LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

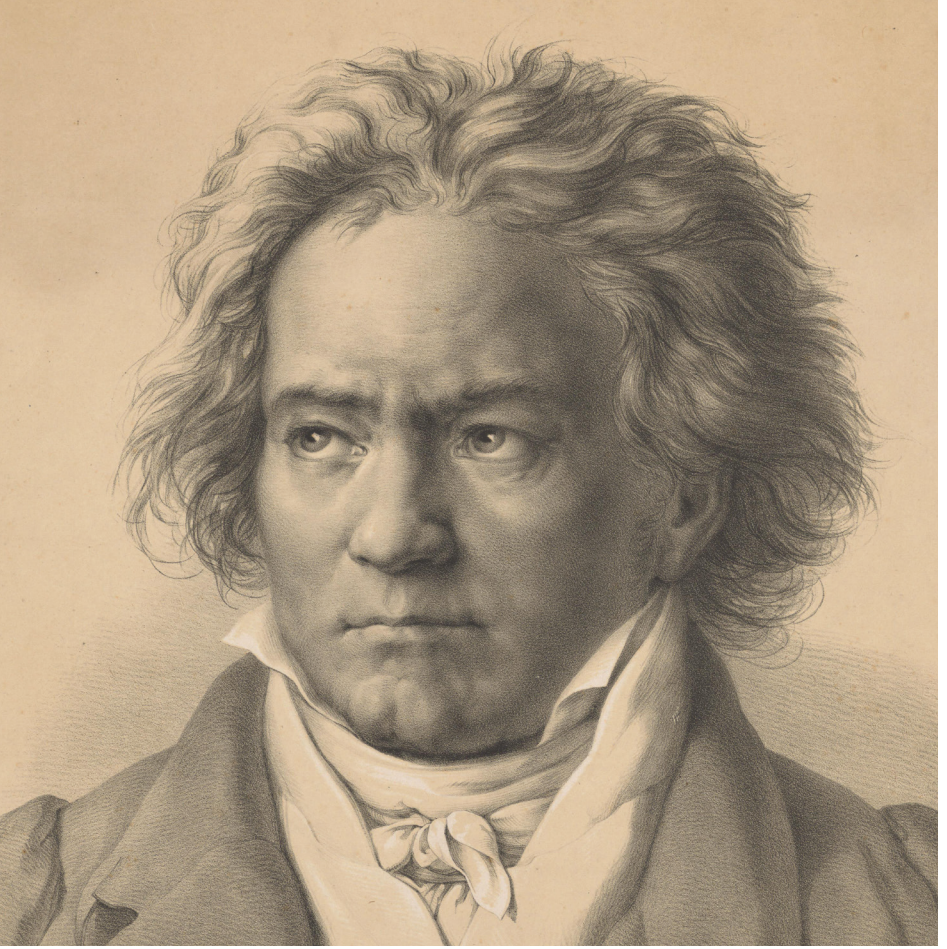
APPASSIONATA





Gianluca Cascioli
fortepiano

Fortepiano built by Paul McNulty after Graf ,
Op. 318 (ca. 1819) originally from Kozel Castle, Czech Republic.
The instrument has a Viennese action, sustaining and 'una corda' pedals,
as well as moderator and double moderator stops. Compass: CC–f4.



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

APPASSIONATA

Piano Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57 ('Appassionata')

1.	*Allegro assai*	09:58
2.	*Andante con moto*	05:06
3.	*Allegro ma non troppo - Presto*	08:23

Piano Sonata No. 30 in E Major, Op. 109

4.	*Vivace ma non troppo - Adagio espressivo*	03:48
5.	*Prestissimo*	02:15
6.	*Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung*	12:41

Six Bagatelles, Op. 126

7.	*Andante con moto, cantabile e compiacevole*	03:15
8.	*Allegro*	02:49
9.	*Andante, cantabile e grazioso*	02:18
10.	*Presto*	03:58
11.	*Quasi allegretto*	02:16
12.	*Presto - Andante amabile e con moto*	03:33

Total timing 60:27



"A truly new manner"
by Luca Benedetti

In 1802, Beethoven announced his intention to create "a truly new manner" in his compositions. The three works on this recording trace important stages in the development of this ambition in his piano music. The *Sonata in F Minor, op. 57*, is one of the defining works of his so-called "heroic period." The *Sonata in E Major, op. 109*, and the *Bagatelles, op. 126*, belong to his late style. In these works, Beethoven explores the boundaries of musical form and expression, continually pushing them further and taking the music of his time "beyond its limits" (as musicologist Federica Rovelli pointed out).

