

EIGHTY-FIFTH SEASON

Symphony Center Presents

Sunday, October 23, 2016, at 3:00

Piano Series

RUDOLF BUCHBINDER**J.S. Bach***English Suite No. 3 in G Minor, BWV 808*

Prelude

Allemande

Courante

Sarabande

Gavottes 1 and 2

Gigue

Schubert

Four Impromptus, D. 899

No. 1 in C Minor: Allegro molto moderato

No. 2 in E-flat Major: Allegro

No. 3 in G-flat Major: Andante

No. 4 in A-flat Major: Allegretto

INTERMISSION**Beethoven**

Sonata in G Major, Op. 14, No. 2

Allegro

Andante

Scherzo: Allegro assai

BeethovenSonata in F Minor, Op. 57 (*Appassionata*)

Allegro assai

Andante con moto—

Allegro ma non troppo

Johann Sebastian Bach

Born March 21, 1685; Eisenach, Germany

Died July 28, 1750; Leipzig, Germany

English Suite No. 3 in G Minor, BWV 808



COMPOSED

Circa 1720

From 1717 to 1723, Bach was director of music at the court of Anhalt-Cöthen, north of Leipzig. He liked his job. His employer, Prince Leopold, was

a well-educated man, twenty-four years old when he engaged Bach. (Bach was thirty-two.) Leopold was fond of travel, books, and paintings, but his real passion was music. (Reports had it that Leopold spent a whopping twenty percent of the court's annual budget on his musical establishment.) The prince was an accomplished musician who not only played violin, viola da gamba, and harpsichord well enough to join with the professionals in his household orchestra, but he also had an exceptional bass voice. He started the court musical establishment in 1707 with three players; by the time of Bach's appointment, the ensemble had grown to nearly twenty performers equipped with a fine set of instruments.

It was for these musicians that Bach wrote many of his outstanding instrumental works, including the *Brandenburg* Concertos, orchestral suites, violin concertos, and much of his chamber and keyboard music. Leopold appreciated Bach's genius and Bach returned the compliment when he said of the prince, "He loved music, he was well-acquainted with it, he understood it."

The six *English* Suites were probably composed at Cöthen, though ideas and perhaps even complete movements may date from as early as 1715, when Bach was serving as organist and chamber musician to Duke Wilhelm Ernst of Weimar. The origin of the work's name is unknown. An early copy of the first suite (none of the composer's autographs survive) bears the words "Fait pour les Anglois" (Made for the English), though this designation does not appear to have

originated with Bach. To further honor this hypothetical British dedicatee, Bach borrowed for the gigue of the first suite a theme by Charles Dieupart, then one of the most popular harpsichordists in London. The *Brandenburg* Concertos followed a not dissimilar gestation, when Bach collected together six of his finest concerted pieces and sent them to Christian Ludwig, margrave of Brandenburg, a guest at Cöthen in 1718.

Works of imposing scale and expansive expression, the *English* Suites adopt the conventional baroque model for the form: a large opening movement followed by a series of stylized dances. Each of the suites (except no. 1) begins with a prelude in quick tempo employing the ritornello form (orchestral refrain with solo episodes) of the Italian concerto. In the G minor suite, this opening movement is muscular in motion and rich in imitative counterpoint. Bach followed the prelude with the standard succession of dances established in German practice with the works of Johann Jakob Froberger around 1650: allemande, courante, sarabande, gigue. In the *English* Suites, an additional dance of differing character (bourrée, gavotte, passepied, menuet) is inserted before the gigue. The moderately paced allemande, if its French name is to be trusted, originated in Germany in the sixteenth century. French composers found it useful for displaying their most elaborate keyboard ornamentations, and passed it back to German musicians in that highly decorated form. The courante was an old court dance genre accompanied by jumping motions that was frequently paired with the smoothly flowing allemande.

