

SAGE
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A Beethoven Cycle: The Complete Piano Sonatas

Recital VI: Sonatas Nos. 22–26

Jiayan Sun, piano

Thursday, February 21, 2019

8:00 PM

Sweeney Concert Hall, Sage Hall



SMITH COLLEGE

PROGRAM

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Sonata No. 22 in F Major, Op. 54 (1804)

In Tempo d'un Menuetto
Allegretto

Sonata No. 23 in F Minor, Op. 57 (*“Appassionata”*) (1804–1806)

Allegro assai
Andante con moto –
Allegro ma non troppo

Intermission

Sonata No. 24 in F-sharp Major, Op. 78 (*“À Thérèse”*) (1809)

Adagio cantabile – Allegro ma non troppo
Allegro vivace

Sonata facile, No. 25 in G Major, Op. 79 (1809)

Presto alla tedesca
Andante
Vivace

Sonata No. 26 in E-flat Major, Op. 81a (*“Les Adieux”*) (1809)

Sonata caracteristique, Lebewohl, Abwesenheit und Wiedersehen

Das Lebe wohl (The Farewell). Adagio – Allegro

Vien am 4ten Mai 1809, bei der Abreise S. Kaiserl. Hoheit des Verehrten Erzherzogs Rudolf
(Vienna, 4th May 1809, on the departure of His Imperial Highness the esteemed Archduke Rudolph)

Abwesenheit (Absence). Andante espressivo. *In gehender Bewegung doch mit viel Ausdruck*

Vien 1810 am 30ten Jenner. Geschrieben bei der Ankunft Seiner Kaiserl. Hoheit Des Verehrten
Erzherzogs Rudolf

(Vienna, 30th January 1810, written on the arrival of His Imperial Highness the esteemed Archduke
Rudolph)

Das Wiedersehen (The Return). Vivacissimamente. *Im lebhaftesten Zeitmasse*

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>

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

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

The mature symphonies of Beethoven are studies in contrast: the third is monumental, the fourth, restrained; the fifth is all powerful, the sixth, pastoral; the seventh is gigantic, the eighth, jolly. The F-Major Sonata, **Op. 54**, of modest aims and proportions, forms precisely this kind of contrast with its predecessor, the “Waldstein,” which closed Jiayan Sun’s fifth recital, and with its successor, the “Appassionata,” which we shall hear this evening. At the outset of Op. 54 (which some commentators hear as having features in common with the other great two-movement sonatas, Opp. 78, 90, and 111), we believe we are in the presence of a minuet, but the structure turns out to be that of a rondo, with three gentle refrains (in F Major) surrounding two more vigorous episodes (in F Minor), the latter enlivened by sudden *sforzandi* that unsettle the normal metrical pattern, which in three-four time has the emphasis on the first beat. The second movement is a *perpetuum mobile*—a movement that offers a uniform texture throughout and that tenders no real “themes.” It nonetheless fulfills one’s expectations regarding the *tonal* patterns of the sonata form, which proves, if proof were needed, that describing the sonata form primarily in terms of first and second *themes*—as some folks still do—is folly.

In the tenth measure of the first movement of the Sonata in F Minor, Op. 57, the “Appassionata,” an ominous warning is sounded in the lower register of the keyboard, *dit-dit-dit dab*, three low-D-flats, one low C. The warning will be sounded anew in measures twelve and thirteen. You will hear it again, later, nowhere more catastrophically than at the end of the development section, *fortissimo*, just before the return to F Minor, and to the principal theme, which marks the beginning of the recapitulation. In the most astounding performance of this sonata that I ever heard—like you, I have heard it often, for the “Appassionata” vies with the “Pathétique,” the “Moonlight,” and the “Waldstein,” for the title of the best known of them all—that warning, hammered out with a ferociousness greater than everything that had gone before, greater, almost, than the piano could bear, scared me to death. The pianist, Russell Sherman, had had a *great idea*. The motive, which we associate with the Fifth Symphony (although there it is not of the same metrical construction), and which occurs almost everywhere in the works of Beethoven’s “heroic decade” (roughly 1803-1813), has become in and of itself symbolic of Beethoven’s “heroism”: that those three shorts and a long represent the letter V, in the Morse Code—V for Victory—is a fortuitous, if anachronistic, coincidence.

