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A Beethoven Cycle, Jiayan Sun, piano

Music: Faculty Performances

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11-8-2018

## Recital 3: Sonatas Nos. 9–11 & Three “Electoral” Sonatas: Program

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A Beethoven Cycle:  
The Complete Piano Sonatas

Recital III: Sonatas Nos. 9–11 &  
Three “Electoral” Sonatas

with pianists

Yena Li ‘21

Rachel Yan ‘21

Kristiana Labuga ‘21

and

Jiayan Sun

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Thursday, November 8, 2018

8:00 PM

Sweeney Concert Hall, Sage Hall



SMITH COLLEGE

# PROGRAM

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## Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Three “Electoral” Sonatas, WoO 47 (1783)

No. 1 in E-flat Major

Yena Li

Allegro cantabile

Andante

Rondo vivace

No. 2 in F Minor

Rachel Yan

Larghetto maestoso – Allegro assai

Andante

Presto

No. 3 in D Major

Kristiana Labuga

Allegro

Menuetto sostenuto

Scherzando. Allegro ma non troppo

### *intermission*

Sonata No. 9 in E Major, Op. 14 No. 1 (1798)

Allegro

Allegretto

Rondo. Allegro comodo

Sonata No. 10 in G Major, Op. 14 No. 2 (1798)

Allegro

Andante

Scherzo. Allegro assai

Grand Sonata, No. 11 in B-flat Major, Op. 22 (1800)

Allegro con brio

Adagio con molta espressione

Minuetto

Rondo. Allegretto

Jiayan Sun

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<http://libguides.smith.edu/beethovencycle>

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

## NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

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Think of a flower: Rose. Think of a color: Red. Think of a composer: Beethoven. You would suppose, occupying as he does that preeminent place in the pantheon of most people's "general knowledge," that almost everything about the old boy has been known forever, audited by the experts for almost that long, and put on perennial display by the masters and mistresses of the keyboard of yesteryear and yesterday. But the three early sonatas that open this evening's recital, **WoO 47**, are rarities on the concert stage: many of you will be hearing them for the first (and last) time.

"WoO" has nothing to with the "pseudoscientific" (the president's "woo-woo" beliefs) or the cocktail (vodka and schnapps): it is an abbreviation for "Werke ohne Opuszahl" or "works without opus number," of which, in Beethoven's catalogue, there are over *two hundred*. Most are these are occasional pieces, dances, light-hearted songs; the three sonatas, in E-flat Major, F Minor, and D Major, composed in mid-1783 and published in the autumn of that year, are among the more substantial numbers in the group. They require little analysis because they are constructed of the basic building blocks of musical composition that the young Beethoven would not long thereafter begin to bend into shapes and patterns of his own devising. The left-hand accompaniments are often simple, repeated chords (a harpsichord-like pattern), or simple "Alberti" basses—the kinds of basses you know if you played that sonata in C Major, by Mozart, that swims into the ken of all piano-playing youngsters, and that gives them the horribly absurd idea that C Major is a "simple" key. (Beethoven's final utterance in the world of the sonata, the utterance you will hear in the last of these eight recitals, is the C-Major hymn that closes Op. 111: this represents the *apotheosis* of C Major; it is not simple, it is sublime.)

One of the things we observe in the piano sonatas, as the composer ripens, is quite precisely the increasing variety of pianistic textures he invents in order to *give the illusion* of sustained sonorities. The piano can do a lot of things, but it cannot do what the voice can do, and what a wind or sting instrument can do, which is to sustain a note and to increase its volume and intensity. The difficulty of performing these three sonatas, then, which will be played, appropriately, by the *students of their teacher*, is to articulate their clearly articulated textures, and to attempt to make them sing.

