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A Beethoven Cycle, Jiayan Sun, piano

Music: Faculty Performances

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10-18-2018

## Recital 2: Sonatas Nos. 5-8 & 19-20: Program

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# A Beethoven Cycle: The Complete Piano Sonatas

Recital II: Sonatas Nos. 5-8 & 19-20

Jiayan Sun, pianist

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Thursday, October 18, 2018

8:00 PM

Sweeney Concert Hall, Sage Hall



SMITH COLLEGE

# PROGRAM

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## Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Sonata No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 10 No. 1 (1795–1798)

Allegro molto e con brio

Adagio molto

Finale. Prestissimo

Sonata No. 6 in F Major, Op. 10 No. 2 (1797–1798)

Allegro

Allegretto

Presto

Sonata No. 7 in D Major, Op. 10 No. 3 (1797–1798)

Presto

Largo e mesto

Menuetto. Allegretto

Rondo. Allegro

### *intermission*

Sonate facile, No. 19 in G Minor, Op. 49 No. 1 (1797)

Andante

Rondo. Allegro

Sonate facile, No. 20 in G Major, Op. 49 No. 2 (1796)

Allegro ma non troppo

Tempo di Menuetto

Grande Sonate pathétique, No. 8 in C Minor, Op. 13 (1796–1799)

Grave – Allegro molto e con brio

Adagio Cantabile

Rondo. Allegro

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*Please silence all cell phones and other electronic devices before the performance.*

## NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

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Looking back, from the month of September 1798, when the three sonatas of Op. 10 were published, Beethoven would have reflected not only upon the four sonatas we heard in Jiayan Sun's first recital, the trilogy of Op. 2 Nos. 1-3, and the singular Op. 7, but also on three earlier "starter" sonatas, in E-flat, Minor, and D Major, from the years 1782-1783, known as the "Kurfürstensonaten" because they were dedicated by the ten-year-old boy to the aged "Kurfürst" [*Gesundheit*] Maximilian Frederick, the "Elector" of Cologne, who had offered him support. (These Electors, so named because they participated in the election of the emperor, played important roles in Beethoven's general education in Bonn: their acceptance of Enlightenment ideals insulated the boy from the more extreme ideas of those who would soon make the French Revolution.) The three youthful sonatas, which we will hear on Jiayan Sun's third recital (performed by Smith students), show evidence of Beethoven's musical education: they are now rarely played because, by comparison with what Mozart was doing at the same time, and with what Beethoven would do shortly thereafter, they seem innocent and conventional.

With the new trilogy of Op. 10 Nos. 1-3, in C Minor, F Major, and D Major, dedicated by the composer to the countess von Browne (she and her husband, Johann George Imperial count von Browne-Camus, were generous patrons from 1798 through 1804 and recipients of the dedications of a dozen works composed during that period), Beethoven injects into the old forms an increasing number of personalized gestures and emotions: these reach a climax in the *Largo* of the third sonata, in D Minor—music that foreshadows some of the tragedy of the "Pathétique," Op. 13, which closes this evening's program. In the effort to explain the conceptual framework in which Beethoven was working in the 1790s, William Kindermann, one of today's best known Beethovenians, cites Friedrich Schiller's contemporary essay *Über des Pathetische* ("On Tragic Pity"): "Schiller stresses that the depiction of suffering *as such* is not the purpose of art; what must be conveyed is resistance to the inevitability of pain or despair, for in such resistance is lodged the principle of freedom." Did you follow that? In fact, what we appreciate in Beethoven is precisely his uncanny ability to suggest pain, or suffering, or difficulty—via ever more complex melodic motives, rambunctious dynamics, violent shifts of tempo, sudden and surprising modulations—and his concomitant ability—by fulfilling expectations, by rounding off forms—to suggest, somehow, that the difficulty has been overcome. These gestures, constituting trajectories from despair to hope, are the characteristics of the music of Beethoven's so-called periods of "imitation" and "externalization"; when we come to the late music, something

else will come into play.

Some years ago, explaining to undergraduates the music of **Op. 10 No. 1**, I used for my lecture the recording of the piece by the magnificently eccentric pianist Glenn Gould. I did so because Gould plays the opening “exposition” in fifty-seven seconds flat. (Artur Schnabel, who favored rapid tempos, takes a minute and a quarter; Daniel Barenboim, who favors relaxed tempos, comes in at over a minute and a half.) I did so not in order to treat an existential question (Is the piece the same piece when played now *prestissimo*, now *largissimo*?), but in order to demonstrate the tonal structure—the move from the tonic key of C Minor to the relative major key of E-flat—without taking too much class time! Because, even if you are not consciously aware of it, what you *feel*, listening to this music, results from transition from the opening key (a contemporary of Beethoven’s called C Minor the key of the love-sick soul) to the related key (that contemporary called E-flat the key of love and devotion). These designations are not scientific. But Beethoven, who *himself* spoke of keys as colors, clearly supposed that harmonic transition would cause you to feel *something*.

