

A close-up portrait of a young man with dark, wavy hair and light-colored eyes, looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. He is wearing a light blue button-down shirt under a dark grey jacket. The background is dark and out of focus.

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CLASSICS

**BEETHOVEN
PIANO
CONCERTO
NO. 5**

*& Works for
Solo Piano*

Alessio Bax

Southbank Sinfonia
Simon Over *conductor*

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

PIANO CONCERTO NO. 5 & WORKS FOR SOLO PIANO

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-Flat Major, Op. 73 “Emperor”

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---------|
| 1 | I. Allegro | [20.26] |
| 2 | II. Adagio un poco moto | [6.55] |
| 3 | III. Rondo | [10.13] |

- | | | |
|---|--------------------|--------|
| 4 | Praeludium, WoO 55 | [2.29] |
|---|--------------------|--------|

Piano Sonata No. 27, Op. 90

- | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| 5 | I. Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus mit Empfindung und Ausdruck | [5.26] |
| 6 | II. Nicht zu geschwind und sehr singbar vorgetragen | [6.27] |

Contredanses, WoO 14

- | | | |
|----|----------------------------------|--------|
| 7 | I. Contredanse in C Major | [0.29] |
| 8 | II. Contredanse in A Major | [1.54] |
| 9 | III. Contredanse in D Major | [1.04] |
| 10 | IV. Contredanse in B-Flat Major | [1.10] |
| 11 | V. Contredanse in E-Flat Major | [0.33] |
| 12 | VI. Contredanse in C Major | [0.29] |
| 13 | VII. Contredanse in E-Flat Major | [0.39] |
| 14 | VIII. Contredanse in C Major | [0.34] |
| 15 | IX. Contredanse in A Major | [0.39] |

- | | | |
|----|------------------|--------|
| 16 | Polonaise Op. 89 | [5.25] |
|----|------------------|--------|

Total timings:	[64.52]
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ALESSIO BAX PIANO
SOUTHBANK SINFONIA
SIMON OVER CONDUCTOR

www.signumrecords.com

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

*Born Bonn, baptized December 17, 1770; died
March 26, 1827, Vienna*

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-Flat Major, Op. 73 “Emperor” (1809)

In May 1809, Vienna fell to Napoleon for the second time in four years. The first conquest of the Austrian capital, in 1805, happened relatively quietly, as French forces entered the city without opposition. But the 1809 siege of Vienna was accompanied by a heavy bombardment. History has remembered the image of Beethoven cowering in his brother's basement, holding a pillow tightly around his ears to preserve what was left of his hearing.

Beethoven wrote to his publisher on November 22, “We are enjoying little peace after violent destruction, after suffering every hardship that one could possibly endure. I worked for a few weeks in succession, but it seemed to me more *for death* than for *immortality*... I no longer expect to see any stability in this age. The only certainty we can rely on is *blind chance*.” Despite Beethoven's bleak outlook during this time and a consequently flagging impulse to work, the year 1809 produced several major compositions: the Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat

Major, Op. 73; the String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 74 (*Harp*); the Piano Sonatas in F-sharp, G, and E-flat, Opp. 78, 79, and 81a; et al.

Unlike the *Eroica* Symphony (composed in 1803, and in whose genesis Napoleon is directly, infamously, implicated), the Fifth Piano Concerto's sobriquet – *Emperor* – was not bestowed by Beethoven, but by a publisher post facto. Although Beethoven completed the Concerto before the French invasion, the zeitgeist surrounding the Napoleonic Wars seems nevertheless to have permeated the work. Witness its martial rhythms and suggestions of military triumph in the outer movements.

The *Emperor*, the last of Beethoven's five piano concerti, recalls the *Eroica* in several ways. The two works share the same key, the same nobility of character. Indeed, the *Emperor* is sheerly symphonic in scope – more so than Beethoven's other piano concerti, which, until the Fourth (1806), generally proceed in the Mozartian tradition. The Fourth and Fifth Concerti, composed after Beethoven's promise in 1803 “from now on... to embark on a new path,” count alongside the *Eroica* as signature works of his so-called “heroic” style.

