



# ADAM GOLKA

**BRAHMS**

Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 1

**BEETHOVEN**

Piano Sonata No. 29, Op. 106, 'Hammerklavier'

**BRAHMS: Piano Sonata No. 1 in C major, Op. 1**  
**BEETHOVEN: Piano Sonata No. 29 in B flat, Op. 106, ‘Hammerklavier’**

Beethoven wrote his first *Piano Sonata* in 1795 at the age of twenty-five, the last in 1822 when he was fifty-two. They are a barometer of his creative development with the last five in particular showing an expansion of creative genius that pushed the boundaries and created new forms for the piano. The composers who came after Beethoven had a hard act to follow and many were not successful with the form and struggled to develop it further. Robert Schumann’s (1810-1856) expertise was in shorter piano works that formed part of a cycle such as his *Carnaval, Op. 9, Etudes Symphoniques, Op. 13* or *Kreisleriana, Op. 16*, but of his three *Pianos Sonatas* written at the beginning of his career in the early 1830s, those in *F sharp minor, Op. 11* and *F minor, Op. 14* have rarely been popular with pianists or public alike. Only the last to be completed (*Piano Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 22*) has had any success and this was a work on which he laboured for seven years.

Even Chopin’s (1810-1849) first attempt at writing a piano sonata, a work in *C minor, Op. 4*, was not a success. His two famous *Piano Sonatas, in B flat minor, Op. 35* and *B minor, Op. 58*, have the effect of separate movements being brought together. Indeed, Schumann wrote of the *B flat minor Sonata* that Chopin ‘simply bound together four of his

most unruly children.’ It was not until Franz Liszt (1811-1886) wrote his *Piano Sonata in B minor* that a composer continued the developments of Beethoven resulting in a one movement, motivically structured work.

When we turn to Brahms we see that he was also struggling in the shadow of Beethoven. His three *Piano Sonatas* were all written in 1853, the same year as Liszt’s *Sonata*. Brahms was twenty years old and felt that the first *Sonata* he wrote (in *F sharp minor*) was not as competent as the second (in *C major*). Therefore, in order to create a good impression as a budding composer, with Schumann’s help, he had the *C major* published first as *Op. 1* and the *F sharp minor* published as *Op. 2*. These early works are seldom heard in the concert hall, although the *Third Sonata in F minor, Op. 5* has been popular with some pianists.

There are obvious similarities between the opening of Beethoven’s *Hammerklavier* and Brahms’ *C major Sonata*. Indeed, Brahms uses almost the same rhythmic figure as Beethoven for the initial statement. He also uses the upbeat quaver (eighth note) to crochet (quarter note) that Beethoven uses throughout. It is worth noting that

in the opening melody of his *Fourth Symphony*, written thirty years later, Brahms was undoubtedly influenced by the melody from bar 78 onwards in Beethoven's *Adagio*. The short second movement uses a German folksong on which

Brahms writes a short set of variations, a form he favoured. The minor key gives the melody a rather forlorn air reminiscent of his *Ballades, Op. 10*, with the first variation sounding almost sinister. The text of the poem is printed over the staves:

<i>Verstohlen geht der Mond auf.</i>	Stealthily rises the moon.
<i>Blau, blau Blümelein!</i>	Blue, blue flower!
<i>Durch Silber wölkchen führt sein Lauf.</i>	Through silver cloudlets makes its way
<i>Blau, blau Blümelein</i>	Blue, blue flower!
<i>Rosen im Tal,</i>	Roses in the dale,
<i>Mädel im Saal,</i>	Maiden in the hall,
<i>O schönste Rosa!</i>	O handsomest Rosa!



**Johannes Brahms in 1853, the year he composed his *Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 1***

*Allegro*  
*Quarta Sonata*  
*J. Brahms*

Handwritten musical score for the opening of Brahms' Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 1. The manuscript is on aged paper and features two systems of staves. The first system contains the first two staves, and the second system contains the next four staves. The notation is dense, with many accidentals and dynamic markings such as *p*, *p molto marc.*, *cresc.*, *smp.*, and *sempre cresc.*. The key signature is one sharp (F#). At the bottom, there is a purple circular stamp and a rectangular stamp that reads "MUS. 3251".