That is why, when he brings back the opening music, in a “recapitulation,” he *changes* the transition, in order to sound the tune that we originally heard in E-flat Major in two new keys: F Major, which is a surprise, and C Minor, which is expected—because, in the so-called “sonata style,” which is the style of nearly all the stories Beethoven tells, the home key, at the end of the movement, is inevitably reestablished and reasserted. That is how *music* worked. To do otherwise, at that time, would be to decide to run around the block, to exit your front door, to run around the block, and to return “home”—to your neighbor’s garage.

The middle movement displays good-natured lyricism in the related key of A-flat Major (“related” because, with four flats, the key signature is only flat away from the three of C Minor). The finale, *prestissimo*, based on a repeated motive that would seem playful were it not in the minor mode, follows the formal procedure we have mentioned. To it, Beethoven added a caboose, or coda, that ends in C Major, *quietly*. This unexpected silence may be a sign that he expected the pianist to move directly to the following piece, Op. 10 No. 2, in F Major. Because, for those with a little music theory, C (the “tonic” of Op. 10 No. 1) is “dominant” to F (the “tonic of Op. 10 No. 2), a relationship like that of spark to fire. But we find no such connection between Op. 10 No. 2 and Op. 10 No. 3: this “trilogy” is really a twosome plus one.

The first movement of **Op. 10 No. 2** seems to derive myriads of playful textures from the first two tiny motives: a two-note question; a triplet reply. But it

is dangerous to suppose, for Beethoven in particular, that the opening music is “pregnant” with the rest of the piece: that may be the way we hear it, but that is not the way he wrote it. When you attempt to decipher his nearly indecipherable sketches, you realize that his *first* thoughts were muddled memos of melodies and miscellaneous matters in the middles and in the margins. My guess is that his first idea, here, was the curious one of returning to the opening material in the “wrong” key. Such a “fake” recapitulation—in D, not F—is something he would have learned not from the “President” of “fake” news, but from “Papa” Haydn, who invented the procedure. Glenn Gould, performing this sonata and struck by this surprise as though by lightning, slows the tempo by half. Amazing.

The middle movement is a minuet and trio in ternary meter in which, as always in these stylized dance movements, the phrase structure is regular: if, in a dance, the music isn’t symmetrical, the dancers will land on the wrong foot. Beethoven does tell a little joke at the end by closing with what seems like a three-bar phrase. It’s not a knee-slapper, you only get it if you’ve been counting the measures, but Haydn would surely have said to his disciple: *gut gemacht, mein Junge!* Haydn would also have recognized himself in the finale, where, in another jocular mood, Beethoven sets down the equivalent of a clock ticking regularly and running a little wild. Tick-tock movements are found now and again in Beethoven—the second movement of the Eighth Symphony is the most famous of them—and they seem to suggest the composer’s profound awareness that his music, and everything else, is simply... a matter of time.

The “plus one” of the trilogy, **Op. 10 No. 3**, in D Major, is “plus” in form and content: more than other early sonatas, this one has attracted to its pages such big guns as Richter and Horowitz, no doubt because of its *Largo*, whose darkness has been compared to that of the slow movement of Beethoven’s Quartet Op. 18 No. 1—which Beethoven likened to the tomb scene in the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*. The marking in the piano sonata, *mesto* (“mournful”), only deepens what the notes themselves make clear.

By their simplicity, the *Deux Sonates faciles* that comprise **Op. 49** (the title page of the publication, like most of Beethoven’s title pages, is in French) cause surprise, because, after the Second Symphony, Op. 36, for example, or the Third Piano Concerto, Op. 37, listeners expect something more mature. In fact, the “high” opus number of these two two-movement works refers only to the date of publication (January, 1805); they were composed in and around 1797. If you took piano lessons as a kid, you surely tried to play the minuet, in G Major, that closes the second part of the diptych.

With the *Grande Sonate pathétique*, **Op. 13**, completed in 1798, published in

1799, we arrive at a work that belongs to the core of the not-as-large-as-you-might-have-imagined repertory that made Beethoven the single most influential composer of the Western world. “For nearly two centuries, *a single style of a single composer* has epitomized musical vitality, becoming the paradigm of Western compositional logic and of all the positive virtues that music can embody for humanity.” That style is Beethoven’s “heroic” style: its values “have become the values of music itself.” I am quoting from *Beethoven Hero*, a pithy book by Scott Burnham, of Princeton University, who successfully shows how the tonal and thematic processes employed by the composer, less the humorous and lyrical, more the tragic and demonic, come to embody “heroism”—a quality we admire, and revere—and musical excellence itself.

Now, I recognize that there are moral and musical relativists amongst you for whom the very notion of “great music,” particularly when associated with white male Europeans, is antiquated, and suspect—at best. But if you happen to be reading these notes, you are probably someone who is at least willing to play the highly stimulating game of Who’s the greatest, and someone who might be willing to say that greatness is something “out there,” something *more* than a mere personal preference for red wine, for example, or red apples, red roses, or Red Sox.

