

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770-1827)

Sonata in D Major, Op. 12, No. 1 (20:51)

- 1 I Allegro con brio (8:28)
- 2 II Tema con variazione (Andante con moto) (7:55)
- 3 III Rondo (Allegro) (4:28)

Coolidge Auditorium, Library of Congress, December 3, 1971

Sonata in E flat Major, Op. 12, No. 3 (18:32)

- 4 I Allegro con spirito (8:31)
- 5 II Adagio con molto espressione (5:47)
- 6 III Rondo (Allegro molto) (4:14)

Coolidge Auditorium, Library of Congress, December 10 and 11, 1970

Sonata in A Major, Op. 47 "Kreutzer" (31:29)

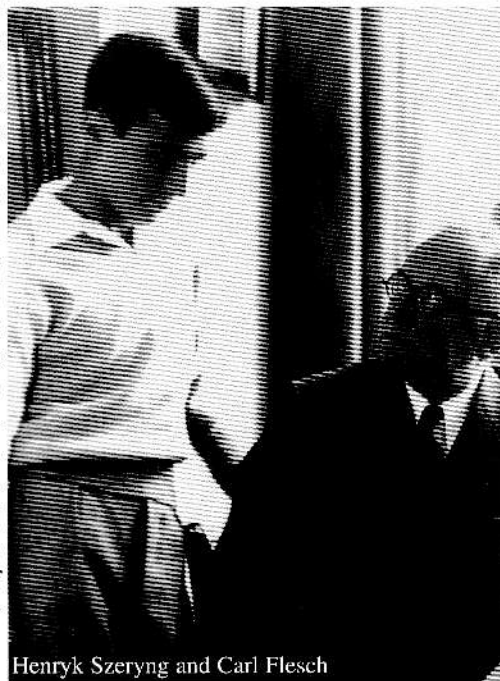
- 7 I Adagio sostenuto-Presto (11:34)
- 8 II Andante con variazioni (13:01)
- 9 III Finale (Presto) (6:54)

Coolidge Auditorium, Library of Congress, December 10 and 11, 1970

Henryk Szeryng, violin; Gary Graffman, piano

During their preparation for the now historic Library of Congress recitals represented on this disc, Gary Graffman showed Henryk Szeryng some early editions of the Beethoven violin sonatas that he happened to own. The two men exchanged a few smiles over the original description of the Op.12 works as 'sonatas for the harpsichord or piano with a violin'. Partly because pianists

have so many Beethoven sonatas of their own, and partly because so many generations of violinists chose to play with accompanists instead of proper partners, the ten sonatas for violin and piano have often been associated with violinists rather than duos. Such artists as Artur Schnabel (who appeared with the violinists Carl Flesch and Bronislaw Huberman) and Adolf Busch (who treated the pianist Rudolf Serkin as an equal) fought for years to establish the sonata recital as a conversation rather than a monologue. As a busy international soloist, Szeryng had perforce to accept the compromise of employing an accompanist for most recitals. But he started his



Henryk Szeryng and Carl Flesch

mature career well, with Artur Rubinstein at the piano, and he made wonderful recordings with Ingrid Haebler. We must be grateful that on three occasions in 1970 and 1971, he was brought together with one of the best American pianists.



Szeryng was the most cosmopolitan violinist of his generation. Born into a well-to-do, cultured family on 22 September 1918 in Chopin's birthplace Zelazowa Wola, near Warsaw, he knew Paderewski and Huberman as friends of his parents. When he was five his mother started teaching him piano and harmony; but at seven he changed to his elder brother's instrument, the violin, taking lessons with Leopold Auer's former assistant Maurice Frenkel. It was Huberman who suggested in 1928 that he should be sent to study with Flesch in Berlin. By 1933 Henryk was touring, but his parents wisely decided that he should study further and in Paris he worked with Gabriel Bouillon for violin and Nadia Boulanger for composition, also coming under the influence of Jacques Thibaud. Eager for knowledge, he was soon speaking seven languages and soaking up the artistic ambience of the French capital. Years later he said: 'Violinists should obtain a good general education,

particularly in the humanities, in history and languages. The study of music should include the sciences of acoustics and mathematics. Their musical education should include harmony, counterpoint, piano, orchestra, opera, etc. A violinist can learn a good deal from singers and from pianists.' He was preaching what he had practised! During the war Szeryng became invaluable to the Polish government in exile as General Sikorski's personal liaison officer. In 1942 he accompanied the general to Mexico to seek asylum for 4,000 Polish refugees. The Mexicans' generous response led to Szeryng's taking their citizenship after the war and teaching at the university in Mexico City. In 1954 Rubinstein suggested that he should resume his career. Szeryng was ready and, helped by the publicity generated by duo concerts and recordings with his fellow Pole, he began what became a brilliant career. He retained his links with Mexico, championing composers such as Chávez and Ponce - when the present writer first heard him more than 40 years ago, he was dazzled with his renderings of Central and South American pieces - and in 1956 became an official Mexican cultural ambassador, travelling on a diplomatic



