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LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Piano Concerto No. 3

Complete piano concertos vol. 3

Hannes Minnaar

Jan Willem de Vriend

THE NETHERLANDS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



SUPER AUDIO CD

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orkest van het oosten

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Minor, Op. 37

- [1] Allegro con brio
- [2] Largo
- [3] Rondo: Allegro

17:10

7:47

9:40

total time 34:40

Piano Concerto No. 3

The missing link. Hannes Minnaar's release of the beginning and end phases (numbers 1 & 2 and 4 & 5 respectively) of Beethoven's piano concertos is now 'followed' by No. 3. It forms a link in another sense as well. The first concertos: replete with youth, sparkling, often even rambunctious; the last two both more mature and more heroic. And *Piano Concerto No. 3* then? In part still building on his youth (Beethoven was around 30 when he wrote it), this is the first one where we hear heroism. Might has become the central theme.

Beethoven himself regarded it with a mixture of modesty and pride. 'Cramer, Cramer, we'll never be able to produce anything like that!' he once said to a colleague, referring to Mozart's *Piano Concerto in C major, K. 491*. Beethoven performed the brilliant work himself; he felt a great reverence for it, and chose it as the example for his *Concerto No. 3*. But there is something else. In 1801 he wrote to his publisher: 'It [*Piano Concerto No. 3*] is one of my best compositions in this genre.' For a long time, he did not want to part with it: 'Musical policy prescribes that the composer retains his best concertos for himself for a while'; he preferred to keep it 'for when I go on tour again.' As usual, Beethoven knew exactly what he was worth, and if you had any idea at all about music, you took your hat off to Mozart.

The work did not come about overnight. Although the premiere was in 1803, Beethoven probably started on it in 1797 – even before the first two piano concertos had been written. Considering the letter cited above, it must have been rather well under way in 1801, although no matter how strange it

may sound, the final version had still not been committed to paper when it premiered. Before it was published in 1804, Beethoven continued to tinker with it, one reason for which was his enthusiastic encounter with the latest product of Parisian piano manufacturer Erard: he had again managed to expand the tonal range, to more than five octaves, and Beethoven hastened to benefit from this.

‘But where’s the piano?’ When you first listen to the beginning of *Piano Concerto No. 3*, you grow a bit concerned. The composer, highly resourceful and with a flair for drama, unfolds a grandiose tableau for the orchestra, but leaves the soloist with 111 empty initial measures. The audience that had gathered in the Theater an der Wien on the evening of 3 April 1803 for the premiere, with Beethoven himself as the soloist, was probably uneasy. A solo concerto was meant to be a joyous occasion, a playful dialogue between the orchestra and the soloist, and which one would win? They were expecting a light-footed and preferably virtuoso display. But this massive introduction was like a rock, a tower of strength.

If you wanted to follow Beethoven’s musical ways closely – and there were a number of them – then evidently, it would cost you some effort. Goodness gracious, what an evening! Not only *Piano Concerto No. 3* premiered, but also Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 2* and the oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives*. Together with *Symphony No. 1*, it was a bit much for one concert, even for the greatest admirers. The audience was hesitant, unsure. Some members of the choir and the orchestra were even rebellious. The rehearsals for this marathon had started at eight o’clock in the morning (!) and didn’t end until

two-thirty in the afternoon. The musicians were exhausted; they grumbled. But problems were prevented by a tactical intervention from higher up: Prince Karl Lichnowsky, a devotee of Beethoven’s who had sat through the entire rehearsal, ordered huge baskets filled with bread, cold meats and wine and asked everyone to kindly help themselves. Material consolation for mental effort. After that, they all had one more go at a rehearsal of *Christ on the Mount of Olives*... It was not the first time that Beethoven was saved by a prince, and would not be the last time either.

A certain Ignaz Ritter von Seyfried did not have a very enjoyable evening. He had the privilege of turning the pages for Beethoven’s piano concerto. A lowly task? ‘Heaven help me,’ he said later, ‘it was easier said than done. I saw before me almost nothing but empty leaves; at the most, on one page or another, a few Egyptian hieroglyphs wholly unintelligible to me were scribbled down. Beethoven hadn’t had time to commit everything to paper. He would give me a secret glance whenever he was at the end of one of these invisible passages, and my scarcely concealed anxiety not to miss the decisive moment amused him greatly, and during the pleasant supper afterwards, he laughed most heartily about it.’

How did people react to this remarkable spectacle? With reserve. Coolly. We can well assume that no justice was done to many aspects – whether Beethoven could laugh about them or not. With 1800 florins, the profits were good, but the *Zeitung für die Elegante Welt* judged the concert as follows: ‘The performance by Mr v.B., who is after all known to be an excellent pianist,

could not fully satisfy the expectations of the public.’ And that was it. Not until one year later, after an academy concert in the Augarten, the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* took a much more positive view: ‘This concerto is undoubtedly one of Beethoven’s loveliest works. It is a masterful piece.’ It was perhaps a boon that the solo part as presented by Beethoven’s pupil Ferdinand Ries was less chaotic.