Opening page from the Manuscript of Brahms' *Piano Sonata No. 1, Op. 1*

(Image owned by Musiksammlung, Austrian National Library)

At the end of the movement Brahms instructs the performer to plunge straight into the following *Scherzo* and *Trio*. The third of the scale (E) becomes the tonic as Brahms chooses E minor as the key for this movement. The *Trio* uses E again as a pivot to return to C major for a flowing, slightly chromatic soaring melody. The opening of the *Finale* uses the material from the beginning of the first movement recast in 9/8 time with Beethovenian effects such as *sforzandi* on the last quaver of the bar and accented syncopation.

Beethoven wrote his *Piano Sonata in B flat, Op. 106* in 1817 and 1818 when he was in his late forties. The work has come to be known as the *Hammerklavier* because *Große Sonate für das Hammerklavier* appears on the title page. This simply means 'large sonata for the piano' and was also applied to the previous *Sonata, Op. 101 in A major*. It is his most technically challenging piano sonata and because we hear it so often today in the concert hall, we forget that for decades after its publication it was not heard. Although



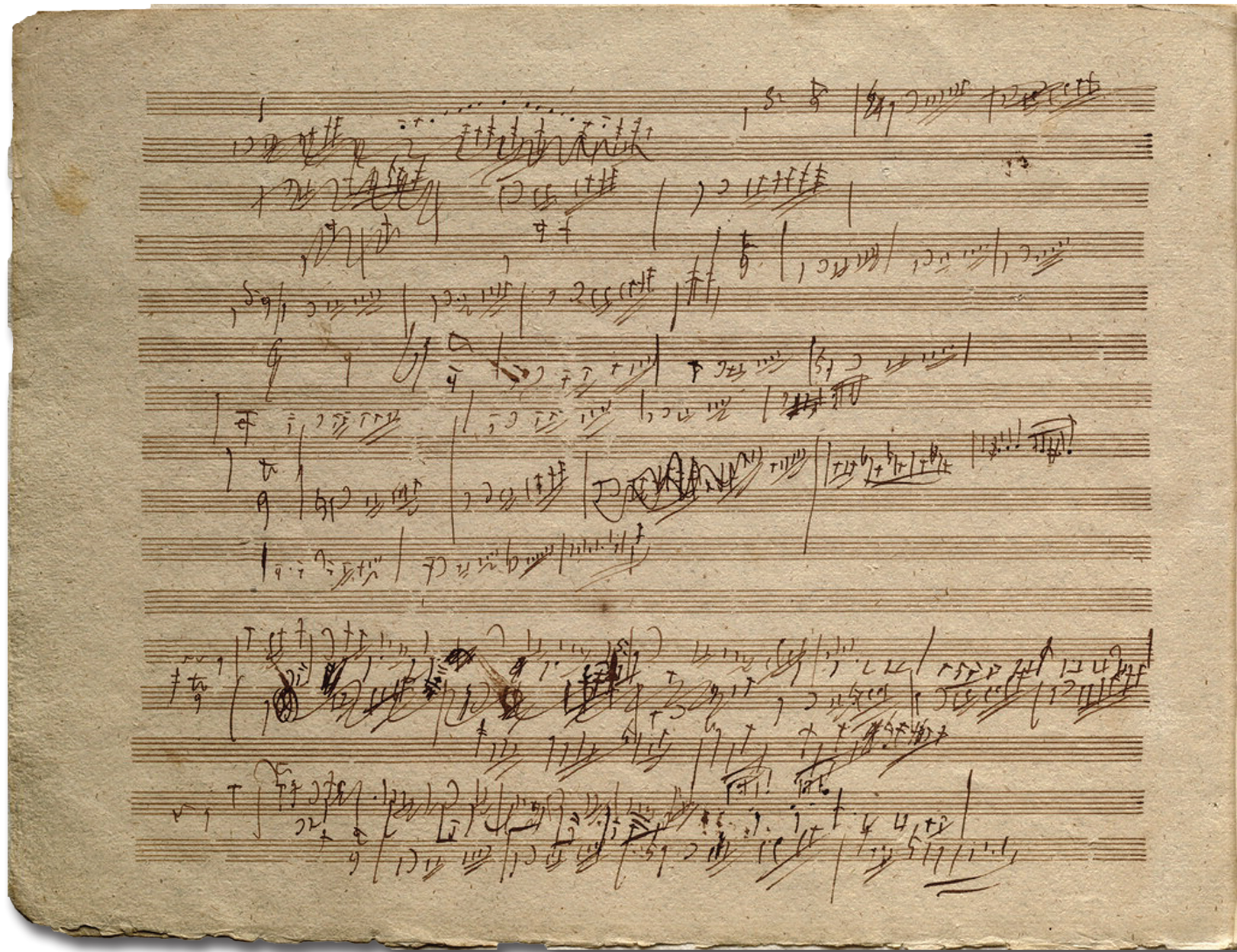
**Ludwig van Beethoven in 1818, the year he completed his *Hammerklavier Sonata, Op. 106***

