resonus

Ludwig van

BEETHOVEN

Complete Works for Cello and Piano

Robin Michael *cello*

Daniel Tong *fortepiano*

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Complete Works for Cello and Piano

Robin Michael *cello*
Daniel Tong *fortepiano*

Cello by Stephan von Baehr (Paris, 2010), after Matteo Goffriller (1695)
Classical bow by Dodd c.1790 (Op. 5 and Variations), and a copy of a bow by F.X. Tourte (1815) by Pierre Nehr (2017) Paris (Opp. 69 & 102).

Fortepiano by Paul McNulty (Divisov), after Anton Walter & Sohn (c.1805)

About Robin Michael:

'*Michael played with fervour, graceful finesse and great sensitivity*'
The Strad

About Daniel Tong:

'[...] it's always a blessed relief to hear an artist with Daniel Tong's self-evident love and understanding of the instrument'
BBC Music Magazine

Disc One

Sonata No. 1 in F major, Op. 5, No. 1

1. Adagio sostenuto	[2:35]
2. Allegro	[14:54]
3. Rondo: Allegro vivace	[7:15]

12 Variations on 'See the Conquering Hero Comes' from Handel's 'Judas Maccabeus', WoO 45

4. Theme	[0:43]
5. Variation I	[0:40]
6. Variation II	[0:41]
7. Variation III	[0:44]
8. Variation IV	[0:56]
9. Variation V	[0:51]
10. Variation VI	[0:41]
11. Variation VII	[0:41]
12. Variation VIII	[0:46]
13. Variation IX	[0:49]
14. Variation X	[0:43]
15. Variation XI	[3:12]
16. Variation XII	[1:10]

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

17. Adagio sostenuto e espressivo	[5:01]
18. Allegro molto più tosto presto	[14:41]
19. Rondo: Allegro	[8:55]

12 Variations on 'Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen' from Mozart's 'Die Zauberflöte', Op. 66

20. Theme	[0:30]
21. Variation I	[0:38]
22. Variation II	[0:30]
23. Variation III	[0:30]
24. Variation IV	[0:38]
25. Variation V	[0:29]
26. Variation VI	[0:27]
27. Variation VII	[0:41]
28. Variation VIII	[0:29]
29. Variation IX	[0:38]
30. Variation X	[1:16]
31. Variation XI	[1:07]
32. Variation XII	[2:00]
Total playing time	[76:09]

Disc Two

Sonata No. 3 in A major, Op. 69

1. Allegro ma non tanto	[13:13]
2. Scherzo: Allegro molto	[5:17]
3. Adagio cantabile – Allegro vivace	[8:32]

7 Variations on 'Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen' from Mozart's 'Die Zauberflöte', WoO 46

4. Theme	[0:46]
5. Variation I	[0:40]
6. Variation II	[0:43]
7. Variation III	[0:59]
8. Variation IV	[1:28]
9. Variation V	[0:37]
10. Variation VI	[2:19]
11. Variation VII	[2:00]

Sonata No. 4 in C major, Op. 102, No. 1

12. Andante	[2:33]
13. Allegro vivace	[5:10]
14. Adagio – Tempo d'Andante – Allegro vivace	[7:13]

Sonata No. 5 in D major, Op. 102, No. 2

15. Allegro con brio	[6:53]
16. Adagio con molto sentimento d'affetto	[8:33]
17. Allegro	[4:53]
Total playing time	[71:59]

Beethoven's works for cello and piano in context

Our desire to categorise all things musical often leads to a distortion of how historical events came to pass. Beethoven is a prime example of this and his cello sonatas perhaps present a chance to reassess and explain better, the rather crude categorisation of his often so-called 'three periods'.

Today, if we consider the canon of the cello/piano sonata repertoire, the Op. 5 sonatas are considered generally to be the first *bona fide* examples of this genre. Whilst still being published and presented as *Sonates pour pianoforte et violoncelle*, there is a true *égalité* between the instruments which had hitherto not been explored. This however in no ways illustrates the context in which these works were conceived and given life.

Nowadays, cellists the world over lament the (perhaps apocryphal) anecdote of Bernhard Romberg, one of the most famous cellists of the day, refusing the offer of a cello concerto from Beethoven. But in the context of the day, it would have been no more bizarre for Beethoven to have refused a piano concerto from say Romberg or another eminent cellist of the day. Romberg, the Duport brothers and Kraft (father and son) all wrote prodigiously for the instrument, partly of course out of necessity but also, more importantly because the metier of a musician of the day was much more all-encompassing.

