1784 composed no fewer than six masterpieces in the form (Nos. 14-19); 1785 saw the production of three more great piano concertos, among them this triumphant C major score, one of the most technically demanding of his concertos. Mozart finished it on 9 March, just in time for the première the following day.

The first movement is an elfin march, which has been described as 'a tiptoed march, in stocking feet'. It is enhanced by chromatic harmonies, with cheeky interludes for the wind band, a coy first entry of the piano and an epigrammatic ending. The mark Allegro maestoso is not in the autograph, but appears in reliable editions to offer a hint that the movement's strength lies in mass and not in speed. The Andante is a wonderfully scored dreamy rhapsody accompanied by hypnotic triplet quavers. The finale, however, dispels this mood in a moment, recalling the first movement with its spirited chromaticism and the tentative care with which (if the score is followed literally) the piano pauses to listen to its first note. The wind's contribution here has been irreverently compared to a steam organ!

The C major Concerto is a display concerto, with an orchestra including trumpets and drums, full of ostentatiousness and verve. Although listening with modern ears, we are impressed by its graceful melodies and

orchestration; contemporary listeners must have been surprised by its modernity, particularly in the slow movement. In fact, that lilting andante is one of the best-known parts of this concerto; its languid theme familiar to all those who saw the Swedish film *Elvira Madigan*.

Completed on March 9th (coincidentally the same date as Howard Shelley's birthday!) the concerto was first performed on 10 March 1785, so our Piano Explored performance on 10 March 2021 will mark this work's 236th anniversary.

Howard's Verdict:

'Eternally perfect, and possibly Mozart's most famous concerto, with a hypnotic slow movement which never fails to enthrall it's hearers.'

Available on CD:

Chandos [CHAN9404]
Mozart: Piano Concertos, Vol. 6: Howard Shelley & London Mozart Players

'My regard for Howard Shelley's ongoing Mozart piano series on Chandos increases with each successive release in what is rapidly evolving into one of the most accomplished and illuminating contemporary traversals of the cycle. Howard Shelley's playing leaves little unsaid, and the Chandos recordings, made at St Jude's Church, London, in June 1994, are in every way as magnificent as the performances themselves' *Fanfare*

Concert three

Hummel

JOHANN NEPOMUK HUMMEL

(1778–1837)

Piano Concerto No 4 in E major, Op.110

- I Allegro pomposo e spiritoso
- II Andante con moto
- III Rondo. Allegro moderato

Johann Nepomuk Hummel was an Austrian composer and virtuoso pianist whose music reflects the transition from the Classical to the Romantic eras. He was born in Pressburg, Kingdom of Hungary, now Bratislava in Slovakia, and his father was the director of Vienna's Imperial School of Military Music and conductor of the orchestra at the Theater auf der Wieden.

A child prodigy, the young Hummel so impressed Mozart that he was taught and housed by Mozart for two years free of charge, and made his first concert appearance at the age of nine in one of Mozart's own concerts. Like Mozart, Hummel was taken on a four-year European tour by his father to show off his talents and they spent some time in London, where Hummel enjoyed the guidance of Muzio Clementi.

The tour was cut short by the French Revolution and Hummel returned to Vienna where he was taught by Haydn and also Salieri; Hummel struck up a respectful friendship with a fellow pupil of Haydn – one Ludwig van Beethoven, and seems not to have been intimidated by his friend's prodigious talent, although Hummel wrote no symphonies. Hummel went on to enjoy the highest reputation as both a composer and a virtuoso performer and his music forms part of the transition from the Classical period of Mozart and Haydn, to the Romantic era of Chopin, Mendelssohn and Schumann.

Hummel's E major Concerto shows his admiration for Mozart while looking forward to Chopin. Hummel's music was designed to entertain rather than to educate, and this work almost smiles at you, its charm and

sparkle eschewing any pretentiousness. Throughout the work are opportunities to convey the music's joie de vivre, with abundant melodic and lyrical passages, plenty of beautifully wrought passagework and Hummel's trademark trills.

Howard's Verdict:

'This concerto combines the classical strengths of Hummel's friends – Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven – with what was a new type of light romanticism encompassing moments of melting beauty and virtuosity.'

Available on CD:

Chandos [CHAN9687]
Hummel: Violin/ Piano Concertos: Howard Shelley with London Mozart players

'Shelley... is outstanding in this music, synthesizing the classical and romantic elements perfectly. A natural Mozartian, he allies his poise and clarity to a fearless technique, and absorbs Hummel's most ostentatious demands into the musical fabric, giving the decorative solo part the necessary grace and piquancy.'
Gramophone 'Critics' Choice' of January 2000

'With Shelley at the helm, the Piano Concerto emerges with an almost Mozartian freshness and elegance. Quite literally there's never a dull moment.'
Classics CD

'Shelley's technical control is outstanding.'
BBC Music Magazine



Concert four

Mozart and Moscheles

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

(1756-1791)

Piano Concerto No. 6 in B-flat major, K.238

I Allegro aperto
II Andante un poco adagio
III Rondeau: Allegro

Mozart composed his piano concertos for the fortepiano, a predecessor of our modern piano, which produced a lighter sound than today's instruments and had a much smaller dynamic range.

