

University of Washington
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School of Music

presents a Faculty Recital:

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Robert Davidovici, *violin*
and
Craig Sheppard, *piano*

perform

The Sonatas for Violin and Piano

by

Ludwig van Beethoven

December 16, 1770 - March 27, 1827

A Complete Cycle in Three Concerts
during the 1998-1999 Season

[November 1, 1998
Nos. 1-5]

January 31, 1999
Nos. 6-8

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Nos. 9-10

The Sonatas for Violin and Piano

by Ludwig van Beethoven

CD 13,318
13,319

November 1, 1998

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DAT 13,317
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DAT 15
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CD 1 [1] intro remarks - Davidovici (2:10)

[2] Number One (21:57)
 Allegro con brio
 Andante con moto (Theme and Variations)
 Allegro

2

[3] Number Two (17:31)
 Allegro vivace
 Andante piuttosto allegretto
 Allegro piacevole

3

[4] Number Three (20:38)
 Allegro con spirito
 Adagio con molta espressione
 Allegro molto

4
2dB

INTERMISSION

CD 2 [1] Number Four (16:29)
 Presto
 Andante scherzoso più allegretto
 Allegro molto

5

[2] Number Five (24:35)
 Allegro
 Adagio molto espressivo
 Scherzo: Allegro molto
 Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

6

Early in the 20th century, the French composer and pedagogue Vincent d'Indy (1851-1931) divided the works of Ludwig van Beethoven into three principal groups, corresponding to stages in his artistic development. At the time, d'Indy called them periods of imitation, externalization, and reflection. We have come to think of them, respectively, as Beethoven's early, middle, and late periods. Such labels provide a convenient cubbyhole for positioning Beethoven's compositions. They can be helpful to listeners seeking broader stylistic or philosophical connections between different works.

At the same time, such categorization can be misleading. Beethoven's artistic growth was a continuous, evolutionary process. He did not wake up one morning and announce: "I've completed my early period and am now embarked upon my middle period. Henceforth all my major works will be in heroic style, until further notice." Inevitably there are gray areas, transitional works that display overlapping characteristics among these purported three styles.

Eight of Beethoven's ten violin sonatas were composed by 1802 and fall into Beethoven's early period. Only the "Kreutzer" sonata (Opus 47, also in A-major) and the Sonata in G, Opus 96 (1812, revised 1815) can even be considered middle period compositions. By comparison, seven of the nine symphonies are middle-period works. By 1803, Beethoven's Second Symphony received its first performance, and he had composed his Third, the *Eroica*. The Third Symphony was not premiered until in 1805, and six additional symphonies lay in the future. The tenth and final Violin Sonata, Opus 96 in G, on the other hand, stands apart from its siblings: Composed in 1812 and probably revised in 1815. Thus these ten sonatas do not provide the complete chronological overview of Beethoven's compositional development that one might derive from a thorough consideration of the complete symphonies, or piano sonatas, or string quartets.

What they do provide is an extraordinary in-depth view of a genius at work for the first two-thirds of his career. As a youth in Bonn, Beethoven played violin as well as piano. After his arrival in Vienna in 1792, he continued violin study for a while, though of course he rapidly became established as a keyboard virtuoso. Consequently his violin writing is idiomatic and fluid. Beethoven's violin sonatas reflect his comfort level with the medium of violin and piano. The treatment of the piano as a virtuoso instrument, the exchange of melodic material between the two players, the depth and variety of slow movements, and the command of formal structure: All these elements are richly fertilized by Beethoven's imagination. The process of expansion and growth is a joy to perceive, for Beethoven was already a secure master when he wrote his first violin sonatas.

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Beethoven composed his first three violin sonatas in 1797 and 1799, publishing them in Vienna in 1799 as Opus 12. They are thus products of the high classic era, rather than the early romantic period. He dedicated his Opus 12 sonatas to Antonio Salieri, the opera composer and imperial *Kapellmeister*, with whom he studied dramatic and vocal composition, probably starting in 1798. Their relationship later became strained, but at this point it was evidently cordial. Salieri's influence may account for the vocal character of the melodies, particularly those of each sonata's slow movement.

