

# EVENT ONE

Friday 15 September 1.00pm – 2:00pm  
Unitarian Chapel, St Saviourgate, York  
Tickets £15 (18 and under free)



CELLO AND PIANO RECITAL

**Tim Lowe** (Cello)

**Katya Apekisheva** (Piano)

**Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)**

**12 Variations on a Theme from Handel's oratorio Judas Maccabeus  
WoO 45**

In 1796, age 26, Beethoven arrived in Berlin on a concert tour, there as a pianist – his improvisations and performances of his own works had audiences gasping. Being a concert pianist was his first chosen career, although fate played its part because by the turn of the century he realised his deafness would in time put paid to playing. As his outer-ear faded so his inner-ear quickened.

Before this happened, in Berlin he met two French virtuosi cellists Jean-Pierre Duport and his younger brother, Jean-Louis. Jean-Pierre had recently been appointed as first cello in the court orchestra of Frederick-Wilhelm II. The king was himself a keen amateur cellist. So Beethoven's appearance at the court with his two cello sonatas is perhaps not so surprising.

The two sonatas were written on a grand scale, real concert pieces and are full of exciting effects for the cello. These sonatas were for the first time a genuine partnership between the two instruments. It is as though Beethoven was introducing his idea of the cello sonata into what he intuitively knew was going to be an important series (he wrote three

more). And as the fates dictated Beethoven knew the acoustic properties of the cello before deafness descended.

Feeding into these early cello sonatas was Beethoven's deeply held admiration for Handel; his ability to evoke an emotion or construct an entire dramatic scene out of scraps of motifs. Towards the end of his life his friend J. A. Stumpff asked Beethoven who he thought the greatest composer and the answer came back without hesitation, "Handel, to him I bow the knee." We know that Beethoven heard Handel's oratorio *Judas Maccabeus* in Vienna. It is quite telling that Beethoven uses dotted and double dotted rhythms in his first cello sonata's opening *Adagio* in imitation of the oratorio. *Judas Maccabeus* was clearly on his mind while he was in Berlin because during the trip he wrote several companion pieces to the two cello sonatas including *12 Variations on the aria "See, the Conquering Hero Comes"* from the oratorio.

Although it was several centuries too soon to conjure up a recording of Beethoven's improvisations on the piano, the variations give us a good idea. Freed from the stern demands of sonata structure – he displays his genius for fantasy, colour and poetry and shows us his most human side.

### **Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)**

#### **Sonata for 'Cello and Piano in E Minor, Op. 38**

*Allegro non troppo*

*Allegretto quasi Menuetto*

*Allegro*

Brahms wrote over 100 chamber music scores but only two dozen survived his intense self-criticism especially his initial worry about composing in the shadow of Beethoven. The Op. 38 Sonata for Cello and Piano was the first duo sonata that Brahms allowed to be published. The three surviving violin sonatas came from later on and the clarinet sonatas much later still. But what unites all these works and is demonstrated in this early sonata is Brahms' interest in and love of

warmth of tone and sonority rather than more obvious and dazzling effects. Indeed Brahms' choice of the 'cello for his first published sonata reflects his lifelong affinity with the warm, sunset quality of the instrument and can be heard time and time again in the cello melodies that abound in his symphonies, the wonderfully idiomatic handling of the cello in the double concerto and the memorable cello solo at the beginning of the slow movement of the second piano concerto.

Three movements of Op.38 were written during a concert tour in 1862. Like Beethoven before him, as we have just seen, Brahms received considerable acclaim as a virtuoso pianist. By the time the score was completed in 1865, when he was in his early thirties, Brahms had discarded an Adagio and added a new finale which pays tribute to J. S. Bach (1685-1750), the other great influence on Brahms, with its inventive fugal structure.

