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SERIES

DISC THREE:
Concerto 5 &
Triple Concerto

BEETHOVEN
PIANO CONCERTOS

ELIZABETH SOMBART **PIANO**



ROYAL
PHILHARMONIC
ORCHESTRA

PIERRE
VALLET
CONDUCTOR

PIANO CONCERTOS No. 5 & TRIPLE CONCERTO

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E flat, Op. 73 'Emperor'

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---------|
| 1 | I. Allegro | [22.49] |
| 2 | II. Adagio un poco mosso | [08.30] |
| 3 | III. Rondo: Allegro | [11.01] |

Concerto for Piano, Violin and Cello in C, Op. 56 'Triple'

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------|---------|
| 4 | I. Allegro | [17.45] |
| 5 | II. Largo | [04.22] |
| 6 | III. Rondo alla polacca | [13.08] |

Total timings: [77.50]

ELIZABETH SOMBART Piano
DUNCAN RIDDELL Violin | RICHARD HARWOOD Cello
ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
PIERRE VALLET Conductor

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Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E flat Op. 73 'Emperor' (1809)

- I. Allegro
- II. Adagio un poco mosso
- III. Rondo: Allegro

Beethoven finished work on this last and most imperiously all-embracing of his concertos in 1809, just as the walls of Vienna were collapsing under the inexorable might of Napoleon's invading armies. Beethoven was incensed, berating one officer rather uncharitably: 'If I, as a general, knew as much about strategy as I the composer know about counterpoint, I'd give you something to do!' Meanwhile, Joseph Haydn, Beethoven's one-time tutor, had passed away peacefully only a few streets away on May 31.

The old regime was literally disintegrating around him, and Beethoven's hearing was now deteriorating so rapidly that he was forced to face the prospect of never performing again in public. He was reported to be tying pillows to his head in his cellar against the noise of the battles outside, in order to protect what was left of his aural senses. Here he was with the concerto that represented the perfect vehicle for his unique performing style, and he was simply no longer up to the job. It took Beethoven three years to come to terms with the scale of

the problem and finally allow the 1812 premiere to go ahead with Carl Czerny as soloist.

In the event this was probably just as well, if composer Louis Spohr's recollections of watching the great man in rehearsal the previous year are anything to go by: 'It was not a treat, for in the first place the piano was badly out of tune, which Beethoven minded little since he could not hear it; and secondly, on account of his deafness, there was scarcely anything left of the virtuosity of the artist which had formerly been so greatly admired. In *forte* passages the poor deaf man pounded on the keys till the strings jangled, and in the *piano* moments, he played so softly that whole groups of notes were omitted, so that the music was unintelligible unless one could look at the score. I was deeply saddened at so hard a fate. If it is a great misfortune for anyone to be deaf, how shall a musician endure it without giving way to despair? Beethoven's continual melancholy was no longer a riddle to me.'

It would also seem that Beethoven's personal circumstances (not to mention levels of hygiene) had gone to the board. Just as he was putting the finishing touches to the concerto, the Baron de Tremont paid the composer a visit in the summer of 1809. His diary entry paints a rather sad picture of the great man: 'His lodging, I

believe, consisted of only two rooms, the first one having an alcove containing the bed, but small and dark, for which reason he made his toilet in the second room, or salon. Picture to yourself the dirtiest, most disorderly place imaginable – blotches of moisture covered the ceiling; an oldish grand piano, on which the dust disputed the place with various pieces of engraved and manuscript music; under the piano (and I do not exaggerate) an unemptied *pot de nuit*...The chairs, mostly cane-seated, were covered with plates bearing the remains of last night's supper.'

The concerto's nickname 'Emperor' is current only in English-speaking countries and seems to derive from a remark made by the British piano maker J. B. Cramer, in which he described this blazing masterpiece as the 'emperor among concertos'. Ironically, it is the work's all-conquering spirit and unquenchable reserves of spiritual as well as physical energy that led the notoriously conservative Viennese audiences of the time to complain that Beethoven had 'aimed beyond the comprehension of the common man'. However, it is now generally recognised as one of his seminal masterpieces in any genre.

Whereas the Fourth Concerto opens with the piano gently announcing the main material, the 'Emperor' announces itself with an imposing series of virtuoso flourishes, before the concerto proper has even got underway. The second subject is strangely unsettling,

vacillating between its initial presentation in the minor mode in detached strings (the piano plays it in the recapitulation), and the legato warmth of the horns in the major. Having already surprised us with those mini-cadenzas at the start, Beethoven reduces the traditional cadenza to the briefest of reflections before leading to a massive final coda, one of the longest in the concerto repertoire.

