



EROICA

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The music of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) occupies a central position not only in the piano repertoire, but also in the imagination of the music-loving public at large. Beethoven's compositions, as well as his legendary persona, have come to be seen as the embodiment of the early Romantic era and Romanticism in general. Beethoven's music is perhaps even seen as the standard-bearer for Western art music as a whole. No serious composer after Beethoven could escape his influence. Indeed, when one considers genres such as the

symphony, the string quartet, and the piano sonata, it could be claimed that the remainder of common-practice tonal art music is but a series of footnotes to Beethoven.

Beethoven was a trailblazer in several respects. With Beethoven, the Romanticist attitude to musical material arrived wholesale. Frequent use of tightly-knit motive-based themes resulted with entire movements emerging organically from a few core musical ideas subjected to thorough development. Beethoven no longer saw formal schemes as merely a set of rigidly determined 'containers' for thematic content, but instead composed such that the musical material itself determines the architecture of the piece from the bottom up. In terms of tonality, harmonic juxtaposition and modulation are used not simply for the sake of contrast, but to serve dramatic, personally expressive purposes. Clearly, in Beethoven's music the temperament of the composer imposes itself fully on the listener.

It wasn't just in a technical sense that Beethoven was an innovator: he was also a progressive in terms of the day-to-day business of being a composer. While it is true that Beethoven had aristocratic benefactors and patrons to whom he dedicated many of his works, he was by no means a court composer in the vein of Joseph Haydn. The music Beethoven wrote was *his*, and no patron or social elite dictated the course of his musical ideas. Furthermore, Beethoven was active as a pianist, earning an income by performance and teaching. He used his concert appearances

to promote his compositions, which were then published and sold to the public. He was similarly independent with regard to chamber and particularly orchestral music, presenting concerts to the ticket-buying public in cooperation with concert houses, patrons and orchestras.

Beethoven is seen as something of a mythological hero-figure in Western music. His fiery disposition is often reported in historical accounts, as well as being pictorially represented in portraits, sketches and caricatures by his artist contemporaries. The composer was something of a hot-head, and his arguments with friends, acquaintances, and even publishers contributed to the modern image of a man with little time for anything but his art. Beethoven never married, and yet his intense, tempestuous and somewhat mysterious relationships with various members of the opposite sex have even been the topic of several books and even a Hollywood film. And then, of course, there is Beethoven's most famous personal affliction: his deafness. In 1797, while the composer was still in his twenties, an infection led to an irreversible deterioration in hearing. Within a decade, Beethoven had ceased all public performance due to deafness. This loss of hearing, ultimately unaided by listening horns and doctors, was a source of intense despair. But despite Fate's cruellest blow, Beethoven continued to compose, albeit at a reduced pace. Tellingly, some of his most profound and personal music was produced in the last phase of his career.

This recording represents three central works in Beethoven's keyboard output. They are all highly idiosyncratic, deeply expressive compositions. All bear Beethoven's hallmark thematic development, harmonic adventurousness and breadth of formal conception. The first of these works is the *Variations and Fugue on an Original Theme* in E-flat major, op. 35, nicknamed the 'Eroica' Variations. Variation writing as a musical form can trace its roots to 16th century English and Spanish composers, writing for both keyboard and string instruments. The early Baroque composers ensured the spread of variation writing across Europe. The Baroque variation technique arguably reached its zenith in J. S. Bach's landmark 'Goldberg' Variations of 1741-42. The set of 'Goldberg' Variations is, of course, a work entirely constituted by variations based on a single theme. More commonly thereafter, particularly with the Classicists such as Mozart and Haydn, the theme-and-variations form found itself as a movement within larger multi-movement works, whether solo, chamber, or symphonic. After the Classicists, the Romanticists turned their attention back toward writing monumental, stand-alone sets of variations, often with the piano in the starring role. Good examples include the *Variations on a Theme by Paganini* and the *Variations on a Theme of Haydn* (both by Johannes Brahms, 1865 and 1873 respectively), and later, the orchestral *Enigma Variations* (Edward Elgar, 1899). The interest in variation writing continued through to the 20th century, with

composers such as Arnold Schönberg and especially Anton Webern spending much time on works dedicated to the development and alteration of an initial theme.

