



Igor Levit plays Shostakovich

Sun 26 Jan 7.30pm
Barbican Hall

Part of Igor Levit Featured Artist
Part of Barbican Presents 2019–20

barbican

Important information



When does the concert start and finish?

The concert begins at 7.30pm and finishes at about 10.20pm, with a 20-minute interval.



I'm running late!

Latecomers will be admitted if there is a suitable break in the performance.



Please...

Switch any watch alarms and mobile phones to silent during the performance.



Please don't...

Take photos or recordings during the performance – save it for the curtain call.



Use a hearing aid?

Please use our induction loop – just switch your hearing aid to T setting on entering the hall.



Need a break?

You can leave at any time and be readmitted if there is a suitable break in the performance, or during the interval.



Looking for refreshment?

Bars are located on Levels -1, G and 1. Pre-order interval drinks to beat the queues. Drinks are not allowed in the hall.



Looking for the toilets?

The nearest toilets, including accessible toilets, are located on Levels -1 and 1. There is a further accessible toilet on Level G.



Carrying bags and coats?

Drop them off at our free cloakroom on Level -1.

Welcome to tonight's performance

Sun 26 Jan, Hall

A warm welcome to tonight's concert, the first in our Featured Artist series celebrating the extraordinary musicianship of pianist Igor Levit.

Though still only in his early thirties, Igor Levit is already hugely acclaimed. He combines a fearsome intellect with an ease at the piano that allows him to tackle the most demanding of repertoire and, most importantly, bring it alive for his audiences. He first made his name as a Beethoven pianist (and last autumn released a complete cycle of the sonatas), but he's fascinated by a wide range of repertoire, and a firm champion of lesser-known pieces by the likes of Busoni and Ronald Stevenson.

Today's concert is a typically demanding programme, featuring the *24 Preludes and Fugues* of Shostakovich. They may have been inspired by Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* but the language is all the Russian's own, and they range wide in mood, from playful to darkly troubled, with every emotional shade in between.

Igor Levit returns for a concert of Shostakovich and Messiaen with fellow pianist Markus Hinterhäuser on 13 February and for a programme of chamber music by Beethoven, Brahms and Bartók on 19 February.

Tonight's concert promises to be a wonderful occasion. I hope you enjoy it.

Huw Humphreys

Head of Music

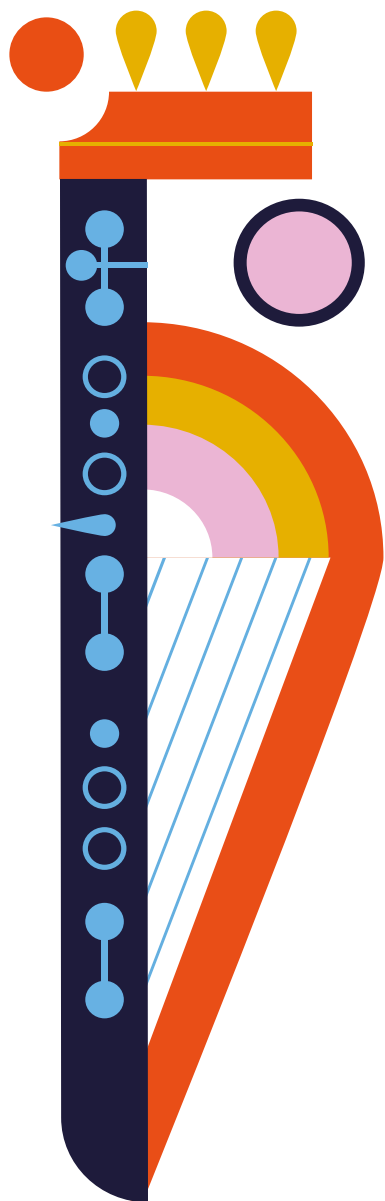
Programme produced by Harriet Smith

All information correct at time of printing

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The City of London Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre



Igor Levit plays Shostakovich

Sun 26 Jan 7.30pm
Barbican Hall

Shostakovich 24 Preludes and Fugues:
Nos 1–12

interval 20 minutes

Shostakovich 24 Preludes and Fugues:
Nos 13–24

Igor Levit piano

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Dmitry Shostakovich (1906–75)

24 Preludes and Fugues, Op 87 (1950–1)

One of the most significant events in the 1950 celebrations of Bach's bicentenary was the first international Bach competition, held in July that year in Leipzig.

