

# LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

(1770-1827)

## SONATA No. 11 IN B-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 22 (26:29)

- |   |      |                              |        |
|---|------|------------------------------|--------|
| 1 | I.   | ALLEGRO CON BRIO             | (7:01) |
| 2 | II.  | ADAGIO CON MOLTO ESPRESSIONE | 9:02   |
| 3 | III. | MENUETTO                     | (3:34) |
| 4 | IV.  | RONDO: ALLEGRETTO            | (6:52) |

## SONATA No. 13 IN E-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 27, NO. 1 (17:28)

- |   |      |                        |        |
|---|------|------------------------|--------|
| 5 | I.   | ANDANTE                | (6:03) |
| 6 | II.  | ALLEGRO MOLTO VIVACE   | (1:59) |
| 7 | III. | ADAGIO CON ESPRESSIONE | (3:27) |
| 8 | IV.  | ALLEGRO VIVACE (5:59)  |        |

## SONATA No. 31 IN A-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 110 (19:16)

- |    |      |                                     |         |
|----|------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| 9  | I.   | MODERATO CANTABILE MOLTO ESPRESSIVO | (6:11)  |
| 10 | II.  | ALLEGRO MOLTO                       | (2:22)  |
| 11 | III. | ADAGIO, MA NON TROPPO               | (10:43) |

GARRICK OHLSSON, PIANO



## "BEETHOVEN'S MUSIC IS MUSIC ABOUT MUSIC."

— F.W. NIETZSCHE, 1878

Sonatas lacking nicknames such as *Pathétique*, *Appassionata*, *Moonlight* or *Tempest* contain all their meanings in themselves. Known only as the word "sonata" and a key or an opus number, they refer to nothing outside themselves nor do they conjure emotional connections with the world of daily life. Yet, in the abstraction of form filled with motifs, harmonies, textures, rhythms and controlled energy affecting every second of their duration, nameless sonatas have proven to be enduring and endearing components of the listening experience. Whether in a recital hall or one's home: they are "music about music."

From the nib of Ludwig van Beethoven's pen came more than two dozen sonatas without equal – in themselves providing complete sets of feelings as their notes pass in review. This was a skill that the composer developed while in his twenties, one that astonished his former teacher Joseph Haydn before challenging Vienna's musical elite and, in just three decades more of growth, sweeping across the world. "Sonata" became synonymous with Beethoven's name, a standard of musical excellence to be met by every self-respecting pianist, amateur and professional. Some of his early sonatas and a few of the middle ones – at least this movement or that – imposed few obstacles to a reasonable level of performance. However, if truth be known, the majority stymied all but the most developed fingers *and* minds. They were hard to play and hard to interpret. They still are. When someone succeeds, the results take

us into the inner world of Beethoven's musical thought and we sense the reward that comes with understanding. Upon reflection, listeners discover that each sonata has the power to strengthen their relationship with one of history's most esteemed composers.

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**Sonata No. 11 in B-Flat Major, Op. 22** sprang into existence just as the 19<sup>th</sup> century was being born from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>. In some ways, it bids the old century a hearty farewell, for its proliferate materials and keyboard gestures are those of the preceding age – short motives, rolling arpeggios and plain scales. Beethoven at thirty, however, crafted something new with this work. The opening gesture of the *Allegro con brio* (Fast, with brilliance) – a cute three-beat burble that last about two seconds – is used sixteen times in twelve measures with ingratiating effect. This is fun à la Clementi (an older-generation composer of similarly fingery sonatas). Then, almost before we know it, a flurry of activity sweeps the ear to the expected new key where three more motives appear in succession. A scale in loud octaves moves up and down the keyboard to signal this Exposition's end and, after the obligatory repeat of it all, to prepare for the Development which is based almost entirely on the energetic opening and closing gestures. Everything presented initially is brought back in so regular a fashion and so compactly that it creates the expectation that there must be more – and there is: an *Adagio con molto espressione* (Broadly, with much expression).

If parts of his first movement seemed rather like reductions for the keyboard of string quartet writing and other parts like orchestra writing, Beethoven's second movement – except for three pianistically pearly runs in the treble – also seems to come to life slightly beyond the instrument in the realm of singing, while being perfectly playable on it. As scholar Paul Bekker observed, this is *music that happened to be set down for the piano... not music necessarily imagined in pianistic terms. Beethoven did not say: "Here is a piano, let's write something for it," he said: "I must write this music: the piano will do very well for it."* In that observation perhaps lies the key to understanding Beethoven's originality here as the simple sonata form plays out at its stately pace.

