GOING BEHIND THE NOTES: EXPLORING THE GREAT PIANO COMPOSERS
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BEETHOVEN: IDEALIST, CONSOLER AND LIBERATOR

Dr. George Fee
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Performance: Adagio cantabile from Sonata in C Minor, Op. 13

The Man Beethoven (1770-1827)
Life in Vienna
Beethoven's Ideals
Beethoven's Personal Philosophy
Beethoven's Music and His Era

Performance: Sonata in A-flat Major, Op. 26
- Andante con Variazioni
- Allegro molto
- Maestoso andante: Marcia funebre sulla morte d'un eroe
- Allegro

10 Minute Break

Performing Beethoven's Music
Beethoven's Later Life and Later Works

Performance: Sonata in A-flat Major, Op. 110
- Moderato cantabile molto espressivo
- Allegro molto
- Adagio ma non troppo—Fuga: Allegro ma non troppo

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GENERAL READING

*Dubal, David. The Art of the Piano: Its Performers, Literature, and Recordings, 3rd edition. Amadeus Press, 2004,1989.
Schonberg, Harold. The Great Pianists, revised and updated. Simon and Schuster, 1987, 1963.
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BEETHOVEN LISTENING

32 Piano Sonatas-most famous: Op. 10, No. 3, Op. 13, Op. 27 #2, Op. 31, #'s 2&3,
Op. 53, 57, 81a, 109, 110, 111
7 Piano Trios--most famous: Op. 70, No. 1, Op. 97
16 String Quartets--most famous: Op. 59, Nos. 1-3, Op. 131
5 Piano Concerti
9 Symphonies

BEETHOVEN: IDEALIST, CONSOLER, AND LIBERATOR

PERFORM: Adagio cantabile from Sonata in C Minor, Op. 13

To Beethoven, life and music were profoundly serious. His music makes demands on us. However, his music has the potential to yield profound and uplifting results. I believe that If we put forth the effort, Beethoven's music can make a significant difference in our lives.

The Man Beethoven

The image of Beethoven is so often one of an angry, tempestuous man, being rude to people, and shaking his fist at the world. This side of Beethoven cannot be denied. However, there are so many other sides to him.

Beethoven was quite short, about 5'4'', with broad shoulders, a large head, a wide chin, a round nose, and a short neck. He had a dark complexion, which caused people in his childhood to call him "The Spaniard." His face was noticeably pock-marked, although not nearly as much as Haydn's and Mozart's. He had coal-black hair, and very bushy eyebrows. His hands were overgrown with hair and his fingers were short, thick, and especially wide at the ends. His eyes were noted for their animation and expressivity, and always seemed to reflect his inner feelings.

He was famous for his awkward and clumsy physical movements. In Vienna, where everyone danced, Beethoven couldn't. In his earlier years, he was thin, dressed stylishly, and wore his hair rather short. In his later years, he was frequently unshaven, and he let his gray hair grow wildly. During these years, he could be seen trudging around Vienna looking like a homeless person, with the same ridiculously long overcoat hanging down to his ankles. He bent slightly forward when he walked, and was frequently humming music to himself, and gesticulating wildly. When he would take walks in the country, sometimes the oxen and other animals were frightened away by his eccentric gesturing.

People found Beethoven very intriguing. He seemed at least a little odd to virtually everyone. He was extremely hypersensitive to any slight and imagined many which had never been intended. Even people obviously trying to help him were misunderstood and subjected to harsh criticism. He frequently tended to be irrational and stubborn, and could never be reasoned with, even when the facts did not in the least support him. Later in life, he clearly had difficulty separating fantasy from reality.

While naively trusting in many ways, Beethoven could also be highly suspicious, a trait which, not surprisingly, became magnified with increasing age and deafness. Though very reserved with strangers, with friends Beethoven could be extremely lively, comical, witty, and even mischievous. He was famous for his loud, raucous laugh, which many found to be unpleasant.

Beneath his rough, unpolished exterior, friends and many others could perceive the genuinely well-intentioned human being who never evidenced any pretenses. Goethe described Beethoven as "an utterly untamed personality, and at the same time, the most sincere artist I have ever met." Antonie Brentano wrote of "his soft heart, his glowing soul" and summarized Beethoven as "natural, simple, and wise, with pure intentions." I suppose some might dismiss Toni Brentano as being an unobjective source, since she is likely to have been the only woman who ever returned Beethoven's love. But Toni Brentano's description of Beethoven was echoed by many others who frequently wrote of Beethoven's

"truly child-like amiability," "his child-like naivete," and above all, his sincerity. The poet Grillparzer wrote:

> "For all his odd ways, which often bordered on being offensive, there was something so inexpressibly touching and noble in him that one could not but esteem him and feel drawn to him."

Despite his great sociability with friends, and his deep desire to connect with other human beings, a dominant trait of Beethoven's personality was his fundamental inwardness. His homelife growing up was miserable. Neighbors all commented on his being neglected and always dirty. It is not surprising that he was lonely, withdrawn, and always serious. He seemed to be happy only when he could be alone. It was a totally dysfunctional home, with his alcoholic father often needing to be brought home from the police station by the young Ludwig. Beethoven was never close to his mother, who apparently was never known to smile, and spent her life berating the institution of marriage due to her own dismal experience. It did not help matters that her Flemish father-in-law was living in the home and berating her, as well as his son. Not surprisingly, there was no religion in the home.

Playing music was Beethoven's escape, as it has been for so many people who have been deeply drawn to it. He was incessantly at the piano. Oddly enough, despite his father being a professional musician, Beethoven received little encouragement in his musical growth. His father seemed threatened by his son's talent, and even discouraged improvisation, which in those days was a prerequisite for every skilled musician. What a far cry from the Mozart household, where everything, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, was focused on facilitating the child's musical and personal development.

Seriousness and inwardness would remain throughout Beethoven's life. Goethe wrote, "Never before have I seen an artist with more power of concentration, more energy or more inwardness." Beethoven's philosophy for his entire life seemed to be described by his statement, "There is no happiness in the outer world. You must create it in yourself."

