

Thursday 5 December 2019

Barbican celebrates Beethoven at 250

The year 2020 marks the 250th birthday of **Ludwig van Beethoven**, one of the most iconic figures in music. A quintessential 'Romantic Artist', an advocate for political reform, a bridge between the classical and romantic eras, and a composer who was driven by deafness to retreat into an interior world – Beethoven is a powerful symbol of hope and his music represents many things to many people. Ringtones bleep *Für Elise*, protesters in Parliament Square sing the *Ode to Joy*; Beethoven's music features in Hollywood movies and was heard at the fall of the Berlin Wall. Beethoven is omnipresent, and the Barbican's Beethoven celebrations will shine a light on the many different aspects of this complex composer.

Highlights include:

- **Beethoven Weekender** (1 – 2 Feb) – a fresh and informal way to experience and explore Beethoven through a complete symphony cycle, chamber music concerts, talks, screenings of the cult 70s cartoon *Ludwig*, contemporary responses to his music, and family events
- **BTHVN on TOUR** (27 Jan – 6 Feb) – an exhibition from Beethoven's birth place, Beethoven-Haus Bonn, displaying personal objects up close; including the composer's own violin, ear trumpet and sketch books, as well as Andy Warhol's famous Beethoven screen-print
- European premiere of **David Lang's** new one-act opera: ***prisoner of the state***, staged for the concert hall – a dark, futuristic retelling of the story behind Beethoven's only opera *Fidelio*, that asks questions about the price of liberty and the pursuit of truth in an oppressive state (11 Jan)
- **Sir Simon Rattle** and Barbican Resident Orchestra the **London Symphony Orchestra** pitting Beethoven against Alban Berg, including Beethoven's rarely heard masterpiece *Christ on the Mount of Olives* (19 Jan)
- **Two contrasting, complete symphony cycles**: one with visiting orchestras from Liverpool, Bournemouth, Birmingham, Gateshead and Manchester on modern instruments, under their respective music directors (1-2 Feb, during *Beethoven Weekender*); and another with **Sir John Eliot Gardiner** and his **Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique** on period instruments (11-16 May)
- Recitals by world-renowned soloists including violinist **Anne-Sophie Mutter** (8 Apr) and pianist **Evgeny Kissin** (6 Feb)
- **Sir András Schiff** completing his cycle of Beethoven's five piano concertos with the **Budapest Festival Orchestra** and **Iván Fischer**, which began in 2019 and concludes in 2020 (23-24 May)
- Barbican Associate Ensemble **BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus** will perform one of Beethoven's most personal works, *Missa Solemnis* (4 March)

[David Lang's *prisoner of the state* \(European premiere\)](#)

Concert staging

BBC Symphony Orchestra

Saturday 11 Jan 2020, Barbican Hall, 8pm

Tickets £15 – 40 plus booking fee

Composer and co-founder of pioneering new music collective Bang on a Can, **David**

Lang's new one-act opera ***prisoner of the state*** receives its **European premiere** at the Barbican in January in a staging for the concert hall. Lang's work is a dark, futuristic retelling of the story behind Beethoven's only opera *Fidelio*: *prisoner of the state* tells the story of a woman who disguises herself as a prison guard to rescue her husband from unjust political imprisonment, with a libretto by the composer that refers to Beethoven's *Fidelio*. The opera asks searching contemporary questions about the price of liberty and the pursuit of truth in an oppressive state. Lang was inspired to write the piece by what he felt to be the unrealised potential in *Fidelio*'s narrative: *"For me the most problematic observation about Fidelio is that at the end, after the prisoner is freed, I always want the townspeople to sing about freedom, or about tyranny, or about justice, and instead they sing about how great it is for a wife to save her husband. 'All who have such a wife, join our song!' And of course, only one of the prisoners has been freed. What happens to the rest of them? For the past forty years I have wanted to make my own version of Fidelio, so I could think more closely about it, and maybe answer some of these questions for myself."*

The concert staging will be directed by **Elkhanah Pulitzer**, who also directed the world premiere in New York in June 2019, and performed by the **BBC Symphony Orchestra** and **BBC Singers** under conductor **Ilan Volkov**, with soloists **Julie Mathavet** (The Assistant), **Jarrett Ott** (The Prisoner), **Alan Oke** (The Leader) and **Davóne Tines** (The Jailor). *prisoner of the state* uses original text material written by Lang, as well as scraps of Beethoven's original librettos (but not his music).

Produced by the Barbican and the BBC SO.