The Sonata is completed by two more movements – a subtle *Menuetto* (with its inclement, minor-key *Trio*) whose opening uses the *Adagio's* first motive seven times before giving way to a passage suggesting measured drum-rolls, and an elegant *Rondo: Allegretto*. Springtime freshness pervades the flow of this finale despite its materials being only those basic scales and arpeggios that informed the first movement. Beethoven's imagination is shown to have no peer in this efflorescence of simple elements treated with unending variety and set off from one another by syncopations, counterpoints and cross rhythms – yet unified from first to last.

When the work was published in 1802, it bore a dedication to Beethoven's early patron, Count Johann Georg von Browne, who

once gave Beethoven a horse and whom the composer called the "first Maecenas of his Muse."

**Sonata No. 13 in E-flat Major, Op. 27 no. 1, *Sonata quasi una Fantasia*** marked a departure by Beethoven from the rigors of sonata form, as the original title {in italics} indicates – a sonata in the style of a fantasy. Why this experiment was made is unknown, but informed speculation has it that Beethoven was picking up the scent left by his older contemporaries Clementi and Dussek, whose recent sonatas had treated form more freely than ever. Begun in 1800 and completed the following year, Beethoven published this work in 1802 with a dedication to the Princess Josephine von Liechtenstein (whom he slapped a year or so later after she missed notes in a performance of his *Tempest* Sonata).

Beginning with an *Andante* of gentle persuasion, Beethoven sidesteps quietly away - twice from his home key to C Major, a fact that means nothing particular until the new key is made the base from which the composer launches a salvo, *Allegro*, of extroverted, whirling figures before resuming his *Andante* in E-flat as if nothing had happened. Surely humor lies at the bottom of such shenanigans, for these procedures have about them none of the musical weight expected from a sonata's first movement nor is any of the material developed. Strange. However, there is no time to ruminate about the

movement's mystery because the score instructs its performer *Attacca subito l'Allegro*, suddenly to begin the next movement.

Marked *Allegro molto vivace* (Fast, very lively), this rushed and hushed music also opposes two keys - C minor and A-flat Major - but in the character of a scherzo-trio-scherzo (although Beethoven does not deem it so). As the content is led to a breathless halt, another instruction - *Attacca subito l'Adagio* - propels the performer into the following movement marked *Adagio con espressione* (Broadly, with expression). The mood is now one of elegiac poetry set in the key of the middle of the previous movement, A-flat. Little respite is provided by this page's undeniable beauty because Beethoven leaves it to "attack" his finale, *Allegro vivace*. Rambunctiously exuberant, the music races along from idea to idea and back, then to another idea and back as Beethoven combines rondo form with sonata form for a marvelously wrought conclusion that even finds time to pause in remembrance of the preceding *Adagio* before flying off, *Presto*, to its end.

Fantasy is everywhere in this music, as pianist Kenneth Drake puts it, like a *safety valve of human consciousness, the drawing board of the architect, the curiosity of the inventor, the raptus of the composer. Beethoven seems to have used the term quasi una fantasia as an explanation for the departure from conventional form - beginning with a slow movement, joining movements, including a cyclic element - not to escape the restraint of the rational but to unify the sonata through rational means.*

The year 1823 found Beethoven, after nearly two year's effort, ready to publish a new work for the piano, the **Sonata No. 31 in A-flat Major, Op. 110**. He intended to dedicate it to Antonia Brentano, but his publishers forgot their instructions and the work appeared with no dedication. Instead, the lady, whom many believe was Beethoven's unnamed "immortal beloved," received the dedication of the London edition of the last sonata Beethoven was to write for the piano, the towering masterpiece in C-minor, Op. 111, and she discovered herself to be as well the dedicatee of the colossal *Diabelli Variations*, Op. 120.

Beethoven's penultimate Sonata is technically superb, its sonorities euphonious, its melodic content direct and accessible. Throughout the score, a wealth of interpretive indications spur the performer to high levels of subtlety. The first movement, designated as *Moderato cantabile molto espressivo* (Moderately, very expressively song-like), like the third, *Adagio, ma non troppo* (Broadly, but not too much so - a "Song of Lament"), is intensely human, its rising lines suggesting hopeful anticipation in contrast to the third movement's falling lines and their prevailing sadness.

Between these occurs a powerful movement marked *Allegro molto* (Very quick). Its rhythm is ambiguous, complex, and the effect

unsettling. Though few notes are present, this movement is rich in keyboard tone, wide in range, asymmetrical in details, and ingenious in its placement of structural silences.

