


MOZART BEETHOVEN
HEAVEN *and* **HELL**

KATIE MAHAN



STEINWAY & SONS



“...continue to ascend further and further into the heaven of art, there is no undisturbed, unmixed, purer joy than that which comes from it.”
- Ludwig van Beethoven



Heaven and Hell

by Katie Mahan

Ludwig van Beethoven was born in 1770 at a time when a young child prodigy named Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was enchanting royalty and the nobility across Europe. Word of the young Mozart's fame and accomplishments caught the attention of Beethoven's father, Johann van Beethoven, himself an accomplished musician, who became obsessed with the idea of his son becoming the next child prodigy to tour Europe and bring fame and fortune to the family. Unlike Mozart's father who, by all accounts, raised, guided and disciplined his children with love and encouragement, Beethoven's father was an alcoholic who frequently abused his son and accused him of being a disgrace to the family when he failed to live up to his lofty standards. Nevertheless, in Johann van Beethoven's quest to have his son become the next Mozart, young Ludwig grew up with a thorough knowledge of Mozart's works and a profound admiration for the older composer. One can almost imagine Mozart as the embodiment of the young Beethoven's musical conscience. His music was somehow a reflection of divine inspiration that had the power to capture the full depth of human emotion and the very essence of heaven and hell.

In his great dramatic masterpiece *Don Giovanni* K. 527, universally considered to be one of the greatest operas ever written, Mozart demonstrates this power more convincingly than in perhaps any other work in his oeuvre. Premiered in Prague in 1787, the opera, which is based on an old Spanish legend dating back to the early 1600s called "El burlador de Sevilla" ("The trickster of Seville"), depicts the downfall of a serial womanizer and the inability of a human being to change for the better. The final scene of the opera features a confrontation between Don Giovanni and the ghost of the Commendatore - whom Don Giovanni has murdered in the opera's first act - culminating in Don Giovanni's dramatic descent into hell. Through the combination of dramatic and musical techniques, Mozart pushes the boundaries of opera beyond anything that had come before. He takes us a step away from classicism and a step toward romanticism by putting man, not God, at the center in a struggle between good and evil, heaven and hell. Beethoven himself struggled with his own morality and the increasing extremes of his existence - the exaltation of his art and the torment of his physical condition, the heaven and hell of his life and art. He

was clearly not unaffected by the power of Mozart's writing in *Don Giovanni*, as is evidenced by the several sketches in Beethoven's hand in which he copied out individual sections from the opera in order to learn from them. On the contrary, it is worth considering that it was Mozart and the spectre of Don Giovanni that opened the young Beethoven's eyes to the infinite possibilities of expression that lay ahead for him.

I have chosen to begin this program with my own solo arrangement of the Overture to *Don Giovanni* because my motivating idea for this album is the golden thread of conscience between Mozart and Beethoven. The extremes of heaven and hell as so brilliantly depicted by Mozart in *Don Giovanni* must have dwelt in Beethoven throughout his life and formed a subconscious basis from which he ascended to unimaginable attainment. It is this evolution that I seek to depict with this album.

Before discussing the short selection entitled "Ah, soccorso!" that follows the Overture to *Don Giovanni* on this album, I would like to segue into Beethoven's Sonata *quasi una fantasia* No. 14 in C-sharp minor Op. 27, No. 2 - a work which is certainly among the most popular pieces of music ever written. For many listeners, this sonata, known around the world simply as the 'Moonlight' Sonata, brings to mind the dark and romantic image of a solitary boat floating on the shimmering moonlit waters of an alluring lake where wooded mountains rise high in the distance. This depiction of the sonata is attributed to Heinrich Friedrich Ludwig Rellstab, considered by some to be the first great music critic, from a serialized story he wrote for publication in the *Berliner allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* in the summer of 1824. Although Beethoven and Rellstab met in Vienna in 1825, as is evidenced by written exchanges in Beethoven's conversation books, it is not clear whether or not Beethoven was aware of Rellstab's depiction of his Sonata Op. 27, No. 2. What is clear, however, is that Beethoven himself did not give the work the title 'Moonlight,' and that the work most likely had a very different genesis.

