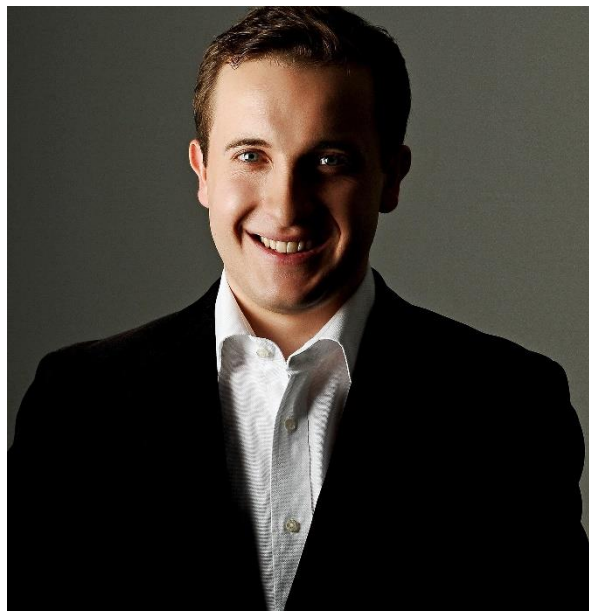


**Ben Schoeman**

**Piano Recital**

**Knysna Concert Series, 21 August 2017**



### **Programme**

#### **JS Bach (1685-1750)/F Busoni (1866-1924) - *Ich ruf zu Dir, Herr Jesu Christ* (I call to thee, Lord Jesus Christ, BV B 27/5)**

Bach composed the church cantata *Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ* (I call to You, Lord Jesus Christ), in Leipzig for the fourth Sunday after Trinity and first performed it on 6 July 1732. The great Italian-German virtuoso pianist Ferruccio Busoni transcribed ten chorale preludes by Bach for the piano, of which this is one of the most popular. The deeper registers of the organ are effectively imitated through thicker bass chords on the piano and Busoni uses descriptive markings to guide the performer through the various colouristic stages of this poignant chorale.

#### **R Schumann (1810-1856) – *Kreisleriana* (Fantasies, dedicated to F. Chopin), Op. 16**

- I. Äusserst bewegt (extremely fast)
- II. Sehr innig und nicht zu rasch (very intimate/heartfelt and not too fast) – Intermezzo I (very lively) – Tempo 1 – Intermezzo II (a bit faster) – Langsamer (slower) – Adagio – Tempo 1
- III. Sehr aufgereggt (very agitated) – Etwas langsamer (a bit slower) – Tempo 1 – Noch schneller (even faster)
- IV. Sehr langsam (very slow) – Bewegter (faster) – Tempo 1
- V. Sehr lebhaft (very lively)
- VI. Sehr langsam (very slow) – Etwas bewegter (slightly faster) – Tempo 1
- VII. Sehr rasch (very fast) – Noch schneller (even faster) – Etwas langsamer (slightly slower)
- VIII. Schnell und spielend (fast and playful)

*Kreiseriana*, one of Robert Schumann's largest solo piano works, consists of eight movements. Although each one has a distinct character, there seems to be an overarching sense of unity – an emotional intensity that runs from the first tempestuous triplet figurations to the last mysterious staccato notes in the bass register. Schumann achieves this partly through the consistent alternation between B flat major and G minor tonalities. The title stems, as with many other works of Schumann, from literature. He was an ardent reader of ETA Hoffman and Jean Paul's novels, and it is the brooding, epic and capricious nature of these works that so clearly provided the inspiration for a composition such as *Kreiseriana*. The leading character in Hoffman's novel *The Life and Opinions of Tomcat Murr*, is the Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler. Kreisler is a Romantic soul, who philosophises about love and higher ideals. His mischievous cat Murr, on the other hand, enters his work room and writes his own autobiography on the back of the master's manuscript papers. The ultimate novel by Hoffman is therefore a somewhat bizarre amalgamation of two seemingly contrasting stories that ultimately come together in a poignant union (much like this work of Schumann). Schumann's complex personality and his depressed emotional state led him to write music that fluctuates between deeply introverted passages and very agitated outbursts. In *Kreiseriana*, the latter is represented by virtuosic runs. The music of JS Bach also served as an inspiration here, as the writing is often highly contrapuntal and the textures layered. The regular occurrence of toccata figurations and brief chorale-like interludes arguably strengthen this argument. The structures of the movements are mainly conventional (ABA or ABACA), but the melodic tension and highly chromatic harmonies render this quite a modern work for its time. Schumann wrote to his publisher, after having completed the whole set in only two months in 1838, that he loved it the most of all the music he had been working on at the time.

