

Mari
Koodama

Beethoven

Piano Sonatas

Op.101 & Op.106

“Hammerklavier”



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 – 1827)
Piano Sonata No. 29 in B flat major, Op. 106
“Grosse Sonate für das Hammerklavier”

1. Allegro	11. 11
2. Scherzo (assai vivace)	2. 41
3. Adagio sostenuto	15. 53
4. Largo – Allegro risoluto	11. 36

Piano Sonata No. 28 in A major, Op. 101

5. Etwas lebhaft und mit der innigsten Empfindung	3. 41
6. Lebhaft, marschmäßig (Vivace alla Marcia)	5. 45
7. Langsam und sehnsuchtsvoll	2. 27
8. Geschwinde, doch nicht zu sehr, und mit Entschlossenheit	6. 56

Total playing-time: 60.14

Recording venue: Concertboerderij “Onder de Linden”, Valthermond, the Netherlands (2/2013)

Recording producer: Wilhelm Hellweg • Balance engineer: Jean-Marie Geijsen

Recording engineer: Jean-Marie Geijsen • Editing: Erdo Groot, Jean-Marie Geijsen

He surpasses himself

Beethoven's late piano sonatas burst open known boundaries. Challenge the listener. Demand the pianist to give his all. And open up new horizons to both of them. For there is a very special aura clinging to these works; an aura that one attempts to capture with terms such as esotericism, mysticism, spirituality, or radicalism. For otherwise, words fail us. This recording presents a combination of his Op. 101 and Op. 106, perhaps the boldest giants in Beethoven's late works for the piano. And at the same time, it is the final release in Mari Kodama's integral Beethoven cycle, which is now available.

Thus, on this recording Mari Kodama performs his late works, part 2 (part 1, containing Op. 109, Op. 110 and Op. 111, has already been released on the Pentatone label, PTC 5186 389). In both these sonatas, Beethoven makes a powerful entrance into a new "sonata domain" and a novel world of expression, which ruthlessly and uncompromisingly dispenses with existing conventions and rules. He expands the well-established sonata form; one could even state that he basically "disintegrates" it. Siegfried Mauser refers to this as the "radicalism of musical translation," which until this very day continues to present one of the greatest challenges for the listener. Thus, it is self-evident that only a basic attempt at an interpretation or analysis can be presented here.

One must take into account Beethoven's personal situation while writing his last piano sonatas, for his compositions and his style are considerably marked by his social isolation, various illnesses, personal problems, and, most especially, his increasing deafness. Once again, to quote Siegfried Mauser: "The tonal utopia [of his late works, FS] was able to develop undisturbed in a protected internal environment, his often-mentioned emotional stress probably provided an enormous reservoir of energy, and years of experience as both composer

and instrumentalist guaranteed an appropriate implementation." Thus, one should consider his deafness a crucial factor for the absolute "freedom" to explore new creative paths, to attempt the outrageously bold? Regardless of the consequences? A reasonably plausible explanation, considering the ensuing compositions.

Sonata in A major, Op. 101

Beethoven wrote his four-movement Sonata in A major, Op. 101, between 1813-1816, and dedicated it to his pupil Dorothea von Erdmann. The sonata was printed in Vienna in 1817 and possesses a high concentration of many of the characteristics associated with Beethoven's late style: an expansion of the sonata form, the use of fugal techniques, and a highly developed lyrical expression. Furthermore, this is the first sonata to which Beethoven adds in the title the extra words "for the fortepiano"; the instrument in which the strings are struck by small hammers, and which had stood in Beethoven's house since 1817 in the form of a grand piano supplied by the English piano-builder Thomas Broadwood. The work displays distinctive features straight away, due to its large dimensions. Thus, the second movement is not the usual scherzo, but a march-like structure. The Finale provides a substantial conclusion, with fairly long fugal sections. It is preceded by a slow movement, which feels more like an introduction; consequently, the first movement in fact takes over the function of the slow movement, thanks to its reduced conciseness. These few brief observations make it clear that Op. 101 is a highly individual composition.

Although the first movement "Etwas lebhaft und mit der innigsten Empfindung" (= rather lively and with the most fervent feeling, Allegretto ma non troppo) is based on the standard sonata form as

far as structure is concerned, it completely ignores the sonata's core message of contrast between the themes (is there even a second theme here?)! Instead, expansive melodies ring out, it all sounds perfectly pleasant. Richard Wagner considered this one of the first examples for his "endless melody". A state of suspension, as it were, appears to ensue, for quite a while the tonic A major remains absent. And precisely due to the use of syncopation, it feels as if the movement is barely moving forward; this is particularly noticeable before the commencement of the development, and also before the coda.

This is followed by the second movement, so admired by Schumann, "Lebhaft, marschmäßig" (= lively, like a march, Vivace alla marcia), in which Beethoven creates a highly charged, jittery, yet dashing march with the aid of the syncopated rhythm. Complex polyphony prevails. In the trio, canonical developments reign supreme.

The enormous emotionalism and seemingly improvised manner of the third movement "Langsam und sehnsuchtsvoll" (= slow and yearning, Adagio ma non troppo, con affetto), a mere 30 bars long, as well as a literal quote from the beginning of the sonata – which provides a kind of cyclical parenthesis – prepares the *attacca* transition to the Finale "Geschwinde, doch nicht zu sehr, und mit Entschlossenheit" (= swiftly, yet not too fast, and with determination, Allegro).

