

Evgeny Kissin plays Beethoven

**Thu 6 Feb 7.30pm
Barbican Hall**

Part of Beethoven 250

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 10pm, 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

Thu 6 Feb, Hall

A warm welcome to this evening's concert, given by one of the greatest pianists of today.

Evgeny Kissin first made international headlines while still in his teens and his journey from Wunderkind to mature artist has been undertaken very much in the public eye.

Beethoven has long been one of his passions and this evening he performs four works as part of the Beethoven 250 celebrations here at the Barbican.

The *Pathétique* Sonata is a work of passion and power, with the composer very much wearing his heart on his sleeve. Its drama is

offset by a slow movement of great beauty. The *Eroica* Variations remind us of what a tremendous pianist Beethoven was in his earlier days and they anticipate the late *Diabelli* Variations in the brilliant way they work and rework the theme, one that he reused in the finale of his *Eroica* Symphony.

In the second half Evgeny Kissin pits the desperate drive of the *Tempest* Sonata against the *Waldstein*, one of Beethoven's most symphonic sonatas in its scale and nobility.

It promises to be a remarkable evening. I hope you enjoy it.

Huw Humphreys

Head of Music

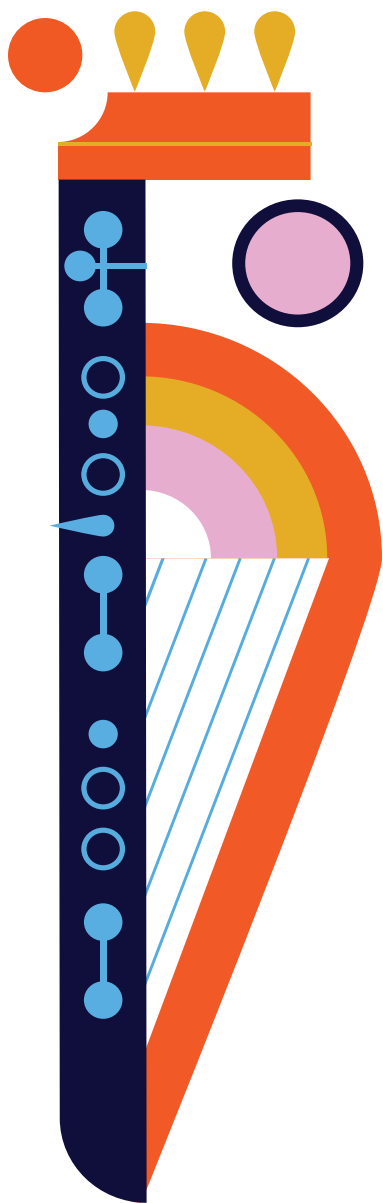
'Without question Evgeny Kissin is a phenomenal pianist, a deeply intuitive and sensitive musician.'

New York Times

Programme produced by Harriet Smith
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Evgeny Kissin plays Beethoven

Thu 6 Feb 7.30pm
Barbican Hall

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 8, Op 13
Pathétique
15 Variations and a Fugue, Op 35 *Eroica*

interval 20 minutes

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 17, Op 31 No 2
Tempest
Piano Sonata No 21, Op 53 *Waldstein*

Evgeny Kissin piano

Part of Beethoven 250

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Beethoven 250 at the Barbican

Thu 6 Feb, Hall

This season the Barbican, London Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Academy of Ancient Music and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama celebrate 250 years since the birth of Ludwig van Beethoven. But what is his relevance today?

Beethoven is the ultimate creative genius. He epitomises the popular, romanticised image of the great composer. Beethoven suffered. He was taciturn, isolated and lacking in social graces. He endured the worst affliction imaginable for a musician: deafness. In spite of all this (many, including Wagner, would argue because of all this), he managed to compose some of the most breathtaking, transcendental, sublime music of the Western canon. At first, Beethoven's deafness was understood as a barrier to his compositional prowess: the reason for the bizarre, jarring sounds of the late string quartets. Later, it was seen as the key to his greatness, enabling him to access profound, inward truths.

Living through turbulent revolutionary times, Beethoven was an advocate for political reform. He saw a power-shift away from the aristocracy. His political beliefs were more

ambivalent and changeable than his mythology allows, but his music has come to represent resistance against tyranny and oppression, and the defence of individual freedom, equality and radical social change. It is a powerful symbol of hope, revisited in times of political struggle, a celebration of freedom and brotherhood.

