



Beethoven Piano Concertos Part 2
Inon Barnatan Alan Gilbert

ACADEMY OF ST MARTIN IN THE FIELDS




STEINWAY & SONS

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

CD I

Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major, Op. 19 (1795)

1	I. Allegro con brio	14. 44
2	II. Adagio	9. 04
3	III. Rondo. Molto allegro	5. 54

Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 61a, (arr. Beethoven for Piano and Orchestra) (1807)

4	I. Allegro ma non troppo	25. 14
5	II. Larghetto	10.02
6	III. Rondo. Allegro	10.11
Total playing time:		75. 12

CD II

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 73 ("Emperor") (1811)

1	I. Allegro	21. 12
2	II. Adagio un poco mosso	7. 41
3	III. Rondo. Allegro	10. 35

Fantasia in C Minor, Op. 80 ("Choral Fantasy") * (1808)

4	I. Adagio	3. 49
5	II. Finale: Allegro – Meno allegro – Allegro molto – Adagio ma non troppo – Marcia, assai vivace – Allegro – Allegretto ma non troppo quasi andante con moto "Schmeichelnd hold und lieblich klingen" – Presto	15. 54
Total playing time:		59. 15

Inon Barnatan, piano

* **Lydia Teuscher**, soprano 1

* **Amy Lyddon**, soprano 2

* **Rosie Aldridge**, Mezzo

* **Toby Spence**, Tenor 1

* **Ben Bevan**, Tenor 2

* **Neal Davies**, Baritone

* London Voices

Academy of St Martin in the Fields

Alan Gilbert, conductor



A Journey of Rediscovery

It is perhaps ironic that the composer whose music remains most urgent and relevant is the one who is largely responsible for the popular perception of Classical Music as a temple to the works of the past. Until Beethoven emerged, concerts were mostly contemporary music variety shows, with performers playing their newest creations mixed with entertaining and popular fare. Beethoven's music caused a seismic shift. Its drama, scope and complexity demanded bigger and better instruments and ensembles, dedicated conductors, and repeated hearings. Whether or not it was his intention, however, his music never lost its immediacy and, more than 200 years later, it still grips us as it did when it was first performed. Perhaps even more so.

I recently took part in a recreation of one of the most epic concerts in history: the "Akademie" concert of 1808, in which Beethoven premiered his *Fifth Symphony*,

his *Sixth Symphony* and his *Fourth Piano Concerto*, conducted a concert aria and movements from his Mass, improvised a fantasia and capped it all with the *Choral Fantasy*, which was written specifically as a grand finale to this concert. Can you imagine being at the premiere of even one of these pieces? Hearing Beethoven conduct, play and improvise, in his final public performance as a pianist? It's hard to fathom the momentous significance of that singular evening. Yet the 4-hour-long, underrehearsed concert, held in a theater with broken heating, was not an unmitigated success. Both the musicians and the audience were stretched to their limits.

After the original "Akademie" concert, Critic Johann Friedrich Reichardt wrote that the concert was proof "that one may have too much of a good thing."

What could be more Beethovenian than this storied occasion? One man pushing toward greatness with extremes and defiance, testing not only his own limits, but ours, too? It both accentuates the

genius of Beethoven and also humanizes him. When we recreated that concert, it was fascinating to think of these familiar pieces as living, breathing pieces of contemporary art, and imagine them being heard for the first time.

The journey of recording the complete cycle of concertos is one of immersion, struggle, and rediscovery. In some ways, recording a piece of music is the most intense relationship one can have with it, and becoming so intimately familiar with this music shakes it from its familiarity. It's exhaustive and exhausting, and it connects me to each piece in a unique way. The immersion becomes even more intense when it's not just one work, but a body of work. I come face to face with every tiny detail of the piece and the minutiae of my own playing and choices, working out every detail while putting it in context, taking a micro and macro view of each piece and how it relates to its siblings. It's a testament to these concertos that having played them all my life, and even after

this immersion, the music still manages to surprise me.

