

# WIGMORE HALL

Wednesday 3 July  
7.30pm

Esther Yoo violin  
Jae Hong Park piano

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*

Jean Sibelius (1865-1957) Violin Sonatina in E Op. 80 (1915)  
*I. Lento - Allegro • II. Andantino • III. Lento - Allegretto*

Arvo Pärt (b.1935) Fratres (1977)

Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953) Violin Sonata No. 1 in F minor Op. 80 (1938-46)  
*I. Andante assai • II. Allegro brusco • III. Andante • IV. Allegrissimo*

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**Beethoven** changed so much about music; elevating the violin to an equal sonata-form footing with the piano was one of his smaller gifts to the world. Properly, the 10 numbered violin sonatas he composed between 1798 and 1812 are for piano and violin (keyboard leading the way), but these are genuine partnerships which opened rich possibilities for musicians and composers in the century that followed. Beethoven was also well-equipped to push the possibilities of the instrumental pairing, being a celebrated pianist and a proficient violinist, though his violin playing deteriorated as his hearing worsened.

The G major Sonata dates from the start of his 'middle' period, and was the third of a trio published as Op. 30. They bore a dedication to Tsar Alexander I of Russia who, in 1801, had swept to power on the back of a plot which saw his father, Tsar Paul, murdered in his own recently completed castle. Beethoven completed them in 1802, the year Alexander visited Vienna, where he was celebrated as the very vision of a modern monarch. The first and last movements of the G major Sonata fizz with bubbling excitement; not for nothing, the work was once referred to as the 'champagne sonata'.

At its centre is a tender minuet, a perfect foil for the boisterous outer movements. All this liveliness, though, disguises the fact that Beethoven himself had been plunged into deep despair by his encroaching deafness, which he expressed in a letter written for, but never delivered to, his brothers Carl and Johann, known as the *Heiligenstadt Testament*. The contrast between the Sonata in G and the *Testament*, which reveals all the pain he felt at losing the sense his art existed solely to serve, reminds us that a composer's music cannot simply be read as an expression of how they felt when it was written.

**Sibelius** longed for success as a violinist, but had to settle for becoming Finland's greatest composer. He wrote for the violin one of the mightiest concertos in its repertoire, but also a number of small pieces, including this succinct Sonatina in E, written in 1915, his 50th year. Cast in three short movements, the Sonatina opens with a striking gesture handed from the piano to the violin, before launching into a spirited *Allegro* reminiscent of the energetic brio of his Third Symphony. Sibelius gives the violin long singing lines over a gently rocking piano accompaniment in the *Andantino*; its concluding moments waft away with the reflective air of one of his great tone poems for orchestra. The athletic finale takes us to pages of Sibelius's sketchbook, utilising a melody originally intended for his Sixth Symphony, which he worked on over a number of years until the early 1920s. Fittingly, the first performance of this Sonatina came in the same month as the first version of his Fifth Symphony, another piece which cost him much effort in revising, for

though his works often sound as natural and inevitable as flowing water, the work which went into achieving that was immense.

Born in Estonia in 1935, **Arvo Pärt** spent his early career reacting against the strictures of the ruling Soviet regime with musical modernism, before simplifying his language and antagonising the authorities further with expressions of religious faith. *Fratres* ('Brothers'), composed in 1977, is at its heart a series of variations over a repeating series of chords, and represents one of Pärt's early uses of his *tintinnabuli* style, which combines voices moving in arpeggiated and stepwise motions respectively. It exists in more than a dozen different instrumentations; this 1980 version introduces a dizzying, furiously string-crossing opening for the violin.

The First Violin Sonata by **Prokofiev** had a long gestation, but such is its extraordinary unity of tone and purpose that you'd never guess quite how long it took. When he began the piece in 1938, the composer was smarting from the failure of his epic *Cantata for the 20th Anniversary of the October Revolution*, which proved too wild and independently-spirited for Stalin's regime to countenance. Though he moved on to more successful projects quickly, it was a terrible humiliation for a man who had returned to the USSR permanently just a few years prior, on the assumption that he would take up the mantle of the Soviet Union's leading composer after years living in the West.

The Violin Sonata was put aside until the end of the Second World War, when the great violinist David Oistrakh prompted him to take it up again and finish it. Oistrakh had, towards the end of the war, asked Prokofiev to make a violin arrangement of his 1943 Flute Sonata, which became the Second Violin Sonata; the quirk of the overlapping history of the two works means that the First Violin Sonata was actually completed after the Second.

By Prokofiev's standards, the sonata is unusually sombre. The uniformly dark mood of the first movement culminates in a remarkable passage which the composer told Oistrakh should sound 'like the wind running through a graveyard'. The second movement carries the appropriate indication *brusco* ('sharp, sour'), while the exquisite third reminds us of Prokofiev's gift for captivating melody. Then, in ending the finale with a revival of the 'graveyard' music, he gives the sonata a cyclical shape not found elsewhere in his works. And it followed him beyond the grave too: Oistrakh played the first and third movements at the composer's funeral in 1953.

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