There is perhaps no other sonata in the entire repertoire for the instrument that is so redolent of the cello's qualities as a dark and deeply resonant voice with a special character of introspection. The first theme exploits just this feature; the ability to sing a sonorous melody in the 'cello's lowest register. Indeed at no point in the whole sonata does the pitch rise high enough to demand use of the treble clef. The second movement - *Allegretto quasi Menuetto* - is based on a classical dance form. This minuet, however, could never be mistaken for Haydn or Mozart. The wistful melody and surprising turns of phrase are pure Brahms. The vigorous fugal *Allegro finale* salutes Bach's *Art of the Fugue*. (There are three thematic subjects - the first a variant of one of Bach's themes.) In this movement Brahms's mastery of contrapuntal writing comes to the fore. That Brahms managed to create such a masterful fugue within sonata form merely attests to his genius.

The other key feature of this work is also very characteristic of Brahms in reflecting its composer's reverence for his cultural heritage; back to a distant past echoing Palestrina and the earliest German song tradition, through the revered Beethoven from whom he almost certainly gleaned the cello sonata as a form, through to his liberation of line and pulse

which was to be so significant in the future of music. Brahms's first extant duo sonata is an extraordinary work. It draws from a long cultural legacy but is of the moment, fresh and forward thinking, changing the future; quintessential Brahms.

### **Peter Ilych Tchaikovsky (1840 – 1893)**

#### **Nocturne Op.19 No.**

#### **Valse sentimentale Op. 51 No. 6**

Tchaikovsky's *Nocturne* is a beautiful, gentle outpouring of love; a tune typical of Tchaikovsky's visionary music drifting in from who knows where? Originally composed for piano, the cello transcription is particularly efficacious and lends itself to the cantabile voice of the instrument.

Tchaikovsky wrote waltzes exploring a wide range of moods throughout his compositional career, including a collection of six piano pieces, written in 1882, Op. 51, all dedicated to women. The gently melancholy *Valse sentimentale*, is the best known of the set. It has long been a favourite not only of pianists but, thanks to several transcriptions, string players too.

### **Robert Schumann (1810 -1856)**

#### **Adagio and Allegro Op. 70**

"The qualities of the violoncello are exactly those of the beloved dreamer whom we know as Schumann." These words of Donald Tovey could not be more apt. In the 'cello Schumann found a perfect vehicle for the expression of his most profound musical thoughts. Having studied the instrument as a young man, he wrote for it with special sympathy in both his orchestral and chamber music. His love for the instrument is clearly demonstrated by the cello parts in all four of his symphonies, as well as in the concertos for piano and violin, and of course throughout his chamber music.

It is unfortunate that he knew no great 'cello virtuosi who might have inspired him to write many more works. As it is, we must be deeply grateful for what we have. The *Fünf Stücke im Volkston* (1849), the wonderful Cello Concerto (1850), *Fantasiestücke* Op. 73 (originally conceived for clarinet) and the *Fünf Romanzen* written late in 1853, a few months before his final breakdown. The *Adagio and Allegro* was written in 1849, originally written for horn and entitled *Romanze and Allegro*.

In 1849 Germany was in turmoil, the revolution against the monarchies that had begun a year earlier spread like wild-fire. The Schumanns, then living in Dresden, were in considerable peril. Republican soldiers came looking for Robert in order to conscript him into the army. Robert managed to hide and he, Clara and their eldest daughter escaped to a sanctuary out of town. Two days later, Clara—six months pregnant—returned to Dresden in the middle of the night, snatched the remaining three children from their beds and made a dramatic escape. It was all rather hair-raising. Later on Schumann reflected that he had been busy '...it seemed as if the outer storms impelled people to turn inward, and only there did I find a counterforce against the forces breaking in from outside'. As Stephen Isserlis remarks, "...typical of Schumann—one gets the feeling that for him the outer world was always something of a threat; he preferred to live within his dreams."

As always Schumann wrote quickly, a reverie into which, despite everything that had happened, nothing harsh or threatening from outside was permitted to intrude. The *Adagio and Allegro* is a welcome addition to the cello repertoire because it was re-arranged from the horn original with the composers approval for piano and 'cello by the well-known 'cellist Frederick Grutsmacher. The piece is very well suited to the character of the 'cello and is probably better known in this version. The *Adagio* has a long, gently meandering 'cantabile' line, a love song unfolding and opening out before coming to complete stop, in peace. There is a pause followed by an ecstatic outburst of happiness; Schumann showing us his most romantic face.