

presents...

# ISATA KANNEH-MASON | Piano

Friday, October 6, 2023 | 7:30pm

Herbst Theatre

*Tonight's performance is dedicated to the memory of André Watts*

**HAYDN**

**Piano Sonata in C Major, Hob.XVI:50**

*Allegro*  
*Adagio*  
*Allegro molto*

**FANNY  
MENDELSSOHN**

**Easter Sonata**

*Allegro assai moderato*  
*Largo e molto espressivo; Poco più mosso*  
*Scherzo: Allegretto*  
*Allegro con strepito*

**INTERMISSION**

**SCHUMANN**

**Kinderszenen, Opus 15**

*Von fremden Ländern und Menschen (From Foreign Lands and Peoples)*  
*Curiose Geschichte (Curious Story)*  
*Hasche-Mann (Blind Man's Bluff)*  
*Bittendes Kind (Pleading Child)*  
*Glückes genug (Happiness)*  
*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)*

**CHOPIN**

**Piano Sonata No. 3 in B Minor, Opus 58**

*Allegro maestoso*

*Scherzo: Molto vivace*

*Largo*

*Finale: Presto non tanto*

**This program is made possible by the generous support of Martin and Kathleen Cohn.**

**Isata Kanneh-Mason** is represented by Enticott Music Management in Association with IMG Artists  
18 Hearne Road, London W4 3NJ, UK    [enticottmusicmanagement.com](http://enticottmusicmanagement.com)

**Isata Kanneh-Mason** records exclusively for Decca Classics

Steinway Model D, Pro Piano, San Francisco



## ARTIST PROFILE

SF Performances presents Isata Kanneh-Mason for the second time. She made her SF Performances' debut in March 2022.

Pianist **Isata Kanneh-Mason** is in great demand internationally as a soloist and chamber musician. She offers eclectic and interesting repertoire with recital programs encompassing music from Haydn and Mozart via Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann, Chopin and Brahms to Gershwin and beyond. In concerto, she is equally at home in Felix Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann (whose piano concerto featured on Isata's chart-topping debut recording) as in Prokofiev and Dohnányi.

Highlights of the 2023–24 season include performances with the Philadelphia Orchestra, National Arts Centre Orchestra Ottawa, London Mozart Players, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra on tour in the USA and Germany, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Cleveland Orchestra, Toronto Symphony, and Stockholm Philharmonic. With her cellist brother, Sheku, she appears in recital in Japan, Singapore, and South Korea in addition to an extensive European recital tour. Isata also gives a series of solo recitals on tour in the USA and Canada as well as at London's Wigmore Hall, the Lucerne Festival, and across Germany.

In 2022–23 Isata made successful debuts at the Barbican, Queen Elizabeth and Wigmore halls in London, the Philharmonie Berlin, National Concert Hall Dublin, Perth Concert Hall and Prinzregententheater Munich. As concerto soloist, she appeared with orchestras such as the New World

Symphony Miami, City of Birmingham Symphony, Barcelona Symphony, Geneva Chamber Orchestra and Los Angeles Philharmonic and was the Artist in Residence with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Isata is a Decca Classics recording artist. Her 2019 album, *Romance—the Piano Music of Clara Schumann*, entered the UK classical charts at No. 1, *Gramophone* magazine extolling the recording as “one of the most charming and engaging debuts.” This was followed by 2021's *Summertime*, featuring 20th-century American repertoire including a world premiere recording of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's *Impromptu No. 2 in B Minor* and 2023's endearingly titled album *Childhood Tales*, a tour-de-force showcase of music inspired by a nostalgia for youth.

2021 also saw the release of Isata's first duo album, *Muse*, with her brother Sheku Kanneh-Mason, demonstrating the siblings' musical empathy and rapport borne from years of playing and performing together. Isata and Sheku were selected to perform in recital during the 2020 BBC Proms, which was a vastly reduced festival due to the Covid-19 pandemic and they performed for cameras to an empty auditorium. 2023 sees her BBC Proms solo debut, this time to a fully open Royal Albert Hall, alongside Ryan Bancroft and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales.