The *Sonata op. 57*, one of Beethoven's own favorite works, was published in Vienna in 1807 by the Bureau des Arts et d'Industrie. It was dedicated to Count Franz Brunsvik de Korompa, an amateur cellist, admirer, and friend of the composer. Beethoven probably began work on the sonata in the summer of 1804 and continued into the early months of 1805. The numerous surviving sketches for the first movement testify to the long and complex process of its composition. The autograph manuscript, dating from early 1806, is likewise full of corrections and erasures. According to one account, the pianist Marie Bigot performed the sonata at sight from this manuscript in Beethoven's presence. The uncertainty surrounding the sonata's chronology has prompted extensive historical debate. It has also become entangled with several famous episodes from Beethoven's life, contributing to the work's legendary aura, particularly in earlier scholarship. Some scholars have

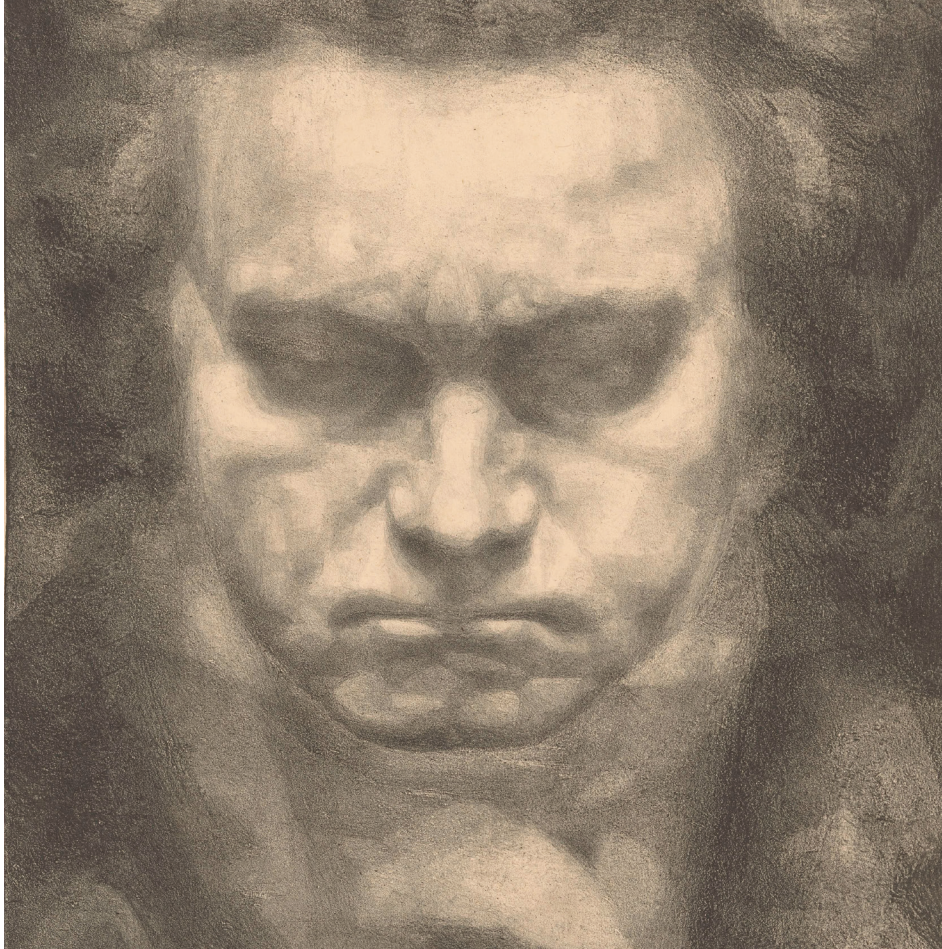
linked the sonata to Beethoven's relationship with Josephine Deym, the sister of its dedicatee. Another story claims that the theme of the final movement came to Beethoven in a sudden flash of inspiration during a summer walk near Döbling with Ferdinand Ries. The title by which the work is known today, *Appassionata*, was not Beethoven's. It was first given to the sonata in 1838 by the Hamburg publisher Cranz, who used it for an arrangement for piano four hands. Czerny, for his part, considered the sonata "far too grand" for such a title. The opening of the first movement, Allegro assai, immediately establishes the sonata's dramatic character. A pianissimo arpeggio descends and then rises, ending in an expectant trill. Beethoven's characteristic compression of motivic material, together with a repeated-note motif reminiscent of the opening of the *Fifth Symphony*, steadily builds the tension until the first forte. The second theme is closely related to the first but appears in the bright key of A-flat major. For a moment, its lyrical character provides relief from the prevailing tragic mood. The two themes are closely connected, yet they pull in opposite directions. This gives the development a dramatic character as Beethoven continually transforms the thematic material, driving it toward the climax of the coda (Più Allegro). The first theme returns one last time, sinking into the lowest register. The tension then fades into pianissimo without being fully resolved.

