

PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

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PREVIEW
NOTES

Jonathan Biss, piano
Monday, March 30 – 7:30 PM
Perelman Theater, Kimmel Center

PROGRAM (Selection of Program Notes)

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 B-flat Major, Op. 22

Ludwig van Beethoven

Composed: 1800

Duration: 25 minutes

With the Piano Sonata No. 11, Beethoven moves closer to the more far-reaching expressive worlds of the Op. 31 group of sonatas. Cast in four movements: Allegro con brio, Adagio con molto espressione, Menuetto, and Rondo (Allegretto), the sonata 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 development section, the opening idea appears in altered form, and a second theme follows.

Sonata in A Major, Op. 101

Ludwig van Beethoven

Composed: 1816

Duration: 20 minutes

Beethoven's Sonata No. 28 is a generally subdued work, like its immediate predecessor. Unlike that piece, however, it foreshadows the styles and trends of the future and, though sometimes overlooked, deserves the attention of pianists and listeners. According to Schindler, who was not always a reliable source, Beethoven described the first movement of this sonata as containing "impressions and reveries." The latter word appears to fit the generally dreamy and peaceful mood of this movement. It is short and carries the description "Etwas lebhaft, und mit der innigsten Empfindung" (Somewhat lively, and with the most ardent perception). Obviously, the composer was hoping to draw the pianist's attention to the many subtleties of the piece.

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.