



# T B S



## Cristian Sandrin

### Late Beethoven Piano Sonatas

22 January 2023

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We are most grateful to HSH Dr Donatus Prince of Hohenzollern for his financial support for our concerts this year.

## Programme

**Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

**Piano Sonata No.30 in E, Opus 109**

*Vivace ma non troppo; Prestissimo; Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo*

This sonata, completed in 1820, is the first of Beethoven's last three great sonatas: Op. 109, Op. 110 and Op. 111. In these sonatas, Beethoven grappled with his personal afflictions, which he expressed in his own words as "Oh God, give me strength to conquer myself".

The first movement of Op. 109 is questioning and disturbing, with two starkly contrasting ideas, the first serene and lively – *vivace*; the second dark and grief-stricken. This makes for a most profound and enigmatic movement.

The second movement is a violent outburst of anger – *prestissimo*; stark and ruthless in character.

As if purged by the above outburst, the final movement is one of Beethoven's most beautiful set of variations, with a hymn-like theme radiating compassion, warmth and love. This theme is then used in six variations, the final one being a magnificent climax to the sonata, with shimmering trills and the suggestion of tolling bells.

**Piano Sonata No.31 in A flat, Opus 110**

*Moderato cantabile, molto espressivo; Molto allegro; Adagio ma non troppo*

The score of this unorthodox work is dated Christmas Day, 1821.

The first surprise is the very gentle nature of the first movement. Beethoven goes so far as to direct the pianist to play *con amabilità*. Short though it is, its 'sonata form' shape can be discerned, though without conspicuous sign-posting beyond the high register and two-voice duet of the secondary theme. The next movement is very abrupt, fulfilling the functions of a *scherzo* without being so called. It is in a fast two-time with a short and spectacular running middle.

The last movement is an elaborate slow-movement-plus-fugue sandwich. The résumé may sound fanciful but it is entirely dependent on Beethoven's directions as to how it is to be played. First, after soft introductory chords which use mysterious modulations, the right hand sings a recitative, very fantastic but ending conventionally, to lead into the *Arioso dolente* (sorrowing song) which is accompanied by heart-throbbing chords in the left hand. The music soon dies away, and a fugue begins, the outline of its subject reminding us of the shape of the very beginning of the sonata. This fugue shortly makes a climax but then immediately disintegrates most mysteriously into a repeat in a distant key of the *Arioso* but now marked 'worn out, weeping'. The right-hand melody is broken up as if by sobs and the left-hand heartbeats become spasmodic – a clang like a funeral knell.

Out of this crisis emerges the fugue subject beginning upside down, as Beethoven points out, and as though from an immense distance. Gradually the music makes its way home into the original key with the subject the right way up, to end with the highest jubilation. What Beethoven means is transparently clear, as he marks the *pianissimo* resumption of the fugue 'bit by bit coming to life again'.

## Interval

This will only be a short interval of 5-10 minutes

### Piano Sonata No.32 in C minor, Opus 111

*Allegro con brio; Arietta - Adagio molto semplice e cantabile*

'The Agony and the Ecstasy', in that order or inverted, were never better personified than in Beethoven and much has been written already about the conflicting forces in his character. Let us pause on the most striking aspect of all for him: the Agony of the Deaf Composer, the great dichotomy which he thought would doom him and which, at the age of thirty-two, after six years' struggle, he accepted and so conquered. Its relevance here is in the *Sonata in C minor*.

Beethoven's thirty-two piano sonatas are considered one of the greatest achievements in the genre. They form a huge arc from 1795 with the first three (Op. 2) to this *Sonata in C minor*, composed in 1822. From 1801 onwards they evolve through memorable nicknamed works - the *Pastoral*, the *Moonlight*, the *Waldstein*, the *Appassionata*, the *Farewell*, - to the culminating six 'Late Sonatas', between 1814 and 1822. Not only was Beethoven a visionary in music, his deafness had by now given him an inner hearing of such magnitude that it seemed to transcend the limits of the contemporary pianoforte. The peak of this in the mighty Op. 106, the *Hammerklavier*, an epic conception claimed to be the greatest of all classical sonatas.

The *Sonata in C minor, Op. 111* is the embodiment of conflict and consolation. It has only two movements, a form rarely used in the sonatas. They present two contrasting emotional states, reaching such heights and depths that, for many, Beethoven had said all here. It was to be his last sonata.

A fiercely dramatic introduction leads into the main movement, *Allegro con brio*, with its key motif a brusque rhythmical figure which sets off into the running, rushing excitement - and so on through what Julian Haycock has incomparably described as "a raging structure of immense power and energy", evolving from sonata form.

*Lento* means slow. *Adagio* may imply it, but its root meaning is at ease. This is a sublimely lovely movement, a simple little tune, singing peace after the storm and stress, sets off a series of ineffably expressive Variations. (Again a traditional form, the variation with repeats, is transformed.) They demand the highest virtuosity technically and the deepest interpretative understanding.

### Cristian Sandrin

Cristian Sandrin's first contact with the piano happened at a very young age as music played an inherent part of family life. Born in Bucharest, Cristian first studied in Romania under Marina Dragomirescu and Cristian Dumitrescu, winning numerous local competitions and eventually having his public debut at the prestigious Romanian Atheneum at the age of 13.

Upon moving to London, Cristian studied at the Royal Academy of Music for 7 years. He completed his Advanced Diploma in 2019, this a special programme reserved only for the very best students. Previously, in 2018 he received a DipRAM distinction, awarded for an outstanding performance for the Master of Music final recital.

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Cristian Sandrin is very passionate about music, and his love for Mozartian repertoire led him to conduct numerous piano concertos from the keyboard in the Summer Piano Festivals and for the official opening of the Angela Burgess Recital Hall at the Royal Academy of Music. Cristian toured the UK extensively through the Countess of Munster Recital Scheme in 2018-2020. He held a very successful and critically well received debut solo recital at the Wigmore Hall in 2017. He has benefitted particularly from Imogen Cooper's Music Trust which provides exclusive mentorship and guidance.

Cristian is a laureate of many international competitions, most recently being awarded the "Roslyn Tureck Special Prize" for the best interpretation of Bach during the Olga Kern International Piano Competition 2019 in New Mexico, USA. Recently Cristian had his debut as soloist with the famed "George Enescu" Philharmonic in Bucharest.

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