For the slow movement, Beethoven pulls in the musical reins to create a magical oasis of peace and tranquillity, introduced by muted orchestral strings. There follow two main variations on this opening theme, the second an enchanting version for woodwind with piano accompaniment. Beethoven leads us directly into the finale with a halting version from the soloist of the main rondo theme to come, before it charges away in all-conquering mood.

Right to the end Beethoven remains unconventional. There is no traditional cadenza, and then the orchestra falls gradually silent save for the timpani gently murmuring the rhythm of the main theme. Quite out of the blue, the piano suddenly re-emerges with a stream of blistering octave unisons up and down the length of the piano, leading to a final brief orchestral flourish. With nearly 20 years of life remaining to him, but with his concertising days at an end, Beethoven's love-affair with the concerto was over.

Concerto for Piano, Violin and Cello in C Op. 56 'Triple' (1804)

- I. Allegro
- II. Largo
- III. Rondo alla polacca

Composed between 1803 and 1804, the 'Triple' Concerto develops upon the essentially good-humoured nature of the first two piano concertos, as though the angst-ridden Third had never been composed. Yet it is no less radical in its departure from Classical norms, if less dramatically signalled. By subjecting his materials to various forms of temporal expansionism, Beethoven was moving towards a new period of macrocosmic expression, as is borne out by the first two 'Razumovsky' String Quartets and the 'Archduke' Piano Trio. Fascinatingly, he chose not to expand his thematic material, but rather pass his ideas around in a dazzling array of different musical contexts and keys, thereby creating a template for the Romantic generation that followed.

Yet despite its interest for Beethoven scholars and its vital impact on the music of the next hundred years or so, the Triple's Concerto's lack of obvious dramatic muscle from this most expressively fervent of composers has led to its comparative neglect. The great English musicologist Donald Francis Tovey typically had his finger on the pulse when he suggested that if the work 'were not by Beethoven, but by

some mysterious composer who had written nothing else and had the romantic good fortune to die before it came into performance, the very people who most blame Beethoven for writing below his full powers would be the first to claim it as the work of a still greater composer.'

The Triple Concerto was one of the first works to be written for Beethoven's distinguished piano pupil, Archduke Rudolph (one of the Emperor's sons). Rudolph was no mean pianist himself, as is shown by the fact that he not only received the dedication of the 'Emperor' Concerto – he could also play it. For reasons that have never been satisfactorily explained, the dedication of the Triple Concerto went to another supportive member of the aristocracy, Prince Joseph Lobkowitz.

The exact date of the first performance, presumably given by the Archduke's private orchestra (for whom the work was originally intended) has gone unrecorded. Playing alongside Rudolph on this occasion was violinist Anton Seidler and acclaimed cellist Anton Kraft, who had led the cellos in Haydn's orchestra at Esterházy. It would seem that Beethoven admired Kraft's playing a great deal as he gave him the lion's share of the spotlight, most notably in the slow movement. The cello is the first soloist to enter in all three movements and also plays the little unaccompanied bridge passage that leads into the finale.

The opening Allegro begins quietly in the cellos and basses, in complete opposition to the customary call-to-arms – interestingly, of Beethoven’s seven mature concertos, only the Second and Fifth for piano open imposingly. This builds into a gradual crescendo based on a sequentially repeated idea characterised by a dotted rhythm. This is then subtly transformed to become the second subject, announced initially by the orchestral violins. It would have challenged even a composer of Beethoven’s creative genius to write a cadenza for all three soloists and integrate it symphonically into the overall structure, so Beethoven simply side-stepped the issue by doing without one.

The brief, elegiac slow movement – a series of sublime meditations on a melody announced by the solo cello – appears to suspend time itself with its long-breathed phrases and sense of profound stillness. This only serves to heighten the sense of expectation for the Polonaise finale into which the cello leads us directly. This joyously expansive treatment of the triple-time Polish national dance is structured as a rondo, the returning polonaise section being contrasted and complemented by some of Beethoven’s most rumbustious invention.

Notes by Julian Haylock

B I O G R A P H I E S

ELIZABETH SOMBART

Born in Strasbourg, Elizabeth Sombart started studying the piano at the age of seven. She entered the conservatoire of her home town and gave her first public performance at eleven. After receiving the National Piano and Chamber Music First Prize, she left France to study in Buenos Aires with Bruno-Leonardo Gelber. Her training was completed with great masters such as Peter Feuchtwanger in London, Hilde Langer-Rühl in Vienna, and finally Sergiù Celibidache at the University of Mayence, with whom she studied musical phenomenology for ten years.

Elizabeth has performed in the world’s most prestigious concert venues: Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), Suntory Hall (Tokyo), Théâtre des Champs-Élysées (Paris). In addition to solo and chamber



music recitals, she has performed concertos with L’Orchestre National de Lille and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

From a young age, Elizabeth has sought to share classical music with the most diverse audiences possible, and with people from disadvantaged backgrounds. In 1988, she created Fondation Résonance, which is active today in seven countries. One of the foundation’s key goals is to bring classical music into the community, to institutions where it is most needed: hospitals, orphanages and prisons.