The piano concerto as a genre provides a natural medium for Beethovenian heroism: the solo virtuoso, seated in front of the orchestra – and, *nota bene*, at Beethoven's own instrument. (Beethoven himself was soloist in the premieres of the first four concerti, but his worsening deafness precluded his premiering the Fifth. Beethoven's student and patron, Archduke Rudolph, to whom Beethoven dedicated the Concerto, gave its first performance on January 13, 1811, at the palace of Prince Joseph Lobkowitz. The German pianist Friedrich Schneider gave the *Emperor's* public premiere later that year, on November 28.) In this light, the Fourth and Fifth Concertos each present an unorthodox – indeed, revolutionary – take on heroism.

Vln. I
 Vln. II
 Vla.
 Vc.

pp

Bucking the convention of orchestral exposition preceding the soloist's entrance, the Fourth begins with a gentle utterance by the soloist alone. The Fifth goes even farther – to the shock, one can imagine, of contemporary listeners – beginning with a piano cadenza (typically reserved for the movement's final lap) in dialogue with *fortissimo* orchestral tutti.

The Allegro's primary thematic material further probes the essence of heroism. First violins present the first theme, a gallant melody buoyed by a rush of sixteenth notes in the seconds and violas. Clarinet takes up the melody, *dolce*, noble and sentimental, punctuated by dotted-rhythm tutti outbursts, as if to depict at once the archetypal hero's strength and capacity

for introspection. Timpani and brass amplify the theme's might – a thundering departure from the Fourth Concerto, in which trumpets and timpani don't appear until the final movement.

The second theme is contemplative: staccato violins, followed by splendid, legato horns (see excerpt on previous page).

So is it brief, before the first theme returns excitedly to the fore. Anticipating the Romantic trope of Robert Schumann's complementary alter egos, the virile Florestan and the pensive Eusebius, the Allegro's exposition is squarely Florestan's purview.

pp *leggermente*

The piano enters with grand, majestic chords, yet *dolce*; the hero's strength is coincident with his benevolence. Such is doubly asserted when the piano takes up the contemplative second theme, *pianissimo*, *leggermente*, and elaborated into thoughtful triplets – the Solomonic reasoning of an enlightened ruler (see excerpt below).

"The quality of mercy is not strain'd," Shakespeare tells us. "It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven / Upon the place beneath ... 'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes / the throned monarch better than his crown."

Certainly, Beethoven's throned monarch brandishes his sceptre too. A rich development section pits the soloist toe-to-toe with the orchestra en masse. Throughout this colossal movement, the soloist is unquestionably the catalyst, leading the orchestra here with virtuosic, finger-twisting counterpoint, there with magnificently sonorous proclamations.

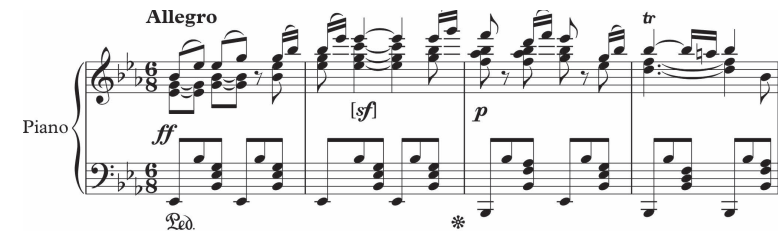
Notwithstanding the first movement's grandeur, and despite being the shortest of the Concerto's three movements, the sublime Adagio, in B Major, constitutes the *Emperor's* emotional heart. Its searching melody, marked by an aching ascent of a seventh, is surely one of Beethoven's most deeply felt (see excerpt below).