Up until the founding of the Paris Conservatoire in 1795 which was the first designated institution where a violinist could go to learn to 'a violinist' (and thus the process of categorisation began), composing and improvising were integral parts to every musician's apprenticeship and development. Beethoven was no different (apart from perhaps just how much he excelled at all these facets), and at the time of the premiere of the Op. 5 sonatas, he was primarily known as a virtuoso pianist with an astonishing propensity for improvisation.

Beethoven was still however a fledgling composer, his Op. 1 set of trios having only been published the year before the 1796 Op. 5 sonatas. His evolution and development as a composer is fascinating in the context of these five sonatas and their places in the chronological overview of his output.

Whilst the Op. 5 sonatas represent

Beethoven at the cusp of his compositional career and an ever developing focus towards his first group of Op. 18 quartets and first symphony (these two forms being the benchmark calling card for any composer of the epoch wanting to make an impression), the final pair of sonatas Op. 102 reveal to us the mature composer who could no longer perform due to his deafness. The premiere of the Archduke Trio Op. 97 which Beethoven himself played in, was his last public appearance and these sonatas, written just after, show how acutely his compositional aesthetic was changing with a rigorous distillation of ideas and sophistication of counterpoint that would manifest itself in works such as the Ninth Symphony and *Missa Solemnis*.

One can only imagine the frisson of creative energy when Beethoven and Jean-Louis Duport came together to introduce his Op. 5 sonatas for the first time at the court of Friedrich Wilhelm II in Berlin. Beethoven's prowess for dazzling virtuosic displays and party piece improvising – taking well-known themes from audience members and extemporising seemingly at will, was widely known. Duport was also lauded for his technical mastery and command of the cello, Voltaire saying 'Sir, you will make me believe in miracles, for i see that you can turn an Ox into a nightingale'! (I would argue that the ox would have appealed just as much as the nightingale to Beethoven and he certainly exploits both sides). Duport also wrote one of the most important treatises on cello playing. Relevant still today, it also gives us a snapshot of the style of cello playing that must have appealed so much to Beethoven and also influenced how he himself approached the writing of these sonatas in terms of cello technique.

Sadly for us, there are no first-hand accounts of those Berlin concerts. In fact the only surviving anecdote of either of these works in Beethoven's hands comes from the composer himself when he played through the Op. 5 No. 2 Sonata with Dragonetti, the double bass virtuoso of the day, who was on a visit to Vienna. Beethoven, convinced that Dragonetti would falter when it came to the nimble string crossing arpeggios in the last movement, was astonished at the ease with which Dragonetti dispatched them!

But despite this lack of first-hand account, Duport's influence even at a subliminal level can be seen in both of the Op. 5 Sonatas. Whilst Beethoven might not have necessarily known many of Duport's own works, cellists of the day would have known these and assimilated them into the fabric of the cello playing style of the day. There is a great deal of similarity for example in Beethoven's writing for the cello in the sets of variations to some of Duport's own Études and Beethoven would have heard examples of these at musical soirées, most likely in the form of improvised pieces of the sort that Beethoven himself excelled.

When comparing Op. 5 to the Op. 1 set of three trios, (the third of which Haydn famously warned was too shocking for the unsuspecting Viennese public) we don't see the same level of sophistication in the cello writing compared to the treatment of the violin, the cello still effectively taking a continuo role. But by Op. 5 we can see Beethoven's own assimilation of the developing schools of cello playing which were coming directly from the likes of Duport and Romberg.

There are other important historical aspects involving these sonatas. Friedrich Willhelm II himself played a large part in bringing Beethoven and Duport together in collaboration, he was a keen amateur cellist himself and employed both the Duport brothers at his court. His invitation to Beethoven to present himself at court in Berlin obviously sowed the seeds for these ground breaking sonatas. Also, two years previously, there had been a production of Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus* in Vienna. Beethoven is though to have been in attendance and this almost certainly must have been the inspiration for the set of variations bearing the oratorio's most famous theme.