Dmitry Shostakovich headed the Soviet cultural delegation and was a member of the jury. Among the entrants was the 26-year-old pianist and composer Tatiana Nikolayeva, who had recently graduated from the Moscow Conservatoire and who had brought with her the complete 48 Preludes and Fugues of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, ready to play any of them on request. She went on to win the first prize, the second being shared by two other female Soviet contestants. Shostakovich's Bach immersion continued in Berlin where he filled in for Maria Yudina for a performance of Bach's D minor Concerto for three harpsichords (pianos in this case) alongside Nikolayeva and Pavel Serebryakov. Back in Moscow, he set out to compose his own 24 *Preludes and Fugues*, which appeared over a period of four and a half months.

The appearance of the *Preludes and Fugues* is all the more remarkable given that since early 1948 Shostakovich had been suffering from the fallout of the 'anti-formalist' campaigns spearheaded by Andrey Zhdanov. These were part of a general Stalinist initiative to bring the arts back into line after the relative freedom of the war years. Shostakovich was one of the main victims of the campaign, and his most serious works from these difficult years, such as the First Violin Concerto, the song-cycle *From Jewish Folk Poetry* and the Fourth String Quartet, had remained unperformed. The nature of the works he was able to get performed –

including the Stalinist oratorio *The Song of the Forests* and the film scores *The Fall of Berlin*, *Belinsky* and *The Unforgettable Year 1919* – is testament to the extent to which he was obliged to dumb down his public musical persona. In this context, the appearance of the *Preludes and Fugues* represents both a return to untainted artistic wellsprings and an attempt to salvage a measure of self-esteem and integrity.

Given the still-prevailing official demand for tuneful and programmatic music, when submitting the *Preludes and Fugues* for peer review by the Composers' Union in March 1951 Shostakovich was certainly testing the tolerance levels not only of his composer colleagues but also of Soviet artistic standards in general. Beyond that, the incongruity of the project with other contextual factors, such as the Cold War and Stalin's 'anti-cosmopolitan' (a cover in effect for anti-Semitic) campaign, combined with the innate ambivalence of his musical language, provided rich material not only for speculative decoding but also for a narrative or dramaturgical interpretation.

It is not hard to find, alongside the numerous reminders of Bach, hints of more contemporary cultural resonance – for instance in the Jewish inflexions of the F sharp minor *Prelude and Fugue*, No 8, and more generally in the prevalence of themes built around characteristic motifs of Russian revolutionary song and art music, exploited as such by Shostakovich in his 11th Symphony (1957).

The typically Shostakovichian elusiveness of the *Preludes and Fugues* makes any attempt to pin down their musical character extremely precarious. Yet it would be equally reductive simply to label them as abstract works that

Preludes and Fugues: a potted history

J S Bach famously started a trend for preludes and fugues when he produced his so-called '48' – the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, with pieces in every major and minor key (though in fact he wasn't the first – that honour goes to Johann Caspar Ferdinand Fischer and his *Ariadne musica* of 1702).

Two hundred years after Bach's death, Shostakovich wrote his own set of 24 *Preludes and Fugues* but he wasn't the only one to be inspired by JSB. Composers as diverse as Mendelssohn, Hindemith, David Diamond and Nikolai Kapustin have all responded to the challenge in highly creative ways.

Once you remove the fugue from the equation and consider only the prelude, the list gets much longer, from Chopin's set of 24 via Debussy's two books of 12 *Préludes* – tone-poems in miniature – to Scriabin, Alkan and Shostakovich himself, with his set of 24, Op 34.

