



2020 SUMMER CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL PROGRAM NOTES

Brightmusic Celebrates the 250th Birthday of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

“Often, I can scarcely hear anyone speaking to me; the tones yes, but not the actual words; yet as soon as anyone shouts, it is unbearable. What will come of all this, heaven only knows!” — BEETHOVEN

It is difficult to overstate the impact of Beethoven’s contribution to the development of Western Music. Though struggling most of his life with ill health and progressing deafness, and—some would argue—a touch of madness, Beethoven would become perhaps the greatest composer of all time. He is considered the most instrumental force in the transition from the Classical-era music of Mozart and Haydn to the prolific Romantic period of the 19th century.

Born in Bonn in 1770 in the waning years of the Enlightenment, Ludwig van Beethoven would go into the family business—music. His grandfather was the distinguished Kappelmeister at the court of the Prince-Elector in Bonn, where his father, Johann van Beethoven, served as a court musician. Johann, the child’s first teacher, struggled with alcoholism and was physically abusive, beating the little boy to get him to practice his instruments. Subsequent teachers were kinder and more competent.

Beethoven was composing by the time he was 13 and, while still a teenager, served as assistant organist and played viola in the court orchestra. It was apparent early on that this young man would “make a noise in the world,” as Mozart is said to have proclaimed, though there is no evidence that the two ever met. Shortly before his 16th birthday, he was sent by the Elector to Vienna to study with Mozart, but before arrangements could be made, he was summoned to the bedside of his dying mother. After her death, he would become head of the family, caring for his two younger brothers and his ailing father. Despite poverty and the burden of familial duties, he would manage to get an adequate musical grounding by the time he left for Vienna at the age of 22, never to return.

Over the next three and a half decades, Beethoven would become the most celebrated composer in Europe. He would kick down doors and bulldoze ramparts with his unorthodox style, revolutionary ideas and his utter disdain for the dying power structures of the eighteenth century. “Prince! What you are, you are by accident of birth!” he would pen in a fit of rage to one of his patrons. “There are thousands of princes, but there is only one Beethoven!” Although he was an enthusiastic bridge burner, his friends and patrons rarely abandoned him, recognizing his genius. But the composer, by all accounts, had a sense of humor and knew his own limitations. He would write to a friend, “Beethoven can write music, thank God, because he can’t do another thing on earth!”

CONCERT 1 (“Distant Beloved”) **The Mae Ruth Swanson Memorial Concert**

Romance No. 2 in F major, Op. 50, for violin and piano (arr. Joseph Joachim)

One of Beethoven's most enchanting works, the Romance No. 2 was written for violin and orchestra in 1798, toward the end of the Classical era, and dedicated to the premier violinist of the day, Ignaz Schuppanzigh. This sentimental adagio cantabile was written before the Romance No. 1 but published two years later, in 1805. Both romances were written in the rondo form, built around recurring themes. It was later transcribed for violin and piano by the great 19th-century violinist Joseph Joachim, a close friend of Johannes Brahms.

An die ferne Geliebte, Op. 98 (for piano and tenor)

“To the Distant Beloved,” Beethoven's only song cycle, was written in 1816. It is considered the first song cycle by a major composer, setting the stage for many who would follow, in particular, Franz Schubert and Robert Schumann, whose songs and song cycles are considered the pinnacle of the art. The six songs of “An die ferne Geliebte” make up a circle of songs, not a chronological narrative, where the theme of the first reappears as the conclusion of the last and each song, in different keys and time signatures, moves without a break into the next. The text was written by a poet/physician, Alois Isidor Jeitteles, at the composer's request. The work centers on the longing for a young man's distant beloved and his painful separation from her. The work is often thought to be a reflection of the composer's own yearning for his “Immortal Beloved,” the subject of his enigmatic letter written in July 1812. Found in his personal effects after his death, apparently never sent, the letter is a torrent of longing for a woman whose identity remains unknown. According to a close friend, “There was never a time when Beethoven was not in love.”

Piano Trio Op. 11 in B-flat major “Gassenhauer” (for clarinet, cello and piano)

Composed around 1797-1798, Beethoven's trio was written toward the beginning of his career when the clarinet was a relative newcomer. The work makes technical demands on all the instruments but the piano is the star, as it was with many of Beethoven's works which included the piano. Beethoven was impressed by the virtuosity of an Austrian clarinetist, Franz Joseph Bähr. According to a cellist friend of the composer's, Beethoven exclaimed, “Bähr blows like a god!” Bähr likely performed the work in its premier, as he likely did for many of Beethoven's works for the clarinet. Though at the time Beethoven was relatively unknown in Vienna, the leading music newspaper of the day, *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, wrote, “This trio is by no means easy in parts, but it runs more flowingly than much of the composer's other work and produces an excellent ensemble effect...” Beethoven would not long remain in the shadows.

