

Ludwig van Beethoven

Andrew Rangell, piano

Sonata No. 10 in G Major, Op. 14, No. 2 (15:50)

- 1 Allegro (7:08)
- 2 Andante (4:59)
- 3 Scherzo: Allegro assai (3:43)

Sonata No. 17 in D minor, Op. 31, No. 2 ("Tempest") (24:16)

- 4 Largo; Allegro (9:16)
- 5 Adagio (7:39)
- 6 Allegretto (7:21)

Sonata No. 24 in F sharp, Op. 78 (11:14)

- 7 Adagio cantabile; Allegro, ma non troppo (8:12)
- 8 Allegro assai (3:02)

Sonata No. 9 in E Major, Op. 14, No. 1 (11:16)

- 9 Allegro (4:19)
- 10 Allegretto (3:45)
- 11 Rondo: Allegro comodo (3:12)

Sonata No. 27 in E minor, Op. 90 (16:42)

- 12 Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus mit Empfindung und Ausdruck (6:26)
- 13 Nicht zu geschwind und sehr singbar vorzutragen (10:16)

Sonatas Nos. 9 and 10 (E Major and G Major)

Beethoven's ninth and tenth piano sonatas, the two of Opus 14, follow hard upon a highly impressive group: the first eight! Five of these are especially grand, containing four movements. All are bursting with features (and demands) which could be called revolutionary. Number eight, of course, is the high-profile *Pathétique* – three movements only, but packing a wallop. And so the Opus 14's – modest in scope, genial in disposition – form their own little relaxed island in the tumult of Beethoven's early sonata production. They speak and sing a bit more gently than their older siblings, and enact their games and dramas less strenuously. But lo, their manifold delights and subtleties (so routinely consigned to small inexperienced fingers) make them eminently concert-worthy. Both are three-movement affairs. Neither has a conventional slow movement. Both manifest at times a quartetish style of polyphony, and in fact the E major was arranged, by its composer, for quartet (appearing two years later, differently groomed, and under the alias of F major).

The simple, schematic, almost childlike materials of the first movement of Opus 14, No. 1 are handled with wit, mischief and a deft chromatic touch. (Note, for instance, the droll dissonant clash of passing voice-lines in the second theme.) Unexpected pathos appears at the development's outset. The recap is brought in with surprise bravado. Finally a delicately suspenseful coda (again, with chromatic play) elevates the entire movement in its closing.

Wistful and melancholy, the following *Allegretto* (seemingly a kind of Ländler) finds some consolation in its warm C major trio section. The pianist Wilhelm Kempff commented that "Brahms must have loved this movement for its veiled ambiguity of mood." This ambiguity crystallizes in a short coda which hints at the smiling trio section – but instead draws the curtain closed with solemn pizzi-

cati unisons in E minor.

The finale (*Allegro comodo*) is a buoyant romp in sonata/rondo form, a movement more of frolic and fun than of moment or matter. Thematically it reverts to the innocence and simplicity of the first movement. The concluding cadence, in unison octaves, bursts upon us with so little preparation that it has no time to be as pompous as it might like.

The G major, Op. 14, No. 2, sunny throughout, opens with the most lyrical and linear of themes, whose graceful upbeat figures (assisted by conspiring left hand entrances) mislead the listener as to where the actual downbeat is. (This ambiguity is brilliantly extended in the development section). The whole movement, thematically speaking, possesses a Mozartean sort of grace and felicity. The coda presents a final charming (and Beethovenian) deconstruction of the opening material.

A humble set of variations forms the second movement. The theme, chorded and pointillist, is also pointedly naive. The variations develop this theme hardly at all but decorate it nicely, finally even making it flow – with a sprightly sixteenth-note accompaniment! All this leads to a final stripped-down restatement, in a tiny comic coda whose final chord hits the rapt listener like an exploding cigar.

The finale, a sonata/rondo cum scherzo, sports a breathless parade of segments – its longer and tuneful central episode standing between smaller clusters of more frequently repeated material. The skittish main theme immediately presents a metrical ambiguity as it whizzes past (shades of the first movement) and the fragmented nature of what unfolds keeps the listener continually and happily off balance. The last presentation of the theme is new, anchored by a pedal-point *g*, and with racing triplets. Still we are not prepared for the final tonic punctuation, at the bottom of the keyboard, the cheekiest of throw-away endings!