Early critics in the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, an influential music journal, dismissed the Opus 12 sonatas as "a forced attempt at strange modulations, an aversion to the conventional key relationships, a piling up of difficulty upon difficulty." Such criticism seems far-fetched to ears listening on the cusp of the 21st century.

The first movement of the **D-major sonata**, Opus 12, No. 1 is forthright enough: based on a unison fanfare built on D-major triads. The development section begins with a startling modulation to F major that is representative of the daring key changes Beethoven would continue to explore. The second movement is a fine set of variations (actually, double variations) in A-major that demonstrates how thoroughly he had mastered variation technique, even this early in his career. The finale is a bouncy and cheerful rondo in 6/8. Beethoven's restriction to three movements was unusual during a period when he favored imposing four movement structures particularly in the piano sonatas.

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Beethoven's A-major Sonata, Opus 12, No. 2 is among the least frequently performed of his ten violin sonatas. Max Rostal, the Austrian-born English violinist and scholar who edited the favored edition of the Beethoven Violin Sonatas, has written:

"Not everything in music needs to be philosophical, dramatic or deeply serious. Gaiety, light-heartedness and youthful freshness have their place, too, and anyone who recognizes and enjoys the lovely, unburdened character of this Sonata and can perform it accordingly will do justice to this charming work."

His imaginative ideas come across with striking freshness because this work is so rarely performed. More 18th-century *galant* style than heroic or dramatic, the A-major sonata is full of charm. A true duet, it de-emphasizes virtuosity on the part of both pianist and violinist (although its runs in parallel thirds are exceptionally difficult to play evenly!). By 19th-century standards, the violin's role is more accompanying; in all three movements the pianist announces the principal thematic material, followed by a restatement from the violin. During the 18th-century, this was conventional procedure.

Beethoven's music is uncharacteristically lyrical and melodious. His opening *Allegro vivace* is downright flirtatious, an exuberant romp in rollicking 6/8 time that fairly sparkles with high spirits. Even the slow movement, curiously marked *Andante più tosto Allegretto* [Andante almost like an Allegretto], does not darken the cheery mood with storm clouds. At worst it is more like high overcast. The Sonata closes with a gentle rondo (marked "*piacèvole*," or pleasant, agreeable, a highly unusual marking in Beethoven's music). Its persuasive, almost beseeching character is entirely in keeping with its companion movements, underscoring the sense of intimacy in this sonata. That Beethoven's music is also crafted in a highly skilled manner is our additional bonus.

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We associate Beethoven with drama: A demand for attention that exclaims, "Notice me! I'm important!" The E-flat major sonata, Opus 12, No. 3, utters that imperative in no uncertain terms. By far the flashiest of the three Opus 12 sonatas, it features dazzling runs for the piano and dramatic flourishes in both outer movements. Whereas the first sonata is assertive and fanfare-like and the second lyrical and more gentle, the third is bold, aggressive, and highly virtuosic.

Beethoven's *Allegro con spirito* puts its cards on the table with triplet and sextuplet arpeggios, sixteenth-note passage work for both instruments, and the sudden dynamic changes that were already a Beethoven hallmark in the late 1790s. E-flat major is an heroic key for him. Although this sonata precedes the most famous heroic works—The *Eroica* Symphony, the *Emperor* Concerto, the *Les Adieux* piano sonata—the early heroism of Ludwig van Beethoven, piano virtuoso, is much in evidence.

The slow movement, set in the surprising key of C major, bears the tempo marking *Adagio con molta espressione*, making it the only real slow movement of the set. The variations of the D-major sonata are rich with passage work alternately delicate and dramatic, and the slow movement of the A-major sonata is in moderate tempo. The richly embellished piano part of this E-flat work recalls some of the late Haydn slow movements, but the songful depth of the violin line is pure Beethoven, achieving a depth often found in his early piano sonatas, but only rarely in his chamber music from the same years. The sonata concludes with a lively rondo that is a minefield of sudden dynamic changes. They add humor and definition to the finale, as well as musical challenge.