As mentioned, Beethoven took Mozart’s *K. 491* as an example for this piano concerto. The key of C minor is just a coincidence; this mainly attests to the fact that it is Beethoven’s preferred key –think of *Symphony No. 5*, the unfinished *No. 10*, *Coriolan Overture*, *Choral Fantasy*, the *Piano Sonatas Op. 10, No. 1*, *Pathétique*, *Op. 111*, and so on – and so it naturally had to be represented in the domain of the solo concertos. The most important thing Beethoven borrowed from his older colleague was the interplay of light and dark. For instance, right at the beginning: the theme, first softly, *piano*, and then overwhelmingly *forte* – a theme with a broken triad, not unknown in the work of Mozart. Once the solo part has taken the floor, it stays there, as it does in Mozart, until the first movement reaches its bitter end. The casual and surprising start of the final rondo is also reminiscent of his great role model. The surprising 6/8 time of the coda also has a parallel in Mozart’s other great concerto in a minor key: *K. 466* in D minor.

Beethoven’s *Piano Concerto No. 3* is an uncommonly expansive and dramatic concerto, innovative and pioneering in many senses. The length of the introduction alone! Then the piano makes its entrance, not as per usual,

with its own theme, but with a scale. If anyone else wrote it, it would be a joyless stopgap of the best kind, but Beethoven turns it into a characteristically robust gesture. (In the Largo, it makes a brief and witty comeback shortly before the end.) The cadenza is not a virtuoso excursion but a fundamental and compositionally necessary part (most often, Beethoven’s own cadenza from 1809 is played). The passage for the timpani, immediately afterwards, is striking; softly arpeggio-ing, the piano recovers from its cadenza, suggests a major key but in vain, while the timpani modestly but emphatically asks our attention with a punctuated rhythm (an echo of the third measure). It must be the first time in history that a soloist accompanied a timpani.

The transition to the second movement, the Largo, must have been a shock at the time. And it still is. From C minor to E major: unheard of. Are these two keys in any way related? Perhaps Beethoven had in mind an ultimate minor-major effect: the interval from C to E is a major third. Later, Brahms (*Symphony No. 1*) and Rachmaninoff (*Piano Concerto No. 2*) would imitate this. The piano seizes the opportunity, perhaps in revenge because the orchestra made it wait so long in the first movement, while the orchestra stays hushed. This elaborate solo opening is novel, presaging the famous beginning of *Piano Concerto No. 4*.

Once the orchestra is allowed to play, it must play *con sordino* (muted), and trumpets and timpani are not appropriate to this ethereal whole. About two-thirds of the way through the playful rondo, Beethoven reaches back briefly for the E major of the Largo (no, he never forgets anything!) and ends exuberantly in C major – youthfully happy, as he will never be again.

Stephen Westra

Translation: Carol Stennes/Muse Translations



Hannes Minnaar

Hannes Minnaar received international acclaim after winning prizes at the Queen Elisabeth Competition (2010, 3rd prize) and the Geneva International Music Competition (2008, 2nd prize) and being awarded a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship (2011). He studied with Jan Wijn at the Amsterdam Conservatory, graduating with the highest distinction and took master classes with Menahem Pressler, Willem Brons and Ferenc Rados. In addition, he studied organ with Jacques van Oortmerssen.

Minnaar was soloist with various orchestras, including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, during which time he worked with conductors such as Marin Alsop, Jiří Bělohlávek, Herbert Blomstedt, Frans Brüggen, Eliahu Inbal, Edo de Waart and Xian Zhang. He gives recitals in many European countries and around the world. He performed at the Royal Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), Konzerthaus (Berlin), Musashino Hall (Tokyo) and the Great Hall of the Tchaikovsky Conservatory (Moscow) and was invited to the festivals of La Roque d'Anthéron, Bordeaux (Jacobins) and Guangzhou.

Minnaar is also active as a chamber musician. As a member of the Van Baerle Trio he won prizes at competitions in Lyon (2011, CIMCL, 1st prize) and Munich (2013, ARD, 2nd prize). The trio gave 18 concerts in an international tour in the "Rising Stars" series in 2014, including the Barbican (London), Musikverein (Vienna) and Cité de la Musique (Paris). Minnaar also performed with musicians such as Janine Jansen, Isabelle van Keulen and Mischa Maisky.

His three solo albums are highly acclaimed. His debut album was awarded an Edison and Gramophone published a full-page article about this album. The same magazine wrote about his second album "Bach inspirations": *"After Minnaar's debut disc, this makes two hits in a row"*. BBC Music Magazine selected it as "Instrumental choice of the month" with 5 stars. His third album with piano music of Gabriel Fauré received rave reviews by both national and international press. Gramophone wrote: *"Minnaar's identification with this unique realm of music is complete and his deeply felt interpretations shine with clarity and infinite nuance."*

In the autumn of 2016, Hannes Minnaar received the Nederlandse Muziekprijs (Dutch Music Award), the highest honour that can be bestowed by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) to a musician working in the field of classical music.