Isata was an ECHO Rising Star in 21–22 performing in many of Europe's finest halls and she is also the recipient of the coveted Leonard Bernstein Award, an Opus Klassik award for best young artist and is one of the Konzerthaus Dortmund's Junge Wilde artists.

## PROGRAM NOTES

### Piano Sonata in C Major, Hob.XVI:50

FRANZ JOSEPH HAYDN  
(1732–1809)

Haydn's approximately 60 keyboard sonatas are almost unknown to general audiences, who are daunted by their sheer number and more readily drawn to the famous nineteenth-century piano sonatas that followed. Yet there is some very fine music here indeed. Haydn's *Sonata in C Major* is one of a set of three he composed in London in 1794 and dedicated to pianist Therese Jansen, presumably with her talents in mind. Everyone notes the full sonority of these sonatas, and this has been explained in different ways. Some believe that these sonatas consciously echo the sound of the series of grand symphonies Haydn was then writing for London orchestras. Others have felt that the brilliance of these sonatas is the best evidence of Therese Jansen's abilities, while still others explain it as a sign that the English fortepianos were much more powerful than the instruments Haydn was used to in Vienna.

Whatever the reason, Haydn's *Sonata in C Major* rings with a splendid sound. The opening *Allegro* is full of forthright energy. The initial pattern of three notes repeats throughout: it is sounded tentatively at first, then quickly repeated in full chords. Haydn plays this pattern out with great energy and brilliance across the span of a fairly lengthy movement (more than half the length of the entire sonata).

The central movement is an expressive *Adagio* in abbreviated sonata form whose main subject is built around the rolled chords heard at the very beginning. The concluding *Allegro molto*, barely two minutes long, is full of high comedy. It feels like a very fast waltz that starts and stops and modulates throughout, as if the composer cannot quite make up his mind how he wants it to go. Haydn of course knows exactly how he wants it to go, and this lurching, stumbling dance should leave us all laughing.

### Easter Sonata

FANNY MENDELSSOHN  
(1805–1847)

There is general agreement that the two most prodigiously-talented young compos-

ers in history were Mozart and Mendelssohn, and there were many parallels between the two. Both were born into families perfectly suited to nurture their talents. Both showed phenomenal talent as small boys. Both began composing as boys, and from the earliest age both had their music performed by professional musicians. Both became virtuoso keyboard performers. In addition, both played the violin and viola and took part in chamber music performances. Both composed voluminously in every genre. Both drove themselves very hard. Both died in their thirties.

But there is uncanny further parallel between the two: both Mozart and Mendelssohn had an older sister whose musical talents rivaled their own. Mozart's sister Maria Anna, five years his senior, performed as a child with her brother in all the capitals of Europe, where they were put on display by their ambitious father. She also composed (none of her music has survived), but a serious career in music was out of the question for a woman at the end of the eighteenth century. She married in 1784 and grew estranged from her brother—they did not see each other over the final years of his life.

Fanny Mendelssohn, four years older than Felix, had a much closer relation with her brother. Like Felix, she began composing at an early age, and some of her songs were published under her brother's name. She too was discouraged from making a career in music, and at age 24 she married the painter Wilhelm Hensel and had a son. But music remained a passion for her, and she composed an orchestral overture, chamber music, works for piano, and a great deal of vocal music; late in her brief life, Fanny overcame her family's opposition and began to publish music under her own name. Fanny remained extremely close to her brother throughout her life, and her sudden death from a stroke at age 41 so devastated Felix that he collapsed on hearing the news and never really recovered—his own death six months later at age 38 was triggered at least in part by that shock.

The *Easter Sonata* (that title originated with the composer) has had a complex history. Fanny composed this four-movement sonata in April and May of 1828, when she was only 22. She is known to have performed it several times, and her brother once played it from memory, so the piece was widely known within the Mendelssohn family. But with the deaths of both Fanny and Felix in 1847, the manuscript vanished, and the music was forgotten for

over a century. Then in 1970 the manuscript was found in Paris in the possession of a French collector; because the manuscript was signed "F. Mendelssohn," it was assumed to be the work of Felix. But careful musicological work in 2010 established that the manuscript was in Fanny's hand and had been cut out of the album of manuscript paper in which she worked. Finally, nearly two centuries after it was written, the *Easter Sonata* was published with a proper attribution.