The two sonatas of Beethoven's Op. 14, No. 1 in E Major, No. 2 in G Major, from 1798, the same year as the "Pathétique," which we heard on Jiayan Sun's second recital, provide ample evidence of the maturing of Beethoven's notions of pianistic textures. The first movement of **Op. 14 No. 1** opens with a four-bar phrase whose texture of melody-plus-accompaniment could not be

more conventional. But immediately thereafter the texture becomes contrapuntal, imitative, and otherwise complex. The structure of this movement conforms to the tonal model of the opposition of “tonic” and “dominant” that Beethoven almost always follows, in major-mode first movements, but here, the melody that articulates the contrasting tonal area (the so-called “second theme group”) includes an openly exposed, rising chromatic scale that leads—precisely because of those chromatic notes—to some surprising if momentary dissonances: *C-double-sharp* against *B-sharp*, for example! (which in writing looks weirder than it sounds). These suggest to me that Beethoven was at the time looking at some of the mature music by Mozart, with whom he had earlier wanted to study, but in vain (when Beethoven moved from Bonn to Vienna, in 1792, Mozart had been dead for a year). The composer of the “Jupiter” Symphony had enjoyed this very kind of chromatic play.

The second movement of Op. 14 No. 1, marked *Allegretto*, is a dance-like yet meditative movement, in E Minor, in ternary meter, with a C-Major trio and a tiny coda that—like the first movement—ends gently, seeming to encourage the player to press on without pause. The finale, too, a *rondo* whose principal tune plays with metrical ambiguity (one wonders whether the first two notes are down-beats or up-beats, and near the end one is disoriented by octaves hammered out off the beat), concludes without ceremony. It is as though Beethoven were telling us that the two sonatas of Op. 14 are related, and composed of the same genetic material.

This leads me to take note of the fact that these two sonatas played a role in the development of the widely adopted terminology for the so-called “sonata form” that has the first principal thematic elements characterized as “masculine,” and the second principal thematic elements characterized as “feminine.” At Smith College, it has been appropriate, I have always thought, to look into the origins of this sexualized if not sexist terminology, of which an early instance occurs in Vincent d’Indy’s *Cours de composition musicale* (1909): d’Indy, the composer-critic who first used *imitation*, *extériorisation*, and *réflexion* to describe the three phrases of Beethoven’s creative life, dubs the opening gestures of the typical Beethoven sonata as “forceful,” “energetic,” and “*masculine*”; the secondary gestures as “supple,” “elegant,” and “*feminine*.” He justifies this dichotomy with reference to a remark of Beethoven’s as reported by his famously untrustworthy amanuensis, Anton Schindler: “The two sonatas, Op. 14,” Beethoven is alleged to have said, “represent [...] a dialogue between a man and a woman, or between a lover and his beloved.” Was Beethoven talking about the inner workings of the individual sonatas? Or about differences in their characters as a whole? *Das können wir nicht sagen!*

Be this as it may, it turns out that the fellow who actually introduced the masculine-feminine dichotomy into official sonata-form parlance was a mid-nineteenth-century theorist named Adolf Bernhard Marx. Political opponents and advocates of the gendered nomenclature have surely been spurred on by knowing it came from a Marx, and, gadszooks, an Adolf.

The metrical ambiguity that floats over the finale of Op. 14 No. 1 is found again at the opening of **Op. 14 No. 2**, where the first five short notes sound like upbeats to the first long note—as though one were saying, rapidly: I think this is a *trick!* We learn only in the fifth bar that what we have been hearing is, rather: I think this is a trick! Such musical ambiguity, whether metric (where is the downbeat?) or tonal (where is the tonic?), is the stuff of sophistication; when resolved, it is the stuff of satisfaction. (At the end of the movement, Beethoven will *tell us* that he was making a joke—by altering the phrase to say simply, in four syllables rather than six: this is a *trick!*) Tonally speaking, what Beethoven does in this movement is characteristic: after establishing the home key of G Major by means of an opening eight-bar sentence, in gestures more motivic than melodic, he begins immediately to head for the hills, or, rather, for the contrasting key area, in this case the “dominant,” D Major. This means that of the sixty-three measures that constitute what we call the “exposition” (because in it, the principal materials are exposed), we are solidly in the home key for only eight of them. Why, then, do we say that G Major is “home”? Because, when we come back, we will linger, and find “home” vibrant, and fresh.