Glossary

Fugue A fugue takes a theme (the 'subject'), often short, which is first heard in one part (known as a 'voice' even in instrumental fugues) and is then taken up at a different pitch by each other part in turn. The 'subject' dominates the entire fugue and it's a very strict form of writing, which makes it tricky for the composer.

Stretto An effect used by composers when writing fugues whereby the theme reappears in closer and closer succession to create an increasing sense of excitement or tension.

manifest no more than the private persona of the composer. In fact they fall, broadly speaking, into four distinct character groups, all of which are set out in the first four pieces of the cycle: these are renewal (the opening C major *Prelude and Fugue*), playfulness (as in the mischievous A minor, No 2), sober meditation by way of balance (as in several of the slow minor-key *Preludes and Fugues*, beginning with No 4), and, overlapping, grandeur (most evident in the G major *Prelude* of No 3).

Whereas Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* places each successive major/minor pair of *Preludes and Fugues* according to a rising chromatic scale, Shostakovich follows the circle-of-fifths succession (C–G–D–A) he had already used in his series of 24 *Preludes* (1932–3), which in turn derives from Chopin's Op 28 *Preludes*. Within the set there are numerous over-arching links that create a web of inter-relations, contributing to a compelling sense of psychological journey when the cycle is experienced as a whole.

No 1 (C major): The clean, C-major air feels like an attempt to enter a realm of pure musical thought, untainted by official interference – to make a statement, in effect, by not making one. Just as with Shostakovich's First String Quartet (1938), this is music about simplicity rather than simple music. The gentle sarabande-like rhythm of the *Prelude* is followed by a hushed, all-white-note *Fugue*.

No 2 (A minor): The principle of play is introduced: from the neo-Bachian, running figuration of the *Prelude* to the near-grotesque three-voice *Fugue* filled with mischievous references to Bach's C minor *Fugue* (Book 1).

No 3 (G major): The *Prelude* is organ-like in its textures, with majestic striding octaves and rich chords set against declamatory outbursts in the treble; these are swapped round as the piece unfolds, the chords moving into the treble and the declamation into the bass, while the harmony is left strikingly unresolved at the end.

A fast gigue-*Fugue* follows, laid out according to the pattern of the majority of the fugues in the set, with wide-ranging modulations in the middle section and overlapping (*stretto*) entries towards the end.

No 4 (E minor): This stately *Prelude* in chorale-prelude style has tragic undertones, reinforced by continuous drooping accompanying quavers set against the majestic bass. The four-voice meditative *Fugue* gradually accumulates power and passion.

No 5 (D major): The *Prelude* has an ambiguous air of restraint and antiquity, its harpsichord-like arpeggiated accompaniment and singing treble and bass hinting at the character of a fast minuet. It is followed by a humoresque *Fugue*, featuring four staccato repeated notes that make for some ingenious overlapping entries near the end.

No 6 (B minor): The sober mood of No 4 returns in the double-dotted, French overture-style *Prelude*. After an emotional outburst, a hushed ending paves the way for the meditative *Fugue*, in four voices and with a two-part subject.

No 7 (A major): A sense of new beginnings dominates the restrained, morning-dew *Prelude*. The music is purely diatonic, except for a short chromatic passage in the middle. The sparkling three-voice *Fugue* has a subject ingeniously built on broken chords.

No 8 (F sharp minor): One of the most moving of the set, this carries strong socio-political resonances, due to the Jewish idiom that Shostakovich hints at in the *Prelude* then overtly states in the prolonged *Fugue*.

No 9 (E major): A dialogue between extremes of register in the *Prelude*, often in unison, prepares for the only two-voice *Fugue* in the cycle, bringing back the element of play.

No 10 (C sharp minor): A quasi-chorale-prelude with running figuration interspersed with low-register chords leads to another slow, meditative *Fugue* with an overall arch-shaped rise and fall.

No 11 (B major): The gavotte-like mischief of the *Prelude* gives way to a strongly accented *Fugue* which recalls the headstrong energy of Shostakovich's early theatre scores.

