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Alpha Listing by Composer I: From J.S. Bach to Ludwig van Beethoven

J. S. Bach (1685-1750) The Art of the Fugue: I, IX, XI, Canon alla Ottava

The prolific J. S. Bach was the master of the fugue. Toward the end of his life he composed a variety of every type of contrapuntal operations he could think of. He called them simply "counterpoints" and it is believed he had no plans for their publication; his editors thought otherwise. A year after Bach's death, out came *Die Kunst der Fuge.* Today, The Art of the Fugue can be found in recordings and arrangements for piano, organ, chamber orchestra, string quartet and brass quintet.

It takes great fortitude to sit through a complete "Art," but a goodly sample of Bach's inspirations is always positive for the musical soul. The four counterpoints chosen for today's program are good examples of Bach's imaginative ways, whether the complications are done in slow, stately manner (I and XI) or trippingly on the keys (XI and the Canon). Special attention should be given to Counterpoint XI, which one commentator notes as being "one of the most chromatic and 'modern' pieces Bach wrote."

Gilles Vonsattel, piano April 21, 2007

J. S. Bach (1685-1750) The Bach Cantatas----Church and Secular.

In 1517 when Martin Luther posted his 95 theses onto the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, the Lutheran Reformation began. Two hundred years later in 1723 when Johann Sebastian Bach became cantor at the Saint Thomas Church in Leipzig, Lutheranism had a firm hold in Germany. The Lutheran church calendar remained similar to that of the Roman Catholic Church, centered as it was on the major feasts of Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, and Trinity Sunday. The Sunday services themselves, unlike those of Catholicism, utilized singing by soloists and worshippers, as well as instrumental accompaniments. German Baroque composers evolved a structure for these elements that came to be known as a "cantata, " normally consisting of arias for one or two voices, some recitatives, an original tune for chorus, then a traditional chorale in which the churchgoers could join since they knew the song from childhood probably.

Every Sunday had to have its own cantata composed by the church's paid cantor who utilized Biblical text appropriate to the Sunday (e.g. Easter) or an original text on a religious theme. To churn out the numerous cantatas, each composer borrowed liberally from his own previously used melodies, as well as from other composers whose tunes they may have remembered from attending church services elsewhere.

Bach spent his last twenty-seven years on earth in Leipzig and is believed to have composed some 300 cantatas, about two-thirds of which are known to still exist. It is believed that Georg Philipp Telemann, a contemporary of Bach and the director of music for five churches in Hamburg, composed some 1700 church cantatas! That we are listening today to works by Bach and not Telemann suggests once again the genius of J. S. Bach (as well as the lack of a good 21st Century public relations agency for Telemann since he was hardly a hack composer.)

Lutheranism pervaded the entire political and social community, and often Bach would be sought to compose a "secular cantata" to honor members of the University of Leipzig faculty, a newly appointed Town Council, or some other non-religious item of importance. Some thirty of Bach's secular cantatas survive. (In the BWV numbering system, all those in the 200s are of the secular variety.) These cantatas use text that is closer to an opera libretto; it tells a story. One of the most famous of the secular cantatas--the Coffee Cantata, BWV 211--is represented by one selection in today's program. Here Bach took off his wig and poked fun at coffee-crazed Leipzigers.

Bach Aria Group Sept. 23, 2001 (Program of 10 Bach Cantata Arias & Duets)

J. S. Bach (1685-1750) <u>Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue, BWV 903</u>

Definition of Fantasy: "An instrumental piece in which the imagination of the composer takes precedence over conventional styles and forms."

In that definition is the clue to why some Bach scholars have said that of the hundreds of works of J. S. Bach, there is no other like the Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue. Here the Germanic genius lets loose from the strictures of writing for the organ and composing cantatas. In 1717, Bach left his churchly duties as an organist to the Duke of Saxe-Weimar and with his wife and children went the 90 miles to become Kapellmeister for Prince Leopold at Cothen where he would serve for 6 years. (Bach never ventured far from the central part of Germany throughout his life.) It was in Cothen, under the guidance of music-lover Leopold, that Bach composed most of his instrumental music (harpsichord), chamber and orchestral works (e. g. Brandenburg concertos).

One of the works he wrote in Cothen (thought to have been in 1720) is the work on today's program. One must realize that much of the keyboard music that Bach wrote had one specific aim: to improve the keyboard abilities of his students, his wife and his children. Some believe the Chromatic Fantasy was written for his wife Maria Barbara. (If it was, she certainly knew her way around a keyboard.) Since several of his children became major composers in their own right, Bach was not only a good teacher, but the transmitter of an appropriate musical genetic code!

Bach must have been an incredible improviser at the keyboard, something that one feels immediately at the beginning of the work, with the speedy waves of notes in a type of prelude, which over and over presents broken chords (arpeggios). Then comes a dramatic pause and a shift in intensity: a melodic line, not unlike the recitative in Italian operas, where a coloratura sings alone, punctuated by harpsichord chordings. This takes center stage while leading to a quiet ending to the fantasy portion. The fugue, one of the longest ever written by Bach, then begins simply with two pairs of four chromatic notes played ascendingly. These are joined in the 8th measure by a rhythmic counter-subject. What happens for the next minutes is a journey for those chromatic four-somes that could only have happened in the hands of the fugal master, Johann Sebastian Bach

Llewellyn Sanchez-Werner, piano November 13, 2016

J. S. Bach (1685-1750) Concerto in D minor for Two Violins

Considering the esteem in which Johann Sebastian Bach is now held, it seems impossible it would be nearly one hundred years after his death before the world began to recognize what he had accomplished. Very few of his works were published

in his lifetime. He had been the perfect musical servant with a life of servitude to God and to royalty. “I worked hard,” Bach stated in appraising his life.