The popular image can be problematic. Beethoven's vocal and choral music, or simply the works that do not contain journeys from struggle to redemption, are rarely performed because they do not comply with our perception of the heroic, suffering artist. In contrast, the Barbican's innovative, inclusive and, occasionally, irreverent programme will question the myths. The Beethoven we hear will be at times refreshingly unfamiliar.

Beethoven's music endures. Its universal themes mean that it remains relevant to almost any time and place. It has been heard in prisons, concentration camps, at the fall of the Berlin Wall, in films, and in venues across the globe; 250 years after his birth, Beethoven belongs to everyone. And that is something to celebrate.

Dr Joanne Cormac
University of Nottingham

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Piano Sonata No 8 in C minor, Op 13 *Pathétique* (1798–9)

1 Grave – Allegro di molto e con brio

2 Adagio cantabile

3 Rondo: Allegro

Beethoven and C minor

What's in a key? We might think not very much but there we'd be wrong. Composers through the ages have associated particular keys with definite moods. In the case of Beethoven, C minor drew from him music of passion and power and, particularly in his earlier works, tremendous turbulence. The most famous instance of its use is in his Fifth Symphony, whose drive and determination is finally resolved into the major. It's a great instance of a work moving from darkness to light.

He wrote three piano sonatas in C minor: in both Nos 5 and 8 (Op 10 No 1 and the *Pathétique*, Op 13) the mood is vehement and the works themselves are very taut, increasing the sense of energy. By the time of his final Piano Sonata, Op 111, however, sheer drive has been replaced by something more extreme, encompassing craggy violence and a transcendence that is far removed from these early pieces.

Glossary

Sonata A term coined by Classical-era composers to designate a multi-movement work for one or two instruments with, usually, an extended opening movement, a slow one, a minuet or scherzo and a lively finale

Adagio cantabile At a steady pace and in a singing manner

Allegro At a lively pace

Prestissimo Very fast

The nickname for Beethoven's Eighth Sonata is written in stone – quite literally, as the engraved title-page of a published edition of 1799 proclaims 'Grande sonate pathétique'.

In all probability it wasn't Beethoven's idea (nicknames rarely were), though he may have given his approval. Certainly the work begins with a palpable gravity, with Beethoven using a slow introduction for the first time, as well as a melodic line that emphasises the minor quality of the key and infusing it with drama through its rhetorical dotted rhythms. Even the Allegro di molto, for all its driving energy, can't shake off the memory of that portentous introduction: not only does the sombre opening come back to haunt the Allegro – a most unorthodox move on Beethoven's part – but it even reappears speeded up in the development, making it very much an integral part of the first movement as a whole. Its return right near the end of the movement, transformed from fierceness to a doleful acceptance, helps to put the brakes on a movement whose vehemence skirts a sense of out-of-controlness.

Beethoven offers a hard-won serenity in the Adagio cantabile, a movement that prefigures the slow movement of another great C minor Sonata, that of Schubert, D958. Both have a dignified chorale-like melody in A flat major, later set against a triplet backdrop.

This A flat key is one to which Beethoven returns in the middle of the finale – a way of cross-referencing movements that he was to use more and more in his structural planning of works. Here it has the effect of tempering the fire and drive that send the sonata hurtling towards its closing bars, but not before one further reminiscence of A flat, a voice of reason that is swiftly pushed aside in a final burst of defiant minor.

Ludwig van Beethoven

15 Variations and a Fugue, Op 35 *Eroica* (1802)

Thu 6 Feb, Hall

Beethoven frequently worked simultaneously on dissimilar pieces – the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, for instance, or the Fourth Symphony and Fourth Piano Concerto.

In October 1802 he offered two new sets of variations to the publishers Breitkopf & Härtel: Op 34, consisting of six variations, is about half the length of his Op 35 *Eroica* Variations. But he pointed out that both were striking for being ‘noticeably different from my earlier ones’ and it’s not insignificant that these were the first examples in the genre to which he gave opus numbers.

