

Beethoven Piano Sonatas

Jimin Oh-Havenith

Ludwig van Beethoven

Klaviersonate Nr. 23

f-Moll op. 57 ('Appassionata')

- I. Allegro assai 11:04
- II. Andante con moto – 5:42
- III. Allegro ma non troppo – Presto 8:36

Klaviersonate Nr. 30

E-Dur op. 109

- I. Vivace ma non troppo, sempre legato –
Adagio espressivo 3:47
- II. Prestissimo 2:46
- III. Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung.
Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo 2:24
Var. I - Var. VI • Cantabile 11:07

Klaviersonate Nr. 32

c-Moll op. 111

- I. Maestoso – Allegro con brio ed appassionato 10:06
- II. Arietta. Adagio molto semplice cantabile 20:52

Jimin Oh-Havenith plays Beethoven

Beethoven's piano sonatas occupy a special and unique place in the history of piano music. Hans von Bülow called them the "New Testament of piano playing" (Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* being the "Old Testament"); Bülow was one of the first great Beethoven interpreters and his edition of the sonatas remains highly instructive to this day. More to the point, Beethoven's sonatas form their own cosmos which has captivated pianists and listeners alike since the publication of the Op. 2 debut set of three sonatas, composed in 1795. The sonatas' attraction also becomes apparent in the uninterrupted flow of performance cycles and complete recordings, which was launched by Artur Schnabel's recording (1932-37) and continues, via illustrious names such as Wilhelm Backhaus, Wilhelm Kempff, Yves Nat, Tatiana Nikolayeva, Friedrich Gulda and Alfred Brendel, to the present day. The monumental block of 32 sonatas, which Beethoven completed in 1822 with another set of three works – Opp. 109-III – reflects even more clearly than Beethoven's symphonies the stormy transition in music and contemporary history from the classical to the romantic eras, and from the French Revolution to the restoration period under Metternich. And since the body of sonatas also mirrors Beethoven's artistic personality, it is always worthwhile to think about how this type of project, in the history of keyboard music, evolved from previously large-scale undertakings, such as Domenico Scarlatti's 555 (!) sonatas or Joseph Haydn's 52 sonatas, strangely neglected even now. Scarlatti's unimaginable productivity and the wealth of ideas and pianistic situations in his sonatas are ultimately based on a single starting point – a one-movement sonata in two parts, each of which is repeated. With Haydn, on the other hand, we find an almost experimental investigation of a wide variety of formal principles, all the while maintaining an astonishing compositional economy. Beethoven, who, after his move from Bonn to Vienna, was Haydn's star pupil from November 1792 to January 1794, proved to be extremely quick to learn in regards to the treatment of musical material. In terms of radicalism in artistic expression, however, he immediately went beyond Haydn, which inevitably led to conflicts. In this regard, it was Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach who became Beethoven's role model since Bach, as one of the main representatives of the musical *Sturm und Drang*, had contributed substantially to creating a more subjectivised and rhetorically charged music concept: in the field of piano music, he had produced no fewer than nine sets of piano sonatas and fantasies, published between 1742 and 1787, as well as the highly influential treatise, *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* [Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments] (1753/62). Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's influence may indeed be considered the greatest and most important constant in Beethoven's piano oeuvre: that influence is immediately palpable in the excited mood of the first four-movement sonata in F minor, Op. 10 No. 1, and remains perceptible in the turmoil of the last sonata, Op. III in C minor. The latter is conceived in two contrasting movements, forming a greater unity: Bach's oeuvre features several such examples.

The legacy of CPE Bach and Haydn, as well as the poles of emotional-rhetorical and rational-constructive orientation of composing that they represented, determined the physiognomy of Beethoven's sonatas. One could, to maintain the imagery, speak of a magnetic repulsion between the two poles, but in art the situation is more complex. For opposites are conveyed and create a complex combination of construction and expression. Beethoven refuses or redefines the previously prevailing expectations of music to perform societal tasks of a religious, representative or entertaining nature. From 1803 he spoke explicitly of the completely new path that he now had to take: he referred to the idea of lyrical music that follows an inner (and sometimes an exterior, illustrative) programme. At the end there is the self-referential question as to what music actually is, can be, and – as the mysterious motto of Beethoven's last string quartet in F major, Op. 135, suggests – must be. Exploring and crossing boundaries can therefore be named as a central motif in Beethoven's compositional work, and this applies to his piano music in a "physical" manner. Beethoven was an excellent pianist and improviser and usually worked out his musical material at the instrument, even after becoming increasingly deaf. His treatment of the instruments was feared:

their mechanical stability, tonal range and dynamic possibilities could never be large enough for him, and in the course of his life he came to prefer the English Broadwood grand pianos to the Viennese pianos. (Regardless of this, Beethoven cultivated a friendship with the Viennese piano maker couple Johann Andreas and Nannette Streicher.) The pianistic design of the sonatas and the ever increasing technical and virtuosic demands – through to the “Hammerklavier” sonata, Op. 106, which was initially deemed unplayable and whose premiere was realised thanks to Franz Liszt – also reflected the evolving design of grand pianos during Beethoven’s lifetime. And there are always pianists who opt to perform Beethoven’s sonatas on the instruments that were available to him. This experience can reveal interesting insights relating to choice of tempi, dynamics and articulation for performances on modern grand pianos: due to the much smaller key drop and the lighter touch Beethoven’s music can, or even has to, be played much faster on historical instruments, putting into perspective some of the “unplayable” passages (such as the famous octave glissandi in the finale of the “Waldstein” sonata). Jimin Oh-Havenith takes this into account in her interpretation with carefully chosen tempi, which also enable the most vivid and transparent depiction of the thematic structures and inner developments – which Theodor W. Adorno interpreted as the “destinies” of fictional characters in a novel.

This CD presents three of Beethoven’s most famous, most beautiful, but also most demanding piano sonatas. The so-called “Appassionata” – whose title was added by the Hamburg publisher Crazz in 1838 – was written in 1804/05 as an example of the “new path” discussed above. Its opus number places it between the Triple Concerto, Op. 56, and the Fourth Piano Concerto, Op. 58, two works that could not be more different and at the same time more characteristic of Beethoven’s middle period. The traditional heroic-dramatic interpretation of the Sonata Op. 57, taking up the key of the first sonata, Op. 2/1, needs to be put into perspective. It originates from Daniel Friedrich Schubart’s late eighteenth century attribution of key aesthetics, where F minor is associated with “deep melancholy, lamentation, moaning and longing for the grave”. This motif of melancholy had been dominant in Beethoven’s personal and artistic life at least since his *Heiligenstadt Testament* of 1802. The beautiful movement of variations forms the centre of the work, while the outer movements can be heard as manifestations of a futile rebellion which turns into a sarcastic dance in the coda. In Beethoven’s last sonatas, the variation as a form and technique took on equal status to the sonata form. Whilst one can be associated with the idea of a target or an arrow that culminates in the recapitulation of the theme, the other represents the concept of a circle or a circling motion. Both the E major Sonata, Op. 109, written in 1820 and dedicated to Maximiliane Brentano (the daughter of the alleged “Immortal Beloved”, Antonie Brentano), and the C minor Sonata, Op. 111, which Beethoven dedicated once again to his pupil, friend and patron, Archduke Rudolf of Austria-Hungary, conclude with an extensive set of variations. Whilst the E major sonata still comprises a fantastically sweeping scherzo (whose cunning rhythmic shifts point to Schumann), thus committing to the old three-movement conception (also preferred by Mozart), the C minor sonata ends after the variation movement. It does not seem conceivable to try and surpass it, for the theme – which is both simple and touchingly other-worldly – is subjected to astonishing metamorphoses in the following five variations, which enter uncharted territory, which is also reflected in the complex signatures of $\frac{9}{16}$, $\frac{6}{16}$ and $\frac{12}{32}$. This new territory affects not only the extremes of expression, but also the demands placed on the instrument, whose keyboard range is savoured and stretched to the limit. Once again, it is the boundaries that we come up against and that allow a glimpse into the inexhaustibility of Beethoven’s imagination. In his novel *Doctor Faustus*, Thomas Mann (inspired by Theodor W. Adorno) interpreted the end of the C minor sonata as a farewell to the world and to the genre of the sonata itself. But isn’t this music also a beginning?

Wolfgang Rathert

Translation: Viola Scheffel

Jimin Oh-Havenith




Jimin Oh-Havenith was born in Seoul, South Korea. In 1979 she began her piano studies with Jin-Woo Chung at the Seoul National University. From 1981 to 1984 she continued her studies with Aloys Kontarsky at the Musikhochschule Köln.

In addition to her concert activities as a soloist as well as radio and CD recordings, she also performed as a piano duo with her late husband Raymund Havenith (†1993).

Jimin Oh-Havenith taught at the Hochschule für Musik in Mainz and the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst in Frankfurt am Main.

Since 2013 she is active as a soloist again.





recording:
May 30 - June 1, 2019

recording location:
Jesus-Christus-Kirche, Berlin-Dahlem

recording producer / executive producer:
Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff

sound & editing:
Dipl.-Tonmeister Justus Beyer

recording format:
pcm, 96kHz, 24 bit

piano:
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