Sonata No. 17 (D minor)

In 1801 or 1802 Beethoven told a friend that he was not fully satisfied with his earlier piano sonatas and would henceforth seek a “new path”. The recently composed Opus 27 sonatas – both marked “quasi una fantasia” – already provided explicit evidence of Beethoven’s search for new means of internal continuity in his sonatas. The D minor sonata of Opus 31 (Beethoven’s only sonata in that key) is, I think, a yet more fully-realized witness of his “new path.” A darkly hued tone-poem for piano, it consists of three complex fantasia-like movements, integrated into a single tapestry. Burke aptly characterized the work’s aura as “the enchantment of melancholy.” And in many ways (including a particularly coloristic use of piano textures) it prefigures a generation of Romantics to come – while also harkening back to the expressionist fantasies of C. P. E. Bach.

The first movement, in its tension-filled interplay of extremes, represents as radical a re-orientation of sonata form as can be found in any Beethoven sonata up until the transformative ambiguities of Opus 109’s first movement (some 20 years later). Predictable guideposts have been banished. Opposing musics in an ambiguous context are made to collide, interweave, and develop with the high intensity that results from the most scrupulous inner logic: the structure is itself felt to be evolving freshly in the moment. (Yet an underlying sonata form, however willfully obscured, has in fact never been abandoned.)

Two germinal fragments open the piece: first, in a somber questioning tone, a slowly rising arpeggiated figure. Answering, an agitated step-wise response, with expressive syncopations. The movement as a whole is dominated by the headlong and turbulent development of both (arpeggiated and scalar) figures. (These figures, by the way, are also significantly present in both other movements.) The hushed opening music re-appears three times – and in the last of these

a memorable new element is added (in fact at the moment of recapitulation): a veiled and lamenting recitative – enveloped in the haze of a specially indicated, long-held pedal. Floating here in recitative are the same step-wise elements elsewhere heard only at high speed.

The slow movement emerges, like the first, out of an arpeggiated chord – but this time in the reassuring tonic position, rather than in the more ambiguous first inversion of the sonata's very opening chord. Tender and delicate as the first theme is, it is presented in a fragmented way, with shifting registers and textures. Only with the second theme, and its gentle regular left-hand accompaniment do we feel a completely soothing sense of arrival. (In the meantime a muffled drumbeat, a recurrent triplet figure, has sounded a slightly disquieting note.) Lacking a formal development section, this movement is in an abridged sonata form – yet two areas of development remain to deepen the feeling of fantasy. A finely filigreed accompaniment of arpeggiated 32nd notes magically transforms the recapitulation. And finally a richly sculpted coda (itself a species of development-section, however long-deferred) brings the movement to an almost weightless conclusion.

The finale (in sonata-rondo form) is also a fantasy, one of unceasing motion, obsessive repetition and deep anxiety. (In all of these ways it bears resemblance to the closing movement of Mozart's tragic A minor sonata, K. 310. Unlike the Mozart, it ends not with defiance, but with surrender.) Considerable tension is sustained throughout the movement (and rhythmic monotony prevented) by its metrical ambiguities and strategic syncopations, by its wonderful modulatory capacity, and finally by its wide-ranging and affecting use of chromatic harmony.

Sonata No. 24 (F sharp Major)

It is worth saying that apart from his hallowed final sonata (Op. 111), Beethoven's mature two-movement sonatas (Opp. 54, 78, and 90) have not received the attention they deserve. Off-beat, sometimes indirect, they are among his most fascinating creations – and most treasurable.

Dedicated to his friend and one-time pupil Therese von Brunsvik, Op. 78 was especially prized by Beethoven, who once expressed his preference for it over the early C sharp minor sonata (a best-seller then and now). The sheer graciousness of this work tends to conceal its subtlety of construction and the organic connections between movements, embedded everywhere in thematic and figurational material (using the half-step motif so cleverly) and in the dotted rhythms of both movements' themes. A highly original, understated use of keyboard textures – eschewing the more finger-proud brilliance of the *Waldstein* and *Appassionata* – is unerringly expressive. The chosen key of F sharp certainly has something to do with this.

A four bar introduction – calm and almost prayerful, with an F sharp pedal-point – sets a tone of inwardness for the coming gentle allegro. It is a tiny, perfect and indispensable prologue. The allegro, a slender, compact sonata form, is relaxed in character, and it hints of Schubert in its opening theme (think of Schubert's "little" A major sonata). The development section is especially concentrated and compressed. But Beethoven at the movement's end supplies a graceful first ending, in furtherance of his (highly unusual) directive: to reprise the entire development and recapitulation!