### **Z Kodály (1882-1967) – *Dances of Marosszék* (1927)**

Zoltán Kodály, along with his friend and colleague Béla Bartók, played a significant role in the revival and appreciation of Hungarian folk music (and even traditional music from adjacent regions such as Slovakia and Romania). He was a true Renaissance man, being a gifted composer, ethnomusicologist, and one of the twentieth century's most important music educators. He devised highly effective aural training methods. In 1927 he combined various melodies from the Marosszék region in Hungary to form an intricate, rhapsodic and highly virtuosic piano piece. This was orchestrated and adjusted three years later (initially championed by Arturo Toscanini) and now joins some of Kodály's other major orchestral works that entered the standard repertoire: *Peacock Variations*, *Dances of Galánta* and the *Háry János Suite*.

Interval

### **P Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)/transcribed by M. Pletnev – *Concert Suite from 'The Nutcracker'*, Op. 71a**

- **March**
- **Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy**
- **Tarantella**
- **Intermezzo**
- **Trepak (Russian Dance)**
- **The Tea (Chinese Dance)**
- **Pas de Deux**

Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Nutcracker* hardly needs any introduction. It is one of the most popular Romantic works. In 1978, shortly before winning the gold medal in the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, the young Russian pianist Mikhail Pletnev (b. 1957) completed his transcription of seven

movements from *The Nutcracker*. Pletnev's phenomenal pianistic abilities are clearly illustrated in the very thickly-textured piano writing and he perfectly captures the expansiveness and wide plethora of colours in Tchaikovsky's beautiful orchestral score. Some of the greatest technical challenges in Pletnev's transcription are the fast scales coupled to the march-theme in the first movement, the layering of the strings against the material of the celeste in the *Dance of the Sugar-Plum Fairy*, the very wide registral leaps in the *Chinese Tea*, and the expansive arpeggiatic writing in the *Trepak* and *Pas de Deux*. The *Tarantella* is probably the most unpianistic movement, but Pletnev nonetheless manages to capture the spirit of this Sicilian dance through the innovative use of the pedal markings and articulation. This transcription can be regarded as a preparation to the more extensive later arrangement by Pletnev of Tchaikovsky's other great ballet *Sleeping Beauty*.

### **S Rachmaninoff - Sonata No. 2 in B flat minor, Op. 36 (1931 version)**

- **Allegro agitato**
- **Non allegro**
- **Allegro molto**

In 1913, Rachmaninoff stayed with his family in a house in Rome that was previously also inhabited by Tchaikovsky. One wonders if it is a coincidence, therefore, that the Piano Sonata he had been working on at that time, includes almost identical figurations to that of Tchaikovsky's famous Piano Concerto no. 1. One example that comes to mind, is the chordal cascade in the very final coda of both works. Be that as it may, Rachmaninoff amalgamates many years of pianistic experimentation in his Second Sonata, which became an important warhorse for many distinguished pianists such as Vladimir Horowitz, Zoltán Kocsis and others. Rachmaninoff's daughters contracted typhoid fever in Rome, so he could only complete the Second Sonata after their recovery, when the family had temporarily transferred to Berlin. The composer employed strict sonata form, but he also utilised the concept of thematic transformation that runs like a thread through all the movements. The movements are not separate entities, as they are combined by means of a short transitional passage (inserted at the opening of the second and third movements). In 1931, Rachmaninoff decided to revise the work, discarding (what he regarded as) superfluous material. The revised version will be performed in this recital. Although it is shorter, it still contains some of the fiendish technical challenges of the original version. Like Rachmaninoff's other important piano work, the *Corelli Variations*, the Sonata has a largely brooding and melancholic character. It certainly forecasts the dark days of the coming Revolution of 1917, after which Rachmaninoff had to permanently relinquish his beautiful country estate Ivanovka and had to flee with his family to Europe and the USA, never to return to his beloved Russia.

Notes: © Ben Schoeman