The second movement, impish and playful, is cast as a theme and variations. Usually we think of “variations” as transmutations of *melodies*. But what Beethoven respects, as he fiddles with the “theme,” is the *periodic structure* of eight bars plus twelve. If you count bars while listening, you will hear where he is faithful, and where he strays. It’s all only a joke, he tells us at the end, by saying: BOO!

The finale gives us the earlier kind of pleasantry, based on metrical ambiguity. Where is the downbeat, we ask again, as a tiny three-note motive is thrice repeated on the three different beats of the 3/8 meter to form a kind of “hemiola” or superimposition of one metric pattern upon another. Sudden pauses, sudden *fortes*, and sudden *pianos*, such as at the very end, remind us that Beethoven, in 1798, was a pretty happy fellow: he could utter profound thoughts, in some of the slow movements of the earlier sonatas, and throughout, in the “Pathétique,” but he was still some years away from feeling upon his shoulders the dark weight of the world.

This evening’s program closes with Sonata in B-flat Major, **Op. 22**, designated by Beethoven a “grand” sonata because of its composition in four movements rather than three. Only one other Beethoven sonata is in B-flat Major, the

monstrous “Hammerklavier,” Op. 106, of 1818, and the commentariat has found similarities between that one and this one, namely, the structural use of chains of descending thirds. In Op. 22, we hear cuckoo-bird gestures in the first and second measures of the “first-theme group,” and full-throttled falling thirds in the “second-theme group,” as it announces the contrasting key, i.e., the dominant, F Major. The “groups” I enclose in quotation marks are so-named because in fact, like his predecessors and his contemporaries, Beethoven usually articulated the main tonalities not by a single theme, but by several. (Haydn was notably proud of himself when he completed a sonata movement that required only one: we call this *monothematic*; perhaps Beethoven called it *monotonous*.) In the “Hammerklavier,” there are falling thirds everywhere, nowhere more prominently than in the grandiose opening pronouncement, which is, for the pianist, one of the most treacherous pronouncements of them all.

I dwell on the falling thirds to make the point that, when composing in certain keys, like artists painting in certain media, Beethoven tended to behave in the same ways.

The second movement of Op. 22, marked *Adagio con molta espressione*, would seem to be a kind of meditation: the texture, spacious, sometimes conspicuously transparent, suggests to me that, in this very slow tempo, Beethoven perhaps found himself *improvising* the complex ornaments and accompaniments of the sort he set down elsewhere. The movement, in the key of E-flat Major, makes the expected modulation to the dominant, B-flat, and comes to a halt. A second section begins in the suddenly distant key of G Major, then works its way back, via traditional paths, to the home key of E-flat. By “traditional paths” I mean something slightly technical—the “circle of fifths”—which is too important not to try to explain. G is “dominant” to, and a fifth above, C; we go to C. C is “dominant” to F; we go to F. F is “dominant” to B-flat; we go to B-flat. B-flat is “dominant” to E-flat; we go to E-flat; E-flat is “dominant” to A-flat; we go to A-flat. And so on round a “circle” of keys a “fifth” apart. Get it? “Dominant” means “expectant of,” “prefatory,” “wishing to lead to.” That is all you need to know. In his great middle period, sometimes called “the heroic decade,” Beethoven did expectancy as no one before him ever imagined it could or should be done.

The third movement is a gentle, almost Chopin-like minuet (B-flat Major), with a contrasting trio, *furioso*, in G Minor. In this section, a brilliant, international prize-winning pianist, whose performance of this piece is available on YouTube, gets lost. (I have forgotten his name.) Have you ever thought about how amazing it is that the great pianists play this music without scores? Opera singers have to memorize tens of thousands of words. (In the libretto of *Tristan und Isolde*, for

example, there is a total of about ten thousand words.) But pianists have to memorize *millions* of notes.