No 12 (G sharp minor): This is a grand conclusion to the first half of the set, with a grave passacaglia for the *Prelude*, followed by a convoluted fast *Fugue* in 5/4 time, whose last page deliberately withdraws from what might have been a grandstand conclusion.

interval 20 minutes

No 13 (F sharp major): The lilting 6/8 *Prelude* is another breath of fresh air, comparable to Nos 1 and 7. The long-drawn-out *Fugue* is the only one of the set in five voices, with a chorale-like style and a complex canvas of tonalities.

No 14 (E flat minor): A dark and menacing atmosphere dominates the declamatory Mussorgskian *Prelude*, with tremolos as its main musical motif. The three-voice swaying *Fugue* has a flowing motion darkly coloured by the tonality.

No 15 (D flat major): This is one of the best-known of the set and one of the most intriguing, thanks to the interrelation between its *Prelude* and *Fugue*. The former is alternately sarcastic and quizzical but mainly tonal, while the latter wrests tonal order from a near-atonal whirlwind.

No 16 (B flat minor): The profoundly expressive and translucent *Prelude* is, like No 12, in a quasi-passacaglia design, with rhythmically accumulating figuration. It is followed by an extremely long and searching, ornate and even improvisatory-sounding *Fugue*, held at a constant *pianissimo*.

No 17 (A flat major): A return to pastoral character and a sense of the *faux-naïf* in the *Prelude* is followed by a gaily tripping *Fugue* with rustic dance flavours, allowing for another island of repose for the listener and performer.

No 18 (F minor): An expressive and melancholic instrumental aria opens the *Prelude*. The *Fugue*'s subject also has a singing quality to it, and the end comes, as in the *Prelude*, with an F major resolution.

No 19 (E flat major): The *Prelude* alternates brassy chorales with spiky interjections, the alternations becoming gradually more closely spaced while the interjections gradually descend in register. Another chromatically contorted *Fugue* follows, teasing the listener with its 5/4 metre and modal language.

No 20 (C minor): The bleak recitatives in the *Prelude* pre-echo the opening of the 11th Symphony. The *Fugue*'s subject is derived from the first bar of the *Prelude* and is then worked into an expansive, thoughtful tableau, ending with a serene coda in C major.

No 21 (B flat major): The *Prelude* is another prime example of the playful element of the cycle. The *étude*-like *Prelude* is followed by a skipping *Fugue* which reaches a strenuous conclusion.

No 22 (G minor): The *Prelude*'s Baroque-style figuration over grave harmonies, as though from the *ritornello* of a Bach aria, leads to a floating and meditative *Fugue* with a song-like subject.

No 23 (F major): A beatific *Prelude* in Bach-chorale-prelude manner, yet also Romantically serene, is followed by a flowing, curvaceous *Fugue*; the two add up to an elevated, consolatory experience before the final piece.

No 24 (D minor): During the course of this final *Prelude* and *Fugue* we can virtually hear the epic first movement of the composer's 10th Symphony (1953) being born. In a monumental peroration, the grandeur of the *Prelude* re-emerges in higher form towards the culmination of a long, accelerating double *Fugue*. The ever-increasing tension towards a cascade of octaves gives way to a triumphant D major, concluding the cycle on an unmistakable note of defiance.

Programme note by Michelle Assay

'On his return home to Moscow from Leipzig, Shostakovich immediately began to compose his *Preludes and Fugues*. At his request I telephoned him every day and he asked me to come to him to listen to him play the piece he had just written. The *Preludes and Fugues* is a work of great depth, of unsurpassed mastery and greatness. It contains 24 masterpieces, each with its own internal world. They can and must be compared to Bach's cycle. They are a new word in polyphony. At a performance of the whole cycle it is possible to follow its vast overall concept.'

