**Programme**

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**Performer**

Piano Colleen Lee (HKS Artist Associate 2010/2011)

**Programme Notes**

**Pierre Boulez**

**Sonata No 3 for Piano** (1955-1957)

With his *Piano Sonata No. 2* (1948), Pierre Boulez began expanding his use of serial techniques beyond the realm of pitch to other musical elements such as rhythm and dynamics. This led him to the notion of "perpetual expansion," a sort of open form in which works might vary extensively from performance to performance and exist in a constant state of revision. He derived this concept from the great French poet Stéphane Mallarmé, whose Livre was such a free-form collection, begun in the early 1870s but left unfinished at the poet’s death in 1898.

The Sonata No. 3 is the first such open form work, begun in the mid-1950s, revised in 1963, but never completed in the usual sense. The sonata is usually described by the composer and other commentators as having five movements or “formants” (“Antiphonie,” “Trope,” “Constellation,” “Strophe,” and “Séquence”); however, only two, Formant 2: “Trope” and Formant 3: “Constellation-Miroir,” have been published. The other three are regarded as “works in progress.” Boulez gave the Sonata its premiere on September 26, 1957, at Darmstadt, where he regularly taught in the late 1950s and early 1960s. There remains some controversy as to whether Boulez or Karlheinz Stockhausen -- whose Klavierstücke XI, also an open form work, was likewise premiered at Darmstadt in July 1957 -- was the real revolutionary in this area.

Boulez described his Sonata’s form and inspiration in the article “Sonata, que me veux-tu?” (*Sonata, What Do You Want Of Me?*). The “Trope” movement, which appeared in print in the form of a spiral booklet, consists of four sections: “Texte,” “Parenthèse,” “Commentaire,” and “Glose.” These can be played in several different orders. “Texte,” probably the simplest of the four sections, is often featured first, whereas “Commentaire,” with its scherzo-like playfulness and dramatic
chords (including a particularly long-held one at its end),

sounds most like a normal conclusion.

The sheet music of “Constellation-Miroir” consists of
nine large sheets in six “constellations” -- three of “Points”
(structures concentrating on single notes, printed in green),
two of “Bloks” (structures based on chords and arpeggios,
printed in red), and a short “Mélange” (featuring both single
notes and chords). “Constellation-Miroir” would normally be
played in the order “Mélange” - “Points 3” - “Bloks II” - “Points
2” - “Bloks I” - “Points 1,” as opposed to an unpublished
version of the movement which is played in reverse order.

Elements within each of the six sections can be arranged in
several different ways. Boulez likens the structure to a map
of an unknown city in which the performer “must direct
himself through a tight network of routes.” The music of
“Constellation-Miroir” alternates between spare, delicate
passages and more assertive, granitic sections; it is a remote
and enigmatic movement, with considerable space between
its gestures. (Chris Morrison)

Felix Mendelssohn
Songs Without Words, Op 53

Songs Without Words, German Lieder ohne Worte, collection
of 48 songs written for solo piano rather than voice by
German composer Felix Mendelssohn. Part of the collection—
consisting of 36 songs—was published in six volumes during
the composer’s lifetime. Two further volumes—with 12 more
songs—were published after Mendelssohn’s death in 1847.

Most famed of the four dozen Songs Without Words is the
lighthearted and aptly named “Spring Song,” Op. 62, No. 6, in
A major, from the fifth volume.

In 1842 Mendelssohn wrote to a correspondent about the
composition of the Songs Without Words:

If you ask me what I had in mind when I wrote it, I
would say: just the song as it is. And if I happen to have
certain words in mind for one or another of these songs,
I would never want to tell them to anyone, because the
same words never mean the same things to others. Only
the song can say the same thing, can arouse the same
feelings in one person as in another, a feeling that is not
expressed, however, by the same words.

In that same letter, he had earlier remarked:

People often complain that music is too uncertain in its
meaning, that they should be thinking as they hear
it is unclear, whereas everyone understands words. With
me it is exactly the reverse, and not only in the context
of an entire speech, but also with individual words.

These, too, seem to me so uncertain, so vague, so easily
misunderstood in comparison to genuine music that fills
the soul with a thousand things better than words. The
thoughts expressed to me by the music I love are not too
indefinite to be put into words, but on the contrary, too
definite.

The first set of six songs, Op. 19, appeared in print in
England in 1832 under the title Original Melodies for the
Pianoforte. The following year it was published in Germany
as Lieder ohne Worte. Five more collections appeared in the
course of Mendelssohn’s abbreviated life (he died at age
38). These include Op. 30 (1835; first published in France as
Six Romances and later that year in Germany as Lieder ohne
Worte; all later volumes were published in Germany under the
familiar title), Op. 38 (1837), Op. 53 (1841), Op. 62 (1844), and
Op. 67 (1845). (Betsy Schwarm)