In 1821, Sir John Russell wrote of Beethoven, "The moment he is seated at the piano, he is evidently unconscious that there is anything in existence but himself and his instrument." In this poignant, private music, we hear the composer thus seated at his piano – until the

end of his life, writes biographer Maynard Solomon, "Beethoven's most intimate means of self-communion."

The Adagio ends with a pregnant closing gesture: an ascending E-flat Major chorale,



emerging from a hazy fog of horns. This gesture explodes, *attacca*, into the ebullient 6/8 rondo finale. The victorious refrain infuses the galloping lilt of 6/8 time (ONE-two-three, TWO-two-three) with an adrenalized rhythmic jolt (ONE-two-THREE, two-two-THREE, ONE-) see excerpt at the bottom of the previous page)..

This finale is a sonata-rondo, a hybrid form in which the refrain not only recurs in between contrasting episodes, but develops as the movement proceeds. Beethoven's hero is ever searching, ever pursuing a new path. His journey is never complete.

The present recording complements the *Emperor* Concerto with a selection of lesser-known works for solo piano. There are two early works: a short prelude and a set of contredanses; and two later ones, the Polonaise in C Major and the Sonata No. 27 in E Minor, Opp. 89 and 90, both composed in 1814.

The **Prelude in F Minor, WoO 55**, is thought to have been composed in 1803 (it was published in Vienna in 1805), though some sources contend it may date from as early as 1787. It is tempting to hear it as the dark,

moody creation of the angsty seventeen-year-old Beethoven. More precisely, the Prelude betrays the young Beethoven's deep study of Bach's keyboard preludes. (In 1783, Beethoven's teacher, Christian Gottlieb Neefe, published the following on his student's behalf: "Louis van Beethoven... a boy of 11 years [sic] and of most promising talent. He plays the piano very skillfully and with power, reads at sight very well, and I need say no more than that the chief piece he plays is *Das wohltemperirte Clavier* of Sebastian Bach, which Herr Neefe put into his hands. ... The youthful genius ... would surely become a second Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart if he were to continue as he has begun.")

Beethoven composed a set of twelve **Contradanses, WoO 14**, for orchestra between 1791 and 1801; nine appear in versions for solo piano. They seem innocuous, inconsequential works, until the ear detects in the seventh dance a seed for the *Eroica* Symphony.

The polonaise, a stately Polish dance distinguished by its characteristic rhythm –



– was popular among European nobility in the early nineteenth century. Beethoven dedicated his **Polonaise in C Major, Op. 89**, to the Empress Elisabeth Alexeyevna of Russia, whom he met at the Congress of Vienna. The Empress rewarded Beethoven with a fee of 50 ducats. Beethoven's Polonaise begins with a flourish before settling into a lively, delectable dance tune. Even a C Minor interlude is fleeting, and contains nothing of Beethoven's signature C Minor *Sturm und Drang* (cf. the Fifth Symphony, *Pathétique* Sonata, et al.); this Polonaise enjoys fair weather from start to finish.

"I had a delightful walk yesterday with a friend in the Brühl," Beethoven wrote in September 1814 to his patron, the Count Moritz Lichnowsky, "and in the course of our friendly chat you were particularly mentioned, and lo! and behold! on my return I found your kind letter. I see you are resolved to continue to load me with benefits. As I am unwilling you should suppose that a step I have already taken is prompted by your recent favors, or by any motive of the sort, I must tell you that a sonata of mine is about to appear, dedicated to you. I wished to give you a surprise, as this dedication has been long designed for you, but your letter of yesterday induces me to

name the fact. I required no new motive thus publicly to testify my sense of your friendship and kindness."