The finale of the B-flat Sonata is a *rondo* in which we hear the peaceful principal thematic material, or “refrain,” on four separate occasions. In between, three “episodes” offer a kind of diversity (of materials) that we as an institution can only dream about: they are serious and sad, they are frisky and funny: they are musical creeds and colors joined by virtuous, vertiginous virtuosity.

—Peter Bloom

Grace Jarcho Ross 1933 Professor of Humanities, Emeritus

## **Finding Connections: A Musical Story Through Three Lenses by Yena Li, Rachel Yan, and Kristiana Labuga**

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YL: Once upon a time, a girl was born in a country about 7,300 miles away from here. When she was 4 years old, her mother asked her what she wanted for her birthday. She said she doesn't know. So her mother gave her two choices: a piano, or some colorful clay. She thought, “huh, interesting,” and chose the colorful clay without hesitation. Her mother bought the piano anyways. Out of curiosity, she asked for piano lessons, thus started her wonderful adventure with piano and music.

RY: Exactly one year later, another girl was facing the same dilemma, except this time she chose the piano over the violin, not for some noble reasons, but simply because she thought the piano is a better toy since it has more strings.

KL: Several years later, on the other side of the world, a girl from a small town in California begged her mother to let her take piano lessons. She had been asking since the year before when she was nine, but had been continually turned down since there were no piano teachers available. After the mother discovered a piano teacher who lived just a few blocks away, she caved in to the young girl's pleas. Soon the young girl was practicing on a 64-key electronic keyboard, fingers stumbling over C-major scales, relentless to perfect simple nursery rhymes.

YL: Well, from my perspective of the story, it was not that wonderful in the beginning. She had some very strict teachers, who would hit and yell at her every time she played something wrong. She soon developed fear toward the piano and piano lessons. The curiosity and excitement that she had when interacting with the



piano vanished. She didn't want to practice, and her mother caught her millions of times reading random classical literature while "practicing" the piano. She would be physically sick before and during the lesson, and her teacher told her that she should just give up piano, because she will never be able to produce beautiful music, and that no one will want to teach her with her small hands. Her mother also asked her to give up. But she said no. She didn't know why, but she had a strong urge to keep exploring the world of music and having conversations with the piano.

RY: Quite the opposite, my young pianist was fascinated by this giant music box. She had long heard about how the piano is considered the "king" of all instruments. When asked to "make a sound" on the instrument upon its arrival, she literally made *a sound*, not by playing the key, but by knocking on the wooden case, thus marking her first ever contact with a piano. "This is the best birthday gift ever!", she thought, smiling. Well, what this little girl didn't know was that she had opened the door to a secret path that would lead her to places filled with both joy and struggle.

KL: My protagonist had a wholesome and free relationship with the piano. After developing some skills, she was at liberty to build her repertoire in any way she pleased. She found herself playing piano for hours a day, out of natural inclination and joy for learning the language of music and its sounds. Her piano teacher didn't offer much guidance beyond completing a piece, so the young girl felt lost and wasn't sure how to move forward with her newfound love. Still, it was enough for her to play piano because she simply wanted to play.

YL: When she was 13 years old, this girl was sent to somewhere 7,300 miles away from home to an all-girls school. Under the influence of a different culture, speaking a language that she'd only listened to in English classes and eating foods that she'd never seen before, she had no one to talk to or to depend on. She struggled and closed herself away from other people. She stopped talking in class and avoided going to the dining hall for meals because she didn't know who to sit with. She was always smiling, but her heart hurt.

RY: Soon, following the footsteps of the first girl, my protagonist also arrived in the U.S. Having similar experiences of culture shock, she thought that if she could live up to other people's expectations, then she would fit in better. So she taught herself to be strong and to withhold emotions. She became cautious with everything; she slowly hid away in the crowd.