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Only two years elapsed between the completion of the Opus 12 sonatas and the *Sonata No. 4 in a-minor, Opus 23*. It doesn't sound like a long time, but Beethoven was undergoing a change in style. It is as if the prospect of a new century emboldened him to wander further afield from the high classic models in which he had

been educated. Moreover, during the intervening two years he had completed his first string quartets and his first symphony, both of which were important compositional milestones. Beethoven's career and reputation were growing. He enjoyed enormous success with his Septet, Opus 20, which became some of the most popular music in Vienna. His new-found confidence is evident in the fourth and fifth violin sonatas, which are rarely played together but must be considered companion pieces.

It seems curious that this sonata has never approached the overwhelming popularity of its companion sonata, the "Spring," Opus 24, for the a-minor sonata has drama, drive, passion, and one of Beethoven's most engaging slow movements. Nothing in this sonata's outer movements recalls the *galant*, post-Haydnesque style of the Opus 12 sonatas. Instead, Beethoven seems to foretell his own heroic phase. The opening *Presto* is a vigorous *tarantella* that rushes forward, always seeming to totter at the edge of control. The texture is unusually contrapuntal for early Beethoven, weaving intricate three-part patterns with great skill and narrative success.

The slow movement bears another unique tempo marking: *Andante scherzoso più Allegretto* (Moderate "walking" speed in a playful manner, more like an *Allegretto*). What was it about these violin sonatas that brought out the fanciful side of Beethoven's imagination? We cannot fault him for not explaining what he sought! This time, he gives us a modified sonata form whose opening piano statement features silences that invite response and commentary from the violin; both are forthcoming. The second theme is developed as a *fugato*, subtly echoing the contrapuntal emphasis in the first movement.

Returning to a-minor for the finale, Beethoven recaptures the headlong, breathless momentum of the opening movement. At its most basic level, this is a rondo. But with such suspense! The music maximizes drama through *fermatas*, momentary switches to *adagio* tempo, and deceptive passages in long notes (half notes and whole notes) that seem on the verge of exploding with tension.

Opp. 23 and 24 were conceived as a pair; both are dedicated to Beethoven's patron Count Moritz von Fries, a Viennese banker and arts patron. Both were composed in 1800-01, and were initially published as Opus 23, Nos. 1 and 2; however, a publisher's error in the violin part necessitated re-engraving, and the second sonata was reissued independently as the *Sonata No. 5 in F, Opus 24*, subsequently acquiring the subtitle "Spring." It is vastly different in character from the a-minor sonata, a fact that argues in favor of its partnership with that work. Beethoven often coupled like works that were strikingly different in content and mood.

The Opus 24 sonata is one of only two Beethoven violin sonatas in four movements. Its length feels spacious and untroubled. The nickname "Spring" derives both from the music's lyrical quality and setting in the pastoral key of F-major, and from the sense of limitless optimism that seems to characterize this amiable work. This is a beauti-

fully proportioned and even-tempered sonata. Its first movement provides a double exposition of each subject, with both players getting a stab at the new musical ideas as they appear. This technique emphasizes the equal partnership between the instruments.

The slow movement is as Mozartean as Beethoven gets: aria-like, in five sections. Beethoven's humor and rhythmic imagination shine forth in the sprightly scherzo. His finale is the most adventuresome of the four movements, keeping our ears engaged as it wanders into unexpected keys.

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The three sonatas published as Opus 30 were composed in 1802, a time when Beethoven had lifted one foot out of the 18th century and set his sights on exploring the uncharted territory ahead. Nevertheless, the formal rigors of high classical style remain much in evidence in these works. The title page of the first edition still announced *Trois Sonates pour le Pianoforte avec l'accompagnement d'un Violon*—Three Piano Sonatas with Violin Accompaniment. The concept seems odd to us, because in our musical culture we tend to think of the pianist as the accompanist. Beethoven and his publisher were adhering to the convention of the day in thus presenting these works. His violin part is certainly more than obbligato, and an integral part of the musical fabric. The Opus 30 title page is an anachronism that serves as a reminder: Piano and violin are equal partners in this music, requiring commensurate musicianship, technique, and sensitivity to ensemble playing.