Tatiana Nikolayeva

Dmitry Shostakovich

(1906–75)



Few composers's music bears the imprint of its times more tellingly than that of Dmitry Shostakovich. He was born in St Petersburg in 1906, the year after the brutal repression of a massed popular uprising. He was 11 when the October Revolution of 1917 broke out, and he marked it in his first composition, *Funeral March for the Victims of the Revolution*. His rapidly developing talent was soon recognised, and at just 13 he was admitted to the city's Conservatory. He wrote his First Symphony as a graduation piece at 19. Within a year it was an international success.

In the early heady years of the Communist republic Shostakovich's style grew wildly experimental, delighting some but enraging others. But his part-satirical, part-tragic opera *The Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, premiered in 1934, was another stunning success, putting him at the forefront of Soviet artistic life. Two years later, however, the Soviet dictator Stalin saw *Lady Macbeth*, and almost immediately a vicious attack followed in the state newspaper *Pravda*. Shostakovich suddenly found his career, and possibly his life, in peril. In response he wrote his Fifth Symphony (1937), superficially more

conservative than previous major works, and furnished with an outwardly optimistic conclusion. Official approval followed, yet some at the time also detected a note of impassioned dissent in the music.

During the Second World War, Shostakovich again achieved hero status with his 'Leningrad' Symphony (No 7), partly written during the devastating siege of his native city. It was performed all over the world, including, remarkably, in besieged Leningrad (St Petersburg) itself. But after the war Shostakovich again found himself under attack, a process that culminated in his official denunciation in 1948 by the Soviet Central Committee secretary Andrey Zhdanov. For the next few years, until after the death of Stalin in 1953, Shostakovich survived by writing propaganda pieces, while keeping more serious, potentially dangerous compositions such as the First Violin Concerto and the 10th Symphony closely hidden.

During the political 'thaw' of the later 1950s, Shostakovich found himself rehabilitated. Then in 1960, to the surprise of many, he joined the Communist Party. To what extent this was the result of coercion is still debated, but it seems he felt this was a capitulation too far, and according to some he considered suicide. It is said that the composer described his patently autobiographical Eighth Quartet (1960) as composed 'in memory of myself'. In later years Shostakovich's position in Soviet cultural life seemed unassailable, but his health failed drastically, and in his later works there's a tendency to brood on mortality. Yet despite the dark character of much of his finest music, many of his fellow Russians found comfort and encouragement in it and since his death in 1975 increasing numbers across the world have felt the same. His status as one of the 20th-century's most important composers is now secure.

Profile by Stephen Johnson

Igor Levit

piano

Hailed by the *New York Times* as 'one of the essential artists of his generation', Igor Levit was named the 2018 Gilmore Artist and that same year won the Royal Philharmonic Society's Instrumentalist of the Year. He is the Artistic Director of the Chamber Music Academy and the Standpunkte Festival at the Heidelberg Spring Festival and last year was appointed professor at his alma mater, the University of Music, Drama and Media in Hanover.

In September 2019 Sony Classical released Igor Levit's highly anticipated first recording of the complete Beethoven sonatas. This season also marks the start of a series of three Beethoven sonata-cycles at the Lucerne Festival, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg and Stockholm's Konserthuset. The end of the season will see him on tour in the USA with an all-Beethoven sonata programme – appearing at, among others, New York's Carnegie Hall, Princeton University, the Kennedy Center in Washington DC and San Francisco's Davies Symphony Hall.

This season he is also the Featured Artist here at the Barbican. The residency comprises tonight's solo recital plus two chamber concerts, with repertoire ranging from Beethoven to Messiaen.

Orchestral engagements will see him on tour in Europe with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Manfred Honeck, and returns among others to the Cleveland Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhausorchester and London Philharmonic Orchestra.

Highlights of past seasons include his debuts with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, as well as international tours with the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra.

Born in Nizhny Novgorod in 1987, Igor Levit moved to Germany with his family at the age

of 8. He completed his piano studies at the Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media in 2009 with the highest academic and performance scores in the history of the institute.

