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# A Beethoven Cycle: The Complete Piano Sonatas

Recital V: Sonatas Nos. 16 - 18 & 21

Jiayan Sun, piano

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Thursday, January 31, 2019

8:00 PM

Sweeney Concert Hall, Sage Hall



SMITH COLLEGE

# PROGRAM

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## Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Sonata No. 16 in G Major, Op. 31 No. 1 (1802)

Allegro vivace  
Adagio grazioso  
Rondo. Allegretto

Sonata No. 17 in D Minor, Op. 31 No. 2 ("*Tempest*") (1802)

Largo – Allegro  
Adagio  
Allegretto

Sonata No. 18 in E-flat Major, Op. 31 No. 3 (1802)

Allegro  
Scherzo. Allegretto vivace  
Menuetto. Moderato e grazioso  
Presto con fuoco

### *Intermission*

*Grande Sonate*, No. 21 in C Major, Op. 53 ("*Waldstein*") (1803–1804)

Allegro con brio  
Introduzione. Adagio molto –  
Rondo. Allegretto moderato

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The Josten Performing Arts Library has created a LibGuide to facilitate access to literature and resources on Beethoven's life and work.

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

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

## NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

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On his previous recital, the fourth of the eight he has dedicated to the thirty-two sonatas, Jiayan Sun performed several works that date from 1801, the year in which Beethoven first outwardly expressed his inner fear regarding the onset of the deafness that would eventually lead him away from the concert hall and into a world of increasing isolation and silence. Fear, however, is not something one encounters in the works we shall hear this evening.

In fact, the first movement of the G-Major Sonata, **Op 31 No. 1**, seems designed to give us a jolly good laugh, as it incorporates a number of the traditional elements of musical comedy (comedy, that is, as we take it in the dusty arena of classical music). The opening gestures have the hands playing a sixteenth-note apart—a mockery of the feeble player who can't get it together. Then, more than the usual number of scales and arpeggios, those necessities whose proper execution separates the ace from the amateur. Finally, especially at the end, the use of the sudden opposition of *fortissimo* and *pianissimo*, something, as in the cartoons, that is always good for a guffaw. It would no doubt be pedantic to mention the unexpected move to B (major and minor) as the contrasting key in the exposition of the sonata, and the consequences of that move in the recapitulation. So I won't mention them.

Is the second movement, *Adagio grazioso*, one of Beethoven's longest inter-chapters, a gentle mediation on the delights of digital dexterity? Is it another parody, as its hyperbolic trills and ostentatious ornaments would suggest? Is this Beethoven's view of an Italian diva, decomposing and on the decline?

Considering the final fifty bars of the third movement, another *rondo* structure with lots of returns of the main theme, I think we have to conclude that humor was indeed on his mind throughout. That main theme is Schubertian in its lyricism; slowed down, near the end, it becomes almost heart-breaking. But then Beethoven steps on the gas, cries, then whispers: *meine Damen und Herren*, it's all been a joke.

The three sonatas of Op. 31 were designed as a triptych with malice—or tonal diversity—forethought. Here, as with the three sonatas of Op. 2, the three sonatas of Op. 10, and, frankly, the last three sonatas, Op. 109, 110, and 111, we have one sonata in sharps (the G-Major), one in flats (the E-flat Major), and one in the minor mode (the D-Minor). I was reminded of this triadic habit of the composer's in an article by a Beethoven scholar who has studied the *sketches* of these works and who has shown that, like others, these, too, developed from a “haze of different ideas” that only gradually came together into coherent wholes. Beethoven cherished those sketches: he *gave away* the

autograph manuscripts and published scores, but hoarded the sketchbooks, like gold, until the end.

