

JONATHAN BISS

BEETHOVEN

THE COMPLETE
PIANO SONATAS



ORCHID CLASSICS



LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770 – 1827)**The Complete Piano Sonatas**

Jonathan Biss

CD 1

Piano Sonata No.5 in C minor, Op.10 No.1

1 Allegro molto e con brio	5.18
2 Adagio molto	7.23
3 Prestissimo	4.11

Piano Sonata No.11 in B flat major, Op.22

4 Allegro con brio	7.24
5 Adagio con molt'espressione	6.37
6 Menuetto	3.12
7 Rondo: Allegretto	6.26

Piano Sonata No.12 in A flat major ('Funeral March'), Op.26

8 Andante con variazioni	6.56
9 Scherzo. Allegro molto	2.37
10 Maestoso andante, marcia funebre sulla morte d'un eroe	5.20
11 Allegro	2.53

Piano Sonata No.26 in E flat major ('Les Adieux'), Op.81a

12 Das Lebewohl. Adagio – Allegro	6.53
13 Abwesenheit. Andante espressivo (In gehender Bewegung, doch mit viel Ausdruck)	3.08
14 Das Wiedersehen. Vivacissimamente (Im lebhaftesten Zeitmaße)	5.35

Total time 74.10

CD 2

Piano Sonata No.4 in E flat major, Op.7

1 Allegro molto e con brio	7.45
2 Largo, con gran espressione	8.11
3 Allegro	5.08
4 Rondo: Poco allegretto e grazioso	6.55

Piano Sonata No.14 in C sharp minor ('Moonlight'), Op.27

5 Adagio sostenuto	5.07
6 Allegretto	2.05
7 Presto agitato	7.16

8 Fantasy in G minor, Op.77 9.09**Piano Sonata No.24 in F sharp major ('Funeral March'), Op.78**

9 Adagio cantabile – Allegro ma non troppo	7.04
10 Allegro vivace	2.39

Total time 61.25

CD 3

Piano Sonata No.15 in D major, Op.28

1 Allegro	9.15
2 Andante	6.19
3 Scherzo: Allegro vivace	2.20
4 Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo	4.58

Piano Sonata No.16 in G major, Op.31 No.1

5 Allegro vivace	6.22
6 Adagio grazioso	10.09
7 Rondo, allegretto – Presto	6.29

Piano Sonata No.21 in C major, Op.53 ('Waldstein')

8	Allegro con brio	10.40
9	Introduzione: Adagio molto – Attacca (in F major)	3.50
10	Rondo. Allegretto moderato – Prestissimo	10.00

Total time 70.26

CD 4

Piano Sonata No.1 in F minor, Op.2 No.1

1	Allegro	3.54
2	Adagio	4.36
3	Allegretto	3.18
4	Prestissimo	4.39

Piano Sonata No.6 in F major, Op.10 No.2

5	Allegro	8.20
6	Allegretto	3.45
7	Presto	3.51

Piano Sonata No.19 in G minor, Op.49 No.1

8	Andante	3.34
9	Rondo: Allegro	3.12

Piano Sonata No.23 in F minor, Op.57 ('Appassionata')

10	Allegro assai	9.36
11	Andante con moto	5.30
12	Allegro ma non troppo – Presto	8.08

Total time 62.28

CD 5

Piano Sonata No.3 in C major, Op.2 No.3

1	Allegro con brio	9.45
2	Adagio	7.15
3	Scherzo: Allegro	3.02
4	Allegro assai	5.09

Piano Sonata No.25 in G major, Op.79

5	Presto alla tedesca	4.23
6	Andante	2.25
7	Vivace	1.55

Piano Sonata No.27 in E minor, Op.90

8	Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus mit Empfindung und Ausdruck	5.22
9	Nicht zu geschwind und sehr singbar vorgetragen	6.36

Piano Sonata No.28 in A major, Op.101

10	Etwas lebhaft, und mit der innigsten Empfindung. Allegretto ma non troppo	3.58
11	Lebhaft, Marschmäßig. Vivace alla marcia	6.14
12	Langsam und sehnsuchtsvoll. Adagio, ma non troppo, con affetto - Geschwind, doch nicht zu sehr, und mit Entschlossenheit. Allegro	10.22

Total time 66.29

CD 6

Piano Sonata No.9 in E major, Op.14 No.1

1	Allegro	6.29
2	Allegretto	3.37
3	Rondo. Allegro comodo	3.10

Piano Sonata No.13 in E flat major, Op.27 No.1
('Sonata quasi una fantasia')

4	Andante	4.28
5	Allegro molto e vivace	1.55
6	Adagio con espressione	2.22
7	Allegro vivace	5.19

Piano Sonata No.29 in B flat major, Op.106 ('Hammerklavier')

8	Allegro	10.51
9	Scherzo. Assai vivace	2.49
10	Adagio sostenuto	15.32
11	Largo. Allegro risoluto	12.14

Total time **68.48**

CD 7

Piano Sonata No.2 in A major, Op.2 No.2

1	Allegro vivace	6.49
2	Largo appassionato	5.41
3	Scherzo. Allegretto	3.16
4	Rondo. Grazioso	6.24

Piano Sonata No.20 in G major, Op.49 No.2

5	Allegro ma non troppo	4.00
6	Tempo di menuetto	3.00

Piano Sonata No.17 in D minor, Op.31 No.2 ('The Tempest')

7	Largo. Allegro	7.45
8	Adagio	6.40
9	Allegretto	6.08

Piano Sonata No.30 in E major, Op.109

10	Vivace ma non troppo. Adagio espressivo	3.54
11	Prestissimo	2.20
12	Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung. Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo	12.45

Total time **68.45**

CD 8

Piano Sonata No.8 in C minor, Op.13 ('Pathétique')

1	Grave – Allegro di molto e con brio	8.27
2	Adagio cantabile	4.42
3	Rondo – Allegro	4.43

Piano Sonata No.10 in G major, Op.14 No.2

4	Allegro	7.10
5	Andante	4.42
6	Scherzo – Allegro assai	3.27

Piano Sonata No.22 in F major, Op.54

7	In tempo d'un menuetto	5.08
8	Allegretto – Più allegro	5.35

Piano Sonata No.31 in A flat major, Op.110

9	Moderato cantabile molto espressivo	6.44
10	Allegro molto	2.14
11	Adagio ma non troppo – Fuga: Allegro ma non troppo	10.46

Total time **63.43**

CD 9

Piano Sonata No.7 in D major, Op.10 No.3

1	Presto	6.32
2	Largo e mesto	7.48
3	Menuetto: Allegro	2.47
4	Rondo: Allegro	4.24

Piano Sonata No.18 in E flat major, Op.31 No.3

5	Allegro	8.17
6	Scherzo: Allegretto vivace	4.56
7	Menuetto: moderato e grazioso	3.35
8	Presto con fuoco	4.33

Piano Sonata No.32 in C minor, Op.111

9	Maestoso – Allegro con brio ed appassionato	8.47
10	Arietta: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile	16.14

Total time **67.56**

CD 1

Sonatas 5, 11, 12 & 26 ('Les Adieux')

The 32 Beethoven piano sonatas are often referred to as one of the greatest – if not the greatest – bodies of music ever composed. True enough. But to refer to them as such is to obscure the brilliance and individuality of each work, for what is perhaps most remarkable about the sonatas is that they really aren't a 'body of music' at all: they are 32 masterpieces, 32 distinct structures, 32 fully realized, often awe-inspiring, always unique emotional universes. As individual works, each is endlessly compelling on its own merits; as a cycle, it moves from transcendence to transcendence, the basic concerns always the same, but the language impossibly varied.

In the end, I think, it is the nature of these concerns – which could crudely be described as being of the 'man versus universe' variety – which unites this music, in spite of the incredible amount of ground it covers both formally and stylistically. A favourite cliché about Beethoven is that he moved from thumbing his nose at the traditionalists in his first period, to magnificence in the middle one, to spirituality in the late. (Even the idea of three periods is a cliché, in fact – a figure as complex as Beethoven will probably always be vulnerable to oversimplification, and his compositional style was in a perpetual state of evolution.) But in fact, the last sonatas betray no lessening in his gruffness, or desire to shock, and the earliest ones have slow movements which already seem to stop time. (And this is to say nothing of the moments of extraordinary tenderness in the middle works.) And so it is with Op.10 No.1. The middle movement forms an oasis of profound beauty, always searching, yet with a deep stillness grounding it. 'Oasis', because the music which surrounds it is among the most restless Beethoven wrote. This is one of the first of Beethoven's many works in C minor, and the qualities one associates with this composer in this key – anxiety, rage, the shaking of the fist – are fully in evidence here. Beethoven was, throughout his life, attracted to opposition, to dichotomy, of character and feeling – in no other composer's music do the tender and the furious coexist so closely – and in this

sonata that idea is extended to tempo: where the outer movements are meant to quicken the pulse not only of the player, but the listener, life itself slows down for the second movement. Or: if the fast movements grapple with a world which infuriated Beethoven, the slow one imagines a different, more perfect one.

Where Op.10 No.1, like so many of its neighbours, shows Beethoven inventing, Op.22 feels very much like a summation. Despite the early opus number, Beethoven had by this point written more than a third of his piano sonatas, and in this work – a particular favourite of his – he demonstrates an enormous ease and confidence with the form; the sonata's ideas sound as if they had simply flown from the composer's pen. Beethoven surely had as restless an imagination as any great artist, but in this sonata we find him looking more backwards than forwards; the last two movements in particular adhere closely to a model he had established, and throughout the piece, one is reminded of one or another of the previous sonatas. But while the sonata is revolutionary neither in form nor in content, it is no less marvellous for it: the impish wit of the work's opening, for example, or the never-ending, heaven-directed song of the second movement are indicative of a master revelling in his own mastery.

