

WIGMORE HALL

Thursday 26 June 2025
7.30pm

Alina Ibragimova violin
Cédric Tiberghien fortepiano

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Violin Sonata No. 1 in D Op. 12 No. 1 (1797-8)

*I. Allegro con brio • II. Tema con variazioni.
Andante con moto • III. Rondo. Allegro*

Violin Sonata No. 3 in E flat Op. 12 No. 3 (1797-8)

*I. Allegro con spirito • II. Adagio con molta espressione •
III. Rondo. Allegro molto*

Interval

Violin Sonata No. 2 in A Op. 12 No. 2 (1797-8)

*I. Allegro vivace • II. Andante, più tosto allegretto •
III. Allegro piacevole*

Violin Sonata No. 5 in F Op. 24 'Spring' (1800-1)

*I. Allegro • II. Adagio molto espressivo •
III. Scherzo. Allegro molto – Trio • IV. Rondo. Allegro
ma non troppo*



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Soon after the publication of Beethoven's Sonatas for violin and piano Op. 12 in 1799, a bewildered response appeared in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*. 'The critic, who heretofore has been unfamiliar with the piano pieces of the author, must admit, after having looked through these strange sonatas overladen with difficulties, that after diligent and strenuous labour he felt like a man who had hoped to make a promenade with a genial friend through a tempting forest and found himself barred every minute by inimical barriers, returning at last exhausted and without having had any pleasure.' The anonymous author declared that the music was, 'Learned, learned and always learned – and nothing natural, no song.' In short, the reviewer found Beethoven's compositions to be unnatural in their harmonic adventurousness and technical demands, a puzzling verdict considering their closeness in style to Mozart's mature violin sonatas.

Beethoven's first three sonatas for violin and piano, written in Vienna in 1797-98, were dedicated to one of his teachers, Antonio Salieri, Kapellmeister to the Imperial Court. They treat the violin and piano as equal partners, a status affirmed with the bold unison fanfare that opens **Op. 12 No. 1**. The initial D major flourish is followed by the combination of two related thematic ideas: a spiky melody, announced by violin, and a blend of arpeggio and scale figures that arises simultaneously in the piano. The movement's second theme takes the first theme's flowing motif and transforms it into a genial melody. A third theme, lyrical and expansive, prepares the ground for the development section, cast in the surprising key of F major, the rhapsodic nature of which Beethoven subverts with a dramatic return to the opening fanfare and the arrival of the recapitulation.

There's no want of song in the D major sonata's slow movement, a set of four contrasting variations on a charming theme. The coda contains a suggestion of the work's opening fanfare and foreshadows the theme of the subsequent *Rondo*. Beethoven builds his finale on a wonderfully robust theme against which he leans a long and engrossing first episode that dissolves with the return of the rondo tune and its arresting minor-mode restatement by the violin. A transition leads to the second episode, during which its arching theme is developed and used to pivot to the rondo's return. The closing coda marries a fragment of the rondo theme to the second episode's melody, bound together by a sequence of audacious modulations.

Rich textural contrasts within each of Beethoven's Op. 12 compositions were doubtless tailored to suit the expressive subtleties of the finest Viennese fortepianos, those by Stein and Streicher foremost among them. The **Sonata No. 2 in A** opens with a featherlight dialogue, albeit one punctuated by surging scales and accented syncopations. Mystery pervades the transition that prefaces the short development section, embodied in a sinuous melody played in octaves by both instruments. The recapitulation dances towards a held silence from which emerges an exquisite slow movement, graced by its haunting lament; the expressive range is intensified in a discursive central section, before the main theme

returns in decorated fashion. Beethoven paints an idyllic scene in his *Rondo* finale only to suggest its fragility with a series of silences in the first episode and unsettle its charm again with weighty *sforzandos* in the piano's left hand. Peace is soon restored with a full recall of the rondo theme.

The **Sonata in E flat Op. 12 No. 3** presents formidable challenges to the pianist, notably in the concerto-like opening of the first movement's development section. Beethoven here complements dashing keyboard writing in the outer movements with bold, unadorned melodic ideas on the violin. The slow movement projects what is commonly held to be among the most original creations from the composer's early career, distinguished by a seemingly endless flow of violin tunes set against a sonorous piano accompaniment. As a publication intended for the amateur market, the Op. 12 set contains music to test the keyboard skills of Beethoven's contemporaries; it closes with a delightful reward for both players, however, in the shape of the E flat sonata's *Rondo*, the joyous character triumphs after withstanding a barrage of 'learned' counterpoint in its central episode and again early in its coda.

Beethoven's Violin Sonatas Op. 23 in A minor and **Op. 24 in F** were originally advertised by the Viennese firm of Mollo in 1801 under one opus number. Their publication as separate works was necessary because the company's engraver had mistakenly prepared the violin parts for each work to suit different sizes of paper. A review in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* stated that 'they are among the best Beethoven has written, and that really means generally among the best being written right now. The original, fiery, and bold spirit of this composer could not escape notice even in his earlier works (although these apparently did not get the friendliest reception everywhere, since he himself sometimes raged in an unfriendly, wild, gloomy and troubled manner.) Now this spirit becomes constantly clearer, rejects excesses more and more, and projects ever more agreeably, without loss of character.' The two sonatas, composed in 1800-1, were dedicated to the wealthy Viennese banker and patron of the arts, Count Moritz von Fries.

It is easy to hear why the Violin Sonata in F Op. 24 'Spring' was so well received by press and public alike. The broad, relaxed theme with which the work opens surely inspired the sonata's popular nickname, its lyrical strength suited to a vision of spring; likewise, the carefree principal theme of the *Rondo* finale invites thoughts of the season of new life. It seems fair to suggest that the *Adagio*'s simple melodies, mostly played at a low dynamic level, represent the composer's interpretation of birdsong. A short, boisterous *Scherzo* provides a delightful interlude between the contemplative slow movement and the relaxed *Rondo*, remarkable for projecting radiant optimism at a time when Beethoven was beginning to bemoan the onset of deafness in his letters.

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