

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827)
Piano Sonatas

with commentary by

Kevin von der Heydt
piano

Introduction by Dr. James Caplinger

Grande Sonate Pathétique in c minor, Op. 13 (1798)
Grave. Allegro di molto e con brio
Adagio cantabile
Rondo: Allegro

Sonata in d minor, Op. 31, no. 2 "Tempest" (1802)
Largo. Allegro
Adagio
Allegretto

~ *Intermission* ~

The "Kurfürsten" Sonatas, Wo047 (1782-83)
No. 1 in E-flat Major: Allegro cantabile
No. 2 in f minor: Larghetto maestoso. Allegro assai
No. 3 in D Major: Allegro

Sonata in E Major, Op. 109 (1820)
Vivace ma non troppo
Prestissimo
Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo

All invited to a Reception in the Old Stone Room following the Concert

Sunday, June 28, 2015, 3:00 pm
Carnegie Hall, Lewisburg, WV

Beethoven Biography

Ludwig van Beethoven was born on December 15 or 16, 1770 in Bonn, Germany, to a musical family. His grandfather, Ludwig, born in 1712, was a fine singer with a bass voice. He emigrated in 1733 from Mechelen, Flanders (now Belgium) to sing in the court chapel in Bonn. Young Ludwig's father, Johann, born 1740, was a tenor who also sang in the court choir. Because of the elder Ludwig's leadership skills as well as musical ability, he became "Kapellmeister" in 1761, leader of all the court's musicians.

So young Ludwig grew up with music all around; when he showed talent, his father pushed him mercilessly, sometimes forcing him to practice in the middle of the night. Johann had dreams that young Ludwig could be another Mozart and that they would travel around Europe making lots of money. He lied so often about Ludwig's age (making him younger) that Ludwig himself never seemed to know how old he was. Although Beethoven did eventually become as famous as Mozart, he was not quite the child prodigy.

Beethoven's most important teacher as a child was Christian Gottlob Neefe. Under Neefe's guidance, Beethoven published his first three sonatas in 1783. Named the "Kurfürsten Sonatas," they were dedicated to the "Kurfürsten" — or Elector of Cologne — who was Neefe and Beethoven's benefactor and employer. The second sonata in f minor seems to be the seed for Beethoven's "Pathétique."

Neefe was court organist; at age 13, Beethoven became his salaried assistant organist. Beethoven also played viola in the orchestra during his teen years. Apparently he was never a very good string player, but by age 20 he became one of the finest piano virtuosos in Europe. Neefe introduced Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier" to Beethoven, which at that time was only known to a few connoisseurs.

Neefe also had an extra-musical influence. He supported very progressive social and artistic ideas, and he probably introduced Beethoven to Friedrich Schiller's 1785 "Ode to Joy" poem. This had quite an influence on young Ludwig, who wanted to one day set it to music. Beethoven's dream was realized when he immortalized the poem in the last movement of his "Ninth Symphony."

In 1787, Beethoven traveled to Vienna where he met Mozart and played for him. Lessons with Mozart, however, were not to be: after

just two weeks in Vienna, Beethoven received a letter from his father, commanding him to come home immediately — his mother was dying of tuberculosis. Ludwig's father always had a propensity for drink, but losing his wife put him over the edge. It fell upon Ludwig to support his two younger brothers. By 1789 he was collecting part of his father's salary to do so, and his father was duly retired.

In 1792, Beethoven's brothers were grown up enough so that he could finally leave for Vienna again. Unfortunately, Mozart had died a year earlier; Beethoven then studied with Haydn, Vienna's other famous composer. He also studied counterpoint with the pedantic Albrechtsberger for about a year.

In 1794, Beethoven was ready to launch his "Opus 1 Piano Trios" and was well known in Vienna as a piano virtuoso. He was gaining support of important patrons. By 1798, he had already published seven piano sonatas, three string trios, three violin sonatas and more. In that year he finished his "Grande Sonate Pathétique, Op. 13" and it hit Vienna like a bombshell. Never was there such pathos, drama, excitement and power of the first movement, or such soulful but simple beauty of the slow movement, which became one of Beethoven's most well known melodies. This sonata was played all over Europe and made him famous.

It was also in 1798 that Beethoven first noticed he was going deaf and a ringing in his ears began. This horrified him; he sought the help of many doctors, but to no avail. Not wanting to admit to anyone that he was losing his most precious sense, Beethoven started avoiding contact with others, and he was considered a misanthrope. In 1802, he poured out his heart and soul in a sort of Last Will and Testament to his brothers (which he never filed) explaining his dire circumstances. This document was called the "Heiligenstadt Testament," named after the city in which it was written; it was found among his papers after he died.

1802 was also the year that Beethoven wrote the "Tempest Sonata, Op. 31 no. 2". He did not choose the name as he did with the "Pathétique," but the stormy character of this sonata could be a reflection of his state of mind as described in "The Heiligenstadt Testament."

Beethoven fell in love with women very easily; his passionate focus usually centered on one of his young, pretty piano students from

the aristocracy, or a married woman. All were unattainable and nothing worked out, despite his longing to be married.

As much as some women may have admired him for his musical genius, he was, unfortunately, not a very attractive mate. In addition to his increasing deafness and having gastrointestinal problems for most of his life, Beethoven was from the lower class, and one Frau von Bernhard describes him as *“small and plain looking with an ugly, red pock-marked face, dark, shaggy hair and commonplace clothes. He had a provincial dialect spoken in a rather common manner. He was unmannerly in both gesture and demeanor.”*

Among his belongings a torrid love letter was found — written most likely in 1812 — addressed to “Immortal Beloved.” People have speculated on the object of Beethoven’s ardor for almost 200 years, and a film of the same title was made in the 1990s. However, the identity of this mysterious “Beloved” has still not been solved.

