

This recording of two Beethoven sonatas completes Viktoria's survey of all ten for violin and fortepiano, shared between myself and Kristian Bezuidenhout (nos 3 and 9).

It is astonishing that a mere fifteen years separate the composition of these two works, so vast is the difference between them in style, expression, and ambition. Complementing Viktoria's gut strings and classical bow, for the A major Sonata *op 12 no 2* we use a modern replica of a Walter fortepiano from 1805, built by Paul McNulty. For the G major Sonata *op 96*, inspired by the sheer inventiveness of its keyboard writing with its amplified demands for colour and expression, we use Paul McNulty's copy of an 1819 Graf.

The A major sonata, *op 12 no 2*, was composed during 1797–1798 and follows a simple three movement form. Much is indebted to Mozart: the prevailing lightness of character, a clarity of texture and an equally balanced interplay between the two instruments. The first movement opens giddy with good cheer, its teasing 'wrong-note' theme rather puerile, interrupted by outbursts of virtuosic mirth. In contrast, the second movement occupies a melancholic A minor: introspective, haunting and deeply personal. The third movement, endearingly marked *Allegro piacevole*, returns to the major and combines lyricism with a gentle playfulness and benevolent spirit.

Written at the very end of 1812, *op 96* breathes originality from first note to last. From its hushed opening motif – a delicate, trilling fragment, such an unlikely protagonist! – the sonata seems to grow organically, charting a journey at once novel yet true to itself. While ostensibly in G major – pastoral, benign, clear – the work has an unusual fascination with Eb major. We stumble there, as if accidentally, in the first and fourth movements, while the trio of the third could be seen as a celebration of the key. For the profound second movement, the sonata's heart, Eb major is our sanctuary.

The sonata's modest opening also belies the depth of drama and emotion we shall discover. Each movement reaches some form of crisis: in the coda of the first movement, the trilling motif now sinister, emerging from the fortepiano bass through a wash of diminished harmonies saturated in pedal; in the centre of the second movement at the height of an impossibly long crescendo, violin singing with such intensity of feeling it nears desperation. Perhaps the G minor third movement, a *Scherzo* with obsessive tendencies, is a crisis in itself. And if we have learnt anything along the way, as the *Finale* introduces its inconspicuous theme – cheerful and with Scottish flavour – we know the following variations may yet contain twists and turns of invention and surprise.

**Alasdair Beatson**