



**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN**

Piano Sonatas nos. 3, 23 & 30

**Angela Brownridge**



SUPER AUDIO CD

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## LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

### Piano Sonata no. 3 in C major op. 2 no. 3

[1] Allegro	10:19
[2] Adagio	8:11
[3] Scherzo	3:10
[4] Allegro assai	5:27

### Piano Sonata no. 23 in F minor op. 57 'Appassionata'

[5] Allegro assai	9:09
[6] Andante con moto	6:42
[7] Allegro ma non troppo	8:21

### Piano Sonata no. 30 in E major op. 109

[8] Vivace, ma non troppo	4:20
[9] Prestissimo	2:25
[10] Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung	13:25

total time 71:34

## New paths of compositional thinking

"Ludwig van Beethoven, [...] solicitous only towards his art, eager to perfect himself in it, to battle with virtuosos in order to become the first among them." Thus wrote Hugo von Hofmannsthal about Beethoven, who was an excellent and successful pianist. As a composer, he consistently stretched the genre of the piano sonata, adding his own twists. ETA Hoffmann commented that "Haydn and Mozart, the creators of the newer instrumental music, were the first ones to show us this art in all its glory; however, it was Beethoven who looked upon them, full of love, entering into their innermost being." Although Beethoven had composed the so-called "Kurfürstensonaten" [Prince-Elector's Sonatas] as a teenager in Bonn, the following three piano sonatas held such significance for him that in 1795 he gave them his second opus number. He wrote them shortly after relocating to Vienna, dedicating them to his role model Joseph Haydn, who had also taught him for a short while. But, by that time, Haydn was advanced in years and too busy with commissions from England to look after his pupil. Beethoven therefore had no other option but to find new patrons and teachers. His fame as a pianist travelled fast – and soon also that as a composer. In 1795 the "Jahrbuch der Tonkunst von Wien und Prag" commented that "Beethoven, a musical genius" had made his mark with "several beautiful sonatas, of which his most recent ones are particularly fine".

Even these early sonatas leave no doubt that Beethoven intended to take the genre into more elevated realms and to greater significance. In the *C major*

*Sonata op. 2 no. 3*, he added concerto-like elements: all movements bar the *Adagio* are studded with technical subtleties, aiming at the brilliant effects of a piano concerto. The striking main theme of the opening movement features a splendidly balanced core motif. The well-defined structure of the sonata form is veiled by several secondary ideas. At the beginning of the sophisticated development, mighty chordal passages can be heard. Semiquaver runs lead into the recapitulation. A concerto-like cadenza is woven into the sensational coda. The effusive *Adagio*, emerging in the remote key of E major, is a prime example of a movement cast in three-part song form. The ethereal musical textures include a melancholy lament in a precipitous minor key. The *Scherzo*, complete with imitative entries of the main motif, appears as a humoresque. The trio section is dominated by rolling triplet quavers and nuanced dynamics. The glittering final rondo heightens the ingenious main theme at every return with surprisingly novel variants. Thirds in contrary motion lead into a chorale theme. The highly virtuosic coda impresses with long chains of trills and powerful chords.

Beethoven increasingly pursued his vision of a new pianistic sphere with novel soundscapes – leaving his predecessors Haydn and Mozart far behind. He would often break the mould, creating pure drama according to his motto “All true art represents moral progress”. His contemporaries already recognised the passionate character of Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata in F minor op. 57*. He had not chosen the sobriquet of “Appassionata” himself: the Hamburg publisher Craz was responsible for this addition. But Beethoven, who regarded this composition as his “greatest” sonata to date, reportedly suggested to Anton

Schindler that he should, in relation to this work, read Shakespeare’s drama “The Tempest” in which a terrible storm erupts, symbolising the dubiousness of human existence. The sonata is dedicated to Count Franz von Brunswick, whom Beethoven called a “friend and brother”.

After a *pianissimo* introduction, the famous sonata emerges, pulsating and with wild runs. Themes are excitedly chopped up. The music constantly swells up into *fortissimo* outbursts, only then to plummet in free fall. The nostalgic secondary theme manages to introduce a certain sense of calm – but the agitated nature of the music keeps on forging ahead like thunder. The second movement appears to originate from a different, better world. It serves as an island of tranquillity between the storms of the outer movements and consists of a solemn theme with three variations. The oppressive finale returns to the impetuosity, defiantly elevating it to intractability. Akin to a *perpetuum mobile*, it progresses further and further into a relentless vortex featuring incessant semiquaver chains and thematic metamorphoses. There seems to be no escape from this existential struggle; even the development is repeated. The sonata ends abruptly, and with destructive force – Beethoven had managed to burst the limits of his time, following the “new path” he had announced.