This work is very much a companion piece to the Op. 5 sonatas and as well as highlighting Beethoven's own reverence for Handel's music (which became more and more important to him throughout his life), the variation form in Beethoven's hands, illuminates not only his compositional mastery even at a fledgling stage, but gives us an insight as to what the content to his extemporisations at these salon soirées might have been like. The extent and rigour with which he is able rework a simple melody in terms of contrasting characters, rhythmic meters and re-harmonisations is astounding and in all likelihood, it would have been an

even more unharnessed version of this, that his audience would have heard when improvising. The Op. 5 sonatas and variations also give lie to the often quoted opinion that at this point in his compositional development, Beethoven didn't consider the cello to have enough melodic properties to be able to hold a long sustained line, certainly in the way that a violin could. This has been suggested as a reason why there is no *bona fide* slow movement in any of the cello sonatas until Op. 102 No. 2. but it seems clear that his desire to experiment with form was the motivating factor here.

Both Op. 5 sonatas begin with slow introductions which then unfold into extended 'Sonata Form' Allegros. Rather than being alternatives to a stand alone slow movement they are perhaps an example of a prototype that Beethoven was already consider to use for his first two symphonies. The similarities with these early symphonies do not end there. Beethoven begins the 'Rondo' finale of Op. 5 No. 2 seemingly in the 'wrong' key. He gives us a theme that starts with a C major chord, the subdominant. He quickly cadences in the 'correct' key of G major but harmonic wrong footing is very similar to how he opens his first symphony. Here, in the aforementioned slow introduction, he takes things even further by preceding the subdominant chord with it's own dominant chord and takes us 'round the houses' harmonically before finally arriving at the home key of C major and the 'Allegro' main body of the movement.

If the Op. 5 and Op. 102 sets of Sonatas pave the way for much that was to come in those so-called periods, the Op. 69 Sonata is the exception to the rule. Written very much at the height of his 'heroic', middle phase, Beethoven was in a period of intense creative productivity.

Of all the masterpieces conceived around this time the Op. 69 Sonata is most closely related to the two most polemic of symphonies, the Fifth and Sixth. Whilst the Fifth symphony evokes so much of the French revolutionary fervour of the time with it's musical quotations from Rouget De L'ilse's *Hymne Dithyrambique* and Cherubini's *Hymne Du Panthean* concerning *liberté* and the 'rights of man' the Sixth Symphony is his most celebrated paean to nature.

Where does Op. 69 fit into the context of these such juxtaposed works? Perhaps in some ways, the perfection of Op. 69 lies in the fact that is a perfect fusion of these two worlds. There are clear motivic similarities between both the symphonies and the sonata, perhaps most strikingly the bass line that accompanies the horn call of the scherzo of the Fifth Symphony. This bass line in fact becomes the melodic material for Op. 69's own 'Scherzo', it's subsequent trio highly reminiscent of the Sixth Symphony's own Scherzo.

Beethoven seems to combine both the revolutionary and the benevolence of the two symphonies in this one sonata – his two opposing symphonic worlds, coexisting in a completely organic fashion.

It is also interesting to note in relation to the Op. 5 Sonatas, how much Beethoven by this period had honed his process of motivic development. Whereas he uses Sonata Form in the Op. 5 No. 1 sonata to give himself ample room to show his full plethora of skills and repertoire, with Op. 69 we can see his desire to distill and use form to give himself a different kind of freedom.

In the first movement of Op. 69, the first utterance, a theme played by the cello alone, provides much of the motivic material for the whole movement. It has often been commented that the

theme which permeates the development of this movement bears a striking similarity to the viola da gamba aria *Es ist Vollbracht* from Bach's *St Matthew Passion*. Whilst musically these themes and what they represent emotionally in the context of both works seem almost identical, in Beethoven's case this theme also comes directly from his opening phrase, a very obvious motivic variation of it, and further evidence of the concise nature of his narrative. Having said this, Beethoven's connection and devout deference to the music of Bach and Handel continued to grow along with his own compositional style. Like Schumann after him, counterpoint became increasingly important and as we arrive at the last two sonatas, Op. 102 these elements become more striking and we see how his ever developing inner ear was compensating for his complete lack of ability to hear music outwardly.

On the face of it, like the early Op. 5 set there may seem to be more that separates these two sonatas than unites them. However, on closer inspection it is striking how, despite the huge difference in form and architecture of the two, these two works inhabit each others sound world in a way that makes it impossible to imagine one existing without the other.