During a particularly peaceful time around 1720, Bach was a Kapellmeister at Cöthen in central Germany. The prince, his employer, provided him with an orchestra of eighteen players and the obligation to compose new orchestral works for his concerts. By that time, concertos by Antonio Vivaldi had been published and circulated widely in Europe, and Bach even arranged some of them for other instruments. Influenced by Vivaldi’s concerto form—three-movements, “slow-fast-slow,” and simple themes that return several times during a movement--Bach then put his own stamp on this concerto form.

That stamp is obvious in this Concerto for Two Violins, with its marvelous counterpoint. A fugue is utilized effectively both in the forward-thrusting first movement, with the two violins acting as independent voices, and then in the calmly beautiful second movement. Here the melodic phrases are passed generously and gently from one soloist to the other. For the final movement, Bach provides a sense of musical “fits and starts,” wonderful contrast to the linearity of the other movements.

Chamber Orchestra Kremlin November 10, 2002

J. S. Bach (1685-1750) English Suite #4 in F Major, BWV 809

Johann Sebastian Bach's love of the keyboard is evidenced in his six English Suites, six French Suites, and six Partitas, created for the harpsichord. Albert Schweitzer, the famed physician, organist and Bach scholar, believed that the suite form came about through “the pipers of the seventeenth century, who used to string together various national dances. The German clavichord players adopted the form from them and developed it.” Bach's suites had two purposes: 1) to provide the joy of music to the player and 2) to be a pedagogical tool. The choice of alternating dance rhythms—essentially “fast” followed by something “slower”--provided a special pleasure. Each of the English Suites, in the Baroque tradition, begins with a prelude, followed by four dances: the allemande, courant, sarabande, and gigue. Most of these dances were obsolete by Bach's time, with the “gigue” becoming the “jig,” not unknown to the Irish and British.
The Prelude to English Suite #4 has a definite fugal beginning and then the scampering of notes in both hands. The allemande is typical of the stately 4/4 time German dance and is followed by the livelier courante. The centerpiece of the suite is the slow, dignified Sarabande, a dance form of Spanish origin. Bach adds another then-popular dance rhythm, the Minuet, before finishing with a Gigue that is full of musical energy.

Roman Rabinovich, piano Aprtil 24, 2004

J. S. Bach (1685-1750) French Suite No. 6 in E Major

Bach’s French and English suites were written to enhance the keyboard abilities of his wife, with the French suites being of a more graceful nature than the English ones. The suite on tonight’s program is typical of all the French suites—eight portions that represent different French dances, which Bach knew from having collected French keyboard music in his early years. Ernest Hutcheson, in his book <u>The Literature of the Piano</u>, makes the following point: “Being founded on dance tunes, the suites and partitas abound in lighter, gayer moods than the majority of the more strictly contrapuntal writings of Bach.” Hutcheson then provides an interesting connection

between composers of two eras when he states that Chopin "liked to practice Bach rather than his chosen program immediately before playing in public."

Orli Shaham, piano April 24, 2004

J. S. Bach (1685-1750) Partita No. 2 in C Minor

The six "partitas" that Bach published in 1731 had the overall title *Clavierübung* (or "Fun at the Keyboard") and were really "dance suites." One must realize that much of the keyboard music that Bach wrote had one specific aim: to improve the keyboard abilities of both his wife and his children. (Since several of his children became major composers in their own right, Bach was a good teacher as well as transmitter of an appropriate musical genetic code!)

The "dance suite" of Bach's time emerged from the era of troubadors who brought from land to land a great variety of music types. Dance rhythms moved from country to country and composers of the baroque period built their suites from these favorite dance rhythms. Bach introduces the Partita No. 2 with a **Sinfonia** (an overture with a fugal conclusion,) then he follows with the traditional dances. First, an **Allemande**, of German origin, somewhat stately in 2/4 time. (The name persists in square dance calling, e.g. "Allemande left with your left hand.") The **Courante** following, French in origin, is brisk (think of a "current" flowing at fast pace.) A **Sarabande**, slow and elegant with the emphasis on the second of three beats, came from the Spanish lands. The **Rondeau** following, though not a dance, prefigures the rondo (main section returning at end) form. Finally, a **Capriccio**, which is in fact a form of gigue (or English "jig") ends the Suite in merry form.

Anne-Marie McDermott, piano November 21, 1999

J. S. Bach (1685-1750) Ricercare from *The Musical Offering*

The pianist Charles Rosen (1927-2012) was not only an excellent artist, but one of the best writers about classical music in his generation. Though the Bach "Ricercare" in this concert is for three winds and strings, its origins are nicely described by Rosen:

It was on May 7, 1747, that Bach visited Frederick the Great at Potsdam. The Prussian king preferred the pianoforte -- then called "forte and piano" -- to the less nuanced harpsichord or the organ; so much so that he had 15 of the instruments built for him. During this visit the king led Bach from room to room to try them out. (Bach had encountered pianos before the royal visit; he had complained that their action was too heavy, their treble too weak.) Frederick played for Bach a theme of his own and then asked Bach to improvise a fugue on it. After Bach obliged with a three-voice fugue, the king demanded a more spectacular six-voice fugue. Bach improvised a six-voice fugue on a theme of his own, but on his return to Leipzig wrote out a six-voice fugue on the royal theme. He had it printed with a number of other works all based on the same theme, and sent it to Frederick as "a musical offering."