The work intended for Lichnowsky was Beethoven's **Piano Sonata No. 27 in E Minor, Op. 90**. It remains one of the least well-known among Beethoven's iconic cycle of thirty-two piano sonatas, but of course merits closer attention. It is a compact work, comprising just two movements. The sonata-form first movement, marked *Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus mit Empfindung und Ausdruck* (with liveliness and with feeling and expression throughout), is rhetorically trim. It may put the listener in mind of Beethoven's *Serioso* Quartet, a study in brevity whose first movement contains all components of a proper sonata-form movement – a brusque opening theme, lyrical second theme, full development section, recapitulation, and coda – concentrated inside just four minutes of music. Likewise, this Sonata's first movement is all lean muscle, no fat, nor even repeats. Its terse first theme yields fluidly to a contrasting second theme; the development section occurs in the blink of an eye, and the movement comes to a tidy close. The second movement (*Nicht zu geschwind*

und sehr singbar vorgetragen – not too fast and very singable) is a flowing, bucolic E Major reverie.

Beethoven's associate and untrustworthy biographer Anton Schindler made the spurious claim that the composer had intended to title the movements *Kampf zwischen Kopf und Herz* ("A contest between head and heart") and *Conversation mit der Geliebten* ("Conversation with the beloved") – references, supposedly, to Lichnowsky's consideration of a marriage prospect. Though utter fiction, Schindler's claim would not be implausible based on the Sonata's musical content alone.

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ALESSIO BAX

Combining exceptional lyricism and insight with consummate technique, Alessio Bax is without a doubt “among the most remarkable young pianists now before the public” (*Gramophone*). He catapulted to prominence with First Prize wins at both the Leeds and Hamamatsu International Piano Competitions, and is now a familiar face on four continents, not only as a recitalist and chamber musician, but as a concerto soloist who has appeared with more than 100 orchestras, including the London and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras, Dallas and Cincinnati Symphonies, NHK Symphony in Japan, St. Petersburg Philharmonic with Yuri Temirkanov, and the City of Birmingham Symphony with Sir Simon Rattle.

An accomplished chamber musician, in summer 2017 Bax inaugurated a three-year appointment as Artistic Director of Tuscany’s Incontri in Terra di Siena festival. His regular collaborators include his wife, pianist Lucille Chung, superstar violinist Joshua Bell, Berlin Philharmonic principals Daishin Kashimoto and Emmanuel Pahud, and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. In 2013 he received the Andrew Wolf Chamber Music Award and Lincoln Center’s



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Martin E. Segal Award, which recognizes young artists of exceptional accomplishment.

Bax’s celebrated discography for Signum Classics includes a solo album of Mussorgsky and Scriabin; a guest appearance on Chung’s disc of Poulenc piano works; *Lullabies for Mila*, a collection dedicated to their baby daughter; Beethoven’s “Hammerklavier” and “Moonlight” Sonatas (a *Gramophone* “Editor’s Choice”); *Bax & Chung* (Stravinsky, Brahms, and Piazzolla); *Alessio Bax plays Mozart* (Piano Concertos K. 491 and K. 595); *Alessio Bax plays Brahms* (a *Gramophone* “Critics’ Choice”); *Bach Transcribed*; and *Rachmaninov: Preludes & Melodies* (an *American Record Guide* “Critics’ Choice 2011”). Recorded for Warner Classics, his *Baroque Reflections* album was also a *Gramophone* “Editor’s Choice”.

Bax graduated with top honors from the conservatory of Bari, his Italian hometown, at just 14. After further studies in Europe, in 1994 he moved to the United States. A Steinway artist, he now lives in New York City with Lucille Chung and their daughter, Mila.

www.alessiobax.com

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Eugene Lee
Joanna Park
Maria Oguren
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Andrea Montalbano
John Han

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Claire Sledd
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Southbank Sinfonia is an orchestra of young professionals described by *The Independent* as 'a hugely talented young ensemble whose performances are always theatrical'. It is internationally recognised as a leading orchestral academy, each year bringing together 33 of the world's most promising graduate musicians to provide a much-needed springboard into the profession.