The Romanticists and their descendants were no doubt inspired by the monumental solo keyboard variations written by Beethoven, the central examples being the ‘Diabelli’ Variations (1819–23) and the earlier ‘Eroica’ Variations (1802). The ‘Eroica’ Variations received their nickname due to the theme that Beethoven chose as his subject, as this theme is prominent in the Third Symphony in E flat major (1803, the ‘Eroica’ or ‘Heroic’ Symphony). This dotted-rhythm melody is, in fact, to be found in several of his works around this period. In addition to the op. 35 variations and the Third Symphony, the ‘Eroica’ theme makes an appearance in music for the ballet *Die Geschöpfe von Prometheus* (*The Creatures of Prometheus*, 1801), as well as the suite for orchestra entitled *12 Contredanses*, which Beethoven had worked on for ten years starting in 1791. That it was constantly on the composer’s mind at this time is further shown by the fact that his sketchbooks are littered with adaptations and variations of this fertile melody.

The dotted-rhythm ‘Eroica’ melody forms the central theme of the Variations, and thus, the nickname ‘Eroica’ has stuck. The Variations, however, are not dedicated to any heroic figure in particular. Instead, they are dedicated to Beethoven’s friend and supporter, Count Moritz von Lichnowsky. The identity of the hero that Beethoven had in

mind when titling the Third Symphony had been Napoleon Bonaparte. The circumstances surrounding this subtitle are a part of musical folklore. Beethoven idolised Bonaparte, who was at the time an important figure in the newly formed Consulate. The composer considered Bonaparte to be the personification of the ideals of the French Revolution—for despite the fact that Beethoven accepted the patronage and friendship of the aristocratic classes, he was an anti-monarchist at heart. However, in 1804, Bonaparte had declared himself Emperor Napoleon of France, and was soon to put a destructive and bloody imperialist agenda into practice. In Beethoven’s eyes, Bonaparte had turned his back on the spirit of the Revolution by assuming monarch-like dictatorial authority. News of Bonaparte’s declaration of absolute power reached Beethoven via his pupil and assistant Ferdinand Ries, who was therefore on hand to witness the composer’s reaction. Ries reported that Beethoven, in a fit of rage, ripped the title page from the nearest manuscript of the Third Symphony and tore it in half. This may be something of an embellishment, however. The extant score in the composer’s hand still sports its title page, although it is clear that Beethoven violently scratched Napoleon Bonaparte’s name from the title page, damaging the paper beneath. When the Symphony was eventually published in 1806, the title had been changed to ‘Heroic Symphony’, with a dedication to ‘the memory of a great man’.

Beethoven’s compositional craft is on full display in the

'Eroica' Variations, as this is thematic development without equal. One may wish to draw a comparison with Beethoven's orchestral works, as such rich thematic development is a hallmark of the symphonies. The 'Eroica' theme, when presented in the Third Symphony, is also subject to variations. Another similarity between the two works is that both feature variations of the bass that precede the statement of the full theme. That is not to say that Beethoven composed two identical sets of variations. As a matter of fact, by tracing the manipulation of the dotted 'Eroica' theme through the published works that contain it, as well as the sketchbooks, one gets a picture of just how rich Beethoven's musical imagination was. Beethoven's compositional essence was development, and with this theme, his genius is evident. He was able to mutate, change and develop this simple theme in myriad ways. In the 'Eroica' Variations alone, the full theme is varied fifteen times, in addition to the three variations on the bass preceding the first statement of the complete theme. And, of course, Beethoven caps it off with the ultimate contrapuntal treatment: a fugue.

Also featured on this disk are two of Beethoven's piano sonatas. Variation of thematic material was a hallmark of Beethoven's style that extended far beyond works or movements with the title 'Variations'. Beethoven's thematic development was to become the inspiration for the organicism of the late Romantics such as Liszt and Brahms, where entire works seem to owe their material to the development of a central thematic kernel. With Beethoven, constant development (or, if you will, variation) of thematic material was fused with expansion of form. No longer were introductions, codas and passages linking themes merely tools for creating the architecture of a piece. Instead, they had become opportunities for further thematic development, and points at which new material could be introduced. This meant that content now dictated form, as opposed to form constraining content. A prime example is the first movement of the afore-mentioned Third Symphony. However, this trend is also salient in the piano sonatas recorded here.

The Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor, op. 13, was written between 1797 and 1798, seeing publication in Vienna in 1799. The nickname commonly associated with the work, 'Pathétique', is derived from the subtitle that the publisher added to the title page with Beethoven's approval: 'Grand sonate pathétique'. The word 'pathétique' shouldn't be directly translated into the English word 'pathetic', in its modern sense. Instead, a better translation would perhaps

be 'pathos-laden'. (Compare Tchaikovsky's tragic Sixth Symphony in B minor, also nicknamed 'Pathétique'.) It hasn't escaped the notice of musicologists that this sonata—and in particular, thematic content in the second movement—bears some resemblance to Mozart's C minor sonata, K. 457. Mozart's sonata is also a work of pathos and turmoil, although perhaps presented in a manner more serene and less brusque than Beethoven's.

The 'Pathétique' opens with a C minor chord, the tonic of the key to which Beethoven seemed to instinctively turn for his most profound statements of tragedy. What follows the slow introduction is a frantic sonata form, wild in both note-count and harmonic scope. Note that material from the slow introduction makes a reappearance later in the movement—again, the composer does not allow formal convention to stand in the way of musical content. The slow movement is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful that Beethoven put to paper, its lyricism previously unimaginable through the course of the opening movement. The final movement is a rondo, where a central theme returns after brief interludes of alternative material. Here, note again that Beethoven defies convention by using thematic material from the first movement. In this manner, he creates a work that is not simply thematically unified within each individual movement, but across the sonata as a whole. This, in a nutshell, is the 'organicism' that is so often pointed out as a characteristic of later Romantic music.

The 'Pathétique' Sonata bears a dedication to Prince Karl Alois von Lichnowsky, the elder brother of Moritz von Lichnowsky, dedicatee of the 'Eroica' Variations. Karl von Lichnowsky was a steadfast financial supporter of music in Vienna, and a pivotal figure in Beethoven's early days there. The Prince's patronage, however, did not mean that Beethoven would append a dedication to a whimsical ditty made for easy listening. The op. 13 sonata is a fine example of Beethoven breaking the shackles of musical conservatism for the sake of personal expression. The sonata proved popular, but it was also perhaps a forewarning to Vienna's more old-fashioned audiences that Beethoven had no intention to write trivial music that merely entertained a genteel audience.

The second sonata presented on this disk is Sonata No. 23 in F minor, op. 57, written between 1804 and 1806, and published in Vienna in 1807. This sonata also bears a nickname: 'Appassionata'. However, this is a subtitle that Beethoven did not personally approve. It was instead supplied by the publisher, August Heinrich Cranz, who thought it a fitting description given the tumultuous, dramatic nature of the outer movements. Furthermore, it wasn't applied to the original version of the work, but rather to a four-hand arrangement of the work dating from 1838—that is, some years after Beethoven's death.

The key of F minor is the tonic of the outer movements, which are both cast in Beethoven's expansive treatment

of sonata form (or, more aptly, the thematic material in the outer movements demanded expansive sonata-form treatment). It is interesting that, apparently, the lowest note available to Beethoven on his piano at the time was an F, for much time is spent in the sonata thunderously hammering that lowest available note. The only respite from the sonic and emotional turmoil is the beautiful *Andante con moto* second movement, a piece of music that has something of the restrained composure of Mozart's slow movements. It is essentially a set of four variations, preceded by a statement of a main theme. Yet even here, there is tangible tension built into the form itself. The outer movements are in F minor, but instead of choosing dominant, subdominant, or relative major for the middle movement, Beethoven chose the key of D flat, the key most distant from the work's tonic. This mirrors the dipping into the tritone key area in the troubled first movement. And, as if to reinforce the idea that this is but a temporary and unstable respite from passionate despair, the *Andante* leads directly into the restless finale.

What might have triggered such an outpouring of musical emotion? Beethoven's music undoubtedly became more and more emotionally raw as his career progressed, a fact often linked to the frustration associated with his irreversibly deteriorating hearing. It was around the time of the composition of the 'Appassionata' Sonata that Beethoven was beginning to accept that his hearing would be lost, and that no remedy for his deafness would be found. Ironically,

the work bears a dedication to Count Franz von Brunswick, a man whom it has been suggested was in possession of a personality that was anything but passionate. (There are suggestions that Beethoven himself was, in fact, enamoured by both of Count von Brunswick's sisters at the time!)

