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PREVIEW
NOTES

Beth Levin, piano
Wednesday, November 19, 2014 – 8:00 PM
American Philosophical Society, 427 Chestnut Street

Program

Sonata in E Major, Op. 109

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born: December 16, 1770 in Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827 in Vienna, Austria

Composed: 1820

Last PCMS performance: Richard Goode in 2013

Duration: 20 minutes

The only complete works to emerge from the period of 1820-1823 were the last three piano sonatas, the *Missa Solemnis* and the *Ninth Symphony*. Even when compared to these imposing works, the *E Major Piano Sonata* retains its status of a masterpiece. The first movement has a nearly unique structure: it opens with a theme marked *Vivace ma non troppo* that almost immediately slows to an *Adagio espressivo*. Thereafter, the two contrasting tempos and utterances alternate. On the surface, this short movement has a serene, almost angelic quality, but, like many other works written during this period, the composition's surface is merely one dimension among many. The finale is twice as long as the previous two movements put together. It is a theme-and-variations scheme, whose main theme is marked *Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo*. While the finale contains many lively moments, it is predominantly slow-to-moderate in tempo and generally subdued, gaining in confidence as the narrative proceeds. This movement concludes with the main theme played slowly and serenely.

Sonata in A-flat Major, Op. 110

Ludwig van Beethoven

Composed: 1821

Last PCMS performance: Richard Goode in 2013

Duration: 19 minutes

This unusual work, thematically threadbare at the outset, is a great and deeply profound composition, whose fugal finale achieves the highest keyboard art. This composition opens with a gentle, slow idea of strong spiritual character, the music sounding mesmeric, tranquil and chorale-like. Yet this lovely opening

contains the seeds of this movement's rich thematic and harmonic material. The second movement is short and jovial at the onset, but that temperament is periodically interrupted by a ponderous *ritardando*, which finally overtakes the direction and character of the piece. The third movement, marked *Adagio ma non troppo*, is somber, bordering on the funereal. The finale begins without pause after the *Adagio*. This is a movement of great subtlety and beauty, and its structure is masterful and original.

Sonata in C Minor, Op. 111

Ludwig van Beethoven

Composed: 1821-22

Last PCMS performance: Richard Goode in 2013

Duration: 26 minutes

This sonata's turbulent first movement—and its ensuing lengthy *Arietta*—take the listener into a sonic universe previously unexplored by other composers. The sonata begins with a grim introduction, typical of the composer's serious style, because it starts the narrative with a question, or dilemma, with dark, emphatic chords followed by trills, which introduce an added element of uncertainty. The main theme begins in a slow, sinister vein in the low end of the piano. After it is presented in full, the tempo slows, ushering in another idea, but this new idea is short-lived, and the main theme soon returns. In the development section the theme is twisted into a mysterious variation of the dark, somber introduction. With no recapitulation to movement creeps to one final climax, that slowly fades within itself. The second movement opens in a playful manner; it strikes one as not the kind of melody that might yield variations of sundry character. This theme and the first three variations form the first section of the movement, and it is the fourth variation that marks the second half of the movement.