The contrasting Andante con moto presents a solemn, almost chorale-like theme in D-flat major. Beethoven subjects it to a series of variations in which the note values gradually become shorter, the register rises, and the dynamics intensify. When the theme returns, transformed and spread across different registers, it anticipates the endings of opp. 109 and 111. Two diminished-seventh chords abruptly interrupt the movement's expected conclusion and lead directly into the final Allegro ma non troppo. The attacca connection makes the central movement feel less like a self-contained section than part of a larger dramatic arc. The dissonant chord now takes on the character of a fanfare, giving rise to a sinuous descending figure that leads into the turbulent opening theme. The movement is driven throughout by an unrelenting flow of sixteenth-note quadruplets. After a brief, hesitant thinning of the texture, the motion returns with renewed force. A short, emphatic new theme, almost dance-like in character, launches the coda (Presto), which brings the sonata to a frenetic and fiercely charged conclusion.

The *Sonata in E Major, op. 109*, is the first of Beethoven's last three piano sonatas. He conceived the three works as a group between 1819 and 1822 for the Berlin publisher Schlesinger, during the same period in which he was working on the *Ninth Symphony* and the *Missa solemnis*. They represent a crucial stage in the development of his late style. By this point, Beethoven had already transformed sonata form in his earlier works, taking it to a point of no return in the *Hammerklavier Sonata, op. 106*. In op. 109, he goes further, allowing form to unfold with increasing freedom from convention. At the same time, he returns to older musical forms and techniques, especially variation and fugue, engaging with the great contrapuntal tradition of

the past. The expressive world is also very different from that of the heroic period. Dramatic contrasts and dialectical tension remain, but they increasingly give way to a more intimate and contemplative character. After the monumental complexity of op. 106, Beethoven seeks a new sense of formal balance in op. 109. He reverses the traditional proportions of the sonata: two relatively short fast movements lead to a monumental finale, which becomes the work's true center of gravity.

The first movement, Vivace ma non troppo, probably began as an independent piece intended for the second volume of Friedrich Starke's *Wiener Piano-Forte Schule*. Its brevity is deceptive. It is a sonata-form movement of considerable structural complexity. The first theme consists of a sixteenth-note arpeggiated figure. A sharply contrasting second thematic group follows, distinguished by its tempo (Adagio espressivo), rhythm, and dynamics. When the opening theme returns, it leads into a development built around a series of rising figures. The tension gradually increases until it reaches a climax over a dominant pedal in the upper voice. Another appearance of the Adagio follows, after which the tension quickly dissolves and the delicate character of the opening returns. Without a break, the Prestissimo in E minor begins. It too is in sonata form, but its regular pulse and consistent thematic character contrast sharply with those of the first movement. Together, the first two movements form an extended introduction to the final Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo – Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung, a theme and variations. The theme is ex-



traordinarily beautiful, with the character of a stylized sarabande. Across six variations, it is "gradually transcended, dissolved, and sublimated" (Roman Vlad). Beethoven intensifies this process by removing the repeat signs and writing out the repetitions in full. These repetitions become, in effect, "variations within variations." The process reaches its furthest point in the final variation. Here, the motivic material gradually dissolves until only an echo remains beneath a free trill on the dominant. The theme then returns in pianissimo, just as it appeared at the beginning, bringing the work full circle. After everything it has undergone, the theme's simplicity now sounds like a conscious and deeply transformed farewell.