I sincerely hope this album holds some surprises for you too, both with the familiar and the less so. Next to the justly loved *Emperor*, this release has three of the least-often performed concertos by Beethoven: the *Second Concerto*, the *Choral Fantasy* and Beethoven's own piano version of his *Violin Concerto*. Few have recorded, or even heard, this version, and I think it more than deserves our attention. I find it makes me listen to the *Violin Concerto* with fresh ears, but it also has a beauty of its own. The magical toy-box sound Beethoven produces in the miraculous second movement is uniquely pianistic, as are the wild cadenzas he wrote for the first movement, with a surprise guest appearance by the timpani. As for the celebratory *Choral Fantasy*, it doesn't only herald the future *Ninth Symphony*, but has sweeping power and charm, and to my ears echoes the *Violin Concerto*, written only a couple of years before it, in its lyrical

Adagio section. The *Second* concerto, the most classical of the lot, is still strikingly original, witty, and bold, with a cadenza written by a much more experimental Beethoven.

I'm immensely grateful to the remarkable Alan Gilbert, who approaches every piece in the repertoire as if it is a contemporary piece, and to the musicians of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, who play as if their lives depend on it. A huge thanks to producer/engineer Adam Abeshouse, whose ears are second to none, and to Paul Sekhri for making the *Fantasy* a reality with his generous support.

And as for Mr Reinhardt's comments, I have to side with Mae West: "too much of a good thing is wonderful!"

- Inon Barnatan -



*I'm eternally grateful
to*

Paul Sekhri

*for making
this recording possible*

Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat Major, Opus 19

The *Second* has always been the least familiar of Beethoven's five piano concertos, at least in part because of a remark made by the composer himself. He once referred to it as "a concerto for piano, which I do not consider one of my best," and some have been quick to take this cue. Beethoven, always a good salesman for his own music, made that remark as a way of noting how much better his subsequent concertos were, but evidence is strong that Beethoven held the *Second Piano Concerto* in high regard. Certainly he worked very hard on it: he began this concerto when he was still a teenager in Bonn, revised it thoroughly in his first years in Vienna, and then — after its premiere at a charity concert in 1795 — he wrote an entirely new finale in 1798. He performed it frequently, at least twice with Haydn conducting, and in 1809 he came back and wrote a new cadenza for

the first movement, clear evidence of his continuing affection for this music.

The opening *Allegro con brio* is a great deal less violent than some of the other movements to which Beethoven would later give that same marking, such as the opening movements of the *Third* and *Fifth* Symphonies. It begins with the firm dotted rhythm that will recur throughout, and in this opening statement Beethoven makes use of a technique Mozart often employed — changing the instrumental color of a theme even as it is stated: the full orchestra's opening gesture is answered by the strings, who in turn give way to the winds, and this evolving prism of instrumental color is then repeated. A substantial orchestral introduction treats both this opening figure and a more lyric idea introduced by the strings. The piano makes a most understated entrance, then develops these opening ideas with a grace and restraint fully worthy of Mozart. Matters change sharply at the



Alan Gilbert
© Peter Hundert

cadenza, however. Beethoven composed this cadenza nearly twenty years after he began work on the *Second Concerto*, and stylistically it comes from the composer who was then engaged in writing the “*Emperor*” *Concerto* and the instrumental music to *Egmont*. This cadenza is a tightly-argued fugato on the concerto’s opening gesture, and it goes on for some time — clearly the older Beethoven found new points of interest in his youthful music.

The *Adagio* takes us back to the world of Mozart — its heartfelt main theme has the poise of that composer’s finest slow movements. Along the way comes another distinctly Mozartian touch: woodwinds sing a poised chorale accompanied only by pizzicato strings and murmuring piano. Piano alone launches the high-spirited rondo-finale, full of energy and syncopated accents. Beethoven nicely unifies this movement by keeping the alternating episodes very much in the character of the rondo tune itself, and at the end the music

relaxes into the pianist’s long right-hand trill in thirds. The concerto seems on the verge of trilling its way into silence when suddenly the orchestra leaps in to bring matters to a very firm conclusion.