As I alluded to earlier, there are a number of sketches in existence in which Beethoven copied out sections of *Don Giovanni* by hand. Of particular relevance is the fact that in the early 20th century, the Swiss pianist Edwin Fischer discovered a sketch in the archives of the Musikverein in Vienna in which Beethoven had copied out the music to "Ah, soccorso!" ("Ah, help!" from Act I, Scene I), the aria in which Don Giovanni kills the Commendatore. Because the sketch in Beethoven's handwriting has not only been dated to shortly before composition of the Sonata *quasi una fantasia* Op. 27, No. 2, but also transposed from its original C minor to C-sharp minor, there is a strong probability that the dark, fiery story of *Don Giovanni* was more likely the inspiration behind the famous sonata than a romantic image of a lonely boat floating on a moonlit lake.

The story of a boat on a lake never convinced me - in fact it left me totally perplexed as to how the second and third movements worked into the scenario - but the story of the dream and demise of Don Giovanni does. To my mind, it not only encapsulates the entire spirit of the work, but also provides an answer to perplexing questions. To begin at the beginning of the story: in the first movement, Beethoven pays tribute to the memory of Mozart and the ghost of Don Giovanni, as if in a dark, enigmatic dream. As dreams are often distorted and unclear, this interpretation further offers a reasonable explanation as to Beethoven's mysterious - and unfortunately often disregarded - indication that the entire movement be played *senza sordino*, literally with dampers raised in a single, unbroken pedal from beginning to end. The resulting effect is a sustained blurring of harmonies and resonance, as in the subconscious world of dreams. Moving on to the second movement, we can imagine waking from the dream and attempting, with a now clear and fully conscious mind, to make sense of the story we just dreamed, before finally allowing ourselves to be drawn back once again, now in the third movement, into the fantasy of *Don Giovanni* to complete the tale of his dramatic fall into the raging flames of hell.

In order to illustrate this scenario in the clearest possible way, I have included my own solo arrangement of "Ah, soccorso!" from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* - transcribed to C-sharp minor as Beethoven did in his hand-copied sketch of Mozart's original - as a prelude to the 'Moonlight' Sonata. I invite each of my listeners to sit back, listen and contemplate the connection between the music of the two composers and decide for yourself whether it captures your imagination the way it captured mine.


Moving onwards in the program, we veer away from the drama of *Don Giovanni* to the ever popular Bagatelle in A minor WoO (“Work without opus number”) 59, known as *Für Elise*. The original manuscript for this miniature has been lost without a trace, and although likely composed in 1810, it was first published in 1867 by the Beethoven scholar Ludwig Nohl who claimed to have seen the original autograph score. There is unfortunately only a single remaining sketch leaf for *Für Elise* which also contains sketches for other works and is part of a larger collection known as the “Sauer” sketchbook. Furthermore, there is no title or dedication whatsoever on the leaf; it is simply marked “No 12.” We therefore have to take Nohl’s word for it that the manuscript included the dedication “Für Elise am 27. April zur Erinnerung von L. v. Bthvn.” In any case, the question remains, who exactly was Elise? As there does not appear to have been any women with that name among Beethoven’s circle of friends or acquaintances, many scholars believe that Nohl may have misread the dedication, and that the work was intended to read “Für Therese”, not “Für Elise.” A plausible explanation for this theory is that, as Beethoven only attended grammar school through the age of 10 - at which point his father forced him to withdraw to focus solely on his musical education - his handwriting was notoriously messy and challenging to read throughout his life. Furthermore, the person who best fits as the dedicatee is a woman name Therese Malfatti, who was a friend and student of Beethoven, and to whom it is believed that Beethoven may have proposed in 1810.

We now come in the program to one of the crowning achievements of Beethoven’s middle period and a milestone in the piano repertoire, the Sonata No. 21 in C Major ‘Waldstein’ Op. 53, dedicated to Beethoven’s early friend and mentor Ferdinand Ernst Joseph Gabriel, Count von Waldstein und Wartenberg. The ‘Waldstein’ Sonata, also known as “L’Aurore” (The Dawn), is a revolutionary and technically brilliant work. Beethoven takes the sound world of the earlier ‘Moonlight’ Sonata a step farther, using trills, shifts of register and further development of special pedal effects in the pursuit of a new way of achieving effects of tone color, washes of sound, orchestral effects and expressive possibilities on the piano. Where in the ‘Moonlight’ Sonata, Beethoven takes us on a journey into the depths of darkness and the raging fires of hell, in the ‘Waldstein’ Sonata, he takes us on a journey into the ethereal lightness of dawn and the vision of heaven.

