



THE UNIVERSITY
of ADELAIDE



ELDER CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC

CONCERT SERIES 2020

Lunchtime Concert

Stephen King *viola*
Konstantin Shamray *piano*

Friday 12 June, 1:10pm

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United Nations
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PROGRAM

Piano Sonata No. 14 in C sharp minor, Op. 27

Beethoven

- I. Adagio sostenuto*
- II. Allegretto*
- III. Presto Agitato*

Sonata for Viola and Piano, Op. 147

Shostakovich

- I. Moderato*
- II. Allegretto*
- III. Adagio*

The year 1801 marked not only the dawn of a new century, but also a significant new approach on Beethoven's part to matters of form and structure in the piano sonata. The bold use of unusual and exotic keys, quasi-programmatic elements, irregular forms and unorthodox ordering of movements all contributed to heralding a new note in Beethoven's sonatas. The composer called each of his two sonatas Op. 27 *quasi una fantasia*. In these works, the improvisatory impulse, free flights of fancy and avoidance of conventional forms are carried further than ever before. In Eric Blom's words, these sonatas "show the composer emancipating himself from the classical sonata pattern and doing it as drastically as possible by substituting pieces in a freely chosen form for the traditional first movement that was always the most important part of a sonata, though not invariably in what we now call sonata form."

While the first of the two Op. 27 sonatas may be one of Beethoven's least-known, its sister, the *Moonlight*, is surely the best-known. The subtitle, as many people are aware, was not given by Beethoven. It came from the German critic and poet Ludwig Rellstab (1799-1860), who once commented that the first movement made him think of "a vision of a boat on Lake Lucerne by moonlight." The work was very popular in Beethoven's lifetime, though the composer himself did not have a particularly high regard for it, and was annoyed that the public afforded it greater status than many of his other works.

The musical and structural (as opposed to the romantic and fictitious) elements of the sonata are considerable. The *Moonlight* is written in a rarely-used key, especially for the period, C-sharp minor. Mozart did not write a single work in this key, and Haydn did so only once. Also, most unusually, all three movements are based in the tonality of C-sharp: minor for the outer movements, major for the central one, at least to the ear. (The *Allegretto* is technically in D-flat major, the enharmonic equivalent of C-sharp major, and easier to read than C-sharp major; the latter would require seven sharps in its key signature!) Like the two previous sonatas, this one is an experiment in form, with Beethoven attempting to build a successful structure with the main weight at the end, not the beginning, of the sonata.

The opening movement in each of the two previous sonatas had been in slow or moderate tempo, while the finale was not only fast but also the most substantial movement. In the *Moonlight*, this approach is carried to extremes. In addition, each movement inhabits a single emotional world without contrasts: the unbroken placidity of the first movement gives way to blithe, innocent charm of the second, which in turn is succeeded by the tempestuous upheavals of the third.

The Viola Sonata was Shostakovich's last work, and there is good reason to suppose that he knew it would be. He composed the greater part of it in June and July 1975 and died, of lung cancer, on 9 August. Following his own wishes, the Sonata was first performed by its dedicatee Fyodor Druzhinin, violist of the Beethoven Quartet (in succession to Borisovsky), who played it in private on 25 September, which would have been the composer's sixty-ninth birthday, and in public on 1 October to a packed audience in the Small Hall of the Leningrad Philharmonic. On that occasion Druzhinin acknowledged the standing ovation by holding the score aloft.

In consultations with Druzhinin during the process of composition, Shostakovich described the first movement of the Sonata as a 'novella', perhaps in recognition of its free-flowing three-part form. Here, as in many of his late works, atmosphere and tension are generated by the friction between twelve-tone themes (as at the piano's first entry) and moments of pure diatonicism.

The scherzo-like second movement recycles the opening music from Shostakovich's abandoned wartime opera based on Gogol's *The Gamblers*, a tale of card-sharps duped by their intended victim. In character this movement begins halfway between a polka and a quick march; the later stages are newly composed.

