

# WIGMORE HALL

Monday 24 March 2025  
1.00pm

Giorgi Gigashvili piano

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 30 in E Op. 109 (1820)

*I. Vivace ma non troppo – Adagio espressivo*

*II. Prestissimo*

*III. Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo: Gesangvoll,  
mit innigster Empfindung*

Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953)

Piano Sonata No. 6 in A Op. 82 (1939-40)

*I. Allegro moderato*

*II. Allegretto*

*III. Tempo di valzer lentissimo*

*IV. Vivace*



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In 1820, **Beethoven** was feeling his age: beset by lawsuits about the guardianship of his nephew Karl, late with the *Missa Solemnis* for the enthronement of the Archduke Rudolph, his favourite pupil, as Archbishop of Olmütz, and troubled by ill health which in the first months of 1821 confined him to his bed for six weeks with rheumatic fever. And as always, playing publishers off against one another to squeeze a bit more money out of them.

In April 1820, Beethoven interrupted work on his Mass to compose a piano piece that was probably intended for Friedrich Starke's forthcoming Piano Method. It may have been this didactic purpose that decided him to concentrate on one unusual aspect of the magnificent pianoforte that Thomas Broadwood had sent him from London a couple of years before. It possessed a Broadwood speciality, a divided sustaining pedal. The wooden pedal was simply sawn in two, the right-hand half raising the dampers from middle C up, and the left-hand half raising the dampers from middle B down. Works exploiting this device – Mendelssohn's Sonata Op. 6 and Rondo Capriccioso Op. 14, for instance – are often in the key of E, because its important note B (the dominant) can be held on by the left-hand part of the pedal, while harmonies change above. Beethoven's piece was in E, and details of its rhythmic notation suggest that he was thinking in terms of one hand being more sustained than the other.

A month later, however, the Berlin publisher Schlesinger offered him 90 ducats (getting on twice Beethoven's late brother's Civil Service salary, to give a rough comparison) for three piano sonatas, and the E major piece quickly became the first movement of Op. 109, any didactic purpose it may have had as a pedalling exercise lost in the translation. The completed sonata was sent to Schlesinger in the autumn, and published a year later.

Beethoven's musical language in intimate works like sonatas and string quartets has become by this stage in his development extremely concentrated. The word *cantabile* – 'singing' – crops up everywhere, reminding us of Wagner's idea of late Beethoven as 'endless melody'. It is unsurprising, then, that Beethoven uses compositional techniques appropriate to melody: fugue and variation.

When Beethoven was a child, his ambitious father had published some of his compositions, lying about his son's age to make him seem even cleverer. Unfortunately, no-one was impressed, and Beethoven published nothing more, all through his teens.

At the time of the French Revolution, Beethoven was working in Bonn's opera house, playing the viola in a truly revolutionary opera – *The Marriage of Figaro*. A little later, his employer, the Elector of Cologne, sent him off to Vienna to meet its composer. After meeting Mozart, he plucked up the courage to publish some music again: 24 variations on a tune by Righini.

This, the first published composition of the adult Beethoven, already shows him a master of variation form. 15 more sets followed before the set of 32 in his favourite key, C minor, composed in 1806. Op. 76 followed in 1809. Besides such independent sets, variation was an important part of Beethoven's sonata and symphony style. The slow movements of the 'Appassionata', the 'Archduke', the Violin Concerto, the Ninth Symphony; the A flat Sonata Op. 26 (following Mozart by beginning with the variations), the finales of Op. 109 and the C minor Sonata Op. 111, several string quartets; and, back in the Ninth Symphony, the mighty finale itself – all present wonderful sets of variation.

**Prokofiev's** mother, Maria, came from a family of serfs once owned by one of Russia's most enlightened great families, who encouraged their dependents to pursue the arts and theatre. Maria, having made a fortunate marriage, spent Sergei's early childhood having piano lessons in Moscow or St. Petersburg for two months every year, and the boy benefited from her contacts – the composer-pianist Glière spent several summers at the Prokofiev's house, teaching him. Prokofiev left the Conservatoire in 1914 having won a grand piano for his performance of his First Piano Concerto Op. 10. A review of its première in 1912 said that the composer 'seems to be either dusting the keys or striking high or low notes at random', but two years later the tolerance of the musical world had increased dramatically. 1912 also saw the composition of the well-known Toccata Op. 11, a second Piano Concerto (to be rewritten in 1923), and this Second Sonata, the work of a pleasant summer break in Kislovodsk.

Prokofiev declared that his music followed two major principles, clarity and brevity, and embodied four characteristics: classical ('born when I heard my mother play Beethoven sonatas'), innovation ('which started after Taneyev's mocking remark about my "much too simple" harmony'), toccata-like character ('of less importance'), and lyricism. 'A fifth character,' continued Prokofiev, 'the so-called "grotesque", is a side-line'.

In 1914, he travelled to London, where the ballet impresario Diaghilev encouraged him to be more Russian, and commissioned a ballet. *Chout* underwent many changes as Diaghilev and Massine explained the requirements of a ballet, but when it was produced in Paris in 1921 Ravel pronounced it a masterpiece, and even Stravinsky, a serious rival in the ballet stakes, praised it. That was Opus 20. Op. 21, *Visions fugitives*, was composed in 1917, Prokofiev having returned to the Conservatoire to learn the organ as an original way of avoiding conscription. The Sixth Piano Sonata was written in 1940 during a war from which there was to be no escape for anyone. It was premièred by its composer in a broadcast from Moscow in May 1940. It was followed by two more 'war sonatas', Op. 83 (1942) and Op. 84 (1944).

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