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Alongside this, specialist development sessions that embrace leadership and communication provide each musician with the professional toolkit required to pioneer their own future

musical ventures. To date, nearly 500 musicians have completed the programme, many going on to enjoy exciting careers with leading orchestras worldwide.

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Enabling players to devote themselves fully to the experience, every place is free and every player receives a bursary. Making this possible is a family of supporters – trusts, organisations and individuals like you – who recognise the players' potential and relish following their remarkable progress and the spirit they exude in performances. To find out how you can support the orchestra and discover more about its next performances, visit southbanksinfonia.co.uk

SIMON OVER

Simon Over studied at the Amsterdam Conservatoire, the Royal Academy of Music and Oxford University. From 1992 to 2002, Simon was a member of the music staff of Westminster Abbey, and Director of Music at both St Margaret's Church and the Chapel of St Mary Undercroft in the Palace of Westminster. Since 2015 he has been Music Director at St Clement Danes, the central church of the Royal Air Force. He is the Founder-Conductor of the UK Parliament Choir and has conducted all the choir's performances in conjunction with the City of London Sinfonia, La Serenissima, London Festival Orchestra and Southbank Sinfonia.

Simon is Music Director and Principal Conductor of Southbank Sinfonia. He founded the orchestra in 2002 and has conducted many of its concerts throughout the UK, in Europe and in Asia. He has conducted Southbank Sinfonia in recordings with cellist Raphael Wallfisch, tenor Andrew Kennedy, soprano Ilona Domnich and tenor Leo Nucci. In 2009-10 he conducted the orchestra in 71 performances of *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (Tom Stoppard/André Previn) at the National Theatre.



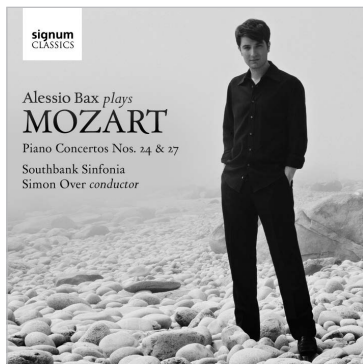
In 2006, Simon was appointed Conductor of the Malcolm Sargent Festival Choir and has been associated with the Samling Foundation – working with young professional singers – since its inception. As Music Director of Bury Court Opera he conducted *Dido and Aeneas*, *Rigoletto*, *La Cenerentola*, *Eugene Onegin*, *The Fairy Queen*, *The Rake's Progress* and *Madama Butterfly*. Further credits include Guest

Conductor of the City Chamber Orchestra (Hong Kong), the Goyang Philharmonic Orchestra (Korea) and directing Mozart's *Bastien und Bastienne* for the 2011 Vestfold International Festival in Norway. Recently appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the Southern Sinfonia, New Zealand, in 2013 he conducted a joint concert with the Yamagata Symphony Orchestra and Southern Sinfonia, representing Australia and New Zealand in Tokyo's Asia Orchestra Week.

Simon has worked both as conductor and accompanist with many internationally-acclaimed artists, including Sir Thomas Allen, Sir James and Lady Galway, Dame Emma Kirkby, Dame Felicity Lott, Sir Willard White, Alessio Bax, Emma Johnson, Simon Keenlyside, Malcolm Martineau, and Amanda Roocroft. As a pianist, his performances with American violinist Miriam Kramer at the Wigmore Hall and Lincoln Center, New York – as well as on several recordings – have received high critical acclaim.



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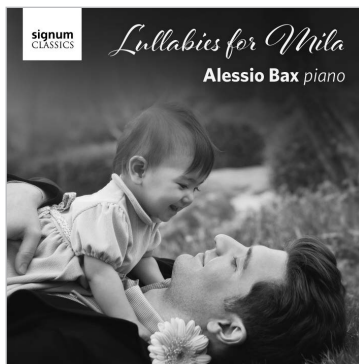


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Southbank Sinfonia
Simon Over *conductor*
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