



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

National Gallery of Art
2,766th Concert

Till Fellner, pianist

February 7, 2010
Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

Program

Sonatas by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Sonata no. 12 in A-flat Major, op. 26 (“Funeral March”), (1800–1801)

Andante con variazioni

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Marcia funebre sulla morte d’un eroe

Allegro

Sonata no. 13 in E-flat Major, op. 27/1 (“Sonata quasi una fantasia”)
(1800–1801)

Andante

Allegro molto e vivace

Adagio con espressione

Allegro vivace

Sonata no. 14 in C-sharp Minor, op. 27/2 (“Moonlight”) (1800–1801)

Adagio sostenuto

Allegretto

Presto agitato

INTERMISSION

Sonata no. 22 in F Major, op. 54 (1804)

In tempo d’un menuetto

Allegretto

Sonata no. 21 in C Major, op. 53 (“Waldstein”) (1803–1804)

Allegro con brio

Introduction: Adagio molto

Rondo: Allegretto moderato

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

The Musician

Till Fellner was born in Vienna, where he studied with Helene Sedo-Stadler. Further studies led him to Alfred Brendel, Meira Farkas, Oleg Maisenberg, and Claus Christian Schuster. His international career was launched in 1993 when 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 in a trio with violinist Lisa Batiashvili and cellist Adrian Brendel.

In October 2008 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, Vienna, and Washington, DC, 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. This season, Fellner continues the next four installments of the Beethoven cycle, which has received high critical and audience praise. Other concerts include performances with the Südwestrundfunk Orchestra and a Canadian tour with the Montreal Symphony and Kent Nagano as well as joint recitals with Mark Padmore, performing Schubert's *Winterreise*. Fellner's most recent release is a recording of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Two- and Three-Part Inventions*, on the ECM label.

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 48-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 (1802–1815), and late (1816–1827)—one finds fifteen sonatas in the first period, twelve in the second, and five in the third.

Composed at the end of Beethoven's "early" period, *Sonata no. 12 in A-flat Major* is an excellent example of his constant experimentation with the sonata form. The work unfolds in four movements instead of the expected three. The first movement is not in the conventional sonata-allegro form, but is a theme and variations. In the second movement, the composer recalls the *Scherzo: Allegro molto* from his first symphony, composed one year before the sonata (1799). The third movement, *Marcia funebre sulla morte d'un eroe* (Funeral march on the death of a hero) is the one that gives the sonata its nickname. Its irregularly palpitating rhythmic figure presages what is soon to come in the second movement of the *Symphony no. 3* ("Eroica"). The light-hearted Allegro with which the sonata ends provides a satisfying foil for the seriousness of the funeral march.

Beethoven's *Sonata in E-flat Major*, op. 27, no. 1, represents a radical breakthrough for the composer. As suggested by its subtitle, "Sonata quasi una fantasia" (Sonata in the manner of a fantasy), it consists of sections that relate to one another in a fantastical way, rather than according to the

established relationships of sonata movements. The opening movement is a lyrical *andante* that calls to mind a slow dance. A free and virtuosic interlude, marked *allegro*, interrupts with startling abruptness, but then the composer reverts to the original *andante* as if nothing had happened. A brief, stormy scherzo, in which the hands play three-note patterns in opposition to each other, is contrasted with an eccentric trio that features a syncopated hunting horn call. The *Adagio con espressione*, identified as the third movement, is a moment of quiet contemplation that serves as an introduction to the final movement, a rondo with a number of contrapuntal episodes. At the climax of the rondo, the music comes to a sudden halt as the theme from the third movement returns for a reflective moment, but before long the fantasy rushes to its conclusion in a coda, marked *presto*.

Beethoven subtitled both of the sonatas of his op. 27 as “Sonata quasi una fantasia,” perhaps an indication that he was moving into a new and more flexible approach to composition—an approach that eventually came to be the hallmark of the romantic era. The *Sonata no. 14 in C-sharp Minor*, op. 27, no. 2, (“Moonlight”) attained great popularity almost immediately upon its publication in 1801, and its first movement lives on with the opening motif of his *Fifth Symphony* and the rondo of his bagatelle *Für Elise* as the most widely and instantly recognizable music Beethoven ever wrote. The familiar appellation “Moonlight” originated with German poet and music critic Ludwig Rellstab (1799–1860), who compared the first movement’s rippling texture to the moonlight shimmering on Lake Lucerne. This texture is provided by the triplet figure with which the first movement begins, which, when it is played at a moderate tempo, takes equal place with the melody as an item of interest for the listener, and induces a trancelike atmosphere. This is not an emotionless trance, however; from time to time the triplet figure rises and falls in a sublime sigh, followed by a mysterious echo in the lower register.

