

MUSIC AT AN EXHIBITION

NOTATING  
BEAUTY

THAT  
MOVES



28.3.2018 WED 7:30PM

SONG AND

DANCE I

#### Programme

Pierre Boulez      **Sonata No 3 for Piano** (1955-1957)  
Felix Mendelssohn      **Songs Without Words, Op 53**

#### 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 "Blocs" (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" - "Blocs II" - "Points 2" - "Blocs 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 what 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)