New York Chamber Soloists May 18, 2013

J. S. Bach (1685-1750)/A. Marcello (1684-1750) Concerto in D minor, BWV 974

Bach's earliest year of composing focused on works for the organ since supported his family as an organist. In 1716 he came across a publication of an oboe concerto by the Venetian composer, Alessandro Marcello. Bach at the time was influenced by the jauntiness of concertos by Italian

composers such as Antonio Vivaldi and Archangelo Corelli. To better understand the workings of these Italians, he transcribed their works for other instruments, including the Marcello concerto for harpsichord/piano. Indeed the result provides a prime example of a baroque concerto with a moderately fast first movement, a contemplative second, and a joyous, bouncy third. ***Xiayin Wang, piano Nov. 8, 2009***

Samuel Barber (1910-1981) Souvenirs for Piano, Four Hands, Op. 28

Daisy and Roy Barber, of the pleasant Philadelphia suburb of West Chester, brought a determined child into the world: "I wasn't meant to be an athlete. I was meant to be a composer, and I will be, I am sure." So wrote young Samuel Barber, not yet in his teens, to his mother hoping she would dissuade his physician father from molding his only son to his image and likeness. The budding composer found a special place of musical joy in visits to his mother's sister, Louise Homer, a contralto of international reputation. Her husband, Sidney, a composer and music professor would become Barber's surrogate musical father. The joy compounded when at fourteen, Barber entered the newly opened Curtis Institute in Philadelphia majoring in three areas: piano, composition, and voice. Musical talent had concentrated in young Barber. He himself sang the premiere of his song, Dover Beach (1931), composed with quartet accompaniment. In the 1930s, as his talents blossomed, no type of composition --- symphony, concerto, opera, vocal -- was left unexplored. With Toscanini championing Barber's soulful Adagio for Strings, the composer gained permanence in the "Hall of Fame of Great Tunes." By 1950, Barber had traveled to all the great capitals of Europe with his lifelong friend and companion, Gian Carlo Menotti, the successful opera composer, who had been Barber's classmate at Curtis. Elegance had its charm for them both and they spent many an hour in grand hotels enjoying the music of the salon orchestras. In 1951, Barber composed Souvenirs, a suite containing a waltz, schottische, pas de deux, two-step, hesitation tango, and galop. "Think of that coming out of your serious minded Westchester Presbyterian nephew," Barber wrote to Sidney Homer. For the listener, this totally enjoyable sextette of pieces needs to be seen through the eyes and words of the composer: "Imagine a divertissement in a setting of the Palm Court of the Hotel Plaza in New York, the year about 1914, epoch of the first tangos; 'Souvenirs' ---remembered with affection, not in irony or with tongue in cheek, but in amused tenderness."

Spoleto Festival USA Chamber Music April 1, 2001

Samuel Barber (1910-1981) String Quartet, Opus 11

1. Molto allegro e appasionato 2. Molto adagio 3. Molto allegro

The composer Arnold Schoenberg wrote: "An artist is to me like an apple tree: When his time comes, whether he wants it or not, he bursts into bloom and starts to produce apples...." Samuel Barber clearly felt that way in May 1936 when he wrote to a friend: "I have vague quartettish rumblings in my innards and need a bit of celestial Ex Lax to restore my equilibrium; there is nothing to do but get at it..." While in Italy on a composition grant, Barber heard his first symphony performed then began his quartet. He completed the first two movements before returning to the United States. The quartet was first performed at the Library of Congress on April 20, 1937, but Barber later completely discarded the third movement. Not until 1943 did he complete the quartet.

In the first movement, Barber sets the mood for the entire quartet, a dark feeling with underlying passion. The harmonics are spare. With the second movement, Barber's most famous melody arises. He recognized its special quality from the start when he wrote a friend: "I have just finished the slow movement of my quartet today---it is a knockout!" (Arturo Toscanini urged Barber to orchestrate the movement and the Maestro himself premiered the Adagio for Strings with the NBC Symphony). The unique quality of this melody is that it stretches forward into time, unbroken in its upward climb, increasing in tension until there is a fortissimo outcry, then silence. The steadfast melody then quietly returns. The short third movement commences with a melodic outburst that contrasts with a simple lyrical melody before the passion returns and the quartet concludes. ***Laurentian Quartet Lilian Kallir, Guest Pianist April 12, 1997***

Bela Bartok (1881-1945) Out of Doors, Sz. 81

1. With drums and pipes 2. Barcarolle 3. Musettes 4. The Night's Music 5. The Chase

Bela Bartok, the foremost Hungarian composer of the 20th century, ultimately passed up the world of Hungarian folk songs that first attracted him. By the 1920s he composed in a modern mode, which at first hearing "is usually not pleasant to listen to, for it is disjointed, discordant, and seemingly amorphous." But, oh, how much more interesting on second hearing. The five-part suite of pieces, "Out of Doors," composed in 1926, is a perfect introduction to Bartok's piano music, ranging from the seemingly barbaric (the beginning of "With drums and pipes" as well as "The Chase") to the eerily evocative ("The Night's Music"). Melodies do exist, but in a more fragmented form than one is used to. For example after the crashing mounds of notes that begin the first part of "With drums and pipes," a rather attractive melody occurs in the bass, then slithers through until it reemerges again. The suite's longest segment, "The Night's Music," proves Bartok's mastery of the piano. Whether the notes represent birds, crickets, or the snapping of alligator jaws (how's that for imagination?), what a wondrous piece of music this is.

Gilles Vonsattel, piano April 21, 2007

Bela Bartok (1881-1945) Romanian Folk Dances

Though Bela Bartok was born in the Hungary of pre-WWI, realignments of borders after "The Great War" made him a Romanian. But all the Balkan countries were ripe with cultures whose music had unique folk qualities whether Hungary, Romania, Transylvania or Serbia. A young Bartok became infatuated with the folk music from this region. At 21 years of age and already a well-known pianist and some-time composer, he began a ten-year gathering of folk songs through journeys of the area. At times he was accompanied by his friend Zoltan Kodaly, soon to be another famed composer, as they recorded songs from native singers on a cylinder recorder. The region of Transylvania (notable as the setting for the novel *Dracula*) was particularly rich in the thousands of melodies that Bartok noted in his travels.