The third movement spans only 26 bars but contains a world of knowledge about human feeling captured in tones known only to Beethoven. After a brief transition, a *Recitativo* speaks to us wordlessly but tellingly before Beethoven spins out his unique *Arioso dolente* (Song of lament) in A-flat minor. With no interruption, the gentle voice of a *Fuga: Allegro ma non troppo* (Fugue: Fast but not too much so) in A-flat Major is raised and developed in masterly fashion, brought to a climax, then submerged temporarily by the lament's exhausted return. It is a stroke of genius which mesmerizes the listener and prepares him to accept the fugal development, this time treating the same subject in inversion. The Coda restates the fugal subject as a 25-bar-long major-key *melody* enriched by full chords and a luxuriant accompaniment. With a flourish as carefully controlled as everything else in the Sonata, the great masterpiece ends - as the sweep of five full octaves is caught by the pedal and proclaimed victoriously.

- FRANK COOPER

*Frank Cooper, an authority on music of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, teaches at the New World School of the Arts in Miami and at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida.*



Since his triumph as winner of the 1970 Chopin International Piano Competition, pianist **Garrick Ohlsson** has established himself worldwide as a musician of magisterial interpretive and technical prowess. Although he has long been regarded as one of the world's leading Chopin exponents, Mr. Ohlsson commands an enormous repertoire, which ranges over the entire piano literature. A student of the late Claudio Arrau, Mr. Ohlsson has come to be noted for his masterly performances of the works of Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert, as well as the Romantic repertoire. His concerto repertoire alone is unusually wide and eclectic-- ranging from Haydn and Mozart to works of the 21<sup>st</sup> century-- and to date he has at his command some 80 concertos, which he regularly performs with the world's leading orchestras. A musician of commanding versatility, Mr. Ohlsson is also a consummate chamber pianist. He has collaborated with many of the leading chamber groups of our time, including the Cleveland, Emerson, Takács and Tokyo String Quartets, and with violinist Jorja Fleezanis and cellist Michael Grebanier, he is a founding member of the San Francisco-based FOG Trio.

A prolific recording artist, Mr. Ohlsson can be heard on the RCA Victor Red Seal, Angel, Bridge, BMG, Delos, Hänssler, Nonesuch, Telarc, and Virgin Classics labels. For Bridge Records, he has recorded the following: Bach: *Goldberg Variations*, BWV 988; Handel: Suite No. 2, HWV 427; (BRIDGE 9193); Beethoven Sonatas, Vol. 1: Op. 7, Op. 78, Op. 101; (BRIDGE 9198); Beethoven Sonatas, Vol. 2: Op. 2,

No. 2, Op. 81, Op. 111; (BRIDGE 9201); Beethoven Sonatas, Vol. 3: Op. 2, No. 3, Op. 14, No. 1, Op. 14, No. 2, Op. 79; (BRIDGE 9207); Beethoven Sonatas, Vol. 4: Op. 26, Op. 28, Op. 90; (BRIDGE 9249); Beethoven Sonatas, Vol. 5: Op. 13, Op. 27, No. 2, Op. 53; (BRIDGE 9250); Charles Wuorinen: Music for Violin and Piano (with Benjamin Hudson) (BRIDGE 9008); Justin Dello Joio: Two Concert Etudes, Sonata (BRIDGE 9220).

A native of White Plains, N.Y., Mr. Ohlsson began his piano studies at the age of 8. He attended the Westchester Conservatory of Music and at age 13 entered the Juilliard School. His musical development has been influenced by a succession of distinguished teachers, most notably Claudio Arrau, Olga Barabini, Tom Lishman, Sascha Gorodnitzki, Rosina Lhévinne, and Irma Wolpe. Although he won First Prizes at the 1966 Busoni Competition in Italy and the 1968 Montréal Piano Competition, it was his 1970 triumph in the Chopin Competition in Warsaw, where he won the Gold Medal, that brought him worldwide recognition. Mr. Ohlsson was awarded Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Prize in 1994 and received the 1998 University Musical Society Distinguished Artist Award in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Most recently, Mr. Ohlsson won in the "Best Solo Performance" category of the 2008 Grammy Awards for his "Beethoven Sonatas, Vol. 3" (BRIDGE 9207). That, and the present disc, are part of his Complete Beethoven Sonata cycle, which is being issued by Bridge in 2008 and 2009.



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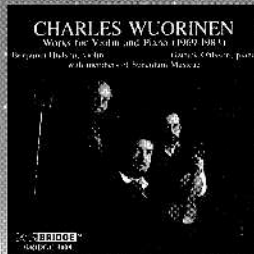
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