Minnaar has recorded all of Beethoven's piano concertos for Challenge Classics. Recent and future highlights include Liszt's Totentanz and a new concerto by Robert Zuidam with the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Markus Stenz, Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto with the London Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Carlos Miguel Prieto and a solo recital in the Meesterpianisten series in the Main Hall of the Concertgebouw.

Jan Willem de Vriend

Jan Willem de Vriend was appointed chief conductor and artistic director of The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra in 2006. Since then, The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra has become a notable phenomenon on the Netherlands' musical scene. It has presented semi-scenic performances of works by Mozart, Beethoven, Strauss and Mendelssohn. There were premieres of works by Offenbach, Say and Mahler. And by substituting period instruments in the brass section, it has developed its own distinctive sound in the 18th and 19th century repertoire. It has recorded Beethoven's complete symphonies conducted by de Vriend. Opera conducting has come to play a significant role in de Vriend's career. He has led the Combattimento Consort Amsterdam (being artistic director from 1982 – 2013) in unknown operas by Gassmann, Rameau, Heintzen and Haydn, among others, as well as familiar operas by such composers as Monteverdi, Handel, Rossini and Mozart. For the opera houses of Lucerne, Strasbourg, Barcelona, Moscow and Enschede, he has conducted operas by Handel, Mozart, Verdi, Strauss and others. He has conducted many distinguished Dutch orchestras, including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra and The Hague Philharmonic Orchestra. De Vriend is also a welcome guest internationally and has conducted orchestras in China, Germany, Austria, Italy and France.

The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra

The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra is based in Enschede, in the province of Overijssel. Performing at an international level, as evidenced by its highly acclaimed CDs and invitations for international tours, the orchestra is firmly rooted in society.

Jan Willem de Vriend has been its artistic director and chief conductor since 2006. Under De Vriend's leadership, the orchestra has expanded its repertoire to cover music from four centuries. Its use of period instruments in the Classical repertoire gives the orchestra a distinctive and highly individual character.

The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra performs amongst others in Amsterdam, Utrecht, Enschede, Zwolle and Deventer. In addition, it often works with the Dutch National Touring Opera Company. In its home town Enschede, the orchestra builds on a symphonic tradition of more than 80 years, and it is known as one of the most modern and entrepreneurial orchestras in the Netherlands. Its international partners include the BBC Philharmonic and the Tonkunstler Orchestra.

The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra created a number of ensembles. The orchestra's commitment to expanding its social relevance is also reflected in the large number of projects in which education is a key element.

The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra has made successful tours of the United States, Spain, China and England, and it has performed in such famous venues

as Carnegie Hall in New York and Birmingham Symphony Hall. Its CDs of the complete Beethoven symphonies (for Challenge Classics) and music by Dutch composers such as Julius Röntgen and Jan van Gilse (for the CPO label) were very well received by the international music press.

The orchestra has worked with distinguished conductors, such as its former chief conductor Jaap van Zweden, Vasily Petrenko, Edo de Waart, Hans Vonk, Gerd Albrecht, Marc Soustrot, Eri Klas, Ed Spanjaard, Claus Peter Flor and Tan Dun. Ed Spanjaard will be the orchestra's principle conductor as from the 2017/2018 season.

It also has accompanied many celebrated soloists, including Gidon Kremer, Ronald Brautigam, Natalia Gutman, Charlotte Margiono, Antje Weithaas, Marie- Luise Neunecker, Hélène Grimaud, Robert Holl, Fazil Say, Jean-Yves Thibaudet and Thomas Zehetmair.

The Netherlands Symphony Orchestra is financially supported by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Province of Overijssel and the Municipality of Enschede, as well as annual contributions from sponsors.

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Ypma Piano's-Steinway Center Nederland has made two important contributions to these CD recordings: the immaculate Steinway & Sons concert grand, selected by Hannes Minnaar, and the efforts of their tuner Gerben Bisschop, who has applied his expertise to prepare the historical tuning of the instrument.

All this would not have been possible without the financial support of:
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This High Definition Surround Recording was Produced, Engineered and Edited by Bert van der Wolf of NorthStar Recording Services, using the 'High Quality Musical Surround Mastering' principle. The basis of this recording principle is a realistic and holographic 3 dimensional representation of the musical instruments, voices and recording venue, according to traditional concert practice. For most older music this means a frontal representation of the musical performance, but such that width and depth of the ensemble and acoustic characteristics of the hall do resemble 'real life' as much as possible. Some older compositions, and many contemporary works do specifically ask for placement of musical instruments and voices over the full 360 degrees sound scape, and in these cases the recording is as realistic as possible, within the limits of the 5.1 Surround Sound standard. This requires a very innovative use of all 6 loudspeakers and the use of completely matched, full frequency range loudspeakers for all 5 discrete channels. A complementary sub-woofer, for the ultra low frequencies under 40Hz, is highly recommended to maximally benefit from the sound quality of this recording.

This recording was produced with the use of Sonodore microphones, Avalon Acoustic monitoring, Siltech Mono-Crystal cabling and dCS - & Merging Technologies converters.



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Executive producers: Anne de Jong
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