



Beethoven Piano Concertos Part 1
Inon Barnatan Alan Gilbert

ACADEMY OF ST. MARTIN IN THE FIELDS

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

CD1

Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Major, Op. 15 (1795/1801)

1	I. Allegro con brio	18. 22
2	II. Largo	11. 18
3	III. Rondo. Allegro scherzando	8. 44

Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Minor, Op. 37 (1800/1804)

4	I. Allegro con brio	17. 22
5	II. Largo	9. 58
6	III. Rondo. Allegro	9. 08

Total playing time: 74. 56

CD2

Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, Op. 58 (1805/1808)

1	I. Allegro moderato	19. 47
2	II. Andante con moto	4. 59
3	III. Rondo. Vivace	10. 08

Concerto for Violin, Cello and Piano in C Major, Op. 56 ("Triple Concerto") (1803/1804)

4	I. Allegro	17. 50
5	II. Largo. Attaca	4. 53
6	III. Rondo alla polacca	12. 58

Total playing time: 70. 40

Inon Barnatan, piano

Stefan Jackiw, violin (Triple Concerto)

Alisa Weilerstein, cello (Triple Concerto)

Academy of St. Martin in the Fields

Alan Gilbert, conductor



A Musical Family

I've been getting to know the Beethoven concertos since childhood. Hearing them was one of my earliest musical memories, and they have been a constant in my life as both listener and player. Every time I return to one of them there are further discoveries to be made, greater depths to be mined, and more conversations to be had with the music. For me, this is the most rewarding aspect of exceptional music; it warrants an ongoing relationship, to which there is always a next level ahead.

As with exceptional music, so, too, with exceptional musicians. I've cherished every occasion I've had to play with extraordinary orchestras and conductors, and it is especially fulfilling when the first artistic collaboration develops into a long-standing musical relationship, where you know one another well enough that the power of your shared experience allows you to go further. When I decided to record the Beethoven

concertos, I knew it would be the perfect opportunity to work with people I could engage with as a musical family, all of us advancing our collective conversation with the music.

I have bonded with the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields over our many years of performing and touring together. On our sometimes weeks-long tours, the musicians not only perform and rehearse together, but also share many meals and long bus rides. It can be a grueling routine, but I've always been grateful to spend the time with these incredible musicians as we grew into a close musical family. It has always amazed me how every concert with them feels like the most important concert they will ever play — they give everything, every time. They do the same in the recording studio, in which they have almost unparalleled experience; their legendary recordings, over 500 releases, have cemented their reputation as one of the most beloved ensembles in the world. In fact, upon raising the idea of

recording the complete set of Beethoven concertos, it came as a surprise to me — and to the orchestra itself! — to learn that they had yet to record the complete set. To be the first to record the cycle with the Academy makes these releases even more special to me.

If I had a ready answer to the question of what orchestra I'd most like to collaborate with here, my answer to the question of who should conduct was equally obvious and enthusiastic. I met Alan Gilbert when he invited me to be the inaugural Artist-in-Association of the New York Philharmonic. Over those three seasons, and in the years since, we have formed a close musical and personal friendship as we've performed together around the world. I've always admired Alan's musicianship, intellect, and ferocious curiosity, and having played Beethoven many times together, I knew he would be indispensable to this project.

Cellist Alisa Weilerstein is another important member of my musical family, performing together, recording together, and enjoying a close friendship for over a decade. Amongst the many pieces we performed together is the Triple Concerto, and having heard her play it I could not have imagined another cellist being a part of this recording.

I've also played the Triple in the past with violinist Stefan Jackiw, whom I've known for almost 20 years, having met at one of my first chamber music festivals. He played it with a special combination of intensity and flair that this piece requires, and I knew then that if I ever recorded the piece, I'd ask Stefan.

The last piece of the family puzzle that made this possible is Adam Abeshouse, our brilliant producer and engineer. From my very first solo recording, I've worked with Adam on almost every album since, and it was imperative to me that he be

the producer of this set. Recording is a very difficult, vulnerable process, and learning to trust a set of ears other than your own is one of the most difficult things a musician can do. I have come to trust Adam more than almost anyone else on earth to hear not only what I'm doing, but also what I mean to do.