It may be that this mastery came slightly too easily for Beethoven's liking, for the next four sonatas find him experimenting with form as boldly and as variously as any group of works he wrote. It is astonishing that the first of these, the Opus 26, was written within a year of Op.22, its immediate predecessor; the only thing the two works have in common is that they are unjustly neglected – one hardly ever hears either, other than in the context of a complete cycle of the sonatas. While the 20th and 21st centuries may not have taken notice of this lovely and slightly peculiar masterpiece, the 19th certainly did: it was the funeral march from this sonata, not the 'Eroica' Symphony, which was played at Beethoven's own funeral, and Chopin – almost alone among great musicians in his general indifference to Beethoven – admired it greatly, and was surely influenced by it. The aforementioned funeral march is the most obvious manifestation of that influence, but one imagines that Chopin was equally struck by the almost total

absence of grand gesture, of rhetoric, throughout the work. The sonata opens with a theme of disarming simplicity and beauty, which – unprecedented in Beethoven's output – becomes the basis not of a sonata movement, but a set of variations. So instead of developing – not to say manipulating – the theme, he embroiders it, allowing it to expand and contract, to unfold of its own accord. So often in Beethoven, one feels the composer attempting (and virtually always succeeding) to bend the material to his will; in this work, even in the funeral march, dedicated to 'A Hero', nothing ever feels imposed on the motives. The form of the Op.26 may be unprecedented, but after the brilliance and bluster of the early sonatas, its quiet confidence and utter absence of any attempt to ingratiate may be its most striking features.

Being ingratiating, of course, dropped ever lower on Beethoven's list of priorities as he aged, and while there is no shortage of beauty in the works of his last two decades, it is increasingly a rugged, even gnarled beauty, and one always at the service of the idea at hand. And the ideas themselves grow ever bolder – less and less reliant on any convention of musical language. This sort of innovation did not come easily: Beethoven's first 20 sonatas were composed in the space of seven years, from 1795 to early 1802; the subsequent seven years saw the composition of only five, and it was not until 1810 that the 'Les Adieux' Sonata (*Lebewohl*, in German, No.26) was completed. Conventional wisdom says that Beethoven's late style was still several years away, but this work, despite the almost reckless exuberance of its finale, has an interiority which is a hallmark of every subsequent sonata he composed. (The 'Hammerklavier' Sonata's magnificently impenetrable slow movement is enough to make it qualify, despite the grandness of the rest of the piece.)

And accordingly, nothing about the sonata is business as usual. Its most obviously unique feature is its programmatic nature: whereas the Pastoral Symphony is programmatic only in the sense that it attempts to evoke the feelings attached to certain events, the 'Les Adieux' first movement is permeated with a three-note motif – actually marked *Le-be-wohl* at the

sonata's opening – obviously intended to mimic a horn call, a formal gesture of parting. While nothing in the second or third movements conveys in such a literal way the absence and return, respectively, of Archduke Rudolph, the sonata's dedicatee and inspiration, the idea of a formal narrative has been planted so firmly in our heads by this point that we can supply the imagery ourselves.

More significant are the sonata's formal innovations. What is so striking about the first movement is that while its body – its exposition, development and recapitulation – is perhaps the most compact of any of Beethoven's movements in sonata form, it is flanked by an introduction and coda of extreme spaciousness. While this might in theory make the movement ungainly – think gigantic limbs attached to a modest torso – in reality, these appendages, in being far longer than one would expect, prove enormously effective in illustrating the pain of parting. This is the genius of Beethoven: his formal innovations are never theoretical, or merely 'ideas'; his forms become maps of the works' emotional content, of their truest nature.

There is one final way in which the 'Les Adieux' sonata points the way towards Beethoven's last works. Early in his compositional career, Beethoven was content for his last movements to round the works off; this rounding off might be graceful (Op.22), or brash (Op.10 No.1), but there is nothing in these movements to alter the general course of the works. As Beethoven grew older, his conception of the multi-movement work changed so that ultimately he viewed them as emotional trajectories which were not resolved until the final notes were played. This is very much in evidence in 'Les Adieux'. The last movement provides the work with a resolution not only because a movement called 'The Absence' must inevitably be followed by a return, but because the emotional ambiguity which permeates the first two movements absolutely demands the uncomplicated joy of the last.

Perhaps it is these two qualities – the complexity and ambiguity on the one hand, the optimism and occasionally even euphoria on the other – which best define what the Beethoven sonatas represent. To embark on this journey is thus both awe-inducing, and pure delight.

CD 2

Sonatas 4, 14 ('Moonlight'), 24, Fantasy in G minor

What is it that we talk about when we talk about The Beethoven Sonatas? About The Sonata Form? These questions (pace Raymond Carver) often occurred to me as I prepared to make this album. Other than their determination to confound every expectation (and, of course, their greatness, and the bloody-mindedness of their author), is there any common thread running through these works? Together they demonstrate that the form of the sonata – the idea of the sonata – is large and mutable enough to accommodate history's most restless and relentless musical imagination, over and over again, no matter his mood or his priorities of the moment.

In the thrilling Sonata, Op.7, Beethoven's first priority is bigness: this sonata alone gives the lie to the notion that his early works are less grandly conceived, or spiritually minded, than his later ones. In length – no sonata, save the 'Hammerklavier', is longer – in brilliance, and in its concerns, it is of a scope that is unprecedented for a sonata; few symphonies composed by that time are as long or as ambitious. Its first movement does not begin so much as spring into being, the bass pulsating beneath a two-note declamation. This motive is emblematic of the movement in that it is memorable less for its originality or its beauty than for its verve and its drive. Even in its most lyrical moments this movement retains a bubbling-over quality – despite its grand proportions, it never for a moment loses its buoyancy. The enormous pleasure this music brings comes from the power of Beethoven's enormous personality at its most exultant.

When the second movement arrives, Beethoven deploys the whole of this personality in an utterly different direction, as the physical gives way to the metaphysical: this music is one of Beethoven's earliest (and already breathtaking) surveys of the cosmos. Where the first movement is all certainty, the second is essentially a series of unanswered (perhaps unanswerable) questions: even in moments of harmonic resolution, this music is filled with mystery. But while the movement is filled with and shaped by its silences – they

are almost more meaningful than the notes that surround them – it is somehow, miraculously, seamless; until its final moments, it does not allow the listener to exhale fully.

The final two movements are on the surface more conventional – the third a minuet, the fourth a *grazioso* rondo. But just when we feel sure the work's drama is behind us, Beethoven pulls another trick from his sleeve, as the rondo's central episode, in a fist-shaking C minor, reappears, transformed, in a long coda – an extended, affecting, lyrical farewell. Apparently as early as 1797, the role of the sonata finale was on Beethoven's mind: he ultimately shifted the centre of gravity from the first half of the work to its conclusion, and Op.7 is a first, tentative step along that path.

That this work and Op.27 No.2 (the ill-nicknamed 'Moonlight') are both sonatas seems roughly as probable as a St Bernard and a dachshund both being dogs: in shape, size and character they have nothing in common with one another. If confounding expectations is a central theme of the Beethoven sonatas, Op.27 No.2 is most confounding of all – its first movement is perhaps the most surreal, suspended rumination Beethoven ever wrote. In this movement, the building-blocks are not the point any more. (And how Beethoven loved building blocks!) Not that it has no structure – if you squint, you can see a sonata form – but the essence of this movement is surely not its architecture, but its atmosphere. That atmosphere – tightly coiled yet spacious, eerily still but absolutely not peaceful – is so extraordinary, it is simply one of those pieces one hears once and then never forgets. After a wisp of a second movement – for all its charm, it has a kind of neutrality about it which is probably necessary given what has just elapsed – comes a finale as unrelenting and remorseless as the first movement is ambiguous. Here again is a new conception of the sonata finale – a barnstorming answer to every question posed earlier in the piece. An uninhibited expression of everything that is reined in previously, this movement is the work's terrifying id.

Eight years and a whole universe separate Op.27 No.2 from Op.78. Nothing in this gem of a work – a special favourite of Beethoven – is normal. Not the number of movements – two, placing it in the company of only a handful of the sonatas. Not its proportions – save for the heart-stopping four-bar phrase which opens the work, it contains no slow music. Certainly not the key – F sharp major, the porcupine of tonalities. And yet, the predominant impression it leaves is not of awkwardness, or even strangeness, but of how very beautiful it is. Its warmth and generosity are all the more moving in light of how effortful composition was for Beethoven at the time. Beset with personal difficulties and reaching for a new style, he wrote only four piano sonatas in the decade this work comes in the middle of. But as he took baby steps to the future, certain jewels emerged, and this sonata is one of them. In its first movement, all of F sharp major's edges – all the porcupine's quills – have been smoothed, and what emerges is one of the composer's most mellifluous and songlike creations. The edges come back with a vengeance in the second movement, which is rowdy and happily absurd. Beethoven's sense of humour could on occasion be witty and refined, but here it is earthy, tongue not in cheek but sticking belligerently out at the earnest fellow who wrote the first movement – yet another view of the sonata's last movement in relation to what precedes it.