Beethoven's curt manner with his friends and colleagues is often quoted and used to build a picture of his personality but his musical friendships were not only important but instructive in terms of realising the creative workings of his inner ear. His relationship with Frederick Linke, cellist of the Schuppanzigh Quartet was a fruitful and long lasting one. His quartet premiered a number of Beethoven's works and Linke himself appeared in concert with Beethoven giving first performances of both Op. 70 Trios and the aforementioned premiere of the Archduke Trio. Linke also ran a series of salon concerts in Vienna of which Schubert was frequently in attendance.

This microcosm of Viennese musical life is important to bear in mind when considering particular musical connections between Beethoven and Schubert. It is entirely plausible for instance that Linke could have introduced a particular version of Beethoven's Kreutzer sonata that had been arranged for the unusual combination of two violins, viola and two cellos to his salon series. Whilst we don't know who made the arrangement (some believe it to have been Beethoven but anyhow, the culture of arranging works for different combinations of instruments was commonplace). If Schubert had happened to have been in attendance he would have been struck by the unusual timbre of the ensemble. A string quintet normally had two violas not two cellos and this could well have inspired Schubert's own masterpiece for this instrumental combination.

Linke premiered both the Op. 102 Sonatas and we also know that he presented them at this series of salon concerts. Is it maybe not a coincidence therefore that the opening of Op. 102 No. 2 begins with a theme that exactly foreshadows one of the most striking thematic motifs in Schubert's own *Death and the Maiden* Quartet? Whilst Beethoven's own impact on Viennese musical life and beyond was colossal, what of the crossroads he was at compositionally at the time of writing these last two sonatas?

Perhaps if we look towards his final Symphony and choral masterpiece, the *Missa Solemnis*, we can see, through these two Sonatas, how the seeds for these two symphonic works were to take root.

The economy of material in these last two Sonatas is breathtaking and no more so than in the first, the C major, Op. 102 No. 2. In common with Op. 69, the opening theme (also presented by the cello alone) forms not only the basis for the first movement

but in fact, the intervallic structure of this opening theme is the grain for the entire work. However, far from limiting Beethoven in terms of emotional breadth, this taut structure allows him to condense all of his creative ideas into the most concise narrative.

This sonata might only last around fifteen minutes in length, but if we look to his most expansive symphonic movement, the first movement of the Ninth Symphony, we can see how this distillation and intense, focused organisation of a single motif takes root on a large orchestral scale. Only when we arrive at the recapitulation of this epic first movement do we realise that what seemed to be introductory material at the outset of the movement, a theme that has little or no 'melodic' property, has in fact been the entire basis for the movement. It is astonishing how impactful this is without having the need for any sort of melodic interplay, such is the strength of the counterpoint and structure around it.

If there are similarities between Op. 102 No.1 and the Ninth Symphony can perhaps Op. 102 No. 2 can provide some clues as to the path towards the *Missa Solemnis*. Beethoven's own ambivalence to religion is well documented and in fact there are moments in the *Missa Solemnis* where rather than a reverence towards a deity, Beethoven is questioning its very existence. But it is hard to imagine the fugal writing in this great masterpiece (and subsequently in the Op. 131 and Op. 133 quartets), without the finale of Op. 102 No. 2 and Beethoven's rigorous study of counterpoint having come before it.

Unlike Bach's Musical Offering which poses a fugal subject so chromatic that one wonders how he will be able to negotiate two, three, part counterpoint, let alone a six part fugue, Beethoven's finale of Op. 102 No. 2 presents a fugue with the most benign of subjects. This theme which takes a simple D major scale may seem innocuous but Beethoven takes us through every possible key centre posing, in many ways, just as complex an argument as Bach's but despite the outwardly academic nature of presenting material in this form, there is an overwhelming feeling of joy and almost resurrection after the slow movement.

This slow movement is possible the most extraordinary of all the movements from these sonatas. It is also perhaps a glimpse of the intense and personal sound world of the late quartets. The sombre choral opening which gives way to material of the utmost tenderness (very much the atmosphere of the Op. 130 Cavatine). The timelessness of the music is as hypnotic as where he takes us musically. We end up momentarily in a key (C-sharp minor) so foreign, it as is if we are in the furthest recesses of the human soul. Only then does the fugue subject appear, first as a tentative question but then seemingly as the possible answer to all that had been questioned before.

These last two works for cello and piano seem to encapsulate every facet of Beethoven's musical DNA and the five sonatas as a set shine a unique light onto his whole compositional output and musical life.