The *Six Bagatelles, op. 126*, were composed between 1823 and 1824 and published in 1825. They constitute Beethoven's last major work for piano. They followed the final *Sonata, op. 111* (1822), the *Bagatelles, op. 119*, and the *Variations on a Theme by Diabelli, op. 120* (1823). Their small scale and relatively limited performance history should not obscure their importance. Beethoven himself described them in a letter to his publisher as his most successful work in the genre. Unlike the *Bagatelles, op. 119*, which bring together pieces from different periods of his life, op. 126 was conceived as a unified cycle. Its coherence is reflected in the alternation of slow and fast movements and in its tonal scheme, which moves through descending thirds. As Giovanni Carli Ballola observed, the pieces are "true microcosms of the stylistic characteristics of late Beethoven." They may have been intended for a broad audience, but they contain, in miniature, the extraordinary range and freedom of expression found in Beethoven's final piano sonatas and the *Ninth Symphony*.

The first Bagatelle, Andante con moto, opens with a simple melody that is elegantly varied. A second section then introduces an abrupt change of tempo and character, giving the piece a strikingly asymmetrical shape. The following Allegro is similarly divided between contrasting worlds. A lively, impetuous theme gives way to a more expansive and lyrical section.

The third piece, Andante, presents an exceptionally gentle theme marked "cantabile e grazioso." It is delicately varied and then returns before fading into pianissimo. The fourth piece, Presto, is the longest of the set. It alternates between two contrasting sections: a lively and rhythmically emphatic G-minor section and a more relaxed passage in G major. The following Quasi allegretto could hardly be more different. Its steady, serene dance rhythm gradually takes on an idyllic, pastoral character. In the final Bagatelle, an agitated Presto gives way to an Andante con moto. Once again, a serene and graceful motif is subjected to a series of subtle variations. The opening Presto then returns unexpectedly, bringing the cycle to a tumultuous close.

Appassionata and beyond: A conversation with Gianluca Casioli

Q: You have recorded the *Six Bagatelles* in the past, and the *Sonata Op. 109* has accompanied you since your youth. What made you decide that this was the right moment to record these works together?

GC: The *Bagatelles* had already been part of my discography since 1995, but over the years I came to feel that my interpretative ideas had changed enough to justify a new recording. The *Sonata Op. 109*, on the other hand, has been with me since I was a teenager. I have lived with the *Appassionata* for decades, but only now do I feel that my understanding of it has reached the level of maturity I was looking for before committing it to disc. These are works that have matured with me, and I wanted this recording to reflect where my thinking has now arrived. As a performer, I am generally more inclined to explore neglected repertoire than works that have been recorded countless times. But if I feel I have something substantial to say about one of the great masterpieces of the piano literature, then I think it is worth returning to it.

Q: Your work with Beethoven has also been shaped by your experience with the fortepiano.

GC: It goes back to my years at the Accademia Pianistica di Imola, where Franco Scala taught. He had studied with Carlo Zecchi and had assembled an extraordinary collection of historical keyboard instruments—well over a hundred fortepianos. I spent countless hours experimenting with them,



CARL CZERNY.

simply trying to understand how they worked and what they could reveal. Whenever the opportunity arose I continued to play the fortepiano, although it never became my principal activity as a performer. What interested me was never the instrument for its own sake. For me, the starting point has always been the composer's intentions. A decisive influence was Nikolaus Harnoncourt. His way of approaching a score through the performance principles of its own time was a revelation. I realised that historical instruments could help answer a very simple question: what did Beethoven—or Mozart—actually have in mind when they wrote this music?

Q: In practical terms, what does the fortepiano reveal to you that is more difficult to perceive on a modern concert grand?

