



DIAMOND BAR
PERFORMING ARTS ACADEMY
ADVANCED MUSIC PROGRAM

Tuesday, December 29, 2020

Ludwig van Beethoven

December 1770 - March 26, 1827

Baptized on December 17, 1770 in Bonn, German composer and pianist Ludwig van Beethoven remains one of the most well-loved classical musicians of all time. Like many 19th-century musicians, Beethoven was born into a musical family; his father sang in the choir at Bonn, and served as his first teacher. Inspired by Leopold Mozart's successes with Wolfgang and Nannerl, Beethoven's father took desperate measures to get his son recognized as a child prodigy. It is said that Beethoven the Elder was an abusive pedagogue and father, causing great turmoil in the Beethoven household during the composer's formative years. His alcoholism forced the young Beethoven to leave school at 11, and become the family's breadwinner at 18.

Nevertheless, Beethoven proved to be a rising star from a young age. At age 10, Beethoven met his first composition teacher Christian Gottlob Niefe, with whom he began studying the works of J.S. Bach, C.P.E. Bach, Haydn, and Mozart. To many young pianists, the works of these prominent composers shone because they were pleasing to the ear. The young Beethoven, however, approached expressivity differently. His frequent usage of *fortissimo*, *pianissimo*, *sforzando*, and *fortepiano* stretched the definition of dynamic contrast. His temporary modulations, repetition of themes, and syncopated rhythms forced the average listener to actively follow the evolution of the music, rather than passively sit through the journey. In the early 1790s, Beethoven had the opportunity to present his innovative ideas to Haydn, and at age 21, he moved to Vienna to study under him. With additional tutelage from Johann Georg Albrechtsberger and Antonio Salieri, Beethoven's compositional output grew enormously.

The turn of the century roughly marks the beginning of Beethoven's "middle period." By 1802, the virtuosic composer and performer could no longer ignore the progression of a terrifying physical ailment: he was becoming deaf. After his doctor advised him to vacation in the quieter countryside, he moved to the Austrian countryside in Heiligenstadt. This is where he wrote the Heiligenstadt Testament, a now-famous letter to his brothers in which he discusses his experiences with depression and suicidal thoughts. In the letter, he also expresses that music was the only thing pulling him back from the abyss:

As the leaves of autumn wither and fall, so has my own life become barren... Even that high courage that inspired me in the fair days of summer has now vanished.

But only Art held back; for, ah, it seemed unthinkable for me to leave the world forever before I had produced all that I felt called upon to produce....

In another letter to his childhood friend Franz Wegeler, he described his determination to "seize Fate by the throat; it shall certainly not crush me completely." Whereas his previous compositions attempted to integrate the classical styles of Mozart and Haydn, from this point on, he would embark on a completely new path. Fate, struggle, and triumph thus became major themes during Beethoven's "heroic" period. His melodies, chord progressions, and stylistic flares became infused with a manic urgency. Slow movements became shorter; the elegant minuet became the energetic scherzo.

Alongside this rather aggressive shift in his musical style, Beethoven also developed an intimately spiritual side to his sound. As he grew progressively deaf, the soft rustling of clothes, the gradual creaking of floorboards, and the songs of birds in the morning slowly faded away; to fill this void, he turned to the divineness of the natural world. For Beethoven, nature was deeply connected to spirituality, and he connected with God through the world around him.

However, Beethoven's worsening condition also caused him to become somewhat of a misanthrope. After the death of his brother, a vicious custody battle with his sister-in-law over his nephew, and a turbulent relationship with his nephew thereafter, the composer drew inward. His last major public appearance was the premiere of the revolutionary Ninth Symphony. During this period of relative creative silence, however, the composer underwent yet another metamorphosis. This time, it appeared as though he had finally found equilibrium both in his soul and his music. Ever the innovator, he continued to expand his approach to harmony by utilizing thicker textures and church modes. His late string quartets were also daring departures from tradition, with the composer even adding additional movements to the usual four.

After contracting pneumonia in December 1826, Beethoven lay bedridden until his death the following March. His life had been shaped by one goal: to share himself with the world. Finally believing he had said everything he needed to say, Beethoven passed away on March 26, 1827 during a rainstorm. According to his friend Anselm Hüttenbrenner, there was a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder moments before his death, as if the universe were orchestrating music to welcome Beethoven into the afterlife.

One could say that the stormy weather that fateful day was a fitting end to our great composer's story. Beethoven's darkest moments were what propelled him — along with the rest of Europe's musical identity — into a new age of passion, innovation, and creative freedom. Ushering in the humanistic, deeply emotional soundscapes of the 19th century, his later works are now credited as harbingers of the Romantic era. Though many years have passed since his death, Beethoven's profound message of individuality and triumph through adversity continues to resonate.