More than five hundred concerts are planned in these venues every year. Fondation Résonance also aims to create piano schools with the founding principles of free teaching, no exams, no competitions, no age restrictions, and using the teachings of the Résonance Pedagogy – the phenomenology of sound and gesture.

Elizabeth has recorded an extensive discography, published several books, and featured in a number of documentaries. As a result of her expertise in musical phenomenology, she has a particular passion and reputation for interpreting the musical language of Chopin and she has recorded all Chopin's nocturnes. She has made well-received recordings of Chopin's two piano concertos with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as *Favourite Adagios*, a double CD of *adagio* movements from the great piano concertos, also with the RPO. Elizabeth has recently appeared with tenor Andrea Bocelli by invitation in special gala concerts in Bucharest and Fatima.

Elizabeth Sombart has been honoured in France with the ranks of Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Mérite and Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres for lifetime achievements and services to music.

ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

For more than seven decades the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (RPO) has been at the forefront of music-making in the UK. Its home base since 2004 at London's Cadogan Hall serves as a springboard for seven principal residencies as well as more than forty-five concerts per year in long-term partnership venues across the country, often in areas where access to live orchestral music is very limited. With a wider reach than any other UK large ensemble, the RPO has truly become Britain's national orchestra.

Throughout the regional programme, plus regular performances at Cadogan Hall, Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall and a hugely popular series at the Royal Albert Hall, and international touring engagements, the RPO remains committed to working with the finest conductors. In July 2018, the RPO announced Vasily Petrenko as the Orchestra's new Music Director, assuming the title of Music Director Designate in August 2020 prior to commencing the full role in August 2021. He joins the RPO's roster of titled conductors, which includes Pinchas Zukerman (Principal Guest Conductor), Alexander Shelley (Principal Associate Conductor) and Grzegorz Nowak (Permanent Associate Conductor).



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In 2018, RPO Resound, the Orchestra's community and education programme, celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary. Throughout its history it has thrived on taking music into the heart of the regions that the Orchestra serves, working with a variety of participants in a range of settings including working with young people, the homeless and recovering stroke patients.

Although the RPO embraces twenty-first-century opportunities, including appearances with pop stars and on video game, film and television soundtracks, its artistic priority remains paramount: the making of great music at the highest level for the widest possible audience. As the RPO proudly looks to its future, its versatility and high standards mark it out as one of today's most open-minded, forward-thinking symphony orchestras. For more information, please visit: www.rpo.co.uk

DUNCAN RIDDELL LEADER OF THE ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA



Duncan Riddell studied violin at Trinity College of Music, London, during which he became Leader of both the European Community Youth

Orchestra and International Festival Youth Orchestra. He received college prizes and the Silver Medal at the first Shell LSO Music Scholarship for string players in 1978. On leaving music college, he founded the Roth String Quartet, which won international prizes and performed extensively. In 1989, the Quartet disbanded and Duncan accepted a principal position in the North German Radio Philharmonic Orchestra in Hannover. At the beginning of 1994, he was appointed Co-Leader of the London Philharmonic Orchestra and from 2001 to 2010 he was Leader of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, during which time he appeared many times as a soloist and director, including a live BBC Radio 3 broadcast of Beethoven's Triple Concerto with Andrew Litton.

In 2008, Duncan made his North American debut directing the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra in several concerts featuring Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. Since taking up the post of Leader of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in 2010, he has continued his solo and directing work with the Orchestra. He is in demand as a guest leader with many of the major orchestras in the UK and Europe, and as far afield as North America and Japan, where he regularly appears as a guest leader with the NHK Symphony Orchestra in Tokyo.

RICHARD HARWOOD



Since his critically acclaimed concerto debut at the age of ten, the award-winning English cellist Richard Harwood has performed concerti and chamber music in major venues including London's Royal Albert Hall, all of the South Bank Centre venues, Wigmore Hall, Musikverein (Vienna), Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), Alte Oper (Frankfurt), Thomaskirche (Leipzig), Auditorium du Louvre (Paris) and Alice Tully Hall / Lincoln Center (New York).

As concerto soloist, Richard has collaborated with conductors such as Case Scaglione, John Wilson, Okko Kamu, Marko Letonja, Douglas Bostock, En Shao, Shuntaro Sato and Yehudi Menuhin, and with numerous orchestras including The Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic, Bournemouth Symphony, RTÉ

National Symphony, RTÉ Concert, Auckland Philharmonia and the Ural Philharmonic.

