

WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 15 – Friday 17 June 2022 7.30pm

Isabelle Faust violin

Alexander Melnikov fortepiano



These concerts are part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25

Wednesday 15 June 2022 7.30pm

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Violin Sonata No. 1 in D Op. 12 No. 1 (1797-8)

I. Allegro con brio • II. Tema con variazioni. Andante con moto • III. Rondo. Allegro

Violin Sonata No. 2 in A Op. 12 No. 2 (1797-8)

I. Allegro vivace • II. Andante, più tosto allegretto • III. Allegro piacevole

Violin Sonata No. 3 in E flat Op. 12 No. 3 (1797-8)

I. Allegro con spirito • II. Adagio con molta espressione • III. Rondo. Allegro molto

Interval

Violin Sonata No. 9 in A Op. 47 'Kreutzer' (1802-3)

I. Adagio sostenuto - Presto • II. Andante con variazioni • III. Finale. Presto

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Thursday 16 June 2022 7.30pm

Ludwig van Beethoven

Violin Sonata No. 6 in A Op. 30 No. 1 (1801-2)

I. Allegro • II. Adagio molto espressivo • III. Allegretto con variazioni

Violin Sonata No. 7 in C minor Op. 30 No. 2 (1801-2)

*I. Allegro con brio • II. Adagio cantabile •
III. Scherzo. Allegro • IV. Finale. Allegro*

Violin Sonata No. 8 in G Op. 30 No. 3 (1801-2)

*I. Allegro assai • II. Tempo di menuetto, ma molto moderato e grazioso •
III. Allegro vivace*

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Friday 17 June 2022 7.30pm

Ludwig van Beethoven

Violin Sonata No. 4 in A minor Op. 23 (1800)

I. Presto • II. Andante scherzoso, più allegretto • III. Allegro molto

Violin Sonata No. 5 in F Op. 24 'Spring' (1800-1)

*I. Allegro • II. Adagio molto espressivo • III. Scherzo. Allegro molto – Trio •
IV. Rondo. Allegro ma non troppo*

Interval

Violin Sonata No. 10 in G Op. 96 (1812 rev. 1814-5)

*I. Allegro moderato • II. Adagio espressivo •
III. Scherzo. Allegro – Trio • IV. Poco allegretto*

Thanks not least to Mozart, violin sonatas became a popular genre in the last quarter of the 18th Century. Publishers did a brisk trade in what were conventionally billed as 'sonatas for fortepiano, with the accompaniment of violin'. Mozart, a born musical democrat, had promoted the violin to equal status in the six sonatas K310–306, written in Mannheim and Paris in 1778. **Beethoven** followed suit in his own violin sonatas, nine of which were written in fairly quick succession between 1797 and 1803, the year of the 'Kreutzer' Sonata Op. 47. One 'straggler', the intimate Sonata Op. 96, followed in 1812.

By the time Beethoven composed his three Op. 12 violin sonatas in the winter of 1797-8, he had established himself as Mozart's successor in Vienna, dazzling the cognoscenti with his keyboard improvisations and a stream of brilliant compositions involving his own instrument. Diplomatically dedicated to the influential court composer Antonio Salieri (with whom Beethoven later studied Italian word-setting), the Op. 12 sonatas are among the young firebrand's most genially Mozartian works. Or so they seem to us. After hearing them in 1799, the conservative-minded critic of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* denounced them as 'learned, learned and always learned – and nothing natural, no song...a striving for strange modulations...a heaping up of difficulties' – a foretaste here of the incomprehension that would greet the 'Razumovsky' quartets a few years later. Publishers and players proved more enlightened. The Viennese firm of Artaria brought out no fewer than nine editions; and within a few years the sonatas had appeared in Paris, London and several German cities.

Although Mozart's influence is ever-present in these sonatas, Beethoven's rhetoric, as ever, tends to be that much more emphatic than his great predecessor's. The **Sonata in D Op. 12 No. 1**, in the violin's most brilliant key, is the most assertive of the three. After a trumpeting fanfare, like an in-tempo introduction, the first theme sets a sustained melody, beginning with an octave leap, against a piano counterpoint in smoothly flowing quavers. The second group of themes begins with a lyrical recasting of the flowing quaver motif and continues with a *dolce* melody (linked to the opening by its rising octave) that develops into an urgently modulating dialogue between the two instruments.

For his second movement, in A major, Beethoven writes a set of four variations on an ambling, folk-like theme. While the first two variations are decorative, the third turns to A minor for a dramatic deconstruction of the theme, complete with volleys of *fortissimo* triplets and slashing offbeat chords. After this cosmic battle between the instruments, the assuaging fourth variation presents the theme in shadowy outline on the violin against gently pulsing piano syncopations.