The title *Easter Sonata* needs some explanation. Fanny composed it during a period when the entire family was involved in preparations for a performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829, a performance that would be led by Felix. Both the *Easter Sonata* and the *St. Matthew Passion* deal with the passion—the death—of Christ and not with the resurrection. One should be careful about searching for scene-painting in the *Easter Sonata*—Fanny was more concerned with atmosphere than with pictorial representation, and only in the last movement do we detect some attempt at setting a scene.

The *Allegro assai moderato* is in a generalized sonata form, alternating its dancing opening idea in 9/8 with a soaring second subject. There are moments of turbulence here, and much of the writing is very difficult (Fanny was by all accounts a superb pianist). The slow movement, marked *Largo e molto espressivo*, sets a solemn mood, and at its center comes a long fugue in E minor. This movement proceeds without pause into the *Scherzo*, marked *Allegretto*, which dances agilely and features great cascades of sound across the range of the keyboard; the *Molto vivace* coda of this movement gradually breaks the main theme down into fragments. The last movement is marked *Allegro con strepito* ("noisy, loud"). This is a very dramatic movement, and some have heard here the shouts of the crowd crying out to have Christ crucified, while others hear the earthquake that was said to accompany Christ's death. After all this violence, the *Easter Sonata* concludes with a fantasia on the old chorale tune *Christe, du lamm Gottes* ("Christ, You Lamb of God").

## Kinderszenen, Opus 15

ROBERT SCHUMANN

(1810–1856)

*Kinderszenen*, one of Schumann's most frequently-performed compositions, originated in an almost incidental remark that

the teenaged Clara Wieck made to her future husband: she told him one day that he sometimes seemed like a child to her (this was apparently meant as an incidental observation rather than a furious denunciation). Schumann was struck by this remark, and in February 1838—while Clara was absent on a seven-month concert tour—he composed about 30 very short piano pieces that he regarded as "reminiscences of an older person" about memories of childhood (Schumann was 27 at the time). From these, he chose 13 and published them under the title *Kinderszenen*: "Scenes from Childhood." To Clara he wrote: "You will like them, but you must forget that you are a virtuoso. They make a great impression—especially on myself!—when I play them."

Schumann was very much attracted to the world of the child (Clara's remark contained a large measure of truth), and he composed a good deal of music for children, including the 43 pieces in the *Album for the Young* of 1848. Schumann was quite right that one need not be a virtuoso to play the *Kinderszenen*, though some of them are certainly difficult enough: he intended these "adult" reminiscences to be playable by children, and everyone who has had at least a couple of years of piano lessons has performed some of them. It should be noted that, despite the specific titles, Schumann was not aiming for exact pictorial representation in these pieces: as was often the case with this composer, he wrote the music first and then went back later and decided what they were "about." Schumann commented that "the titles were given afterward and these titles are, in fact, nothing but directions for the performance of the music."

In any case, listeners will discover that they already know many of these charming pieces. They are all brief (the shortest lasts about half a minute), each conveys one specific impression, and there is an endearing innocence about all thirteen. The longest of them, *Träumerei*, has become almost the archetype of the dreamy romantic piano piece, but all listeners will discover old favorites along the way as this music—nicely calculated to charm both children and adults—unfolds.

## Piano Sonata No. 3 in B Minor, Opus 58

FREDERIC CHOPIN

(1810–1849)

Chopin wrote the *Piano Sonata in B Minor*, his last large-scale composition for piano,



during the summer of 1844, when he was 34. He composed the sonata at Nohant, the summer estate in central France he shared with the novelist George Sand. That summer represented a last moment of stasis in the composer's life—over the next several years his relationship with Sand would deteriorate, and his health, long ravaged by tuberculosis, would begin to fail irretrievably. Dedicated to Madame la Comtesse Emilie de Perthis, a friend and pupil, the *Sonata in B Minor* was published in 1845. Chopin himself never performed it in public.