Appended to this sonata – and this album – is a curio: the Fantasy, Op.77. If it is, in fact, merely one of Beethoven's renowned improvisations, no one knows why he elected to write it, and none of the others, down. The most compelling theory is that it was intended as a companion to the sonata whose opus number immediately follows it: this would explain the otherwise inexplicable 'No.2' which appears on the manuscript of the sonata. The theory is further supported by the B major which closes the Fantasy, and the F sharp major which is the sonata's only tonality – both unique in Beethoven's output and altogether unusual, but closely related to one another. At any rate, the Fantasy is, in its own loony way, a masterpiece, filled with the taut, wiry energy that is among Beethoven's hallmarks, but totally lacking in the development and rigour that are in some of his others.

And even in this work – one so freewheeling that we ought to have no expectations for it at all – Beethoven manages to confound. For many minutes, the Fantasy seems to be merely an 'idea parade' – they go as fast as they come, without elaboration, as if the possibility of exploring one motive could never be as entertaining as looking for the next one. Just when this seems sure to be the nature of the entire piece, he lands on a theme, and then absolutely fixates on it, devoting the second half of the work exclusively to a set of variations on it. And what a theme! Entirely rhythmically square, and remarkable in no way that could be identified, it is somehow deeply touching – a premonition of the Ode to Joy. And it is all the more so for being impossible to see coming. Of course the element of surprise is not all that keeps us listening to Beethoven – if the ideas themselves weren't extraordinary, if his personality weren't arresting, we would simply ignore them. But it is worth stopping to notice how many times Beethoven reinvented the wheel – how rarely he used one of his previous works (or anyone else's) as the model for the next one. With virtually every piece he wrote, he challenged himself, and us, to hear music anew. When we talk about The Beethoven Sonatas we talk about Everything.

CD 3

Sonatas 15, 16, 21 ('Waldstein')

Beethoven wrote his 32 piano sonatas over the course of 27 years; only four of those years, from the turbulent centre of Beethoven's altogether turbulent life, are represented on this album. And yet, despite that narrow span of time, the range of expression in these sonatas is anything but narrow. (That this would be the case with more-or-less any three of the 32 sonatas explains why the project of recording the lot of them is so irresistible.) It is, in fact, infinite, moving in turn from subtle to sly, to, finally, cosmic.

The first two sonatas heard here were written primarily in 1801, a year that brought dramatic shifts in Beethoven's conception of the sonata. It was in that year that Beethoven announced to Czerny that he would be taking a "new path". And it is true that while from Opus 1 onwards Beethoven is never anything

other than original, 1801 finds him relentlessly testing the sonata's limits, terrible twos style. A slow set of variations in lieu of a proper sonata allegro (Op. 26); a multi-movement work played without pause (Op. 27 No.1); a ghostly, *sotto voce* rumination which is somehow, improbably, also a fully realized sonata form (Op. 27 No. 2, the 'Moonlight'); a set of halting, increasingly operatic recitatives fully incorporated into an otherwise tersely-argued sonata (Op. 31 No. 2, the 'Tempest') – all of these are among Beethoven's 1801 experiments, and most are without precedent.

The innovations in Opp. 28 and 31 No.1 are no less significant but decidedly less arresting. In fact, the defining features of Op. 28 – sometimes saddled with the rather generic nickname 'Pastorale' – are its soft-spokenness and, particularly, its subtlety: it is subtle in its innovation, in its character, and even in the way it announces itself. Unlike so many of Beethoven's sonatas, whose first notes are declamatory or combative (or both), Op. 28 murmurs its way into being; the gentle pulsation in the bass gives the impression of having existed silently for all eternity, becoming audible just at the moment the sonata begins.

While there is nothing dull or self-serious about this work – it is full of wit and play and, in its second movement, a quiet pathos – its serenity is rarely disturbed. The effect of this is to make its few real outbursts all the more powerful: the sonata's free-wheeling, exultant conclusion and, above all, the remarkable passage in the first movement's development in which Beethoven bloody-mindedly repeats an F sharp major chord for 28 consecutive measures. This eventually involves the elimination of all other musical elements: there is no melody, no rhythm, just this chord, a harmonic intruder in the midst of a sonata in D major. The insane length and all-around improbability of this passage force us to rehear everything that has preceded it. When Beethoven is finally finished with this chord, and effortlessly modulates us back home in three little phrases – what F sharp major? – the work's peace, now knowing what it is to be disturbed, takes on a more fragile, tender quality. This is vintage Beethoven: even what on the surface seems merely lovely, upon closer examination is revealed to be complex and fraught with meaning.

No less layered and finely wrought is Opus 31 No. 1, but here the brilliant detail is placed at the service of high comedy – if Op. 31 No. 2, its companion, is the Tempest, number 1 is Much Ado About Nothing. It is a work that both begins and ends with a joke, and while what comes in between is on occasion truly moving, it never abandons its central mission: to explore every variety of musical humour, rough or refined. The first movement revolves around one ingenious premise: the inability of the two hands to play together – the right hand keeps anticipating the beats, making the left, which is the one actually doing what it is supposed to, sound slothful. It's already funny in its first appearance, but turns uproarious as the hands' inability to get it together leads first to (mock?) rage, and then to a zany and fruitless race up and down the keyboard – an early 19th century Wile E. Coyote and Roadrunner routine.

In the second movement, the humour takes the form of parody: it is a devastating imitation of an aria from an Italian opera, complete with an oom-pah-pah accompaniment and ornamentation that is at times absurdly florid. At the same time, though, Beethoven loved Italian opera – he admired Cherubini more than practically any other composer – and whatever else it might be, this movement is uncommonly beautiful. It is a send-up, to be sure, but it is simultaneously a tribute. And in the hands of Beethoven, perhaps the most powerful musical personality who ever lived, it becomes something its source material never could be: transcendental.

The wit of the finale is of a gentler variety, and the movement itself is not as immediately arresting as the first two. But it was a crucial source of inspiration to no less a genius than Schubert, who used it as a very literal model for the finale of one of his last masterpieces – the A major Piano Sonata, D959. Phrase by phrase, he follows Beethoven's shifts of register, character, note values – everything. Both the Beethoven and the Schubert end with a quick-as-a-flash presto, in each case immediately preceded by the movement's most striking moment: a silence-filled iteration of the finale's main theme, the theme itself seeming to break down. In the Schubert, this gives the material a new and

heartbreaking vulnerability. In the Beethoven, once again, the innovation is played for laughs: the silences have knocked a rather suave theme charmingly off-kilter. It's as if Beethoven is mocking himself for any hint of earnestness he displayed earlier; however dazzlingly and lovingly crafted it might be, earnestness has no place in this work.

Op. 31 No. 1, played less frequently than the two sonatas that follow it, needs to be rescued from obscurity; the 'Waldstein' needs rescuing from its own success. It is so often played, it is difficult to hear with open ears, and it is done no favours by the hordes of piano students who tear into it with mostly misdirected enthusiasm. I often wish that like its similarly abused companion, the 'Appassionata', it had been given a nickname derived not from its dedicatee, but its primary affect: *Sonata Misterioso*. For while it is undeniably a piece of tremendous energy, that energy is often more potential than kinetic: a great deal of the sonata unfolds in the piano-pianissimo range, and nearly all of it, in a good performance, should convey a sense of wonder. Even the brilliant first movement is not without its shadows; all of its motives feature moments that hover between major and minor. The movement ends in triumph, but afterward, the uncertainty it hinted at comes right to the fore: the introduction to the finale is a masterpiece of indistinctness. Most of its phrases pose unanswered questions, its tonality is frequently in flux, and even its metre is not always clear – it is a portrait of instability in sound. When it finally resolves itself into the finale proper, C major has never sounded so open, so life-affirming. The 'Waldstein' is known primarily for a certain athletic quality, but what makes it a masterpiece is the way in which, with ever-increasing power and rapture, it conjures the infinite. Among the many great gifts Beethoven gives us, this vision of the beyond may be the greatest and most unfathomable of them all.

Sonatas 1, 6, 19 & 23 ('Appassionata')

Can this really be how it all begins?

Each time I start to play Beethoven's Sonata Op.2 No.1, the first of the 32, I ask myself that same question. It seems...unfitting...that a body of music so questing, so challenging, so heaven- (and, occasionally, hell-) storming, would begin so unassumingly. Written in 1795 and dedicated to Haydn, the sonata opens with a simple upward arpeggio, the so-called "Mannheim Rocket", a conventional device if there ever was one – a device that Haydn, the work's dedicatee and a composer who had recently finished a long career of writing piano sonatas, would have considered old-fashioned and paint-by-numbers. The initial impression is of music – and, presumably, a composer – with modest aims.

This impression holds for, at most, one phrase. Beethoven was, by nature, neither referential nor deferential, and his personality would not be constrained. On the surface, he may have been paying homage to Haydn, but his restlessness manifests almost immediately: the emotional neutrality of the opening is quickly transformed into urgency, as each subsequent gesture climbs higher and grows more breathless, leading – in mere seconds – to a *fortissimo* outburst, followed by a silence that is all anxiety and irresolution. Beethoven is at work.