It’s worth giving some biographical context here. For a start, Beethoven’s claim that they’re in a different style needs context: this may well have been less a marketing ploy and more a rather exasperated response to a boast recently made by a fellow composer, Anton Reicha, that he had found a new way of writing that most prescribed of genres, the fugue. But, just as importantly, Beethoven’s comment is also contemporary with his famous ‘Heiligenstadt Testament’, in which the composer wrote of his despair at his increasing deafness, his thoughts of suicide and his assertion that ‘it was only my art that held me back’. So perhaps these works represented a turning over of a new leaf, a fresh lease of life.

Certainly they do break new ground: in the compact Op 34 each variation is, unusually, in a different key and the set ranges widely in mood. Op 35 is on a different scale altogether and it’s the most important set he wrote before the *Diabelli* Variations. It anticipates the mighty *Diabellis* in several respects: it has a real presence in terms of scale, there are elements of mockery, the virtuosity is blatant and the theme itself could hardly be simpler. It’s based on a melody from Beethoven’s ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*, which had been premiered in March 1801. But today we know it better as the opening theme of the finale of the Third

Symphony (finished in 1804), which is how these variations came to get their nickname.

The very way in which Beethoven reveals this theme is innovative, presenting first of all its bass-line alone, before adding in one, two, and then three voices, which build in *élan*; only after this do we finally hear the *Prometheus* theme itself. Then begin the variations proper – 15 of them. The first four build in exuberance, their virtuosity a reminder of Beethoven’s great skills as a pianist. The Fifth Variation gives pause, a moment of introspection, the theme stripped of the comic aspects that have up to that point been to the fore. A minor-key Sixth Variation, full of vehemence, leads straight into the Seventh, which features a canon at the octave creating harmonic tension and relishing extremes of gentleness and accentuation. The Eighth has a soulfulness worthy of Schumann, contrasting with the Ninth which sets fiendish double notes against an emphatic repeated bass.

Variations 10 to 13 in their contrasting ways recall the exuberance of the first four and build inexorably towards the last two, the emotional apogee of the piece. Variation 14 is in the unusual, flat-infested key of E flat minor, its mood austere as it prepares for the entry of the final variation, a free-flowing fantasia in 6/8, marked Largo. This sets off simply but eloquently, and musically it seems to pre-echo the fluid and unorthodox forms of Beethoven’s late sonatas. To end, a finale which takes the form of a substantial and crisp-edged fugue based on the first four notes of the theme’s bass and, in its exuberance, recalls the opening variations of the work. In its dazzling confidence it is perhaps also cocking a snook at Anton Reicha – creating a fugue that sounds daringly new yet needs no special pleading.

interval 20 minutes

Ludwig van Beethoven

Piano Sonata No 17 in D minor, Op 31 No 2 *Tempest* (1801–2)

1 Largo – Allegro

2 Adagio

3 Allegretto

Anton Schindler, Beethoven's biographer, claimed he asked the composer the meaning of his 17th Piano Sonata. 'Read Shakespeare's *Tempest*', he is supposed to have retorted.

There's little to suggest the truth of this anecdote and, like so many nicknames bestowed on Beethoven's sonatas by others, it fits only one movement – in this case the first. Furthermore, as the eminent musicologist Donald Francis Tovey once wrote: 'with all the tragic power of its first movement the D minor Sonata is, like Prospero, almost as far beyond tragedy as it is beyond mere foul weather.'

This is the first instance among Beethoven's sonatas (the only one in D minor) of his employing a recitative-like technique, one that he was to use again later, most notably in his penultimate piano sonata, Op 110, and the Ninth Symphony (also in D minor). Its placing within Op 31 is intentionally dramatic – standing as it does between two works of seemingly more relaxed demeanour. As a set, they were significant in marking a new way forward following the crisis that was crystallised in the 'Heiligenstadt Testament'.

Contrast is at the heart of the first movement of Op 31 No 2 with an opening theme that is made up of two seemingly irreconcilable ideas: a Largo unfurling arpeggio that does little to establish the key and a patteringly urgent response (marked Allegro) that culminates in a sighing figure. Beethoven teases the listener by delaying the clear establishment of a key for some moments longer. It is from these simple building blocks – arpeggios, chromatic scales and trills – that the entire movement is moulded. Strikingly, he attains drama as much through

sudden silences as through torrents of notes. The unfurling arpeggio is used as a structural marker, too, notably at the beginning of the development and the recapitulation, the latter occurrence leading to a full-blown passage of the most searing recitative which develops into a devastating sequence of repeated chords before then continuing with the reprise of the opening material as expected, the movement ending with an unsettling rumble in the bass.