Piano Concerto in D Major, Opus 61a

The *Piano Concerto in D Major* is in fact Beethoven’s own arrangement of his *Violin Concerto*. That concerto, composed in the fall of 1806, has always been regarded as one of Beethoven’s finest works, beautifully written for the violin and music of a sovereign ease of expression. Franz Clement gave the first performance of the *Violin Concerto* with the composer conducting on December 23, 1806. And there the matter might have stood, but in May 1807 the pianist-composer-publisher Muzio Clementi passed through Vienna. He met with Beethoven and paid him handsomely for the right to publish several of Beethoven’s recent works in England. He

also commissioned the composer to make a piano arrangement of his *Violin Concerto*. Beethoven was generally unenthusiastic about such arrangements, but Clementi’s offer was generous, and he agreed.

The piano arrangement is straightforward. In general, the pianist’s right hand is given the violin’s line, while the left hand has an accompanying role; this includes some chording not possible on the violin and inevitably makes for thicker



textures. The most interesting aspect of the arrangement comes in its cadenzas. Beethoven had written no cadenzas for the *Violin Concerto*, preferring to leave them to Franz Clement. But now, arranging this concerto for his own instrument, Beethoven composed cadenzas for all three movements, and the cadenza for the first movement is spectacular. Here the piano is joined along the way by the timpani, and the two engage in a dramatic, at times fierce, dialogue — Beethoven’s powerful cadenza makes us re-consider the entire nature of the first movement. Two years later, the composer would remember this combination of piano and timpani when he composed the cadenza for the finale of the “*Emperor*” *Concerto*.

Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat Major, Opus 73 “Emperor”

In May 1809 Napoleon laid siege to Vienna, and after a brief bombardment the city

capitulated to the French and was occupied. Beethoven remained in Vienna throughout the shelling and occupation, and during this period he completed his *Fifth Piano Concerto*. Some have been ready to understand the concerto as Beethoven’s response to the French occupation. Alfred Einstein identified what he called a “military character” in this music, and Maynard Solomon has particularized this, hearing “warlike rhythms, victory motifs, thrusting melodies, and affirmative character” in it. But — far from being swept up in the fervour of the fighting — Beethoven found the occupation a source of stress and depression. During the shelling, he hid in the basement of his brother Caspar’s house, where he wrapped his head in pillows to protect his ears. To his publishers, Beethoven wrote: “The course of events has affected my body and soul ... Life around me is wild and disturbing, nothing but drums, cannons, soldiers, misery of every sort.” The concerto he wrote during this period may be noble and powerful music, but it is

noble and powerful in spite of the military occupation rather than because of it. And in fact Beethoven had done much of the work on the concerto before the French army entered Vienna: his earliest sketches date from February 1809, and he appears to have had the concerto largely complete by April, before the fighting began.

Beethoven defies expectations from the opening instant. The *Allegro* bursts to life with a resplendent E-flat major chord from the whole orchestra, but this is not the start of the orchestral exposition. Instead, that chord opens the way for a cadenza by the solo piano, a cadenza that the orchestra punctuates twice more with powerful chords before sweeping into the movement’s main theme and the true exposition. This is music of shining sweep, built on two main ideas, both somewhat in the manner of marches: the strings’ vigorous main subject and a poised second theme, sounded first by the strings, then repeated memorably as a duet for

horns. After so vigorous an exposition, the entrance of the piano feels understated, as it ruminates on the two main themes, but soon the piano part — full of octaves, wide leaps, and runs — turns as difficult as it is brilliant. This *Allegro* is music of an unusual spaciousness: at a length of nearly twenty minutes, this is one of Beethoven’s longest first movements (it is longer than the final two movements combined).

The *Adagio un poco mosso* transports us to a different world altogether. Gone is the energy of the first movement, and now we seem in the midst of sylvan calm. Beethoven moves to the remote key of B major and mutes the strings, which sing the hymn-like main theme. There follow two extended variations on that rapt melody. The first, for piano over quiet accompaniment, might almost be labeled “Chopinesque” in its expressive freedom, while the second is for winds, embellished by the piano’s steady strands of sixteenths.

As he did in the *Fourth Piano Concerto*, Beethoven links the second and third movements, and that transition is made most effectively here. The second movement concludes on a low B, and then Beethoven drops everything one half-step to B-flat. Out of that expectant change, the piano begins, very gradually, to outline a melodic idea, which struggles to take shape and direction. And then suddenly it does — it is as if these misty imaginings have been hit with an electric current that snaps them to vibrant life as the main theme of the final movement. This *Allegro* is a vigorous rondo that offers some of Beethoven's most rhythmically energized writing — this music always seems to want to dance. Near the close comes one of its most striking moments, a duet for piano and timpani, which taps out the movement's fundamental rhythm. And then the piano rises up to energize the full orchestra, which concludes with one final recall of the rondo theme.