It is fascinating, in this sonata, to hear Beethoven's unmistakable voice fight to assert itself in the face of self-imposed strictures: the work finds Beethoven appropriating the language and the style of the past in a way that he rarely did later on. And so, the slow movement has a floridly vocal quality of the sort one often finds in Haydn's piano writing; but it simultaneously has a gravity, a metaphysical aspect which is the very essence of Beethoven. The menuet has an old-world courtliness about it; but that courtliness is forever being disturbed by misplaced accents, and in fact, the mere presence of a menuet in a piano sonata flies in the face of tradition – the four movement model was, prior to Beethoven, reserved for symphonies, and its use here is a powerful statement of Beethoven's ambition for the sonata genre. The finale has an entirely

symmetrical, even predictable structure; but its *material* bristles with a rage that keeps threatening to spin out of control and into brutality, in a way that looks forward (to another work on this album, in fact), rather than back.

If Beethoven's need to innovate meant that he soon grew reluctant to use the past as template, he continued to use it, with affection, as a point of reference, for the rest of his life: in the *Diabelli Variations*, his last major work for the piano, there are suggestions of Bach and a direct quotation of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, even as the music anticipates the rhythmic puzzles of Schumann and, on occasion, the bel canto line of Chopin. In the Sonata Op.49 No.1, an early work that Beethoven almost certainly conceived as a pedagogical tool and perhaps never even intended for publication, the reference point seems to be neither Bach, nor Mozart, nor Haydn, but Muzio Clementi, whose sonatas and sonatinas for piano, while by no means lofty works, nonetheless have considerable charm. Beethoven surely did not invest much time or energy in this work, and yet it inevitably has a depth of feeling and a strength of personality that Clementi could only aspire to; such is the gulf between talent and genius.

The Sonata Op.10 No.2, while still modest in length, is an altogether more substantial affair, and accordingly, the past it alludes to is a far more formidable one: here, it is the world of Bach and, more to the point, of the fugue, that Beethoven is borrowing from. This being post-Op.2 Beethoven, though, the allusion is fleeting and, in this case, comic: the last movement begins as if it will be in strict three-part counterpoint, but by the time the third voice makes its first appearance, Beethoven is already veering into melody-and-accompaniment territory, and he has soon given up the game entirely. There are, it is true, several more contrapuntal passages sprinkled throughout the movement, but he never fusses too much about the independence of the voices; he allows himself to enjoy the fugal sonority without the pesky business of actually writing a fugue. Beethoven's refusal to commit to the form he seems to be promising at the outset is a joke in a piece that is full of them: the first movement's opening idea is a happy-go-lucky series of fits and starts, and the movement is peppered with

modulations which either lead to unexpected places, or simply *happen*, without warning. But this is not Beethoven in absurdist mode: in sharp contrast to the slapstick one finds in a number of the other sonatas, the humour here is gentle, even earnest. This earnestness comes to the fore in the middle movement, in which Beethoven trades humour for something mellower and darker. The furtive, mysterious, outer sections flank a trio of uncommon loveliness, with a series of appoggiaturas approximating the sighs of a singer in an *opera seria*.

While nothing in these three sonatas is anything less than extremely fine, there is also nothing in them to prepare the listener for the hurricane that is the Sonata Op.57, the so-called 'Appassionata'. The work shares a tonality with the first piano sonata, and with the later "Serioso" Quartet, which is similarly terse and explosive. But ultimately, the 'Appassionata' defies any and all comparisons. It is a one-off, an unrepeatable force of nature, which probably shouldn't be repeated even if it could be, so overwhelming is its power. Beethoven and posterity often disagreed on the greatness question: many of his personal favourites among his own works, such as the sonatas Opp.22 and 78, or the Septet for strings and winds, are comparatively rarely heard today. But Beethoven's conviction that the 'Appassionata' was something special has been confirmed by two hundred years of dumbstruck listeners; its modernity is eternal.

Beethoven's hold on the public owes mostly to two factors: his brilliant command of musical structure and the psychological effect it has on the listener, and the force of his giant personality. Each of these elements is on full display in the 'Appassionata'. I struggle to think of another work in which so much is accomplished with so little in the way of raw materials. The first movement, average in length but massive in scope, is built from nothing more than its opening theme – laconic but fantastically malleable, transforming itself from repression, to warmth, to fury as necessary – and a four note motive that serves as an increasingly ominous leitmotif. The middle movement is a theme and variations whose theme barely merits the title: it is a chorale with almost no melodic interest to speak of. And yet, it is the basis for a world of feeling, each

variation moving a step away from placidity and toward the ecstatic, until the rug is pulled out from underneath at the last moment. And Beethoven links the last movement to the first with one simple harmonic progression, which slithers eerily up a half step. At every turn, the work reveals the freakish architectural acuity of its author.

And as for the personality? On no other occasion did Beethoven unleash it in quite so ruthless a fashion. The 'Appassionata' lives at a high emotional temperature from its first notes, and midway through the first movement comes the first in a series of explosions that are quite literally unprecedented – never before, and only rarely ever, has a work of classical music reached so directly for the jugular. When the finale hurtles to its terrible conclusion, that suggestion of brutality in the finale of Op.2 No.1 has found its full expression, and it is truly terrifying. Beethoven's piano sonatas are nothing if not thorough in their exploration of humanity; in the 'Appassionata' it is its darkest corners that are exposed.

CD 5

Sonatas 3, 25, 27 & 28

20 years, and an entire cosmos, separate the sonatas that bookend this recording. The evolution that takes place within Beethoven between the C major Sonata, Op.2 No.3, and the A major, Op.101, is monumental, almost impossible to overstate: I struggle to think of an artist – not Picasso, not Schönberg, not Joyce – who changed so profoundly over the course of a working life.

But what was the change, really?

The question has occupied me for at least 20 of my own years. For while something in the *sound* of late Beethoven makes it seem as though without precedent, virtually every aspect of the *personality* at work can be found in the early music. The spirituality of Beethoven is as much in evidence in the slow movement of Op.2 No.3 as it is in any late sonata. The same is true of his transcendental use of silence: Beethoven could turn a declarative sentence into

an entreaty, or a koan, with no more than an eighth note rest, and at the start of Op.2 No.3's *Adagio*, he does so no fewer than 10 times before offering even the most tentative of resolutions.

And it's not that late Beethoven offers a pared down version of the composer: in Op.101, as in all the late works, the spiritual and the very gritty exist side by side. The humour, the gruffness, and the rough-and-tumble that so enliven the early sonatas are there in Beethoven's music until the bitter, glorious end.

So, with nothing essential added, and nothing taken away, what has changed so profoundly? I don't pretend to offer a definitive answer – I neither can nor would wish to demystify this most mysterious of music – but more and more, I feel it has to do with Beethoven's embrace of vulnerability.

Certainly, of the many words one might attach to Op.2 No.3, "vulnerable" would not be high on the list. It is daring, ambitious, muscular, jocular, occasionally tender – and nearly always brimming with confidence. The Beethoven who wrote this sonata is in his mid-twenties, and a recent arrival to Vienna, then the unchallenged centre of the musical world. And so, the tremendous scope, originality, and virtuosity (both compositional and instrumental) on display here probably aren't entirely pure in their motivations: Beethoven is out to *impress* the listener, to show what he can do.

And what he can do, it turns out, is most anything he wants to. Ingeniously, Beethoven binds the sonata's four disparate movements with a common opening idea – a sort of curlicue which winds its way around one note before falling to the one below. This is such a simple motive, even calling it an "idea" is a bit grand – and yet it is enough to marry the athletic first movement to the searching second, to the playful last two. Beethoven could pull meaning out of thin air, if he put his mind to it.

The motivic unity of the movements is only one way in which Beethoven's ambition manifests in this early work. Its 25 minute length, its four movements,

and the extreme brilliance of the writing set it sharply apart from anything Haydn or Mozart produced in the genre. So, too, do the symphonic proportions of the first movement, which features not only an extensive, structurally superfluous bridge passage in a minor key, but a full blown cadenza, which ought not to belong in a piano sonata, and which arrives with a big bang that temporarily blows the music off its otherwise confident path.

The Sonata Op.79 is another country entirely – highly uncharacteristically for Beethoven, it is really not an ambitious work *at all*. Written in 1809, in a relatively fallow period and one in which the piano sonata does not seem to have been foremost on his mind, this work is not a destination, but rather a very delightful rest stop. It may have been intended for children – it is sometimes called a "sonatina", and its difficulty is moderate, at least by Beethoven's formidable standards – and it is certainly childlike, in the best sense of the word. The first movement has a harmonic surprise or two, and a couple of formal tricks up its sleeve, but it is predominantly a happy romp. The second movement is just as atypical – a sweetly sad gondolier's song, it is a sort of travelogue, Beethoven touring Venice and recording his impressions. And the last movement, which clocks in at an almost comically short two minutes, may anticipate the great Sonata Op.109 in its opening phrase, but bears it no resemblance on any deeper level; the only ambition here is to charm, which it does, in spades.

Five years later comes the strange and magnificent Sonata Op.90. It, too, is a work that seems to be on the road somewhere, but it is an incomparably more profound affair than Op.79. This is one of just six Beethoven sonatas with only two movements (four, if one discounts the two relatively inconsequential essays that comprise Op.49); in each case, the relationship between the two movements is one of the main sources of tension and drama. With all due respect to the towering Sonata Op.111, in this particular respect, Op.90 may be the most remarkable of all. The first movement has often been likened to a conflict, perhaps between lovers, and while its turmoil is not of the explosive 'Appassionata' variety, it is indeed ever-present. Did Beethoven ever

write anything with more appoggiaturas, or with more intervals that plunge downward – both musical evocations of the sigh? When the last of these brings the movement to a close, the sense of loss seems absolute, and irreversible.