Gary Graffman, debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra, 1947

passport. In 1970 he became cultural adviser to Mexico's UNESCO delegation in Paris. All this time he carried on a front-rank concert and recording career. And he found time to be a fair pianist, a skill that gave him an exceptional understanding of his duo partners. He would play jazz for his friends after hours; and the violinist Peter Rybar has told how, at their first meeting, Szeryng sat down at the piano and, without any music in front of him, accompanied Rybar in an impromptu performance of the Schumann violin concerto.

Gary Graffman, born in New York on 14 October 1928, grew up with the sound of the violin in his ears, as his father was Auer's pupil and assistant Vladimir Graffman. He duly tried the violin but the piano was his choice and he studied from the age of ten at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia with Isabelle Vengerova. Graduating in 1946, he won the Rachmaninoff Prize and in 1947



(photo: Roy Sgrevens)

Gary Graffman playing 'Old 199' (used on this recording) in the Steinway basement.

made his début with the Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy. In 1948 came his Carnegie Hall début and in 1949 he won the Leventritt Award. He spent 1951 in Europe on a Fulbright Award, then studied privately with Vladimir Horowitz, spending the summers of 1952 and 1953 at the Marlboro summer school in Vermont - where he came under the influence of Serkin. He toured South America in 1955 and the following year returned there, also making his first visits to Britain and the European mainland. For the next quarter of a century he enjoyed the career of a sought-after soloist. He does not recall what brought him and Szeryng together but he remembers their Washington concerts with affection. On Thursday and Friday 10 and 11 December 1970 they played Op. 12 no. 3, the 'Kreutzer' and Brahms's D minor. On Friday 3 December 1971 they played Op. 12 No. 1, Schumann's A minor and Brahms's G major. 'He was one of the greatest violinists of all time,' he says of Szeryng. 'It was a tremendous pleasure. He travelled with two violins, a Strad and a del Gesù, and my wife had to sit backstage cradling whichever one he wasn't using! We rehearsed a lot, more for my sake than his. I'd played everything with my father but never in concert, except for the Brahms D minor - I'd played that a lot.' Graffman soon learnt that punctuality was not one of Szeryng's obsessions: if a rehearsal was scheduled for 4.00 p.m., they were lucky to start within half an hour. 'But there was terrific give and take. It was never "I do it



(photo: Fritz Henle)

Isabelle Vengerova watches 10-year-old Gary Graffman

this way". We fitted together so well that as we were rehearsing, we needed just a raised eyebrow to adapt to each other. He had great control, a wonderful sound and innate good taste. He liked art and good wines and so do I, so we had a lot in common.' Szeryng was worried by only one thing. 'I belong to the Serkin tradition by which you have the lid of the piano wide open when playing with a violinist,' Graffman explains. 'In my opinion you end up playing more softly that way. Henryk was very suspicious but it worked out fine. In fact he ended up calling me Prince - he called Rubinstein King or Emperor, I forget which.'



Szeryng and Graffman give very modern readings of the three Beethoven sonatas, in the sense that, while both men have the old-fashioned virtue of good, even tone production, they do not pull the tempo about or lose the basic pulse in the variation movements. The faster movements give the impression that both of them have infinite resources in reserve. In the 'Kreutzer', the most extrovert and virtuosic of the ten sonatas, it is splendid to hear two players who give each other something to 'play against', while never trying to compete or undermine each other. No wonder that, after the first recital, Irving Lowens of the *Washington Evening Star* drew comparisons with the many evenings at the Coolidge Auditorium that had featured the Busch/Serkin combination. Henryk Szeryng died in Kassel on 3 March 1988, in the midst of a busy tour, and since 1979 Graffman's career has been circumscribed by trouble with his right hand, so the experience of these recitals can never be repeated. Today Gary Graffman is head of his alma mater Curtis, holding the post once filled by Hofmann, Zimbalist and Serkin, and in 1995 he became president in addition. He still plays left-hand repertoire - a number of concertos have been written for him - and has one two-handed warhorse, the rather grim Schnittke piano quintet, which does not over-extend his right hand. And he keeps his sense of humour. 'I tell the quartets that I work with: "If the audience shows signs of having enjoyed the Schnittke, we haven't given a good performance".'

~ Tully Potter

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