And here, a further distinctive structural feature awaits the listener, for Beethoven has embedded an unusual fugato into the unambiguous sonata form in the central section of the development, which develops the beginning of the main subject with great determination and virtuosity. The movement is full of pianistic difficulties, but not only of a technical nature: the range of expressive possibilities as well as styles in this sonata is remarkable. It is a huge challenge for the artist to convey and unite this range in an artistically sophisticated manner.

Sonata in B-flat major, Op. 106

Despite Beethoven having already employed the term “Hammerklavier” (= fortepiano) when referring to his Sonata in A major, Op. 101, it is the Sonata in B flat major, Op. 106, composed during 1817-1819, that is known as the *Hammerklavier* Sonata, as the “clandestine opus maximus” (Mausler). Lasting almost 50 minutes, this is not only the longest, but probably also the most monumental piano sonata to have emerged from the early Romantic period. It presents both a terrific summary of the history of the sonata to date, and an audacious preview of developments yet to come. Everything here forms a unified whole, and what is more, literal quotes are no longer a necessary requisite to ensure the flow of the movements in a cyclical manner. Beethoven goes into great depth here, hell-bent on the creation of the movement, so to speak, at the level of the compositional atoms. And he accomplishes this while at the same time dealing with the death of his brother, his increasingly rapid loss of hearing that finally leads to total deafness, and his dramatic financial problems! Beethoven needs money urgently – and so he simply pens this work, and sends it to his publisher with the following words: “Here is a sonata that will give the pianist something to really get his teeth into, that will be played in 50 years time.” And to his pupil Carl Czerny, who first performed the work in 1823-24, he wrote as follows: “I am now writing a sonata that will be my very greatest.”

And indeed, here a compositional utopia has blossomed into reality. A reality that hopelessly overwhelmed both audiences and pianists of the time, with few exceptions. Right up to the present day, Op.106 requires of the performer the greatest technical skills and interpretative courage, as well as the unconditional attention and open-heartedness of the listener.

On the one hand, the above-mentioned “unified compositional whole” of the sonata is a consequence

of the extensive structural system. Here, the Scherzo is placed next to the enormous first movement as a kind of blackly humorous afterthought; and the Largo, which has an improvised feeling about it, next to the huge final fugue as a kind of introduction. At the above-mentioned “atomic” level, two principles of composition play a key role in the cyclic coherence of the work: on the one hand, the suspense-packed juxtaposition of the notes “B flat” and “B” – with the corresponding keys of B-flat major and the “black key” (Beethoven) of B minor, which provides dramatic contrasts and contention. On the other hand, the constant appearance of the third interval, in its characteristic manifestation of the descending third, which can be encountered as a motivic and structure-forming element in all movements (anticipating 20th-century techniques).

The monumental first movement in sonata form opens with a theme consisting of a flourish of chords, with the third interval as a central element. Remarkably, the individual sections are still recognizable as clearly structured, but appear somewhat watered down in their respective “tasks”. Thus elements typical of the development – i.e. motivic-thematic transformation – already appear in the extremely detailed exposition. Siegfried Mausler has described this phenomenon as follows: “the process-based manner of working [with the motivic-thematic material] has seized upon every area as a compositional ideal.”

To quote William Kinderman, the extremely brief Scherzo “parodies” the previous first movement, “transforming its motivic material, full of third intervals, with black humour”. The entire Scherzo movement varies harmonically between the keys of B flat and B. The B-flat minor Trio is dominated by triplets, then presses forward into a Presto section that can be interpreted as a second trio. Only at the

very end of this interlude does the tonic key once again come into its own, following 18 (!) repeated double octaves in both hands.

The Adagio is the longest slow movement in Beethoven’s entire piano sonata oeuvre. Although it adheres to the sonata model as far as structure is concerned, its emotionalism and intensity of expression reach beyond the classical analysis of the form. The key of F sharp minor defines the extremely realistic anguish of the music – interrupted only by two illuminating insertions in G major, reminiscent of the *Missa solemnis*. So, there is but little brightness in this “infinitely sad” song. In the development, Beethoven adds highly detailed indications, such as specifications for the use of the pedals and the dynamics, as a support for emotional expressions such as passion, restraint, sombreness.

Introducing the final movement, there is a free, almost improvisatory Largo with multiple interrupted series of descending thirds. The subsequent fugue is of a monumental character – no less than 385 bars – and full of relentless austerity. This masterpiece of counterpoint can be seen as an uncompromising attempt to stretch to their very limits the possibilities not only of the compositional material, but also of the piano! Beethoven indicates in the score “Fuga a tre voci, con alcune licenze” – i.e. three-part fugue, including various liberties – and these liberties are presented by means of all kinds of contrapuntal techniques: augmentation, retrograde, inversion, and many others. At the end, the thematic material has been all but defeated: powerful octave trills and the mighty, cadential, final chords prove that not only has Beethoven taken the sonata to new heights; at the same time, he has truly surpassed himself.

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English translation: Fiona J. Stroker-Gale

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