The Romanian Folk Dances were written first for piano in 1915, then orchestrated in 1922. The six pieces are short, with the first four of a more restrained nature, and the final two bursting forth. Though the melodies have a certain innate simplicity, Bartok gave each his own harmonic touch. As historian János Kárpáti put it, Bartók "made fast dances even faster and the slow ones even slower." The opening "Stick dance" is highly punctuated. (Bartok heard it first played by two gypsy violinists). The following "Sash dance" is short and brisk, then a slow-down for "Pe loc" (a type of stamping dance). The "Horn dance" (from the region of Bucsum) remains slow,

but then the "Romanian polka" livens up the scene, preparing for the final "Fast dance," actually composed of two melodies and an *allegro vivace* tempo. In such a brief work, what a glorious sense of a unique part of Europe.

The String Orchestra of New York City May 2, 2015

Bela Bartok (1881-1945) Divertimento for String Orchestra

Few composers became so steeped in the folksong music of his country as did Bela Bartok. From 1904 through 1913, he criss-crossed his native Hungary noting down and recording over 6000 melodies. He consumed this music and his works built on the folk melodies, but adding modern tonalities. The Divertimento was composed in Switzerland in 1939 in 15 days, while Bartok was sequestered in an alpine chalet provided by the Swiss conductor, Paul Sacher, who had commissioned the work and even had a piano shipped in from Bern. It was also a time that Bartok anxiously awaited the fortunes of his homeland while Hitler's troops swallowed more and more of Europe. Nonetheless, with this work, Bartok looked back at the classical world of Mozart, who had written 17 divertimentos, music of pleasant diversion. The structure of the Divertimento has a sense of the classical "concerto grosso" in which small groups of instruments play off against each other. Strident chords often provide the dramatic contrast to the simpler folksong-like themes that emerge as early as the first pulsating measures of the work. If any part of the Divertimento reflects the political concerns of the times it would be the middle movement with its muted beginning and fierce fortissimo central outcry. The rondo finale provides a spirited and musically uncomplicated conclusion, a modern salute back to Mozart.

A Far Cry May 7, 2011

Bela Bartok (1881-1945) String Quartet No. 3

"What a listener should not do is to expect Bartók to turn into Mozart or Schubert at any moment. Just relax and let the music come to you. After several hearings you will begin to develop connections in the music and realize that it is largely tonal music." This quotation—so apropos to today's program---this writer happened upon while reading about the six string quartets of Bela Bartok, which are considered great treasures of 20th century music. Bartok, a Hungarian and deeply affected by his years of study of his country's folk music, wrote the six quartets over a period of thirty years. As a result, they evidence the evolution of a master modern tonalist. Of the six quartets, No. 3 is the shortest, only about 15 minutes long. It is in one movement, but there are four segments, with distinct transitions. The first and third portions are slow, somewhat acrid, while the second---the most lyrical with a distinct gypsy flavor---is fast and energetic, as is the short coda.

Bartok brings out a great variety of instrumental colors, using *pizzicatos* (plucking), *glissandos* (sliding along the scale), *col legnos* (striking the strings with the wood of the bow), and *sul ponticellos* (playing near the instrument's bridge, resulting in a glassy sound). In speaking of his string quartets, Bartok wrote: *"The melodic world of my string quartets does not essentially differ from that of folk-song, only the framework is stricter. It must have been observed that I place great emphasis on the work of technical arrangement, that I do not like to repeat a musical idea without change, and I do not bring back one single part in exactly the same way. This method arises out of my tendency to vary and transform the theme. . . . The extremes of variation, which is so characteristic of our folk music, is at the same time the expression of my own nature."*

Alianza String Quartet November 16, 2008

Bela Bartok (1881-1945) Three Burlesques, Op. 8C

Bela Bartok, the man who would bring Hungarian folk music into modern prominence, graduated from the Budapest Academy in 1903. He had a connection to Franz Liszt through one

of his professors who had been taught by the famed Hungarian. Bartok remained to teach at the Academy, and, along with his friend, composer Zoltan Kodaly, began collecting Hungarian folk music, gathering thousands of folk songs of Magyar, Slovak, and Rumanian origins. These would influence Bartok's creative output in many ways.

He first gained fame as a pianist and many of his early compositions were piano pieces, most quite short, which he would perform in his recitals. Among these are the sparkling "Three Burlesques," which have a quality between the romanticism of Franz Liszt and the mature Bartok, where atonality and dissonance had their place. In ABA form, these masterly musical cameos are each less than three minutes. The first two have descriptive titles: "Quarrel" and "A Bit Tipsy." The third has no title, but a designation "Molto vivo, cappricioso." In "Quarrel," the rapid-fire notes suggest an intense argument, mediated in the middle by the calm of a waltz tune, but the final crashing chords are not a sign of agreement. The "Bit Tipsy" gentleman weaves about in shifting rhythms, but with a folksong element in the melody; he may in fact succumb to gravity at the end. Bartok was deeply influenced in his youth by Richard Strauss, whom he had met, so could it be that the "cappricioso" Burlesque is in fact a Till Eulenspiegel-like youth scurrying about the village? ***Roman Rabinovich, piano Aprtil 24, 2004***

Arnold Bax (1883-1953) Elegiac Trio for Flute, Viola, and Harp

Though born a proper Englishman without concern for where the next pound was coming from, Arnold Bax not only had musical talents, but a great love of literature. The early poetry of William Butler Yeats, drew Bax into a love of Irish literature. While developing a major output of compositions of every type except opera, Bax fell in love with Ireland, choosing a tiny village in Donegal as a retreat. He also wrote poetry under the pseudonym of 'Dermot O'Byrne,' and came to know and respect many of the Irish Literary revival figures including Padraig Pearse, a major proponent of Irish nationalism and of Irish language studies. Pearse was a major figure in the 1916 Easter Uprising against the British, resulting in his execution, along with a dozen others. Bax was heartsick at the deaths. Soon after he wrote the Elegiac Trio, which included the harp, the instrument that is at the heart of Gaelic music. Bax, who would later emphasize a big sound in seven symphonies, here lets simplicity speak for his sadness.