With the second movement comes a miraculous turnaround, both literal and figurative. Beethoven takes the falling gesture that ends the first movement, and turns it into a rise; takes its E minor, and turns it into E major; and takes its despair, and turns it into song. If the second movement of Op.79 could have been written by an imaginary Venetian composer, the second movement of Op.90, so generous and so mellifluous, should have been written by Schubert. The warm-heartedness of this music would be wonderful on its own, but so much of its power comes from the way it emerges from the intense resignation of the first movement.

This movement is a rondo, and it features frequent and welcome reiterations of its opening material, as rondos will. But whereas the rondo is traditionally an orderly form, one that gets tied up neatly, this sonata ends less with a conclusion than with a sort of disintegration. It's as if Beethoven doesn't fully trust the *rapprochement* of the second movement. The work's ending doesn't *relive* the pain of the first movement, but in losing its way and evaporating into thin air, it certainly acknowledges it.

So perhaps the road that Op.90 is on is the road to vulnerability, because when we reach Op.101, the very next sonata, that quality is imprinted into the music's DNA. The work comes into being with a nebulousness that is remarkably reminiscent of the ending of Op.90, despite a gap of several years. So nebulous is this opening, in fact, that it doesn't even establish the work's tonality of A major – remarkably, that does not happen with any firmness until near the end of the movement. This tonal wandering is just one manifestation of the work's overall character: boldly inventive, but suffused with fragility and uncertainty. Comparing the opening of this sonata with that of Op.2 No.3 is instructive: in the earlier sonata, the key and metre are established so effortlessly, Beethoven

has energy left over to wink at the audience. Op.101, by contrast, begins with a stutter, a profound uncertainty about its way forward – which is precisely what makes that way forward so affecting.

Op.101 does eventually come into focus, of course, but only bit by bit. The second movement, a march, has all the bustle and bluster that the first movement lacks, but it is a strange sort of bustle: it ranges all over the keyboard as if it has something to prove, and its confident progress is undermined by forays into strange key areas.

And what comes next is more vulnerable still: the briefest of slow movements – a mere three lines in the score – which captures the very essence of loneliness. It looks inward with the same intensity that Op.2 No.3's slow movement looks outward, in this case without finding any answers. This music hovers around what is nominally its tonality (A minor) with even less confidence than the first movement did, and when Beethoven arrives at a half-cadence and comes to a staggering halt there, he seems to be at a total loss about how he might continue.

Well. He might seem to be at a loss, but this is Beethoven, after all, and therefore everything – even apparent disorientation – is a part of the master plan. What follows is a series of events both stunning and, somehow, utterly inevitable. A brief, exploratory cadenza leads, by some strange alchemy, to a return to the opening of the *first* movement, with silences now separating the phrases, and the mood therefore more questioning than ever. Never before had a piano sonata been *cyclical*, and yet this reappearance of the first movement is so exquisitely prepared, it cannot be called a surprise – it is an emotional necessity. The return, so halting at first, quickly works itself up into a lather and, bursting out at the seams, leads straight into the finale, which is exultant, nearly start to finish.

But this exultance has been seriously *earned*. Earlier sonatas such as the 'Appassionata' might be darker, but the sense of doubt, of fragility, of a

devastating aloneness that has to be worked through – this is new in Op.101. Beethoven's 32 sonatas might use the same toolbox, and ask many of the same questions, but only in these late works is Beethoven's soul, bruised and bolstered by the shock of life, on full display.

CD 6

Sonatas 9, 13 & 29 ('Hammerklavier')

The 'Hammerklavier' Sonata is impossible.

I refer not to its technical difficulty, though that would be true enough: even two centuries later – after Brahms, Alkan, Ligeti, and Rachmaninoff, to toggle between the sublime, the less sublime, and the ridiculous – the positions that the 'Hammerklavier' forces the pianist's hands into still seem perverse.

But the physical demands of this work, punishing as they are, are ultimately beside the point: it is the very *existence* of the 'Hammerklavier' that is impossible. Beginning and ending with gestures of stubborn defiance, in between, it doesn't so much break with precedent as simply ignore it. It is a psychodrama of behemoth proportions that absolutely demands your attention without making the minutest play for your affection; it is Beethoven at his grittiest, and most devastating.

Ignoring precedent is an area in which Beethoven already had decades of experience when he wrote the 'Hammerklavier'. (The two other sonatas on this album, in spite of being among the slenderest of the early period, provide ample evidence of this: the first is orchestrated so much more like a string quartet than a piano sonata that Beethoven eventually went ahead and turned it into one. And the second, given the title 'Sonata quasi una Fantasia', blurs the line between the two genres, and does away with the lines between its own movements entirely – sections of implacable serenity are interrupted by music of enormous drive and intensity, and vice versa. This gives the entire work an improvisatory feel which is entirely new in a classical sonata.)

But even by Beethoven's own standards, the 'Hammerklavier' is a brave new world. Its length – anywhere between 40 minutes and...much longer, depending on one's commitment to realizing Beethoven's deranged but thrilling metronome markings – separates it instantly from the other 31 sonatas. Beethoven was a composer of immense ambition, and this ambition manifests in his piano sonatas as much as in any other genre, but he was no maximalist. The emotional scope of these works is achieved through a variety of means, but length is not one of them. The 'Hammerklavier' aside, none of Beethoven's sonatas takes 30 minutes to play; the 'Hammerklavier's' last two movements, linked together, are themselves nearly that long.

Its length can be misleading, however: this sonata is neither spacious nor valedictory. Schumann used the phrase "heavenly length" to describe Schubert's epically scaled 9th Symphony; he would not have been tempted to use it for the 'Hammerklavier'. It is generously proportioned, but it is rarely, if ever, serene. Instead, the 'Hammerklavier' is as long as it is because it is constantly bursting at the seams: its emotional intensity cannot be contained, and thus it spills over, everywhere.

That spillover – that sense of the music being uncontainable – begins at the beginning: the opening phrase is two upward salvos, featuring enormous leaps, spanning virtually the entire keyboard. Not only does this motive announce the work's wild ambition, it establishes the movement's character, which is somehow simultaneously magisterial and frenetic. That is a neat trick, and one that Beethoven improbably manages to sustain for the duration of the movement. The grandeur of the movement is undeniable: never before or after this work did Beethoven use the piano so orchestrally. Again and again, he asks the pianist's two hands to cover the piano's six octaves all at once. He asks – explicitly, through dynamic markings, and implicitly, through the music itself – for the pianist to make a sound that is broader and brawnier than the instrument wants to make. And when he turns down the volume, as he does in the flighty second theme, or in the somewhat neurotic third, or at the start of the development's

fugato, one does not need a wild imagination to hear individual instruments – darting woodwinds, muted strings.

But this orchestral grandeur is undercut (or, depending on how one looks at it, balanced) by a nearly unrelenting propulsion. Particularly if one approximates Beethoven's perilous metronome marking, the movement's progress is not measured but headlong. More vital still to the opening movement's frenetic character is its harmonic strangeness: in brief, its heroic B flat major is repeatedly threatened by incursions of B major and minor. This juxtaposition of B flat and B permeates the entire sonata, and if the spelling of those notes makes it sound like a friendly meeting of neighbours, please know that it is not: sometimes the neighbour really is an axe murderer. An unfettered B flat major might sound majestic, but each intrusion of B – and the fixation on the interval of the half-step it brings with it – makes the movement as a whole sound more shifty, unanchored. The movement ends in wild B flat major triumph, but the sense of danger remains.

Beethoven being Beethoven, this immense and tumultuous opening movement is followed by a scherzo, in the most literal sense: the 'Hammerklavier's' second movement is a joke. Clocking in at under three minutes, it is a madcap, miniature distillation of the first. The relationship between the two movements is roughly analogous to that of *Hamlet* and *The Fifteen Minute Hamlet*: the raw materials and fixations are the same, but the latter, trimmed of all fat, winkingly asks if the former might have taken itself and its dramas just a *bit* too seriously. Even when the second movement goes a bit melodramatic itself at its conclusion – with B flat and B getting into another dustup before the movement seems to disappear into thin air – it does so with an arched eyebrow.

Enthralling as this all is, nothing in the sonata thus far has prepared us for what is coming; nothing could. The 'Hammerklavier's' third movement is the longest slow movement in the literature, and – no hyperbole here – perhaps the greatest tragic utterance western art has produced. Its unbearably raw despair in no way

undermines its dignity, and the meeting of those two qualities – so often, it is one or the other – make this movement an experience like none other.

Beethoven's scalding intensity, profundity, and gigantic personality need no elaboration here: they are much discussed, and they are anyway self-evident, right there for the hearing. Given those qualities – given Beethoven's capacity to translate into sound depths of feeling we hardly knew existed – it is surprising that, in the late period above all, he so rarely wrote *tragic* slow movements. Time and again, in the great final piano sonatas and string quartets (and the ninth symphony), Beethoven went for transcendence in his slow movements. That is yet another way in which the 'Hammerklavier' is not just an outlier, but a one-off: it has, by an enormous margin, the longest span of tragic music to come from Beethoven's final years.

But in keeping with a sonata that attracts and repels in equal measure, this slow movement begins not with a great vocal lament, like the *Arioso* from Op.110, but with a chilling austerity. The barren octaves of the movement's first measure were apparently an afterthought, added after the rest of the movement had already been completed, but the piece would be unimaginable without them. So stripped down that they don't even quite establish the movement's F sharp minor tonality, these two plain octaves somehow predict and necessitate the whole vast movement that follows: its plainspoken but grief-stricken central theme, its dramatic, even catastrophic outbursts, its heart-stopping moments of repose.