One wonders how Beethoven was able to achieve what he did. He did not have the natural aptitude of a Mozart and was not in the least a prodigy. By the age of 25 he had composed few significant works, and actually relatively few works at all. Mozart, by that same age, had composed 60% of his eventual output, and Schubert by age 25 had composed nearly 80% of the works he would ever write. Beethoven at age 25 had basically produced only some songs, several piano sonatas, a couple piano trios, and two piano concerti. His first set of string quartets and his first symphony would not be written until he was 30—the same age Schubert was when he had only one year left to live.

In all his schooling, Beethoven was a poor student, and to the end of his life could not do any arithmetic other than to add, and that, not easily or accurately. He was an atrocious speller and wrote with consistently terrible grammar. Even when doing his musical counterpoint exercises in his early 20's, his answers were filled with errors.

Throughout his entire life, Beethoven was afflicted with continuous digestive problems, including chronic diarrhea. This undoubtedly explains some of his irritability. We all know of his deafness, the first symptoms of which appeared at age 26, and which by age 32 was significant.

Life in Vienna

Beethoven left his home in Bonn, Germany, and settled in Vienna in 1792, when he was 22. Mozart had died just one year before. Vienna at the time was a city of 220,000 people, about the size of Grand Rapids MI today. Paris was twice as large, and London 4 times as large. For 225 years, Vienna had been the seat of the Holy Roman Empire, which as Voltaire said, was neither holy, Roman, or the empire it once was. It was an elegant city, although pedestrians suffered from much blowing dust, and an overabundance of some 4000 carriages and wagons. Its image was one of leisure and decadence, with its universal passion for dancing, its abundance of theater, its ubiquitous gambling casinos, and its rampant prostitution. The penchant for music was equal to the passion for dancing. Aristocrats and the rising middle class not only supported music, but also practiced and performed music in their own homes. Even royalty made time in their busy schedules to practice and play music themselves. (I definitely believe our leaders today would be better people if they had an understanding and love of classical music.)

Beethoven quickly established himself as the reigning virtuoso pianist in Vienna. Like Mozart, he played in the palaces of the aristocrats, and his playing made a truly profound impression on everyone. People had been used to hearing a sweet, delicate approach to the piano. Now they were confronted- and confounded- by an original, bold playing which no one had ever seen or heard before. The fast pieces were explosive and very fast—too much so for some listeners who criticized his playing for being excessively rough and wild. The slow pieces were deeply soulful and uniquely personal. Everyone was profoundly moved by the impact of this new arrival from Bonn. Eyewitness accounts reported that "he knew how to produce such an effect upon every hearer that frequently not an eye remained dry, while many would break out into loud sobs."

Much of what Beethoven was playing were his own improvisations, and it was his playing which brought him fame. He was viewed only as a student of composition since he had come to Vienna ostensibly to study with Haydn. But as a pianist, he enjoyed success after success, and he truly did conquer Vienna.

Since Beethoven had so much contact with the aristocracy, it was not surprising that he received some patronage as a result. However, he still needed to plan on obtaining a court musical position. No one but Mozart had ever tried to succeed as a free-lance musician, and it would have been a very risky thing for Beethoven to plan on doing so permanently. He did manage to survive adequately for a period of years from patron stipends. However, by his 40's, his financial situation had become dire. Massive inflation caused by the Napoleonic Wars, huge currency devaluations, and the bankruptcy and death of his patrons had vastly depleted his income. (It has been estimated that inflation rose 2000-3000% in the 35 years between his arrival and death in Vienna.)

Fortunately, Beethoven lived extremely spartanly. He never received significant income from the publication of his compositions and especially during his last 16 years, he experienced a continuous, never interrupted financial nightmare.

Beethoven's daily habit was to arise at 5 or 6 a.m., compose at his desk, and eat his big meal of the day in the early afternoon. At home, he tended to eat salami and cheese. When dining out his favorite foods were macaroni with lots of cheese on top, or a simple stew. He enjoyed cheap wine with his meals, but never drank excessively. He adored coffee, and made it himself, always counting out the same 60 beans per cup. He would take long walks in the afternoon. At supper time, he would

frequently go to a coffeehouse to read the newspapers or to meet a few friends. The rest of the evening would usually be spent composing. Beethoven was famous for always carrying his sketchbook and a heavy, think pencil, which did not easily break. He would jot down ideas that came to him wherever he was. This was a very different approach from that of Mozart who kept ideas in his head and would only write them down later.

Beethoven was infamous for constantly changing his residences, living in 71 different living quarters during his 35 years in Vienna! Almost every summer, like many Viennese, he would escape the heat in the city and retreat to one of the higher altitude rural suburbs. It is a deeply moving experience to visit some of those residences in Vienna and walk where he walked.

Beethoven's Ideals

The Enlightenment formed the starting point for Beethoven's ideals. The Enlightenment developed after the horrific effects of the 30 Years War, when 1/3 of the population of Europe had been killed or died, and the social order had disintegrated. After the hyper-emotionalism of the Baroque, people were ready to seek and trust Reason to be the ultimate authority, and to look to science for answers. A fresh optimism now lifted the aspiration of people. Man's knowledge was going to lead the way to a better world, and enlightened, benevolent rulers were expected to institute reforms to transform society. The Church would still have a role to play, but the importance of dogma would be reduced. God would still have a place as the reasonable and benevolent creator of the universe but would not be looked to for every answer.

Concurrent with Enlightenment thought were the aesthetics of Classicism. Classicism is a state of balance—a balance between emotion and reason, and between inner feeling and outward form. Order and freedom exist side by side.

A "noble simplicity and calm grandeur" was highly valued. This term was created by the archaeologist and art historian, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, in 1764, to describe the architecture of ancient Greece which, combined with the concept of "naturalness," created an ideal for all the arts.

Bonn, a pleasant, peaceful town of 10,000 people located on the Rhine River, where Beethoven grew up, was a major center of Enlightenment thought. The importance of a mentor should never be overlooked. (I am in music largely because of the piano teacher whom I had from the age of 6 to 18, who influenced my life in so many profound ways.) While Beethoven had no role models at home, he was blessed in many ways to have as his mentor, Christian Gottlob Neefe, whose influence cannot be overestimated. Neefe was the court organist and the only music teacher Beethoven would have from age 11 to 22. However, Beethoven absorbed far more than just music from Neefe. Neefe, aged 33 when Beethoven began studying with him, was a virtuous, upstanding man, and was a leader in the Order of the Illuminati, which was closely related to Freemasonry.