With its breezy 6/8 motion and off-beat *sforzando* accents, the *Rondo* finale is first cousin to the finale of Beethoven's B flat Piano Concerto, No. 2. The first episode counterpoints a chorale-like theme on the piano with a skittish dance, while in the second episode violin and piano in turn present a leisurely cantabile tune. As in the piano concerto, Beethoven reserves his most puckish

inventiveness for the coda, slipping into outlandish keys and playing teasingly with the main theme's short-long rhythm.

The **Sonata in A Op. 12 No. 2** opens with a scherzo-like movement of airborne grace and wit, with the two instruments swapping roles in a spirit of bantering give-and-take. As in the finale of No. 1, Beethoven turns the violin into a percussion instrument in the staccato double-stopped chords that accompany the main theme. In the development and coda he exploits the piano's opening 'flicking' figure with an impish humour worthy of his former teacher Haydn.

After all this exuberance, the not-so-slow second movement in A minor introduces a note of wistful pathos. Beethoven casts this as a three-part (ABA) structure, with a central episode built on graceful imitative exchanges between violin and piano. Opening with a tender, syncopated theme that drifts from A major to B minor, the rondo finale is a sublimated pastoral minuet that lives up to its unusual marking *piacevole* – 'pleasantly'.

With its cascades of triplets and sextuplets, the **Sonata in E flat Op. 12 No. 3** is the most pianistically brilliant of the set. The prevailing spirit is one of elegant swagger, offset in the development by a new *cantabile* theme in the darkly remote key of C flat, played by violin and piano in octaves above a mysterious *tremolo* accompaniment. Beethoven would remember this haunting melody a few years later in the first movement of his Third Piano Concerto.

There is a foretaste of the Third Piano Concerto, too, in the mingled solemnity and Romantic warmth of the *Adagio con molta espressione*. In effect the whole movement is a soulful meditation on a single, long-arched melody, announced by the piano and then revealing its full lyric beauty on the violin. The *Rondo* finale breaks the spell with a lusty *contredanse* tune which Beethoven proceeds to treat with Haydnesque wit and élan – mock-seriousness, too, in the fugal feints of the coda. The theme of the first episode is equally catchy, while the second episode turns to E flat minor for some strenuous contrapuntal argument.

Composed in the autumn of 1800 and originally published as a single opus with a dedication to one of Beethoven's most generous patrons, Count Moritz von Fries, the violin sonatas in A minor Op. 23 and F major Op. 24 form a sharply contrasting pair. While Op. 23 is urgent and pithy, Op. 24 has a lyrical freshness that makes it one of Beethoven's most instantly lovable chamber works. 'Spring Sonata' was a nickname waiting to happen. Unlike the Op. 12 sonatas, Op. 23 and Op. 24 were enthusiastically praised by the reviewer of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, who found them 'among the best B. has written, which is really to say among the best things being written today. The composer's original, fiery and audacious spirit...increasingly begins to reject any kind of excess, and makes an ever more pleasing impression without losing any of his character.'

Both the *Presto* opening movement and the finale of the **Sonata in A minor Op. 23** trade in wiry three-part textures, with the violin often positioned between the piano left and right hands. More than

in any of his Op. 12 sonatas, Beethoven often seems to treat the violin as a percussion instrument. The 6/8 first movement, full of tense, waspish repartee between the instruments, works its opening motif with obsessive vehemence. Respite comes where you might least expect it, in the central development: first in a sustained chorale-like melody for violin, counterpointed with the initial motif in the piano bass, then with a *cantabile* version of the main theme that transmutes cussedness into pathos.

The rondo finale is equally troubled and turbulent. As in the famous 'Pathétique' Sonata, Beethoven offsets its minor-keyed rhetoric (much of it delivered in a smouldering *piano*) with a sustained chorale melody, in F major, whose falling contours echo the first movement's germinal motif. The chorale returns in the coda in the distant key of B flat major. Then, with a gentle twist of the knife, the tonality sinks gloomily back to A minor. The soft closing bars, with their mysterious crescendo-decrescendo, are as bleak as those of the opening *Presto*.

Between such highly charged movements, the A major *Andante scherzoso, più allegretto* offers necessary emotional balm. Like the *Allegretto* of the Eighth Symphony, this delightful music combines the function of slow movement and scherzo. The paired quavers of the main theme are punctuated by whimsical silences, while the second group of themes opens with an airy *fugato* that seems to poke gentle fun at academic orthodoxy.

