

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 24 January 2022 7.30pm

Leonidas Kavakos violin

Enrico Pace piano

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Franz Schubert (1797-1828)

Violin Sonata in A D574 'Grand Duo' (1817)

*I. Allegro moderato • II. Scherzo. Presto •
III. Andantino • IV. Allegro vivace*

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

Violin Sonata No. 2 in D minor Op. 121 (1851)

*I. Ziemlich langsam - Lebhaft • II. Sehr lebhaft •
III. Leise, einfach • IV. Bewegt*

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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Please note that the programme for tonight's concert has changed since these programme notes were written.

One of the most ambitious chamber works from **Schubert's** early adulthood is the Violin Sonata in A D574. Having termed its three predecessors 'sonatinas', the 'Grand Duo' of August 1817 was called a sonata from the outset. All these works were probably intended for domestic use – Schubert may well have written them for his brother Ferdinand – though he would no doubt have hoped for a publication. Sadly, it was not until after Schubert's death that such a wish was fulfilled, with the piece appearing in print in 1851, thanks to Diabelli.

The four movements display hallmarks of the early Romantic sonata, in which virtuosity is balanced with form and bravura with a sense of poise. These qualities are immediately apparent in the opening movement and its fresh first subject. With occasional minor-key inflections, it passes freely between the two instruments. The mood becomes more exuberant with the capricious second subject, before a brief development section takes the impulsive tone forward, a sense of variation continuing throughout the recapitulation.

A sprightly *Scherzo*, with jabbing syncopations and dynamic contrasts, maintains the somewhat combative atmosphere. It is followed by a chromatic *Trio*, during which the piano is in close pursuit of the violin, before the *Scherzo's* perky rhythms return. The third movement is all candour, with a turning melody and gently rocking accompaniment, but impertinent trills and harmonic shifts leave us unsure as to the music's sincerity. Finally, the leaping arpeggios of the second movement return to herald the Rondo, with pizzicato jolts and engaging displays from both players – little wonder Diabelli gave the work its 'Duo' nickname – as this ebullient Sonata comes to a close.

Schumann's Second Violin Sonata Op. 121 was written in Düsseldorf in the autumn of 1851. The composer had recently become the city's municipal music director, though the situation was far from secure. Shortly before embarking on the composition, Schumann had an upsetting contretemps with the deputy mayor, who expressed concern about his ambitious plans. Consequently, at least for the next few months, a bruised Schumann decided to move away from writing public works, instead creating more intimate compositions, including two violin sonatas, with the D minor following on quickly from the pensive A minor Op. 105.

Sometimes nicknamed the 'Grand', the D minor was certainly conceived to impress, as is clear from the imposing if slightly curt introduction to the first of its four movements. The violin provides a smoother, more cajoling line to temper the piano's mood, though the development section keeps various surprises up its sleeve, compounding a sense of agitation that will continue right to the end of the movement.

The model for Brahms's later contribution to the *F-A-E Sonata* for Joseph Joachim, a mutual friend, is to be found in Schumann's second movement, with the same propulsive rhythms. But it also has a more local complement, revealed in the third movement's series of variations on the chorale 'Gelobet seist du, Jesu Christ' that is introduced at the climax of the unsmiling Scherzo. It is only with the finale's lyrical second subject that Schumann truly pulls the clouds apart and prepares for the sonata's triumphant close, which feels all the more so, of course, having been deferred.

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