When the sarabande came to Spain from its birthplace in Mexico in the sixteenth century, it was so wild in its motions and so lascivious in its implications that Cervantes ridiculed it and Philip II suppressed it. The dance became considerably tamer when it was taken over into French and English music during the following century, and it had achieved the dignified manner in which it

was known to Bach by 1700. Bach's example in the G minor suite exists with a florid variation—les agréments de la même Sarabande—for the repeats of each of its two strains. Next is a pair of gavottes, a dance of moderate liveliness whose

ancestry traces back to French peasant music. The closing gigue was derived from an English folk dance and became popular as the model for instrumental compositions by French, German, and Italian musicians. ■

Franz Schubert

Born January 31, 1797; Vienna, Austria

Died November 19, 1828; Vienna, Austria

Four Impromptus, D. 899



COMPOSED

1827

Schubert began his eight pieces entitled *impromptu* in the summer and autumn of 1827; they were completed by December. He did not invent the title. The

term “*impromptu*” had been current in Vienna since at least 1822, when the Bohemian-Austrian composer Johann Voříšek issued a set of brief, ternary-form works of extemporized nature under that name. Schubert was familiar with Voříšek's pieces, as well as with the many independent piano works by Beethoven, Field, Tomášek, and others that were flooding the market in the wake of the burgeoning piano manufacturing trade (and falling consumer prices) of those years.

Schubert sold his eight *impromptus* to Haslinger in Vienna, who agreed to publish them in small lots to test their acceptance. He issued the first two numbers of the series (in C minor and E-flat major) in 1828 as Schubert's op. 90, nos. 1 and 2 with some success, but the composer's death on November 19 that year halted the project, and the remaining pair of op. 90 *impromptus* was not published until 1857 or 1858; the four others were issued at the end of 1839 by Diabelli as op. 142.

Robert Schumann, one of Schubert's earliest champions and the catalyst for the first performance of the *Great Symphony* in C major (conducted, at Schumann's insistence, by

Mendelssohn at the Leipzig Gewandhaus concerts in 1839), knew the works in manuscript copies, and wrote of their special instrumental character:

As a composer for the piano, Schubert stands alone (in some respects, even above Beethoven), in that his writing is more pianistic, that is to say, the piano's full resources are effectively brought into play, than is Beethoven's piano writing, in which tone color is achieved more orchestrally.

Perhaps the most remarkable quality of the *impromptus* is the manner in which Schubert leavened their inherent pianism with his incomparable sense of melody, a situation for which Kathleen Dale proposed the following explanation:

Schubert's continued experience of song-writing had by now so strongly developed his wonderful natural gift of apprehending the spirit of a poem and re-creating it in music that when he turned from songs to write for piano solo, he inevitably composed works, which, though specifically instrumental in character, are so truly lyrical in essence that each is a poem in sound.

A Poem in Sound—music that is flowing, evocative, reflective of the rhythms of the heart and the soul, and of life itself. Such is the gift that Schubert left the world.

The opening piece of the four comprising the first set of *impromptus* (D. 899), in C minor, is

in a sort of free sonata form, though its character is so essentially lyrical that melody here simply eats up any large architectonic plan. The principal theme is a bardic song of melancholy sentiment, balanced as the movement unfolds by episodes of almost painful sweetness. The E-flat major impromptu contrasts an airborne triplet figuration in its outer sections with a waltz-like

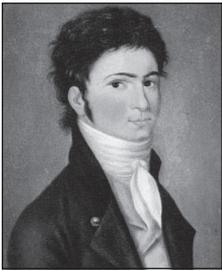
central passage of more fiery temperament. The crepuscular third impromptu supports its long melodic flights with arpeggiated harmonies of the greatest finesse and subtlety. Artur Schnabel, the distinguished pianist of recent memory, noted that the last number of the set, in A-flat major, is “a dance in the moonlight—with the feet scarcely touching the ground.” ■

Ludwig van Beethoven

Born December 16, 1770; Bonn, Germany

Died March 26, 1827; Vienna, Austria

Sonata in G Major, Op. 14, No. 2



COMPOSED
1798

Ludwig van Beethoven, aged twenty-two, arrived in Vienna from his native Bonn in 1792, and during the next few years, established a brilliant reputation as a

pianist and composer with two piano concertos, several songs, a number of chamber works and sonatas, variations, and some smaller pieces for solo piano. By the end of the decade, however, his ambition and his rapidly maturing creative genius had led him to attempt the most challenging, and most public, of instrumental forms—a symphony. He had begun sketching the Symphony in C major as early as 1795, and by 1799, as the score neared completion, he needed to start planning for its performance, preferably in one of the two court theaters, the Burgtheater or the Kärntnertortheater.

