WIGMORE HALL 125

Tuesday 9 December 2025
7.30pm

Vadym Kholodenko piano

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 29 in B flat Op. 106 'Hammerklavier' (1817-8)
I. Allegro
II. Scherzo. Assai vivace
III. Adagio sostenuto. Appassionato e con molto sentimento
IV. Largo. Allegro risoluto

Interval

Boris Lyatoshinsky (1895-1968)

3 Preludes Op. 38 (1942)
I. Andante sostenuto
II. Lento tenebroso
III. Moderato con moto e sempre ben ritmico

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)

6 Etudes d'exécution transcendante d'après Paganini S140 (1838-40)
I. Trémolo • II. Octaves •
III. La Campanella • IV. Arpeggio •
V. La Chasse • VI. Thème et variations

UNDER 35S

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In December 1817, Thomas Broadwood had one of his company's pianos shipped from London to Trieste, from where it travelled by cart to the Austrian capital, arriving the following May. It was a gift for **Beethoven**, who thanked Broadwood enthusiastically: 'I shall regard it as an altar on which I shall place my spirit's most beautiful offerings to the divine Apollo.' One of those offerings was the Piano Sonata No. 29 in B flat, Op. 106, subtitled 'Grosse Sonate für das Hammerklavier' after the instrument on which much of it was composed. It was a timely gift. The previous few years had not been easy. Beethoven had been growing increasingly deaf for some time, and by 1816, he had lost his hearing entirely. A protracted legal battle over the custody of his nephew, Karl, set him against his sister-in-law and sapped both his energy and his finances. The arrival of Broadwood's piano – far larger and more powerful than the Viennese pianos of the time – renewed his creative confidence and inspired one of his most ambitious and grandiose works.

The sonata is linked with another technical innovation – the metronome, patented by Johann Nepomuk Mälzel in 1815. As Beethoven wrote to a friend in 1817: 'I have been thinking for a long time to give up these absurd terms *Allegro*, *Andante*, *Adagio*, *Presto*, and Mälzel's metronome gives us the best opportunity to do so. I give you my word here that I will use them no more in all my newer compositions.' He failed to keep his word, yet the metronome was certainly one way in which he could correlate what he heard in his imagination with what he expected of performers. Abounding in technical challenges and instances of compositional bravura (above all, the fugue that forms the centrepiece of the finale), the 'Hammerklavier' is the longest of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas. Its four movements are conceived on a scale that seems closer to the world of the symphony. Although the score was published in both London and Vienna in 1819, the sonata's fiendish demands meant that it would not be heard in public until long after its composer's death in 1828.

Born in the central Ukrainian town of Zhytomyr in 1895, **Lyatoshinsky** would spend most of his life in Kyiv, where he moved to study law and music in 1913. He went on to teach composition at the Kyiv Conservatory from 1919 until his death in 1968, training generations of modern Ukrainian composers, as well as sharing his knowledge with students of the Moscow Conservatory in the 1930s and 1940s. In the 1920s, Lyatoshinsky had explored an inventive and original musical style that was close to expressionism in spirit. With the advent of Socialist Realism, however, composers were required to write music that would be more obviously accessible to the masses and which drew on the 19th-century classics for inspiration. The *3 Preludes* Op. 38 were written during the Second World War, when Lyatoshinsky was evacuated to the city of Saratov on the River Volga. If they hark back to the examples of Chopin and Rachmaninov, they also constitute a counterpart to the three more famous 'war' sonatas of Prokofiev.

Each prelude is prefaced by a short quotation taken from the work of the Ukrainian romantic poet, Taras Shevchenko, that gives a clue to its mood. Indeed, the three movements form a sequence that traces a journey from introspection to something approaching optimism. The first prelude – marked *andante sostenuto* – is brooding and impressionistic, evoking the end of day and the poet's sense of lonely melancholy. The second – *lento tenebroso* – suggests a graveyard scene. The third – *moderato con moto e sempre ben ritmico* – looks forward to the defeat of the enemy and a radiant future for the victors. The preludes suggest something of Lyatoshinsky's longing for his native land at a time when much of Ukraine was under German occupation – and had been subject to intense Russification under Stalin's totalitarian rule.

In his *6 Etudes d'exécution transcendante d'après Paganini*, **Liszt** picked up where Beethoven left off. Berlioz recalled hearing Liszt performing the 'Hammerklavier' sonata in Paris in 1836, in what may have been its belated première. Liszt later acquired the very instrument on which the 'Hammerklavier' had been composed, gifting it to the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest in 1874, where it can be seen to this day. Another pianist intimately caught up in the performing history of the 'Hammerklavier' was Clara Schumann, who programmed it in a number of her recitals in the 1850s. In turn, she was the dedicatee of Liszt's transcendental studies.

Their inspiration was, however, not a fellow pianist, but a violinist – Paganini, whose virtuosity (allegedly the result of a pact with the devil) dazzled Europe in the early decades of the 19th Century. Liszt raided Paganini's collection of *24 Caprices* for solo violin, as well as two of his six violin concertos, translating their themes into exhilarating showpieces for his own instrument. The six studies – which together form a very loose suite – were composed in 1838, not long after Liszt had dazzled Paris with his interpretation of Beethoven's 'Hammerklavier'. He made a revised edition of them in 1851, tempering some of the difficulties that were such a feature of the original version. The most famous is probably No. 3, nicknamed 'La campanella' ('The little bell'), and No. 5 ('La chasse') evokes the sound of a hunt. Elsewhere, Liszt employs trills and arpeggios, imitating – and gleefully surpassing – the sound of Paganini's violin. No. 6 is a set of variations based on the same theme that would later captivate Brahms and Rachmaninov, as well as composers ever since.