WIGMORE HALL 125

Thursday 25 June 2026
7.30pm

Alina Ibragimova violin
Cédric Tiberghien fortepiano

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

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

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

Interval

Violin Sonata No. 9 in A Op. 47 'Kreutzer' (1802-3)
I. Adagio sostenuto. Presto • II. Andante con variazioni • III. Finale. Presto

Join & Support
Donations
FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

125 years
Mark the moment
Support the music

To find out more visit
wigmore-hall.org.uk/donate

Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management. In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions. Disabled Access and Facilities – full details from 020 7935 2141. Wigmore Hall is equipped with a loop to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.

Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • Wigmore-hall.org.uk • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan

From around 1798-9 Beethoven suffered from a combination of chronic abdominal pains and worsening hearing. To alleviate his encroaching deafness he left Vienna in spring 1802 for the semi-rural village of Heiligenstadt. In his portfolio were the virtually finished Second Symphony and sketches for three violin sonatas. Working swiftly, Beethoven completed the sonatas, published as Op. 30, during May, and subsequently dedicated them to the young Tsar, Alexander I – though he only received the full payment for his dedication after meeting the Tsar at the Congress of Vienna in 1815.

Belying Beethoven's concerns over his hearing, the **G major Sonata Op. 30 No. 3** is a work of unalloyed optimism. Launched by a flurry of scales and a whoop of glee from the violin, the first movement is an inspired *jeu d'esprit*, with violin and piano in conspiratorial collusion. Contrasting ideas include a mock-vehement outburst in the minor key, a skittish little rustic tune over a drone bass and a closing theme disrupted by offbeat accents and chuckling trills.

The *Tempo di menuetto*, in the mellow, contrasting key of E flat major, is a surrogate slow movement that puts a Romantic gloss on the leisured elegance of the *ancien régime* minuet. Sentiment is summarily banished in the riotous finale. With a nod to Haydn's popular 'Gipsy Rondo', Beethoven whisks us to the Hungarian *puszta* with 'exotic' sharpened fourths (i.e. C sharps), repeated scraps of folklike melody and insistent bagpipe drones.

Beethoven had already composed three movements of his final violin sonata, **Op. 96**, when the celebrated French violinist Pierre Rode arrived in Vienna in December 1812, en route from St Petersburg to Paris. A grand *soirée* was planned at Prince Lobkowitz's palace in which Rode would perform a new Beethoven sonata. Despite this new impetus to finish the work, the composer took longer than usual over the finale because, as he informed the sonata'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.' Rudolph partnered Rode in the Viennese première on 29 December 1812, only days after the sonata's completion. While the music was praised, Rode's playing proved something of a disappointment. After a second performance in January one reviewer noted that 'the piano part was played far better … and with more feeling than the violin'.

Turning Rode's distaste for 'rumbustious passages' to advantage, the finale caps a work of sublime poetic inwardness. Unfolding almost casually from its quizzical opening phrase, the gently paced first movement is a rarefied *Ländler*, with hints of spiritualised yodelling. Violin and piano are locked in tender communion as each theme grows naturally from its predecessor. The central development floats over a ceaseless flow of triplets, while the recapitulation glides from G major to E flat major for new reflections on the opening theme.

The recapitulation's drift to E flat prepares us for the key of the *Adagio espressivo*. Beginning with a chorale-like melody on the piano, this deepens the second movement's mood of rapt tranquillity. Beethoven's sketches for the chorale theme reveal a simultaneous process of simplification and lyrical intensification.

Next comes a tetchy G minor *Scherzo* with stinging offbeat accents – a striking contrast with the mood of the sonata as a whole. The coda brightens into G major in preparation for the pastoral theme of the variation finale. Despite 'rumbustious' moments, the tone is one of subdued gaiety. Variation 5 (*Adagio espressivo*) dissolves the theme in a decorative fantasia, while the rustic revelry of the final variation suddenly breaks off for a spectral chromatic fugato: the kind of extreme dissociation, half-comic, half-unsettling, that looks ahead to many a work of Beethoven's final period.

Nearly a decade earlier Beethoven had struck up a friendship with another visiting virtuoso violinist, George Bridgetower, son of a Polish mother and a father of African or West Indian origin. With Bridgetower's encouragement Beethoven rapidly completed a violin sonata which they triumphantly premièred at a concert in Vienna's Augarten on 24 May 1803. Beethoven then fell out with Bridgetower over what the violinist remembered as 'some silly quarrel over a girl'. When the sonata was published it bore a dedication to the French virtuoso Rodolphe Kreutzer who, ironically, branded it 'outrageously unintelligible' and refused to perform it!

Described in the first edition as 'Sonata for piano and violin obbligato, written in a distinctly concertante style, like a concerto', **the 'Kreutzer'** is the longest and most flamboyant violin sonata composed to date. While the public was enthusiastic, reviews were mixed. The *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* even went so far as to dub the 'Kreutzer' 'an act of artistic terrorism'. Beethoven establishes the parity of the instruments at the start of the slow introduction, opening with the violin alone in multiple-stopping. A nagging two-note figure provides the seed of the *Presto*, cast, against expectations, in A minor. This is music of feverish brilliance, with violin and piano vying with each other in devil-may-care virtuosity. In Tolstoy's novella (which in turn inspired Janáček's First String Quartet) it even drove the protagonist Pozdnyshev to stab his wife in a jealous rage. Only the chorale-like second theme brings momentary repose.

Virtuoso display, now skittishly ornamental, is also to the fore in the slow movement, a set of variations on a theme of tender simplicity. One of Beethoven's friends recalled that he played this theme with 'such chaste expression' at the première that it had to be encored twice. The *Finale*, at last re-establishing A major, is a coruscating 6/8 tarantella that Beethoven had originally conceived for the Sonata Op. 30 No. 1 before rejecting it as 'too brilliant' for such an intimate work. There is wit, albeit of a frenetic sort, in this music, with violin and piano now colluding rather than colliding head-on, as they had in the first movement.

© Richard Wigmore 2026
Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.