

Nick Kimberly, 26 marzo 2015

## Louis Lortie, Wigmore Hall - music review

The pianist took on two huge pieces that test both player and piano to the limit



Maestro: pianist Louis Lortie performs (Picture: Hiroyuki Ito/Getty Images)

If ever there was an occasion to call in SPCK — Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Keyboards, that is — last night's recital by pianist Louis Lortie was it. The two works he played, Liszt's Piano Sonata and Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata, are huge pieces that test both player and piano to the limit, although the greater challenge is finding the balance between the tempestuous and the exquisite.

Gathering himself like an athlete, Lortie launched into the peremptory flourish that opens the Hammerklavier, playing it fast but giving it full weight. His piano sounded bright, sometimes painfully so, and he blurred some contours in the fastest passages, but the forward momentum was irresistible. If the dancing motif that opens the second movement was less light-footed than it might be, the Adagio had a feeling of great emotion barely reined in. And then the floodgates opened again, releasing a torrent so overwhelming that control seemed impossible — and yet Lortie's muscular intelligence kept him afloat.

Playing such a piece must leave a pianist simultaneously drained and wired, but Lortie returned a mere 20 minutes later to tackle Liszt's equally daunting sonata. It begins with the hushed intimacy of a whispered conversation but soon develops into a blazing row between the left hand's rich bass resonances and the right hand's liquid crystal runs. Showing even greater control than he had in Beethoven, Lortie had the measure of its mood swings. No encores required.