Beethoven was also plagued with another great distraction and turmoil in his later years. His younger brother Carl, whom he had helped to raise, died in 1815 of tuberculosis, the same disease that killed their mother. Carl’s Will and Testament stated that he wanted the guardianship of his nine year old son Karl to be shared by his wife and his brother Ludwig. However, Beethoven had no respect for Carl’s wife and fought in court for full custody. He loved his brother and nephew and wanted to be a good father to the boy, but with his mercurial temperament, he was really not suited for the job.

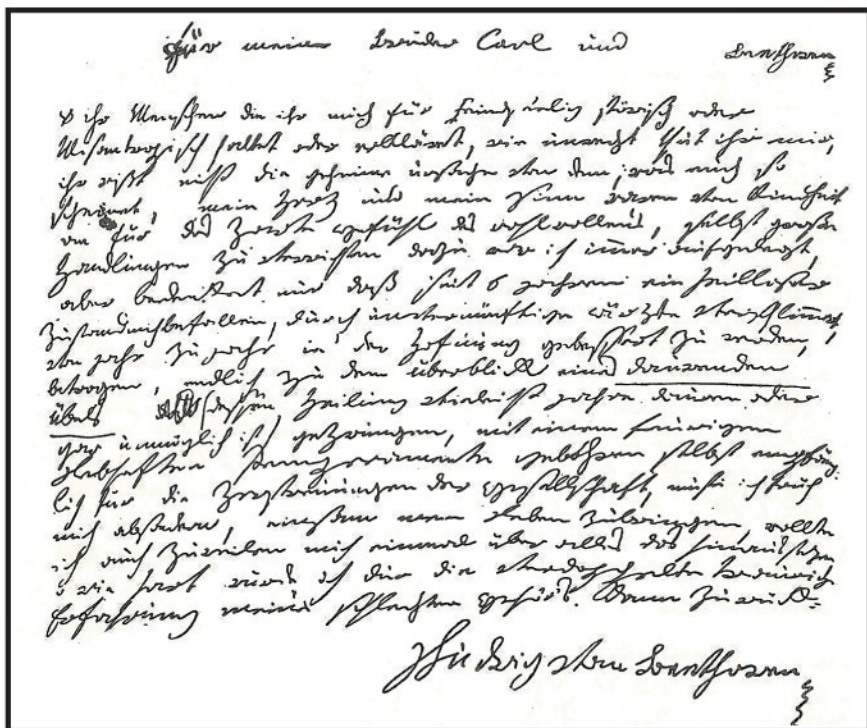
The battles went on for years with the poor boy caught in the middle. Karl tried to commit suicide in 1826. The bullet did not penetrate his skull and he survived. One can imagine the toll that all of this took on Beethoven. It was said that he suddenly looked 70 years old, although he was 55 at the time. He lived only 9 months longer.

Amazingly, Beethoven wrote some of the most incredible music ever written in his later years, when he was totally deaf. This includes string quartets, the “Ninth Symphony” and the last piano sonatas. The “Sonata Op. 109” (1820) is one of the last three piano sonatas he wrote and is yet again immensely original. Here, the second movement is the fast movement, providing a wild ride, and the first movement — a very compact sonata form — acts as an introduction leading into the second movement. The first movement has just two themes, the first a pretty, romantic one of only two short phrases. The second theme is built on just a few chords; however, with its

washes of sound that Beethoven created with arpeggios and runs, he possibly presaged the music of the Impressionists. The third movement begins with a slow, heartfelt theme providing the material for six very creative variations. Beethoven's legendary powers of improvisation are most evident when he composed variations on a theme, of which he wrote many examples.

When Beethoven died on March 26, 1827, he was the most famous musician in Europe and an estimated 20,000 people attended his funeral. The legacy of his 32 piano sonatas is so exalted that this body of work has been called "The New Testament" by pianists. The "Old Testament," that is, Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier," is what Beethoven practiced so much in his youth. Comparing these works to the Bible suggests the profundity of the music as well as their necessity in a pianist's education. Ernest Newman, the celebrated British music critic and musicologist, said: "It is the peculiarity of Beethoven's imagination that again and again he lifts us to a height from which we reevaluate not only all music but all life, all emotion and all thought."

Kevin von der Heydt



From "The Heiligenstadt Testament" in Beethoven's handwriting.

Kevin von der Heydt was born in Cincinnati, Ohio and started studying piano at the age of four. He is a graduate “magna cum laude” of the widely acclaimed Indiana University School of Music in Bloomington, Indiana. There he received his Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in piano performance. While there, he was also the favorite accompanist for the students of the Distinguished Professor of Violin, Josef Gingold.

Following his university studies, Kevin worked in Mexico City, and the Braunschweig State Theatre in Germany as an accompanist and music coach. After a short stint as a freelance musician in New York City, he accepted a full-time position at The Greenbrier Hotel as pianist, where he worked for many years. In this position he performed a wide variety of classical pieces with violin and solo pieces, as well as various other collaborative performances with instrumentalists, singers and dancers.

Kevin has been developing a series of “Concert and Commentary” programs that focus on bringing a single composer’s life and works to a greater understanding with the audience. He has presented the complete Chopin Nocturnes in two programs, a Beethoven sonata program, and is preparing a program of Debussy’s works. It has been written that Kevin plays with a “most beautiful balance of heart and mind.”



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