Recording Beethoven is one of the most intense musical experiences I've had, and I'm grateful to my musical family for making it such a gratifying one.

- Inon Barnatan -



*I'm eternally grateful
to the following people
for making
this recording possible:*

Alfred and Gail Engelberg

**Trine Sorensen
and Michael Jacobson**

Clara Wu Tsai

Piano Concerto No. 1 in C Major, Opus 15

In one of the most famous remarks in the history of music, Brahms spoke of the difficulty of following in the shadow of Beethoven: “You have no idea how the likes of us feel when we hear the tramp of a giant like him behind us.” Beethoven, though, had a few ghosts of his own to contend with. One of them was the spectre of Mozart’s piano concertos, for Mozart had raised the piano concerto from a mere entertainment vehicle to the sophisticated and expressive form in which he composed some of his greatest music, and Beethoven recognized that any concerto he wrote would have to meet that standard. After hearing a performance of Mozart’s *Piano Concerto in C Minor*, Beethoven turned to his friend Johann Baptist Cramer and despaired: “Cramer! Cramer! We shall never be able to do anything like that!” Beethoven had arrived in Vienna in 1792, the year after Mozart’s death, and quickly established a reputation as a virtuoso

pianist. It was expected that the young composer-pianist would write concertos for his own use in Vienna, but — all too conscious of Mozart’s example — Beethoven struggled with his first two piano concertos for several years, and after they were finished he was defensive about them, disparaging them (unfairly) as “not among my best work.” Even as he was acclaimed for his piano-playing in Vienna, Beethoven remained sensitive when it came to composing a piano concerto.

As might be expected, Beethoven’s *First Piano Concerto* shows the influence of Mozart’s concertos: the form and orchestration (flute, pairs of oboes, clarinets, bassoons, trumpets, horns, plus timpani and strings) duplicate Mozart’s final works in this form. Yet the touch of the young Beethoven is already clear. The marking for the first movement — *Allegro con brio* — was a favourite of the young composer. He would use it for the first movement of the *Eroica* and *Fifth*



Symphonies and many other works in these years, yet Mozart never marked any movement in a piano concerto *Allegro con brio*. The movement begins very quietly with the simplest of figures, and seconds later this same figure — stamped out by full orchestra — thunders to life with all the strength one expects from Beethoven. The writing for piano in this movement is graceful and accomplished, but — as in Mozart’s concertos — not conspicuously virtuosic. The emphasis here is on musical values as an end in themselves rather than on virtuoso display.

The piano opens the *Largo* with that movement’s main idea, melodic and also extremely ornate; along the way, the solo clarinet has a part so expressive that at moments this music is reminiscent of the Mozart *Clarinet Concerto*. The piano alone opens the concluding *Allegro scherzando*, its lively rondo tune quickly answered by the boisterous orchestra. This finale is full of energy, and along the way Beethoven offers

his soloist the opportunity for a cadenza, though he leaves the piano out of the orchestra’s rush to the brusque conclusion.

Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Minor, Opus 37

Beethoven’s *Third Piano Concerto* is usually dated from 1800, but there is evidence that he had been working on it for several years at that point, and he continued to revise the music right up to the time of its premiere on April 5, 1803 — at that performance he played the piano part from his pencil-scrawled manuscript. This was a moment of transition in Beethoven’s career — he was working to put the classical models of Haydn and Mozart behind him and to find a distinctive voice of his own. In fact, he would begin work on the *Eroica* only weeks after the premiere of this concerto.