Most thought-provoking of all is the Adagio finale, which takes as its starting point the bleak viola lines from the middle of the second movement. As the finale gets under way Shostakovich paraphrases the famous opening movement of Beethoven's 'Moonlight' Sonata, drawing attention to the kinship between its repeated-note motif and his own favourite funereal intonations. At the heart of this movement is a passage of extreme austerity built on note-for-note quotations, mainly found in the piano left-hand part, from Shostakovich's Second Violin Concerto and all fifteen of his symphonies in sequence. There could scarcely be a clearer indication that he knew—or at least suspected—that this would be his last work.



Stephen King is the violist of the Australian String Quartet, based at the University of Adelaide. Prior to this he spent almost nine years performing with the Australian Chamber Orchestra. This included a major role in planning and running the ACO education program and ACO2.

Stephen grew up in Canberra and after an architecture degree commenced formal viola studies with Elizabeth Morgan in Brisbane, then James Dunham, Kathy Murdock and Michael Tree in the USA. Stephen holds a Doctorate in Chamber Music from the University of Maryland and has worked closely with the Emerson and Guarneri String Quartets.

From 1997 Stephen was violist of the Coolidge String Quartet based in Washington D.C., performing in venues from Carnegie Hall, to the Jerusalem Music Centre and Hong Kong's City Hall, and festivals including Aspen, Tanglewood and La Jolla.

While living abroad, Stephen was the Associate Principal Viola of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra and violist with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project. He has been on the faculty of the New England Conservatory Preparatory Division in Boston, the American String Teachers Association Music Workshops and Australian Youth Orchestra's National Music Camp.

With his wife Kylie, Stephen has three young boys who keep them pretty well tied up in any down time. Stephen used to kayak, bushwalk, make furniture and renovate houses. He dreams of having some time and a big shed.



Russian pianist **Konstantin Shamray** commenced his studies at the age of six in the city of Kemerovo with Natalia Knobloch. He then studied in Moscow at the Russian Gnessin School of Music and the Gnessin Academy of Music with Professors Tatiana Zelikman and Vladimir Tropp, and the Hochschule fur Musik in Freiburg, Germany with Professor Tibor Szasz.

In 2008, Konstantin won First Prize at the Sydney International Piano Competition. He is the first and only competitor to date in the 40 years of the competition to win both First and People's Choice Prizes, in addition to six other prizes. Konstantin also won First Prize at the 2011 Klavier Olympiade in Bad Kissingen, Germany and performed numerous times at the Kissinger Sommer Festival. In July 2013, following chamber recitals with Alban Gerhardt and Feng Ning, he was awarded the festival's coveted Luitpold Prize for 'Outstanding Musical Achievements'.

Konstantin's extensive concert career encompasses Russia, Western Europe, Canada, Australia, Japan and China. He has performed with the Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra, Russian National Philharmonic, Moscow Virtuosi, Orchestre National de Lyon, Prague Radio Symphony, Belgrade Philharmonic and Sydney Symphony amongst others; under the baton of distinguished conductors including Vladimir Spivakov, Dmitry Liss, Tugan Sokhiev, Nicholas Milton and Alexandre Vedernikov. His chamber music partners have included the Australian String Quartet, Kristof Barati, Alban Gerhardt, Johannes Moser, Li Wei Qin and Andreas Brantelid amongst others.

He has enjoyed critical acclaim at Klavier-Festival Ruhr, Bochum Festival in Germany, Mariinsky International Piano Festival and White Nights Festival in St Petersburg, Musica Viva Sydney and Huntington Festivals, Coriole Chamber Music Festival and the Adelaide Festival. Konstantin has recorded CDs for labels Naxos, ABC Classics, Fonoforum and Artaria.

As of 2020, Konstantin is Lecturer in Piano at the Elder Conservatorium of Music at the University of Adelaide.

Elder Conservatorium of Music
music@adelaide.edu.au
+61 8 8313 5995

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