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Inspiring Artists Inspiring You

Recital by Joanna MacGregor - Piano

Bach	French Suite in G major BWV 816
Chick Corea	Children's Songs
Piazzolla arr. MacGregor	Four Tangos
Schumann	Kinderszenen
Joanna MacGregor	For Nina Simone
Beethoven	Sonata in F minor Op.57 Appassionata

Joanna MacGregor piano

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
French Suite no 5 in G major BWV816

Allemande
Courante
Sarabande
Gavotte
Bourree
Loure
Gigue

This recital starts with a 'first half of dance' movements: Bach's elegant, decorated Baroque; Chick Corea's jazzy songs and steps for children; then tangos, from the mighty Piazzolla.

Written between 1722 and 1725, Bach's six French Suites are graceful and melodic. Their relative lightness, and courtly ornamentation, probably earned the description 'French' as a way of distinguishing them from Bach's other suites; like Beethoven's *Moonlight* and Chopin's *Raindrop* prelude, these affectionate nicknames usually attach themselves afterwards. Each French Suite has a distinct personality, the first three being tauter and more tightly constructed in minor keys, the next three looser and more relaxed, in major keys.

The fifth Suite, in G major, has a sunny, radiant atmosphere. Its warm *Allemande* unfurls into a scurrying *Courante*; the serene *Sarabande* reminds us of the Aria from the *Goldberg Variations*. The inclusion of a French *Loure* is a surprise; it's more usual to have a *Menuet* at this point. Instead the *Loure* (sometimes known as a *gigue lente*) is a blissfully reflective movement, where the voices curl lazily around one another. The final *Gigue* is one of the reasons I return again and again to this work: witty, vivacious and sophisticated, it reminds me irresistibly of an Irish jig.

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Chick Corea (1941-2021)
Children's Songs: 4, 6, 11, 17, 18 & 20

The sudden death earlier this year of the American jazz pianist, composer and band leader Chick Corea robbed the music world of a luminous, generous presence. A member of Miles Davis's fusion band in the 1960s, his work drew on Latin American music and rock, as well as jazz. He collaborated widely – with vibraphonist Gary Burton, fellow pianists Herbie Hancock and Friedrich Gulda, guitarist John McLaughlin – writing music for ensembles, bands and orchestras. He won over 25 Grammy Awards, and was considered one of the foremost jazz players, along with Bill Evans, McCoy Tyner and Keith Jarrett.

The suite of twenty short pieces, *Children's Songs,* were published in 1984. Throughout his career Chick Corea cited Bela Bartók as an influence; these lyrical but highly structured miniatures are reminiscent of Bartók's *Mikrokosmos* series, as well as the sensitivity of Schumann's *Kinderszenen.* Anyone who saw Corea in performance - and heard him speak - knows that he was mischievous by nature, another delightful aspect of these clever, jazzy pieces.

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992) arr. Joanna MacGregor
Four Tangos

Tanguedia
Buenos Aires Hora Cero
Milonga del Angel
Libertango

Astor Piazzolla was a master of the bandoneon - the Argentine accordion - and single-handedly re-invented Argentina's greatest musical form, the tango, with a great deal of controversy. Spending his childhood in a poor part of New York (where his parents worked for the Mafia), he headed back to his hometown Buenos Aires at 16, and formed his own orchestra. It took him 20 years to conquer the hearts of the aficionados – and his melting pot of modern jazz, classical and folkloric Latin music so incensed tango purists that he regularly received death threats. Reading the invaluable *Memoirs* compiled by Natalio Gorin, where Piazzolla talks uninhibitedly (and sometimes bitterly) about his life and music, the reader is struck by his struggle and anguish, and anger – qualities which emerge in his music, alongside a thrilling gift for melody and driving rhythm. Despite the fierce criticism, the financial failures and turbulent private life, Piazzolla was finally recognized as genius, whose dark music is steeped in Hispanic, Italian and Jewish ideas.