A great deal has been written about the op. 57 sonata, and yet a fair deal of this literature mentions at some point that words are useless in conveying the passionate affect expressed by Beethoven. Instead of talking or writing, the 'Appassionata' Sonata, it is often argued, needs to be experienced. There can be no doubt that listening to the work is definitely a musical experience in the fullest sense of the term. But the fact that that people have written so much about the 'Appassionata', in addition to the rest of Beethoven's music, is testament to the adventurous technical craftsmanship and the innovative nature of his compositional style. That people spend so much time *listening* to Beethoven's music is testament to the fact that this is music that speaks to the human condition, even more so than the intellect.

KONSTANTIN SCHERBAKOV

Once a “Superstar for the insider” (Die Welt), Konstantin Scherbakov is today one of the internationally renowned pianists who take a special place in the modern piano world. His creativity and immense contribution to the piano repertoire and recording catalogue are undisputed. “One of the most capable, daring and interesting musicians of these days” – Peter Cossé, the famous German critic once described him. Selfless dedication and uncompromising responsibility towards music and piano repertoire define Scherbakov’s priorities throughout his thirty-year career. For him, being a musician first and foremost means to serve the music and not to stand in the spotlight. Viewing the pianist as an intermediary, communicating the message and intentions of the composer — that is the aesthetic concept that determines Scherbakov’s entire artistic path. An insatiable musical curiosity and an exceptional ability to quickly assimilate unconventional and highly complex texts, an analytical mind and unlimited virtuosity – these are the essential qualities that have accompanied the artist on his journey through the ocean of piano literature.

The 20-year-old pianist’s phenomenal victory at the Rachmaninoff Competition (Moscow, 1983) with Rachmaninoff’s lesser known 4th Piano Concerto, carried a symbolic sign: it made the pianist aware of his interests,

confirmed them and set his future artistic goals. His mission to promote the forgotten, unknown, but no less beautiful music has become apparent.

Over the next ten years, Scherbakov experimented with different styles, explored expressive possibilities, tried to find his own way and developed his artistic capacities. He gave hundreds of concerts in the former Soviet Union and worked intensively at the State Radio Studios. He studied and played the complete works of Sergei Rachmaninoff (Scherbakov rediscovered and promoted some of his forgotten music), complete Prokofiev Sonatas, complete works by Ravel and works by other French composers. However, at all times he remained faithful to his favourite composers Beethoven, Schubert and Chopin. In 1990 Scherbakov made his European début at the XX Music Festival in Asolo, Italy where he played the complete works by Rachmaninoff in four evenings. Swiatoslav Richter was there and praised the playing. Concert engagements in Western Europe immediately followed.

After the pianist moved to Switzerland in 1992, he received an invitation from Klaus Heymann, the founder of “Naxos” to make a CD with a repertoire that had never been recorded before. The release of the CD (Lyapunov, 12 Etudes d’execution transcendante op. 11) was a genuine sensation that not only started Scherbakov’s long recording career, but also determined its direction and thus in many respects the pianist’s perspectives, both in the studio and on stage.

(„This disc is a must for pianofiles... Alpine level of pianism.“ American Record Guide; “This is one of the best solo piano records ever made.” Amazon.com; “ Outstanding. No, more than that – superlative.” CD Review). This recording instantly established Scherbakov as an exceptional and distinguished pianist and shaped his artistic profile as an intelligent virtuoso who, despite all his pianistic grandeur, never flaunted this, but used it as a means to penetrate into the essence of the performed music.

The other important invitation of this kind came in 1995 from the record label EMI Classics, which recognised Scherbakov’s sophisticated virtuosity, artistic sensitivity and musical adventurousness. Asked once again to record something “unusual”, Scherbakov put together a programme of Strauss Waltzes (in arrangements by great virtuosos of the “Golden Age”). This release was also a phenomenal success: “Scherbakov is giving a real boost to the stuffy piano scene!”, wrote *Der Spiegel* enthusiastically. In 1993 Scherbakov made his début at the Lucerne Festival, where he the music press described him as the “Rachmaninoff of today”.

Since then Scherbakov has worked intensively, producing a total of about 40 CDs. He has recorded all the works for piano and orchestra by Medtner, Respighi, Tchaikovsky and Scriabin, as well as the Rachmaninoff piano concertos. Three large-scale recordings requires mention:

The complete piano works by Shostakovich – a work that achieved particularly resounding success with the recording

of the 24 Preludes and Fugues. The winner of the Cannes Classical Award at MIDEM in 2001, this recording left a lasting trace on Scherbakov’s concert career, which culminated in his Salzburg Festival début in 2005 (“One cannot play Shostakovich any better!” *Wiener Zeitung*).

