

NAXOS

Ferdinand **RIES**

Three Sonatas for Violin and Piano

Eric Grossman, Violin • Susan Kagan, Piano



Ferdinand Ries (1784-1838)

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Ferdinand Ries is known mainly through his connection with Beethoven, as his family friend, piano student, and early biographer. Fourteen years Beethoven's junior, Ries was born into a prominent musical family in Bonn; his father, Franz, principal violinist in the Electoral Court orchestra, taught Beethoven violin and viola, and befriended his family during Beethoven's youth. Largely self-taught, Ries developed as a pianist, studying first in Munich, and in 1803, in Vienna, where he asked Beethoven to teach him. Beethoven gave him piano lessons, but sent him to Johann Albrechtsberger, a noted theorist, for composition lessons. Ries was probably Beethoven's closest friend during this period, carrying out musical and secretarial tasks for him: copying parts, making transcriptions and arrangements, proofreading, and seeing to publications. Ries pursued a highly successful career as a touring virtuoso for many years, and after short stays in Paris and Vienna, he finally settled in London, marrying an Englishwoman and raising a family. He also continued to act on Beethoven's behalf.

Ries was a gifted and prolific composer in every instrumental genre whose works, like those of many other composers of his time, were largely overshadowed by Beethoven's overwhelming presence. Still, in his lifetime his music was published and widely known to the music-loving public. In 1804, Ries made his Viennese debut playing Beethoven's *Third Piano Concerto, Op. 37*. He toured throughout Europe, including Russia and Scandinavia, to great acclaim and was made a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music. In his lifetime virtually all his music was published, and often reissued by different publishers, attesting to its popularity. Eventually he and his family left England, settling in Frankfurt am Main in the Rhineland, where he conducted and continued to compose until his death. One of his final achievements was his collaboration with another childhood friend from Bonn, Franz Wegeler; together, they wrote and published an early biography (1838) of Beethoven (*Biographische Notizen über Ludwig Van*

Beethoven), a valuable collection of reminiscences and anecdotes about the composer.

Ries composed eighteen violin sonatas, many of them during his two-year stay in Paris from 1807 to 1809. The opera-obsessed French public showed little interest in Ries's instrumental music, and in 1809 Ries departed on his European tour. The *Violin Sonatas* were brought out by the Bonn music publisher, Simrock, who also published much of Beethoven's music.

The sonatas are models of the Viennese Classical sonata style established by Mozart: most are in three movements, with first movements in sonata-allegro form, lyrical slow movements in ternary form, and rondo finales. Like Mozart, Ries divides the material to provide equal interest for both instruments. The first of the Op. 8 *Sonatas*, in F major, largely follows the Classical mode described above. The pastoral character of the key of F major is embodied in the opening theme of the lyrical first movement. Following a perky *scherzo* and *trio* in F minor, a brief slow movement (*Larghetto*) introduces the rondo finale. Its bucolic theme contrasts strongly with the music of the central rondo episode (in F minor and C minor), where staccato triplets evolve into a bristling fugue – an unusual event in Ries's music, where polyphonic writing is generally avoided.

The companion Op. 8 *Sonata in C minor*, like Beethoven's works in that tonality, starts with an incisive theme, much like that in the opening movement of Beethoven's *Piano Sonata in C minor, Op. 10, No. 3*. Its dotted rhythms and strong dynamics give it a military character, but much of the thematic material that follows turns lyrical. The lovely, serene mood of the following *Adagio cantabile* is a perfect oasis between the first movement and the light *Allegro scherzando* of the Rondo finale, with its staccato texture and rapid repeated notes.

The *Grande Sonata in F minor, Op. 19*, published in 1810, is large-scale in both structure and content; its tonality, along with the dramatic urgency of the main theme of the opening movement, link it in character to

Beethoven's great piano sonata, the *Appassionata, Op. 57*, from 1805. The first movement opens with a brief, poignant *Largo espressivo*, followed by an *Allegro agitato* whose feverish piano accompaniment expresses a mood of foreboding. The second theme turns to a major tonality, but the mood of urgency embodied in the rapid figuration of the piano writing does not change throughout the movement.

The slow movement, marked *Andante*, is one of Ries's loveliest creations; in A flat major, in a flowing triple meter, it is tender and eloquent. The themes, although simple, are deeply expressive.