Trying to describe the terrible power of this music is an exercise in frustration: its greatness lies precisely in its evocation of a despair beyond words. And when, just occasionally, Beethoven alights on a major key, the tenderness in it is almost physically painful: it is the consolation you offer to someone whose pain, you understand, cannot be eased. But still, you try.

Inevitably, the end comes. The movement does not really conclude; it gives up, having neither any hope nor any fight left in it.

Only Beethoven could have written such a movement, and only Beethoven could have found his way out of it. While nothing can match the slow movement of the 'Hammerklavier' for sheer emotional force, the introduction to the finale is, in terms of imagination and structural ingenuity, the most remarkable part of the piece. The mournful F sharp major chords that bring the slow movement to a close are followed, without pause, by a ghostly expressionless series of Fs, played on every octave of the piano. This is less a modulation than a gear shift – into the lowest of all gears.

F being the dominant of B flat major, we are now halfway home. (F sharp was very much a foreign country.) But the second half of the journey proves much more circuitous: having found his way to F in a matter of seconds, Beethoven needs minutes to close the deal and return to the sonata's home key. This music is suggestive of a person groping in the dark, and in a series of passages all in different keys. Beethoven starts out placidly, only to grow, bit by bit, totally unhinged.

At the point at which Beethoven seems to have lost the plot, his bearings, everything, the music takes yet another turn, and we suddenly, as if by magic, are back in B flat major and in the finale proper, which is a fugue. Of course it's a fugue. This craggiest of works demands a craggy conclusion, and, suffice it to say: with this fugue, it gets one. But unlike the heroic, defiant opening of the first movement, the fugue subject is, above all, loony. Consisting of a large leap, a trill, and an almost comically long sequence of sixteenth notes, evoking nothing more than a dog chasing its own tail, this subject is willfully peculiar, and just plain willful. It does not seem to be designed to form the foundation of a massive edifice.

Well. That is, of course, precisely what it is. Whereas the first movement's surface majesty masked a quirky, neurotic essence, here the quirkiness is the surface aspect. Bit by bit, the fugue grows to titanic proportions, as Beethoven gives the subject every imaginable treatment: he expands it rhythmically, he transposes it, threateningly, into B minor, he plays it backwards and turns it upside down, he introduces a second subject and pits it against the main one – he does everything but pick it up and throw it across the room.

It adds up to something monumental, ambiguous and exhausting enough to summate this altogether monumental, ambiguous and exhausting work. To the end, the 'Hammerklavier' is unapologetically enigmatic: the very last phrase is a blaze of glory, but it is also so totally rhythmically off-kilter, one struggles to even identify its metre. It's a pig-headed, my-way-or-the-highway ending to a piece that, from start to finish, dares to be unlovable, and is all the more riveting for it.

CD 7

Sonatas 2, 20, 17 ('The Tempest') & 30

It is Mozart, not Beethoven, who is the most Shakespearean of composers. He has the dramatic instinct, the equal knack for comedy and tragedy (and the understanding that the two are next-door neighbours), and most of all, the razor-sharp psychological acumen that is Shakespeare's signature. Beethoven knows what people wish to be; Mozart understands what people are.

Be that as it may, Mozart never wrote a work rooted in Shakespeare. (Though I haven't given up hope that the manuscript to a *Much Ado About Nothing* or *Twelfth Night* opera might still turn up in some Austrian attic.) Instead, it is Beethoven's Sonata Op.31 No.2 that will forever be known as 'The Tempest'. Beethoven didn't himself give the work this title, but it has stuck, and for good reason: it does a fine job of conveying the extraordinary character of this altogether extraordinary sonata.

'The Tempest' makes its uniqueness felt immediately. Classical works, with few exceptions, begin by announcing themselves, like addicts in recovery programmes: I'm Op.2 No.2, and I'm in A major and 2/4 time. The opening of 'The Tempest', by contrast, tells the listener nothing: its first measures, a ghostly arpeggio suggesting a recitative that does not come, offer almost no clue as to the work's metre, key, or tempo. To listen to this opening is to grope in the dark: to feel unmoored.

And while the metre (*alla breve*) and key (D minor) are soon sorted out, a tempo is never firmly established: the movement is, in the main, a highly driven

allegro, but the largo that began the work in such disorienting fashion returns again and again – more often than in any other sonata movement Beethoven wrote. And each time it does, it becomes a more deeply destabilizing force: what is at first just one arpeggio eventually becomes three, and finally expands into the lengthy recitative that seemed to be imminent the first time around. This music is determinedly, magnificently amorphous: as lacking in direction and focus as the rest of the movement is full of those qualities. The music thus becomes a dialogue of opposites: fast and slow, determined and exhausted, certain and filled with doubt.

The subsequent two movements of 'The Tempest' are less radical but not less wonderful. The second movement, like the first, begins with an arpeggio, but this one leads not to mystery, but radiance: this movement is an oasis in B flat major – as stable and at peace as the first movement was not. The third movement is also stable, on the surface; just beneath, it is anything but. It is a moderately-paced perpetual motion: a deliberate but constant stream of sixteenth notes that is virtually never interrupted over six minutes and hundreds of measures. But the ever-churning motion conveys not groundedness, but high anxiety. This is music in search of something, but the search provides no answers: the movement ends with the same aura of worry and sadness with which it begins. The contentment of the slow movement turns out to have been a respite, or a mirage: unlike Shakespeare's play, this *Tempest* is, indeed, a shipwreck. And further unlike Shakespeare's play (and so many of Beethoven's other sonatas), there is hardly a trace of comedy to be found.

For comedy, though, look no further than the aforementioned Op.2 No.2, a work full of both hijinks and reverence, as befits a sonata dedicated to Haydn. While it lacks the heft and grandeur of some of the other earliest sonatas – certainly Op.2 No.3 and Op.7, the two sonatas that immediately follow it – Op.2 No.2 is both a constant delight and evidence of how fully formed Beethoven's musical personality was at just 26 years of age. While it begins and ends with music of great charm, in between the emotional range is vast. The impish, fits-and-starts

opening turns out to be predictive of no more than one minute of the piece: soon, the staccato bird calls and brilliant scales of the first theme disappear, as the piece seems to lose confidence, to lose its way. The motion slows and, in preparation for the minor key second theme, the mood darkens. *Seriously* darkens: I struggle to think of any other early classical sonata that takes such a stark turn so quickly. This detour into melancholy lasts no longer than the mischievous opening did, and soon, high spirits are restored, but this dramatic and abrupt shift of mood is only the first of many times this sonata explores emotional territory far removed from its playful opening. In the development, the first theme is transposed from A major to A flat – neighbours in name, distant as can be in reality – and from coy to heroic. And when the slow movement comes, Beethoven drops all traces of rambunctiousness: in its place is some of the most pious music he was ever to write. Juxtaposing the sacred and the profane was one of Beethoven's specialties, but this remarkable movement has a prayerful quality which is unusual for him, and deeply moving as a result. Marked *Largo appassionato* – also very unusual – the opening is a slow-moving chorale for three horns, or perhaps men's voices, with a walking bass line marking time with stoic precision. Many of Beethoven's early slow movements have a spiritual dimension – look, again, to the subsequent two sonatas – but usually they tend towards the metaphysical: they ask question upon question, most of them unanswered and in fact unanswerable. But Op.2 No.2's slow movement is not like this: it is not a dialogue with the universe, but a thanksgiving.

The last two movements are not nearly as arresting – this is early period Beethoven, after all, where the action is reliably found in the front half of the sonata. But they are a constant pleasure, particularly the last movement, which more than earns the "grazioso" in its marking: even when Op.2 No.2 is not aiming for the fences, it is a pure joy to listen to.

The Sonata Op.109 is also not without grace, but its grace is never the point: this awe-inspiring work is all about the metaphysics. Written two years after

Beethoven completed the 'Hammerklavier', a self-portrait of the composer at his most belligerent, Op.109 manages to be every bit as profound while simultaneously being surpassingly, almost unbelievably beautiful. And he achieves this in less than half the time taken by the 'Hammerklavier'; never has infinity been so economical.

In the first two movements, the economy is the point; this is Beethoven showing us sonata form stripped down to its very essence. In no more than 6 minutes, Beethoven gives us not one, but two examples of the psychological power of this form. (By contrast, the first movement of the 'Hammerklavier' was 10 minutes long, and really just a warm-up act for the rest of the piece.)

The first movement of Op.109 is defined by the absolute opposition of its two themes: the first is flowing in tempo, concise, rhythmically and harmonically stable, possessed of an easy beauty; the second is broad, discursive, rhythmically various and in constant state of harmonic search, and hugely fragile. These musics, improbably, make perfect sense together: a further demonstration of the magic of sonata form. The second movement is even more stripped down: it is not just the shortest, but the *tersest* sonata movement Beethoven ever wrote. One idea follows another without elaboration, and when the movement comes to an end (two minutes after it started!), there is no air left in the room.

Having demonstrated – twice – how much emotional meaning can be packed into a short space, Beethoven now goes to the other extreme. In one of his greatest sets of variations (which is to say: one of the greatest sets of variations), Beethoven shows us what happens when you take a theme and explore its every crevice, its every expressive possibility. Unlike his earlier variation movements, which are primarily about embellishment, what the theme undergoes here is more like psychoanalysis; Mozart, and Shakespeare, would be proud. The theme itself is both beautiful and awe-inducing – filled with love, but with the simplicity of a hymn – and with every variation, it undergoes a dramatic

transformation: it becomes first a ländler, then a sort of child's game, and then a romp.