GC: Some aspects are difficult to describe in words because they concern the very nature of the sound. The clarity of the bass register, for instance, is extraordinary, and the different colours produced by devices such as the *una corda* or the moderator are not merely interesting timbral effects: they can illuminate the musical structure itself. Perhaps the most striking difference concerns dynamics. On the modern piano, the contrast between *piano* and *forte* is often perceived primarily as a difference in volume. On the fortepiano, by contrast, the dynamic range is less extreme in purely acoustic terms, but the sound itself changes much more profoundly: between *pianissimo* and *fortissimo* the colour constantly changes, becoming sweeter or more biting.
In the second movement of the *Appassionata* Beethoven brings





back the principal theme in the *coda*, fragmenting it between the upper and lower registers. It is the same compositional procedure he employs at the end of the *Allegretto* of the *Seventh Symphony*. Thanks to the fortepiano I can alternate the dark colour of the moderator with the silvery sonority of the *una corda*, creating an almost antiphonal dialogue between the two registers and, consequently, underline this specific idea of the composer.

Q: Czerny's writings seem to have played an important role in your interpretation

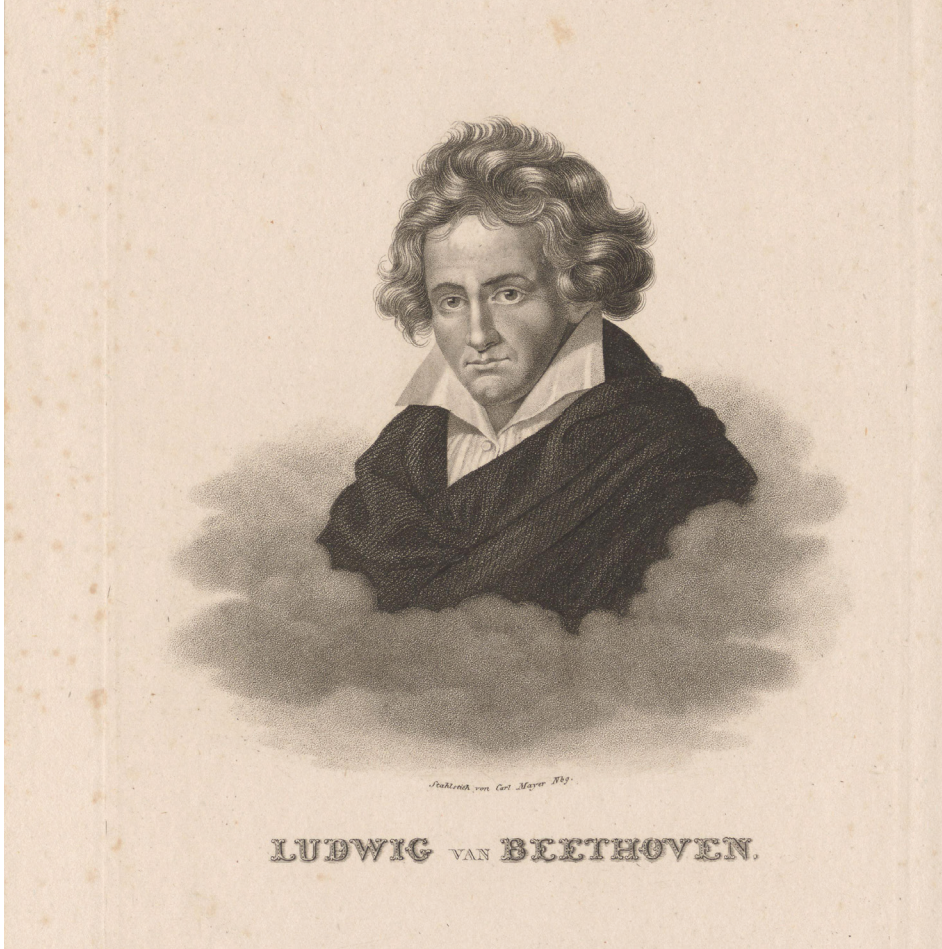
GC: They certainly have. Czerny's observations are invaluable because they offer the perspective of someone who belonged directly to Beethoven's world. Take the opening movement. Although it is written in 12/8, I contantly have the perception that performers understand it almost as a broad 4/4. Faithfully following the 12/8 changes one's perception of the phrasing: the shorter note values recover their proper brevity, the trills become quicker and more incisive, and by restoring Beethoven's original rhythmic profile the music regains something of its threatening character, while the second subject retains its *cantabile* quality. I believe Beethoven's notation is extremely precise. I also believe the syncopations should remain strictly *in tempo* here, because in the first movement they acquire a much wilder character while preserving their structural weight.