He has an exclusive contract with Sony Classical and his debut disc of Beethoven's last five sonatas won the *BBC Music Magazine* Newcomer of the Year Award and the Royal Philharmonic Society's Young Artist Award (both 2014). His second recording featured the complete Bach *Partitas*, while his third, featuring works by Bach, Beethoven and Rzewski, won *Gramophone's* Instrumental Award and Record of the Year in 2016.

In Berlin, where he makes his home, Igor Levit plays a Steinway D Grand Piano, kindly given to him by the Trustees of Independent Opera at Sadler's Wells.



Five things you need to know about Igor Levit

His first-ever recording was of Beethoven's last five sonatas, a daring debut by any standards. He was just 25 when he made it.

His Twitter handle reads: Human being. Citizen. European. Pianist.

He bears that out by speaking out on matters political as well as musical.

And caused something of a rumpus when he performed Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* as an encore at the First Night of the 2017 Proms, which many saw as a pro-European statement.

He's a man obsessed with variation form, and his third recording was of three giants of the repertoire: Bach's *Goldbergs*, Beethoven's *Diabellis* and Frederic Rzewski's *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*.

We hope to see you again soon

If you enjoyed today's performances, we can recommend the following concerts:

Peter Meisel



Igor Levit plays Messiaen and Shostakovich

Thu 13 Feb 7.30pm, Milton Court

In a typically thought-provoking concert, Igor Levit and friends perform Messiaen's ecstatic *Visions de l'Amen* and a pared-down version of Shostakovich's haunting 15th Symphony.

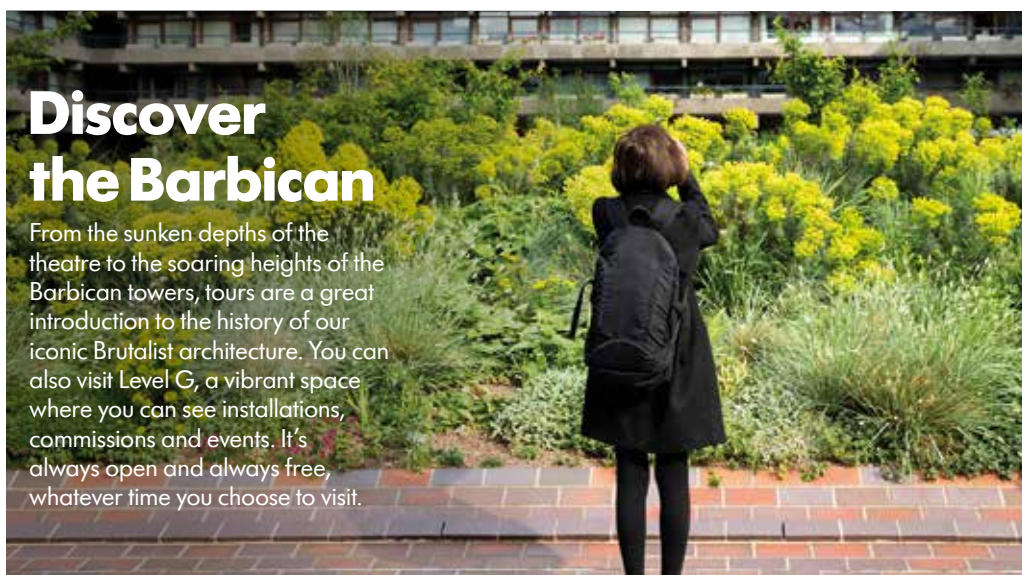
Robbie Lawrence



Igor Levit plays Beethoven, Bartók and Brahms

Wed 19 Feb 7.30pm, Hall

Igor Levit and friends perform Beethoven's iconic *Grosse Fuge* in a two-piano version, Brahms's *Haydn Variations* and Bartók's gleefully anarchic Sonata for two pianos and percussion.



Discover the Barbican

From the sunken depths of the theatre to the soaring heights of the Barbican towers, tours are a great introduction to the history of our iconic Brutalist architecture. You can also visit Level G, a vibrant space where you can see installations, commissions and events. It's always open and always free, whatever time you choose to visit.