

Ferdinand RIES

Sonatas for Violin and Piano • 2

Eric Grossman, Violin • Susan Kagan, Piano



Ferdinand Ries (1784–1838) Sonatas for Violin and Piano • 2

This volume of three sonatas for violin and piano by Ferdinand Ries continues the exploration of his sonatas recorded by Eric Grossman and Susan Kagan, released in 2015 (Naxos 8.573193). Works for violin and piano are among Ries's earliest compositions, beginning with his Opus 3 – two violin sonatas – published in 1815. Although Ries was to develop into one of the finest pianists of his time, the early works reflect his family situation: his father, Franz Ries, was the principal violinist at the Electoral Court in Bonn, Germany, an outpost of the ruling Habsburg Empire. More significantly, Franz Ries was the early teacher of Beethoven, and played an important role in Beethoven's childhood as his friend and protector. As children, his son Ferdinand and Beethoven, despite a difference of 14 years, developed a strong friendship that continued throughout their lives.

Largely self-taught in composition, Ries studied briefly in Munich and in 1803 went to Vienna, where Beethoven had settled. Ries became his student in piano, but Beethoven sent him to the noted theorist Johann Albrechtsberger for composition lessons. In Vienna, Ries was probably Beethoven's closest friend, carrying out all sorts of tasks for him: copying parts, making transcriptions and arrangements, proofreading, and dealing with publishers. Ries pursued a highly successful career as a concert virtuoso for years, and after brief stays in Paris and Vienna, he settled in London, married an Englishwoman and raised a family, while he continued working on Beethoven's behalf.

Ries was a gifted and prolific composer in every instrumental genre, whose works, like those of so many other composers of his time, were largely overshadowed by Beethoven's overwhelming success. Still, most of his music was published in his lifetime (his catalogue reaches 186 opus numbers) and was widely known to the music-loving public. He toured throughout Europe to great acclaim, taught piano in London, and eventually retired to the Rhineland. One of his final achievements was his collaboration with another childhood friend from Bonn, Franz Wegeler, in writing an early biography of Beethoven (*Biographische Notizen über Ludwig van Beethoven*, 1838), a valuable

collection of reminiscences and anecdotes about the composer.

Eighteen violin sonatas with opus numbers were published, many of them during his Paris stay from 1807 to 1809. They are models of the Viennese Classical style established by Mozart; most are in three movements, with the first in sonata-allegro form, the slow movement in ternary form, and a *rondo* finale. Ries is careful to divide the material to provide equal interest for both instruments; lyrical, well-shaped melodies abound throughout his works.

The dates given here follow those appearing in the handwritten thematic catalogue of Ries's works (facsimile edition published by Performer's Edition, Indianapolis, Indiana).

Sonata in B flat major, Op. 16, No. 2 (1806)

The sprightly first theme of the opening *Allegro* is presented by the piano, then repeated by the violin. The development section brings in a new theme, in which the familiar rhythmic motto of the first movement of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* becomes prominent, repeating insistently to a *fortissimo* climax in the bass of the piano before the recapitulation begins. This is a rare example in Ries's piano music of such an obvious reference to Beethoven. The brief slow movement, *Larghetto*, is in E flat, with a tender, lyrical melody. The finale is marked *Polonaise*; its triple metre and the dotted rhythms of its main theme are characteristic of this exuberant dance form which became enormously popular in 19th-century piano music, most notably that of Chopin. It is in ABA form; the B section turns to the key of G minor and a contrasting dark character, before returning to the dance rhythms of the opening.

Sonata in E minor, Op. 38, No. 1 (1811)

The innocent, plaintive phrase that opens the first movement is quickly followed by a quiet but uneasy, agitated figure, which in turn is followed by a lyrical second theme. This contrast of ideas continues throughout the *Allegro*. The second movement, in A major, stands out in Ries's works,

not only because of the simple beauty of its main theme, but in its interesting texture: in a substantial middle section, new melodic material is presented in an exact canon between the violin and the left hand piano part. The use of such a strict and archaic contrapuntal device is virtually unknown in Ries's music, which for the most part looks ahead to the new styles of the Romantic period. A simple restatement of the opening theme closes the movement. The finale is a *rondo*, often favoured by Ries for his last movements; it continues the general mood of the sonata with a melancholic theme. There is some subsequent contrast with the use of dotted rhythms, but the prevailing mood of melancholy is maintained right to the end of the movement, which gradually fades away in *pianissimo*.