But who was Count Waldstein, to whom Beethoven dedicated such a work, and do we perhaps encounter another connection to Mozart? Born in Vienna to a family of the highest Viennese aristocracy, Count Waldstein was appointed knight of the Teutonic Order and in 1788 moved to Bonn where he would become Geheimrat (high advising official) to the Elector of Cologne, Archduke Maximilian Francis of Austria. In addition to his official duties, Count Waldstein was an accomplished amateur musician and passionate supporter of young artistic talent. By the time Waldstein came to Bonn, Beethoven’s talents had already attracted the attention of Maximilian Francis who not only appointed Beethoven court organist but also was persuaded to allow the sixteen year old to travel to Vienna to meet Mozart, whom the Archduke knew personally. Unfortunately, shortly after arriving in Vienna in 1787, Beethoven received word that his mother had become very ill. This necessitated a swift return to Bonn, making a meeting between Beethoven and Mozart therefore unlikely, although recent scholarship suggests that Beethoven may have heard Mozart perform.

Nevertheless, Beethoven’s desire to return to Vienna remained strong, and it was due to Count Waldstein, who had subsequently become a devoted admirer and supporter of the young composer, that Beethoven would have a second chance, in 1792, to travel to Vienna. With Mozart’s premature death in December of 1791, Beethoven would never be able to realize his dream of studying with Mozart but, following an invitation from Joseph Haydn whom Beethoven had met and played for in Bonn when the older composer was en route to London for a series of performances, Beethoven was finally able, with the help of Count Waldstein, to return to Vienna. On the day of his departure, Waldstein wrote the following words to Beethoven:

"Dear Beethoven, you are now traveling to Vienna to fulfill your so long-denied wishes. Mozart's genius still mourns and weeps over the death of his pupil. He found refuge in the inexhaustible Haydn, but no occupation. Through him, he wishes to be united with someone once more. Through unceasing diligence, you will receive: Mozart's spirit from Haydn's hands. - Bonn, October 29, 1792 - Your true friend, Waldstein"

A woman with long, dark, curly hair, wearing a dark jacket, is looking up at a bronze bust of Ludwig van Beethoven. The bust is mounted on a dark stone pedestal and is surrounded by green ivy and purple flowers. The background is a textured, light-colored wall. The scene is outdoors, with a tree branch visible in the upper right corner.

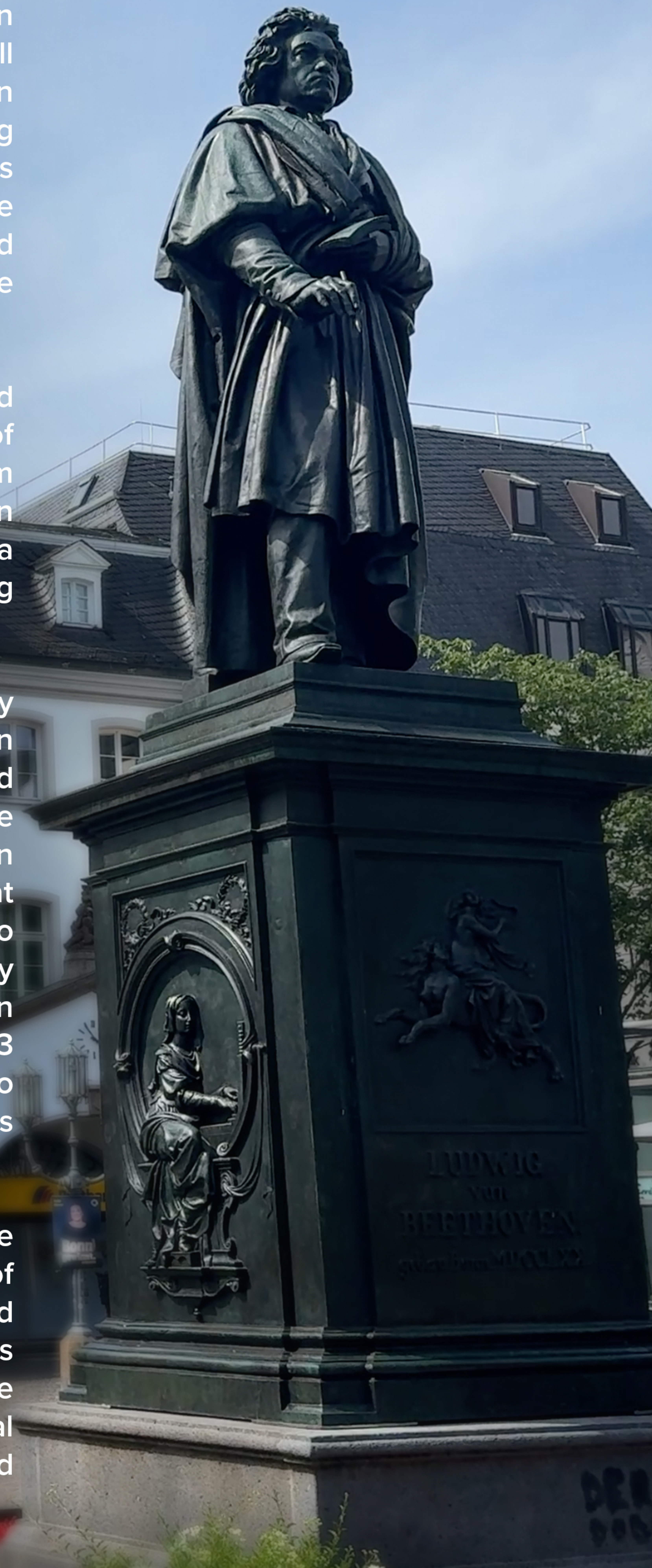
“Music is the one incorporeal entrance into the higher world of knowledge which comprehends mankind but which mankind cannot comprehend.”
— attributed to Ludwig van Beethoven