Freemasonry was a crucial adjunct of 18th century Enlightenment ideals and had spread rapidly across Europe. Though not a religion, it provided transcendental aspirations, moral values to live by, and a vision and ideal of how society should harmoniously function. Truth, Virtue, Universal Brotherhood and Beauty epitomized the movement.

Beethoven attended some university courses in philosophy and hung out at gatherings of intellectuals where Enlightenment ideals were discussed. He was also fortunate to become the piano

teacher of the children of a wealthy family, and the widowed mother encouraged Beethoven to spend time at her home, which was famous for readings and discussions of poetry and the classics.

Inspired by these models, Beethoven formed a habit he would maintain for the rest of his life—reading widely in many philosophical and literary areas. He wrote:

> "I have not the slightest pretension to what is properly called erudition. Yet from my childhood I have striven to understand what the better and wiser people of every age were driving at in their works."

Beethoven is not known to have joined the Order of the Illuminati, or the Masons. (Beethoven was never a joiner of anything.) But it is a credit to Beethoven that he was so drawn to high ideals, took them to heart, and aimed to live by them for the rest of his life. As he wrote at age 37, "Never, never will you find me dishonorable. Since my childhood I have learnt to love virtue—and everything beautiful and good."

Some of the high ideals which Beethoven held dear included service to humanity and brotherhood. Near the end of his life he wrote, "From my earliest childhood my zeal to serve our poor suffering humanity in any way whatsoever by means of my art has made no compromise with any lower motive." Related to his ideals regarding humanity and brotherhood, was his life-long intense love of liberty and freedom.

Haydn's disparaging crack about Beethoven being an "atheist" was not at all theologically correct and was actually meant with reference to Beethoven's frequent boorish modes of behavior. Beethoven was absolutely never an atheist. He described his religious obligations as follows:

> "God . . . sees into my innermost heart and knows that as a man I perform most conscientiously and on all occasions the duties which Humanity, God and Nature enjoin upon me."

Humanity, God, and Nature truly do summarize Beethoven's religious convictions. He had a disdain for religious dogma, and never attended Mass or confession. But he had great awe of the Almighty, as he termed God, and his spiritual searching included exploring Eastern philosophy and religions.

Nature was an enormous part of Beethoven's spiritual aspirations. His worship of Nature was as if it were a religion, having this in common with nearly all the so-called Romantic poets of his time, and many composers after his time. He wrote: "No one can love the country as much as I do. . . .It seems as if in the country every tree said to me 'Holy! Holy!'—who can give complete expression to the ecstasy of the woods?"

Beethoven's Personal Philosophy

What factors allowed Beethoven to achieve what he did?

--For one thing, persistence and determination, the same qualities which are prerequisites to success in anything in life. He never gave up. There were periods when he felt unable to compose, and sometimes these were long periods. "But it always comes back sooner or later," he said.

--He had a sense of mission and fervently believed in the power of his music to change the world.

--He had ambition and believed in himself. Having faith in his own ability, he was never looking to others for guidance, and he always followed his own path.

--He had absolute, total dedication to his art, sacrificing and subordinating everything to his work. When in his early 20's, and taking some instruction from Haydn, Haydn said: "In hundreds of situations I have always found that he is prepared to sacrifice everything for his art."

--Beethoven had such strong will power and indomitable spirit, and he matched it with continuous, persistent hard work, taking every aspect deeply seriously. His attitude was exemplified when the pianist Ignaz Moscheles had completed making a piano reduction of Beethoven's opera," Fidelio", and at the end wrote "Finished, with God's help." After Beethoven saw that, he wrote underneath, "Man, help thyself."

A significant portion of Beethoven's philosophy of life evolved from coping with his hearing loss. The first symptoms appeared when he was 26, with humming and buzzing, and the loss of the ability to hear high notes. The cause has never been determined, although lead poisoning has more plausibility than many other theories which have been clearly disproven.

The situation came to a crisis in 1802, when he was 32. At his summer residence in the Vienna suburb of Heiligenstadt, he wrote a letter to his brothers. This is the most significant document dealing with Beethoven, and perhaps the most meaningful personal document in the history of western music. One must read it in its entirety to understand Beethoven.

He begins by revealing his deafness, and the despair it has caused him. He explains that the deafness is what has compelled him to withdraw from society. He shares that he would have ended his life were it not for his art: "It was only my art which held me back. Ah, it seemed to me impossible to leave the world until I had brought forth all that I felt was within me." He also credits his attachment to virtue as having sustained him and having kept him from suicide. The letter was never mailed, but instead kept by Beethoven for the rest of his life. It obviously marked a turning point, for in the next 8 years there was hardly ever a reference to his deafness.

He had wrestled with his deafness in the years preceding the summer of 1802, as revealed in his letters: "I will bid defiance to my fate." "I am resolved to overcome all this," "I will seize Fate by the throat: it shall certainly not bend and crush me completely." After the Heiligenstadt Testament, he seemed to be able to accept his deafness, and emerged to continuously create many of his most famous works during the next 10 years. Each work was unique and a step forward in his development and growth. Many tended to be heroic, and are typified by the Heroic Symphony, the "Eroica." In fact, Beethoven at this time made heroic triumph almost the dominant quality in his music. Baroque and Classic music had certainly included much tragedy. But the concept of music consistently comprising a continuous struggle, with the protagonist emerging triumphant over adversity was something new that Beethoven brought to music. He was demonstrating it in his own life, and he now portrayed it in his music.

This so-called Heroic period included the composition of Beethoven's only opera, "Fidelio." The composition of this opera illustrated so much of what made Beethoven, Beethoven. Usually an opera composer looks for a libretto which lends itself to pragmatic success in the theater. That seemed to never occur to Beethoven. Instead, for him, it had to be a morally elevated subject and he searched for

the ideal subject and libretto for years. "Fidelio," originally titled "Leonora," after the heroine, has many deficiencies from the viewpoint of standard effective operatic theater. But a plot with the themes of good in a benevolent universe triumphing over evil and injustice, light overcoming darkness, a supremely devoted wife courageously willing to risk all, including potentially her life, to rescue her husband who was a political prisoner, all moved Beethoven greatly. His purpose was not to write a successful opera. His purpose was to compose a serious, powerful, noble work of art, which would liberate and uplift the human spirit.