America's Dream Chamber Artists May 17, 2008

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Piano Trio No. 1 in E flat major, Opus 1

At age 25, Beethoven proudly published Opus 1, a group of three piano trios, dedicated to Prince Carl Lichnowsky, his Viennese patron, who provided a handsome subsidy for the works. It was the same Prince who had been both a pupil and friend of Mozart. The death of Mozart and the arrival of Beethoven in Vienna allowed the musically inclined prince to channel energies and interest from one musical genius to another.

The piano trio had been well developed by Haydn and Mozart before Beethoven took up the challenge. His own abilities as a first-rate pianist tended to give the piano its continuing dominant role, but his egalitarian sensibilities moved him toward giving cello and violin greater prominence. There is none of the dramatic Beethoven in this piano trio. It glides along with an abundance of melodies and an innate energy that percolates throughout, with an absolute gem of a joyful finale. ***The McDermott Trio Saturday, May 21, 2005***

Ludvig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Piano Trio in D Major, Op. 70, No. 1, "Ghost"

The "Ghost" trio came to life in 1808 as a special work of gratitude to the Countess von Erdody, in whose Vienna home Beethoven and his manservant had taken residence. (Beethoven had a reputation for being a difficult tenant, ever complaining and ever moving.) Consistent with his irascibility, Beethoven had broken completely with Prince Karl Lichnowsky, his principal Viennese patron of a dozen years. So the Countess, of a distinguished Hungarian family, had the goal to assure that bachelor Beethoven would have sufficient income to remain permanently in Vienna. Through the Countess's contacts, she helped him gain sufficient annual stipends from local nobility. Since she was a very fine pianist, Beethoven's wrote the two trios of Op. 70 as a gift, the kind only a genius could provide. (The Countess is also one of four or five candidates thought to be the "Immortal Beloved" ["Unsterbliche Geliebte"], the object of an unsent Beethoven love letter discovered after his death.)

This trio is indeed a delicious musical sandwich: two outer movements of melodic, rhythmic persuasion, and an inner movement, "Largo," of unusual introspection. Beethoven's student Carl Czerny said that the largo movement reminded him of the ghost of Hamlet's father, thus providing a name for the trio. (German was the first language into which Shakespeare's plays were translated, and Beethoven had even considered writing an opera based on MacBeth.)

The "ghost" movement is indeed Beethoven at his most unusual and according to one critic, "one of the first atmospheric 'mood pieces' in music history." Indeed the mood begins immediately with eerie string sounds and a subtle motif from the piano that wends its way through abrupt stops, outbursts, and the kind of tremolo that pianists would use accompanying silent movies, sounds that would imply mystery and fear of what's to come.

In the two outer movements, melodic inventions central to Beethoven's keen imagination abound. The trio's very first measures change from a thematic rush of notes to an immediate quiet, reflective second theme led by the cello. Then the piano introduces a third barcarolle-like theme. The movement is one of pulsating energy. In the final movement---Presto---the piano's role is more paramount, shifting from dramatic chords to scampering up and down the keyboard. In the final measures, the "ghost" stirs up a bit of fun, with an exhilarating chromatic run by the piano, finalizing with two emphatic chords.

Weiss-Kaplan-Newman Trio October 20, 2013

Ludvig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Fifteen Variations and Fugue in E flat major on an Original Theme, Op. 35, "Eroica"

There must be a reason that the "theme and variation" form is so popular with composers. What fun it must be to take a melody to new levels of cleverness, of joyfulness and/or of drama, challenging the listener's ear as the theme appears in other form or disappears among embellishments. Beethoven relished a melody he had created for the 1801 ballet Creatures of Prometheus. At the turn of the 19th century, Beethoven had a torrential flow of inspiration; the ballet theme haunted him so much that he used it also for the variations-finale of his epochal Symphony No. 3, "Eroica." During the same time, building on his famed abilities in extemporization, he used this now-named "Eroica" theme as the basis for Op. 35: the Fifteen Variations and Fugue. (Co-published with Op. 35 was Op. 34, a set of six variations on a much-less interesting original theme.)

Heroic as the theme may sound dramatically and forcefully on today's grand pianos, Beethoven's Viennese pianos in 1800 were much more fragile. Still, Beethoven, the great piano improviser, took advantage of the fluidity of the pianos of his day. One commentator notes that "As one moves through the Op. 35 Variations, one encounters a staggering variety of gambits employed to give true meaning to the term 'variation' in dizzying fashion, rapid triplets skip by, alternating with sharp staccato chords and a beautifully sculpted Largo section (variation 15)." At the beginning, the complete theme is presented slowly and majestically for some four minutes before thirteen variations appear, each less than a minute in length. Then come the two lengthy final variations and the brilliant fugue. In toto, it is a work that makes one appreciate even more the genius of Beethoven. ***Michael Brown, piano November 16, 2013***

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Septet in E-flat major, Op. 20

As the 18th century slipped away, Beethoven, the Vienna-based composer, was at a time of transition. With Mozart gone and Haydn aging, he moved from his classical roots toward the grandeur of his own unique musical world. By 1799, his creations had been principally small chamber works, piano sonatas and his first piano concerto. Interestingly, out of the fertile mind of 29 year-old Beethoven, both his First Symphony and the Septet were worked on concurrently. The Septet had an unusual assemblage of instruments for its time: clarinet, French horn, bassoon, violin, viola, cello, and bass. Both lengthy works were presented to the public in the same concert in Vienna on April 2, 1800, an event organized for Beethoven's own financial benefit, as well as show off his composing and pianistic abilities.