The second movement (*Allegretto*) is a delicate syncopated minuet that plays with the light and dark effects of the treble and bass ranges of the piano. The third movement (*Presto agitato*) presents a frantic upward arpeggio that is quintessential “*Sturm and Drang*”—the “storm and stress”

that characterizes much of early romantic music. This movement adheres to sonata-allegro form, though Beethoven breaks with the tradition of presenting a contrasting second theme by making all the themes equally agitated. This finale provides an unexpected and effective contrast to the sonata's intimate first and second movements.

The *Sonata in F Major*, op. 54, completed in 1804, may have provided the composer a brief respite from the massive effort represented by his “Waldstein” and “Appassionata” sonatas and his “Eroica” symphony. All were finished between 1803 and 1805, and presumably preoccupied Beethoven throughout the winter of 1803–1804. Playable on a five-octave keyboard, this two-movement sonata appears at first glance easy to play, and has a reputation for surprising amateurs who approach it as a short and easy sonata, only to become entangled in its technical complications. The opening measures of the first movement are reassuring, with a measured, deliberate tempo and a simple theme. However, just when the sight-reading pianist least expects it, a storm breaks out in the form of triplets in octaves and sixths in both hands. (In many editions, this section appears directly at the first page turn!) This ill-mannered interruption repeats itself in a higher key, then gives way to the quiet opening theme, only to interrupt once again to finish the movement, with the addition of some dissonant chords.

The second movement, an *allegretto*, is a perpetual-motion rondo. Unlike traditional rondos—which introduce contrasting sections and return to the rondo exactly as it was heard the first time—this piece keeps up the flood of sixteenth notes throughout and the feeling of perpetual motion overwhelms any other aspects of the form. The pace and intensity increase throughout the movement, leading to a strenuous coda in which the two hands race each other to the final bar.

In 1803 Beethoven was able to purchase a new Erard fortepiano, which featured a more precise action and a louder tone than the pianos he had previously owned. It inspired him to make new demands on the instrument (and on the player as well) as he composed the *Sonata no. 21 in C Major*, op. 53, which he dedicated to his patron and friend Count Ferdinand von Waldstein (1762–1823).

The first movement, marked *Allegro con brio*, begins with a rapid, highly energetic reiteration of chords in the lower register and an impassioned cry of response in the right hand, several octaves higher. As additional ideas are developed, the second subject is introduced, and each element strives to dominate the composition's discourse. The development section begins with a presentation of the main theme in a dark, subdued mood, and then goes off in a new direction, propelled by two of the brief motifs from the theme. In the recapitulation, Beethoven ingeniously avoids a mere restatement by expanding on the phrase at the end of the main theme.

The second movement (*Adagio molto*), is short, serious, and introspective, drawing dramatic power from its initial three-note utterance spanning the interval of a sixth. Originally, Beethoven wrote what is now known as a separate piano piece—the *Andante favori*—as the second movement for this sonata, but he decided not to include it, as he found the complete sonata too long. Instead, he positioned the *Adagio molto* as an introduction to the finale (*Rondo: Allegretto moderato*). In the latter movement, the seven-note rondo theme has a pastoral quality as it is first introduced. Beethoven proceeds to transform this tranquil mood into one of ecstatic celebration, enhanced by colorful sprays of notes that reach the uppermost octave of the Erard piano.

Program notes by Stephen Ackert

Next Week at the National Gallery of Art

Karin Paludan, soprano
Danielle DeSwert Hahn, pianist

Music by Gershwin

Presented in honor of
From Impressionism to Modernism:
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February 10, 2010
Wednesday, 12:10 pm
West Building Lecture Hall



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the Garden Café remains open until 6:00 pm.

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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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