As chamber musician, he has collaborated with the Jerusalem and Endellion Quartets, Gidon Kremer, Yuri Bashmet, Olivier Charlier, Benjamin Schmid, Alena Baeva, Ilya Gringolts, Pekka Kuusisto, Vilde Frang, Chen Halevi, Julian Bliss, Martin Roscoe, Peter Donohoe, Finghin Collins, Gottlieb Wallisch and Julius Drake, among others. Richard was cellist of the Sitkovetsky Trio from 2014-2016.

Contemporary music is important to Richard. This started in 2002 when he took part in the Park Lane Group Young Artists' Series on the South Bank and premiered solo works written for him by Dominic Muldowney and Martin Butler. He has also given the European premiere of David Horne's *Zip* with the composer at the piano. For his solo album *Composing Without the Picture*, Richard premiered works written for him by Christopher Gunning, Alex Heffes, Fernando Velázquez and Benjamin Wallfisch.

Richard began his studies with Joan Dickson, before continuing with other eminent teachers such as Steven Doane, David Waterman, Heinrich Schiff (University of Music and Dramatic Art, Vienna) and Ralph Kirshbaum (Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester). He complimented his

studies by taking master classes and lessons with Mstislav Rostropovich, Janos Starker, Steven Isserlis, Boris Pergamenschikow, Miklós Perényi, Bernard Greenhouse, Valentin Erben (Alban Berg Quartet), William Pleeth, Zara Nelsova and Ferenc Rados.

Richard has won many awards beginning in 1992 when he became the youngest ever winner of the Audi Junior Musician Award. The recipient of many awards from the MBF, Hattori Foundation and KPMG / Martin Musical Scholarship Fund, Richard continued this success by winning the 2004 Pierre Fournier Award. He was also the first British 'cellist ever to be awarded the title "Bachpreisträger" at the International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition, Leipzig 2004. Among many other accolades, he received the special "mention" prize from the jury at the Rostropovich Competition, Paris in 2005.

Richard enjoys teaching and has given masterclasses at the Royal Northern College of Music (Manchester), Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (Cardiff), Birmingham Conservatoire, Royal Irish Academy of Music (Dublin) and the Bruckner University (Linz), in addition to other teaching and summer course coaching.

Richard plays a cello by Francesco Rugeri, dated 1692.



PIERRE VALLET

French conductor Pierre Vallet studied conducting and the theory of phenomenology in music with Sergiù Celibidache, piano with Louis Hiltbrand in Geneva and Peter Feuchtwanger in London. He is a graduate of L'Ecole Normale de Musique de Paris and the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris.



Praised for the elegance and intensity of his interpretations, Vallet is a frequent guest conductor with the world's great opera companies. Performance highlights include *Madama Butterfly* and *Faust* at the Metropolitan Opera; *Tannhäuser* and *Carmen* at L'Opéra National de Paris; *Samson et Dalila* and *Carmen* at The Dallas Opera; *Orfeo* at Opera Theater Saint Louis; *Don Carlo* at the Lithuanian National Opera Theater; *La Juive* at the Göteborg Opera, Sweden; *Faust* at the Gran Teatro del Liceu, Barcelona. His North American premiere performance of *Persée et Andromède* by Ibert was selected by the New York Times as one of the top ten classical performances in New York in 2016.

He has enjoyed a long-term musical partnership with Seiji Ozawa, with whom he has worked closely on some forty operatic productions throughout Japan, the US and Europe. For the past 21 years, he has been associated with the Metropolitan Opera.

Maestro Vallet's symphonic work includes appearances at the RPO in London; the Camerata Royal in Bucharest; the Filarmonica Brasov; the National Philharmonic of Chisinau, Moldova; the St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra; and the Spoleto Festival USA. His discography includes two recordings with the RPO and Elizabeth Sombart of the Chopin piano concertos and a collection of Favorite Adagios of piano concertos, as well as *Cendrillon* by Nicola Isouard.

As a pianist, he has performed in duo recitals in both the US and Europe with some of the world's most renowned singers, including Natalie Dessay, Maria Guleghina, Denyce Graves (at the White House), Dmitri Hvorostovsky,

Roberto Alagna (at the Vienna State Opera), Nancy Herrera (at the Teatro Solis in Montevideo) and Joyce di Donato.

A committed educator, Pierre Vallet is a sought-after lecturer and guest teacher at the world's premier training institutions. In addition to his work with the Lindemann Young Artist Development Program at the Met, he has been a regular visitor to the Washington Young Artist program, the Steans Music Institute in Chicago, the Tanglewood Music Center, the Wolf Trap Opera Company, the Houston Grand Opera Studio.

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Signum Records, Suite 14, 21 Wadsworth Road,
Perivale, Middlesex UB6 7LQ, UK.

Tel: +44 (0) 20 8997 4000
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