The attendees for a modest ticket price would definitely have gotten their money's worth hearing a Mozart symphony, some excerpts from Haydn's oratorio, "The Creation," and the first public performances of Beethoven's Septet and First Symphony. The composer also performed as soloist in one of his piano concertos, then followed with piano improvisations. The fact is that after that concert, it was the Septet that caught on quickly with the Viennese because of its sprightly, melodic way and did much to establish Beethoven as the brightest of new young composers. (He certainly did not do himself a disfavor by dedicating it to the Empress Maria Teresa of Austro-Hungary, then arguably the most powerful woman in Europe.) With great public demand, the publisher insisted that Beethoven arrange the septet for smaller groups of instruments to satisfy the Viennese obsession for salon performances. Among the arrangements was even one he did for piano, clarinet and cello.

The Septet, with its multiple movements, looks back to Mozart serenades and their emphasis on strings. But the mix of instruments gives a more symphonic feel than what a listener would experience in the classical serenades. The violin is the major player throughout, nonetheless. A composer can only write parts to the level of the performers and lucky is the composer who knows who will be playing at the premiere. It is believed that Beethoven gave a prominent role to the violin knowing it would be played in the premiere by Ignaz Schuppanzigh, one of Vienna's foremost violinists.

In the six movements of the septet, Beethoven's imaginative ways with instruments, melodies and rhythms show forth on a level of total joy to the listener. The first movement has a slow, almost drone-like, beginning before dashing into an energetic "allegro con brio." The second movement has the sense of a *romanza*, with a special role for the clarinet. With the third

movement, Beethoven honors the classical format with a minuet, a pleasing melody the composer used also in one of his "two easy sonatas," Op. 49. What follows the minuet is one of Beethoven's favorite forms: theme and variation. First the strings do the variations, then the winds, and finally all join in. The fifth movement scherzo provides the instruments with a charming playfulness, with the horn suggesting something of "the hunt." The final movement, like the first, begins with a slow introduction, something unexpectedly rather doleful, but Beethoven's quick transfer to the high spirits of the "presto" erases those sad notes. This movement alone had to be a major reason why the Viennese fell in love with the Septet.

Frisson, String & Wind Nonet Sunday, November 11, 2018

Ludvig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Sextet in E-flat Major for Two Horns & Strings, Op. 81b

For some reason, soon after Beethoven had moved to Vienna from his native Bonn, he wrote this work (1794-95), but it would not be published for fifteen years. For someone not aware of this, the high opus number suggests this should be a work of Beethoven maturity. Instead it comes from a young Beethoven, one who still saw Mozart as his guide. The spirit of the music is that of a Mozart divertimento. A more mature Beethoven would provide French horns with some of their most thrilling sounds, such as in the first movement of his Symphony No. 7 when the horns let loose with his great first theme after that long, dramatic introduction.

In this sextet, as one commentator has put it, you "really have a chamber concerto for two horns and four accompanying strings"; drama is not the essence here, but a seamless meshing of the horn sound with the strings. No matter what you call this work, the music is immensely enjoyable for its directness, pleasant melodies and intricate horn writing. The conversational mode of the horns in the first movement (yes, even a bit of "anything you can do, I can do better"), the lyrical joy of the second movement, then the "hunting horn" sense in the third, provides something rarely heard in classical music: two horns displaying the beauty of the form in sheer playfulness. ***New York Chamber Soloists May 18, 2013***

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Sonata for Horn and Piano in F Major, Op. 17
Arranged for viola by Michael Tree

Perhaps it may seem strange to adapt a work for horn and piano into one for viola and piano, yet we have to believe Beethoven would have given his blessing. Why? Because the score of Beethoven's Op. 17 is marked *Sonate pour le Forte-Piano avec un Cor ou Violoncello;* the composer himself had seen it also as a work for a stringed instrument in place of the horn. When the work was premiered in 1800 in Vienna by the well-known horn player Giovanni Punto, Beethoven himself was at the piano.

The 30-year old composer had yet to achieve as great a fame as Punto. In fact, when they repeated the work later in Hungary, a critic at the concert wrote: *"Who is this Beethoven? His name is not known to us. Of course, Punto is very well known."* But the Viennese had already become quite aware of Beethoven as an excellent pianist. Besides several dozen sonatas already published, by 1800, Beethoven had already composed the first three of his five piano concertos. Two weeks before the successful premiere of the horn sonata, Beethoven organized a concert in Vienna for his own monetary benefit. On that night he performed one of the piano concertos and the orchestra premiered his Symphony No. 1. Fame would soon overwhelm him.

As for the sonata, one critic has noted that its "overall impression is one of straightforward music-making without the introspection or inner conflict we often

hear in Beethoven's later work." Indeed, the sonata is full of energy in the initial movement, almost a martial emphasis. The brief inner movement provides a bit of relief before the rondo, which ends the work in quite a joyful rush.

The Schumann Trio March 18, 2012

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Sonata in E Flat Major, Op 31, No. 3

I. Allegro *II. Scherzo: Allegretto vivace.*
III. Menuetto: Moderato e grazioso. *IV. Presto con fuoco.*

Beethoven's thirty-two piano sonatas, the cornerstone of piano literature, are one of his greatest legacies. (I suppose one could say that his thirty-two sonatas are indeed "variations" on a theme!) Beginning with his first three piano sonatas, dedicated to Joseph Haydn in 1795, Beethoven throughout his compositional life composed sonatas that confirmed his growth as the "monarch of the piano." The Sonata in E-flat Major (composed in 1802) is considered by some as the first of the sonatas to pre-figure the great ones to come later, such as the *Waldstein* and *Appassionata.*

