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Powerful Chopin and commanding Beethoven from François-Frédéric Guy at Wigmore Hall

Par [Alexander Hall](#), 04 octobre 2022

Untimely deaths rob us all of what might have been. Chopin was just 39 when he died; Nicholas Angelich and Lars Vogt were both 51 when they died earlier this year. So it was entirely fitting that [François-Frédéric Guy](#), who numbered Angelich and Vogt among his closest friends, chose to open his [Wigmore Hall](#) recital with Chopin's *Nocturne in C minor*, Op. 48 no. 1 by dedicating it and the rest of the concert to their memory.



François-Frédéric Guy

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Guy's start was weighty, as was much of what followed later in the evening, the left hand tolling like a bell, individual notes and chords placed with deliberation, the mood pensive but not disengaged from the outer world. Then with an outpouring of fury the development section dispelled all calm, an impassioned statement that had Guy rattling the bars of his cage, calling to mind Dylan Thomas' *Do not go gentle into that good night*, before the final chords of the piece felt like the soft closing of a prayer-book.

Then, with the briefest of pauses, it was straight into Chopin's *Ballade in G minor*. My own preference is for a more dreamlike treatment of the main theme, but the rolling left hand asserted itself quite early on, the music shot through with Gallic temperament, Guy driving quite fast into the major climax, cascades of notes spilling over in a rush of momentum, before the final plunging descent spelled out utter devastation.

Chopin's third and last of his sonatas has repeated *sempre legato*, *dolce* and *sostenuto* indications in the long first movement. Guy paid rather less attention to the overall *Allegro maestoso* marking, and in the powerful delineation of rhythm appeared to be foreshadowing the gruff forcefulness of late Beethoven in the second half. This was indeed heady and heroic stuff, the surges and swells at times quite vehement, the proverbial young man in a hurry. The *Presto* Finale followed a similar pattern, the left hand turbo-charged and urgent, all wrapped up in a full-blooded statement of anguish which seemed to come straight from Schubert's *Erlkönig*. The third movement *Largo* had a seamlessness to the phrasing, the gentle dynamic shadings producing a dappling of the light, with exquisite moments of delicacy towards the end, like the hushed murmurings of a troubled soul.

Guy has regularly championed the music of his compatriot [Tristan Murail](#), and it was good to hear his latest composition *Impression, soleil levant*, written for the pianist in 2021. It makes use of the left hand strumming the strings both at the start and towards the close to create the spectral quality that Murail favours, with a collection of eerie effects in a sound-world of chilling transparency. Connections with Monet's early Impressionist painting of the harbour landscape at Le Havre are not always immediate, save in the watery effects of repeated cascades and trills together with individual notes acting like raindrops on a reflective surface, brief Chopinesque fragments colouring the sonorities.

This recital closed in the same key with which it had begun, in a commanding performance of Beethoven's *Piano Sonata no. 32 in C minor*. The opening movement was emphatic, the thundering octaves impressive, the mood purposeful and aspirational. Yet it was in the final movement *Arietta*, with a hushed and consolatory statement of the theme followed by the songlike nature of the following four variations that Guy took his listeners into spheres beyond, in an otherworldly meditation on music itself, the trilling in the final minutes a perfect example of Beethoven's own tintinnabulation, simplicity expressed in the ultimate key of C major after a seemingly infinite and complex progression through time.