Unfolding like an inspired improvisation, the sinuous opening melody of the **Sonata in F Op. 24** sounds gloriously spontaneous. Yet as with so many of Beethoven's most memorable ideas, sketches show that it started life as a much plainer, squarer invention. While the predominant mood is one of relaxed geniality, with a gracious spirit of give-and-take between the two instruments, the second theme, veering between major and minor, introduces a more strenuous note that Beethoven further intensifies in the central development.

The *Adagio molto espressivo* is a luxuriant idyll, a harbinger of the 'Pastoral' Symphony's 'Scene by the Brook', complete with suggestions of birdsong. At the movement's centre is a gorgeous sequence of modulations, initiated by a dip from B flat to the deep, veiled key of G flat major. In quirky contrast with the rest of the sonata, the third movement is Beethoven's most laconic scherzo: a tiny, rhythmically ambiguous *jeu d'esprit* in which violin and piano often sound comically out of sync. Sketches reveal how Beethoven improbably evolved this piquant music from a rather prim minuet.

Launched by as gracefully Mozartian a theme as Beethoven ever conceived, the *Rondo* finale matches the first two movements in lyrical expansiveness. Each return of the rondo theme is inventively varied. On its penultimate appearance it slips with airy nonchalance from the 'wrong' key of D major to the prescribed F major, then finally dissolves into a flurry of dancing triplets.

In April 1802 Beethoven moved on the advice of his doctor from central Vienna to the village of Heiligenstadt, in order to alleviate his encroaching deafness. In his portfolio were the virtually finished

Second Symphony and sketches for three violin sonatas. Working swiftly, Beethoven completed the sonatas during May, and subsequently dedicated them to the young Tsar, Alexander I, who had instituted a programme of enlightened social reform in Russia.

By 1802 Beethoven had outgrown any direct Mozartian influence. Yet Mozart's spirit, his gift for hinting at emotional depths beneath a smiling, ordered surface, is distantly sensed in the **Sonata in A Op. 30 No. 1**. One of Beethoven's best-kept secrets, this underrated sonata is a work of captivating lyrical charm and subtlety. The first movement is an idealised minuet, with the two instruments in gentle colloquy. While the mood remains unruffled, the music constantly draws energy from the piano's semiquaver figure in the opening bar.

The lyricism deepens in the tender *Adagio molto espressivo*, whose broad violin *cantilena*, exquisitely harmonised, is underpinned by a gentle rocking motion. When the Op. 30 violin sonatas first appeared in print, this *Adagio* was singled out for praise in an otherwise lukewarm review in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. For the finale Beethoven originally wrote a breakneck tarantella, before rejecting it as 'too brilliant' - and, we can guess, much too long - for the work. A year later the tarantella found its natural home in the 'Kreutzer' Sonata. Beethoven's replacement finale for Op. 30 No. 1 could not be more apt to the work's spirit: a delightful set of six variations on a gentle pastoral tune that sounds like a folksong refined for aristocratic consumption.

Most celebrated, and imposing, of the 1802 triptych is the **Sonata in C minor Op. 30 No. 2**. Whereas Nos. 1 and 3 were conceived for the salon, this grandly scaled work, in four rather than the usual three movements, is a symphony for two instruments. Its magnificent first movement has one of Beethoven's trademark 'pregnant' openings, sounded softly in bare unison, that portends, and duly delivers, high drama. This initial theme generates music of dark grandeur, sometimes smouldering, sometimes explosive, as when the theme storms in *fortissimo* at the recapitulation. The major-keyed second subject combines delicacy with a pronounced military strut - an echo here of the 'Marseillaise', and a reminder of the Napoleonic Wars that were raging throughout Europe.

After the first movement's tumultuous coda, the *Adagio cantabile* offers much-needed emotional balm. Beethoven originally planned this movement in G major before opting for A flat, a key in which the violin loses some of its natural brightness. The prevailing serenity is gently ruffled by a poignant violin solo in A flat minor, and later challenged by sweeping *fortissimo* scales that evoke the first movement's martial spirit.

Defying expectations, as ever, Beethoven follows this *Adagio* with a *Scherzo* in C major that cheerfully cocks a snook at 18th-century elegance. According to the (often unreliable) memoirs of Beethoven's factotum Anton Schindler, the composer wanted to delete this piquant movement from the sonata 'because of incompatibility with the nature of the work as a whole'. We can be grateful that he didn't. C minor returns with a vengeance in the

Finale, a sonata-rondo that begins with an ominous bass rumble, moves through lyrical pathos and a swaggering Hungarian-style march, and ends in uncompromising ferocity.