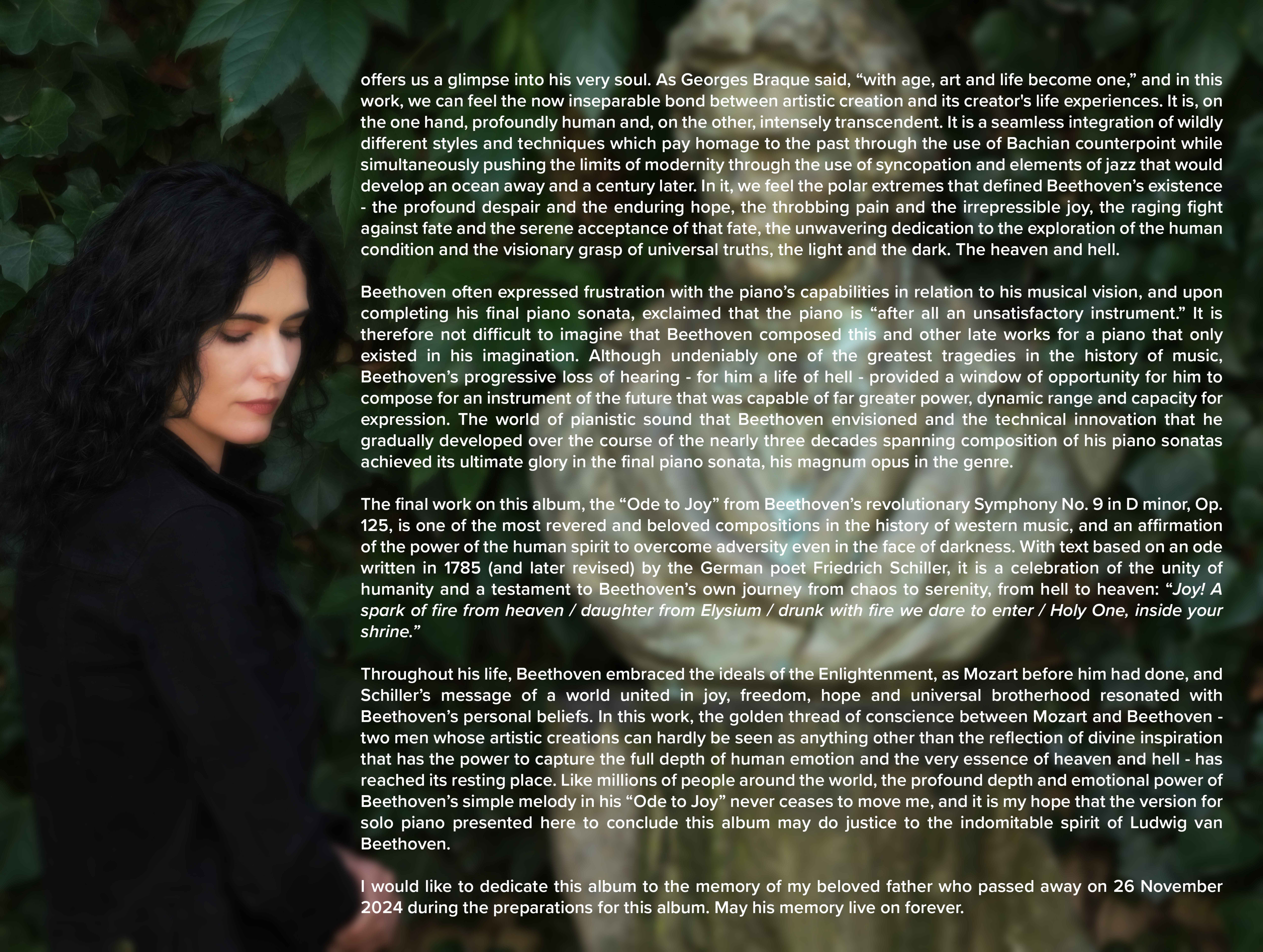
Beethoven would never again return to Bonn, and there is little record of continued contact between Beethoven and Count Waldstein. In the years following Beethoven's departure from Bonn, Count Waldstein fell out of favor with the Elector of Cologne and developed an obsession with the idea of defeating Napoleon Bonaparte's revolutionary army. He spent all of his money raising an army to fight Napoleon, and following years spent in London and Germany, finally returned to Vienna where he married the wealthy Countess Isabella Rzewuska. After squandering all of her money as well, he spent his final days at a poor house outside of Vienna. On the day of his death, Waldstein received a letter informing him that his elder brother had died and the entire family fortune now belonged to him. In spite of the unfortunate path that Count Waldstein's life took, Beethoven honored him with one of his greatest masterpieces for piano.