The Adagio begins with the same device of a rising arpeggio, but the effect could not be more different, hailing a much stiller movement, against which the right hand launches into a kind of *arioso* (not that any singer could encompass such a wide range), which has a touching yearning quality.

To finish, Beethoven blasts away the rhetoric of the preceding movements with a *perpetuum mobile* (though not a fast one), the arpeggio featuring once more yet sounding quite different in an uneasily agitated movement, with the composer insistently repeating and reinforcing tiny motifs, hammering home their effect.

Ludwig van Beethoven

Piano Sonata No 21 in C major, Op 53 *Waldstein* (1803–4)

- 1 Allegro con brio
- 2 Introduzione: Adagio molto
- 3 Rondo: Allegretto moderato – Prestissimo

Beethoven began the *Waldstein* the year after completing the sonata we've just heard, but what a difference!

The nickname of Op 53 comes from Count Waldstein, dedicatee of the sonata and a longstanding friend of the composer. And if Beethoven had made previous moves away from the lucrative amateur market in terms of the demands made on the player, in this sonata he emphatically breaks all ties. It's not a work of blaring, glaring virtuosity, however, but rather one that often proceeds by stealth; and it's striking how many of the dynamics are set at *piano* and *pianissimo*, not least the very opening, which steals in on a repeated C major chord, only to shift rapidly from here to an alien B flat chord. And so it proceeds: with Beethoven using the most basic of building blocks in the most subversive manner. When we do finally reach a theme of sorts, it's a gentle chorale-idea in a seraphic E major that temporarily seems to still the energy, before this too is subsumed into the greater scheme of things.

The far-reaching harmonic experiments of the first movement of the *Waldstein* are followed by a mysterious, brief second-movement Adagio molto. This is in fact an extended introduction to the rondo finale, the music unfurling, gradually revealing itself to the listener, bar by bar, with nothing that could be described as a melody as such.

Beethoven joins this to the Allegretto moderato via an ingenious gradual speeding-up, the finale announced with a melody stamped out against a whirling accompaniment, which is followed by a

syncopated passage that sounds momentarily Schubertian, before returning to earlier material and building to an emphatically affirmative close.

Programme notes by Harriet Smith

'Beethoven always sounds to me like the upsetting of bags of nails, with here and there an also dropped hammer.'

John Ruskin in a letter dated 6 Feb 1881

Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770–1827)



When Ludwig van Beethoven was born in 1770, many composers were still uniformed servants. By the time of his death in 1827 the composer had become a new type of Romantic hero, a musical freedom fighter, and a voice of hope at a time when political idealism had failed. Brought up in the Rhineland city of Bonn, Beethoven suffered horrible abuse at the hands of his alcoholic musician father, but found refuge and strength in music. His talents were soon recognised, and in 1792 he went to Vienna to study with the world-famous composer Joseph Haydn. Their relationship was strained, as were many of his later relationships with his aristocratic patrons (authority figures always posed a problem for him), but Beethoven learned a great deal from Haydn and his style advanced in leaps and bounds during this period. At first Beethoven was more successful as a concert pianist than as a composer, but after the appearance of his First Symphony, First Piano Concerto and earliest set of string quartets, Op 18 in 1800 it was clear that a startling new force had taken to the musical stage.

Success was followed by profound crisis, as Beethoven began to realise that something

was seriously wrong with his hearing. As ever he found strength in composing. His Third Symphony, the 'Eroica' ('Heroic', 1803) takes symphonic writing onto a new epic and personal-dramatic plane. Initially the 'Eroica' was to have been dedicated to Napoleon Bonaparte, but Beethoven was incensed when Napoleon proclaimed himself Emperor, and his attitude to the former French Revolutionary hero remained complicated.

Protests against tyranny and expressions of defiant hope can be heard in such later masterpieces as the Fifth Symphony (1807–8) and his only opera *Fidelio* (1805, revised 1814), but after Napoleon's defeat in 1814 Beethoven joined in the celebrations, hymning the victorious British general Wellington in his *Wellingtons Sieg* – the so-called 'Battle' Symphony – significantly not regarded now as among his finest compositions.