Few sonatas by anyone provide such immediate pleasure upon hearing it than this four-movement work. The first movement begins with a "quizzical" three-note theme that permeates the "easy-going" allegro movement. The second movement, "scherzo," could not be a happier experience with its frenetic movement forward, a staccato-like melody assuaged by slower, reflective moments. (It is this movement that has provided the nickname "The Hunt" for the sonata.) The third movement is a beautiful song, one of Beethoven's loveliest. The fourth movement explodes onto the scene and with the left-hand's consistent driving force, the movement has a sense of joy that makes the listener want to stand and shout "Bravo, Beethoven*!"* ***Anne-Marie McDermott, piano November 21, 1999***

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Sonata No. 5 in F major, op. 24, "Spring"

When Beethoven composed the "Spring" sonata, he was about thirty years old and had found his own musical voice. In the same time period he had completed his first symphony as well as the "Moonlight Sonata." Hearing these, his Viennese listeners recognized that Beethoven had brought something new to music. Not unexpectedly, some criticized him for being too adventuresome in harmonies and rhythms. With such criticism, Beethoven may well have decided to provide in the "Spring" sonata a work of extreme listenability, something to quiet his critics and reach the broadest audience. In this his fifth violin sonata, Beethoven makes the piano a prominent partner to the violin. In the first movement (allegro), the violin and piano seem to be enjoying an "anything-you-can-do-I-can-do-better" game as they toss melodies back and forth. The tranquility of the second movement (adagio), contrasts beautifully with the following scherzo movement. Here the instruments play a brief game of tag, with the violin echoing the piano in a split-second delay. The rondo finale provides a Mozartean melody, which the violin and piano share in lively Beethoven equality.

Ayako Yoshida, violin, Andrew Armstrong, piano May 19, 2001

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) **Sonata No. 23 in F Minor, Opus 57 "Appassionata**

The thirty-two piano sonatas of Beethoven are the cornerstone of the piano repertoire and show the evolution of a musical genius. The "Appassionata" was written in 1804, the middle period of his sonata writing, and deafness was already upon him. Did the passion in the "Appassionata" reflect his struggle with this knowledge? Well, we really don't know because the name was appended by his publisher.

The stormy first movement is filled with a darkness unknown in the piano literature of its time. It is said that Beethoven chose the key of F minor because F was the lowest key on his piano and he wanted to "plumb the dark depths to the fullest." The "passion" in the outside two movements is neatly contrasted by the serene second movement—a theme and variations on a hymn-like melody.

Ferdinand Ries, a piano student of Beethoven, tells of taking a walk with the composer in the summer of 1804 during which Beethoven was "humming and howling" seemingly without any specific notes. Ries asked him what was the problem: "A theme for the last movement of the Sonata [F minor] has occurred to me," Beethoven responded. Continuing on with Beethoven to his home where he was to have a piano lesson, Ries later wrote: "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 still to see me and said: 'I cannot give you a lesson today; I must do some more work.'" The completion of the "Appassionata," we must assume.

Christopher Taylor, piano September 30, 2007

Ludvig Van Beethoven (1770-1827) **Sonata in C sharp minor, op. 27 ("Moonlight")**

None of the 32 piano sonatas of Beethoven are as well known as Op. 27, No. 2, the "Moonlight Sonata." (And what aspiring amateur pianist hasn't attempted that first movement!) It is one of two sonatas written in 1801 and given the subtitle "quasi una fantasia" ("somewhat fanciful"). The term "Moonlight" was suggested by a German poet who when he heard the sonata's first movement, reflected on his sailing on a moonlight night on Lake Lucerne. It became affixed after Beethoven's death.

Beethoven, who was always challenging new ways in music, begins this, his 14th piano sonata, with a slow movement, not in sonata form. In fact, there is an interesting linearity to the three movements as they proceed from slow to faster to fastest. The Adagio Sostenuto ("slow and sustained") first movement does indeed keep your attention, almost to the point of mesmerization. There is the constant rolling three-note ostinato, contrasted with deep bass notes, and the simple theme starting with the dotted rhythm, which is typical of a funeral march. Whether you call the movement melancholy, mournful, or reflective, it has a singular attraction. The short, playful second movement emerges, as Franz Liszt wrote, "as a flower between two huge abysses." In the Presto Agitato final movement one can sense the side of Beethoven that is railing against the fate that was causing him to lose his hearing. This movement is in the sonata form, and provides a lyrical melody that counteracts the tempestuous aspects that begin and end the sonata. You can always rely on Beethoven for a conclusion to a piano sonata that rings powerful and memorable. ***Cecile Licad, piano Sunday, October 20, 2019***

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Sonata in C Minor, No. 32, Op. 111

For the competent pianist, there is no greater Beethoven gift than his 32 piano sonatas. The very name of some of those sonatas---Pathetique; Moonlight; Hammerklavier; Tempest; Appassionata---suggest the driving force of the man who tore himself away from the classical era of Haydn and Mozart and led music into the romantic era.

During Beethoven's time, the piano became the powerful instrument we know today. Beethoven's emotions—pent-up in a life of little joy, no lasting love, plus ultimate deafness---express themselves directly in music with massive sounds and variable sonorities and---don't let us forget---melodies of the first order.

Critics see Op. 111 as Beethoven's brilliant "goodbye" to his years of composing piano sonatas. He would live five more years after its publication in 1822, but not compose another sonata. All indications are that he had explored and exhausted the sonata's potential for him. (He would, however, not abandon the piano, for a year later he published the Diabelli Variations, Op. 120, a near hour-long masterpiece.)

"Contrast" is the word this writer would like to emphasize in Beethoven's final piano sonata. Since there are only two movements, not the traditional three, the contrasts are readily noted:

First Movement	Second Movement
Minor key	Major key
Sonata form/fugal	Theme and Variation
Allegro	Adagio
Turmoil	Serenity
Down to earth	Up to heaven

It is hardly surprising that Beethovern chose C minor as the key of the sonata's first thrust because that key had been his favorite to introduce musical drama (e.g. the "fate" opening of Symphony #5, the mysterious opening to Piano Concerto #3). And the listener to the first movement should know what to expect from the Beethoven's own instruction: *"Allegro con brio ed appassionato."* ("Brisk with vigor and passion.") Talk about contrast! In the very first measure of the sonata, the pianist strikes the piano with forceful octaves, but quickly moves to quiescence anticipating the main theme of the movement, which is dark and brooding. And so the movement moves alternately between percussive octaves, brilliant counterpoint, rapid fire notes, and pensive interludes. In spite of the drama and passion of the first movement, it ends peacefully.