Liszt had played the *Hammerklavier* in Paris in 1836, it was not heard in London until more than thirty years after it appeared in print when it was performed by a Russian born Frenchman, Alexandre-Philippe Billet.

On 24 May 1850 he played the *Hammerklavier* for the 'first time in public' – but probably that meant in London – and the considered reaction of the journalist and the audience response is worth quoting. 'The grand feature of the concert was Beethoven's *Sonata in B flat, Op. 106* – the longest and one of the most original and extraordinary pieces ever written for the instrument. The difficulties of this work, which was composed at a late period of Beethoven's career, are so enormous, that no pianist has ventured before to attempt it in public. M. Billet however, has had the courage to make the essay; and though the performance took up more than half an hour, the audience listened to it with marked attention throughout, and applauded each movement with enthusiasm.

The *Finale*, especially, containing an elaborate fugue in three parts, many points of which are so widely dispersed that it is almost impossible for the hands to grasp them simultaneously, demands prodigious mechanical powers. But M. Billet found both fingers and intelligence for the task, and executed the *Finale* with unflagging spirit and decision, never once abating, for his own convenience, the rapid tempo indicated by the

composer.' (*The Times* quoted in *Musical World*, 1 June 1850) The heroic opening statement heralds a great movement of immense vitality, vigour and power. The interval of a third is important throughout as it is in the following *Scherzo* movement (and in the next *Sonata* he composed, *Op. 109*). The development contains a section in canon form as a foretaste perhaps of the great fugue of the last movement. The emotional heart of the work is the extended *Adagio sostenuto in F sharp minor* which Beethoven marks *Appassionato e con molto sentimento*. He develops the material into a figured, impassioned aria in the upper register of the keyboard which he directs should be played *con grand'espressione*; he continued this idea of a vocal style and increasingly complex variations to a certain degree in his remaining piano sonatas – the last movement of *Op. 109*, the *Aria* of *Op. 110* and the *Arietta* of *Op. 111*. The movement draws to a close on the major and a short passage of improvised modulation leads to the dominant of B flat, preparing us for the last movement. Indeed, Beethoven's contemporaries reported that the composer far preferred to improvise at the piano than play his own published works and this passage gives us an idea of what it would have been like to witness such a feat. The fugue is one of dynamically relentless movement and boundless vigour incorporating many trills and leaps. After some 250 bars a short passage of crochets (quarter notes) in D major stems the flow for thirty bars before the fugue begins again in its home



Manuscript sketches of the fugue from Beethoven's 'Hammerklavier' Sonata, Op. 106, 4th movement

(Image used courtesy of the Library of Congress, USA)

key incorporating the previous material.

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It is surprising to me that the *Hammerklavier* and Brahms' *Opus 1* have not been paired together on a recording, to my knowledge, until now, since the teenage Brahms pays such obvious tribute to Beethoven's masterpiece; the identical rhythmic motto in their respective opening announcements cannot be a coincidence. In both cases, ecstatic opening chords herald the beginning of larger-than-life adventures – adventures which demand an insistently symphonic use of the instrument and mercilessly awkward, acrobatic use of the performer's hands.

That said, the most elusive challenge for the performer is finding an appropriate sense of breath and scope in the *Adagio sostenuto* of the *Hammerklavier*. The emotional journey of this movement is not only comprehensive, but downright exhausting. To me, it illustrates alternating stages of grief: brooding sadness, unbounded pathos, and momentary hopes of redemption, achieved finally through the art of counterpoint and fugue in the following movement. I love the three short-lived, canonic attempts in the introduction to the fourth movement, in which Beethoven deliberately imitates Bach, and gives the sense of a progression from that master's

counterpoint to his own new vision of fugue.