We now move forward in time to 1821 and the Sonata No. 32 in C minor Op. 111, a work which was dedicated to Beethoven's great friend, patron and student Archduke Rudolph of Austria. The youngest brother of Emperor Francis I of Austria, Archduke Rudolph was a clergyman and a highly accomplished musician whom Beethoven met in the winter of 1803-04, likely at one of the musical soirees of Prince Franz Joseph Maximilian Lobkowitz, a passionate music lover who maintained a private orchestra and in whose palace in Vienna Beethoven premiered a number of works including the "Eroica" Symphony and fourth piano concerto, among others.

Although Beethoven received a number of scholarships and stipends to support him financially during his early years in Vienna, he constantly sought a permanent position which would provide him with a regular income. In 1809, Beethoven was finally offered a suitable position, as Kapellmeister in the German city of Kassel. Word traveled around Vienna that Beethoven was prepared to accept the position, and so in order to dissuade Beethoven from accepting, Archduke Rudolph convinced the Princes Lobkowitz and Kinsky to join him in an agreement that would pay Beethoven a salary of 4000 florins per year for the rest of his life - provided that Beethoven agree to remain in Vienna. This gave Beethoven complete artistic freedom and financial stability to follow his own creative vision, and in essence made him the first freelance musician with a regular salary through patronage. Even when a series of unfortunate events including a major devaluation of the Austrian currency in 1811, the sudden death of Prince Kinsky in 1812 and the bankruptcy of Prince Lobkowitz in 1813 threatened the subsistence of the agreement, Archduke Rudolph continuously increased his payments to Beethoven to ensure that Beethoven would not suffer financially. In return, Beethoven dedicated more works to Archduke Rudolph than to any other patron.