Sparkling and crystalline in texture, a scherzo in mood, the concluding allegro vivace seems to cast off all restraint with its mix of effervescence, wit, and surprise. Its coda is calming yet suspenseful, supplying finally a wonderfully

explosive affirmation. Beethoven did not compose a more fresh, radiant, and classically perfect sonata than this small one.

Sonata No. 27 (E minor)

Somewhat larger than Op. 78, Op. 90 can also be said to have a wider emotional range. Its first movement contains persistent questions and ambiguities unthinkable in Opus 78. The songful spun-out rondo movement is profoundly Schubertian in its slow unfolding. The German language tempo indications translate thus:

- I. With liveliness, and always with feeling and expression
- II. Not too quickly, and very songfully.

The first movement exposition is disjunct and troubled, searching for resolution while insistently developing the repeated-note figure of its opening chords. This figure is taken much further in a free and unpredictable development section which concludes with a rather astonishing passage: a kind of systematic, canonic examination of a descending triad motif (also from the movement's opening) using a succession of augmentations and diminutions – to seemingly stumble, at last, into the recapitulation! This kind of abstraction is a vivid reminder that we are on the verge of Beethoven's "late" period. The movement ends more in resignation than resolution.

The gentle radiant landscape of the rondo dispels all shadows. We hear its expansive theme very often, and in its penultimate statement irresistibly in the tenor voice. Beethoven's endgame – a long approach to the end of a long movement – is remarkably calibrated, a dwindling of energy, but in fits and starts. Most personal and unusual – as the texture thins to nothingness – is the tiny accelerando found in the last half-dozen bars. A final, smiling, exhalation.

Born in Chicago and raised in Colorado, **Andrew Rangell** is a graduate of the Juilliard School, earning a doctoral degree in piano under Beveridge Webster. He made his New York debut as winner of the Malraux Award of the Concert Artists Guild and has since performed throughout the United States, Europe and Israel. From 1977 to 1985 he was resident artist and principal piano instructor at Dartmouth College, and a frequent guest with many of New England's foremost performing groups and festivals. Mr. Rangell's recital repertoire has reflected a breadth of interest and affinity. From 1984 to 1985, he gave a five-concert series of Bach programs at Boston's Gardner Museum which included keyboard concertos, the Six Partitas and the *Goldberg Variations*. His many New York recitals have included works from all periods, from Orlando Gibbons and Johann Froberger to Luciano Berio, Carl Nielsen, Arnold Schoenberg, George Enescu, and the two epic Sonatas of Charles Ives. Mr. Rangell's gifts as an extraordinary interpreter of Beethoven received high acclaim during three successive seasons (1986-89) devoted to the performance, in a seven-concert sequence, of the thirty-two Beethoven piano sonatas. This period saw ten traversals of the complete cycle (including Boston presentations at both Sanders Theater and Jordan Hall,



both Sanders Theater and Jordan Hall, and at New York's 92nd Street Y) as well as a debut at Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival and the award of an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Of Mr. Rangell's most recent New York recital, Charles Michener of the *New York Observer* wrote: "For me, the great discovery of the series has been Andrew Rangell . . . Mr. Rangell is an individualist. And such was his intensity—like the late Glenn Gould, he seemed to be propelled by an irresistible force—that the listener's attention was riveted to the music."

Andrew Rangell's extensive discography on the Dorian label includes Bach's Goldberg Variations, Beethoven's final five sonatas, two diverse collections entitled "A Recital of Intimate Works" (Vol. I & II), and a pairing of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* and Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*. A two-disc set of Bach's six Partitas released in November, 2001 was cited in both *The Boston Globe* and *Boston Phoenix* as one of the 'Best recordings of 2001.' Mr. Rangell's performances of the complete Chopin *Mazurkas* joined the Dorian catalogue in 2003 and were characterized, in *Gramophone*, as "taking the humble mazurka to new heights of variety and sophistication."

1998-99 marked Andrew Rangell's first active concert season following a long hiatus due to a serious hand injury. Since that time he has steadily reclaimed and expanded his performance and recording career. Mr. Rangell was honored to perform a solo recital in the 2003 Venice "Biennale," Italy's foremost contemporary music festival. In 2006 Mr. Rangell's children's book, *Sammy Snake's Lucky Day*, will be published in Paris.

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~ Andrew Rangell

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