



# *Beethoven*

SUNDAY, JANUARY 27, 2013

3:00 P.M. – 5:00 P.M.

CONRAD PREBYS CONCERT HALL

UC San Diego



THE 17TH ANNUAL CONCERT TO BENEFIT  
THE LYTLE ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIPS  
SUPPORTING GRADUATES OF THE PREUSS SCHOOL  
ATTENDING THURGOOD MARSHALL COLLEGE

# Beethoven

Cecil Lytle, Piano

PROGRAM

PIANO SONATA IN Bb MAJOR, OPUS 106  
(*Das Hammerklavier*)

- I. *Allegro*
- II. *Scherzo: Assai Vivace*
- III. *Adagio Sostenuto*
- IV. *Introduzione: Largo-Fuga: Allegro Risoluto*

INTERMISSION

PIANO SONATA IN C MINOR, OPUS 111

- I. *Maestoso – allegro con brio ed appassionato*
- II. *Arietta: adagio molto, semplice e cantabile*



## PROGRAM NOTES

Cecil Lytle

There are just two compositions on today's concert, both by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827). These two works are among Beethoven's most dynamic and least known of his 32 piano sonatas. Except for performances by Franz Liszt and a rare few other virtuosi, they went unplayed throughout the 19th century, and pianists assiduously avoid them even today. They are as difficult to play as they are to listen to at one sitting. Taken together, however, they give the listener an insight into the musical and philosophical issues that captured Beethoven's interests late in life. He was not steadily writing as many works late in life, but he wrote compositions of greater magnitude and scope. It was a period of his mature ideas as well as mature problems. Deafness, troubles with his nephew, loneliness, and ill health were partial inspirations for these larger and more perplexing works.

Both sonatas are long and make abundant use of dissonances uncommon for classical sonatas. Opus#106 (lasting a little over 43 minutes) and Opus 111 (just under a half-hour) are simultaneously quite traditional in terms of structure, yet strikingly avant-garde for the day.

### **PIANO SONATA #29 in Bb MAJOR, OPUS 106 (1818)**

The three years prior to the publication of Opus 106 were a fallow period for Beethoven. In "Das Hammerklavier" (so named for the most advanced pianoforte of the day), he both returns to the traditional elements of sonata-form and departs from tradition. It is comprised of the archetypical four-movement form made famous by his early mentor, Franz

Josef Haydn (1732-1809). Its twelve-minute first movement (*Allegro*) is pure sonata-form, but in itself is significantly longer than many of his early and middle-period piano sonatas. The ingredients and activities taking place in those dozen minutes are brazenly new—some analyses claim that there are up to six “1st themes” in the first movement. The whimsical second movement (*Scherzo: Assai Vivace*) has a simple ABA form lasting a brief three minutes by comparison. The slow third movement (*Adagio Sostenuto*) is substantially longer than any slow movement in his oeuvre, including the Ninth Symphony published in 1825, causing one musicologist to label the movement, “...a mausoleum of collective sorrow.”

The final movement (*Introduzione: Largo-Fuga: Allegro Risoluto*) is arguably the most interesting in “Das Hammerklavier.” Almost defying analysis, it is longer than the first movement and pays twisted homage to Beethoven’s idol, Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). After a series of halting/lurching passages, the introduction gives way to the chief compositional device of the previous century, a fugue—in this case a three-voice fugue. But that is where the likeness ends: a typical Bach fugue contains, at most, a dozen notes; this fugue is built on over sixty. Not completely satisfied with this extravagance, Beethoven embeds numerous trills, concluding with a fury in a distant key. He then commences a brand new fugue subject, in yet another key. Within a short time, he combines the subjects from both fugues. The concluding pages are a *tour de force* in musical deconstruction of the sixty-note theme.

### **PIANO SONATA #32 in C MINOR, OPUS 111 (1822)**

Opus #111 is the last piano sonata Beethoven would compose. Although he would go on to publish many more musical works, Opus #111 is the last sonata of any type in his remaining oeuvre; there are no more violin sonatas, cello sonatas, or other instrumental sonatas. It is as if he realized that

Opus #111 said all that could be said about sonatas and sonata-form. Sonatas would not be a convention of the future.

Beethoven's last sonata is steeped in numerology. It has only two movements instead of the traditional four: one fast, and the other slow (sort of). The first movement opens with a commanding *Maestoso* based on three giant phrases, melodically and harmonically unrelated to the actual material of the sonata-form to follow. The only similarity between the triptych-like introduction of the movement and its faster sonata-form section is that the first theme is made up of three contiguous motivic parts. When each part appears, it is heard three times. The subsequent appearances of the three-part figure grow inexorably further and further apart, as the first movement progresses. Although only nine minutes long, the unfolding nature of the first movement gives the illusion of continued expansion.

“Theme and Variations” is the general architecture of the second movement (*Arietta: Adagio Molto, Semplice e Cantabile*), with each of the six variations built on an ever-diminishing note value. For example, the hymn-like opening theme has the rhythm of one articulation (chord) for every three beats; the first variation has three articulations for every three beats; the second variation contains six articulations for every three beats; the third variation has twelve articulations for every three beats, and so on. The basic pulse of the three beats remains the same in each variation, but the subdivision becomes increasingly atomized. This diminution gives the auditory illusion of continued contraction, things getting shorter. In reality, the second movement is actually twice as long as the first movement.

Both piano sonatas are peculiar and beautiful in different ways. Each of these sonatas tells us something about the state of Beethoven's musical mind in his final years. They reveal Beethoven as a Janus-like figure at the dawn of the 19th century, looking forward and backward at the same time. In Hellenistic terms, perhaps he was a fiery Prometheus figure—innovative and vital, but fastened securely to earthly customs.

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