The result is not operatic theater which experienced and innate masters of the theater, such as Mozart, Verdi, or Puccini, would compose. But "Fidelio's" great moments are among the most riveting, elevating, and memorable moments one can experience in the opera house.

Typically for Beethoven, he expended a huge amount of effort composing "Fidelio." Writing it initially, revising it three times, and supplying four different overtures for it, took many years. Late in life, he said, "Of all my children, this was born in the greatest labor, and caused me the most sorrow. And for that reason, it is the child most dear to me." I believe if one does not know Fidelio, one does not know Beethoven.

Beethoven's Music and His Era

Beethoven's music is unthinkable without the influence of the Enlightenment and Classicism, which was brought to its musical high point by Haydn and Mozart. Beethoven was clearly influenced by their compositions, as well as by Gluck's serious, monumental, almost austere, uncluttered music. If one does not know Gluck's operas, one is missing profoundly moving music, and music which was extremely influential on Mozart and Beethoven. J. S. Bach's music was another influence on Beethoven, and the influence of Handel was much larger than many realize. Beethoven proclaimed Handel to be "the greatest composer that ever lived" and credited him with "achieving vast effects with simple means." "Achieving vast effects with simple means" would become an integral quality of Beethoven's own music as well.

Beethoven's music is a product of a noble, almost austere idealism. Like his personality, it contains a simple, genuine, heart-felt sincerity, with never a hint of anything contrived or calculated. It is never in the least fancy or merely pretty. One has the impression that every note is of the utmost importance, and that not even a single note was written casually or is meant to be performed casually. One looks in vain for any blatantly sensual qualities in his music.

Love is not a word many people associate with Beethoven, because we tend to associate love in music with romantic expressions of love, more suited to the music and personalities of composers like Liszt or Schumann. But Beethoven's music transcends romantic love and is based on a love of mankind and a love of the Good. He was the first composer to consistently write for posterity. He wrote for us today, and for those who will come after us. As he wrote on the score of his Missa Solemnis "From the heart—may it in turn go to the heart."

Beethoven's era was not the Age of Elegance nor yet the Romantic Era. It was the Age of Revolution and the Age of Napoleon, the period between the Classic and Romantic Eras. The French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars spanned the years from when Beethoven was 19 until he was 45. His ideals- liberty, equality, and brotherhood- had much in common with the French Revolution's professed ideals. His music also had much in common with the earnest, ethical character of the music of

revolutionary France. In fact, if one wants a visual artist to study to gain insight into Beethoven's music, I believe that artist and kindred spirit of Beethoven would be the French Neo-classicist painter Jacques-Louis David, who is associated with the revolutionary period in France.

While not being "Romantic," Beethoven's music was representative of the emotions and changes taking place in this "Age of Revolution." More personal human emotion began to be expressed in all the arts. In Beethoven's case his powerful, intense emotions resulted in music which always seems larger than life. His musical humor is usually not the subtle, controlled wit of the 18th century which evidenced the "smile of Reason." It is not the sophisticated, amusing, teasing joking of Haydn. It is raucous, boisterous, and often coarse and earthy, just as Beethoven was in his daily life. His rugged, pungent syncopations and sforzandos figuratively jab us in the ribs.

Exuberant, unbridled energy is an obvious quality in Beethoven's music. This can be especially seen in his Scherzo movements. The word Scherzo means "joke" and Beethoven totally transformed the Scherzo from Haydn's witty examples of the genre. Beethoven's Scherzi would frequently be wild, driving and even daemonic.

Haydn's and Mozart's music is full of joy and gaiety and makes us smile. When Beethoven expresses joy his music is ecstatic, unrestrained, and bursts its bounds. When his music unexpectedly surprises us, it doesn't merely surprise us. It astounds us! It astonishes us!

Dynamic contrasts and wide extremes of dynamics became very frequent. A trademark was that he would build and build and build, and then suddenly drop to a very low dynamic level.

The depth of intensity in Beethoven's slow movements was another step toward the future.

The length and scope of Beethoven's individual movements greatly surpassed that of his predecessors and contemporaries.

Beethoven does not come near to going down in history as the greatest melodist, harmonist, or contrapuntist. So, what is it that makes Beethoven's music so powerful?

Partly it is that his music is so incredibly tightly constructed with never an unessential or superfluous note. He is above all a builder, an architect. In each of his pieces, he took the most basic, simple elements and materials of music and then developed them to their utmost possibilities. His music is never static, stagnant, or meandering. It always drives forward to its goals and destinations.

However, there is more to the answer to this important question of "Why Beethoven?". As he did so often, it was Leonard Bernstein who articulated the answer more perceptively than anyone. He credited Beethoven's "inexplicable ability to know what the next note has to be."

Bernstein termed it "the principle of inevitability – when you get the feeling that whatever note succeeds the last is the only possible note that can rightly happen at that instant." Bernstein continues: "Imagine a whole lifetime of the struggle…. always probing and rejecting. This somehow is the key to the mystery of a great artist: that for reasons unknown to him or to anyone else, he will give away his energies and his life just to make sure that one note follows another inevitably. It seems rather an odd way to spend one's life. But it isn't so odd when we think that the composer, by doing this, leaves us at

the finish with the feeling that something is right in the world, something that follows its own laws consistently, something we can trust, that will never let us down."

Bernstein's interviewer responded: "But that is almost a definition of God."

Bernstein replied, in that unforgettable, inimitable voice, "I meant it to be."

You can see Beethoven's struggles in his sketch for his 5th Symphony reproduced on your handout.

Beethoven pioneered the idea of a composer having a mission to change society, writing for posterity, and incorporating more of one's unique, individual personality and state of mind into what had previously been a shared musical language. However, his music remained rooted in the language he inherited, and did not follow the directions in which other composers were starting to go. Instead, he continued to develop his own language and message to new heights and depths, as if the rest of the musical world did not exist.

I dispute the notion of considering Beethoven's music to be in the "romantic" category. His music, as well as Schubert's, should be seen as primarily classical. In neither case does the music lend itself to extensive tempo fluctuation, and in their works the balance and structure of so-called "classic" music is never abandoned.

