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CLASSICS

BEETHOVEN

VIOLIN SONATAS Nos. 1, 5 & 8

Tamsin Waley-Cohen *violin*

Huw Watkins *piano*



LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

VIOLIN SONATAS Nos. 1, 5 & 8

Violin Sonata No. 1 in D major, Op. 12 No. 1

- | | | |
|---|---|--------|
| 1 | I. Allegro con bio | [9.28] |
| 2 | II. Tema con variazioni. Andante con moto | [7.20] |
| 3 | III. Rondo. Allegro | [4.50] |

Violin Sonata No. 5 in F major, Op. 24 “Spring”

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---------|
| 4 | I. Allegro | [10.08] |
| 5 | II. Adagio molto espressivo | [6.10] |
| 6 | III. Scherzo. Allegro molto | [1.08] |
| 7 | IV. Rondo. Allegro ma non troppo | [7.10] |

Violin Sonata No. 8 in G major, Op. 30 No. 3

- | | | |
|----|--|--------|
| 8 | I. Allegro assai | [6.06] |
| 9 | II. Tempo di minueto, ma molto moderato e grazioso | [7.47] |
| 10 | III. Allegro vivace | [3.32] |

Total timings: [63.42]

TAMSIN WALEY-COHEN VIOLIN
HUW WATKINS PIANO

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ARTIST'S NOTE

A few years ago, during a radio interview, Huw announced that he would like us to record a Beethoven cycle together, much to my delight, and a little to my surprise. Beethoven has been at the heart of our recital programmes for the past dozen years or so, and in many ways, feels like ‘home’. We want to share our love and our feeling of closeness to Beethoven’s music with as many people as we can through our recordings, and we hope its powerful, life-affirming spirit, its warmth, confidence, and noble beauty will bring as much joy to our listeners as it brings to us.

Tamsin Waley-Cohen



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AN OBLIGATO SOUL

Beethoven and the violin sonata

“I cannot write anything non-*obligato*, for I came into this world with an *obligato* soul”. When Beethoven sent his Septet Op.20 to the publisher Hofmeister of Leipzig in December 1800, he clearly felt the need to explain himself. He really shouldn’t have. The principle that the separate parts in a chamber work were individual and necessary (*obligato*) as opposed to optional (*ad libitum*) was widely established by the time of Mozart’s final violin sonatas in the late 1780s. With the spread of the pianoforte, the idea that a keyboard sonata would require “accompaniment” from a string instrument was increasingly redundant.

So convention alone dictated that Beethoven’s Op.12 of 1798 – his first published work for violin and keyboard – should be described on its cover as *Three Sonatas for keyboard with a violin*. But old-fashioned amateurs who tried to play these works without violin were soon confused. The critic of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* described them as “pianoforte pieces” before confessing that he’d played them “without any pleasure. Learned, learned and always learned – and

nothing natural, no song”. He’d failed to realise that the violin part was anything but an optional extra.

Beethoven would never have made that error. He had begun his professional career as a viola player in Bonn, and although the piano dominated his performing career in Vienna, he took violin lessons with Wenzel Krumpholtz, and continued to play in private, though as his hearing deteriorated so too did his playing. “We occasionally played his sonatas for violin together” recalled his piano student Ferdinand Ries. “But it was really awful ... his ear did not tell him when he had attacked a passage with the wrong fingering.” Nonetheless, as late as 1825, Beethoven was still able to pick up a violin and illustrate details in the Op.132 quartet to members of Schuppanzigh’s quartet – though he played a quarter-tone flat.

But his string player’s instincts never left him, and Beethoven’s twelve violin sonatas add up to a comprehensive exploration of the possibilities and potential of writing for two quickly-developing instruments on equal terms – possibilities that he was ideally placed to understand. The three sonatas on this recording are waypoints on a journey, crafted by a composer who was both violinist and pianist, and who never

ceased exploring the practical possibilities of the instruments for which he wrote.

Violin Sonata No. 1 in D major, Op. 12 No. 1

Allegro con brio
Tema con variazioni. Andante con moto
Rondo. Allegro

Where Mozart led, Ludwig van Beethoven was never ashamed to follow. Attending a Viennese performance of Mozart’s C minor Piano Concerto K.491 in 1799 with the pianist Johann Cramer, he reportedly turned to his companion and exclaimed “Cramer! Cramer! We shall never be able to do anything like that”. Beethoven could have added that actually, he didn’t need to. The previous year, in the spring of 1798, he’d published three violin sonatas Op.12, which prove that he’d made a close study of Mozart’s. And at the head of the title page is the traditional heading “Sonata for Pianoforte and Violin”.