Each of these variations finds the mood lightening and the pulse contracting; with the fourth variation, this pattern reverses, with not just the pulse but the universe itself expanding to accommodate Beethoven's ambitions. This variation, a sort of tapestry woven between three voices, is the point at which this movement goes from philosophical to cosmic: in it, and in the two subsequent variations, Beethoven continually stretches or ignores the limitations of the instrument, using the extreme reaches of the piano, asking at times for a sonority that is enormous and enormously intense, yet free from duress.

Having said everything there is to be said about this sublime theme, Beethoven brings it back, as the piece comes full circle. It is both unchanged and utterly transformed: having been turned inside out and put under a magnifying glass, it has acquired meanings that it simply did not have the first time around. Among Beethoven's greatest gifts is his ability to conjure the infinite; he did so time and time again. But he may have never done so with as much simplicity as in Op.109; it is the most unassuming of miracles.

CD 8

Sonatas 8 ('Pathétique'), 10, 22 & 31

When I was deciding how I would divide Beethoven's 32 sonatas into nine volumes, I had really just one priority: to showcase Beethoven's staggering range – of expression and of invention – as much as possible on each of them. This was not difficult to achieve: with Beethoven's restless imagination, nearly every sonata becomes an exploration of uncharted territory.

Still, from volume to volume, certain themes emerge. F minor drama runs through Volume 4: barely contained in Op.2 No.1, it is furiously unleashed in the 'Appassionata'. On Volume 7, Beethoven's Shakespearean way of spinning a story is hardly confined to the 'The Tempest': Op.109 is, if anything, a richer, more riveting narrative.

Here, on Volume 8, it is the merging of disparate elements in a single work that rules the day. The C minor Sonata Op.13, known as the 'Pathétique' – a name that tells us virtually nothing about the piece but at least does it no violence – is the first of Beethoven's sonatas to truly break ground by means of its structure. The main body of the first movement is a restless, agitated whirlwind: each of its three themes hurtles upward, and there is not a moment of it where either the tension or the propulsion abates. This music is preceded by a slow introduction which, while no less intense than the music that follows it, is as deliberate as the allegro is headlong.

There is nothing unprecedented in that: Haydn and Mozart wrote many fast movements with slow introductions. What makes the 'Pathétique' such a formal revelation is this slow introduction's refusal to go away. Reappearing at two critical moments – first at the juncture between the exposition and the development, then again before the coda – it brings the movement's motion to a screeching halt without providing the slightest respite. Quite the contrary: because these appearances of the introduction are so jarringly out of place – the movement has long since been "introduced" – they disorient and upset the listener. The classical period, for all the emotional depth and psychological acuity and sheer beauty of its greatest music, is in large part about order – about things being in their proper place, serving their proper function. This was not to be Beethoven's *modus operandi*, and with the first movement of the 'Pathétique', we see for the first time the full extent of his disdain for existing rules. Beethoven makes (and then, usually, breaks) his own rules, and in the 'Pathétique', these rules produce music of fury and chaos.

Fury and chaos could not be further away from the Sonata in G major, Op.14 No.2. It is a modest but unfailingly lovely work: modesty and loveliness are qualities not often found in Beethoven's sonatas, and their combined presence here is not a coincidence. Freed from the need to barnstorm and break down barriers, Beethoven can devote himself to simpler pleasures: the unhurried, *dolce* lyricism of the first movement, the sly but gentle humour of the subsequent two.

But even if this sonata weighs in on the lighter side, it is still surprising in that its constituent parts show up in places you wouldn't expect them to. In the middle of Op.14 No.2 is not the usual slow movement, but a set of three variations on a theme that is so cheeky, it is essentially a wink in musical form. And the last movement is not a rondo, but a scherzo – a form almost always found on the inside of a sonata, rather than at the end. Beethoven is by no means reaching for the rafters with this small, enormously endearing work, but he is still busying himself rearranging sonata furniture.

It is hard to say what Beethoven was doing when he wrote the Sonata in F major, Op.54. It is without question the oddest of the 32 sonatas, and the one that most exemplifies the theme of this album: the way in which its events follow one another seems downright bonkers as times. Beethoven marks the first of this sonata's two movements "In tempo d'un menuetto", presumably because "Menuetto twice interrupted by a herd of stampeding elephants" felt cumbersome to him. The main, menuet sections of this movement are courtly and *grazioso*, if a bit foursquare, each phrase coming to a hard stop instead of dovetailing into the next; in between come torrents of *forte* octaves in both hands, with accent after accent adding to the (mock, I think?) belligerence of the music. It makes no sense, the merging of these musics, but it is oddly compelling: the coda that follows the third, wildly embellished appearance of the menuet has a depth and a nostalgia that one could never have predicted listening to the alternately stilted and ridiculous material that preceded it.

And then, as if to apologize to the listener for the whiplash the first movement induced, Beethoven follows it with an Allegretto whose steady sixteenth note motion never once wavers. So the sonata as a whole is as much a meeting of opposites as the first movement was unto itself. A good composer would have rejected this work's shape as absurd; it took a great one to recognize the strength in its strangeness.

So, the unexpected way in which different material coexists in the 'Pathétique' creates heightened tension; in Op.14 No.2 it brings comfort; in Op.54 it inspires

snort-laughter. In the Sonata Op.110, the astonishing sequence of events Beethoven puts forth leaves the listener in a state of awe. In none of the other 31 piano sonatas does Beethoven cover as much emotional territory: it goes from the absolute depths of despair to utter euphoria. Playing Op.110, or even listening to it, is an experience like none other: devastating and life-affirming in equal measure.

Formally, the Sonata Op.110 is a bit of a paradox: it is on the one hand a wild, woolly journey – its last movement has so many component parts, I'm not entirely sure it is properly described as a single movement. But in spite of this, it is also one of the most tightly-constructed works Beethoven ever wrote. Just nineteen minutes long, it is *unbelievably* compact, given its emotional richness, and its philosophical opening idea acts as the work's thesis statement, permeating the work, and reaching its apotheosis in its final moments.

Op.110's structure is not its only paradox. While much of its material is lofty, even exalted, it has moments of extreme earthiness – some of the second movement's themes were allegedly familiar to Beethoven from his time spent in Viennese beer halls. And while the sonata is forward-looking and was a tremendous source of inspiration to 19th century composers, it also has a certain retrospective quality. There are numerous links to the preceding (and equally awe-inspiring) sonata Op.109: their opening ideas are close cousins, and when Op.110 reaches its most desperately dark moment, it does so with a direct quotation of Op.109. And in many ways, Beethoven is reaching even further into the past with this work: its sprawling final movement, composed of recitatives, ariosos, and fugues, is really the world of the baroque, viewed from a one hundred year distance.

"Bad composers borrow; great composers steal," Stravinsky is alleged to have said. While the forms of this last movement may come from Bach, Beethoven's theft of them is as undeniable as it is glorious – the forms themselves become almost incidental, a backdrop against which Beethoven can apply his

profoundest thoughts and titanic personality. Beethoven takes one of the movement's ideas and literally turns it on its head – the second fugue's subject is a literal inversion of the first's – and this is a helpful metaphor for what he does to the baroque forms. Bach may have loved the recitative, but he would never have repeated the same note 27 (!) times in a row – a desperate, obsessive, cry into the void. He may have written hundreds of magnificent ariosos, but he would never have incorporated a massive crescendo, followed by a sudden *subito piano* – a musical representation of a dashed hope – into one. And he may have been the greatest master of the fugue of all time, but his fugues were ends unto themselves: they did not develop, and grow, and strive, until they turned into something else entirely – into outpourings of pure melody (pure spirit, really) at the extreme upper end of the piano, the accompanying left hand at the extreme lower end (because the piano was never, ever enough for Beethoven – he wants more, bigger, everything). Bach is the template here, but the music is Beethoven at his most sublime: at his most Beethoven. Having stolen from the very best, Beethoven gives his very best: Op.110 is a journey into the infinite.

CD 9

Sonatas 7, 18 & 32

In my scores for each of the sonatas on this recording there are question marks.

I write almost nothing in my music; I never have. Not when I was young, to the consternation of my teachers, and not now, to the amusement and occasional irritation of my colleagues. My scores contain few fingerings, hardly any phrasing indications, virtually no written instructions. Somehow, the clarity and even inspiration I get from looking at the unblemished score outweighs the potential benefit of anything I might choose to add to it. And anyway, I tell myself, if it really matters to me, I won't forget it.

This near absence of markings makes the *presence* of all those question marks all the more striking. It's not just that these works are filled with questions; it's that the questioning aspect is so central to their meaning. Playing these sonatas, I

felt I could get by just fine without writing the words *giocoso*, or *teneramente*, or *appassionato*, even though they often apply, Lord knows; the question marks, on the other hand, felt indispensable.

This recording is about culminations: each of the three works is the last of a set of three; the album comes at the end of nine years of recording these sonatas: Op.111 is Beethoven's farewell to the genre. And so it is a beautiful irony that these pieces feature so many more questions than they do answers – that they offer so much more uncertainty than certainty. It is especially fascinating given that this is Beethoven, of all people: a composer of unmatched inner conviction and intensity. And yet, ultimately, this music is as much about his vulnerability as it is about his strength.