The first movement of the F-Minor Sonata is unusual in that the exposition, which moves expectedly from F Minor to A-flat Major (where the

glorious second theme is a rhythmic transformation of the first), is not repeated. The development section is long; it takes up the first and second themes as well as the transitional materials, and explores keys near and far before that crashing warning brings us home. The recapitulation, regular, is followed by a coda in which, after another explosion, the principal theme, exhausted, draws matters to a close.

In an earlier note for these concerts, I qualified the key of D-flat Major as “noble”: *there*, I was speaking of the “trio” of the second movement of Op. 26, the sonata with the funeral march. But what I had in mind is *here*, the *Andante con moto* of the “Appassionata.” A perfectly regular theme in two equal parts of eight bars each, with dotted rhythms suggestive of the shine of military brass, is followed by four variations, and a return to the theme: D-flat at its best. But watch out—because that theme does not come to a full stop: it is open-ended, and thus attached to the third movement. In fact, in his “period of externalization,” Beethoven develops the *habit* of linking penultimate movements to finales. We find such links in the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, in the Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos, in the first and third of the “Rasumovsky” Quartets, and more. These are the external signs of the internal “organic unity” of this music: the impression it gives us, that is, of having been germinated from a single seed—not *e pluribus unum* but *e unibus pluram*.

The finale is another *perpetuum mobile*, it is *furioso*, and, especially at the end—the coda, which caps and heroically culminates the sonata form whose proportions are unusual in that the exposition (as in the first movement) is not repeated, while the development and recapitulation *are*—it is *fast*.

What do we *mean*, in music, by “great”? One way of answering this unanswerable question is simply to point to the “Appassionata,” with its satisfying psychological progression from struggle to hard-won victory, from fear to ferocity, and say: *that* is what we mean. Now, I admit, dear reader, that here I arrogate unto myself a *we* that is unrepresentative of those who wish to deconsecrate the canon, its creators, and its crusaders. I never thought I would use this word in a sentence, but on the question of greatness in music, I am, with every respect for every other point of view, an antisestablishmentarian.

In Beethoven’s creative lifetime, the distance between the “Appassionata,” completed in 1806, and the Sonata in F-sharp Major, **Op. 78**, completed in 1809, can be measured in time and money, politics and war, philosophy and physical wellbeing. In 1809, the year of Haydn’s death, Beethoven’s career took a new turn. As the historian Giorgio Pestelli has written: “In the month of March the contract with the three Viennese noblemen [Princes Lobkowitz and Kinsky and the Archduke Rudolph] confirmed the forty-year-old composer’s enviable position. In

May, Vienna was invaded for the second time by [Napoleon's] foreign troops, and the court and the nobility took refuge in Hungarian castles; Beethoven remained in the city, in his brother's cellar with his head between pillows so as not to hear the gunshots that were tormenting his afflicted ears. How the student of Rousseau had changed since 1794, when, with his Bonn friends, he spoke ironically about the pleasure-loving temperament of the Viennese! Now he railed against the war, that was interrupting concert life and those social customs on which music depended so much."

Pestelli rejects the old dates for Beethoven's "period of externalization" (ca. 1803 to ca. 1813) and begins a new period here, in 1809, that is characterized, in the sonatas Op. 78 and Op. 81a, by a new sense of intimacy—and lyricism. In Op. 78, we have a four-bar introduction, *Adagio cantabile*, that seems to say: "the subject of the following work is, in point of fact, lyricism." I do not know if the introduction was an afterthought; it might have been; some introductions are. But this one also permits Beethoven to begin the main business, *Allegro ma non troppo*, with an all-important upbeat figure that, without prior music, might have gotten lost.

