



'Lockdown is allowing me to practise without deadlines, which means I can work on the music that I really feel like working on now and see where that might take me'

Of this étude, Driver confesses: 'I tinkered with the original version, but for me at this point in time it would not have been a success! Even in the revised version, one of the main challenges is very dense textures. Ligeti is quite precise in his instructions, saying use the pedal but don't blur the harmonies. The result of harmonic clarity combined with vertiginous speed and high density is a sense of contemplating an object rather than creating a musical narrative. And personally I think at the moment I can realise that more effectively in the revised version.'

Surely playing music this complex must have had an impact on Driver's own technical know-how? 'I think inevitably it has developed all sorts of things within me as a musician. Of course, I feel invigorated by them, and not just as a listener and appreciator but also as a player of them. Polyrythm is something we pianists can completely avoid learning about, but the heightened polyrhythmic awareness that has come from playing the Études is helping me in all sorts of unexpected repertoire, even Beethoven and Chopin, because it brings into question the whole idea of precision of rhythm versus flexibility of rhythm, and the notion that rubato can sometimes seem inflexible, whereas something that is very strict metrically can seem very free. The severity of the technical demands in Ligeti makes those things obvious, and so when you revisit more traditional, more well-trodden paths you see them anew.'

I ask Driver whether he'd spent much time with earlier recordings of the Ligeti Études, not least Aimard's groundbreaking set. 'I've listened to quite a few: I'm always interested to hear how people have approached these studies

and to read about their ideas. Aimard is a special case because he was so closely involved in the genesis of the Études. He was Ligeti's favourite interpreter (Nos 10 and 12 are dedicated to him) and so what he says about them is important, just as if we were playing Bach or Liszt we'd be poring over historical documents to give us insights.'

Given that Ligeti's Études are already so fêted might there one day be a time when they're within the grasp of gifted conservatory students the world over? 'I think one of the difficulties of these études is training our ears to hear the polyrhythms and multiple lines. For a younger generation of pianists who have this music in their ears from an earlier age it's perhaps easier. Once you hear and understand it you can visualise it, which makes realising it at the keyboard a lot simpler. And the less effort that is required technically, the more interesting the interpretation can be. One can have a multiplicity of approaches, and that may indeed be the case for these études.'

As for what might be next for Driver, I suggest that he'd be grateful to tackle something with slightly fewer notes. 'Lockdown is both terrible and wonderful. It is allowing me to practise without deadlines, which means I can work on the music that I really feel like working on now and see where that might take me. I'm spending a lot of time playing Fauré. I grew up playing the piano quartets as a student but never really went into the solo music and now I'm discovering all those wonderful riches. They're very private and intimate. I'm working on Nocturnes Nos 6 and 13 at the moment, which is an intensely rewarding process.'

Danny Driver's *Ligeti* is issued on March 5 and reviewed next issue

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