Beethoven’s late piano sonatas in particular are surrounded by a singular aura: as far as their construction and expressivity are concerned, they are mystical and also bold. However, he never forgot tradition, as becomes clear in his *Piano Sonata in E major op. 109*. It is the first of the final three great sonatas. Written in 1820 (when Beethoven was already entirely deaf and, as a result,

was isolated from society), it is dedicated to Maximiliane Brentano, the daughter of his longstanding friend Antonie Brentano, who (as many other women) has been thought to be a possible addressee of the famous love letter to the, as yet unidentified, "Immortal Beloved". In the same year Beethoven noted in his conversation booklet: "True art is idiosyncratic [...], it cannot be forced into flattering forms." *The E major Sonata* is a fine example of this aspiration. Here, Beethoven presents and stages the unexpected. In his dedicatory note he explained: "It is the spirit which holds together noble and better humans in this world and which cannot be destroyed by any age; this spirit is now speaking to you."

Despite its straightforward dimension, the sonata is ingeniously geared towards the finale, a movement of variations. In the lyrically floating opening movement, the sonata form is recognisable only in rudimentary form, to the benefit of improvisatory traits. Beethoven allows himself to engage in free fantasising and also introduces several bold harmonic twists. The tempestuous *Prestissimo* follows on *attacca*, a character piece with striking bass lines, repeated notes and broken triads. All preceding material is toppled into monstrous turbulences of a demonic ride through hell. The finale, marked "Songful, with the most heartfelt sentiment", follows as the climax. Featuring a striding saraband rhythm, it is based on a lyrical melody which is illuminated by six multifaceted variations – sometimes operatic, sometimes pointillist, sometimes scherzo-like. The "Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung" found particular praise for the fugal technique of the fifth variation: "This little piece with its serious physiognomy in the so-called *galant* style contains [...] so much evidence of the great master's

artistry." The sixth variation, which sees the return of the opening melody in its original form at the end, unleashes an enormous increase in the flow of motion.

Heidi Rogge

Translation: Viola Scheffel / Muse Translations



## **Angela Brownridge** piano

*"one of the world's finest pianists...."* - New York Times

Hailed as a major star in classical music Angela Brownridge has been compared with such pianists as the legendary Solomon, Rachmaninov, Cherkassky, and Bolet. She began her life in an atmosphere of freedom and individualism virtually impossible to find today. Under the guidance of Maria Curcio, who had been a pupil of Schnabel for many years, she absorbed the ability to produce every nuance of the piano, and to present music flexibly and persuasively instead of concentrating on a single method of technique or continual displays of brilliance, learning to deal with the differing requirements of a varied range of composers which recalls Cortot in his prime. Indeed, by realising that many pianists of a bygone age played with far more individuality, magic, and inspiration than has become the fashion, she was able to develop her own unique personality. In an age which has become over-fascinated with mere technique, and which seeks the degree of 'perfection' offered by over-edited CDs, Angela's playing restores spontaneity, character, and beauty of sound to the platform.

A child prodigy, equally talented in composition, extemporisation, and technically brilliant, Angela first performed in public at the age of seven, and a year later had several pieces published. By the age of ten she had given her first concerto performance, and in her early teens was appearing regularly as a recitalist and concerto performer throughout Great Britain and abroad. She later won a piano scholarship to Edinburgh University, and after graduating B. Mus. was awarded

a further scholarship for a two-year period of study in Rome with Guido Agosti. As the winner of several competitions she was able to continue her studies with Maria Curcio in London, where she now lives.

Since then Angela has appeared in all the major London concert halls, and has visited Eastern and Western Europe, the USA, Canada, the Far East and Australia, as well as performing extensively in the UK. She has been a soloist with many leading orchestras and conductors, and Festival engagements include Bath, Edinburgh, Warwick, Newport Rhode Island, Bratislava, Brno, Hong Kong, and Maastricht.

Her recorded repertoire is very varied, including some first ever collections of the complete piano music of Barber, Gershwin, Kenneth Leighton and the complete piano concertos of Saint-Saëns.

Her recordings have received worldwide critical acclaim, several being voted "Critics' Choice" by Hi-Fi News and Record of the Year by the Absolute Sound magazine of America . She has also appeared on BBC TV in programmes which have involved her in discussion about the music she has performed. She often gives lecture recitals and master classes, and maintains her love of improvisation which has led her on occasions into the world of jazz.

## Concert Reviews

*'...true genius. Her performances were passionate, rhapsodic and totally compelling. She is a marvellously exciting artist, and a wonderfully assertive pianist with a strong sense of musical structure'.*

New York Times

*'...amazing technique and tonal splendour ... wonderful clarity and dramatic force ... electrifying authority of which passion and dedication were the keynotes. She is an artist of the highest calibre and this was playing of the highest order'.*

The Guardian

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