

— BEETHOVEN 32 —

貝多芬

鋼琴奏鳴曲全集

The 32 Sonatas of Beethoven (2)

David Gwilt



Most people know, or know of, the “Pathétique” sonata of Beethoven, in the same way as they know, or know of, the “Eroica”, “Pastoral” and the Ninth Symphonies. If they are interested in fine music then they will also be acquainted with the titles “Les Adieux”, “Waldstein” and “Hammerklavier”. These are piano sonatas by Beethoven that stand out above the horizon of the whole 32 by virtue of a character that causes them to stick in the memory. The “Pathétique” is a work that brilliantly encapsulates the pathetic character, while the story behind “Les Adieux” – the departure from, absence from and return to Vienna of a great friend and patron – captures the imagination,

and the “Waldstein” impresses by its sheer size and brilliance and the “Hammerklavier” is so almost impossibly imposing that it makes its presence felt even if it is never actually heard.

But each of the other 28 sonatas is equally special in its own way, and a journey that encompasses all 32 brings an incredible range of expressions, characters, emotions and moods. In fact Beethoven was only 12 years old when he produced his first three sonatas, published in 1783. The product of youth, these three works are most

often not included in performances of the “complete” piano sonatas, which number 32 counting from the three Opus 2 sonatas of 1795. Started ten years after the earlier works, these show a young man of exceptional gifts and with exceptional things to say.

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A large, elegant, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ludwig van Beethoven". The script is fluid and characteristic of the late 18th or early 19th century.

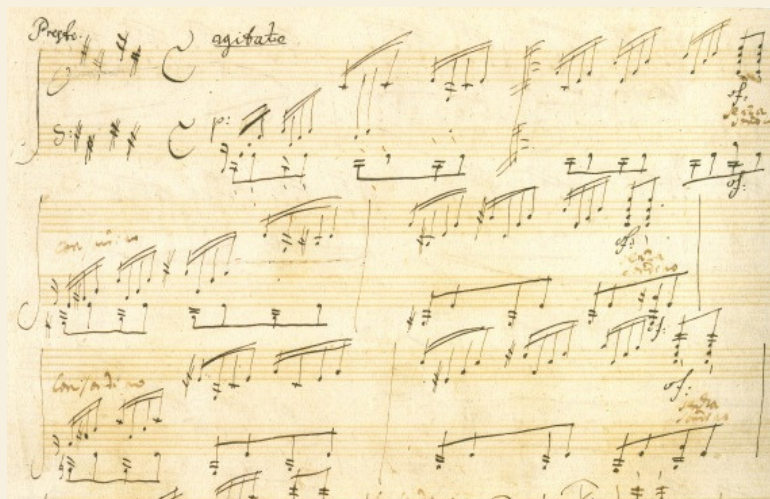
He had come to Vienna in 1792 to study with Haydn, later saying that he learned nothing from him. Whether free composition was discussed at all is not known, but certainly Haydn gave him a course in counterpoint and when he left for London recommended the young composer to Albrechtsberger, the counterpoint expert, for further instruction. Perhaps the seeds of his interest in fugue were sown at this time.

The sonatas of Opus 2 already show several different aspects of Beethoven’s character – tempestuous, lyrical, sunny and humorous, and virtuoso and forceful in works that see the composer’s powers growing before ones eyes and ears. On his arrival in Vienna, Beethoven had quickly made a name for himself as an exceptional pianist, and no doubt he wrote many of his works for piano with the intention of performing them himself. Certainly he played these first three at a private concert in the house of Prince Lichnowsky with the dedicatee, Haydn, present.

The piano sonatas earned Beethoven varying amounts. Publishers would agree a fee for publishing them, and some of the sonatas were commissioned, so that they would be paid for twice. Almost all of them are dedicated to someone – often a patron or a talented pupil – and this could lead to a thank you gift also. Beethoven often attempted to have his works published in different places simultaneously, thus receiving two fees for the same work. There being no such thing as copyright protection in those days it was imperative to make the most of every financial opportunity. People who commissioned a work would have the sole right to its use for six months to a year, after which it could be published. The composer received no royalties – only the initial down payment from the publisher.

Between 1795 and 1805 Beethoven wrote 23 piano sonatas, including most of the famous ones – the “Pathétique”, the “Moonlight”, the “Waldstein” and the “Apassionata”, and then between 1809 and 1822 only nine. In the late 1790s and early 1800s signs of his approaching deafness were becoming more noticeable,

and in 1814 he gave his last performance, apart from some accompanying, as a pianist, in his “Archduke” Piano Trio. Perhaps this encroaching deafness in part accounts for the drop in number of works for the piano, but the last nine contain extraordinary music, including the final five in his “late” style. The last four were composed after he had become completely deaf, yet they show



Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata

an inspired use of the instrument. Perhaps deafness served to sharpen the inner ear, which is what composers in any case rely on. The sounds of musical instruments in the mind are just as clear as if one were hearing them with the outer ear, and yet it does seem in certain passages in these last sonatas that Beethoven had imagined a piano of the future, an ideal instrument to cope with his subtle textures. During Beethoven's time significant advances were made in the building of pianos – increasing the range and improving the quality of sound.

In early 1818 the London firm of Broadwood sent Beethoven a beautiful grand piano. It arrived as he was in the middle of composing the “Hammerklavier” sonata, and, even though he could hardly hear it, it became a favourite possession during the rest of his life.