Cheltenham Music Festival 3–11 July 2026

Programme Notes

# Mariam Batsashvili

## Pittville Pump Room
## Sat 4 July

## Mariam Batsashvili *piano*

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| **Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart** | Fantasia in D minor, K. 397 | 6’ |
| **Franz Schubert** | Impromtus, Op. 142, D. 935 | 26’ |
| **Franz Liszt** | Valse de l’Opéra Faust | 9’30 |
| *Interval* | | |
| **Franz Liszt** | Hungarian Rhapsodies Nos. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 | 41’ |

## About the Programme

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) – Fantasia in D minor, K.397**

When Mozart arrived in Vienna in 1781, he was still in the service of the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg, Hieronymus Colloredo. The arrangement was an unhappy one, and after a series of disputes Mozart was dismissed, according to his own account, with a literal “kick to the backside” from the Archbishop’s steward, Count Arco. It was a humiliating end, but for the 25-year-old it also marked a beginning. Choosing the uncertain life of a freelance composer and performer, Mozart quickly found Vienna fertile ground. “This is the land of the piano, for sure!” he wrote home to his father, and within months he had established himself as one of the city’s leading keyboard players.

Composed the following year, the Fantasia in D minor reflects this period of new independence. Rather than following the carefully ordered structure of a sonata, the piece moves through a sequence of short contrasting sections, marked Andante, Adagio, Presto, Tempo primo and Allegretto.

Mozart wrote relatively few works in D minor, though the key also appears in his Piano Concerto No. 20 and, later, the unfinished Requiem. The Fantasia opens quietly and with restraint, before moving quickly through contrasting ideas and sudden changes in tempo.

The piece also carries one of Mozart’s small musical mysteries. The original manuscript has not survived, and the final ten bars heard in most performances were almost certainly supplied after his death by August Eberhard Müller. Some performers have even written their own conclusions: for her Philips recording, Mitsuko Uchida replaced Müller’s ending with one of her own, echoing the work’s opening bars.

Whether Mozart intended the Fantasia as a complete work or as the opening to something larger remains unknown. With the manuscript lost, we may never know how he intended it to end.

**Franz Schubert (1797–1828) – Impromptus, Op. 142, D. 935**

Schubert composed his second set of four Impromptus in December 1827, less than a year before his death. Although they are now known as Op. 142, Schubert appears to have regarded them as a continuation of the earlier Op. 90 set, numbering them five to eight in the manuscript.

Publication proved difficult. Schubert offered the pieces to several publishers, but they were considered too long and too demanding for the amateur market. One publisher reportedly dismissed them as “unmarketable in France”. The set was eventually published in Vienna in 1839, more than a decade after Schubert’s death.

The opening Impromptu in F minor is one of the largest and most ambitious of all eight pieces. Its scale led Robert Schumann to suggest that the four Op. 142 Impromptus might once have been intended as a piano sonata, although that idea remains a matter of debate. The second, in A-flat major, has the character of a graceful dance, while the third presents a set of variations on a melody Schubert had already used in both Rosamunde and his A minor String Quartet. The final Impromptu returns to F minor in a work of brilliance and energy, bringing the set to a dramatic close. Reviewing the pieces in 1838, Schumann described them as “one more beautiful memory of Schubert”.

**Franz Liszt (1811–1886) – Valse de l’Opéra Faust**

In 1844, Liszt improvised at the piano during a public reading of Goethe’s Faust in Weimar. Afterwards, he wrote that he had experienced “moments of quite clear inspiration”. The subject remained with him, and in 1861 he returned to it in Valse de l’Opéra Faust, a concert paraphrase based on Charles Gounod’s opera.Gounod’s Faust had premiered in Paris two years earlier. The paraphrase draws on the Act II waltz and the love duet between Faust and Marguerite, Ô nuit d’amour, bringing them together in a work for the concert hall rather than the theatre.

By this time Liszt was living in Weimar, where he was conducting and promoting the music of composers including Wagner, Berlioz as well as Gounod. Like many of his piano paraphrases, Valse de l’Opéra Faust is more than a straightforward arrangement. Liszt reworks Gounod’s music, moving from the waltz to the love duet before returning to the dance at the close.

Works of this kind formed an important part of Liszt’s career. Long before recordings, piano paraphrases allowed audiences to hear operatic music away from the theatre, while giving performers the chance to bring familiar works into the recital room.

**Franz Liszt (1811–1886) – Hungarian Rhapsodies Nos. 10–14**

When Liszt visited Hungary in 1846, the composer Béni Egressy wrote a piece to welcome him to Pest. Liszt repaid the compliment by performing it several times, though, according to the press, “in his very own way”. That transformation later became the basis of the Hungarian Rhapsody No. 10.

Liszt believed many of the melodies used in the Hungarian Rhapsodies were authentic Hungarian folk songs. Later research showed that several of the melodies came not from peasant folk music but from popular songs and the repertoire of Roma bands. Yet the works continued to attract admiration from later generations. Béla Bartók described the Hungarian Rhapsodies as “perfect creations of their own kind”.

The five rhapsodies heard tonight show the range of Liszt’s approach to the genre. Some are based on verbunkos recruiting dances and csárdás melodies, while others rework popular songs. Many also share the contrast between slower, improvisatory sections and more energetic dance episodes that became a hallmark of the Hungarian Rhapsodies. Nos. 10–14 were published in 1853. A few years later, Liszt returned to the Fourteenth Rhapsody and expanded it into his Hungarian Fantasy for piano and orchestra. The final Hungarian Rhapsodies would not appear until the 1880s.

Notes written by Harriet Hillier, RPS Young Writers Winner (2026)

## Artist Biographies

**Mariam Batsashvili** *piano*

Mariam Batsashvili, described by *Concerti* as a “pianistic charm offensive from Georgia,” is regarded internationally as one of the most expressive soloists and fascinating musical personalities of her generation. Born in Tbilisi, she possesses the rare gift of turning every phrase into something special. She began piano studies at the age of five with Natalie Natsvlishvilian at the Evgeni Mikeladze Music School in her hometown. At the same time, she developed a particular passion for the vast piano works and symphonic poems of Franz Liszt. She continued her studies at the Liszt Academy of Music in Weimar under the guidance of Grigory Gruzman. In 2011, she received an award at the Franz Liszt Competition for Young Pianists in Weimar. A decisive breakthrough in her career came in Utrecht in 2014, when she won the 10th Franz Liszt Piano Competition, which brought her worldwide attention.

She has given recitals in more than 30 countries across Asia and Europe, as well as North and South America. In addition, she has performed with leading orchestras such as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and the Brussels Philharmonic. Since 2017, she has been an official Yamaha Artist. In the summer of 2019, her Warner debut recording *Chopin & Liszt* was released. *The Guardian* praised her not only for her virtuosity but also for her unique sensitivity to “Liszt’s inner life, his melancholy, and his nonchalant poetry.

Kindly supported by the late John Harvey Hooper