

*Next Concert: Thursday 27th November*

STEVEN ISSERLIS *cello*  
PETER EVANS *piano*

BEETHOVEN      Sonata in G minor Op. 5 No. 2  
SCHUMANN      Adagio & Allegro Op. 70  
IMOGEN HOLST      Fall of the Leaf for solo cello  
PROKOFIEV      Sonata in C Op. 119

EDINBURGH  
UNIVERSITY  
CONCERTS

1980—81

STEVEN ISSERLIS *cello*  
PETER EVANS *piano*

*15 pence*

Reid Concert Hall, Thursday 27 November 1980

BEETHOVEN 1770–1827

Sonata in G minor Op. 5 No. 2

*Adagio sostenuto ed espressivo*  
*Allegro molto più tosto presto*  
*Rondo (Allegro)*

SCHUMANN 1810–56

Adagio and Allegro Op. 70

INTERVAL

IMOGEN HOLST b. 1907

‘The Fall of the Leaf’  
for solo cello

PROKOFIEV 1891–1953

Sonata in C Op. 119

*Andante grave*  
*Moderato*  
*Allegro, ma non troppo*

Beethoven's five cello sonatas were the foundation stone of the repertory for cello and piano and they have remained its most substantial and enduring monument. It is often not realised that ‘the two grand sonatas with obligato violoncello, Op. 5’ were the first of their species since all the cello sonatas which preceded them had continuo accompaniments, not the fully written out piano part which Beethoven provides. They were composed for Beethoven's visit to the court of the cello-playing Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia. The composer played them with Dupont, the king's first violoncellist, in Berlin in 1796. For his pains he received a gold snuff-box filled with Louis d'or, which he was still creature enough of his age to describe as ‘not an ordinary snuff-box; but such a one as it might have been customary to give to an ambassador’. But then Beethoven was indeed an ambassador just as J.S. Bach had been before him when he made his musical offering to the Prussian court.

The G minor sonata is one of the finest of Beethoven's early works. With audacious assurance the composer seizes the new medium and at one stroke creates a true duo far removed from the concept of the ‘accompanied piano sonata’ which characterises most late 18th-century duos. Beethoven's writing for the cello here is singularly grateful, the texture finely balanced and the music tightly argued. The slow introduction, long enough to be a distinct slow movement, shows nevertheless that Beethoven had already developed the capacity to shape the architecture and tonal balance of this element in a larger work so that it remains genuinely introductory, precipitating inevitably the events of the ensuing movement. The allegro molto is generously proportioned with a strongly drafted development section and extensive coda.

The rondo is in G major, attractively tuneful but by no means lightweight. Purists might find it strange that in 1799 Beethoven played the sonata with the great double-bass player Dragonetti and was deeply impressed by his expressive playing and by his fleet execution of the arpeggio figures in the last movement. Beethoven's later exploitation of the technical capacity of the double-bass may well have been unleashed by this experience.

Instruments with a relatively small repertory can ill spare the art of the arranger and cellists are grateful that Schumann explicitly approved of the performance of his Op. 70 with violin or cello replacing the original horn part. In fact the cello version works well except in some fanfare-like passages. The title ‘Adagio and Allegro’ gives a less accurate impression of the piece than Schumann's evocative German tempo directions. To the warmth of the Adagio (in the original manuscript headed ‘Romanze’) the Allegro adds an impulsive exuberance denying the malaise from which Schumann was already suffering in 1849. It is in simple rondo form with a brief coda. The canonic central episode is slightly slower. As in many of Schumann's instrumental works the thematic materials of the movements are closely integrated.

Imogen Holst is better known for her conducting and championing of the works of others than as a composer. ‘The Fall of the Leaf’ reflects her interest in English music, since these three studies for solo cello written in 1964 are based on a melody found in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. The tune, in which a descending scale is prominent, is presented in slow tempo and then repeated with a pizzicato accompaniment out of which grows the first study, a stormy piece marked vivace. The second study (poco adagio) is quiet. Perhaps one may imagine the leaf lying calm and still before being caught up in the swirling *perpetuum mobile* of the third study (presto) after which a restatement of the theme brings the work to a gentle close.

Prokofiev wrote comparatively little chamber music but pieces like the G minor quintet and the cello sonata are among the best of his earlier and later works respectively. Like Beethoven's G minor sonata, Prokofiev's Op.119 was written for a leading virtuoso – in this case Rostropovich who gave its first performance in 1949. The first movement is predominantly lyrical in character but has contrasting episodes in a quicker tempo and builds to a considerable, cadenza-like climax just before the close.

Prokofiev's colourful juxtapositions of unrelated tonalities are well in evidence in all movements and there are some felicitous details of scoring which succeed in bringing his keen sense of orchestral imagination to a chamber work.

The whimsical second movement is a kind of burlesque march not far from the world of ballet, with a slower middle section in triple time, a *pas seul* for the prima ballerina perhaps, all sinuous curves and gracious voluptuousness. The finale is a simple rondo with strongly contrasted episodes, the central one in a slower time and with an accompaniment of feathery delicacy from the cello when the piano takes up the tune. A coda of great brilliance (in fact there are two versions of it, one more flamboyant than the other) brings the sonata to a close with a reference to the opening of the first movement.

M.T.

*Next Concert: Thursday 4th December*

EDNA ARTHUR     *violin*  
LEON COATES     *piano*

MOZART             Sonata in B flat K454  
DELIUS             Sonata No.2  
BRAHMS             Sonata in A major Op.100

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*violin*

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