CONCERT 2 (“Celebratory Cello”)

Cello Sonata in G minor, Op. 5, No. 2

A pair of cello sonatas make up Beethoven's Op. 5. Written in 1796 while Beethoven was in Berlin to meet King of Prussia Friedrich Wilhelm II, himself an accomplished cellist, Beethoven performed both sonatas for the king with the king's first cellist, a virtuoso named Jean-Pierre Deport, in the premier of these works. The G minor sonata begins, as does the Sonata No. 1, with a long atmospheric adagio sostenuto introduction followed by an allegro in sonata form. The second and final movement is a joyful rondo finale. The piano part, like much of Beethoven's works for keyboard, is virtuosic and intended as a showcase of his skill.

String Trio in G Major, Op. 9, No. 1 (for violin, viola and cello)

Though less often performed than the composer's other chamber works, the three trios that make up Opus 9 are considered a significant milestone in Beethoven's development, and the composer considered them some of his best works. Not intended as light chamber pieces, the Op. 9 trios would hone his skills for the string quartets and the symphonic works that would follow. Written in 1797-98 and published a year later, all three trios were dedicated to

Count Johann Georg von Browne, a leading patron of Beethoven at that time. Beethoven would write no more trios after he published his Op. 18 string quartets in 1801. The four-movement Op. 9, No. 1 trio has all the rich elegance of Mozart but with a spirited, full-throttle energy that was the hallmark of much of the young Beethoven's work.

CONCERT 3 (“Immortal Beloved”)

Adelaide, Op. 46 (arr. for clarinet and piano by Ivan Müller)

This song composed by Beethoven around 1795 for piano and voice was later arranged for clarinet and piano by Müller. The text, a love poem written by Friederich von Matthisson (1761-1831), would have appealed greatly to the young romantic, who dedicated his composition to the poet. Matthisson is said to have admired the song and wrote in 1825 that, although the poem had been set to music by several composers, “none of them so threw the text into the shade with their melody as did the genius Ludwig van Beethoven.” The piece remains one of Beethoven's most beloved songs and was especially popular in his day. The transcription by Müller for clarinet and piano captures all the lyricism of the song as the clarinet capably assumes the part of the human voice.

Violin Sonata No. 9 in A major, Op. 47 “Kreutzer”

Intended by the composer to be more of a concerto in scope than a sonata, the three-movement “Kreutzer” is known for its technical difficulty and unusual length, requiring nearly three-quarters of an hour to perform. Written in 1802-03 and published in 1805, the work is named for violinist Rodolphe Kreutzer, the most celebrated violinist of his day. Beethoven originally dedicated the sonata to George Bridgetower, but after a falling out with the violinist, who reportedly insulted a woman whom Beethoven admired, the composer changed the dedication to Kreutzer. By all accounts, Kreutzer did not like the piece and refused to play it, declaring it “outrageously unintelligible.” As with many of Beethoven's sonatas for two instruments, the “Kreutzer” gives equal weight to both and becomes a stormy dialogue. Commentator Rob Kapilow says, “Violinists never like to program this piece, because it's one of the most excruciatingly nerve-wracking beginnings—to play these awkward, slow chords. But what comes after that is even more extraordinary.”

CONCERT 4 (“Joyful Winds”)

Duo for Clarinet and Bassoon, WoO 27, No. 1 in C major

Beethoven is believed to have written three sets of duos involving the clarinet. The “fingerprints” of the mature Beethoven are not evident, as they are believed to have been composed while Beethoven was still young and strongly influenced by Haydn and Mozart as his own style was evolving. Some have even alleged their origin is spurious. Published in Paris in the early 1820s, this charming piece has been described as “light and agile.”

Trio in E-flat major, Op. 38 “Grand Trio” for Clarinet, Cello and Piano

Following the publication of Beethoven's enormously popular Op. 20 septet written in 1799-1800 and scored for violin, viola, cello, double bass, clarinet, horn and bassoon, Beethoven made a more marketable arrangement for a smaller ensemble. The structure of the septet—and the “Grand Trio” which would follow—is based on the classical-era divertimento with few innovations. Published in 1805, this expansive six-movement trio captures the charm and vitality of the original septet, which is considered the finest example of Beethoven's early chamber works. Beethoven, however, came to resent the septet's wide popularity. “That damn work! I wish it could be burned!” he is said to have grumbled. —*Program Notes by Sara Grossman*