

PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

a life more beautiful

PREVIEW
NOTES

Jonathan Biss, *piano*

Monday, March 30 – 7:30 PM

Perelman Theater, Kimmel Center

PROGRAM

Sonata in A-flat Major, Op. 26, Funeral March

Ludwig van Beethoven

Composed: 1800-1801

Duration: 20 minutes

The full title of the "Funeral March" movement is "Marcia funebre sulla morte d'un Eroe"; the dead hero is never identified and is likely a mere literary device. Here, the obvious symphonic parallel is the second movement of the composer's "Eroica" Symphony, right down to the irregularly palpitating rhythmic figure. This was especially popular among the Romantics; even Chopin, who rarely performed Beethoven's music in public, included it in his repertoire.

Sonata in F Major, Op. 54

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born: December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Electorate of Cologne

Died: March 26, 1827, in Vienna, Austria

Composed: 1804

Duration: 12 minutes

This brief work falls right between Beethoven's monumental "Waldstein" and "Appassionata" sonatas, with the "Eroica" Symphony lurking nearby. Playable on a five-octave keyboard, this little sonata lures amateurs and then snares them in unexpected technical complications. Billed as a minuet, the first movement takes a measured, deliberate tempo, the simple, pleasant, ruminative theme lifting up from the bass. However, just when the student pianist starts enjoying the somewhat complacent mood of this beginning, the trio storms through with nasty octaves in both hands. This development, which really feels like a strange interruption, seems inexplicable.

Sonata in C Major, Op. 53, Waldstein

Ludwig van Beethoven

Composed: 1803-1804

Duration: 24 minutes

Following the acquisition of an Erard fortepiano in 1803, Beethoven was inspired to write this sonata, one of the finest among his 32. The composer had known for about two years that he was losing his hearing, but he was far from complete deafness. With its mighty rhythmic drive, harmonic inventiveness, thematic incandescence, and wealth of ideas, this sonata is one of the great works of the piano repertoire.

Sonata in B-flat Major, Op. 22

Ludwig van Beethoven

Composed: 1800

Duration: 25 minutes

With this sonata, Beethoven moves closer to the more far-reaching expressive worlds of the Op. 31 group. Cast in four movements, it starts off almost as if it were beginning in the middle of a passage. A vigorous, but seemingly incomplete, theme is presented. As the material immediately starts to repeat itself, the opening motif is abbreviated and then the vigorous theme is heard again, but fuller now, expanding its range of color and reaching a triumphant chordal passage. Other thematic material sprouts delightfully and the exposition is completed. In the ensuing section, the opening idea appears in altered form, and a second theme follows.

Sonata in A-flat Major, Op. 110

Ludwig van Beethoven

Composed: 1821-1822

Duration: 20 Minutes

Beethoven's piano sonatas grew in complexity and depth as the cycle of 32 progressed. The last dozen or so could be called absolute masterpieces of piano music, with the latter half of that group rising to a level that often inspires awe and wonderment. This work, though sometimes overshadowed by the mighty "Hammerklavier" Sonata, and the last, the C minor, Op. 111, seems quite as impressive as these better-known works. This unusual work, thematically threadbare at the outset, is a great and deeply profound composition, whose fugal finale achieves the highest keyboard art.