Sonata in A minor, Op. 38, No. 2 (1811)

The first movement opens with a terse and abrupt figure, followed by a gentle main theme in the related major key of C; a short middle section offers a contrapuntal treatment of themes from the initial material, followed by a recapitulation of the opening themes. The second movement, in the key of F, consists of a simple theme in a moderate tempo, alternated between the two instruments, followed by three lively variations, the last one minor and with martial dotted rhythms. The finale, *Presto*, is driven by a tremolo-like figuration in the piano, driving in non-stop motion toward a quiet conclusion.

Susan Kagan

Also available



Sonata in F major, Op. 8, No. 1
Sonata in C minor, Op. 8, No. 2
Sonata in F minor, Op. 19

8.573193



Eric Grossman

Eric Grossman is a versatile performer hailed for his flawless technique, superb musicianship, and commitment to a wide range of repertoire. A graduate of The Juilliard School, where he studied with Dorothy DeLay, Grossman enjoys an active performing career. He has performed across the US, Europe, Korea, Japan, and Cuba in recital and as soloist under such conductors as Zubin Mehta, Stanisław Skrowaczewski, and Michael Gielen. Mr. Grossman has recorded Lowell Liebermann's *Violin Sonata* with the composer, Ravel's *Tzigane* for a PBS documentary of the dancer Suzanne Farrell, and won the CUBADISCO award for his recording of the two *Violin Concertos* by Jorge López Marín. As a chamber musician, Mr. Grossman has collaborated with David Soyer, Seymour Lipkin, and Philip Myers. He recently played a recital at the Metropolitan Museum of Art on the museum's 'golden period' Stradivarius. In 2012–13 Mr. Grossman played a series of Paganini recitals in New York and across the US.

Photo: Genelli Studio



Susan Kagan

Susan Kagan is a pianist, author, and educator. She is a graduate of Columbia University (B.S. *cum laude*, 1951), has an M.A. from Hunter College, CUNY (1975), and holds a PhD from the Graduate Center of CUNY (1983). She recently retired from the faculty of Hunter College, where she taught music history. In 1995 she founded the New York Chapter of the American Beethoven Society. She is the author of *Archduke Rudolph, Beethoven's Patron, Pupil, and Friend* (Pendragon, 1988), and was a critic for *Fanfare* magazine. Ms. Kagan is on the Advisory Board of the American Beethoven Society. She has recorded extensively including a partnership with Josef Suk, two sets of Mozart piano concertos, piano music of Beethoven, Archduke Rudolf and Beethoven's first teacher Christian Gottlob Neefe, as well as the complete sonatas and sonatinas for solo piano and piano duet of Ferdinand Ries on Naxos, and most recently three violin sonatas by Ries with Eric Grossman (Naxos 8.573193).

Photo: Peter Schaaf

This second volume of Ferdinand Ries's violin sonatas furthers our exploration of music by a gifted composer who enjoyed a close and productive relationship with Beethoven as student, friend, and colleague. Filled with elegance and refinement, these three sonatas display the range of Ries's creative gifts as a composer, skilfully synthesising the clarity and discipline of Mozart's Viennese Classical style with the inventiveness and freedom of the new Romanticism developing in the early 19th century. Volume 1 (8.573193) was regarded as 'simply too good to miss' by *MusicWeb International*.

**Ferdinand
RIES**
(1784–1838)

Sonatas for Violin and Piano • 2

Sonata in B flat major, Op. 16, No. 2 20:31

- | | | |
|----------|-----------------------|-------------|
| 1 | I. Allegro | 9:48 |
| 2 | II. Larghetto | 4:02 |
| 3 | III. Polonaise | 6:39 |

Sonata in E minor, Op. 38, No. 1 21:23

- | | | |
|----------|------------------------------------|-------------|
| 4 | I. Allegro | 7:39 |
| 5 | II. Larghetto quasi andante | 6:04 |
| 6 | III. Allegretto non troppo | 7:34 |

Sonata in A minor, Op. 38, No. 2 23:00

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|----------|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| 7 | I. Allegro molto | 7:16 |
| 8 | II. Andante con variazioni | 8:40 |
| 9 | III. Presto | 6:56 |



WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS

Eric Grossman, Violin • Susan Kagan, Piano



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8.573717

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Playing Time
65:06



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