Like its A-major sibling in Opus 12, the **A-major sonata of Opus 30** is a sleeper among the Beethoven violin sonatas, slipping unnoticed past most music lovers. And what a loss! For this is music of tenderness and gentility, humor and compassion. In short, it reveals a side of Beethoven that we do not often see and, indeed, may not even recognize exists. This Beethoven is serene, at peace with his world, even sentimental at moments. Although perhaps technically less demanding than the other two sonatas in this set, it does have flashes of brilliance, and requires both sensitivity and grace to perform.

Beethoven entrusts the violin with the long line of the slow movement theme, subtly echoing the dotted rhythms of the piano's gentle accompaniment in later themes. This **Adagio molto espressivo** shows us the operatic Beethoven, with the soprano line supported by a delicate yet colorful 'orchestra.' Some of the runs foretell the elaborate embroidery of Chopin nocturnes. An ethereal, tender quality pervades this lovely movement.

The last movement is a set of variations that was initially intended as a finale for the Kreutzer sonata (also in A major). Beethoven rejected that idea after opting for variations in the Kreutzer slow movement instead. The theme is Schubertian and the tempo relaxed, in keeping with the balance of the sonata. The variations, however,

are characteristic: The first one featuring piano, the second violin, and the balance offering a more even distribution of material. Brilliant left hand triplets in Variation III attest to Beethoven's continued prowess as a keyboard artist; his *minore* variation (V) is interrupted by a delicious *adagio* pause. With a key signature change to 6/8 for the last variation, Beethoven signals a brief return to out-and-out virtuosity, concluding the sonata with a brilliant flourish.

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Beethoven's **C-minor Violin Sonata Opus 30, No. 2**, has never acquired a nickname, perhaps because with Beethoven the key of c-minor speaks so forcefully. Abram Loft has written:

"Chamber music is sometimes a relaxing experience, at least after the fact. This work is not relaxing, and it should take a conscious effort on the part of the players and the listeners to unwind after hearing this piece."

Opus 30, No. 2 is a high-spirited, gripping piece, both passionate and strong. It is easy to understand why it is among the most frequently played of the Beethoven sonatas and a great audience favorite. What distinguishes this work from its predecessors are elements of epic struggle associated with massive, later works like the Fifth Symphony and the *Appassionata* Sonata. Only two of the ten Violin Sonatas are in minor mode. Into this one he compressed a considerable amount of pent-up wrath.

Beethoven establishes tension and agitation with his opening motive, a sinister flourish built around a descending minor triad. He adds to it with ominous rumblings in the pianist's left hand, leaving us with a feeling that lightning may strike at any moment. It does, after a fashion, with brittle, aggressive chords. The second theme, in fanfare-like dotted rhythm, has a distinct military flavor enhanced by the staccato accompaniment. Beethoven sustains his headlong pace with bravura passage work for both instruments, particularly the piano.

The songful second movement opens with a piano solo in A-flat major, with violin echoing the theme's long vocal phrases. Gradually Beethoven's texture thickens. His note values increase first to triplets, then to sixteenth note arpeggios. By the time he escalates to his brief, dramatic climax (an outburst in the distant key of C-major), he has increased *beyond* 32nd and 64th notes to a fortissimo exclamation with 128th notes! As Abram Loft has noted:

"Beethoven wants to shock, to jar us, to fling us from one end of the rhythmic and dynamic scale to the other, moving from extreme close-up to tranquil, distant view."

He maintains that grip on our attention in the scherzo through rhythmic displacement of the beat. The lopsided result seems to imply duple instead of triple time -- and all of a sudden the wrong foot seems to be tapping! The trio

section cleverly re-uses the melodic material of the Scherzo.

For the finale, Beethoven returns to the shock tactics he employed so effectively in the first two movements. Unresolved harmonic tension and insistent repeated chords emphasize the agitation. A presto coda whips the brisk tempo into a final frenzy.

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If the A-major Sonata, Opus 30 No. 1 presents Beethoven the lyricist, and the c-minor is Beethoven the struggling hero, then the **Sonata in G major, Opus 30 No. 3** is Beethoven the prankster and humorist. The outer movements absolutely sparkle with good nature. The first opens with a fleet, buzzing scale pattern, a rocket-like arpeggio, and a double exclamation point. The whirl of rapid-fire ideas, textures and dynamics might be a dizzying assault on the ears in the hands of a lesser composer. Beethoven builds his entire development section on the whirring triplets of the opening, punctuating his harmonic wanderings with trills and sudden *sforzati*.