Written in 1776, when Mozart was just twenty, the Piano Concerto No. 6 was completed the year after he composed his five concertos for violin. Despite the short time between the violin concertos and the B-flat piano concerto, the piano concerto is quite different stylistically from the violin works, lacking their unrestrained quality although it is still a richly inventive work. This particular concerto shows Mozart's continuing explorations of harmonic language and instrumentation: the orchestra is more 'present', but the virtuosity of the pianist still shines through.

Scored for two oboes, two flutes, two horns, and strings, the B-flat Piano Concerto has a conventional three movement, fast-slow-fast form. The first movement is marked Allegro aperto, a rare instruction also found in his A major violin concerto, written in 1775. Literally translating as 'open' or 'frank', the exact meaning is unknown, but perhaps we can assume that it denotes radiance or gaiety, indicating the playing should also be a little more expansive than is usual for an allegro.

The Andante is full of charming, liquid phrases, as in his famous slow movement from the C major concerto K.467 the accompanying triplet quavers give an hypnotic feel to the movement. In this movement, the oboes are replaced with flutes, giving it a sweeter character, and the strings often marked pizzicato, heightening

the movement's hushed, graceful quality. We are given a glimpse of what would become one of his strongest qualities – the ability to switch from major to minor and back again, which in this case adds an extraordinary luminosity to the movement.

The Finale is a traditional rondo, and its cheerfulness is evocative of the Turkish elements in the finale to the A major violin concerto, inviting us all to dance. The oboes return, the flutes take a back seat and the horns have a moment in the spotlight, while the soloist gets to show off his or her virtuosity with a section in G minor which requires some nimble Baroque-style fingerwork.

Howard's Verdict:

'An early, but lesser-known gem from the most prolific composer of perfect piano concertos ever.'

IGNAZ MOSCHELES

(1794-1870)

Piano Concerto No.1 in F major, Op.45

I Allegro maestoso
II Adagio
III Rondo: Allegro vivace

Born in 1794 into an affluent German-speaking Jewish merchant family, Ignaz Moscheles was a Bohemian composer and piano virtuoso. His father was keen for one of his children to become a musician, and Ignaz (whose original first name was Isaac) took up the piano and developed an early passion for the music of Beethoven, although his teacher at the Prague Conservatory urged him to focus on Bach and Mozart. Moscheles settled in Vienna in 1808, studying with Albrechtsberger and Salieri, and became close friends with Meyerbeer, Hummel and Kalkbrenner, the latter two becoming rival piano virtuosos. While in Vienna, Moscheles was able to

meet his idol Beethoven, who was so impressed with the young man's abilities that he entrusted him with the preparation of the piano score of his opera *Fidelio*.

Moscheles travelled extensively in Europe as a pianist and conductor, eventually settling in London (1825-1846) where he became co-director of the Royal Philharmonic Society in 1832. He was later based at Leipzig, where he joined his friend and sometime pupil Felix Mendelssohn as professor of piano at the Conservatory. Moscheles had been instrumental in bringing Mendelssohn to London for the first time in 1829.

Moscheles' Piano Concerto No 1 in F major was published in 1819 under the title of 'Society Concerto' (Gesellschafts-Konzert) with a dedication to Count von Appony. Moscheles revised it in 1823 for future publications. It is perhaps the only one of his concertos that holds back from technical ostentation; its nearly classical purity possibly indicating that he composed it partly for his pupils.

Mozart's influence is discernible throughout this ebullient and joyful concerto, above all in its flawless structure, but also at times in the orchestration (for example with the writing for the horns near the end of the first movement and in the finale). The expansive first movement contains some elegant dialogue between soloist and orchestra, while at the start of the slow movement Moscheles' phrasing verges on the operatic, with the piano's beautiful A minor melody reminiscent of a cantabile vocal line. This phrase is repeated later by the orchestra in a simple and melancholy form with the piano adding embellishments. The Rondo brims with happiness and wit, accelerating towards a barnstorming finale, rounding off the work in suitably celebratory fashion.

Howard's Verdict:

'I hear Mozart's airy sound world, and the sparkle and romance of youth in this exhilarating first concerto by Moscheles – Mendelssohn's teacher, friend and respected colleague.'

Available on CD:

Hyperion [CDA67385]

Moscheles: Piano Concertos Nos 1, 6 & 7: Howard Shelley & Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra

'Played with a taste and vivacity that reflect the temperament of the music ... the thing that strikes you most about this music is its lively originality' *Daily Telegraph*




'I defy anyone not to be captivated by this delightful, witty, rhythmically vital and spontaneously inventive work, especially when played as stylishly as here' *International Record Review*



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