My piano arrangements were inspired by the late, unpublished scores for Piazzolla's preferred quintet line-up of bandoneon, violin, piano, electric guitar and acoustic bass. Some years after Piazzolla died in 1992, I was asked to tour with *Quinteto Piazzolla*, Piazzolla's original musicians from Buenos Aries, - including the great guitarist Horacio Malvicino and bassist Hector Console). I learnt a great deal about the Piazzolla style: especially how certain little licks have to sound 'mugre', loosely translated as dirty/rough.

Tanguedia

An explosive bolero; *Quinteto Piazzolla* often liked to open their shows with this, and the bassist Hector Console would slap his bass rather violently, while the others stamped.

Buenos Aires Hora Cero
An impression of the night's street sounds in Buenos Aires. Piazzolla liked to use contemporary techniques, semi-improvised, over this composition.
Milonga del Angel
One of his heartstopping yearning melodies, from his *Angel* trilogy written in 1965. The tango is traditionally the dance of parting lovers.
Libertango
Piazzolla always claimed his music was heavily influenced by Bach, and this famous 16-bar sequence is the opening of the Well-Tempered Clavier, modulated to A minor. It became Piazzolla's big, international hit of the 70s, and remains gigantic; someone, somewhere in the world, will always be playing this.

Schumann (1810-1856)
Kinderszenen Op.15

Von fremden Ländern und Menschen *Of Foreign Lands and Peoples*
Kuriose Geschichte *A Curious Story*
Hasche-Mann *Blind Man's Bluff*
Bittendes Kind *Pleading Child*
Glückes genug *Happy Enough*
Wichtige Begebenheit *An Important Event*
Träumerei *Dreaming*
Am Kamin *At the Fireside*
Ritter vom Steckenpferd *Knight of the Hobbyhorse*
Fast zu Ernst *Almost Too Serious*
Fürchtenmachen *Frightening*
Kind im Einschlummern *Child Falling Asleep*
Der Dichter spricht *The Poet Speaks*

Schumann's much-loved *Kinderszenen*, Scenes from Childhood, was written in 1838, when Schumann was 28. He dashed off the entire set in just a few days. He originally wrote thirty pieces – 'pretty, droll little things', he told his wife Clara Wieck – and recycled the unused movements years later, in *Bunte Blätter* Op.99, and *Albumblätter* Op.124. What strikes the listener now is the poignant aspect of these tiny movements; elusive, will o'the wisp memories, seen through an adult lens, of childish games, faraway places, dreams, anxieties. The last two movements - *Child Falling Asleep* and *A Poet Speaks*- are almost existential, refracting Schumann's fragile mental health. I have never forgotten hearing Horowitz's last performance of this work in London. I was a student, and he was 83: he played with the perfect confluence of wisdom and experience, and with the delicacy of a child.

Joanna MacGregor (b.1959)
For Nina Simone

Little Girl Blue
Good Bait

Nina Simone had a huge impact on me as a teenager. I thought her playing was visceral, and her singing, songwriting and activism profoundly moving. A boyfriend took me to see her at Ronnie Scott's on my

eighteenth birthday; I sat about six feet from her. She was magnificent, but deeply troubled. I remember she snarled at her drummer and bassist, who were both brilliant, and played like mercury for her. The next day Ronnie Scott found her taking heroin backstage and fired her on the spot. Her politics, songs, and passionate anger were touchstones for me.

Simone's take on *Little Girl Blue* (Lorenz Hart/Richard Rogers) brilliantly melds a delicate *Good King Wenceslas* with melancholic lyrics: *Sit there and count your fingers/What can you do?/Old girl, you're through? Sit there, count your little fingers/Unhappy Little Girl Blue.* Her version of *Good Bait* (Tadd Dameron/Count Basie) displays her primary ambition to be a concert pianist, turning an upbeat number into a slow Bach fugue with a fiery Lisztian ending. Nina Simone trained seriously to be a classical pianist from the age of six in Mississippi, but was rejected by the Curtis Institute when she was seventeen, and felt bitterly betrayed for the rest of her life. She gave an interview just before she died saying how angry she still was to have been denied her dream. Her pride and fury energized her remarkable life.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Sonata in F minor Op.57 *Appassionata*