Robin Michael (cello)

Robin Michael studied at the Royal Academy of Music with David Strange and Colin Carr and later with Ferenc Rados. He is principal cellist in Orchestre Revolutionnaire et Romantique, Solo cellist with Orchestre Les Siecles (Paris) as well as regular guest principal cellist with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Irish Chamber Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, RTE Concert Orchestra, English Chamber Orchestra, English National Opera and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

Robin was the cellist in the Fidelio trio for over ten years with whom he toured Europe, North America, Asia and South Africa. He has also appeared in collaboration with the Dante and Eroica quartets. Highlights in his discography include the premier recording of Joe Cutler's cello concerto with the BBC CO (NMC), Brahms/Schumann sonatas with Daniel Tong (Resonus), first recording of the original version of Mendelssohn's Octet on period instruments (Resonus), Vivaldi cello concertos with Barocksolisten Müchen (Hanssler Classics) and Fidelio trio recordings on Naxos, NMC, Métier and Delphian records.

Recent concert highlights include complete Bach and Britten suite cycles in France and London, the South Korean premier of Jonathan Harvey's *Advaya* for cello and electronics, UK premier of Steve Reich *Cello Counterpoint*, Elgar concerto in Romania, both Haydn concertos at the Spier festival in South Africa as well as festival appearances in Buenos Aires, Library of Congress, Washington, and European festivals including Cheltenham, Aldeburgh and St Magnus.

Robin is artistic director of the Kinnordy Chamber Music festival in Scotland, now in it's fifth year.

Robin plays on a cello made for him by the German luthier Stephan von Behr, 2010.

www.robinmichael.co.uk

Daniel Tong (fortepiano)

Daniel Tong was born in Cornwall and studied in London. His musical life is spent performing as soloist and chamber musician, as well as directing two chamber music festivals, teaching and occasionally writing. He released his first solo recording of works by Schubert for the Quartz label in 2012. He also recorded short solo works by Frank Bridge for Dutton as part of a London Bridge Ensemble disc and broadcast Janáček's Piano Sonata live on BBC Radio 3.

He has appeared at many of the foremost British venues and festivals – Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre, St George's Bristol, Birmingham Town Hall, Queen's Hall, Edinburgh as well as the Cheltenham, Aldeburgh and Edinburgh Festivals. He has also performed in many other parts of Europe including festivals in St Mere, Ponte de Lima, La Loingtaine, Resonances and Cucagnan, as well as concert venues in Paris, Brussels, Stockholm, Antwerp and Lyon. He is frequently heard on BBC Radio and his performances have been broadcast throughout Europe and beyond. His project 'Music Discovery Live', in collaboration with musicologist Richard Wigmore, has seen a series of lecture-recital weekends on Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann piano works. In autumn 2012 he was invited to curate an Elgar festival at Kings Place in London and he also curated a Dvořák programme there in 2014. He has also presented lecture-recitals on Beethoven piano sonatas at St George's, Bristol.

Daniel has collaborated with the Elias, Navarra, Callino, Barbirolli, Allegri and Heath quartets. He has a regular duo with baritone Ivan Ludlow. Each year Daniel plays with an array of wonderful individual artists, often at his own chamber festivals, in Winchester and also in the Wye Valley.

In 2015 'Beethoven Plus' commissioned ten new works to partner the ten Beethoven sonatas for violin and piano. Daniel premiered the cycle at Kings Place in London with Krysia Osostowicz and their duo has since performed this fascinating and inspiring set around the country. They record the cycle throughout 2017 for SOMM records.

Daniel's passion for song accompaniment has led to work with Ivan Ludlow, Mary Bevan, Stephan Loges, Clare Presland and others. Daniel is Head of Piano in Chamber Music at the Birmingham Conservatoire as well as chamber music coach at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama.

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With thanks to The Boas Trust, Patrick and Mary Gifford, Wye Valley Chamber Music, and Penelope Clive for their generous assistance in bringing this project to fruition.

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Recorded in St John's Church, West Meon, Hampshire on 18–20 September & 7–9 October 2019
Producer, engineer & editor: Adam Binks
Fortepiano supplied and maintained by Alexander Skeaping
Recorded in 24-bit/96kHz resolution
Cover image: Profile of Beethoven by merrymoonmary (istockphoto.com)

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