The finale, in Ries's usual rondo form, reverts to the mood of the first movement, with a feeling of breathlessness in its fast tempo and rushing figuration; but at the same time, it conveys a playful feeling rather than a dramatic one. The rondo theme, in the tonic key, is a quirky, disjointed little staccato figure in the piano, followed by a lyrical legato melody in F major in the violin. A central episode, however, is of a different character: a sudden wild and loudly turbulent section in minor characterised by loud, alternating octaves in the piano, and abrupt, almost harsh chords in the violin, which slowly returns to the playful rondo theme.

Susan Kagan

Also available



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Eric Grossman



Photo: Gianelli

The violinist Eric Grossman's first teacher was his father, cellist John Grossman, who instilled in him an abiding love for music. A graduate of Juilliard, where he studied with Dorothy DeLay, Eric Grossman enjoys an active performing career. He has given highly acclaimed recitals and solo performances with orchestras in the United States, Europe, Korea, Japan, and Cuba under renowned conductors including Zubin Mehta, Stanislaw Skrowaczewski, and Michael Gielen. He has performed and recorded Lowell Liebermann's *Violin Sonata* with the composer, and recorded the soundtrack performance of Ravel's *Tzigane* for *The Elusive Muse*, a PBS documentary on dancer Suzanne Farrell. He won the CUBADISCO award for his performance of the *First and Second Violin Concertos*, written for him by Jorge López Marín, and recorded live with the Cuban National Symphony Orchestra, with the composer on the podium. As a chamber musician he has

collaborated with such noted artists as David Soyer, Seymour Lipkin, Philip Myers, and Gerald and Susan Kagan, among many others. During 2012-2013 he presented a series of recitals in New York and across the United States dedicated to the compositions of Niccolò Paganini.

Susan Kagan



Photo: Peter Schaaf

Susan Kagan, a pianist, author, and educator, has explored the music of composers associated with Beethoven and his milieu. She holds a Ph.D from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York; her dissertation on the music of Archduke Rudolph, Beethoven's composition student for more than two decades, was published by Pendragon Press in 1988 (*The Music of Archduke Rudolph, Beethoven's Patron, Pupil, and Friend*). She has recorded several of his works for the Koch International label. Her discography includes three CDs in partnership with the renowned violinist Josef Suk (Koch), two sets of Mozart piano concertos with the Suk Chamber Orchestra of Prague (Vox and Koch Discover), and the complete solo piano sonatas of Ferdinand Ries on five CDs (Naxos). She recently retired from the faculty of Hunter College, where she taught music history and founded the New York Chapter of the American Beethoven Society. In 2007 she received the Ira F. Brilliant Lifetime Achievement Award for Beethoven Performance and Studies from the American Beethoven Society. She was a reviewer of new recordings for *Fanfare* magazine until 2011, and serves on the Advisory Boards of the American Beethoven Society and the Schubert Society of the United States.

Ferdinand Ries was Beethoven's student, close friend and biographer. He was a gifted and prolific composer whose works, like those of many other composers of his time, were largely overshadowed by Beethoven's presence. Ries's music was widely known and admired in his lifetime, and his 18 *Violin Sonatas* are models of the Viennese Classical style established by Mozart. The pastoral character of the first *Sonata, Op. 8* is enlivened through the unusual appearance of a fugue, while the second of the pair features a lovely, serene *Adagio cantabile*. The large-scale drama of the *Grande Sonata, Op. 19* links it to Beethoven's *Appassionata*.

Ferdinand RIES

(1784-1838)

Three Sonatas for Violin and Piano

Sonata in F, Op. 8, No. 1 30:25

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------|
| 1 I. Allegro ma non troppo | 12:43 |
| 2 II. Allegretto vivace | 7:00 |
| 3 III. Larghetto | 1:59 |
| 4 IV. Allegretto quasi allegro | 8:43 |

Sonata in C minor, Op. 8, No. 2 26:28

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| 5 I. Allegro con spirito | 12:07 |
| 6 II. Adagio cantabile | 6:23 |
| 7 III. Allegro scherzando | 7:59 |

Grande Sonata in F minor, Op. 19 20:51

- | | |
|-----------------------------------------|------|
| 8 I. Largo espressivo – Allegro agitato | 7:39 |
| 9 II. Andante | 7:03 |
| 10 III. Allegro | 6:08 |

WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS

Eric Grossman, Violin • Susan Kagan, Piano

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Producer and engineer: Ryan Streber • Booklet notes: Susan Kagan • Piano: Steinway

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