The form of the *Third Piano Concerto*, however, is that of the classical concerto:



a sonata-form first movement, a singing slow movement, and a rondo-finale. The opening *Allegro con brio* is based on two themes, both announced by the orchestra: the ominous opening (what energy is coiled within this simple figure!) and a flowing second subject. The entrance of the piano on fierce octave runs is dramatic, almost strident, and much of what follows has an aggressive, edgy quality. Unlike its two predecessors, Beethoven's *Third Piano Concerto* is consciously virtuosic. Beethoven composed the powerful cadenza, probably as late as 1809, and the orchestra makes an impressive return as the timpanist very quietly taps out the rhythm of the concerto's very beginning. Beethoven mutes the strings in the *Largo* and sets the movement in the remote key of E major. From the inspired simplicity of the piano's solo beginning, the music grows increasingly ornate, and the writing for solo winds here is particularly distinguished. The finale is a propulsive rondo based on its powerful opening idea, again introduced by

solo piano. Along the way, Beethoven offers some wonderful episodes, each strongly characterized; one of these is a brief fugato on the rondo theme. That same tune is magically transformed at the coda: Beethoven moves into C major, re-bars the music in 6/8, and marks it *Presto*. On this bright energy the concerto dances to its energetic close.

Piano Concerto No. 4 in G Major, Opus 58

Beethoven could relax a little in the spring of 1806. Over the previous three years, much of his energy had gone to just two works — the *Eroica* and his opera *Leonore* — and with his lengthy labours on those heroic achievements behind him he could turn to the other works that had been germinating in his imagination during those years. Now music poured out of him: the *Fourth Piano Concerto*, the *Fourth Symphony*, the three *Rasumovsky Quartets*, and the *Violin Concerto* were all completed during the

summer and fall of 1806. Yet despite this rush of energy, many have noted a calmer quality in this music, and the *Fourth Piano Concerto* in particular seems unusually relaxed and lyric. But if the surface of this concerto is serene, some unusual things are going on within the music itself, particularly in the relation between piano and orchestra.

The first movement in all of Beethoven's first three piano concertos had been marked *Allegro con brio*, but here he begins with the more relaxed *Allegro moderato*. And in that same instant he defies classical tradition by having the solo piano open the concerto. In the classical concerto the orchestra would launch the music, laying out the themes before the entrance of the soloist. But now the solo piano opens Beethoven's *Fourth Piano Concerto*, and only when it has stated the opening idea does the orchestra enter to begin the actual exposition. Just as intriguing are the four fundamental notes of the piano's

theme — they outline the same rhythm (three shorts and a downbeat) that would open Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, written the following year. But where those four notes blast that symphony to life, here — at a slower tempo and marked *dolce* — they give the music an easy forward impetus, and Beethoven uses that rhythm—which saturates this music — to underpin and propel much of the *Allegro moderato*. At ca. eighteen minutes, this is a spacious movement, and Beethoven's detailed markings make clear the kind of performance he wants — despite moments of turbulence in the development, he repeatedly reminds the performers: *dolce e con espressione*, *espressivo*, and *leggieramente* ("lightly").

The relation between soloist and orchestra is even more unusual in the *Andante con moto*. Beethoven builds this movement on a dialogue between the orchestral strings — whose music is gruff, explosive, angry — and the piano, which is serene, calm, and



restrained (Beethoven marks its entrance *molto cantabile*). These exchanges between the rough orchestra and calm piano are one of the most famous moments in music (Liszt compared this movement to Orpheus taming the wild beasts). Gradually the piano's serenity subdues the orchestra's aggressiveness, and the movement flows directly into the rondo-finale.

The finale's central theme is built on crisp martial rhythms, made all the more effective by being stated so quietly at first. Only after the piano has begun to develop this figure does Beethoven let go, and the orchestra stamps it out to launch the finale on its way. While this movement can have moments of power and brilliance, Beethoven generally keeps orchestral textures light, with one passage for solo cello, another for divided violas, and — at many points — an orchestral accompaniment of only pizzicato strings. The *Presto* coda seems to point matters toward a violent conclusion, but Beethoven

suddenly turns whimsical, allowing the piano a few moments to reconsider the movement's main theme before the orchestra leaps back in to hammer out the final chords.

