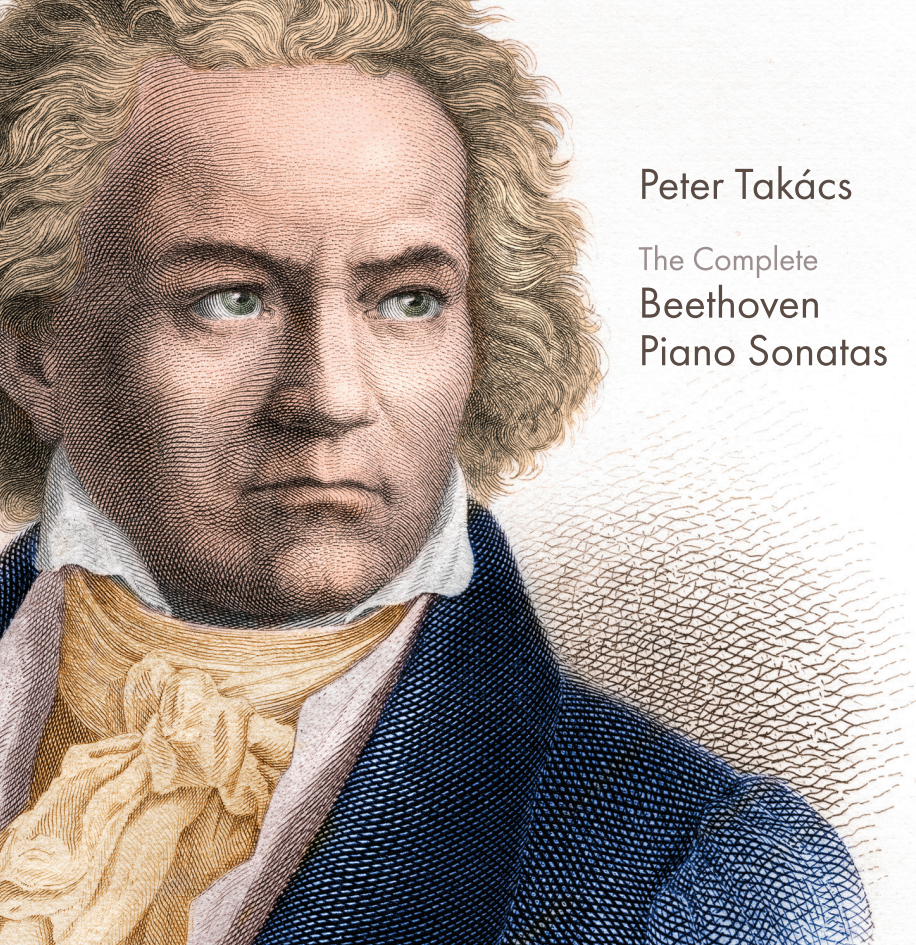




Peter Takács

The Complete
Beethoven
Piano Sonatas

*This edition of the complete piano sonatas
of Ludwig van Beethoven is dedicated to my children,
Dan Takács and Linda Pear, Nina Takács, and
to my precious granddaughter, Greta Takács-Pear.*



Possible early portrait of Beethoven, ca. 1783, Bonn, artist unknown



Peter Takács, Pianist

Hailed as “a marvelous pianist” by *The New York Times*, Peter Takács has established himself as a distinguished performer, teacher, and lecturer. Winner of the William Kapell International Competition, he has appeared in recital, chamber music, and with orchestras in the United States, Europe, and Asia. He has given master classes throughout the world and has been an adjudicator in many prestigious international competitions.

In 2015–16, he inaugurated a new recital series entitled “Key Pianists,” performing three all-Beethoven programs at Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall. His recording of the complete Beethoven Piano Sonatas was released on the Cambria label in July 2011 to critical acclaim. He is Professor of Piano at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, where he has been teaching since 1976.

In the Beethoven 250th anniversary year 2020, in recognition of Mr. Takács’s achievements, Oberlin Conservatory received a generous gift to establish The Peter Takács Beethoven Prize, to be awarded annually to a piano student selected for outstanding Beethoven interpretation.



*Ludwig van Beethoven (1804/05),
by W. J. Mähler*

The Complete Beethoven Piano Sonatas Peter Takács

Disc 1

- 1–4 Sonata No. 1 in F minor, Op. 2 No. 1
- 5–8 Sonata No. 2 in A major, Op. 2 No. 2
- 9–12 Sonata No. 3 in C major, Op. 2 No. 3

Disc 2

- 1–4 Sonata No. 4 in E-flat major, Op. 7
- 5–6 Sonata No. 19 in G minor, Op. 49 No. 1
- 7–8 Sonata No. 20 in G major, Op. 49 No. 2
- 9–12 Sonata No. 11 in B-flat major, Op. 22

Disc 3

- 1–3 Sonata No. 5 in C minor, Op. 10 No. 1
- 4–6 Sonata No. 6 in F major, Op. 10 No. 2
- 7–10 Sonata No. 7 in D major, Op. 10 No. 3

Disc 4

- 1–3 Sonata No. 8 in C minor, Op. 13 ("Pathétique")
- 4–6 Sonata No. 9 in E major, Op. 14 No. 1
- 7–9 Sonata No. 10 in G major, Op. 14 No. 2
- 10–13 Sonata No. 12 in A-flat major, Op. 26

Disc 5

- 1–4 Sonata No. 13 in E-flat major, Op. 27 No. 1
- 5–7 Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp minor, Op. 27 No. 2 ("Moonlight")
- 8–11 Sonata No. 15 in D major, Op. 28 ("Pastorale")

Disc 6

- 1–3 Sonata No. 16 in G major, Op. 31 No. 1
- 4–6 Sonata No. 17 in D minor, Op. 31 No. 2 ("Tempest")
- 7–10 Sonata No. 18 in E-flat major, Op. 31 No. 3

Disc 7

- 1–3 Sonata No. 21 in C major, Op. 53 ("Waldstein")
- 4–5 Sonata No. 22 in F major, Op. 54
- 6–8 Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57 ("Appassionata")

Disc 8

- 1–2 Sonata No. 24 in F-sharp major, Op. 78
- 3–5 Sonata No. 25 in G major, Op. 79
- 6–8 Sonata No. 26 in E-flat major, Op. 81a ("Les Adieux")
- 9–10 Sonata No. 27 in E minor, Op. 90

Disc 9

- 1–3 Sonata No. 28 in A major, Op. 101
- 4–7 Sonata No. 29 in B-flat major, Op. 106 ("Hammerklavier")

Disc 10

- 1–3 Sonata No. 30 in E major, Op. 109
- 4–6 Sonata No. 31 in A-flat major, Op. 110
- 7–8 Sonata No. 32 in C minor, Op. 111

Disc 11

- 1 Andante in F major, WoO 57 ("Andante favori")
- 2–3 Sonata in C major, WoO 51
- 4–5 Sonatina in F major, WoO 50
- 6–14 Three "Elector" Sonatas, WoO 47 ("Kurfürstensonaten")
- 15–16 Sonata in D major for piano four-hands, Op. 6

(with Janice Weber)



Ludwig van Beethoven (1803), Christian Hornemann

A Note on Interpretation

For many reasons, I feel strongly that the musical text should not act as a final destination, but rather constitute a point of departure for the interpreter. First, there is no such thing as “the text,” since what we see on the printed page of even fully dependable editions is a composite of many, often contradictory, source materials and editorial decisions. Second, musical traditions have changed over the centuries, and we have to reconstruct the original intentions of composers by immersing ourselves in historical and artistic contexts, which may entail implications not found on the printed page. Third, we have to search for narrative truth by empathetically divining what my great teacher Leon Fleisher calls “the wisdom of the material,” the unspoken essence that lies beyond the notes. As an example, the *Allegro* movement of Op. 111, marked *con brio e molto appassionato*, is often played too fast, at the expense of its essentially Baroque *toccata* and *fugato* aspects.

Always with great deliberation, I have taken some liberties with “the text,” some trivial (as in small discrepancies between parallel sections of a movement), some possibly more controversial, such as making adjustments in high and low registers where the compass of Beethoven’s piano forced him to delete notes he obviously would have included (and invariably later did as they became available, as in his insistent use of the “*contra E*” [low E] in the fourth movement of Op. 101). In the early works, I occasionally include a small *Einleitung*, a lead-in at fermata points in rondo movements, which are thoroughly within Classical expectations. Contrary to Czerny’s belief, Beethoven was often quite flexible in his choices, as in his options for trill execution in the “*Waldstein*” finale or in higher-register alternatives in the Op. 111 *Allegro*, depending on keyboard span availability.

Beethoven considered choice of tempo the most important element of interpretation. My paramount consideration has always been the character of each movement, as well as consistency of pulse between different thematic areas. A special case is the choice of tempos in the “*Hammerklavier*” Sonata, Op. 106, which carries metronome markings by Beethoven himself. This has been a controversial issue, but I have decided that the indicated tempos are too fast and act against the proper character of each movement. I am emboldened in this position by a note that Beethoven appended to a metronome marking to his song *Nord oder Süd* (as quoted in George Barth’s illuminating book, *The Pianist as Orator*), to the effect that it applies only to the beginning, after which one must follow the character of the music, “because feeling also has its tempo.” I will let the listener be the judge of the appropriateness of my tempo decisions.

This music is centuries old, and while some of its meanings may have changed over time, I fervently believe it carries the same evocative power today as it did at its conception. In that spirit, at every point, I have tried to create a sense of naturalness and inevitability in my interpretive choices, in an attempt to fulfill Beethoven’s words:

“*Von Herzen möge es wieder zu Herzen gehen!*”

(From the heart, may it return to the heart!)

—Peter Takács

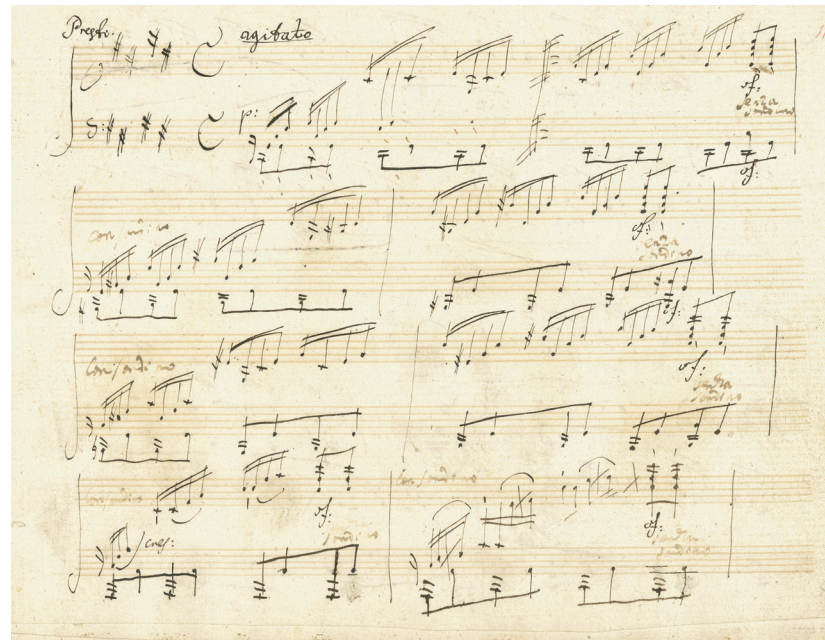


Ludwig van Beethoven,
copper engraving by Blasius Höfel (1814)

The Mind of Beethoven ✨ *A Performer's Perspective*

One of the lasting rewards of performing and recording Ludwig van Beethoven's thirty-two piano sonatas, the pianist's "New Testament" (the "Old Testament" being Bach's "*Well-Tempered Clavier*"), is the privilege of getting to know the creator's mind, of gleaning the ideas, values, and visions that were the catalysts for his continued productivity in this form. The challenge is to identify these recurring patterns in their vast variety and over a lifetime of artistic evolution.

Certain characteristics are so emblematic in Beethoven as to permeate his entire output. One is a pervasive sense of **restless energy**, manifested in many forms, such as the use of repeated notes for propulsive momentum, as in the first movements of sonatas Op. 7 and Op. 53, "*Waldstein*," or the tempestuous use of *perpetuum mobile* sixteenth notes in the finales of sonatas Op. 27/2, "*Moonlight*," Op. 31/2, "*Tempest*," and Op. 57, "*Appassionata*," among others. Another general trait is a **deeply felt expressivity**, best exemplified by his slow movements (listen to the darkly despairing *Largo e mesto* of the D major Sonata, Op. 10/3). As a balance, he also displays an **antic sense of humor**, from "wrong-key" recapitulations (see Example 4) to cheerful Haydn-esque themes, as in Op. 10/2, i, to the use of rustic folk-tunes, as in the *Scherzo* of Op. 110 ("*Unsa Kätz häd Kaz-In g'habt*"—our cat had kittens), used here as comic relief between the lyricism of the first movement and the dramatic unfolding of the *Recitative–Arioso–Fuga* finale (see Example 5). A fourth characteristic is **impatience with limitations, traditions, and inherited rules** (including his own), manifested in a constant search for formal innovation, harmonic distillation, and aesthetic transcendence (see Example 7).



Op. 27 No 2, iii, mm. 1-8, courtesy of Beethoven-Haus, Bonn

In addition to these defining qualities, I have identified a number of specific artistic aims and techniques that are central to Beethoven's creative process. These include (1) a desire to surprise, startle, and delight the listener; (2) the influence of other instrumental forms on pianistic colors and textures, especially string quartet and symphony, on his piano music; (3) operatic aspects, both as general artistic influences and as specifically related to his only opera "Fidelio"; (4) nature as mystical inspiration; (5) illness and healing; (6) improvisation as compositional device; and (7) the search for transcendence. This list, while not exhaustive, begins to provide a window into "the mind of Beethoven."

1 A desire to surprise, startle, and delight the listener.

Beethoven was wary of convention and found myriad ways to avoid predictability by playing with expectations, sometimes humorously, sometimes to startlingly innovative effect, but never in a shocking way. I will mention three ways (*among many others*) in which the composer found ways to capture the listener's attention:

a. beginnings: One has only to think of the opening of the Fifth Symphony to realize the power of a first theme to fling open the doors to a composition's musical universe. In the piano sonatas, openings take many forms, always plunging the listener into the emotional world of the movement. One example is the so-called "*rocket*" motif, a fast-rising figure favored by early symphonists, designed to get the piece to a flying start. In the very first published sonata, Op. 2, No. 1, the breathless mood is established instantly with a

hushed F-minor staccato arpeggio in the right hand followed by another, this time in the left hand, and in C minor (*Example 1*):

Example 1. *Op. 2 No. 1, i, mm. 1–10*



Other ways to begin pieces in startling ways include:

–**quirks**, as in the off-beat, hands-not-together opening of Op. 31, No. 1

(*Example 2*):

Example 2. *Op. 31 No. 1, i, mm. 1–11*



—**question marks**, as in the harmonically unstable opening of Op. 31, No. 3, in a dotted rhythm to which I have put the words, “*Liebst du mich?*” (Do you love me?) (Example 3)

Example 3. *Op. 31 No. 3, i, mm. 1–6*



—“**upheavals**,” most notably in the precipitous fanfare opening of Op. 106, appropriately known as “*Hammerklavier*,” announcing a work that, according to Beethoven, “will keep pianists busy for the next 50 (make that 200!) years!”

(Example 4):

Example 4. *Op. 106, i, mm. 1–4*



(Anecdotally, it has been suggested that the words “*Vivat, vivat Rudolphus!*,” referring to the sonata’s dedicatee and Beethoven patron, Archduke Rudolph, are implied by the martial rhythm of this opening theme).

b. structural surprises: The established nature of sonata form—exposition, development, recapitulation, with strong tonal rules—gave Beethoven a golden opportunity to thwart expectations, often by playing with harmonic norms.

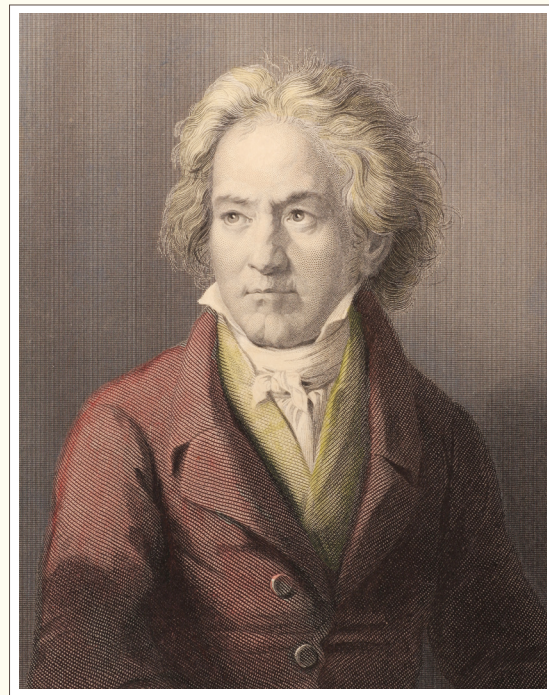
In the F-major Sonata, Op. 10, No. 2, the recapitulation occurs in D major, to delicate effect (Example 5):

Example 5. *Op. 10 No. 2, i, mm. 118–121*



In the E-flat Sonata, Op. 7, in a transition I call “looking for home,” the recapitulation begins in A minor—a tritone (*augmented fourth*) away from the tonic key!—creating an almost desperate sense of disorientation, traveling to D minor before returning, with a sense of affirmation, to the first theme in the right key (Example 6):

Example 6. *Op. 7, i, mm. 169–172*



Portrait of Ludwig van Beethoven, hand-colored engraving, (1845) by W. Holl after a painting by Kloeber

c. internal variations: In order to avoid literal repetition, Beethoven used constant variation and ornamentation in recurring thematic material. For example, in the skittish rondo finale of Op. 10, No. 3, each recurring theme is altered to create a playful, cat-and-mouse atmosphere (Examples 7a, b, c, and d):

Example 7. *Op. 10 No. 3, iv*

(a) mm. 1-2

(b) mm. 46-47

(c) mm. 56-57

(d) mm. 84-85

Another example is the first movement of the F-major sonata, Op. 54, which Alfred Brendel called, in a perceptive essay, a “beauty and the beast” story. The graceful, simple minuet which opens the movement is followed by a relentless *sempre forte e staccato* passage in octaves, setting up the feminine-masculine dichotomy; as the piece progresses, however, each theme is varied to create an increasing symbiosis with the other until, at the end, a tamed beast, murmuring repeated Fs in the bass, walks off hand in hand with a resigned beauty (Examples 8a, b, and c):

Example 8. *Op. 54, i*

(a) mm. 1-4

(b) mm. 25-26

(c) mm. 137-138

sempre forte e staccato

f

sempre forte e staccato

2 Instrumental colors and textures. In attempting an understanding of Beethoven’s piano writing, it is imperative to become familiar with his entire output, especially in the defining genres of string quartet and symphony. The richly homogeneous texture of the string quartet is often found in slow movements (see, for example, the *Adagio molto* of Op. 10, No. 1 and the *Adagio cantabile* of Op. 13, “*Pathétique*”), sometimes expanded to include bass, as in the moving string quintet *coda* of the variation movement of the A-flat Sonata, Op. 26 (Example 9):



Ludwig van Beethoven (1815)
by W. J. Mähler

Example 9. *Op. 26, i, mm. 205–208*



Tonality and texture sometimes suggest woodwind writing, as in the opening of the late sonata Op. 110, a serenade for clarinets and bassoons in A-flat major marked, tellingly, *con amabilità* (courteously) (Example 10):

Example 10. *Op. 110, opening (Moderato cantabile molto espressivo)*



Often, one finds orchestral effects such as string repeated-note bowings, usually written as broken octaves, creating a dynamic symphonic effect in the first movement of Op. 2, No. 3 (Example 11):

Example 11. *Op. 2 No. 3, i, mm. 85–89*

Allegro con brio

Similarly, the excitement of violoncello-double bass repeated notes is suggested in the left hand of the *Allegro di molto e con brio* of the “*Pathétique*” Sonata, Op. 13 (Example 12):

Example 12. *Op. 13, i, mm. 11–14*

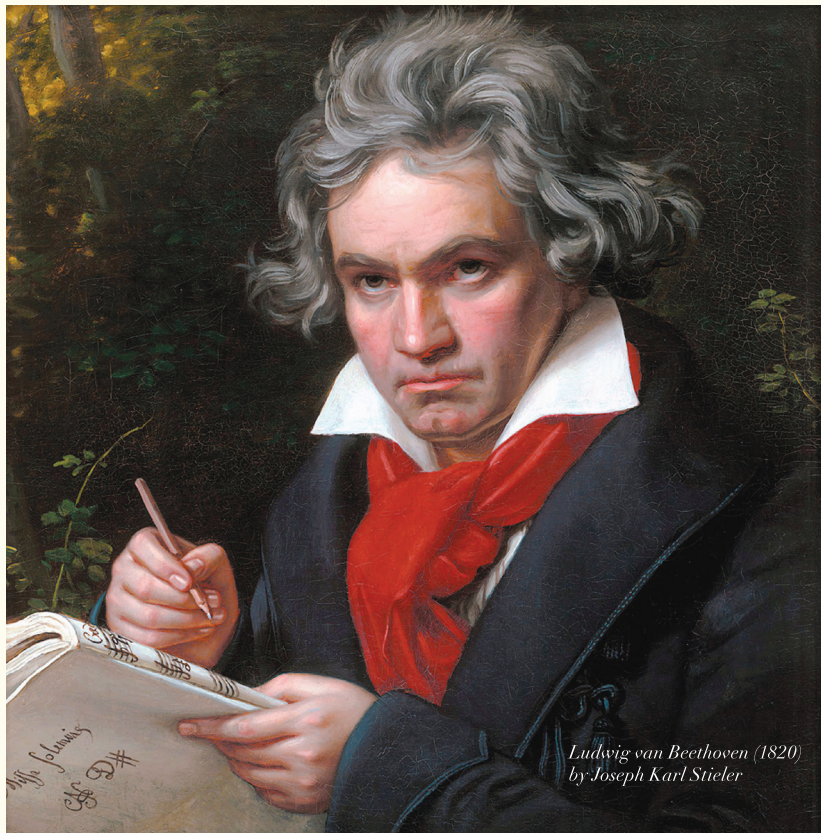
Allegro di molto e con brio

The rumble of timpani can be heard in the *coda* of the *Scherzo* movement of the Sonata Op. 2, No. 3 (Example 13):

Example 13. *Op. 2 No. 3, iii, mm. 119–122*

or the pedal point in the suspenseful recapitulation of the “*Appassionata*” Sonata, Op. 57 (Example 14):

Example 14. *Op. 57, i, mm. 134–136*



With varied registral entries, Beethoven suggests lively woodwind exchanges between flute, clarinet, and bassoon, as in this spirited passage from the finale of Op. 10, No. 3 (Example 15):

Example 15. *Op. 10 No. 3, iv, mm. 74–77*



Woodwind conversation is also suggested in the leaps of the “*Waldstein*” Sonata development (Example 16):

Example 16. *Op. 53, i, mm. 96–99*



A rich instrumental ensemble effect is created in the opening of the “*Farewell*” Sonata, Op. 81a, combining the suggested outdoor setting with the psychological pain of separation: the opening horn call is followed by string quartet alternating with wind choir, shown first in the piano version (Example 17a) and then in an orchestration by the author (Example 17b):

Example 17a. *Op. 81a, i, mm. 1–8*

Example 17b. *Op. 81a, i, mm. 1–8*

For performer and listener alike, these instrumental dimensions provide opportunities for an enhanced perception of the composer’s imagination and of the piano’s coloristic capabilities.



THÉÂTRE-LYRIQUE. — PREMIÈRE REPRÉSENTATION DE *FIDELIO*, OPÉRA DE BEETHOVEN. — 3^e acte, 3^e tableau. 1850

3 Operatic aspects. Beethoven was obsessed by the desire to write operas, a vocal and dramatic medium for which he was not particularly suited but in which, as a moral idealist, he yearned to embody his beliefs in theatrical form. One operatic technique that he uses with shattering power is the **recitative**, a form of sung speech found, most tellingly, in the so-called “*Tempest*” Sonata, Op. 31, No. 2. One can surmise the dying plea of a sailor lost at sea, perhaps with the words: “*Ach, ich bin verloren...*” (Oh, I am abandoned...) (Example 18):

Example 18. *Op. 31 No. 2, i, mm. 143–148*



According to Beethoven’s pupil Carl Czerny, the use of the pedal is supposed to create an echo effect “as if coming from a cave,” a haunting and powerful image of loneliness and abandonment.

Another vocal effect with psychological overtones is what I call the “**stern/pleading duet**,” a juxtaposition of implacable force with vulnerable humanity, of which the most wrenching example is the *Adagio* of the Fourth Piano Concerto, often associated with the Orpheus story, in which the powerful orchestral string unison vies with the quiet, pleading voice of the soloist.

In the same vein, the main theme of the “*Tempest*” Sonata alternates lower and higher registers in creating this image of struggle, here perhaps between the blind forces of nature and the helpless, pleading human being (Example 19):

Example 19. *Op. 31 No. 2, i, mm. 21–24*



Listen also to the exchange between the bass octaves and the soft upper melody in the *Adagio* movement of Op. 2, No. 3 (disc 1, track 10, 1:59–2:52):

On a more specific level, Beethoven did succeed in expressing his deeply felt convictions about freedom and social justice in his only opera, *Fidelio*. The opening of the second act depicts a progression from deep despair to hope and exhilaration with music of overwhelming power: Florestan’s first words in the opera (*he does not appear in the first act*) are heard as an outburst of despair: “*Gott! Welch Dunkel hier! O grauenvolle Stille!*” (God! What darkness here! O terrifying silence!). After a long recitative, the aria begins with words of hope: he sees an angel in the form of his wife Leonore leading him to freedom.

In the piano sonatas, a similar emotional arc is expressed in two epic finale movements, the *Introduzione* and *Rondo* of Op. 53, “*Waldstein*,” and the *Recitativo–Arioso dolente–Fuga* of Op. 110, both tracing a journey that begins in suffering and yearning and ends in joyous

triumph. As you listen to these movements, imagine the unjustly imprisoned hero Florestan forgotten in his dungeon (Czerny’s “cave”), expressing his despair yet knowing that rescue is at hand, and finally experiencing deliverance.

4 Nature as mystical inspiration. One of Beethoven’s most insightful biographers, Maynard Solomon, quotes a notation on a sketch-leaf of the kind the composer always carried on his frequent walks on the outskirts of Vienna: “*I am happy; blissful in the forest: every tree speaks through you, O God! What splendor! In such a woodland scene, on the heights there is calm, calm in which to serve Him!*” There is no doubt that Beethoven received deep inspiration from his natural surroundings, ranging from the serene tranquility of a clear day to the turbulent threat of a violent storm, perhaps reflecting his own inner turmoil. The obvious example of this identification with nature is, of course, the “*Pastoral*” Symphony, a programmatic work that depicts nature in its many incarnations; but, even on a less obvious level, one can recognize the spell that nature cast on the composer. For example, listen to the spacious sense of awe in the opening of the *Adagio* of the so-called “*Tempest*” Sonata, Op. 31, No. 2, in the noble key of B-flat major (Example 20):

Example 20. *Op. 31 No. 2, ii, mm. 1–5*





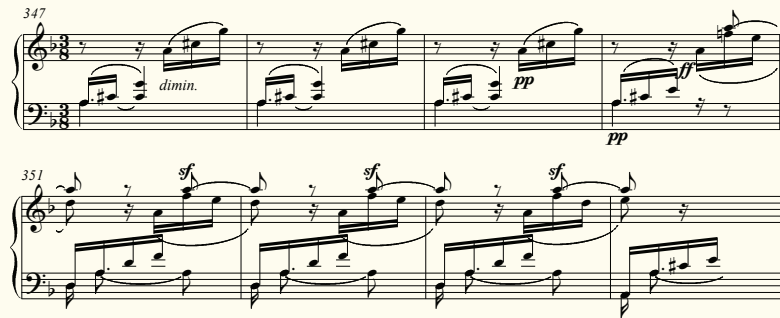
Perhaps the most evocative representation of a tempest in the piano sonatas is the opening of the “*Appassionata*” Sonata, Op. 57: the hushed, mysterious unison opening captures the ominous foreboding preceding the storm, with short trills as small electrical charges announcing the unleashing of a bolt of lightning, represented by the sudden, *ff* arpeggio in mm. 14–16 (Example 21):

Example 21. *Op. 57, i, mm. 12–16*

Another common way of experiencing nature in Beethoven’s day was on horseback or during a coach ride, both often characterized by obsessively repetitive rhythms. One can imagine one such nightmarish ride in the finale of the “*Tempest*” Sonata, a constant, hypnotizing texture of sixteenth notes interrupted by violent sudden, *ff* explosions (Example 22):

“*Pastoral Landscape*” by Alvan Fisher (1854)

Example 22. *Op. 31 No. 2, iii, mm. 347–354*



The programmatic Sonata Op. 81a, subtitled “*Les Adieux*” (The Farewell) provided ample opportunity for both emotional (Beethoven wrote “*Le-be-wohl*” [Farewell] above the main theme’s three descending notes [see Example 17]) and natural tone painting. One can imagine the characteristic sound of galloping on cobblestones in the thematic left-hand rhythm of the first movement (Example 23):

Example 23. *Op. 81a, i, mm. 94–97*



As a final example of Beethoven’s “calm in which to serve Him,” the opening of the Sonata in D, Op. 28, known as the “*Pastoral*” Sonata, captures, in its gently repetitive bass line and mellow unfolding harmonies, the spirit of a benevolent natural world (Example 24):

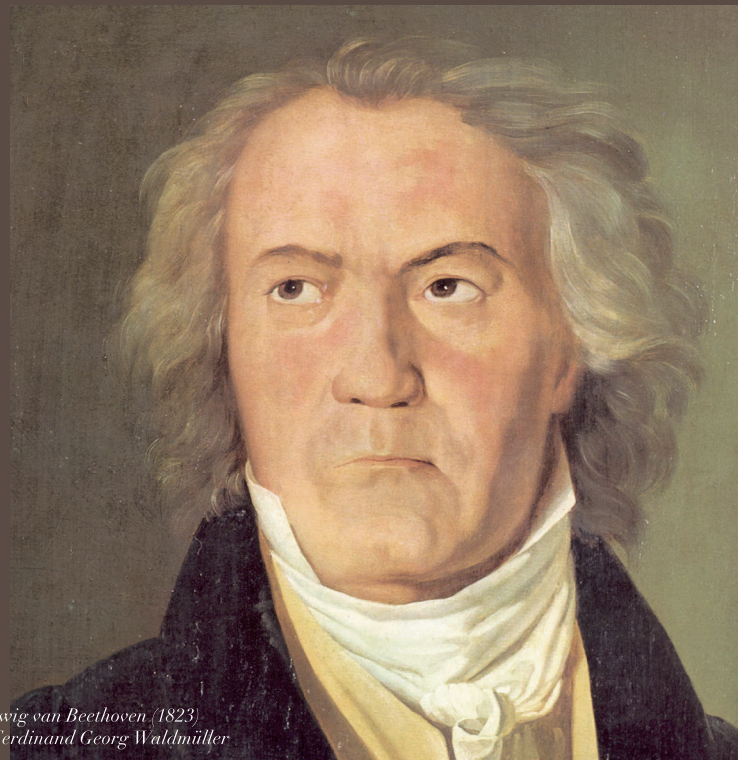
Example 24. *Op. 28, i, mm. 1–10*



5 Illness and healing. One of Beethoven’s most intimate friends, Antonie Brentano, identified by Maynard Solomon as the “Immortal Beloved,” wrote to her sister-in-law Bettina: “He visits me often, almost daily, and then he plays spontaneously because he has an urgent need to alleviate suffering, and he feels he is able to do so with his heavenly sounds...” (quoted in Solomon’s *Late Beethoven: Music, Thought, Imagination*). There is no doubt that the composer, who himself suffered from many physical ailments, found musical ways to describe the ravages of disease followed by the renewal of strength and the blessings of healing. The most powerful expression of this idea is in the *Molto adagio* of his String Quartet in A minor, Op. 132, which bears the inscription “*Holy Song of Thanks by a Convalescent, to the Divinity, in the Lydian Mode.*”

A similar stream-of-consciousness scene of weakness and regained strength is depicted in the finale of the Sonata in A-flat major, Op. 110: the opening “*Scena ed aria*” alternates a **pleading recitative** with an “*Arioso dolente*” (song of suffering), followed by a vast, **restorative fugue**. Then the aria returns, in more halting form, this time marked *perdendo le forze, dolente* (losing strength, lamenting), after which the inversion of the *fugue* is stated with detailed instructions: *sempre una corda* (muted), *poi a poi di nuovo vivente* (gradually reviving). The gradual return of strength is indicated later by removing the mute (*poi a poi tutte le corde*) and by a speeding up of the pace (*poi a poi più moto*), finally bringing the piece to a close with a joyfully exhilarating restatement of the original *fugue* subject, harmonized by excited accompanying figures. In its vast stream-of-consciousness scenario, this is truly Beethoven’s pianistic opera.

6 Improvisation as compositional device. Beethoven was a titanic improviser, as attested by numerous contemporary witnesses. As he matured, he increasingly incorporated improvisatory passages in his sonatas, creating cyclical structures that pointed to Romantic forms used by Schubert (in the “*Wanderer*” Fantasy), Liszt (in his monumental piano sonata), and, of course, Wagner in his epic operatic forms unified by the use of recurring motifs. An example of this unifying device can be found in the transition to the finale of the Sonata in A major, Op. 101: after an *Adagio* marked *Langsam und sehnsuchtvoll* (slow and with yearning), we hear a restatement of the first movement theme, with pauses, as if the composer were searching for a way forward to his closing movement; in m. 24, he hesitates at a three-note descending figure, E-C#-B, repeats it, then rushes forward excitedly to an *Allegro* that uses those same three notes in an inspired motivic transformation (Example 25):



Ludwig van Beethoven (1823)
by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller

Example 25. *Op. 101, iii-v, mm. 25–34*

As an example of his stream-of-consciousness compositional process, listen also to the extraordinary introduction to the final *fugue* in the “*Hammerklavier*” Sonata, as Beethoven samples various Baroque forms (*prelude, fantasia, toccata*) through a cycle of descending thirds, until he hits upon his bold fugal subject (disc 9, track 7, 0:00–2:13).

In these protean passages, we feel as if we have been afforded a privileged glimpse into the workings of the composer’s mind, in which a search for musical solutions, usually worked out privately in sketches, has become an integral part of the musical structure.

7 The search for transcendence. By his years of maturity, Beethoven had traversed an immense journey in his development as a composer, evolving to a point where music had become a vehicle for the most lofty, abstract, even philosophical concepts about time, existence, the human spirit, divine essence, and death as deliverance from earthly suffering. As he moved beyond the enlightened Classical traditions inherited from his immortal predecessors, Haydn and Mozart, one of the forms that allowed him to explore this uncharted territory was the Classical composer’s bread and butter: the theme with variations. In the final movements of two of his last sonatas, Op. 109 in E major and Op. 111 in C minor (as well as in the monumental “*33 Variations on a Theme by Diabelli*,” Op. 120), he explores all aspects of musical expression, creating cumulative narratives of unprecedented power. In his final statement in piano sonata form, the finale of Op. 111 begins this quest for spiritual metamorphosis with the simplest of means: an unadorned *Arietta theme*, marked *Adagio molto semplice e cantabile*, in the elemental key of C major, in the “double trinity” meter of 9/16 (Example 26a). After three initial variations that use the time-honored device of rhythmic diminution, the theme returns, pulsating with rich accompanying harmonies (Example 26b). Finally, a miraculous texture emerges: the theme appears in high register, surrounded by ineffable trills above and murmuring triplets below, creating a magical sense of ultimate peace, of a place where desire and strife have been replaced by blissful serenity, a vision of heaven that the great Artur Schnabel, in his idiosyncratic but revelatory edition, marks with characteristic terseness, *con sublimità* (sublimely) (Example 26c).

Example 26. *Op. 111, ii, Arietta: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile*

(a) mm. 1-2

(b) variation V, beginning, mm. 131-132

(c) variation VI, beginning, mm. 162-163

p

cresc.

pp



Beethoven Monument in Bonn, Germany; in honor of the 75th anniversary of the composer's birth.

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Credits

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Recording Engineer: *John Newton*, Soundmirror Inc., Boston, MA

Producer: *Blanton Alspaugh*

Piano Technician: *Gerhard Feldmann*

Piano: Bösendorfer Imperial Model 290 #44786

Executive Producer, Version 2021: *Martin Reuben*

Art Direction, Version 2021: *Cherie Banks Meyers*

Photograph of Peter Takács: *Tanya Rosen-Jones*

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allmusic.com: “Takács’s playing is clean, his expression subtle, his rhythms supple, his power unrivaled; furthermore, his understanding of Beethoven’s methods and expressions is so profound that this set warrants the highest honors...Recommended as one of the finest Beethoven sonata cycles of any year.”
—*Blair Sanderson*

clevelandclassical.com: “Takács’s touch and voicing are unerring throughout the cycle. He brings an appropriate sense of wit, humor, tragedy, poignancy, relief, or delight to individual movements while steering well clear of any distortions of expression or musical form, and he makes sense and lucidity out of Beethoven’s strangest moments. Takács closes his ‘Mind of Beethoven’ essay with these words: “...at every point, I have tried to create a sense of naturalness and inevitability in my interpretive choices.” He has done exactly that in this impressive set of CDs.”
—*Daniel Hathaway*

cleveland.com: “The performances illuminate Beethoven’s unpredictable and breathtaking journey from wizardly Classicist to transcendent risk-taker. The 11-CD set is a supreme achievement for Takács and a gift to listeners who value artistic profundity.”
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New York Classical Review: “Beethoven could hardly have a better or more welcoming advocate.”
—*Sean Piccoli*

The WholeNote: “For me, Takács reveals qualities in these works that elevate them from piano pieces into musical narratives that engage the listener’s undivided attention and hold it beyond the very last note. I hated to stop any one of them or have my attention diverted in case I missed something. Even the shortest note or phrase has meaning...Listening to these recordings aroused nostalgic remembrances of the wonderment and excitement of hearing these works for the first time.”
—*Bruce Surtees*