KL: Unsure of her relationship with the piano, the young girl in California picked up learning the trumpet. Throughout middle and high school, her band directors were less encouraging of her piano pursuits, so she focused her efforts on trumpet. Though she preferred the sound and touch of the piano, it seemed to drift away because of band responsibilities. During her sophomore year of high school, the girl was whisked away to move to a country 3,000 miles from her hometown. This was difficult because she had never experienced such an abrupt change: there was no longer the familiarity of childhood friends or the community she found through band. She turned back to the piano because it was one thing that held constant. At her new school, she dropped trumpet and asked the choir director if she could accompany on piano. Homesick with few friends, she chose to spend the lunchtimes alone with the piano in the band room and to accompany singers during mornings. She found comfort in this, even though it was a lot of solitary time.

YL: Gradually she turned to piano and to music. She began to enjoy practicing the piano and to feel the emotions in every piece. She could express her personality through music and express music through herself. She started to be friends with music. Her heart started to beat for music and to beat with the music. But she was dancing barefoot on broken glass; she swam with the only sea monster in the deep Pacific; she smelled the burning fire that an old couple was sitting by; she walked in a raging snowstorm... She was only seeing the dark side, loneliness, and pain of music.

RY: She looked at the instrument, something that once had light and life, now embedded in doubt and confusion. She asked herself: Why did I even play the piano? She couldn't find an answer.

KL: All three girls, though coming from different places, arrived at the same question: "Where did the freedom, the energy, and the innocence, all go?"

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Interlude: A Visual Story by Yena Li

When I play the piano, I'm always flooded by different senses: smells, tastes, images, physical feelings... It brings me to another world and lets me experience my past, my future, something that's happening somewhere in this world, and something that's happening in a parallel universe. But it's all hard to describe.

When I first started playing the third movement of my sonata, I sensed the excitement, the energy, and some mysterious elements. During a lesson, my piano teacher told me that this movement reminds him of a hunting scene. Afterward, a vivid story emerged in my mind: inspired by the recurring motives of the rondo form, it involves horn calls, rabbits, bears, and a waterfall. The title of the story is “Hey! Give Back Our Carrots!”

*(Yena Li's drawings are on display in the lobby of Sweeney Hall.)*

Beethoven once described music as “more an expression of feeling than painting.” I believe that music can be a powerful teacher to every one of us, if we are open to finding connections by following our senses.

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YL: The three of us have only known each other for a few weeks, but we were instantly bonded by our stage fright.

RY: Well, not only that, we share similar experiences and passion for music. We connect to each other, to music, and to young Beethoven through learning from these pieces and from each other.

KL: These pieces remind us to worry less about judgments coming from the world around us, to embrace our emotions, and most importantly, to develop our inner strength so that we have the ability to *enjoy* the ups and downs of life. Through young Beethoven, we revisit and access the same childhood curiosity that drew us to the piano in the first place. I think that this means vulnerability, openness, and eagerness to explore the innate joys of music.

RY: At the end of the day, we still have stage fright, we will still worry about playing the wrong notes. But, who doesn't?

YL: Nevertheless, because of these connections that we have made with each other and with music, we feel brave and strong.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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**Yena Li** is a sophomore intending to major in Psychology with a Biology minor. She hopes to explore a career in early childhood education. Besides being a piano student of Jiayan Sun, she enthusiastically pursues other interests, such as tennis, visual art, food, singing, and languages. In high school, she was active in community service projects and was Head of the Student Body during her senior year. Currently, she serves as a Head of New Students for the Cutter House and is a member of the varsity tennis team.

**Rachel Yan** is a sophomore majoring in Psychology and Statistical Data Science. She studies piano with Jiayan Sun, and she is involved in the Smith Outdoor Adventure Program and AEMES Mentoring Program at Smith. Her other interests include martial arts, with a black belt in Taekwondo, and ceramic crafting. She was involved in Empty Bowl, a project that helps local food shelters. She has two cats named Tofu and Pudding, and a younger sister back home in Beijing, China.

**Kristiana Labuga** is a sophomore majoring in Government and Philosophy. Coming from California, she studies piano with Judith Gordon. Besides her academic and musical interests, she enjoys poetry, journaling, and watching films.

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 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 Andrés 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, the 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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