If the A major Sonata is a lyric and the C minor a stormy epic, the outer movements of the **Sonata in G Op. 30 No. 3** suggest an inspired *jeu d'esprit*. Launched by a flurry of scales and a whoop of glee from the violin, the opening *Allegro assai*, in 6/8 time, shares the mischievous, *scherzando* spirit of the Sonata Op. 12 No. 2. Violin and piano remain in close, conspiratorial collusion throughout.

The lyrically beguiling *Tempo di menuetto*, in the warm key of E flat major, is first cousin to the *Menuetto* in the contemporary Piano Sonata in E flat Op. 31 No. 3. Both are surrogate slow movements that put a Romantic gloss on the leisured elegance of the *ancien régime* minuet.

The spirit of Beethoven's one-time teacher Haydn, and in particular the famous 'Gypsy Rondo', lies behind the rollicking *moto perpetuo* finale. We are immediately whisked to the Hungarian *puszta* with 'exotic' sharpened fourths (ie, C sharps), repeated scraps of folk-like melody (which Beethoven ensures you won't forget) and pervasive bagpipe drones.

A year later, in the spring of 1803, Beethoven was introduced to the celebrated mixed race violinist George Bridgetower. Delighted by his playing, he rapidly composed a violin sonata which the two of them triumphantly premièred at a concert in Vienna's Augarten. True to form, Beethoven then fell out with Bridgetower, allegedly after a quarrel over a girl. When the sonata appeared in 1805, it bore a dedication to the French virtuoso Rodolphe Kreutzer who, ironically, branded it as 'outrageously unintelligible' and never played it!

That first edition described the **Sonata in A Op. 47**, as 'Sonata for piano and violin obbligato, written in a distinctly concertante style, like a concerto'. True to its billing, the so-called 'Kreutzer' is the longest and most flamboyantly assertive violin sonata composed to date (the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* reviewer dubbed it 'an act of artistic terrorism'.) Beethoven establishes the absolute parity of the two instruments at the start of the slow introduction, opening with the violin alone in sonorous multiple-stopping, and continuing, with a drift from major to minor, by the piano. A nagging two-note figure proves to be the seed of the main *Presto*, cast, against expectations, in A minor. This is music of hectic brilliance, with the players vying with each other in devil-may-care virtuosity.

Virtuoso display, now skittishly ornamental, is also to the fore in the theme-and-variations slow movement, in F major. One of Beethoven's friends recalled that the composer played the tender theme with 'such chaste expression' at the première that it had to be encored twice. The *Finale*, at last re-establishing A major, is the coruscating 6/8 tarantella that Beethoven had originally conceived for Op. 30 No. 1. There is wit, albeit of a frenetic sort, in this music, with violin and piano now colluding rather than colliding head-on. The opening theme, presented in two-part counterpoint, makes a prominent feature of the rising semitone that had fertilised the first movement, suggesting that Beethoven planned the whole sonata 'backwards' from this tiny motif.

At the polar extreme from the 'Kreutzer' is the **Sonata in G Op. 96**, completed in December 1812 for the visiting French violinist Pierre Rode. Beethoven took longer than usual over the finale because, as he wrote to the work's dedicatee Archduke Rudolph, 'In our finales we like to have rather rumbustious passages, but R[ode] does not care for them so I have been somewhat hampered.'

'Hampered' or not, Beethoven turned Rode's apparent distaste for 'rumbustious passages' to advantage, and created a work of sublime poetic inwardness. Unfolding almost casually from its quizzical opening phrase, proposed by violin and echoed by the piano, the gently paced first movement - more *moderato* than *Allegro* - is a rarefied *Ländler*, with hints of spiritualised yodelling. In the 'Kreutzer' Sonata violin and piano were often locked in mortal combat. Here they dream and commune with infinite tenderness, like a pair of lovers.

The mood of rapt tranquillity deepens in the *Adagio espressivo*, beginning with one of Beethoven's assuaging hymn-like melodies. As in the 'Spring' Sonata, the third movement, a tetchy G minor *Scherzo* with stinging offbeat accents, is at odds with the mood of the sonata as a whole. The *Scherzo*'s coda brightens into G major, preparing for the pastoral, almost child-like theme of the theme-and-variation finale. Despite occasional 'rumbustious passages', the tone is one of subdued gaiety, in keeping with the whole sonata. Variation 5 (*Adagio espressivo*) dissolves the theme in a meditative fantasia, while the rustic revelry of Variation 7 breaks off for a spectral chromatic fugato: the kind of extreme dissociation, half-comic, halfunsettling, that looks ahead to many a work of Beethoven's so-called Third Period.

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