Perhaps due, in part, to the artistic freedom which financial stability enabled and, in part, to the near complete loss of hearing which isolated him from the world but allowed him to traverse the deep inner soundscapes of his imagination, Beethoven's late works transcend the compositional and technical constraints of his time and explore previously uncharted avenues of sonic creation. The Sonata No. 32 in C minor Op. 111, Beethoven's final sonata for the piano, is a miracle of human expression. It is a mirror of Beethoven's own life, and the culmination of his artistic vision and evolution. It is a work of visceral emotion and an intensely personal reflection of his morality. It is as revolutionary as *Don Giovanni*; it transcends mere musical composition and





offers us a glimpse into his very soul. As Georges Braque said, “with age, art and life become one,” and in this work, we can feel the now inseparable bond between artistic creation and its creator's life experiences. It is, on the one hand, profoundly human and, on the other, intensely transcendent. It is a seamless integration of wildly different styles and techniques which pay homage to the past through the use of Bachian counterpoint while simultaneously pushing the limits of modernity through the use of syncopation and elements of jazz that would develop an ocean away and a century later. In it, we feel the polar extremes that defined Beethoven's existence - the profound despair and the enduring hope, the throbbing pain and the irrepressible joy, the raging fight against fate and the serene acceptance of that fate, the unwavering dedication to the exploration of the human condition and the visionary grasp of universal truths, the light and the dark. The heaven and hell.

Beethoven often expressed frustration with the piano's capabilities in relation to his musical vision, and upon completing his final piano sonata, exclaimed that the piano is “after all an unsatisfactory instrument.” It is therefore not difficult to imagine that Beethoven composed this and other late works for a piano that only existed in his imagination. Although undeniably one of the greatest tragedies in the history of music, Beethoven's progressive loss of hearing - for him a life of hell - provided a window of opportunity for him to compose for an instrument of the future that was capable of far greater power, dynamic range and capacity for expression. The world of pianistic sound that Beethoven envisioned and the technical innovation that he gradually developed over the course of the nearly three decades spanning composition of his piano sonatas achieved its ultimate glory in the final piano sonata, his magnum opus in the genre.

The final work on this album, the “Ode to Joy” from Beethoven's revolutionary Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125, is one of the most revered and beloved compositions in the history of western music, and an affirmation of the power of the human spirit to overcome adversity even in the face of darkness. With text based on an ode written in 1785 (and later revised) by the German poet Friedrich Schiller, it is a celebration of the unity of humanity and a testament to Beethoven's own journey from chaos to serenity, from hell to heaven: “*Joy! A spark of fire from heaven / daughter from Elysium / drunk with fire we dare to enter / Holy One, inside your shrine.*”

Throughout his life, Beethoven embraced the ideals of the Enlightenment, as Mozart before him had done, and Schiller's message of a world united in joy, freedom, hope and universal brotherhood resonated with Beethoven's personal beliefs. In this work, the golden thread of conscience between Mozart and Beethoven - two men whose artistic creations can hardly be seen as anything other than the reflection of divine inspiration that has the power to capture the full depth of human emotion and the very essence of heaven and hell - has reached its resting place. Like millions of people around the world, the profound depth and emotional power of Beethoven's simple melody in his “Ode to Joy” never ceases to move me, and it is my hope that the version for solo piano presented here to conclude this album may do justice to the indomitable spirit of Ludwig van Beethoven.

I would like to dedicate this album to the memory of my beloved father who passed away on 26 November 2024 during the preparations for this album. May his memory live on forever.



Beethoven's last piano, a Hammerflügel built by the Viennese piano manufacturer Conrad Graf in 1826 (Beethoven-Haus, Bonn)



MOZART BEETHOVEN HEAVEN *at* HELL

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART

Overture to *Don Giovanni* K. 527 (arr. Mahan) [06:17]

“Ah, soccorso!” from *Don Giovanni* K. 527 (arr. Mahan) [01:26]

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN

Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp minor Op. 27, No. 2 ‘Moonlight’
I. Adagio sostenuto [04:56]

II. Allegretto [02:07]

III. Presto agitato [06:54]

Bagatelle No. 25 in A minor WoO 59 ‘Für Elise’ [02:48]

Sonata No. 21 in C major Op. 53 ‘Waldstein’
I. Allegro con brio [10:20]

II. Introduzione: Adagio molto [04:04]

III. Rondo. Allegretto moderato — Prestissimo [08:53]

Sonata No. 32 in C minor Op. 111
I. Maestoso — Allegro con brio ed appassionato [09:37]

II. Arietta: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile [17:50]

“Ode to Joy” from *Symphony No. 9*, Op. 125 (arr. Mahan) [04:48]

Katie Mahan, piano



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