



CLARE COLLEGE CHAPEL

Piano Recital

Sunday 4 June 2023 at 5.25 p.m.

Gregory May (Clare)

<i>Sideways</i>	Nahre Sol (c. 1991–)
<i>Amberley Wild Brooks</i>	John Ireland (1879–1962)
Étude No. 6, 'Grains'	Unsuk Chin (1961–)
Rondo in c, H. 284, No. 4 from <i>2 Clavier-Sonaten, 2 Fantasien und 2 Rondos für Kenner und Liebhaber</i> , Wq. 59	Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (1714–88)
Étude No. 8 'Fém', from <i>Piano Études Book 2</i>	György Ligeti (1923–2006)
<i>Tree</i>	Gregory May (2001–)
<i>For Simon</i>	Freya Waley-Cohen (1989–)
Étude No. 1, from <i>10 Études on Aksak rhythms</i> , Op. 38	Ahmet Adnan Aygun (1907–91)

Programme notes

I've designed this programme of miniatures in the form of a playlist, aiming to create a seamless flow between the eight pieces on the programme, joining them together through mood and atmosphere rather than by any thematic or historical links. Despite this, one thread linking these pieces together is the idea of the piano 'study', or *Étude*, and I have linked four contemporary études with complementary partner pieces.

Nahre Sol's *Sideways* opens the programme – energetic, bright music that wears the influences of American post-minimalism on its sleeve, with the feeling of being an étude in all but name. Sol is an online content creator, educator, as well as pianist, and this piece comes from her extraordinarily varied debut album *Alice in Wonderland*. The harmonic language of the Sol seems to have parallels with **John Ireland's *Amberley Wild Brooks***, however this piece moves into more dreamy and almost impressionistic territory, with stunning depictions of flowing water.

Unsuk Chin's 6th Piano Étude 'Grains' plunges us into a totally different world, reinterpreting the process of 'granular synthesis', a technique used in electronic music, acoustically. Tiny shards of material are thrown around (some as small as a single note), and these little objects rub up against and collide with each other in what feels like a piece of surreal theatre. This fragmentary music has an unexpected companion in the playful and delightfully weird writing found in **C.P.E. Bach's**

Rondo in C minor. Here, the composer is playing musical jokes on us, taking unexpected U-turns, not developing ideas, and even taking the liberty of leaving the piece open-ended at its close.

Granular, detached music is made more linear by Chin's teacher **György Ligeti**, in his **8th Piano Étude 'Fém'**. Its Hungarian title means 'Metal', and this gives a clue as to the kind of articulation Ligeti is after. My own little piano piece '**Tree**' seemed to spring naturally from the unexpectedly quiet ending of the Ligeti. It's a very literal depiction of a tree, with a Bb pedal providing the 'earth', above and below which little chorales represent the branches and roots, complete with a singing bird at the end.

This atmosphere of gentle contemplation is continued by **Freya Waley-Cohen** in her **For Simon**, written as a tribute to one of her late composition teachers, Simon Bainbridge. The music is extremely simple, for the most part taking on the transparency of a two-part counterpoint exercise, and yet it feels sincere and sentimental, with a gently glowing sound. There are a few cheeky outbursts, here and there and gone in a flash, perhaps a knowing smile or a little giggle.

I close the recital with a showpiece by the Turkish composer **Ahmet Adnan Saygun**, the first of his **Ten Études on Aksak Rhythms, Op. 38**. Aksak rhythms have a characteristically 'uneven' feel (in this piece you'll hear beats of length 4+3+2+5) and were famously explored by Hungarian composer Béla Bartók. They are used by Saygun in this piece to create a driving *moto perpetuo*, which is pianistically challenging in a more traditional sense than much of the other music on the programme, testing dexterity and clarity of double octaves, repeated notes, and stamina. This is all wrapped in an exciting and compelling musical narrative that leads to an explosive, almost orchestral finish.

Gregory May is a third-year music student studying at Clare College. After learning with various private piano teachers, he received a scholarship to attend the Junior department of the Royal Academy of Music, being taught piano by Fiona Harris and composition by Edmund Jolliffe and David Knotts, who continues to be a great support. He was one of the winners in his age category in the 2020 BBC Young Composer Competition, which resulted in a commission for the BBC Concert Orchestra. He currently studies piano with Rolf Hind and composition with Christian Mason.