Like Mozart, Beethoven still observes the 18th-century convention that the violin is accompanying the piano. What Mozart would have thought about Beethoven’s decision to dedicate his three sonatas to the still-influential Antonio Salieri, of course, is anyone’s guess – though given that Mozart actually admired

Salieri (*Amadeus* is pure fiction), he’d probably have approved. Meanwhile, far from being constrained by Mozart’s model, Beethoven had given it Romantic wings. The idea of solo and accompaniment never sat entirely comfortably with a revolutionary age: Beethoven opens his sonata-form *Allegro con brio* (“with brilliance”) with a bravura unison flourish before letting both instruments follow their nature: the violin to sing expressively, the piano supplying whirling, headlong semiquavers...and both then exchanging places.

The *Andante con moto* takes a winsome theme through four variations that let both instruments explore gloriously expressive and inward depths: this is Beethoven the dark-eyed, tousle-haired young poet whose solo appearances were such a hot ticket amongst the young ladies of Vienna’s more fashionable salons. And the jig-like *finale* plays subversive rhythmic games worthy (though Beethoven would never have conceded it) of Haydn himself. This, no doubt, was a contributing factor to the shocked review that these sonatas received from that critic in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*: “A striving for strange modulations...a heaping up of difficulties”.

Meanwhile Beethoven reported gleefully that Op.12 had gone into eight editions – and that publishers in Paris, London and four German cities were vying to print them. The musical public and the critics seem – not for the last time – to have disagreed.

Violin Sonata No. 5 in F major, Op. 24 “Spring”

Allegro
Adagio molto espressivo
Scherzo. Allegro molto
Rondo. Allegro ma non troppo

Musical evenings at the house of Count Moritz von Fries in Vienna could be lively affairs. At one such occasion in May 1800, the visiting piano virtuoso Daniel Steibelt sat yawning through Beethoven’s new clarinet trio Op.11, before a week later ostentatiously improvising a set of flashy variations on the theme Beethoven had used for his finale. Beethoven, furious, grabbed the cello part of Steibelt’s own quintet, barged his way to the keyboard and, placing Steibelt’s music upside down on the desk, launched into his own thunderous improvisation. Steibelt stormed out.

Beethoven, however, felt no enmity towards Count von Fries – a skilled amateur violinist who'd been one of the subscribers to his Op.1 trios five years earlier. In September 1801, the *Wiener Zeitung* advertised *Deux Sonates pour le Pianoforte avec un Violon, Op.23*, dedicated to von Fries – although they would actually be printed Op.23 and Op.24. And the second of the pair feels, even today, like a warm breeze blowing through a window thrown wide. The nickname *Frühlings-Sonate* wasn't Beethoven's (the only note he added to the manuscript was a comment in red pencil that "The copyist who put triplets and septuplets here is an ass"). But F major had a long history as the key of rural greenery, even before Beethoven's own *Pastoral* symphony of 1808.

In any case, the blossoming, birdsong-like freshness of Beethoven's opening melody – now the violin's very own, with the piano supplying a gentle "scene by the brook" accompaniment – suggests its own comparisons. It's a suitably expansive opening to Beethoven's first violin sonata in four movements. The motifs of the A minor sonata expanded and found fulfilment as the sonata continued; here, the opening melody is already the point to which each of the sonata's movements will return (in spirit, if not

the precise notes). And a melody of such breadth simply demands four movements over which to work its charms.

So the serene theme that launches the three leisurely variations of the *Adagio molto espressivo* also begins with a sustained note and a graceful turn, over a gently rippling accompaniment. The tiny *scherzo* plays a cheerful game of catch-up between piano and violin, with a whirling *trio* section so concise that it's barely more than an ornament in its own right: the smile on Beethoven's face is plain to read. And the *finale* sweeps into its amiable flow episodes of dancing glee, rustic *pizzicati*, and just enough of a suggestion of stormclouds to establish that this is all for real – with, just before the very end, the briefest and most unaffected possible prayer of thanksgiving. "The original fiery and bold spirit of this composer [...] is now becoming increasingly serene" wrote an approving (if over-optimistic) Leipzig critic.

Violin Sonata No. 8 in G major, Op. 30 No. 3

Allegro assai

Tempo di menuetto, ma molto moderato e grazioso

Allegro vivace

In April 1802, on doctor's orders, Beethoven moved to the village of Heiligenstadt just outside Vienna, where it was hoped that the rural peace would allow his hearing to recover. It very obviously didn't work: he poured out his despair in an anguished letter to his brothers, known today as the *Heiligenstadt Testament*:

What a humiliation for me when someone standing next to me heard a flute in the distance and I heard nothing, or someone heard a shepherd singing and again I heard nothing. Such incidents drove me to despair; much more of that and I would have ended my life – it was only my art that held me back.

And then, within a matter of weeks, he'd written his three violin sonatas Op.30, concluding with this one: a work described by the great violinist Josep Szigeti as a work of "conflictless perfection". What could be more effortlessly joyful than the exuberant, whirling flourish that opens the first *Allegro assai*, or more sunny than the bustling sonata-form movement that follows? Or

more tenderly nostalgic than the long, searching melody that opens the second movement, the violin spinning its emotions out over the stately tread of the piano's *Tempo di menuetto* (itself a throwback to a gentler age)?