For the more serene second movement, twice the length of the first, the key is C major: "*Arietta: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile."* ("A little aria: Slow, very simple and songlike.") The theme and variation form was a Beethoven favorite (he wrote some two dozen works of that form) and the theme he chose here is of simple, hymn-like beauty. After a highly pensive presentation of the theme come three variations, each faster than the previous one. Then a quiet, lengthy variation introduces unusual trilling, finally leading back to the simple theme and a peaceful conclusion that raises the listener's sense upward as if Beethoven sought to remove all earthly constraints. It is an ending that Andras Schiff, the famed pianist and teacher, believes was

Beethoven's way, after a life of great difficulties, to express his gratitude for being alive and giving his gift of great music to all mankind.

Llewellyn Sanchez-Werner, piano October 21, 2018

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Trio in B-flat major for Clarinet, Cello, and Piano, Op. 11

When 27-year old Beethoven composed this trio for the clarinetist Joseph Bähr, the mix of clarinet, cello and piano was most unusual. (Beethoven later published a version for violin, not clarinet.). At that time, a popular tune "Pria ch'io l'impegno" ("Before I work, I better eat something…"), from the comic opera *L'Amor Marinaro* by Viennese Joseph Weigl, was sung everywhere; Bähr wanted it to be incorporated in the trio. Beethoven acquiesced and the melody became the source of nine variations in the trio's final movement, while also providing the trio with the nickname "Gassenhauer" ("A German street song"). Beethoven already had made himself well-known as a virtuoso pianist and there is no mistaking what instrument is in charge in the trio. In contrast to a contemplative Bax in the Elegiac Trio, here is a German flaunting his pianistic talents in a jolly manner, with only a slight awareness at the time of the silent world he would ultimately enter.

After a perky first movement, and a dreamy, lyrical second, comes the reason why this trio is so popular: a final movement in which, as one commentator notes, "Beethoven dismembers Weigl's ditty and reconstructs it nine different ways." Though in the second variation, Beethoven gives the cello and clarinet an unaccompanied stroll, just keep your attention on the piano throughout and recognize Beethoven's cleverness. With rocking rhythms, trills, and flourishes up and down the piano, it's a tour-de-force. ***America's Dream Chamber Artists May 17, 2008***

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) 32 Variations on an Original Theme in C Minor

Beethoven loved the "variation" form and wrote some twenty different compositions of that type. His first ventures in the form took known melodies (such as Mozart's "Se vuol balare" from *Marriage of Figaro*) upon which to work his wondrous ways. In 1806, he composed these thirty-two variations on his own theme, a tune some seventeen notes long. Now thirty-two variations with a playing time of about ten minutes, suggests rather abbreviated pianistic thoughts. Each variation, except the final one, is only eight measures long. One suspects that Beethoven truly was trying to find out how clever he could be in multiple variations. Often the theme is masked in a plethora of notes, and only hinted at, but he returns it in the right hand several times to remind the listener what set the variation wheel in motion.

Anne-Marie McDermott, piano November 21, 1999

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) Violin Sonata, Op. 12, No. 1 in D major

Did you know that Beethoven was a very good string player as well as being an exceptional pianist? His father, a singer in the employ of the Elector of Bonn, Germany, where the family lived, was his first teacher both for piano and violin, so young Ludwig knew both instruments from an early age. In his late teens, Beethoven gained money by playing the viola in the Elector's court orchestra.

In Vienna, it was the musical age of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Franz Josef Haydn. Maximillian Franz, the Elector of Bonn, and brother of the Hapsburg Emperor Joseph II, had great love for music and recognized Beethoven's talent, so in 1787 he sent him to live in Vienna and study with Mozart, but it was a time cut short by the illness of Beethoven's mother and his return to Bonn. When he was able to return to Vienna years later, Mozart was dead. However, two composers then reigned supreme in the Hapsburg capital —Haydn and Antonio Salieri, the court composer to the Hapsburg emperor--- and Beethoven studied with both. (The play

Amadeus, followed by the movie, actually had the effect of diminishing the true importance of Salieri as both a composer and teacher in his time by making him seem so inferior to Mozart.)

Beethoven's intimate knowledge of both piano and violin would lead to his composing ten violin sonatas over some 14 years, with the first three violin sonatas, Opus 12, published in 1799. As traditional for the classical era of music, they are noted as "for the pianoforte and a violin." But Beethoven did not view the violin as subservient to the piano. Starting with his very first sonata, he began to provide equal partnership for piano and violin. In fact, the very first measures of the sonata you will hear today are a bold ascending theme played in unison, as if to say "I believe in equality." The first movement provides energetic "gives-and-takes." The "share-and-share-alike" concept is strongest in the "theme and variations" second movement. In this movement, the theme is introduced by both the piano and violin, then the first variation finds the piano in charge, while the violin is predominant in the second variation. The third variation is in minor key, leading to the final variation back in the major and jointly bringing the movement to a serene close. In the final movement, a rondo, the piano leads off with one of the composer's most "jolly" themes, then taken over by the violin and given masterful changes as piano and violin provide an abundance of good cheer to a punctuated conclusion. By the way, the three sonatas of Opus 12 were dedicated to Antonio Salieri.

Andrew Armstrong, piano, Tessa Lark, violin, Raman Ramakrishman, cello. Sept. 15, 2019