

INTERVIEW BY JEREMY NICHOLAS

Sounds of solace

Clare Hammond picks recordings that have helped her overcome significant challenges in her professional and personal life



JULIE KIM

My family was not particularly musical and no-one played classical music. However, my grandfather was an avid fan though he would only listen to Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. When we were children we would stay with my grandparents during the holidays, and in the evenings we had a set routine. After quite a formal dinner, they would sit and do the crossword while we listened to music – usually Beethoven. Youra Guller's Beethoven Sonatas is one of the recordings I remember being really struck by at the time. I couldn't tell you why, but I had a sense of the power of it. Then, when I was eight, I heard a live performance that really moved me and I decided I wanted to be a pianist. Before that, I just had a sense of connection with this music, but wasn't able to verbalise it in any way.

Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No 2 was a great favourite of mine during childhood. It was also the first concerto I played with orchestra, so it is a very significant piece. I have a reputation for doing more unusual repertoire but the common thread with many of the pieces I play is their high level of virtuosity and complexity. The Rachmaninov certainly falls into that camp. It's a piece I've lived with for a long time now. Actually, I hadn't heard Moura Lympany's recording until last year. I was astonished because there's a mercurial quality to her playing that you don't often hear in Rach 2. It doesn't detract from the romanticism or the lyricism or the power of the piece, but it does bring something fresh to it – which with such a well-known work is quite a phenomenal achievement.

Oscar Peterson's album *Unmistakable* came into my life while I was preparing my

Etude album for the BIS label, which I think is one of the more significant projects I've done over the years. The repertoire [works by Lyapunov, Szymanowski, Kapustin and Chin] is phenomenally difficult technically and I got very bogged down in the sheer number of notes I had to play. I went for a lesson with my teacher at the time, Ronan O'Hara. He was wonderful and recommended that I listen to Oscar Peterson to get a sense of the improvisatory feeling that you need, along with the exhilaration and joy of playing very difficult and rapid music. Peterson is very impressive technically, but his playing also displays a thrilling nuance of tone and colour that's different from traditional classical pianists. I find that very inspiring and get lots of new ideas from hearing the way he plays.

Schumann's *Humoresque* is related to a very specific period in my life. After the births of my two children, now four and two, I suffered quite badly from postnatal depression. I had always avoided Schumann's music. I loved it and I loved hearing it but when I tried to play it I felt there was something there that I couldn't capture. And then when I was recovering from my postnatal depression and at my lowest ebb, I started working on the *Humoresque* and suddenly found a volatility in the music that I could understand instinctively. This came directly from my terrifying experience of feeling sanity sliding away. Radu Lupu's performance is important because of the sheer variety of colour he achieves. He creates a tone that's incredibly delicate and almost pearlescent, which I've never heard elsewhere.

Unsuk Chin is an important composer for me and I've performed her *Etudes* a lot

over the years. But the disc with *Akrostichen-Wortspiel* (*Acrostic Wordplay*) is one that I've played to my girls. I try to play them as wide a range of music as possible, and I always give them a story to go with it or explain what's going on emotionally. If you played it to most adults there would be a barrier of some kind, but the girls were enraptured by the voice and strangeness of what they heard. They had all kinds of ideas about what might be going on in the music. It was so exciting to see their joy and discovery, and how they could respond imaginatively and emotionally without the barriers we gather in later life. **IP**

Beethoven

Sonatas Opp 110 & 111
Youra Guller *pf*
Apex 2564 69899 8

Rachmaninov

Piano Concerto No 2
Moura Lympany *pf*, Philharmonia Orchestra/
Nikolai Malko
Magdalen METCD8016

Oscar Peterson

Unmistakable
Oscar Peterson *pf*
(Zenph historic re-performance)
Sony 88697951702

Schumann

Humoreske Op 20
Radu Lupu *pf*
Decca 4404962

Unsuk Chin

Akrostichen-Wortspiel
Piia Komsa *sop*, Ensemble Contemporain
Kairos KAI0013062