But Beethoven did open the door for the "romantic" composers to walk through. There would be few composers after Beethoven who would not view his music as a formative influence on their own music, and it is hard to imagine much 19th century music without Beethoven's music having been written.

Beethoven's emotional attitudes and outlook were the areas in which he was closer to the Romantics, rather than his music. This may seem merely an academic or semantic issue. But it is of enormous importance when one is evolving an interpretation of a work by Beethoven.

Piano Sonata in A-flat Major, Op. 26

Elements of struggle form the essence of Beethoven's life and his music. However, they are well-known and are most evident in his symphonies, which were a genre intended for the public. Piano sonatas were private works in the 18th century, and very frequently, they reveal the tender side of Beethoven. This side of him receives far too little attention, and rather than include a boisterous piano work of Beethoven, I have selected two sonatas which exemplify his gentler side. This sensitive aspect was partly a result of his feeling so much pain and hurt in his life. Significantly, he converted that pain into a consoling and healing force. Several times he went to the homes of friends when they were grieving or ill. He would enter silently, seat himself at the piano, and play to them. Upon finishing, without saying a word, he would depart. Consolation was clearly a conscious purpose in his compositions and in his playing.

The two sonatas I have selected to perform today originate from two different periods in Beethoven's life, separated by 20 years. Both are in the Key of A-flat Major—a key representative of warmth and tenderness to musicians in the 18th century.

The Sonata, op. 26, is a departure from the usual sonata structure in many respects. It almost seems like a suite of four character pieces. At this period of his life, 1800-1801, Beethoven was experimenting with formal structures. It opens with a theme, followed by five variations. Beethoven loved writing variations and wrote 60 sets of variations or variation movements in his lifetime. This is Beethoven's only use of a theme and variations as a first movement in his 32 Piano Sonatas. The 3rd variation is especially noteworthy in that its mood and A-flat Minor tonality prefigure the third movement.

Beethoven titled the third movement: "Funeral March on the Death of a Hero." Heroic qualities were certainly not new to music. French Revolution philosophy believed music should serve a noble, ethical, and moral function, and had recently established heroism to be a priority in music. This resulted in the composition of many funeral marches. The Napoleonic Wars also stimulated martial qualities to be integrated into the music of the time. The immediate inspiration for the op. 26 Funeral March was Beethoven's having attended an opera which contained a Funeral March. Beethoven immediately stated: "I must compose such." Ten years before, his first serious and profound work was his "Funeral Cantata on the Death of Joseph II."

It is interesting that Chopin's Funeral March movement in his B-flat Minor Piano Sonata contains a consoling Trio section which later commentators would call the "widow's lament." The Trio section of Beethoven's Funeral March is austerely ceremonial with its imitation of brass instruments and muffled drums. It is significant that Beethoven's Funeral March movement ends in the consoling major key, whereas Chopin's remains in the dark minor.

Chopin would follow his Funeral March movement with an enigmatic, ghostly, terrifying Finale, which ends with a desperate cry of pain. Beethoven's Finale is primarily a joyous movement which releases the tension which had built up in the Funeral March.

It is interesting that op. 26 is the only Sonata of Beethoven which Chopin liked. It is also worthy of note that at Beethoven's own funeral procession, it was not the Funeral March from the Eroica Symphony which was played in an arrangement for military band. It was this movement.

After this 20-minute sonata, we will take our break.

You will find the entire theme of the first movement on your handout as Ex.1. Some of you may wish to refer to it as you hear it being varied in the 5 variations which comprise the first movement.

PERFORM: Sonata in A-Flat Major, Op. 26

10 MINUTE BREAK

Performing Beethoven's Music

It is an awesome responsibility to perform Beethoven's works. I do not use that word, awesome, in the trivial manner for which it is over-used today. What is the true meaning of the word? The Dictionary tells us, "respectful or reverential fear, inspired by what is grand or sublime."

The Sublime was a very important concept in the 18th century. Its primary usage was to refer to something which could not be controlled, and therefore could be dangerous and induce fear. An

example might be the Alps, which actually were what stimulated many philosophers to ponder the concept of the Sublime, and to wonder how something so full of grandeur could provoke both horror and pleasure. The Sublime referred to qualities which were more powerful than, and which were not synonymous with, Beauty. Beauty was viewed only as "a pleasurable experience."

Edmund Burke, who in 1756, wrote an entire treatise on the Sublime, believed the emotion which the Sublime most aroused was astonishment, along with admiration, reverence, and respect. He cited the causes of these feelings to be primarily terror, as well as obscurity, power, infinity, and magnitude. It is significant that many of the qualities philosophers associated with reacting to the Sublime were the same as those from religious experiences, with both stemming from being conscious of something greater than oneself.

Being conscious of something spiritual greater than oneself-isn't that what many people are not fortunate enough to be conscious of in today's world? To me, it is what in large part, brings meaning to life, and classical music can be one means to achieve this.

This concept is very important when playing Beethoven's music. The player becomes like a conveyor of a sacred text. One must be sensitive to, and reflect, the content of the text. But one should not overtly impose him or herself on the message. To do so is to cheapen the message, such as we see happening too often today in the frequent appalling distortion in the singing of the National Anthem. Yet one cannot just let the music speak for itself, which to an extent one aims to do when playing Bach and Mozart. Beethoven is clearly the musical equivalent of Michelangelo, just as Mozart is the musical twin of Raphael. Both Beethoven's and Michelangelo's art is expressed in bold gestures, and their works evidence a titanic struggle- in their creation, and frequently in their subject matter.

I do not believe there is a singer, pianist, or string player who has not lamented the awkwardness of Beethoven's music. The violinist who premiered the violin concerto complained to Beethoven about the awkwardness of the writing, and Beethoven's response was: "Do you think I am thinking of your wretched fiddle when the spirit speaks to me?" The contralto who sang in the premiere of the 9th Symphony called Beethoven a "tyrant over the vocal organs," and was scolded by Beethoven when she asked him to rewrite portions of her part. (Mozart was only too happy to immediately write a new aria if a singer didn't like the one he had written. But not Beethoven!)

I have thought that the playing of Beethoven's music must be similar to climbing a mountain. Both activities require courage, mental and physical stamina, knowledge, and experience. Both furnish craggy experiences and are fraught with danger. One must find one's way through rugged interpretive and technical terrain when playing Beethoven. His music does not lie comfortably under the fingers and is not physically gratifying to play. Note perfection in live performance is almost impossible, and if one is overly intent on that aspect, the messages of the music can frequently suffer. Beethoven's own playing was not always clean. Eyewitnesses said he "let many a note fall under the table," and described his playing as "unpolished, but always full of spirit." Beethoven's student Czerny concurred when saying that Beethoven's playing was "not elegant."

When performing Beethoven's music the performer always feels that he or she is the Man in the Arena in the famous Theodore Roosevelt speech from 1910, "whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming."

It doesn't help the pianist that Beethoven's music was composed for pianos with much lighter actions than today's pianos. A piano of his earlier years took about 17 grams of weight to depress a key, whereas today about 55 grams in the bass and 48-50 grams in the treble are needed.

Selecting a tempo when performing a Beethoven work is a challenge. There is no doubt that Beethoven performed and intended his fast movements to be performed very briskly. I believe that Haydn and Mozart's faster movements are frequently and unjustifiably performed too quickly today. But fast tempi are very defendable in Beethoven's fast movements. If one seeks a safe course and selects tempi too much on the slower side for his fast movements, one may have compromised the Beethovenian energetic spirit of risk and daring. Caution, safety, comfort, and ponderousness have no place in Beethoven's music.

On the other hand, there are legitimate reasons for adopting tempi on the moderate side for Beethoven's faster movements. Tempo selection is a very subjective matter and is interdependent and intertwined with every other element of interpretation and performance. The number of beats occurring per minute is a meaningless figure when looked at in isolation. Two musicians can play a piece at the same number of beats per minute and one pianist can sound inevitably right and the other pianist very much too slow or too fast. So much depends on the individual piece and the totality of the performer's conception.

A performer is not obligated to reproduce the way the composer played, or even the speeds that a composer suggested. It is negligence and malpractice to go clearly contrary to the composer's vision. However, composers have usually been open to many varying interpretations of their works. Very frequently when they themselves have performed or recorded their own music the speeds which they adopted were vastly different from what they had specified in print. Brahms once yelled at someone "Idiot! Do you think I want to hear my music always played at the same speed?" It is well-known that Beethoven, like most composers, performed his own works very differently on different occasions.

Having spent decades examining and pondering the issue of tempi in Beethoven's music, I have come to perform many of Beethoven's faster pieces on the slower side rather than the faster. In most all music I place a high priority on allowing the music to sing. After all, the art of playing the piano consists in large part in making our instrument sing. Music must also breathe, and as Artur Schnabel wrote, "The space between the notes is where the artistry lies."

Spaciousness complements greatness much more successfully than does hecticness or franticness. However, I do consciously aim to deliver the music in ways which avoid squareness, which is often the real impediment to a successful performance rather than merely a slower tempo. Music must always maintain a sense of direction, and direction is that elusive element of interpretation which is so often overlooked and underemphasized.

Many more details can be highlighted in the music when one adopts a tempo which allows the expressiveness of the details to be heard. Many of us have heard these pieces hundreds and hundreds of times. We yearn for performances which will reveal new insights and highlight the unique and special aspects in the music. We wish for magical moments which will move us deeply, and not one more hectic rendition.

What mattered to Beethoven when his or other people's music was being performed, was that the most significant notes and chords be given obvious emphasis by holding them longer than they are notated. He angrily opposed performance of his works by memory, which his student Czerny had done as a stunt. (No one else had played music for memory in those times.) Part of Beethoven's reasoning was that if one played from memory, the player was more likely to fail to give sufficient stress to the more important notes and chords.

For more on this subject of stressing the important notes in a piece, one can go to my wife and my website, www.dersnah-fee.com , where my 8-page essay organizes and shares advice from the extremely valuable 18th century treatises on musical performance. Much of this wisdom is highly relevant to the playing of Beethoven's music.

I justify my own adoption and endorsement of somewhat slower tempi for Beethoven's faster and also slower movements partially by the fact that, as mentioned above, our pianos today are radically different from Beethoven's day. Were I to play on Beethoven's pianos, my tempi would be faster.

It is well known that Beethoven played his slow movements slower than most people played slow movements in his day. Today most all pianists play them slower than he did. In general, what has happened over the centuries is that fast movements have tended to be played faster and faster, and slow movements have tended to be played slower and slower. The fact that our instruments sustain longer allows these slower tempi to be successful.

Beethoven, being an improviser, scoffed at pianists who over-practiced pieces and performed without spontaneity. He stated that:

> "The greatest pianoforte players were also the greatest composers; but how did they play? Not like the pianists of today who prance up and down the keyboard with passages which they have practiced--what does that mean? Nothing!"

However, while spontaneously feeling the drama and intensity of the music, one must keep a clear head when performing Beethoven's music. It is easy to overplay Beethoven's music, resulting in harsh tone, angularity, rushing and loss of control. It is always a challenge for a pianist to hear what is actually emerging from the instrument, as opposed to what one is feeling inside.

Facial expressions or mannerisms are out of place in music with the dignity of Beethoven's. Indeed, simplicity and dignity are qualities sometimes missing in the performance of Beethoven's music today. The intensity of his music is not an invitation to play percussively or make it a vehicle for personal exhibitionism of any sort. When Beethoven played, people said there was something "masterfully quiet and noble" in his expression. They especially remarked on his physical stillness when playing slow movements.

They also praised his unique legato, which was achieved by keeping his hands very close to the keys. He always sought a cantabile, singing style, believing the earlier style of playing epitomized by Mozart to be "choppy." Nuances were extremely important to Beethoven and he was very particular about them when he conducted. Pianists who cannot effectively interpret the poetry in Beethoven's slow movements have missed the heart and soul of Beethoven's music.

One should not indulge in excessive tempo fluctuation in Beethoven since that can destroy the structure. Yet in those soulful slow movements, one must let the music breathe, and have sufficient flexibility. Beethoven said of the slow movement of his op. 10, no. 3 piano sonata:

> "The pace of this rich movement must be changed fully ten times, though only so as to be perceptible to the most sensitive ear. The principal theme is always to be repeated in the tempo of its first statement: all the rest is subject to variation in the tempo, EACH PHRASE ACCORDING TO ITS OWN MEANING."

A unique feature when Beethoven played was his frequent use of allargando— which means an increase in volume combined with a slowing. I believe that this is today underemployed in playing Beethoven, as well as when playing the music of many other composers.

Despite the need for subtle tempo fluctuations in the slow movements, one must be incredibly careful to not sentimentalize or allow the rhythm to become flabby, especially in the small note values. Dotted 8^{th} notes followed by 16^{th} notes must be precise, and rests must be given their full values. Many places in Beethoven's music need as much rhythmic tightness as does Baroque music-for example, the opening Grave of the so-called "Pathetique Sonata." Many deficiencies in playing Beethoven, as well as in playing Haydn and Mozart's music, are rhythmic in nature.

One should not allow excessive pedal to intrude onto Beethoven's textures. There are enormous clarity issues when playing Beethoven's music since today's pianos have such booming basses, and Beethoven created rather thick textures which so frequently lie in the lower registers of the piano.

Despite all the challenges in playing Beethoven's music, undoubtedly like the mountain climber, a pianist can experience a sense of exhilaration. However, I rather envy the climber who is able to attain the summit of a mountain and have the satisfaction of surveying everything below. We performing musicians can never feel we have reached the summit of the mountains we climb. But it is a privilege to be on the Beethoven mountain, deriving deep meaning and satisfaction from its sublime, as well as very human, qualities.

These human qualities should never be overlooked when contemplating Beethoven and his music. He was not that different from any of us. He was looking to give love and to receive love. I often hear what sounds like anger in performances of Beethoven's music. I realize that it is usually unintentional. Nevertheless, if I had only one concept to ask performers to achieve, it would be to play with love in their hearts and ears —love for the composer, love for the music, love for the sound of the piano, love for the listener, and love for the highest ideals of beauty. Ultimately, I see the purpose of musical performance as being to transform and heal lives—our own and others'. No composer's music is more suited to do this than Beethoven's.

Beethoven's Later Life and Later Works

After 1812 or so, when Beethoven was 42, he fell into another major crisis, as he had 10 years previously. Earlier in life he had sometimes wondered if marriage could actually work out for him, and he had been drawn to a number of women. But they almost always were attached to other men, or not in the least interested in Beethoven. After having concluded that he would never marry, in 1812 Beethoven was apparently tempted to believe that perhaps he could. But after realizing that it really

could not work, he now knew for sure that he would be alone for the rest of his life. His sense of isolation was made even more intense by the fact that his hearing had greatly worsened over the previous ten years.

Beethoven was not at all totally deaf when he wrote the Heiligenstadt Testament in 1802. At that time, his hearing varied from day to day, and he was still capable of performing. But by the 18-teens, his deafness was total. Musical sounds were the last sounds to go, with the ability to hear speech having been lost first. Since Beethoven had been a serious, inward person his whole life, his deafness was not what turned him inward. But obviously, it enormously intensified his growing isolation from the world.

His health gradually deteriorated, with jaundice appearing initially, and then cirrhosis of the liver. His philosophy was by now: "Live only in your art" and" Music will help in my hour of need." In Beethoven's later years people frequently noted a feature characteristic of the deaf, where his eyes looked upward. It is visible in two famous drawings and paintings of Beethoven when he was aged 48 and 53 and was termed "the Upwards Look." One of these is reproduced on your program. Some people who saw him commented that his face represented a "feeling of sublimity and melancholy combined." The historian and critic Rellstab wrote: "I read sadness, suffering and kindness in his face—not a trace of harshness."

Beethoven had gone inwards, and he also had gone upwards. From this inner silent world of the last 15 years or so of Beethoven's life came some of the most unique, extraordinary music ever created. It explores where no composer had gone before. There are those who believe that Beethoven's late music is unique, not only in music, but in all the arts.

It is partly the musical qualities and musical development which are in evidence. For example, variation technics are expanded into a true spiritualization of the original. Counterpoint, including imitative writing and fugues, the most learned and complex of compositional technics, is used in the service of the deepest emotional expression. The common trill is transformed into a vehicle of struggle, of questioning, and into a spiritual vibration. At times, the music assumes an obvious language of song, while at other times the music resembles human speech.

In addition to musical growth and development, it is also a spiritual development which these late works reveal. This late music is no longer consciously glorifying the hero, as Beethoven's middle period music had done so triumphantly. It is now a more personal, confessional statement—not meant for a concert hall, but more as a diary. Beethoven is sharing his most intimate thoughts—his doubts and his fears, as well as his optimism and his faith. It is all there in these works. He had suffered all his life, and suffering is still expressed in his music—sometimes even more intensely than ever before. But there are also expressions of acceptance and resignation. Serenity is not what I perceive in this music—the struggle never ended for Beethoven. But he achieved other-worldly qualities and expression in these works.

There is no one philosophy which unites the late works. It is interesting that the last five piano sonatas all include different kinds of struggle, and different kinds of suffering. However, all five end with a sense of transcendency--and yet a different kind of transcendency in each one. The late string quartets pick up where the piano sonatas leave off and explore still more rarified vistas. Through his entire life it was always the quartets which were Beethoven's most autobiographical works, most reflecting what his thoughts and attitudes were at the time of their creation.

Beethoven kept composing and evolving right to the end of his life. This late music of Beethoven was far beyond the comprehension of his listeners. But actually very, very few people ever heard these late works in his lifetime. One must remember that piano sonatas in his time were considered to be private works. Only 2 of his 32 piano sonatas were performed in public during his lifetime, and one of these performances was in, of all places, Boston, Massachusetts. His string quartets, likewise, were only played at small gatherings of friends. But Beethoven at this point was not at all writing for his contemporaries. Even a decade and a half earlier, he had said of his Rasoumovsky quartets, "Oh, these are not for you, but for a later age."

No one can or ever will "understand" or "explain" these late Beethoven works. They defy explanation. They can only be experienced. Every listener can sense and be moved by their profound mystery and searching, their concentrated depth of feeling, their burning intensity, their tender consolation, and their cryptic contrasts of earthly simplicity and heavenly visions.

Conventional heroism is not what one associates with Beethoven's late works. But if one takes a deeper look at what a hero can be in a broader sense, I feel Beethoven, in his later works, shows himself to be one. I think of the words of Gutzon Borglum, the creator of Mt. Rushmore, in his address entitled "Winged Victory:"

> "I thought when I was young that victory must emerge whole and radiant from conflict . . .Now I know that victory is never whole or radiant. . . .Those who conquer are always crippled, always scarred! But still their wings are spread, and still their crippled feet stride on."

To me, that is Beethoven—and that also describes anyone, especially older people, who later in life may not see themselves as heroes, but who ARE, by virtue of continuing to strive. I believe that Goethe's words, spoken by the Angels at the end of Part I of "Faust," apply: "Whoever aspires unweariedly Is not beyond redeeming."

When one thinks of a hero, perhaps Michelangelo's youthful David comes first to mind. But just a few yards away in the Accademia in Florence, are 4 hunks of marble, called the Prisoners, created much later in Michelangelo's life. These are even more illustrative of what Michelangelo stood for. I am not in the least an art historian, but I have read that Michelangelo stated that he consciously worked to liberate the forms imprisoned in the marble. He saw his task as simply removing what was extraneous and revealing what was already there. These 4 prisoners are sometimes thought to represent the struggle of Man to free the spirit from matter, from the bonds of the physical weight of the marble. It is believed that Michelangelo may have left these 4 sculptures incomplete to represent the eternal struggle of human beings to free themselves from their material trappings.

I doubt that Beethoven knew Michelangelo's philosophy and I don't believe he ever saw any of Michelangelo's art in person. But great geniuses can travel on similar paths, even though in different fields. It is my own belief that Beethoven was a liberator, and that his music is illustrative of Michelangelo's art and philosophy. Beethoven's music contains only the essentials and it has the capacity to liberate us. It is significant that some of Beethoven's most inspired writing occurs in his opera "Fidelio," when the prisoners are allowed up out of the dark dungeon for air and light.

There is a 100-year-old biography of Beethoven subtitled "The Man Who Freed Music." That is a ridiculous, absurd title. Music did not need to be freed by Beethoven from anything. But Beethoven was a liberator. He didn't free music. But his music can help us to free ourselves from whatever prison in which we see ourselves.

Piano Sonata in A-flat Major, Op. 110

The Sonata in A-flat Major, op. 110, which concludes today's presentation is the next to the last of Beethoven's 32 Piano Sonatas. It was completed on Christmas Day, 1821, when Beethoven had just turned 51 and would live 5 more years. It is a prime example of the intimate and personal side of his late works. It is the only Beethoven piano sonata which bears no dedication. However, I find it significant that he may have intended at one time to dedicate it to Antonie Brentano, probably the person he felt closest to in his entire life. The emotional worlds this 19-minute sonata traverses are all-encompassing.

GO TO PIANO:

This sonata contains a very unique structure, most obviously in the fact that the movements are linked without any obvious break. The first movement, if we wish to call it a movement, is primarily a gentle, peaceful, tender soliloquy, expressing an ethereal, other-worldly tranquility. Yet at times that is expanded by an intense and heightened elation. The opening of the movement (Ex 2 on your handout) is marked "amiably" and seems as if Beethoven is searching and exploring various introspective thoughts in his own lonely, silent, private world.

Beethoven loved vivid contrasts and incongruities. The ruminative mood of the first movement is suddenly interrupted by a terse, Scherzo-like movement, which quotes two earthy Austrian folk songs—the one being entitled "Our cat had kittens" and the other, "I'm a bum, you're a bum, we're all bums."(They are marked onEx.3) In the middle of the movement, a contrasting section appears.

The 3rd movement is an incredibly unique structure, which suggests a dramatic narrative. A deeply-felt, probing, speech-like, Recitative(Ex.4) leads to an Arioso, a doleful, despairing Lament, which Beethoven labelled "Klagender Gesang," (Song of Sorrow) (Ex.5).This is not just sadness, but profound suffering, heart-breaking sorrow and despair, and true pain. The left hand has throbbing chords like heartbeats. Some 19th century, so-called "romantic" composers might have ended the piece after this section, wallowing in gloom. However, Beethoven answers the profound grief of this A-flat Minor song with a positive response-an affirmation of Faith and Hope. It emerges, first tentatively, but with increasing confidence, as a fugue- where multiple horizontal, melodic lines make up the texture, as opposed to a melody with chords supporting it. You can see this in Ex.6, where I have marked the entrance of each voice. It is worth noting that the fugue subject is derived from the skeletal outline of the opening melody of the entire sonata in Ex.2.Everything is interrelated in Beethoven's music.

Just when the listener senses that the fugue has provided the triumphant, climactic high point of the entire work, the bottom seems to fall out and the Song of Sorrow re-appears (Ex.7). However, this time it is even more tragic. It is the ultimate in suffering. It lies a half step lower, and the previous long-lined melody is now broken up into little sobbing utterances, representing a total hopelessness which Beethoven marked "Ermattat" (Exhausted). When it appears that the hopelessness is final, miraculously, the redemptive ,transformative , healing effect of G Major enters, and out of the total gloom, the fugue subject faintly enters, but this time turned upside down from the original subject.(Ex.8)

The music continues to come to life, gaining in confidence, and makes its way back to the fugue subject right-side up, and now confidently in the home key of A-flat Major. (Ex.9) Gradually the music is transformed from the fugal texture into warm homophony. The music becomes full of jubilation. It keeps gloriously and triumphantly soaring higher and higher, as if leaving the earth behind and reaching a state of infinite, transcendent bliss. I believe it to be one of the most glorious endings in the entire piano literature.

The Sonata, op. 110, illustrates, to me, Beethoven's life and message—the thoughtful, inward probing of the first movement, the attempt at earthy humor in the second movement, the searching and questioning of the speech-like section, the profound grief of the Song of Sorrow, the first failed attempt of the Fugue to overcome the sorrow, the return of an even more despairing sorrow, and, when all seems lost, the still small voice of the Fugue, which unfettered, gradually leads us ever onwards, and upwards, to the highest heights.

Despite all his suffering, Beethoven remained an optimist. His idealism and his music can inspire us, they can console us, and they can liberate us.

PERFORM: Sonata in A- flat Major, Op. 110