Konstantin Scherbakov is the only pianist to play and record the complete works of “The Pianist’s Pianist” Leopold Godowsky; so far 11 of the planned 15 CDs of this huge project have been released.

Recently, the “Lifelong Beethovenian” (*Hi-Fi News*) has completed the third massive project. Like only a few pianists before him, he studied, played in concerts and recorded all nine Symphonies by Beethoven in Liszt’s transcription. The widespread enthusiasm of the music world resulted in the German Critics’ Prize and many concert invitations – to Paris, New York, Auckland, Vienna, Berlin and Moscow, as well as piano festivals like Ruhr, Luzern and Bad Kissingen. His conducting debut in Milano featured a Beethoven program. For many years, the pianist has performed the complete Symphonies cycle and Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas at the Tonhalle Zurich and the National Concert Hall in Taipei. In 2015, he will open the Beethoven Festival in Bonn.

However, Scherbakov’s interests do not lie solely in the uncharted depths of piano literature. Throughout his career, he has been working intensively on conventional repertoire. Clear examples are Beethoven’s massive Diabelli-Variations (“One of the 50 best CDs of all times” Attila Csampai) and

Complete Sonatas, Schubert with tremendous success at the Schubert Festivals in Feldkirch and Schwarzenberg (“... marvel at something not heard before, at the brilliance ... and the precision of form. The notable pianist, going his own way.” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*), the keyboard Sonatas by Scarlatti (“I wouldn’t hesitate to enshrine Scherbakov alongside the great Scarlatti pianists on disc, including Horowitz, Pletnev, Meyer, Tipo, and Schiff. Yes, he’s that good!” *Classics Today*) and Liszt with Christian Thielemann at F. Liszt’s 200th Anniversary celebrations in Weimar and Bayreuth (“The experience was celebrated emphatically: Konstantin Scherbakov ... admiration for his technical ability, that brings out heart, soul or sentiment”. *Landeszeitung*; “Scherbakov as a distinguished talent ... celebrated frenetically by the audience.” *Frankenpost*).

Since 1998 Konstantin Scherbakov has been Professor at the Zurich University of Arts; many of his students received prizes at international piano competitions, most notably Yulianna Avdeeva, the winner of the 2010 Chopin Competition in Warsaw.

Konstantin Scherbakov has been a jury member of many international competitions, such as ARD Munich, Busoni (Bolzano), Liszt (Weimar), Rio de Janeiro, Youth Tchaikovsky (Seoul), Havana etc.

EROICA Konstantin Scherbakov

L. V. BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Variations and a Fugue on an Original Theme in E-Flat Major, Op. 35, "Eroica"

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|-----|-------|---|
| 1. | 04:00 | Introduzione col Basso del Tema (Allegretto vivace) |
| 2. | 00:35 | Variation I |
| 3. | 00:48 | Variation II |
| 4. | 00:44 | Variation III |
| 5. | 00:37 | Variation IV |
| 6. | 00:54 | Variation V |
| 7. | 00:33 | Variation VI |
| 8. | 00:37 | Variation VII (Canone all'ottava) |
| 9. | 00:52 | Variation VIII |
| 10. | 00:40 | Variation IX |
| 11. | 00:38 | Variation X |
| 12. | 00:45 | Variation XI |
| 13. | 00:44 | Variation XII |
| 14. | 00:41 | Variation XIII |
| 15. | 01:09 | Variation XIV (Minore) |
| 16. | 04:50 | Variation XV (Maggiore - Largo) |
| 17. | 04:34 | Finale Alla Fuga (Allegro con brio) |

Piano Sonata No. 8 in C Minor, Op. 13, "Pathetique"

- | | | |
|-----|-------|-------------------------------------|
| 18. | 08:20 | Grave - Allegro di molto e con brio |
| 19. | 05:25 | Adagio cantabile |
| 20. | 04:53 | Rondo: Allegro |

Piano Sonata No. 23 in F Minor, Op. 57, "Appassionata"

- | | | |
|-----|-------|--------------------------------|
| 21. | 09:21 | Allegro assai |
| 22. | 05:50 | Andante con moto |
| 23. | 07:42 | Allegro ma non troppo - Presto |

Total: 65:12

TP1039190

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