Allegro assai
Andante con moto
Allegro ma non troppo - Presto

How 'heroic' is the *Appassionata* sonata? Beethoven composed this magnificent work in 1804-5, polishing it again in 1806 before its premiere, in the aftermath of the *Eroica* Symphony. Czerny called it *'the most perfect carrying-out of a mighty and colossal plan,'* and the first movement is woven onto an orchestral-sized canvas, with ferocious climaxes and - often - shocking dynamics. The huge weight of the Allegro implies an epic, romantic journeying, as if Beethoven is writing his own *Odyssey*; yet like all heroic narratives, there's psychological complexity and a constant undercurrent of anxiety. (Artur Schnabel, in his Beethoven edition, goes to some lengths to create different fingerings for the difficult triplet figures, depending on the level of anxiety being presented). Tragedy permeates the third movement too, an obsessive circling of notes, until a wild *presto* unleashes a sudden, furious ending. Unfinished too, is the middle *Andante*; hardly a slow movement, but a short set of variations on a warm hymn theme. A dramatic interruption slashes into the atmosphere, and the - rather contemporary - anxiety of the finale unfolds.

Often the most valuable insights into composers are left by the memoirs of their students, and sketches. Beethoven's pupil Ferdinand Ries tells us that Beethoven wasn't made angry by wrong notes (he actually preferred those), but hated anyone ignoring his *sforzandos*, *crescendos*, and expression marks. Beethoven's powerful markings in this final movement are structural: they emerge on unusual beats and create sharp, unexpected shifts. His pedal instructions are daring, often deliberately blurring harmonies and creating ghostly textures. All we can do is go back to the text, over and over again, and marvel at the heroism.

Notes by Joanna MacGregor

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Joanna MacGregor CBE is one of the world's most innovative musicians, appearing as a concert pianist, curator and conductor. Head of Piano at the Royal Academy of Music and Professor of University of London, Joanna MacGregor was the Artistic Director of Dartington International Summer School & Festival 2014-2019, Artistic Director of the Bath International Music Festival 2006-2012, and curated the multi-arts Deloitte Ignite Festival at the Royal Opera House, as well as *Aventures+*, an orchestral series for Luxembourg Philharmonie. She runs an annual Summer Piano Festival at the Royal Academy, and has just been appointed Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Brighton Philharmonic, as it approaches its centenary.

As a solo artist Joanna has performed in over eighty countries and appeared with many eminent conductors – Pierre Boulez, Sir Colin Davis, Valery Gergiev, Sir Simon Rattle and Michael Tilson Thomas amongst them – and orchestras, including the London Symphony and Sydney Symphony orchestras, Chicago, Melbourne and Oslo Philharmonic orchestras, Berlin Symphony Orchestra and Salzburg Camerata. She has premiered many landmark compositions, and performs regularly at major venues throughout the world, including Wigmore Hall, Sydney Opera House, Leipzig Gewandhaus, Amsterdam Concertgebouw and the Mozarteum in Salzburg.

Joanna is a regular broadcaster, making numerous appearances at the BBC Proms. She made her conducting debut in 2002 and has enjoyed a close artistic partnership with the Britten Sinfonia for more than fifteen years. Amongst the many artists with whom she has collaborated are Carolyn Sampson, Adrian Brendel, Kathryn Tickell, Brian Eno, and the writer Marina Warner. She was seen on BBC's recent *Civilisations* series with the Wayne McGregor Dance Company. As a recording artist Joanna's work encompasses Bach and Scarlatti as well as jazz and John Cage. Her own record label SoundCircus was founded in 1998 and has released the complete Chopin Mazurkas, the Mercury Prize-nominated *Play*, Bach's Goldberg Variations and *Live in Buenos Aires* with the Britten Sinfonia. Jazz recordings include *Sidewalk Dances* — music by the New York street musician Moondog — and *Deep River*, inspired by the Deep South.

Joanna MacGregor was awarded a CBE for services to music in the Queen's Birthday Honours in 2019. She was Visiting Musician at Oriel College Oxford, and in 2016 was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Cambridge. She makes regular appearances on television, and was the subject of a *South Bank Show*; her ongoing series of music books, *PianoWorld*, has been hailed as 'a new series for the Millennium'. She is currently Chair of the Paul Hamlyn Music Awards, and was a 2019 Booker Prize Judge.