



The Sixty-eighth Season of
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin
Concerts

National Gallery of Art
2,744th Concert

Till Fellner, *pianist*

November 1, 2009
Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

Program

Sonatas by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Sonata no. 25 in G Major, op. 79 (1809)

Presto alla tedesca

Andante

Vivace

Sonata no. 24 in F-sharp Major, op. 78 (1809)

Adagio cantabile; Allegro ma non troppo

Allegro vivace

Sonata no. 15 in D Major (“Pastoral”), op. 28 (1801)

Allegro

Andante

Scherzo: Allegro assai

Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

INTERMISSION

Sonata no. 27 in E Minor, op. 90 (1814)

Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus mit Empfindung und Ausdruck

Nicht zu geschwind und sehr singbar vorgetragen

Sonata no. 4 in E-flat Major, op. 7 (1796–1797)

Allegro molto e con brio

Largo, con gran espressione

Allegro

Rondo: Poco allegretto e grazioso

*This concert is made possible by a generous grant from the
Billy Rose Foundation*

The Musicians

Till Fellner was born in Vienna, where he studied with Helene Sedo-Stadler. He continued his studies with Alfred Brendel, Meira Farkas, Oleg Maisenberg, and Claus Christian Schuster. In 1993 he won first prize at the Clara Haskil Competition in Vevey, Switzerland. Since then Fellner has been in demand as guest soloist with distinguished orchestras, at the major music centers of Europe, Japan, and the United States, and at numerous important festivals. He has collaborated with many conductors, including Claudio Abbado, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Christoph von Dohnányi, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Heinz Holliger, Marek Janowski, Sir Charles Mackerras, Sir Neville Marriner, Kurt Masur, Kent Nagano, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Leonard Slatkin, Claudius Traunfellner, Franz Welser-Möst, and Hans Zender. Fellner regularly performs as part of a trio with violinist Lisa Batiashvili and cellist Adrian Brendel. He has also collaborated closely with tenor Mark Padmore in performances of Schubert's *Die schöne Müllerin* and other song cycles.

In October 2008 Till Fellner launched a cycle of the complete Beethoven piano sonatas in a series of seven recitals. The entire cycle can be heard in New York, London, Paris, Tokyo, and Vienna, as well as here in Washington, where it is being presented jointly by the Embassy of Austria, the Embassy Series, and the National Gallery of Art, with major support from the Billy Rose Foundation. In the 2009–2010 season, Fellner continues the next four installments of the Beethoven cycle, which has been praised by critics and audiences alike. Other concerts include performances with Germany's Südwestrundfunk Orchestra and a Canadian tour with the Montreal Symphony and Kent Nagano. Fellner has numerous recordings to his credit, most recent among them an ECM disc of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Two- and Three-Part Inventions*. Till Fellner appears at the National Gallery by arrangement with Kuenstlermanagement Till Doench of Vienna, Austria.

Program Notes

The custom of playing Beethoven's complete piano sonatas in a consecutive series of concerts began with the great German pianist Artur Schnabel, who played them on seven successive Sundays in 1927 in Berlin to mark the centenary of Beethoven's death. Since then, other eminent pianists have played Beethoven sonata cycles, although none in the concentrated time span in which Schnabel presented his cycle. Alfred Brendel, for example, used the forty-eight-week span of the 1982–1983 concert season to present his seven-concert Beethoven cycle. Memorizing and performing these thirty-two sonatas is the pianistic equivalent of climbing Mount Everest or running a marathon race. They encompass the entire period of Beethoven's compositional career, and range from sunny youthful works to the intense anguish of his troubled later years. Using the periods of composition that are commonly accepted by musicologists—early (before 1802), middle (1802–1816), and late (1816–1827)—one finds fifteen sonatas in the first period, twelve in the second, and five in the third.

Composed in 1809, *Sonata no. 25 in G Major* is one of Beethoven's shorter three-movement works, an average performance lasting no more than ten minutes. The work begins with a *Presto alla tedesca* (Presto in the German style), which presents a forceful and direct opening motive, heard throughout the movement. The brief exposition is followed by a slightly longer development, leading swiftly back to the recapitulation and brief codetta. The *Andante* is simple and elegant, set in ternary form, an effective contrast to the more direct and energetic first movement. This sonata is sometimes given the nickname "The Cuckoo," due to a descending minor third motif that appears frequently in the final *Vivace*, a witty rondo.

After completing his great "Appassionata" sonata, Beethoven did not return to the form for five years. When he did, it was to compose the two-movement *Sonata no. 24 in F-sharp Major*, op. 78, which could not have been

more different from the “Appassionata.” Rumored to have been the composer’s favorite among his own piano sonatas, it is occasionally nicknamed “À Thérèse,” since it was dedicated to the Countess Thérèse von Brunsvik. As a whole, the sonata is charming and sunny in disposition, seemingly written by a man completely at peace with himself and the world. The first movement opens with a brief *Andante cantabile* introduction before the *Allegro* section begins. The romping rondo *Allegro vivace* plays with dynamics, major and minor modes and twists some thematic ideas from the first movement.

In 1801 Beethoven worked on and completed four piano sonatas, including the famous “Moonlight” sonata, and his op. 27, no. 1 “Quasi una fantasia,” both of which contain formally progressive ideas and elements. *Sonata no. 15*, op. 28 (nicknamed “Pastoral” by his Hamburg publisher), composed later than those progressive sonatas, reverts to the classical four-movement style of Beethoven’s earlier years. The first movement, much like the previous sonata on the program, is cheerful and easygoing, reflecting a contented composer. The lyrical *Andante* of the second movement ventures into the minor mode, with a sustained melody singing on top of staccato accompaniment in the bass. Beethoven shows his humorous side in the *Scherzo*, playing with repeated notes in multiple registers of the piano. The rustic *Allegro* finale, with its rollicking rhythm, earns the sonata its “Pastoral” moniker.

When asked about the meaning of its two movements by Count Moritz Lichnowsky, to whom *Sonata no. 27 in E Minor*, op. 90 is dedicated, Beethoven is said to have replied that the first movement was “a struggle between the head and the heart,” and the second represented “a conversation with the beloved.” The first movement, in standard sonata form, is conflicted and restless, always in the minor mode. The second movement is a gentle, flowing rondo, in the contrasting major mode.

Set strictly in classical sonata form, *Sonata no. 4 in E-flat Major*, op. 7, stands out as second in length only to the “Hammerklavier” sonata (op. 106), written twenty years later. Symphonic in scope, the fourth sonata fits completely within the standards of the late classical period in which it was

written. The virtuosic first movement is a broad and confident example of sonata-allegro form to the letter. The stately second movement provides a contrasting mood, followed by what is essentially a classic minuet and trio in the third movement. The finale is an unusually songlike rondo, which includes the requisite stormy episode, but nevertheless concludes sweetly.

Program notes by Danielle DeSwert Hahn

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November 8, 2009

Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm

West Building, West Garden Court

For the convenience of concertgoers
the Garden Café remains open until 6:00 pm.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the
performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones,
pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

Please note that late entry or reentry of
the West Building after 6:30 pm is not permitted.

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