There is nothing funny about **Op. 31 No. 2**, another of the sonatas that achieved especial fame because of a name: according to Anton Schindler—who was Beethoven’s friend and on-and-off secretary, unpaid, from 1814 until the composer’s death, in 1827, and who knew him extremely well—Beethoven said, in response to the question of the meaning of the sonata: “Read *The Tempest!*”

Did he really say that? We don’t know. Schindler’s testimony, ever since 1840, when he published a biography of the composer, has been regarded as unreliable. In 1977, two German scholars demonstrated, via scientific analysis of the handwriting, that Schindler had actually *forged* a number of comments in the little “conversation books” that Beethoven offered to his interlocutors, in the later years, so that he could respond, orally, to their written remarks.

Does it matter? Yes, if you’re interested in the growth of a legend. No, if you’re interested solely in the music. Op. 31 No. 2 is no more “tempestuous” than other scores: “tempestuous,” after all, describes a great deal of Beethoven’s music from the early, the late, and especially, the middle period of his creative lifetime. The first movement here is conspicuous for the slow arpeggios that punctuate the joints of the form—the opening, the opening of the development, the opening of the recapitulation. At the latter point, there is an instrumental recitative, marked *con espressione et semplice*. This is one of the early instances in which Beethoven appears to wish to say something, we know not what. “Speak,” I should like to say to him, as does Hamlet, to the ghost: “I am bound to hear.” Something like this happens in the Ninth Symphony. But there, *coucou*, the voice actually appears.

The arpeggio at the beginning of the *Adagio* “says” that the story of the first movement is here continued. This is a “short” sonata form consisting of a part that moves from tonic (B-flat) to dominant (F), a retransition, and a part—materially like the first—that moves from tonic... to tonic. There is no “development.”

But the finale, *Allegretto*, has a “development” section, as well as the other accoutrements of the sonata form: D Minor to A Minor in the exposition; D Minor to D Minor in the recapitulation. It spins like a wheel, in a uniform texture, from its quiet beginning to its quiet end.

Professors tend to liken the characteristic phrase-structure of the music of the classic era (the era of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven; let us not argue about the precise dates) to an egalitarian dialogue of “question-and-answer.” In the first six bars of the final sonata of the group, **Op. 31 No. 3**, we clearly hear a question. At bar seven, we clearly get an answer. It’s not enough; we hear the question again;

this time, it is more resolved. But the question returns on the way to the dominant, and there, another answer is proposed. The question persists at the beginning of the development, at the point of recapitulation, at the outset of the coda: Beethoven is telling us, this *is* the development, you fools, this *is* the recapitulation, *und so weiter!* (We are arriving at the “period of externalization,” in which the composer never hesitates to state the obvious.) At the end, the answers seem finally to have satisfied the questioner.

The second movement, in duple meter, is nonetheless headed *Scherzo*, the term usually reserved for minuets in three that have been speeded up to be counted in one. Elsewhere in these notes, I have mentioned the charm of Beethoven’s “walking bass” music for piano: short notes in the left hand, sustained notes in the right. This one, the swiftest, is arguably the most charming of them all. In fact, it conforms to the tonal structure of the sonata form. But what matters most are the surfaces, the surprises, the spaces, and—music being nothing more and nothing less than the sonorous articulation of *time*—the speed.

The third movement is a quasi-nostalgic minuet and trio that plays, dare I say cumbrously, with rhythmic ambiguity. (Three-four time is conducive to such play, as we find, prototypically and magisterially, in the first movement of the “Eroica” Symphony.) The finale, *Presto con fuoco*, is a sonata-form *perpetuum mobile* not entirely unlike the finale of the “Tempest”; there, however, we have a “spinning wheel,” in three-eight; here, we have a gallop, in six-eight. *Hi Ho Ludwig!*

With the C-Major Sonata, **Op. 53**, we have a work with a “name” linked not to a character (“Pastoral”; “Tempest”) but to a person: Count Ferdinand Ernst von Waldstein, an ambitious young Bohemian aristocrat (as Louis Lockwood characterizes him in his biography of Beethoven) than whom no one was more important in furthering Beethoven’s ambitions in Bonn and, after 1792, helping him to gain access to the Austrian nobility in Vienna. It is Waldstein who famously inscribed in Beethoven’s album, when the composer was leaving his native city for the Austrian capital, that there, “with the help of assiduous labor, you shall receive Mozart’s spirit from Haydn’s hands.” Waldstein, an amateur pianist and composer, a military man, and a high adventurer who seems at the end to have fallen into poverty, lives on today as Beethoven’s famous dedicatee.