Brian Slack, Double Bass, Class of 2020

Wind Quintet in E-Flat Major, Hess 19 (1793)

I. Allegro

Hannah Zhong, Oboe
Lawrence Wu, Bassoon
Michelle Yang, French Horn
Megan Silva, French Horn
William Luo, French Horn

Octet in E-Flat Major, Op. 103 (1792)

I. Allegro

David Kwon, Oboe
Hannah Zhong, Oboe
Cole Turkel, Clarinet *
Rachel Yang, Clarinet
Lawrence Wu, Bassoon
Paul Curtis, Bassoon *
Yolanda Zheng, French Horn
Bryan Chiu, French Horn

* Guest Artists

Piano Sonata No. 30 in E Major, Op. 109 (1820)

I. Vivace ma non troppo, sempre legato – Adagio espressivo
II. Prestissimo

Mi-Hyun Suh, Piano

Piano Sonata No. 23 in F Minor, Op 57 “Appassionata” (1804-5)

III. Allegro ma non troppo – Presto

Andrew Shi, Piano

String Quartet No. 7 in F Major, Op. 59 No. 1 “Razumovsky” (1806)

I. Allegro

Kelly Tsao, Violin
Sean Chang, Violin
Gloria Choi, Viola
Clare Choi, Cello

Piano Trio in D Major, Op. 70 No. 1 “Ghost” (1809)

I. Allegro vivace e con brio

Kyle Yang, Violin
Clare Choi, Cello
Andrew Shi, Piano

Although the majority of Beethoven's music is catalogued under opus numbers that were assigned to works during his lifetime, new catalogue systems were created after his death to identify works without opus numbers. One such system was the Hess Catalogue, which includes more fragmentary works than do other catalogues, including Beethoven's **Wind Quintet in E-Flat Major**. Only a few parts of this piece in its original form survive today: fragments of the first movement, the full second movement, and the beginning of the third movement. Additionally, Beethoven had intended to score the piece as a wind sextet with a clarinet, but left the staff for the clarinet part blank. Eventually, the quintet was completed by Leopold Zellner in 1862, then edited and published by Willy Hess in the 1950s. For the first movement (*Allegro*), Zellner reconstructed the exposition based on the recapitulation, expanded on the existing development, and kept the surviving recapitulation.

The movement opens with the three horns playing a call. Shortly after, the bassoon and oboe join in with an ascending melody outlining an E-Flat Major chord; this motif is echoed throughout the movement. Lyrical melodies and harmonic passages in the horns are interwoven with the woodwinds' melodic lead to form a warm, rounded texture. The movement generally maintains a mild, temperate atmosphere, despite the appearance of a slightly darker section within the development in the relative minor key. Soon after, the bright initial theme reappears in the recapitulation, returning the movement to its cheerful roots.

Megan Silva, French Horn, Class of 2021

One of the few chamber pieces for winds composed by Beethoven is the **Octet in E-Flat Major**. The ensemble consists of two oboes, two French horns, two bassoons, and two clarinets, an instrumentation inspired by his patron in Bonn, the elector Maximilian Franz. Born from the tradition of *Harmoniemusik*, or wind-band music, this octet was intended to serve as *Tafelmusik* (literally "table-music," i.e. music played at feasts or banquets). As such, the piece has an easygoing, lighthearted feel. The melody is mostly featured in the oboes, with the other woodwinds providing flowing harmonies underneath them. Meanwhile, the French horn embellishes the texture with dramatic arpeggios and a notable virtuoso passage within the recapitulation.

Although this piece was originally composed as an octet in 1792, it was reworked into a string quartet in 1795 and published as such soon after; the octet version was only published posthumously in 1834, causing it to have a misleadingly high opus number. Though music for wind instruments does not make up much of Beethoven's catalogue, the Octet in E-Flat Major has gained its place as a favorite among wind players.

Rachel Yang, Clarinet, Class of 2023

Because Beethoven was completely deaf by the time he wrote the **Piano Sonata No. 30**, he had to use his imagination to compose it. This makes the

sonata's achievements all the more miraculous; there are moments in the piece that break all boundaries of Classical-era music, including the limitations of the piano itself. In some such innovative sections, the right and left hands play in the extreme registers of the piano; additionally, Beethoven gives the dynamic marking *forte*. This is not just an instruction to play the section loudly, but also an indication that the pianist should play with a "full" sound. Though this may seem like a simple request, it is actually quite difficult to play "fully"; this is especially true of the higher registers of the instrument where the high frequency of the pitch causes the piano to sound thin and shrill. To perform such sections on the piano of Beethoven's time meant pushing the limits of the musician's imagination to create the character that Beethoven desired. These characteristics give Beethoven's late works their musical significance, contributing to the evolution of piano performance and even Western classical music itself.