Both halls were then under the management of Baron Peter von Braun, who had made enough money in manufacturing and banking, and curried enough favor at court to be ennobled in 1795. Just a year earlier, Braun had become a force in Viennese cultural life when he was put in charge of the imperial theaters, where he was responsible not only for producing plays, operas, and ballets to satisfy the court's demands but also for choosing which performers had

access to the halls on their free dates (usually during Lent, when theatrical performances were then forbidden in Catholic countries). One of the most effective ways an eighteenth-century musician could win the attention of a potential noble patron was through the dedication of a new work, so for the publication of his two most recent piano sonatas in December 1799—op. 14, nos. 1 and 2—Beethoven inscribed the scores to Braun's wife, Baroness Josefina von Braun.

The tactic worked, and Beethoven was allowed to premiere his First Symphony at the Burgtheater on April 2, 1800. In appreciation, he also dedicated the Sonata for Horn and Piano, op. 17, to the Baroness von Braun after he premiered the work with the touring virtuoso Giovanni Punto at the Burgtheater just two weeks later. (The Brauns were so partial to music for winds that they hosted weekly wind ensemble concerts at their home.) Braun and Beethoven had further dealings—Braun denied him the use of the theaters in 1802, but in November 1805, he staged the premiere of *Fidelio* at the Theater an der Wien, a commercial house established in 1801 by Emanuel Schikaneder (the librettist and first Papageno for Mozart's *The Magic Flute*), whose management Braun had taken over in 1803.

The first movement of the G major sonata, called “an idyll of spring” by the distinguished German-American musicologist Hugo Leichtentritt, follows a relaxed sonata form that takes as its main theme a wide-ranging but fluid

motive floated upon a luminous chordal accompaniment and a subsidiary subject of Italianate sweetness in close, parallel harmonies. These two ideas are filtered through some stronger sentiments in the development section, but regain their original demeanors in the recapitulation that brings formal and expressive closure to the

movement. The andante is a set of three simply constructed variations on a melody of almost folkish naïveté. The finale, with its dynamic surprises, sudden stops and starts, rhythmic dislocations, and unexpected changes of register, is a scherzo—literally, “joke” or “jest” in Italian—not just in name and style but also in spirit. ■

Ludwig van Beethoven

Sonata in F Minor, Op. 57 (*Appassionata*)



COMPOSED
1804–06

Beethoven spent the summer of 1804 in Döbling, an elegant suburb of Vienna nestled in the foothills of the Wienerwald, north of the central city. He wrote to

his brother Johann, a prosperous apothecary in Vienna, “Not on my life would I have believed that I could be so lazy as I am here. If this is followed by an outburst of industry, something worthwhile may be accomplished.” The country air and fizzy Heurigen wine of Döbling must have been true inspiration to Beethoven because during the following three years, he produced a stunning series of masterpieces simply unmatched anywhere in the entire history of music: the *Waldstein* Sonata (op. 53), F major piano sonata (op. 54), *Eroica* Symphony (op. 55), *Triple Concerto* (op. 56), *Appassionata* Sonata (op. 57), Fourth Piano Concerto (op. 58), three *Razumovsky* Quartets (op. 59), Fourth Symphony (op. 60), Violin Concerto (op. 61), and *Coriolan* Overture (op. 62).

The three piano sonatas were all apparently largely formed in Döbling, because Beethoven offered them on August 26 to Breitkopf and Härtel for publication as a set, but was refused. The *Waldstein* and op. 54 sonatas were thereafter finished quickly, but knowledge of the full gestation of the *Appassionata* is sketchy. That much of the material for the work was fixed before he returned to Vienna that fall is confirmed by an

anecdote attributed to his student Ferdinand Ries, who presented himself in Döbling for his regular lesson one summer day in 1804:

[We went on a walk] so far astray that we did not get back to Döbling until nearly eight o'clock. He had been humming and sometimes howling, always up and down, without singing any definite tones. [Beethoven's hearing had become a serious problem by that time.] In answer to my question what it was, he said: “A theme for the last movement of the sonata has occurred to me.” When we entered the room, he ran to the pianoforte without taking off his hat. I took a seat in the corner, and he soon forgot all about me. Now he stormed for at least an hour with the beautiful finale of the sonata. Finally he got up, was surprised to see me, and said: “I can't give you a lesson today. I must do some more work.”