The first movement of the “Pathétique”—surely as “great” as anything of Beethoven’s—compels by striving, as heroes do, to reach a goal. The characteristic dotted rhythms of the grandiloquent introduction, with their richly accented diminished-sevenths and dissonances, are repeated at the beginnings of the “development” and “coda”; they are portentous, and suggestive of monumentality. The main event, *Allegro molto e con brio*, takes us through the keys we expect, with major and minor in swift alternation, in textures varied yet all of a piece. This is the “organic unity” we associate with Beethoven (and with excellence): everything seems carved from the same sovereign “stone” of... the key of C Minor. Indeed, this leads some listeners to hear, at the opening of the third movement, a motive derived from the opening of the first. Different listeners hear different interrelationships. Whether or not it *is*, we seem to *want to believe* that everything is related to everything else.

The ending of the first movement is so crisp that we feel with especial weight the need for something more, something more relaxed. What we find, in the *Adagio cantabile*, is an eight-bar melody now so famous that words about it are doomed to fail. We hear it twice (bars 1-16), we hear it again (bars 29-36), and we hear twice more (bars 51-66). The rest is foreplay and afterglow. When you have found a great melody, your best strategy—Schubert tells us this, too—is not to

break it up, but to repeat it, and to let it sink in.

The finale is what is called a “sonata rondo”: the tonal drama turns on the opposition of the two main keys, C Minor and E-flat Major, and a splattering of others for variety and good measure; the structure relies on the regular return of the primary and secondary thematic materials, although the word “thematic,” in the case of Beethoven’s movements at speed, needs a footnote, for what is at issue is a mosaic of motives that are readily separated and readily recombined.

Beethoven did not give the name “Moonlight” to the famous sonata we will hear on Jiayan Sun’s fourth recital, but he did give this one the title of “Pathétique.” What did he mean by that word? In the very year of the work’s composition, the dictionary of the Académie française offered the concise definition of the adjective as “qui émeut les passions”—that which excites the emotions. The C-Minor Sonata suggests that he probably had in mind something more, something that excited *profound* emotions *profoundly*.

—Peter Bloom

Grace Jarcho Ross 1933 Professor of Humanities, Emeritus

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## ABOUT THE ARTIST

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Praised by the New York Times for his “revelatory” performances, and by the Toronto Star for his “technically flawless, poetically inspired and immensely assured playing,” pianist Jiayan Sun has performed frequently with the Cleveland Orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra, the Chinese and RTÉ (Ireland) National Symphony Orchestras, the Fort Worth and Toledo Symphony Orchestras, the Toronto and Aspen Concert Orchestras, and the Suwon Philharmonic Orchestra, and he has conducted from the keyboard the Meiningen Court Orchestra. His performances have been broadcast by the BBC, the RTÉ, China Central Television, and classical music radio stations in North America. He has performed at and participated in the Verbier Festival, the Gstaad Menuhin Festival, the Klavier-Festival Ruhr, the Aspen Music Festival, the Sarasota Music Festival, and PianoTexas. Under the mentorship of Sir András Schiff, he was invited to give a number of solo recitals in Europe as part of Schiff’s “Building Bridges” project for the 2017-2018 season.

Mr. Sun has been awarded prizes at many of the major international piano competitions, including third prize at the Leeds International Piano Competition, second prize at the Dublin International Piano Competition, fourth prize and the audience prize at the Cleveland International Piano Competition, first prize at the



inaugural CCC Toronto International Piano Competition, among others. Playing early keyboard instruments and studying historical performance practice have played a significant role in Mr. Sun's musical activities, with critically acclaimed appearances with the American Classical Orchestra in Alice Tully Hall.

Hailing from Yantai, China, he received Bachelor's and Master's degrees from The Juilliard School. He continues his studies at Juilliard as a doctoral candidate under the tutelage of Yoheved Kaplinsky and Stephen Hough. His other mentors include pianists Malcolm Bilson, Richard Goode, Robert Levin, and harpsichordist Lionel Party. His devotion to the art of composition led him to study with the composer Philip Lasser. He is the Iva Dee Hiatt Visiting Artist in Piano and Lecturer in Music at Smith College.

For more information, please visit <http://www.jiayansunpianist.com>.

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## A Beethoven Cycle: The Complete Piano Sonatas

Jiayan Sun, pianist

Eight Recitals at 8 PM on Thursdays

Sweeney Concert Hall, Sage Hall

I. Thursday, September 20, 2018  
Sonatas Nos. 1-4

V. Thursday, January 31, 2019  
Sonatas Nos. 16-18 & 21

II. Thursday, October 18, 2018  
Sonatas Nos. 5-8 & 19-20

VI. Thursday, February 21, 2019  
Sonatas Nos. 22-26

III. Thursday, November 8, 2018  
Sonatas Nos. 9-11 & 3  
"Kurfürstensonaten" performed by  
Smith student pianists

VII. Thursday, March 21, 2019  
Sonatas Nos. 27-29

IV. Thursday, November 29, 2018  
Sonatas Nos. 12-15

VIII. Thursday, April 18, 2019  
Sonatas Nos. 30-32



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