Chopin's sonatas have come in for a hard time from some critics, and this criticism intensifies to the degree that they depart from the formal pattern of the classical piano sonata. But it is far better to take these sonatas on their own terms and recognize that Chopin—like Beethoven before him—was willing to adapt classical forms for his own expressive purposes. The *Sonata in B Minor* is a big work—its four movements stretch out to nearly half an hour. The opening *Allegro maestoso* does indeed have a majestic beginning with the first theme plunging downward out of the silence, followed moments later by the gorgeous second subject in D major, marked *sostenuto*. The movement treats both these ideas but dispenses with a complete recapitulation and closes with a restatement of the second theme. The brief *Molto vivace* is a scherzo, yet here that form is without the violence it sometimes takes on in Beethoven. This scherzo has a distinctly light touch, with the music flickering and flashing across the keyboard (the right-hand part is particularly demanding). A quiet *legato* middle section offers a moment of repose before the returning of the opening rush.

Chopin launches the lengthy *Largo* with sharply-dotted rhythms, over which the main theme—itsself dotted and marked *cantabile*—rises quietly and gracefully. This movement is also in ternary form, with a flowing middle section in E major. The finale—*Presto, non tanto*—leaps to life with a powerful eight-bar introduction built of octaves before the main theme, correctly marked *Agitato*, launches this rondo in B minor. Of unsurpassed difficulty, this final movement—one of the greatest in the Chopin sonatas—brings the work to a brilliant close.

—Program notes by Eric Bromberger

## Remembering André Watts



André Watts with Ruth Felt

When pianist **André Watts** walked onto the stage of the brand-new Davies Symphony Hall on November 23, 1980, more than 2,500 people witnessed the birth of what is now internationally recognized as a remarkable success story: San Francisco Performances. From his participation in the first fundraising meeting with SFP founder Ruth Felt and artist and arts patron James Schwabacher, to his numerous recitals over the years, André Watts remained a significant part of San Francisco Performances throughout his lifetime.

Mr. Watts burst upon the music world at the age of 16 when Leonard Bernstein chose him to make his debut with the New York Philharmonic on one of the orchestra's Young People's Concerts, a concert which was broadcast nationwide on CBS-TV. Only two weeks later, Bernstein asked him to substitute at the last minute for the ailing Glenn Gould in performances with the New York Philharmonic, thus launching his career in storybook fashion. A perennial favorite with orchestras throughout the US, Mr. Watts was a regular guest with all of the major American orchestras as well as at the most important US music festivals. He has also performed numerous times in recital for SF Performances, and at other prestigious performing arts venues including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, Boston's Symphony Hall and Disney Hall in Los Angeles.

He had a long and frequent association with television, having appeared on programs produced by PBS, the BBC and the Arts and Entertainment Network, performing with the New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center among others. His 1976 New York recital for *Live from Lincoln Center* was the first full length recital broadcast in the history of television. His extensive discography includes recordings for CBS Masterworks, Angel/EMI, and Telarc. He is also included in the *Great Pianists of the 20th Century* series for Philips, and in a SONY Classical release titled **ANDRÉ WATTS—The Complete Columbia Album Collection**, which features all of the concerto and solo recordings which Mr. Watts made for Columbia Masterworks.

Born in Nuremberg, Germany, Mr. Watts began his piano studies at the age of six and made his orchestral debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra three years later. In 1964, he won the Most Promising New Classical Recording Artist Grammy, and, at age 26, he was the youngest person ever to receive an honorary doctorate from Yale University. Among numerous other honors, he received the Avery Fisher Prize in 1988, and the National Medal of Arts in 2011. He was inducted into the Hollywood Bowl of Fame in 2006, the American Classical Music Hall of Fame in 2014 and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2017. Mr. Watts was appointed to the Jack I. and Dora B. Hamlin Endowed Chair in Music at the Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University in May 2004 and in 2017 was named a Distinguished Professor, the highest academic rank the university bestows upon its faculty.

A founding Board member and an Honorary Trustee for San Francisco Performances for more than three decades, André Watts will be missed greatly by the entire SFP family, and by the classical music world. We are deeply saddened by his passing, and honored to dedicate tonight's performance to his memory.