I learned both of the works on this recording at age fifteen. From the first moment, I found the youthful candor and heroism of the Brahms Sonata irresistible, and I was captured by its evocative connotations to German folk elements; I hear knights, maidens, and minstrels. As for the *Hammerklavier*, I think it was its impossibility that initially enticed me to undertake it, and a truer admiration came only later.

It was invaluable having this recording produced and edited by my long-time mentor, José Feghali. His musical advice, vast knowledge of recording technologies and outstanding patience made for an illuminating recording process. I was also fortunate to have the excellent engineer Charles Harbutt, and my dear friend, Tali Mahanor, piano tuner extraordinaire, at hand during the entire recording sessions.

This recording would not have been possible without help from the following generous organizations and wonderful people: Christine Martin, The Gilmore International Keyboard Festival, The American Pianists Association, Zbigniew Błaszcowski, Irena Karczewska, John and Janet Nine, John Slaby and Ronnie Ip, Sigrid Fried, Stephen and Kato Seleny, and Jonathan Summers.

**Adam Golka, 2014**







Born in Texas to a family of Polish musicians, pianist **Adam Golka** (born 1987) has won widespread critical and popular acclaim with his 'brilliant technique and real emotional depth' (*The Washington Post*). He has garnered international prizes including the 2008 *Gilmore Young Artist Award*, first prize in the 2003 *China Shanghai International Piano Competition* and the 2009 *Max I. Allen Classical Fellowship Award of the American Pianists Association*.

In the United States, Golka has appeared as a soloist with many orchestras, including the Atlanta, Houston, Dallas, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, New Jersey, Phoenix, San Diego, and Fort Worth Symphony Orchestras, as well as with the New York Youth Symphony at the Isaac Stern Auditorium, Carnegie Hall, New York. Internationally, he has appeared with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, National Arts Centre Orchestra, Sinfonia Varsovia, Warsaw and Shanghai Philharmonic Orchestras, and the Teresa Carreño Youth Orchestra of Venezuela, among others.

Golka's solo performances have taken him to the Kleine Zaal, Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, the Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall, Musashino Civic Cultural Hall, Tokyo, the Mostly Mozart Festival, Gilmore Keyboard Festival, Ravinia Festival, New York City International Keyboard Festival at Mannes, Newport Music Festival, and the Duszniki Chopin Festival. His chamber

music appearances have included prestigious festivals such as Marlboro, Caramoor, and Music@Menlo.

Adam began piano studies with his mother, the pianist Anna Golka, and continued as a teenager with Dariusz Pawlas of Rice University. He holds Artist Diplomas from Texas Christian University and the Peabody Conservatory, where he studied with José Feghali and Leon Fleisher, respectively. Adam has continued his development with Mitsuko Uchida, Richard Goode, Murray Perahia, and András Schiff, at whose invitation Adam will participate in a series of solo recitals in New York and Berlin in the 2014-2015 season.

([www.adamgolka.com](http://www.adamgolka.com))

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Johannes BRAHMS (1833-1897)

**Piano Sonata No. 1 in C major, Op. 1** **29:45**

1. I. Allegro 10:58

2. II. Andante – 5:46

3. III. Scherzo (Allegro molto e con fuoco) 5:47

4. IV. Finale (Allegro con fuoco) 7:13

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

**Piano Sonata No. 29 in B flat major, Op. 106, ‘Hammerklavier’** **45:14**

5. I. Allegro 11:08

6. II. Scherzo (Assai vivace – Presto – Prestissimo – Tempo I) 2:40

7. III. Adagio sostenuto 19:12

8. IV. Largo – Allegro risoluto 12:14

**Total Time:** **74:59**

**Adam Golka *piano***

(Piano: Steinway Model D, Hamburg, *CD 187*, serial #580536)

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Engineered by Charles Harbutt • Produced, edited & mastered by José Feghali

Piano tuned & voiced by Tali Mahanor

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& Central Park (inside booklet), New York City, USA, on 4 March 2014

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