

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 1 May 2025
7.30pm

Leonidas Kavakos violin
Enrico Pace piano

Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Fantasy in C D934 (1827)
*I. Andante molto • II. Allegretto •
III. Andantino • IV. Tempo I – Allegro vivace*

Richard Dubugnon (b.1968)

La Minute Exquise (2010)
Hypnos (2010)
Retour à Montfort-l'Amaury (2010)

Interval

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

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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A decade separates the three violin sonatas that **Schubert** wrote early in 1816, during a miraculous period of songwriting, and his next work for solo violin. His interest in the instrument was revived by the experience of hearing Josef Slavík. The largely self-taught Bohemian virtuoso arrived in Vienna in 1826 and was rewarded soon after when Schubert wrote the Rondo in B minor D895 for him and the pianist Carl Maria von Bocklet. The technical prowess and graceful artistry of both players prompted Schubert to compose the Fantasy in C D934 as a more substantial showpiece for their talents. Slavík and Bocklet gave its première in January 1828 at the close of an overlong midday concert, just as many fatigued audience members were leaving to enjoy a late lunch.

The Fantasy, which makes high technical demands on both players, coalesces around a magnificent central set of variations which Schubert based on his song 'Sei mir gegrüsst' ('I greet you'). It opens with shimmering tremolo chords, above which the violin unfolds an exquisite melody that rises to an entrancing cadenza shared with the piano. Schubert has fun with the subsequent *Allegretto*, repeating the fiddle's folk-like theme in canon with the keyboard and transforming it through a rollicking episode in A major. Breathtaking modulations prepare the way for the *Andantino*, in which the task of varying its 'Sei mir gegrüsst' theme is shared by the two instruments. The piano graces the second variation with elaborate figuration as the violin outlines pizzicato arpeggios, while the fiendish third variation requires a display of courage from each player. The 'Sei mir gegrüsst' melody emerges again, albeit in decorated form, allowing the performers to draw breath before another violin cadenza. Schubert now reframes the work's opening material as a majestic gateway to a joyful *Marche militaire*, the progress of which is interrupted by one last echo of 'Sei mir gegrüsst' before making its triumphant return.

Richard Dubugnon, born in Lausanne in 1968, studied at the Paris Conservatoire and the Royal Academy of Music in London. His *3 Pieces for violin and piano* were composed in 2010 for Janine Jansen as part of a recording project devoted to works with nocturnal associations. 'La minute exquise', inspired by the seductive symbolism of Verlaine's famous poem *L'heure exquise*, evokes the seemingly eternal moment of profound intimacy between two lovers, their passion so recently spent under a moonlit sky. Named for the Greek god of sleep, 'Hypnos' relates to an undisclosed hallucinatory dream experienced by the composer. The piece, like 'La minute exquise', is based on one of Dubugnon's earlier songs. 'Retour à Montfort-l'Amaury' recalls a visit to the small house that Ravel bought in 1921 and decorated in elegant fashion. Described by Dubugnon as being 'vaguely reminiscent of Ravel's music', it encapsulates the spirit of place in an improvisatory introduction and a waltz

(interlaced with breathless bars in 5/8 time) that comes to rest in a sublime codetta.

During a visit to Vienna in April 1803, the violinist George Bridgetower met **Beethoven** and asked him to perform in the benefit concert he planned to give the following month. Having accepted the invitation, Beethoven returned to sketches he had made earlier that year for the first and possibly second movements of a new sonata for violin and piano and also to the spirited *Presto* which he had originally created as the finale of his Violin Sonata in A Op. 30 No. 1 but replaced with a more relaxed set of variations. The Violin Sonata in A Op. 47 was completed just in time for its première, which Bridgetower and Beethoven gave at the Augarten-Saal. Their convivial relationship soured over what the violinist later described as 'some silly quarrel about a girl', after which Beethoven decided to rededicate his sonata's first edition to Rodolphe Kreutzer, a renowned French violinist of German descent.

The monumental nature of the 'Kreutzer' Sonata is reflected in its chordal introduction for unaccompanied violin. The irresistible energy of the first movement's *Presto*, hewn from three contrasting yet related themes, rises from an oscillating two-note violin figure that seems to pose the question, 'Dare we?', to which Beethoven's answer is 'You bet!'. It was no exaggeration for the composer to observe on the sonata's titlepage that the piece was written in 'a very concertante style, almost like a concerto'; indeed, both violin and piano assume the role of concerto soloists, whether holding the limelight by turns or engaging in lively dialogue, as they do in the first movement's coda, with its mighty octave leaps and sublime pause for reflection before making a spirit to the finish line.

Textural warmth and emotional richness distinguish the *Andante*, a set of four variations based on a theme of beguiling beauty, brought to life by the piano and elevated by its repetition on the violin. There's room for elegance in the first two variations and heartfelt introspection in the form of their successor, cast in the key of F minor, to which Beethoven adds a final variation that propels both instruments into gleaming high registers. The surprising A major of the sonata's *Presto* finale raises the curtain on a party populated by characters intent on having fun, three of them called upon to serve as the movement's main themes, each strikingly individual yet united by certain melodic resemblances. As in the first movement, the finale includes periods of reflection. Here the meter either changes from compound to simple duple time or slows to walking pace while drawing attention to the little two-note idea that began life as the last movement of another sonata and found its calling as the germ cell for themes heard earlier in the 'Kreutzer'.

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