Q: The *Sonata in E major, Op. 109*, presents rather different challenges. What were the principal questions it raised for you?

GC: One of the most intriguing questions comes from Czerny's suggestion that the first movement should be approached almost as a fantasy. That immediately raises the problem of how the opening *Vivace ma non troppo* relates to the *Adagio espressivo* that appears after only a few bars. How do these contrasting characters belong to the same musical discourse? Finding a convincing relationship between them was one of the central concerns of my interpretation. At the same time, I wanted to preserve the work's structural coherence. Beneath its apparent freedom there are recurring motivic elements—such as the ascending tetrachord—that create connections across the entire movement. Bringing those relationships to the surface seemed essential to me. The second movement also benefits from the colours available on the fortepiano. Beethoven specifically indicates *una corda*, and on the historical instrument that marking produces a sonority of remarkable individuality. The final movement, however, is the true destination of the sonata. I see the variations as a continuous ascent. Each has its own distinct character, but they all contribute to a single large-scale trajectory leading towards the final variation, whose climactic nature seems unmistakable. My aim was to preserve both the individuality of each variation and the sense of an uninterrupted progression towards that final summit.

Q: The *Six Bagatelles, Op. 126*, occupy a unique place in Beethoven's late output. How do you see them?

GC: They originated in rather practical circumstances, yet they



contain an extraordinary concentration of Beethoven's late style. To me they reflect many of the ideas that characterise his final works. When I recorded them many years ago, I was perhaps too fascinated by their spiritual dimension. Looking back, I realised that I had drawn almost everything towards the world of the *Adagio*. This time I wanted to recover something of their nature as *Bagatelles*: pieces capable of lightness, wit and spontaneity, without losing their depth. The *Second Bagatelle* is a good example. It is built upon strongly antithetical musical ideas, and precisely this opposition invites subtle differences of tempo and small nuances of agogic inflection, allowing each idea to emerge with its own distinct character while remaining within a coherent musical framework. Finally, there is a broader question of performance practice. Modern pianism tends to demand absolute synchrony between the two hands, whereas nineteenth-century evidence often suggests greater flexibility. Listening to early recordings or even piano rolls, one frequently hears the melodic line taking a small expressive freedom while the left hand momentarily waits before resuming the pulse. This creates a subtle elasticity without compromising the overall order of the music. I believe that, when used with discretion, this approach opens expressive possibilities that have largely disappeared from modern playing. The same search for sobriety informs my treatment of ornamentation. In Beethoven's late style I prefer to avoid excessive elaboration. A certain restraint seems to me more consistent with the severity and concentration of this extraordinary music.

Recorded at GC Studio, Pecetto Torinese (Italy), on 1-7 August 2024
Executive producers: Gianluca Cascioli & Glaux Records
Recording, Recording Producer, Editing, and Mastering: Gianluca Cascioli
Design: Stefano Aresi
Artist's Photo: Matteo Maso
Graphic elements (cortesy of Rijksmuseum Amsterdam):
Decorations from a dish by the Oud-Loosdrecht manifacture, ca. 1784 (BK-14562-O-M-2), digipack | Anselmus Boëtius de Boodt & Elias Verhulst, *Diversche couleuren van Koorn Bloemen*, 1596 - 1610 (RP-T-BR-2017-1-10-95), digipack | Theodor Neu (attr.), *Ludwig van Beethoven*, 1820-1851(RP-P-1968-160), p. 4 | Aimé de Lemud, *Bethofen* (sic), *träumend*, 1870-1900 (RP-F-F00671-W), p. 6 | Jan Fekkes, *Ludwig van Beethoven*, 1918 (RP-P-1924-85), p. 11 | Anon., *Carl Czerny*, 1821-1899 (RP-P-2020-6208), p. 13 | Josef Kriehuber & Moritz Lämmel, *Ludwig van Beethoven*, 1850-1866 (RP-P-1904-4030), p. 18 | Carl Mayer, *Ludwig van Beethoven*, 1829-1839 (RP-P-2019-4905), p. 21
Fortepiano's Photo (courtesy of Paul McNulty)

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