

A COMING OF AGE

Benjamin Grosvenor has stayed relatively quiet since he won the keyboard final of BBC Young Musician of the Year in 2004, but all that is about to change

On 15 July, eight days after his 19th birthday, Benjamin Grosvenor will become the youngest soloist ever to perform during the first night of the BBC Proms. The 2004 BBC Young Musician of the Year finalist will play Liszt's Piano Concerto No 2 in A major, the first of many Liszt-themed performances at this year's Proms to mark the 200th anniversary of his birth.

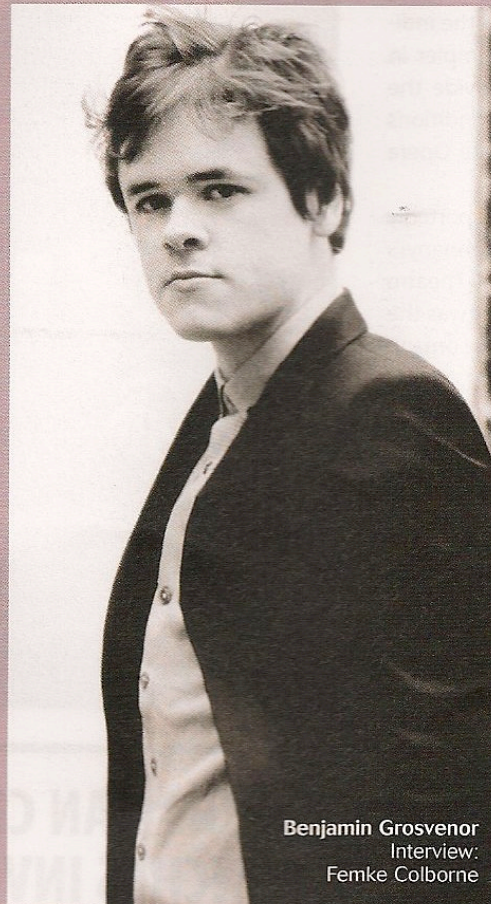
Grosvenor is approaching the big night with a mixture of excitement and trepidation. 'I am excited, but it is also daunting to be performing in front of such a large audience,' he says. The piece is new to his repertoire, and although he gave it a successful test run with an amateur orchestra in early June, he is continuing to prepare meticulously.

'I've got the notes under my fingers and now I'm thinking seriously about what to do with it musically,' he says. Of the recordings he has listened to during his preparation, his favourite is Dutch-German virtuoso Egon Petri's version. 'Petri deals with the tempo changes in the finale really well,' he says.

Grosvenor's Proms debut will not be the only milestone in his career this summer. He also recently signed a recording contract with Universal Classics, and his debut CD will be released to coincide with the Proms performance. The disc, which features works by Chopin, Liszt and Ravel, was recorded at the end of April.

'I've been through the first and second edits and I'm quite happy with the results,' says Grosvenor, although he is reluctant to be any more effusive than that. 'Myra Hess once said she never listened to herself because it was far too depressing, and there is an element of that because you're working towards an ideal you can never reach,' he says. 'You notice all the points where you didn't quite reach the idea – you have an interpretive checklist.'

The repertoire on the CD has been carefully thought through. 'I had been doing the Chopin 4 Scherzos and Ravel *Gaspard de la Nuit* in concerts and thought they worked well together, so they are the cornerstones of the album,' says



Benjamin Grosvenor
Interview:
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Grosvenor. 'I thought Liszt was the obvious composer to link the two, and it also happens to be his anniversary year. It is difficult to find a link between Chopin and Ravel because they are so completely different. Ravel's style borrows much more from Liszt than from Chopin.'

After he won BBC Young Musician of the Year at the age of 11, Grosvenor's parents were careful to nurture his talent and ensure he did not take on too much before he was ready. 'We made a deal that I would do three patches of concerts a year, with time in between to study and learn new repertoire,' he says.

But when he turned 18, he made a conscious decision to focus on launching his career. He is currently in his third year at the Royal Academy of Music in London, but is unsure whether he will continue with his studies as a postgraduate. 'I just want to give as many concerts as possible,' he says. 'That's what I've always wanted to do – I just want to play and perform and see how things go.'