The next definite reference to the *Appassionata* does not occur until the summer of 1806, when Beethoven was visiting the ancestral Hungarian estate of his patron and friend Count Franz von Brunswick at Martonvásár, where the count's sisters, Therese, Josephine, and Caroline, were also in residence. Thayer, in his pioneering biography of the composer, spread the rumor that Beethoven and Therese got engaged that May, and, indeed, the lady did present him with a fine oil portrait of herself, which she inscribed, “To the rare genius, the great artist, the good man, from T.B.” She would almost certainly have accepted a proposal of marriage from him, but he

also seems to have harbored strong feelings for her sister Josephine, recently widowed at the age of twenty-six, and a woman who exerted a strong sensual appeal for the composer very different from the spiritual attraction of Therese.

Beethoven, as always, was stymied in this affair of the heart and remained a bachelor, throwing himself into his work—the Fourth Symphony, op. 59 quartets, Violin Concerto, Fourth Piano Concerto, and the *Appassionata* Sonata were all completed by the year's end. Observed Eric Blom: "There could be room enough in his life for only one of the two things he most cared for: music and love. And being the most purposeful of composers and the most vacillating of lovers, can we wonder that his decision went in favor of his art?"

That the *Appassionata* was completed by September 1806 can be deduced from a fascinating and characteristic shred of Beethoven trivia that attaches to his visit that month to the castle of Prince Karl Lichnowsky at Grätz in Silesia. Lichnowsky, in the spirit of international cooperation and self-preservation, was entertaining a group of French officers (whose comrades had spent several months occupying Vienna the previous year and would do so again in 1809—their presence in 1805 spoiled the premiere of *Fidelio*); he asked Beethoven if he would honor them with some of his piano selections, jokingly threatening to place him under house arrest if he refused. Beethoven, whose sense of humor was more gruff than sophisticated, took offense at the suggestion, angrily gathered up his things, and stormed out of the house and back to Vienna in a torrential rainstorm. His luggage, which contained the finished manuscript of the *Appassionata*, became soaked. When he got home, Beethoven fired off a letter to Lichnowsky, proclaiming, "Prince, what you are, you are by accident of birth; what I am, I am through myself. There have been and will be thousands of princes; there is only one Beethoven."

The rain-stained copy of the sonata in Beethoven's hand still can be seen at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The *Appassionata* was published by the fashionably titled Bureau des Arts et d'Industrie in Vienna in February 1807 and dedicated to Count Brunswick. Its

sobriquet was applied not by the composer but by the Hamburg publisher Crazz when he issued a two-piano version of the work in 1838.

The F minor sonata is in three movements: two massive sonata-form essays anchor it at beginning and end, and surround a short, rapt set of variations in which Beethoven tried to make time itself stand still. When Glenn Gould's recording of the *Appassionata* was issued in 1974, he provided a surprisingly curmudgeonly set of liner notes, which, nevertheless, penetrate straight to the essence of Beethoven's creative procedure in the outer movements of this composition:

The *Appassionata*, in common with most of the works Beethoven wrote in the first decade of the nineteenth century, is a study in thematic tenacity. His conceit at this period was to create mammoth structures from material that, in lesser hands, would scarcely have afforded a good sixteen-bar introduction. The themes, as such, are usually of minimal interest but are often of such primal urgency that one wonders why it took a Beethoven to think them up.

The eminent musicologist Sir Donald Tovey noted exactly the same abundance of inspiration derived from a paucity of material in the nearly contemporary Fifth Symphony, about which he counseled the listener that the power of the music is not contained in its themes, but rather in the "long sentences" that Beethoven built from them. It is this sense of inexorable growth and change, of driving toward the next goal, of constantly seeking that places the *Appassionata* Sonata upon the highest plateau of Beethoven's achievement. ■

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