Mi-Hyun Suh, Piano, 2021

Full of suspense and intensity, Beethoven's **Piano Sonata No. 23** is heard in a variety of contexts, ranging from international piano competitions to the silver screen. One of Beethoven's personal favorites, the "Appassionata" exhibits a wide range of musical tension and color. As the composer grew progressively deaf starting in his late 20s, his compositions began to display sudden outbreaks of fury and emotional affliction; the "Appassionata" is a prime example of this dramatic shift in his compositional style. Finished around the same time as his renowned Fifth Symphony, Beethoven incorporates the same diminished harmonies and tense moods in this piece.

The beginning of the *Allegro* opens with chords that represent a sense of terror, which are immediately followed by a whispering *subito* piano. To many pianists and scholars of music, this stark contrast unmistakably represents the composer's mental instability and worsening mood swings. Because this is the final movement of the entire 25-minute work, Beethoven likely meant to engage the audience by manifesting a constant sense of discomfort in the third movement, never allowing the crowd to relax. The constant shift of motifs is based around the Neapolitan sixth chord; this harmonic choice serves as a key element of the sonata. The piece ends with a final effort to express Beethoven's anger and frustration, featuring a notoriously difficult coda. Famed for both its demanding technicalities and immense musicality, the "Appassionata" will always be a concert favorite.

Andrew Shi, Piano, Class of 2022

Composed for Count Andreas Kyrilovich Razumovsky, the Russian ambassador in Vienna, **Beethoven's String Quartet No. 7** is characterized by a stark stylistic contrast from his earlier works. The piece features epic themes and expanded sonata forms, which was unusual for his time; what's more, it is twice as long as his previous quartets, even exceeding the length of five of his nine symphonies. His unorthodox choices evoked reactions of disbelief and hostility

from the public; in fact, some musicians even believed Beethoven was playing a joke on them with the piece's unprecedented technical and expressive demands. However, when questioned about the quartet's artistic validity, Beethoven responded by saying, "It's not for you, but for a later age..."

The first movement, *Allegro*, features one of Beethoven's most noble themes, presented first in the cello. This decision of instrumentation was heavily criticized by his contemporaries for challenging conventions of composition, as the theme was typically introduced by the violin. In reality, Beethoven's choice was indicative of a sensibility ahead of his time; he was letting the cello set the stage for the lush pleasantness of the upper strings that would follow. Innovative choices such as the ones found in this string quartet would eventually bring forth a new era of musicality and expression. Despite its initially discouraging reception, the String Quartet No.7 has stood the test of time, now undoubtedly a cornerstone of the string quartet repertoire.

Hannah Zhong, Oboe, Class of 2021

It was not an enjoyable experience. To begin with, the piano was terribly out of tune, a fact which troubled Beethoven not at all, as he could not hear it. Furthermore, little or nothing remained of the brilliant technique which used to be so admired. In the loud passages the poor deaf man hammered away at the notes smudging whole groups of them, and one lost all sense of the melody unless one could follow the score. I felt deeply moved by the tragedy of it all. Beethoven's almost continual melancholy was no longer a mystery to me.

– Louis Spohr

In the midst of an excruciating battle against severe hearing loss and overwhelming disapproval from music critics, the **Piano Trio Op. 70 No.1** (commonly known as the "**Ghost**" **Trio**) was a testament to Beethoven's undying love, devotion, and spirit to his craft. Written in 1809, just a few years before the composer went virtually deaf, this piece was written when Beethoven was in the process of reinventing the symphonic works and chamber music of his time (and arguably the entirety of classical music). The nickname "Ghost," coined by Beethoven's protégé Carl Czerny in 1842, was brought to mind after he came across numerous indications of Shakespeare's influence on Beethoven. For one, the trio's second movement (*Largo assai*) reminded Czerny of the ghost of Hamlet's father, which is why it is now known as the "Ghost" movement. Additionally, the words "Macbeth" and "Ende" appear in original sketches for the *Largo assai*, implying that it was inspired by the scene of the Three Witches. As for the trio itself, it served as a transition from the Classical harmonic language to Beethoven's later compositions, proving to be increasingly difficult and intense, unconventional, as well as longer in general.

That said, although the trio was written for the purpose of expressing Beethoven's personal struggles and hardships, he never ceased to communicate

hope and courage, attesting not only to the greatness of the piece, but more so to himself as a human being.

Kyle Yang, Violin, Class of 2023

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