The minuet, in E-flat, is a complete change of pace. Although it is not really a slow movement, it is restrained and elegant, providing quite a contrast with the energetic outer movements. It is also unusually long: More than eight minutes, as opposed to approximately seven for the opening movement and a scant four for the finale. Further, it has no central trio section, nor any formal repeats. Although much of the melodic material is restated, Beethoven changes the texture and voicing, masterfully intertwining his two instruments.

Similarly, the finale mixes accompaniment and melody intentionally, allowing the dominant melodic ideas to remain in the forefront for most of the movement. The overriding message here is one of perpetual motion. Between the violin and the piano, Beethoven ascertains that the motor of sixteenth notes keeps humming. That consistency makes its rare interruptions doubly startling. The lightness of figuration makes this conclusion as delightful as it is difficult.

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The French violinist and composer Rodolphe Kreutzer (1766-1831) was a professor at the Paris Conservatory and concertmaster of the Paris Opéra. He met Beethoven in 1798, while in Vienna as part of the French ambassador's entourage. Beethoven liked Kreutzer's playing, and eventually dedicated this A-major violin sonata to him. Ironically, Kreutzer did not perform the premiere of the piece, nor does it appear that he ever played it at all!

Beethoven began sketching the **Sonata No. 9 in A major sonata, Opus 47** in 1802. He completed it in April 1803, apparently in great haste, for a performance with the celebrated English violinist George Bridgetower (c. 1780-1860). An apocryphal story claims that Beethoven

quarreled with Bridgetower before the Englishman left Vienna, compelling the composer to change the dedication. Thus Kreutzer earned a certain measure of immortality—underscored by the Tolstoy short story inspired by Beethoven's piece, "The Kreutzer Sonata"—for a work he allegedly found unintelligible!

The original title page described this sonata as being in "a very *concertante* style, almost like a concerto." With the "Kreutzer" sonata, Beethoven took the violin sonata out of the private salon and placed it decisively in the concert hall. The writing is brilliant and exceedingly demanding for both players. Pianist and violinist are equal partners in this sonata.

The violin, unaccompanied, declaims the dramatic slow introduction to the first movement with elaborate double and triple stops. No other slow introduction occurs in the Beethoven violin sonatas. Perhaps none other in the entire repertoire switches so abruptly to minor mode after an introduction in major.

An expansive, elegant set of variations constitutes the slow movement. As in the virtuosic opening, the scale and inspiration of Beethoven's writing are symphonic. The finale is a brilliant tarantella, marked *presto* like the first movement; to have both outer movements marked *presto* is another indication of the bold, virtuosic approach to this sonata. Curiously, this finale was originally intended for the Sonata Opus 30, No. 1, but was deemed too brilliant. It is a fitting conclusion to the flashy Kreutzer sonata.

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The **Sonata No. 10 in G, Opus 96**, while technically falling into Beethoven's "middle period," looks forward in many respects to the intellectual challenges of the late string quartets. It has elegance, restraint, and lovely melodies, like its older middle period siblings, the A-major cello sonata, Opus 69, the Violin Concerto, and the Fourth Piano Concerto. On the other hand, Opus 96 asks some probing questions that link it to the profound late works.

The French violinist Jacques-Pierre-Joseph Rode (1774-1830) came to Vienna on tour in early December 1812. A favored student of the famous violinist Viotti, Rode had taught at the Paris Conservatoire since its founding in 1795. He took occasional leaves of absence to further his performing career abroad. Among his friends and champions were Luigi Boccherini in Spain and Louis Spohr in Germany. At the peak of his career, he served as solo court violinist to the Russian Tsar from 1804 to 1808.

During his Viennese sojourn, Rode played the premiere of the new G-major sonata at a private soirée in the home of Beethoven's patron Prince Lobkowitz. The pianist was Beethoven's student and patron, Archduke Rudolph, to whom the sonata was eventually dedicated. The composer was dissatisfied with the performance, possibly because the work took more of its musical character from Rode than he would have liked. He wrote to the Archduke: