Andrés Cárdenes, violin
David Deveau, piano

VIOLIN SONATA NO. 1, IN D MAJOR, OP. 12 NO. 1 (1797-8)
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Allegro con brio
Tema con variazioni: Andante con moto
Rondo: Allegro

VIOLIN SONATA NO. 10, IN G MAJOR, OP. 96
(1812, with later revisions)
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Allegro moderato
Adagio espressivo –
Scherzo: Allegro
Poco allegretto

:: INTERMISSION ::

PIANO SONATA NO. 32, IN C MINOR, OP. 111 (1821-2)
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Maestoso: Allegro con brio ed appassionato
Arietta: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile

GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY DIANNE ANDERSON
VIOLIN SONATA NO. 1, IN D MAJOR, OP. 12 NO. 1
Ludwig van Beethoven (b. Bonn, Germany, December 15 or 16, 1770; d. Vienna, Austria, March 26, 1827)
Composed 1797-8; 22 minutes

The 18th century convention of grouping sonatas or concertos into sets of three, six or even twelve had its origins in the tradition of patronage, in an age where self-employment as a composer was not an option. The young Beethoven, a freelance composer in a competitive field, however, had to keep an eye on the marketplace. By appearing to follow current conventions in his recently adopted city of Vienna, he could encourage sales of his music amongst amateur musicians as well as professionals. His earliest violin sonatas followed standard practice by being grouped into a set of three, as his Op. 12. They appeared to conform to convention even further when they were first published in 1799 by Artaria in Vienna. The title page of the first edition reads: 'Three Sonatas for the harpsichord or fortepiano with a violin.'

The convention of 'accompanied sonata,' with a solo keyboard sonata at its core, plus optional violin, cello or flute, had already been proven old hat by Mozart in his later violin sonatas. Beethoven was well aware of this and had already taken movements from Mozart's violin sonatas, with their dialogue between the instruments (rather than just melody and accompaniment), as models for earlier chamber music of his own.

Beethoven's three Op. 12 violin sonatas, moreover, take advantage of recent technical advances in violin technique and bow design to help the violin compete on a more even playing field with the sonorities and articulation of the piano. Beethoven was fully up to speed on developments in violin technique, having taken lessons from both Schuppanzigh and Krumpholz, two notable violinists of the day, almost as soon as he moved to Vienna. As a virtuoso pianist, renowned for his improvisations on the piano, he was also keenly aware of the substantial increases in sonority, sustaining power and tonal range of the quickly evolving piano. So, the Op. 12 sonatas brought together two instruments that were a prime focus of Beethoven's attention in 1799, and where he was motivated to look forward and embrace developments rather than keep to the status quo.

When first published in the dying days of the 18th century, in January 1799, a reviewer in the Leipzig Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung complained that the Op. 12 sonatas were "heavily laden with unusual difficulties" and "made him feel like a man who had wandered through an alluring forest and at last emerged tired and worn out." Others criticized Beethoven's abundance of ideas and the prominence of the violin. Beethoven's Op. 12 was, as biographer Lewis Lockwood pithily puts it, "more than a salon-music enthusiast could accept."

After a brief opening flourish for both instruments, the lyrical opening melody of Beethoven's D major violin sonata, Op. 12 No. 1 is given first to the violin and then echoed on piano. Beethoven's assertive writing for the violin immediately commanded the musical stage. Neither instrument predominates to the exclusion of the other. The most striking moments come in the slow movement. After shining the spotlight on first the piano then the violin, Beethoven's minor key variation, in sonority, sustaining power and tonal range of the quickly evolving piano. So, the Op. 12 sonatas brought together two instruments that were a prime focus of Beethoven's attention in 1799, and where he was motivated to look forward and embrace developments rather than keep to the status quo.

VIOLIN SONATA NO. 10, IN G MAJOR, OP. 96
Ludwig van Beethoven (b. Bonn, Germany, December 15 or 16, 1770; d. Vienna, Austria, March 26, 1827)
Composed 1812; with later revisions; 26 minutes

Most of Beethoven's ten violin sonatas were composed in the six-year period 1799 to 1803. The last, the Sonata in G major, Op. 96, followed almost a decade after its predecessor, the 'Kreutzer.' In it, Beethoven has one last say on the partnership between violin and piano. He dedicated it to Archduke Rudolph, a musician who stimulated him to write not only one of his finest violin sonatas but to dedicate more compositions to him than to any other person. He also wrote to the Archduke about the background to the generally reflective, often serene tone of this late sonata, poised at the end of his middle period and frequently foreshadowing the more inward probing of his late music. It was written for both the Archduke and the esteemed French violinist Pierre Rode then visiting Vienna, on December 29, 1812. "I had, in writing it, to consider the playing of Rode," the composer wrote of a violinist respected for his aristocratic manner, though now, late in his career, less than virtuoso playing. "In our finales we like rushing and resounding passages, but R does not agree with this -- and so I have been rather hampered."

The sonata opens with an un hurried, gentle conversation between violin and piano, prominently anchored by the trill that is integrated into its musical development. Beethoven explores the lyrical side of the two instruments with music that reflects and gently contemplates, rather than drives relentlessly towards a goal. The slow movement opens a door into the serene world of the late quartets and piano sonatas, coming to rest on a chord that leaps into the Scherzo that follows without break. Compact and marked by its off-beat accents, the Scherzo is understated and balanced by a high-soaring trio. Its surprising ending in the major key again anticipates the movement that follows. This is an unassuming little theme with six wide-ranging, probing variations, at a moderate tempo, full of surprises, sudden stops and strikingly adventurous twists and turns.

PIANO SONATA NO. 32, IN C MINOR, OP. 111
Ludwig van Beethoven (b. Bonn, Germany, December 15 or 16, 1770; d. Vienna, Austria, March 26, 1827)
Composed 1821-2; 27 minutes

The piano was central to Beethoven's development as a composer. His 32 piano sonatas chart an unprecedented journey, from early virtuoso to late philosopher. They often act as a blueprint for Beethoven's artistic and spiritual growth. The arguments posed and solutions discovered frequently find further exploration in his other music. Beethoven wrote solo sonatas throughout most of his life, composing half of them by his 31st year. As time went on, he said more with less.

"It's easy to forget that Beethoven is a composer who only lived to the age of 57 because his works seem so cosmic and timeless. There is a metamorphosis in his writing from the Op. 12 violin sonata (1797-8) through Op. 96 (1812) to Op. 111 (1821), it's a period of just 24 years and yet stylistically, it's almost like three different composers. I find the Op. 12 sonata echt Young Ludwig, with his trademark Allegro con brio first movement, ebullient second movement and then rollicking finale, whereas Op. 96 is more enigmatic. It is played far less than its predecessor, the 'Kreutzer'. I really wanted to revisit Op. 96 with Andris because the last time we did it together was over 30 years ago! It is a very dear work to both of us."

David Deveau on Beethoven

"Beethoven has been totally front and center in my musical life. As a child, I fell in love with his music and this continues. It really grabs me. His music has been a central part of my repertoire: the Concertos, the Choral Fantasy, the Triple Concerto and, of course, the Sonatas. It's part of my blood. I deliberately saved Op. 111 till I was older because I feel that you need a whole lifetime of experience before you can say something special with this music. In this program, Op. 111, Beethoven's final piano sonata, really has to come as a parting thought. I tend to agree with Alfred Brendel that you can't really follow this music with anything."

David Deveau on Beethoven
By the time that the public was coming to terms with the revolutionary aspect of Beethoven, the composer had begun to look inward. In his late music, private thoughts and personal agony find their way into public discussion. The profound and the trivial, often rub shoulders. Expansiveness and compression of thought co-exist. Extremes of despair and sublime find expression within the same piece, notably in his final piano sonata, Op. 111. The music charts a characteristic Beethoven journey from darkness to light, but it eschews the triumph and flag waving of a similar C minor to C major progression found in the Fifth Symphony. Here, Beethoven casts his final sonata in just two movements that both contrast with and complement one another.

The C minor mood of the opening movement is vintage Beethoven, with its brusque dramatic gestures, terse octave statements, downward plunging sequences and extremes of register. Technically, it grapples with the huge challenge of combining a sonata-form first movement with the fugue, in music that is fundamentally tragic in tone. The second movement enters another sound world, altogether calmer, more reflective, and serene. Its sudden entry into C major is startling and the hymn-like theme with which it opens is one of the most sublime of a series that Beethoven used as the basis of his slow movements. Structurally, the condensed theme leads to a seamless sequence of three variations, a double variation (where the two halves of the theme continue to become more varied, rather than literally repeated) and an extended coda. The movement is a meditation on this theme, evolving as its rhythmic note values shrink and the texture becomes increasingly dense. Trills add to the intricacy of the music as it becomes ever more transfigured and ethereal, concluding with a simple pianissimo chord.

— Program notes © 2022 Keith Horner. Comments welcomed: khnotes@sympatico.ca

[Image of Beethoven]