That first movement, three or four times longer than the second, is in an expansive sonata form, with both halves repeated. (It might be worth remembering that the "sonata form," about which I have been nattering in these notes, is essentially *binary*: the first part is "about" the voyage from the home key to the contrasting key; the second part is "about" the return home. The interest lies in *how* we get from here to there.) The second movement, *Allegro vivace*, can also be fitted to the sonata terminology, but it has no "development," and no repeats. Beethoven may have been railing against the war in 1809, but—this movement proves it—he was still able to see much of life as an essentially ludic activity.

The G-Major Sonata, **Op. 79**, is perhaps less frequently played than others, but it is no less delightful. It was composed at nearly the same time as Op. 78 and Op. 81a and shares features with them, but it also shares features with the earlier G-Major Sonata, Op. 31 No. 1, namely a heightened sense of play. Indeed, the first movement has led the name-givers to name this one the "cuckoo"—something you will understand when we come to the development section of the perfectly regular sonata form, with an exposition in G and D, repeated, and a recapitulation in G and G, also repeated. The brief coda, too, features that falling, two-note bird-song motif (which in fact is extracted from the first four notes of the primary theme of the first movement).

The middle movement is a gentle meditation in G Minor, with a middle section in E-flat Major: that key is known as the "submediant" and is a frequent destination of composers writing in the minor mode. The finale, *Vivace*, is almost

over before it's begun. "German music" is usually "profound"; "German humor," usually heavy. Or so they say. But Beethoven, who is synonymous with German music and hardly averse to a joke, can both fly like a butterfly, as here, as well as sting like a bee.

On the title page of the original edition of the E-flat Major Sonata, **Op. 81a** (Op. 81b is a youthful sextet for strings and horns), we read: "Sonate caractéristique: Les adieux, l'absence, et le retour." Beethoven seems to have preferred the German words he inscribed on the score: "Das Lebewohl," "Abwesenheit," and "Wiedersehen." "Le-be-wohl" is even set down above the notes of the first three chords in the right hand, which represent "horn fifths": a three-chord-progression in which the middle chord describes the interval of a perfect fifth; a musical gesture associated with memory, or, in this case, farewell. How slowly can you say "Le-be-wohl"? The answer to that question gives Jiayan Sun a clue to the tempo of the introduction, which he believes ought not be exaggeratedly slow.

The sonata is dedicated to the man who, because of the French bombardment of Vienna in 1809, had decided to leave the city, the man who in 1804 had become Beethoven's student and who would soon become his good friend and his greatest patron—the Archduke Rudolph, the youngest son of Leopold II (Holy Roman Emperor from 1790 to 1792) and the brother of Francis II (Holy Roman Emperor after 1792 and, after the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, Emperor of Austria from 1804 to 1835). Rudolph, you see, was well-connected. He was also a gifted musician, as we may surmise from the intense qualities of the works Beethoven dedicated to him: not only this sonata, but the Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos, the Violin Sonata, Op. 96, the B-flat Trio, Op. 97 ("The Archduke"), the Sonata, Op. 106 ("Hammerklavier"), the final sonata, Op. 111, the *Missa Solemnis*, Op. 123, and the *Grosse Fuge*, Op. 133. Wow!

Those horn-fifths mark much of the first movement of Op. 81a, a "regular" sonata form whose Allegro begins on the unexpected fourth degree of the home key of E-flat, takes us to the dominant, B-flat, through a wide spectrum of keys in the development, and solidly home in the recapitulation. The way the horn-fifths overlap in the coda—you might listen for this—causes a dissonance that a certain conservative editor, in early nineteenth-century Paris, took for a mistake: he "corrected" it, and thought Beethoven should be grateful for the correction.

It is inconceivable that Richard Wagner was not familiar with the middle movement of this sonata, where some of the dissonances—including that of the "Tristan" chord *avant la lettre*—seem to embody Beethoven's anguish at the absence of his royal friend. When the Archduke returned to the city, Beethoven

was as happy as a lark—as you will hear in the finale, *Wiedersehen*, which recalls *Lebewohl* shortly before the end, then shouts out once and for all: *Welcome home*.

—Peter Bloom
Grace Jarcho Ross 1933 Professor of Humanities, Emeritus

ABOUT THE ARTIST

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>.

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