After a year of near silence in 1816, Beethoven entered a new creative phase, often referred to as his 'late' period. Personally these years were scarred by his bitter protracted struggle with his sister-in-law for custody of his nephew Karl. Beethoven won the legal battle, but Karl's increasing unhappiness led to his attempted suicide in 1826, which probably accelerated Beethoven's final decline the following year. Yet this same period saw the creation of some of his most searching music: not just the monumental choral-orchestral Ninth Symphony (1822–4) and *Missa solemnis* (1819–23) but the most remarkable sequence of piano sonatas and string quartets ever composed. These extraordinary works, sometimes anguished or desolate yet also with moments of profound inner calm, have acquired the significance of spiritual documents. Thus Beethoven, the embodiment of heroic individualism, left this world as a different kind of visionary, finding meaning not in politics, but in things apparently beyond this world.

Profile by Stephen Johnson

Evgeny Kissin

piano

Felix Broede



Russian pianist Evgeny Kissin is one of the most distinguished musicians of his generation, revered the world over by audiences and critics alike for the virtuosity and eloquence of his pianism and the imagination and insight of his interpretations. He has worked with leading conductors, including Vladimir Ashkenazy, Daniel Barenboim, James Levine, Riccardo Muti, Seiji Ozawa and Sir Antonio Pappano.

He was born in Moscow in 1971 and began to play by ear and improvise on the piano at the age of 2. At 6, he enrolled at Moscow's Gnessin School, where he received lessons from Anna Pavlovna Kantor, who became his only teacher. At the age of 10 he made his concerto debut with Mozart's Piano Concerto in D minor, K466 and he gave his first solo recital in Moscow a year later. His international breakthrough came in March 1984, when he performed Chopin's piano concertos in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory with the Moscow State Philharmonic conducted by Dmitri Kitaienko. This concert was recorded live by Melodiya, and a two-LP album was released the following year.

He made his debut in Eastern Europe in 1985, toured Japan the following year and appeared in Western Europe for the first time at the 1987 Berlin Festival. In 1988 Herbert von Karajan invited him to perform Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1 with the Berlin Philharmonic

at the orchestra's forthcoming New Year's Eve Concert, which was released on DG. He gave his first performance at the BBC Proms in 1990 and made his North American debut soon after, performing Chopin's two piano concertos with the New York Philharmonic and Zubin Mehta. He opened Carnegie Hall's centennial season in September 1990 with a debut recital, the live recording of which proved an exceptional success.

His discography also includes Grammy Award-winning recordings of Prokofiev's Piano Concertos Nos 2 and 3 and a disc of solo works by Scriabin, Medtner and Stravinsky; other highlights include Beethoven's piano concertos under Colin Davis; and discs of solo works by Brahms, Chopin and Schumann. In 2017 he signed a new exclusive contract with DG, releasing a double-disc set of live recordings of solo works by Beethoven. He followed this with a recording with the Emerson Quartet of Mozart, Fauré and Dvořák.

Evgeny Kissin's close connections with Carnegie Hall were reinforced throughout the 2015–16 season when he celebrated its 125th anniversary with a range of programmes.

Evgeny Kissin's achievements have been recognised with many prestigious awards. In 1991 he received the Musician of the Year Prize from the Chigiana Academy of Music in Siena. He was special guest at the 1992 Grammy Awards Ceremony and became *Musical America's* youngest Instrumentalist of the Year in 1995. In 1997 he received the Triumph Award for his outstanding contribution to Russian culture. His other honours include the Shostakovich Award (2003), the Herbert von Karajan Music Prize (2005), the Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli Award (2007) and honorary doctorates from the Manhattan School of Music (2001), the University of Hong Kong (2009), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (2010) and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (2014).

We hope to see you again soon

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

Robbie Lawrence



Igor Levit plays Beethoven, Bartók and Brahms Wed 19 Feb 7.30pm, Hall

An absorbing programme for piano and percussion, placing Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge* in electrifying counterpoint with Brahms and Bartók.

Benjamin Edlovaga



Simon Trpčeski in recital Tue 25 Feb, Hall

A flamboyantly colourful recital ranging from the deep poetry of Brahms to the steel of Prokofiev.

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.

