

# WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 26 February 2023  
7.30pm

## Gould Piano Trio

Lucy Gould violin  
Richard Lester cello  
Benjamin Frith piano

## Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

### Piano Trio in G Op. 1 No. 2 (1793)

*I. Adagio - Allegro vivace • II. Largo con espressione •  
III. Scherzo. Allegro • IV. Finale. Presto*

### Variations in E flat on an Original Theme Op. 44 (pub. 1804)

### Interval

### Piano Trio in E flat Op. 70 No. 2 (1808)

*I. Poco sostenuto - Allegro ma non troppo •  
II. Allegretto • III. Allegretto ma non troppo •  
IV. Finale. Allegro*

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The Gould Piano Trio opens its all-**Beethoven** programme with the Piano Trio in G Op. 1 No. 2, which was written by the 22-year-old composer in 1793 shortly after his arrival in Vienna from his native city of Bonn. The three Opus 1 piano trios were premièred that year at a soiree hosted by Beethoven's patron, Prince Lichnowsky, who was also the set's dedicatee. Beethoven played the piano parts. Joseph Haydn attended the concert and wrote shortly thereafter, 'Beethoven will in time become one of the greatest musical artists in Europe, and I shall be proud to call myself his teacher.' Indeed, Haydn's influence runs throughout the works in tonight's programme. There is a story that Beethoven fell out with his teacher after the concert, as Haydn suggested that Beethoven should not publish the third trio of the set. Although early works, the Op. 1 trios are symphonic in scale. Each reveals an individual mix of profundity, profanity and humour from a composer already scarred by the realities of life. The Op. 1 No. 2 trio, in common with its partners, employs a four-movement structure rather than the three that habitually constituted works in the genre.

The opening *Allegro* begins inventively with a slow introduction, a feature unknown in previous piano trios. The theme that ensues draws upon elements in the introduction but is light and buoyant; the jolly second theme is played mainly by the violin supplemented by the piano. In the *Largo con espressione* second movement it is the *con espressione* aspect that Beethoven uses to provide his own twist on a siciliano rhythm, which is played at a slower than usual tempo. With a distinctly solemn feel to it, the atmosphere is enhanced by Beethoven's employment of the key of E major. The third movement is a *Scherzo* and trio of Haydnesque character. Initially, the writing features rising and falling scales, before the trio section turns out a waltz that is simultaneously mildly comic and banal. The *Scherzo* returns before a coda that swiftly fades away. The *Presto* final movement again merges a Haydnesque feeling with Beethoven's more boisterous temperament. The opening theme of rapid, repeated notes is assigned to the violin then subtly altered when the piano takes it over. As the movement progresses *sforzando* accents, dynamic contrasts and distant key signatures are employed, with the recapitulation in E major, before octaves in the piano anticipate the initial theme's return.

The Variations in E flat on an Original Theme Op. 44 were probably begun whilst Beethoven was still in Bonn during 1792. Although the title commends the theme as an original one, it in fact is extracted from Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf's singspiel *Das rote Käppchen* ('The little red cap'). The practice of writing variations upon popular themes of the day was not uncommon and Beethoven was fulfilling a demand for

music from gifted amateur musicians to play within domestic salons. There is a cursory, if perhaps unintentional, thematic resemblance to Beethoven's own famous 'Eroica' theme. After the theme is stated 14 variations ensue, inventively utilising the textures of different instrumental combinations, tempi and moods. In the first variation, the piano harmonises to supplement the theme. The second is, in essence, a graceful piano solo. The third sees the violin take the theme with piano and cello accompaniment, whilst the cello assumes the spotlight in the fourth variation. The running piano triplets of the fifth variation give way to more involved writing, whilst the sixth has an improvised feeling. The seventh and thirteenth variations are slow and in the key of E flat minor. The eighth variation returns to the major key; the strings support an ornate piano part. Virtuoso octaves and trills dominate the ninth variation, whilst the tenth is wildly syncopated and the eleventh features restrained writing for the strings. Though rococo elegance dominates much of the writing, this is interjected by a fortissimo outburst in the twelfth variation. Even then, Beethoven was unafraid to cock a snook at tradition. The energetic last variation precedes a brief fast coda. The work was not published until 1804, hence the later opus number.

The Piano Trio in E flat Op. 70 No. 2 was written during the summer of 1808, whilst he was staying in Heiligenstadt. The trio and its preceding opus partner, Op. 70 No.1 (the 'Ghost'), were composed immediately after Beethoven completed the sixth symphony; all are fine examples of his middle period output. The Op. 70 No. 2 trio is one of Beethoven's most nuanced chamber works from this time and is written in four movements. The opening movement has a pensive introduction which links to the main *Allegro*, which oscillates between nervous worrying, with trilling figures heard in the development section, and an airy waltz-like second theme. The *Allegretto* second movement is a double set of variations, based on two alternating yet related themes. One is in the key of C major, the other in C minor. The *Allegretto ma non troppo* third movement is in A flat, making this trio the first of Beethoven's works with movements in three different key signatures. The writing is of such tenderness that one could, if unaware, mistake it in passing for Schubert. That said, the trio section quotes the *Largo* theme from Haydn's Symphony No. 88. Might this indicate that some kind of uneasy truce had been reached between Beethoven and Haydn? The final movement *Allegro* is genial and exhilarating: Beethoven at his most well-mannered and witty. Listen for the interplay between the instruments and also the familiar utilisation of key signatures a third apart from one another.

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