

WIGMORE HALL 125

Wednesday 19 November 2025
7.30pm

This concert is supported by the Rubinstein Circle

Alina Ibragimova violin
Cédric Tiberghien fortepiano

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Violin Sonata No. 4 in A minor Op. 23 (1800)
I. Presto • II. Andante scherzoso, più allegretto • III. Allegro molto

Violin Sonata No. 6 in A Op. 30 No. 1 (1801-2)
I. Allegro • II. Adagio molto espressivo • III. Allegretto con variazioni

Interval

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



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By 1798, when he completed his first set of 'sonatas for fortepiano, with the accompaniment of violin', Op. 12, Beethoven had established himself as Mozart's successor in Vienna, dazzling the cognoscenti with his keyboard improvisations and brilliant compositions involving his own instrument. The next two years were dominated by the Op. 18 quartets, the First Symphony and the Septet, culminating in Beethoven's successful benefit concert in April 1800. That summer and autumn he worked on two more violin sonatas, Opp. 23 and 24, dedicated to his friend and patron, Count Moritz von Fries, an accomplished violinist and host to regular *soirées* at his palace on the Josefsplatz. Fries commissioned the two violin sonatas for a generous fee (by 1800 Beethoven commanded top rates), and in return enjoyed exclusive use of them for six months before they appeared in print.

Like other Beethoven works written more-or-less simultaneously, the sonatas form a pair of opposites. While the 'Spring' Sonata Op. 24 is lyrically relaxed, the outer movements of the **Sonata in A minor Op. 23** are restless and pithy, liable to flashes of violence.

Both the opening *Presto*, full of waspish repartee, and the finale trade in wiry three-part textures, with the violin often positioned in the middle, between the piano left and right hands. Often Beethoven seems to treat the violin as a percussion instrument. In the rondo finale he offsets turbulent minor-keyed rhetoric (much of it delivered in a smouldering *piano*) with a sustained chorale melody whose falling contours echo the first movement's germinal motif.

Part slow movement, part scherzo, the *Andante scherzoso più Allegretto* makes a playful foil to the highly charged outer movements. The paired quavers of the main theme are punctuated by whimsical silences, while the second group of themes begins with an airy fugato that seems to poke gentle fun at academic orthodoxy.

Early in 1802 Beethoven's physician recommended that he spend the spring and summer in rural seclusion to alleviate his worsening hearing. In April the composer duly left Vienna for the outlying village of Heiligenstadt. In his portfolio were the virtually finished Second Symphony and sketches for three violin sonatas. Beethoven completed the sonatas, published as Op. 30, during May, and subsequently dedicated them to the young Tsar, Alexander I, who had instituted a programme of enlightened social reform in Russia.

Beethoven had modelled several earlier works on Mozart, most overtly the A major String Quartet, Op. 18 No. 5. By 1802 he had outgrown any direct influence. Yet Mozart's spirit, his gift for hinting at expressive depths beneath a smiling, ordered surface, can be sensed in the **Sonata in A Op. 30 No. 1**. One of Beethoven's best-kept secrets, this sonata is a work of captivating lyrical charm. The first movement is an idealised minuet, with the two instruments in gentle colloquy. A decade later Beethoven would recapture and rarefy the movement's serene conversational spirit in this final Violin Sonata, Op. 96.

The lyricism deepens in the ineffably tender *Adagio molto espressivo* (a typical Beethoven marking), whose broad violin cantilena, exquisitely harmonised, is underpinned by a gentle rocking motion. When the Op. 30 sonatas first appeared in print, this *Adagio* was singled out for praise in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*.

For the finale Beethoven originally wrote a breakneck tarantella, before rejecting it as 'too brilliant' for the work. A year later the tarantella found its natural home in the flamboyant 'Kreutzer' Sonata, Op. 47. Beethoven's replacement finale for Op. 30 No. 1 could not be more apt to the work's spirit: a delightfully inventive set of six variations on a gentle pastoral tune that sounds like a folksong refined for the salon.

Most imposing of the Op. 30 triptych is the **Sonata Op. 30 No. 2**, in the quintessential Beethovenian key of C minor. Whereas Nos 1 and 3 are conceived for the salon, this grandly scaled C minor Sonata, 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. The contrasting second theme 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: perfect for the assuaging tenderness of the long-drawn opening theme, each half of which is proposed by the piano and repeated by the violin, with an added richness of texture and harmony.

Defying expectations, as ever, Beethoven follows this *Adagio* with a *Scherzo* in C major that cheerfully cocks a snook at 18th-century elegance. Its disruptive offbeat accents become still more insistent in the trio, fashioned as a jaunty canon between violin and keyboard bass. According to Beethoven's (unreliable) factotum Anton Schindler, the composer wanted to delete this piquant movement 'because of incompatibility with the nature of the work as a whole'. We can be grateful that he didn't.

C minor reasserts itself with a vengeance in the finale, whose unstable main theme juxtaposes ominous bass rumbles with snatches of lyrical pathos. As in the opening movement, the mood temporarily brightens with a swaggering Hungarian-style march, though with its tootling piano descant this one suggests an element of parody. When the rondo theme returns, the lyrical fragment flowers, with Mozartian grace, in an unclouded C major. But this respite proves short-lived. In the torrential *Presto* coda the violin hammers out a new stomping march tune that turns out to be a blunt version of the work's opening theme; and the sonata ends, as it began, in an uncompromising C minor.

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