As for the *finale*, it's as if (once again) Beethoven is channelling the rustic high-spirits of his former master Haydn, that most generous of all composers. There's roughness, and some deliciously spicy discords – but is it possible that a man who had weeks earlier been contemplating suicide could now simply stick his tongue out and laugh? It certainly sounds that way. "I would have ended my life" Beethoven had written in the *Testament*, "it was only my art that held me back." Few works remind us more bracingly that when Beethoven said that he lived for music, he meant it.

Richard Bratby

TAMSIN WALEY-COHEN

Born in London, Tamsin Waley-Cohen enjoys an adventurous and varied career. In addition to concerts with the Royal Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Hallé, Liverpool Philharmonic, Czech Philharmonic, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony, Royal Northern Sinfonia and BBC orchestras, amongst others, she has twice been associate artist with the Orchestra of the Swan and works with conductors including Andrew Litton, Vasily Petrenko, Ben Gernon, Ryan Bancroft and Tamás Vásáry.

Her duo partners include James Baillieu and Huw Watkins. She gave the premiere of Watkins' *Concertino*, and in Summer 2020 will premiere a new work for violin and piano with him at Wigmore Hall. She is thrilled to be a Signum Classics Artist. With her sister, composer Freya Waley-Cohen, and architects Finbarr O'Dempsey and Andrew Skulina, she held an Open Space residency at Aldeburgh, culminating in the 2017 premiere of *Permutations* at the Aldeburgh Festival, an interactive performance artwork synthesising music and architecture. Her love of chamber music led her to start the Honeymead Festival, now in its twelfth year, from which all proceeds go to support local charities.



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She is a founding member of the Albion String Quartet, appearing regularly with them at venues including Wigmore Hall, Aldeburgh Festival, and the Concertgebouw. In 2016-2017 she was the UK recipient of the ECHO Rising Stars Awards, playing at all the major European concert halls and premiering Oliver Knussen's *Reflection*,

written especially for her and Huw Watkins. In the 2018-19 season she toured Japan and China, and gave her New York Debut recital at the Frick.

She is Artistic Director of the Two Moors Festival, and has previously been Artistic Director of the Music Series at the Tricycle Theatre, London, and the Bargello festival in Florence. She studied at the Royal College of Music and her teachers included Itzhak Rashkovsky, Ruggiero Ricci and András Keller.

HUW WATKINS

Huw Watkins was born in Wales in 1976. He studied piano with Peter Lawson at Chetham's School of Music and composition with Robin Holloway, Alexander Goehr and Julian Anderson at Cambridge and the Royal College of Music. In 2001 he was awarded the Constant and Kit Lambert Junior Fellowship at the Royal College of Music, he now teaches composition at the Royal Academy of Music.

As a pianist, Huw Watkins is in great demand with orchestras and festivals including the London Sinfonietta, Britten Sinfonia, the BBC orchestras and Aldeburgh and Cheltenham Festivals. He has performed globally at concert



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halls including at the Barbican, the Wigmore Hall, the Library of Congress in Washington and the Smithsonian Institute. Strongly committed to the performance of new music, Huw has given premieres of works by Alexander Goehr, Tansy Davies, Michael Zev Gordon and Mark-Anthony Turnage.

A favourite partner for chamber collaborations, Huw Watkins performs regularly with his brother Paul Watkins, as well as Alina Ibragimova, James Gilchrist, Daniel Hope, Nicholas Daniel, Sebastian Manz, Mark Padmore, Carolyn Sampson, and Alexandra Wood. Recently Huw has featured as both Composer in Residence and pianist at festivals including Presteigne and Lars Vogt's *Spannungen* Festival in Heimbach, Germany, as well as with the Orchestra of the Swan (2012–14).

Huw Watkins is one of Britain's foremost composers and his music has been performed throughout Europe and North America. Huw's works have been performed and commissioned by the Nash Ensemble, Belcea Quartet, Hallé Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, BBC Symphony Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra and Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra.

Huw Watkins is regularly featured on BBC Radio 3, both as a performer and as a composer. His recordings include a disc of Mendelssohn's cello and piano works with his brother Paul Watkins (Chandos), British sonatas for cello and piano with Paul Watkins (Nimbus), Alexander Goehr's piano cycle *Symmetry Disorders Reach* (Wergo), and Thomas Adès' song cycle *The Lover in Winter* with the

countertenor Robin Blaze (EMI Classics). Most recently, NMC Records have released a disc dedicated to Huw Watkins' work entitled *In my craft of sullen art* (NMC). The disc showcases Huw's 'outstanding pianism' (Andrew Clements, *The Guardian*) and reveals him as 'one of the most rounded composer-musicians in the UK' (Andrew Clark, *Financial Times*).

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