Triple Concerto in C Major, Opus 56

Beethoven began this unusual concerto in the fall of 1803 and probably completed it the following summer. The composer himself was unsure how to classify his new concerto. In 1802 he had made plans for what he called a *Sinfonia Concertante in D Major*, and after the *Concerto in C Major* was completed, he referred to it as a "concertante for violin, violoncello, and pianoforte with full orchestra." Today it is most often called the *Triple Concerto*, a name Beethoven probably never heard.

Concertos for multiple instruments of course call to mind the baroque concerto grosso, in which a small group of soloists



plays in contrast to the orchestra, but the *Triple Concerto* is no concerto grosso. Rather, it is a concerto for piano trio and orchestra. Such a concerto posed two particular problems for Beethoven: how to give each soloist enough individual attention and how to keep the cello from becoming buried within this complex texture. He solved these problems precisely: the first by having his three soloists play often just as a trio, the second by allowing the cellist the first statement of many of the themes.

The *Triple Concerto* contrasts sharply with the other music Beethoven was composing in these years. Where the *Eroica*, his opera *Leonore*, and the “*Waldstein*” and “*Appassionata*” *Sonatas* burn with a sense of urgency and dramatic fury, the *Triple Concerto* lacks their tension — this is expansive music, relaxed and agreeable rather than striving. The opening *Allegro* gets off to a grand start with a full-orchestra exposition of its themes, but

textures thin out considerably when the soloists enter — Beethoven often has the soloists play by themselves with only unobtrusive orchestral accompaniment, punctuated by tutti outbursts. The thematic material in this expansive movement is genial rather than distinctive, the rhythms slightly swung rather than sharp-edged.

The second movement is very brief, almost an interlude between the dynamic outer movements. An orchestra of muted strings introduces the *Largo*, but this lyric movement belongs almost entirely to the three soloists — it is essentially chamber music (and in fact it has been arranged for piano trio without orchestra). Once again, the cello leads the way, this time with a theme marked *molto cantabile*. At the movement’s close, the cello suddenly takes charge and hurls the movement into the *Rondo alla Polacca*, or a rondo in the style of a polonaise. The cello introduces the main theme and launches this jovial movement

on its way. Near the end comes a surprising passage: a polonaise is in 3/4, but now Beethoven resets his principal theme in 2/4, foreshortening it and making it dance in new ways before returning to 3/4 for the spirited coda.

Eric Bromberger

Also available
on PENTATONE



PTC 5186 717



PTC 5186 539

Acknowledgments

PRODUCTION TEAM

Executive producers **Inon Barnatan & Renaud Loranger**

Recording producer **Adam Abeshouse** | Assistant engineer **Laurence Anslo**

Piano technicians **Ulrich Gerhartz, Branko Pajevic & Robert Padgham**

Piano provided by **Steinway & Sons**

Photography for cover and portraits of Inon Barnatan **Marco Borggreve**

Liner notes **Eric Bromberger**

Design **Zigmunds Lapsa** | Product management **Kasper van Kooten**

*This album was recorded at Air Studios, Lyndhurst Hall, London in December 2015
(Piano Concertos 1, 3 & 4) and September 2017 (Triple Concerto).*



This recording was made possible, in part,
by an award from the Classical Recording Foundation.

PENTATONE TEAM

Vice President A&R **Renaud Loranger** | Managing Director **Simon M. Eder**

A&R Manager **Kate Rockett** | Head of Marketing, PR & Sales **Silvia Pietrosanti**



PENTATONE

What we stand for:

The Power of Classical Music

PENTATONE believes in the power of classical music and is invested in the philosophy behind it: we are convinced that refined music is one of the most important wellsprings of culture and essential to human development.

True Artistic Expression

We hold the acoustic tastes and musical preferences of our artists in high regard, and these play a central role from the start to the end of every recording project. This ranges from repertoire selection and recording technology to choosing cover art and other visual assets for the booklet.

Sound Excellence

PENTATONE stands for premium quality. The musical interpretations delivered by our artists reach new standards in our recordings. Recorded with the most powerful and nuanced audio technologies, they are presented to you in the most luxurious, elegant products.



Sit back and enjoy