Beethoven Weekender, 1-2 February 2020

Sponsored by DHL

Weekend ticket: £45 plus booking fee

Day ticket: £25 plus booking fee (Young Barbican and under 14s: £10)

Building on the success of the biannual *Sound Unbound* festival, the Barbican's Beethoven celebrations centre around a ***Beethoven Weekender*** which offers a fresh and informal way to experience and explore Beethoven through symphonic and chamber music concerts, talks, and family events. Central to the weekend will be a full Beethoven symphony cycle performed by five of the UK's leading orchestras with their chief conductors in a single weekend:

- Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/Vasily Petrenko (symphonies no 5 & 6)
- Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra/Kirill Karabits (symphonies no 1 & 3)
- City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra/Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla (symphonies no 2 & 4)
- Royal Northern Sinfonia/Lars Vogt (symphonies no 8 & 7)
- Hallé Orchestra/Sir Mark Elder (symphony no 9)

Each symphony will be introduced by Classic FM presenter and Beethoven expert **John Suchet**, whilst numerous other Beethoven performances take place across the Centre in a relaxed festival atmosphere. According to John Suchet, *"more than any other composer, you can hear Beethoven's life in his music"*, and so the Barbican will explore this thought in various chamber music concerts across the weekend. The **Carducci Quartet** performs Beethoven's string quartets, some of his most profound and intimate music, alongside readings of extracts from Beethoven's intensely passionate letters. Violinist **Daniel Sepec** plays **Beethoven's own violin** in a chamber music concert which will be presented by broadcaster **Sara Mohr-Pietsch**. Pianist **Christopher Park** performs Beethoven's bagatelles, short pieces filled with humour as well as profundity, presented by **Gerard McBurney. s t a r g a z e**, a network of multi-talented and classically-trained European musicians, led by **André de Ridder** presents a contemporary take on Beethoven's Symphony No 9 with **Matthew Herbert's *Beethoven NEIN!*** The piece moves from electronic installation to flash mob and culminates in a

participatory performance with the LSO Community Choir.

From 27 Jan – 6 Feb, the Barbican hosts **Beethoven-Haus Bonn's** exhibition **BTHVN on TOUR** which includes artefacts from the composer's birth place, such as the composer's violin, his sketch books, and ear trumpet – used by Beethoven as a hearing aid as his deafness worsened – as well as Andy Warhol's famous screen-print of the composer. The exhibition is created by DHL and Beethoven-Haus. The Weekender also features screenings of the 70s kids' cartoon **Ludwig** – a surreal, mischievous, Beethoven-playing ovoid – with live soundtrack from **Guildhall School's Electronic Music** department, performed by Guildhall Session Orchestra directed by **Mike Roberts**, and live narration from the voice of the original TV series, **Jon Glover**. Young composers and performers work on responses to core Beethoven repertoire, including an installation that reimagines his *Pastoral* symphony which will be set amidst the greenery of the Barbican Conservatory. Barbican's *Squish Space* on Level G will offer Beethoven inspired sensory play sessions for children under five and their parents/carers.

Beethoven Weekender is part of **Inside Out**, the Barbican's 2020 year-long programme exploring the relationship between our inner lives and creativity.

Beethoven's Bagatelles supported by Classical Futures Europe and the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.

Further Beethoven celebrations in 2020

Sir Simon Rattle and Barbican Resident Orchestra the **London Symphony Orchestra** pit Beethoven against **Alban Berg** – two very different kinds of radicalism in a powerful dialogue, including Beethoven's rarely heard masterpiece *Christ on the Mount of Olives* in two performances (19 Jan & 13 Feb). Barbican Associate Orchestra the **BBC Symphony Orchestra** performs the *Missa Solemnis* on 4 March – one of Beethoven's most personal works. Barbican Associate Ensemble, the **Academy of Ancient Music** began its Beethoven celebrations in October 2019 with a rare performance of the complete incidental music for Goethe's play *Egmont*.

Following the Weekender's symphony cycle, **Sir John Eliot Gardiner** and his **Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique** come to the Barbican in May to perform a second cycle of Beethoven's symphonies, this time in a historically informed performance. The cycle is performed across five days (11-16 May).

Celebrated violinist **Anne-Sophie Mutter** performs three Beethoven violin sonatas with pianist **Lambert Orkis** on 8 April: Numbers 4, 5 (*Spring*) and 9 (*Kreutzer*). And renowned pianist **Evgeny Kissin** performs the *Pathétique*, *Tempest* and *Waldstein* sonatas in a recital on 6 February. Following two hugely successful performances at the Barbican in November 2019, **Sir András Schiff** completes his performances of all five piano concertos with the **Budapest Festival Orchestra** and **Iván Fischer** on 23-24 May.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

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About the Barbican

A world-class arts and learning organisation, the [Barbican](#) pushes the boundaries of all major art forms including dance, film, music, theatre and visual arts. Its creative learning programme further underpins everything it does. Over a million people attend events annually, hundreds of artists and performers are featured, and more than 300 [staff](#) work onsite. The architecturally renowned centre opened in 1982 and comprises the Barbican Hall, the Barbican Theatre, The Pit, Cinemas 1, 2 and 3, Barbican Art Gallery, a second gallery The Curve, public spaces, a library, the Lakeside Terrace, [a glasshouse conservatory](#), conference facilities and three restaurants. The City of London Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre.

The Barbican is home to Resident Orchestra, [London Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Orchestra, [BBC Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Ensembles the [Academy of Ancient Music](#) and [Britten Sinfonia](#), Associate Producer [Serious](#), and Artistic Partner [Create](#). Our Artistic Associates include [Boy Blue](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), Deborah Warner, [Drum Works](#) and [Michael Clark Company](#). The [Los Angeles Philharmonic](#) are the Barbican's International Orchestral Partner, the [Australian Chamber Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble at Milton Court, and [Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble.

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