

PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY

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PREVIEW
NOTES

Jonathan Biss, *piano*

Tuesday, November 24 – 6:00 PM

PROGRAM

Sonata in E-flat Minor, Op. 7

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born: December 1770, in Bonn, Germany

Died: March 26, 1827, in Vienna, Austria

Composed: 1796

Duration: 28 minutes

Ludwig van Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 4, sometimes nicknamed the "Grand Sonata," is dedicated to his student Babette, the Countess Keglevich. This piano sonata was composed in Bratislava, in 1796 during his November visit to Keglevich Palace in Bratislava. This early piano sonata, his fourth, is the longest example of the genre in Beethoven's catalog except for the massive "Hammerklavier" sonata of 20 years later. Much is made of Beethoven the revolutionary, and it is too easy to claim that this sonata's symphonic scope is another mark of the young man's daring genius. However, this composition, although unusually long, is a fairly straightforward work which observes the conventions of its day. The first movement, *Allegro molto e con brio*, begins with throbbing chords full of anticipation, but quickly gives way to a bright, confident melody that wanders up and down the scale; it wouldn't be out of place in a Mozart sonata.

Sonata in F-sharp Major, Op. 78, "à Thérèse"

Ludwig van Beethoven

Composed: 1809

Duration: 10 minutes

Beethoven took a nearly five-year break from piano sonata composition after finishing the earth-shaking "Appassionata" sonata of 1804-1805. He returned to the genre only in May 1809, when the departure of his friend Archduke Rudolph prompted him to begin the "Les Adieux" Sonata No. 26, Op. 81a. Before that piece was finished, however, Beethoven wrote, signed, and affixed opus numbers to two other piano sonatas (both relatively brief works), so that, according to the numbering scheme, the Piano Sonata No. 24 in F-sharp Major, Op. 78, is the immediate successor to the "Appassionata" Sonata. Op. 78 was a work for which

Beethoven had considerable affection; the tendency of posterity to assign nicknames to the works of major composers has resulted in Op. 78 occasionally being called "À Thérèse," by reason of its having been dedicated to Countess Therese von Brunsvik. This composition seems the work of a man who has finally exorcised all his demons. It is a light piece in two movements. The first bears a serene *Andante cantabile* introduction, really just a single phrase. The main *Allegro ma non troppo* material flows effortlessly from the opening in one long, undulating theme that gradually breaks into more fragmentary components, then pulls itself together again. This is a matter of gentle examination rather than disintegration; Beethoven employs all these elements in a mild variation of the theme, then eases into a development section that maintains the same mood except for one fairly agitated passage near the end. Things return to the tranquil norm with the recapitulation.

Sonata in A-flat Major, Op. 110

Ludwig van Beethoven

Composed: 1821-22

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.