The nickname "Emperor" did not originate with the composer, and Beethoven's denunciation of Napoleon's self-coronation several years earlier suggests that he would not have been sympathetic to it. The source of that nickname remains unknown, and almost certainly Beethoven never heard this concerto referred to by the nickname that we use reflexively today.

Choral Fantasy in C Minor, Opus 80

On December 22, 1808, Beethoven led one of the most overpowering concerts ever given. The program consisted of the premiere of the *Fifth* and *Sixth Symphonies*, the public premiere of the *Fourth Piano Concerto*, three movements from the *Mass in C Major*, and the aria *Ah! Perfido*. Apparently Beethoven was concerned that this might not be enough music, so he hurriedly composed the *Choral Fantasy* as the concluding work. The concert lasted a long time, the weather was freezing, and

one of Beethoven's associates offered a devastating assessment: "There we sat from half past six till half past ten in the most bitter cold, and found by experience that one might have too much even of a good thing — and still more of a loud." The *Choral Fantasy* is a curious piece of music, yet it plays an important role in the progression of Beethoven's works. It opens with a long section for piano alone, which Beethoven apparently extemporized at the concert. The orchestra enters, and the piano announces the work's flowing central theme, which Beethoven drew from his song *Gegenliebe*, composed over ten years earlier. And at this point every listener sits up in amazement: this theme would later become part of the main theme of the finale of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. Beethoven offers a series of variations on this theme, and only in the closing minutes of the *Choral Fantasy* do the voices enter. The text, probably written by the poet Christoph Kuffner, is full of

flowery praise for the power of music and the arts to inspire mankind, and the combination of solo piano, chorus, and orchestra is meant to mirror the fusion of all arts.

A curious lash-up of different kinds of music, the *Choral Fantasy* looks several directions at once. The quasi-improvisational piano part at the beginning looks back to the style of playing that had helped Beethoven establish his reputation when he arrived in Vienna sixteen years earlier. But the choice of an inspirational — almost ecstatic — text for chorus and orchestra and the use of the same theme look ahead sixteen years to one of the great achievements of Beethoven's final years, the *Ninth Symphony*.

Eric Bromberger

Text Choral Fantasy

Schmeichelnd hold und lieblich klingen
unsers Lebens Harmonien,
und dem Schönheitssinn entschwingen
Blumen sich, die ewig blüh'n.

Fried und Freude gleiten freundlich
wie der Wellen Wechselspiel;
was sich drängte rau und feindlich,
ordnet sich zu Hochgefühl.

Wenn der Töne Zauber walten
und des Wortes Weihe spricht,
muss sich Herrliches gestalten,
Nacht und Stürme werden Licht,

äuß're Ruhe, inn're Wonne,
herrschen für den Glücklichen
Doch der Künste Frühlingssonne
lässt aus beiden Licht entsteh'n.

Graceful, charming, sweet, and singing,
Our living tones are beginning,
With a sense of beauty rising
As flowers forever bloom.

Peace and Joy do flow together
As the calming play of waves.
The once bitter has forever
Transformed into august Joy.

Music's magic reins enchanting,
Telling us the sacred way.
The sun's mighty glory rising
Night and tempest turn to day.

Outer calm, inner bliss,
Solacing the blessed men.
But the spring sunlight of the arts
Are created by both.

Großes, das ins Herz gedrunge,
blüht dann neu und schön empor,
hat ein Geist sich aufgeschwungen,
hallt ihm stets ein Geisterchor.

Nehmt denn hin, ihr schönen Seelen,
froh die Gaben schöner Kunst.
Wenn sich Lieb und Kraft vermählen,
lohnt dem Menschen Göttergunst.

Great things pierce our hearts,
Blooming once more, beautifully,
Once a soul has taken flight,
Spirit choirs resound.

Let all truth shine, joyous beings,
From high art's beloved Grace.
When love and strength, come uniting,
All men rise through Divine Grace.

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Acknowledgments

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