

BLAZING BEETHOVEN

2:00PM

SATURDAY 12 OCTOBER 2024

REARDON THEATRE



Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770 – 1827)

Cello Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 5, No. 2

1. *Adagio sostenuto e espressivo – Allegro molto più tosto presto*
2. *Rondo. Allegro*

Timo-Veikko Valve *Cello*
Stefan Cassomenos *Piano*

Piano Trio in E-flat major, Op. 70, No. 2

1. *Poco sostenuto – Allegro ma non troppo*
2. *Allegretto*
3. *Allegretto ma non troppo*
4. *Finale. Allegro*

Helena Rathbone *Violin*
Timo-Veikko Valve *Cello*
Stefan Cassomenos *Piano*

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Cello Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 5, No. 2

1. *Adagio sostenuto e espressivo – Allegro molto più tosto presto*
2. *Rondo. Allegro*

In the spring of 1796, Beethoven embarked on a six-month tour through Prague, Dresden, Leipzig and Berlin, culminating in several successful performances before King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia in June, though the composer berated the Prussian nobles for sobbing during his improvisations – “Who can live amongst such spoiled children?” Foremost among the king’s court musicians were the Duport brothers, at that time two of the finest cellists in the world. As the king himself was also a skilled and passionate cello player, Beethoven rapidly composed two sonatas while he was in Berlin, which he premiered with the younger Duport brother Jean-Louis, and dedicated to the king.

Up to that point in time, sonatas involving the cello and keyboard either completely emphasised the cello and relegated the keyboard to a purely accompanimental role, or, vice versa, employed the keyboard as the primary instrument, with the cello doubling the bass line. Beethoven’s first two cello sonatas are revolutionary, not just in their scope, melodic development and harmonic richness, but in their promotion of the two instruments to more or less equal partners.

The G minor sonata commences with a rhapsodic introduction almost operatic in scale, variously brooding and whimsical, wherein the lyrical yearning of the cello is set off against the vaulting dotted rhythms of the piano. The brilliant allegro section plays further with a wealth of contrasting elements – driving rhythmic energy, soaring melodies, and a constant shifting between plaintive and frenzied moods. Beethoven caps off the sonata with a charming rondo-finale, in which the themes are refracted through a kaleidoscope of colour and emotion.

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Piano Trio in E-flat major, Op. 70, No. 2

1. *Poco sostenuto – Allegro ma non troppo*

2. *Allegretto*

3. *Allegretto ma non troppo*

4. *Finale. Allegro*

Immediately after completing his Sixth Symphony in the late summer of 1808, Beethoven set to work on two ground-breaking piano trios, begun in Heiligenstadt and completed in Vienna over the space of a few months. The second in E \flat major is less famous than its counterpart (the 'Ghost'), but no less brilliant and innovative, disguising its originality behind an ostensibly lighter and more classical facade. Both trios are dedicated to Countess Anna Maria Erdődy, one of Beethoven's closest friends and champions. In the autumn of 1808, he moved into her spacious Vienna apartment, where the first performance of the trios was given in December with the new tenant at the keyboard.

While in the piano trios of Haydn and Mozart the strings are kept somewhat in thrall to the keyboard, with this work and others like it, Beethoven cuts the leash, allowing all three players to vie for lyrical and technical primacy. The first movement begins with a fleeting but breathtaking introduction, the cello intoning a simple, almost prayerlike melody which is swiftly taken up by the violin then piano. The arrival of the main allegro is announced by a sprightly, amorous theme in the strings, and though darkening clouds briefly loom in the development, this movement radiates light and good humour.

In stark contrast to the 'Ghost' Trio and its sepulchral largo, Beethoven here eschews a true slow movement and proceeds instead with two allegrettos, the first a Janus-faced double theme and variations, the second a leisurely, wistful minuet and trio. The whole work concludes with a rambunctious sonata-form finale, full of playful cat-and-mouse antics between the three players, and constant bursts of semiquavers perpetually driving the music forwards.