The C-Major Sonata, completed in 1804, is immediately contemporary with the “Eroica” Symphony—“one of the incomprehensible deeds in arts and letters,” as a fine old-time scholar put it, with fine old-time hyperbole, “the greatest single step made by an individual composer in the history of the symphony and in the history of music in general.” That, dear reader, is why it is *here* that we mark the

divide between the “period of imitation” and the “period of externalization.” Because, while we hear *intimations* of a “new way” in the sonatas of Op. 31—the expression in quotation marks is Beethoven’s—we hear that “new way,” inside and out, in the “Eroica,” of course, and in the “Waldstein.”

Both of these works open with a repeated-chord pattern that seems to suggest the wide expanse that the works will traverse as well as the spirit of the traverser—a hero, struggling for freedom, which is the controlling metaphor of Beethoven’s middle-period music. At the outset, the piano sonata, with no real “theme,” sets in motion a vibration. We then move, inevitably, to the contrasting key. (This, for Beethoven, is what the “sonata style,” or what music, required.) In C Major, we expect the contrasting key to be the dominant, G; here we get the mediant, E, which is a surprise. The point is not the simple identity of the new key, it is how we get to it, and what its color will be in the light of the colors that have been illuminated moments before.

At the end of the exposition, you will hear Beethoven “in the workshop,” as he loosens and tightens the screws in order to turn back to C, for the repeat of the opening, or in order to turn ahead to F, for the development. Are you *supposed to perceive* these things? Well, yes, when they are repeated, with a difference, it does seem likely that the composer assumed that *some listeners* would hear the harmonic somersaults that take us, first, back to C, and, second, forward to F, where the broad development section begins. Sixty-six bars later, having heard the feverish motivic and modulatory play that constitute what we *mean* by “development” (in the “Eroica” Symphony, the development section has been likened to the Battle of Austerlitz!), and having heard in the skirmish not a trace of that E-Major tune, we return home. Only then do we get the “E-Major” theme, now in A-Major, a third below, not above, the tonic, because in music—where gravity is *more* than a metaphor—what goes up must come down. The “E-Major” theme comes round in the right key, C Major, in the closing bars of the coda.

The original second movement was a pleasant interlude in F Major. Beethoven removed it, published it separately as *Andante favori*, and substituted the dark and dramatic, three-part introduction to the finale that led Donald Francis Tovey to say that here, as a composer of sonatas, Beethoven crossed the Rubicon. Nine bars of literally introductory gestures precede an eight-bar melody, not readily perceivable as such because of the slow tempo; twelve further bars of introductory material, harmonically wandering, bring us to the precipice of the *rondo*, and the *rondo* brings the sonata to a close. We have heard such *rondos* before. The “Waldstein”’s goes like this: Refrain (C Major); Episode (A Minor); Refrain (C Major); Episode (partitioned; motivic; modulating; preparatory); Refrain (C Major);

Coda. That last bit, *prestissimo*, may be the greatest challenge that Beethoven had as yet posed to contemporary pianists. The earlier ones are, of course, well served by artistic brilliance. But this, without virtuosity, is untouchable.

—Peter Bloom

Grace Jarcho Ross 1933 Professor of Humanities, Emeritus

## 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 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.

Jiayan 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 his musical activities, with critically acclaimed appearances with the American Classical Orchestra in Alice Tully Hall.

Hailing from Yantai, China, Jiayan Sun 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, piano  
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