Having said all of that, the work that opens this recording – the D major Sonata Op.10 No.3, one of the masterpieces of Beethoven's early period – begins with a declarative statement; the questions will come later. This opening salvo, rising throughout and crackling with energy in the way that only Beethoven's music can, acts as a launching pad for a movement that is altogether an irresistible force: unusually marked "Presto," its momentum and almost reckless optimism are its dominant features. But even in this movement, brilliant and confident as it is, questioning will play a major role: there are passages where bar after bar, the upbeats are accented, rather than the downbeats. This goes on for such an uncomfortably long time, it eventually messes with our perception of the metre and, by extension, our perception of the passage of time.

The slow movement which follows doesn't merely alter our perception of time: by its end, time itself stops. Its marking of "Largo e mesto" is just as atypical of Beethoven as was the first movement's "Presto" – Beethoven wrote plenty of tragic music, but it was rare for him to make the sadness explicit in the tempo indication, which should give a sense of just how extreme and overt this movement's grief is. This sonata was written shortly before the Quartet Op.18 No.1, whose slow movement allegedly is meant to evoke the tomb scene

from *Romeo and Juliet*. The two slow movements occupy a similar emotional space: where so much of Beethoven's music is deeply emotional without being demonstrative, these slow movements are theatrical. The pain is real, but it is also being *performed*, with sighing appoggiaturas and violent outbursts not just conveying the music's character, but telegraphing it. This movement is – as is always the case with Beethoven – powerful and immaculately wrought, but its affects do not feel as devastatingly personal as is the case with so many of his other slow movements. Still, by the time the movement comes to an end, with its long lines having largely broken down, and silence having become more prominent than sound, the effect is overpowering.

In the last movement of Op.10 No.3, the silences become even more frequent and more significant, and it is here that the music becomes a festival of questions. As thrilling and vibrant as the sonata has already been, it is this movement that is most totally original. Being a rondo, its main theme appears again and again, which only serves to underscore that it isn't really a "theme" at all: it is a three note query, pointed upward, like all questions, ending in irresolution and followed by a silence that is much longer than it is. In this movement, Beethoven manages to be simultaneously good-natured and *extremely* mysterious, and the latter quality becomes more and more prominent as these questions accumulate. It is one of Beethoven's most imaginative solutions to the problem of what sort of a movement should end a sonata, and its final moments – with the left hand playing different versions of the three note figure again and again, as the right glides weightlessly up and down the keyboard – are as moving as they are witty.

If Op.10 No.3's questions took a while to appear, in the Sonata Op.31 No.3, they arrive instantly – in the first measure of the first movement. It is difficult to convey, from the vantage point of 2019, and after Schubert and Brahms and Stravinsky and Xenakis and all the rest, just what a bold move it was for Beethoven to do this in 1802: to begin a work not with an assertive

announcement of its tonality, but with a falling – sighing – fifth, harmonically away from home. This opening conveys such a sense of vulnerability, it was co-opted by none other than Robert Schumann – the philosopher-king of musical vulnerability – for the opening of his A major String Quartet. Beethoven was often the most single-minded – some might say bloody-minded – of composers, sticking with one idea, one character, one mood, for minutes on end. But in this movement, the fragility of the opening is in constant dialogue with music that is spirited and playful. This slightly uncharacteristic meeting of unlike musics launches a sonata that finds Beethoven experimenting again and again: a scherzo that would not sound out of place in a Mozart opera, a courtly, nostalgic menuetto that stands in for a true slow movement, a finale that evokes a hunt. Op.31 No.3 comes near the start of Beethoven's middle period, and the questions are not only in the music itself: after having mastered one version of the form in his early period, Beethoven is now questioning what a sonata can be.

From that point on, Beethoven would provide a different, usually stunning answer to the question each time he wrote a piano sonata; Op.111, his final essay in the form and thus his final answer to that question, is as astonishing – as unfathomable – today as it was in 1822. The shy, halting query that opens Op.31 No.3 was already a significant departure from classical norms; the enraged one that launches Op.111 far from any harmonic home and sets it on its harrowing course is one of the most unsettling moments in all of music. Op.111 has just two movements – the idea of something following the second would be unthinkable – and the two are a clash of opposites. The first is dominated by rigour, concision, rage, harmonic tension, propulsion, and hopelessness; the second, by spaciousness, consolation, consonance, a freewheeling improvisatory quality, and, above all, wonder. This set of variations covers a massive amount of emotional and psychological territory – it ranges from absolute serenity to an overwhelming, questing intensity – but throughout, it regards the universe with the widest of eyes.

Op.111 is the end – the end of Beethoven's journey with the piano sonata, his last word on the genre he upended and in which he was most prolific – and therefore one of the strangest and most remarkable things about it is its inability to end. Its theme has an open-ended, inconclusive quality, which always makes the next variation, and the next, and the next – each more restless than the one before – seem inevitable. When this progression from the calm to the wild reaches an improbably jazz-inflected extreme, and yet *still* cannot resolve, Beethoven searches for closure in other ways, mining the nether regions of the piano, and the stratospheric end, in alternation. When this brings him no closer to a point of rest, he travels further still, to a distant E flat major oasis that chafes and bristles and struggles against the limitations of the piano, against its refusal to make a sound that sings and carries and lives forever...

The desire to live forever, and the impossibility of living forever, is really the subtext of this movement, and of Beethoven's enormous difficulty in ending it. And it is the only explanation for why this movement – the longest and in some ways most monumental of Beethoven's sonata movements – ends not with certainty, not with an affirmation, but with an evaporation into thin air. Not a question, precisely, but one final expression of vulnerability and doubt. My feeling has always been (and always will be, I suspect) that this ending is a death – a heartbeat that simply stops. No one will ever know if this was Beethoven's intention. But it is, beyond all argument, a commentary on the unknowability of the universe. It is somehow both humbling and reassuring to know that Beethoven was as uncertain of his place in it as the rest of us are. His ability to communicate that uncertainty is perhaps the greatest of all the gifts he left us.

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Photo: Luis Luque

Jonathan Biss

Pianist Jonathan Biss's approach to music is a holistic one. In his own words: *I'm trying to pursue as broad a definition as possible of what it means to be a musician.* As well as being one of the world's most sought-after pianists, a regular performer with major orchestras, concert halls and festivals around the globe and co-Artistic Director of Marlboro Music, Jonathan Biss is also a renowned teacher, writer and musical thinker.

His deep musical curiosity has led him to explore music in a multi-faceted way. Through concerts, teaching, writing and commissioning, he fully immerses himself in projects close to his heart, including *Late Style*, an exploration of the stylistic changes typical of composers – Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Britten, Elgar, Gesualdo, Kurtág, Mozart, Schubert, and Schumann – as they approached the end of life, looked at through solo and chamber music performances, masterclasses and a Kindle Single publication *Coda*; and *Schumann: Under the Influence* a 30-concert initiative examining the work of Robert Schumann and the musical influences on him, with a related Kindle publication *A Pianist Under the Influence*.

This 360° approach reaches its zenith with Biss and Beethoven. In 2011, he embarked on a nine-year, nine-album project to record the complete cycle of Beethoven's piano sonatas. Starting in September 2019, in the lead-up to the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth in December 2020, he will perform a whole season focused around Beethoven's Piano Sonatas, with more than 50 recitals worldwide. This includes performing the complete sonatas at Wigmore Hall and Berkeley, multi-concert-series in Washington, Philadelphia, and Seattle, as well as recitals in Rome, Budapest, New York and Sydney.

One of the great Beethoven interpreters of our time, Biss's fascination with Beethoven dates back to childhood and Beethoven's music has been a constant throughout his life. In 2011 Biss released *Beethoven's Shadow*, the



first Kindle eBook to be written by a classical musician. He has subsequently launched *Exploring Beethoven's Piano Sonatas*, Coursera's online learning course that has reached more than 150,000 subscribers worldwide; and initiated *Beethoven/5*, a project to commission five piano concertos as companion works for each of Beethoven's piano concertos from composers

Timo Andres, Sally Beamish, Salvatore Sciarrino, Caroline Shaw and Brett Dean. The latter will be premiered in February 2020 with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra and subsequently performed by orchestras in USA, Germany, France, Poland and Australia.

As one of the first recipients of the Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award in 2003, Biss has a long-standing relationship with Mitsuko Uchida with whom he now enjoys the prestigious position of Co-Artistic Director of Marlboro Music. Marlboro holds a special place for Biss, who spent twelve summers there, and for whom nurturing the next generation of musicians is vitally important. Biss continues his teaching as Neubauer Family Chair in Piano Studies at Curtis Institute of Music.

Biss is no stranger to the world's great stages. He has performed with major orchestras across the US and Europe, including New York Philharmonic, LA Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Danish Radio Symphony Orchestra, CBSO, London Philharmonic Orchestra and Concertgebouw. He has appeared at the Salzburg and Lucerne Festivals, has made several appearances at Wigmore Hall and Carnegie Hall, and is in demand as a chamber musician.

He was the first American to be named a BBC New Generation Artist, and has been recognised with many other awards including the Leonard Bernstein Award presented at the 2005 Schleswig-Holstein Festival, Wolf Trap's Shouse Debut Artist Award, the Andrew Wolf Memorial Chamber Music Award, Lincoln Center's Martin E. Segal Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant, the 2003 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award, and the 2002 Gilmore Young Artist Award.

Surrounded by music from an early age, Jonathan Biss is the son of violist and violinist Paul Biss and violinist Miriam Fried, and grandson of cellist Raya Garbousova (for whom Samuel Barber composed his cello concerto). He studied with Leon Fleisher at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, and gave his New York recital debut aged 20.



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