

Beethoven Cello

Zoe Knighton
Amir Farid

COMPLETE SONATAS AND VARIATIONS
2-CD SET

move

Cellists often moan about the lack of a concerto by Beethoven – and rightly so, but these eight works for cello and piano are the envy of many other instruments. Beethoven had contact with a number of virtuoso cellists (Jean-Pierre and Jean-Louis Duport and Romberg to name a few). Beethoven even went so far as to offer to write a concerto for Romberg, but Romberg politely declined, saying he preferred to play his own compositions. In any case, we are grateful for these five sonatas and three sets of variations. In the late 18th century the cello was beginning to become known as a solo instrument with great expressive potential. Until this time, it was largely cellists such as Boccherini and Romberg writing their own music for the instrument. Some say even the Bach suites were written for his own practice purposes, but that's another story.

One can almost say that Beethoven invented the cello and piano sonata, making it into what we know today. It is fascinating that neither Haydn nor Mozart wrote cello and keyboard sonatas, as they both dedicated string quartets to the dedicatee of the Op. 5 sonatas.

The two Op. 5 sonatas were written for



Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia, who was himself a keen, and apparently competent, cellist. The original manuscript states that they are sonatas for piano and violoncello obbligato. To be fair, the cello part does fly into the upper reaches of the instrument from time to time, and particularly in the opening of the G minor Sonata, the cello and piano answer each other with quite egalitarian diplomacy, but these sonatas are still largely showpieces for the piano.

These sonatas were written and

premiered together, and share an almost identical structure. The first movement begins with a slow introduction which harks back to a baroque form. An allegro follows, in sonata form with coda, and the second movement is a rondo. Beethoven premiered these himself with one of the two Duport brothers (Jean-Louis or Jean-Pierre, but more researchers prefer Jean-Pierre as the main candidate). Beethoven had not begun to experience his hearing loss and so was still able to perform his own compositions. One can imagine that he was not going to let himself be upstaged by any cellist, but also that he was writing these for a king who would play them as an amateur cellist. Wouldn't it be wonderful if today's composers could have the opportunity to write music for today's leaders to play? The mind boggles at the thought.

The *Biographische Notizen über Ludwig van Beethoven*, compiled in 1838 by the composer's friend from Bonn, Franz Gerhard Wegeler, and student from Vienna, Ferdinand Ries, includes the following:

Beethoven played several times at the court of King Friedrich Wilhelm II, where he played the two grand sonatas with obbligato violoncello, Op. 5 which he had

composed for Duport, first violoncellist of the King, and himself. On his departure he received a gold snuff-box filled with louis d'ors [gold coins]. Beethoven told me with pride that it was no ordinary snuff box, but one of the kind which are presented to ambassadors.

The introduction of the F major begins with Beethoven exploring the effects of silence. An arpeggio hangs in the air before it reaches its destination. We hear this same fascination with silence towards the end of the G minor sonata's introduction, as though Beethoven has his players waiting for what feels an eternity before he lets the harmony resolve into the Allegro. Even though the piano has the lion's share of the material, there is still a sense that the two instruments are conversing as equals. The G minor Allegro is particularly gargantuan in structure as the development is repeated as well as the exposition. One wonders if this act of repetition is entirely necessary, but the purpose is made clear at the relief of the coda. In fact, this first movement of the G minor sonata is in itself longer than the entire fourth sonata.

General opinion places the Op. 69 in A major as the favourite of this set of five sonatas. Right smack in the middle of Beethoven's oeuvre, written in 1807/08, Beethoven is said to have written on a manuscript the words *Amidst tears and sorrow*, most likely referring to the political situation of the time with Napoleon's victory over Austria, rather than the music itself. The sonata is surprisingly positive given that inscription. Beginning with a solo cello

line, low in register, it is one of the most recognisable cello themes in the repertoire. To start with a solo cello in a sonata was unthinkable, but of course, for Beethoven, following compositional conventions was entirely optional. This sonata was also written for an amateur cellist, Baron Ignaz von Gleichenstein, who was one of Beethoven's close friends and patrons. The first movement is extremely classical in structure. An interesting thing to note is that part of the second theme involves a simple scale. Who would have thought that a major scale could be so beautiful? The second movement is a scherzo in the style of a menuet and trio. Beethoven has a great play with syncopation in this movement and without a score, it can be hard to pinpoint the beat.

The Op. 102 sonatas were written around 1815/16, and mark the end of a lull in output and the beginning of his surge into the late period of his composition. They are dedicated to the cellist from the Razumovsky quartet and the Countess Erdödy (one of the contenders for immortal beloved fame).

The fourth sonata is the most concise and also begins with a solo cello line (Beethoven must have been pleased with that idea). The opening solo line, like in the A major sonata, invites the piano to play. The two instruments question and answer each other, weaving in and out until they unite in a pizzicato that signals the end of the adagio introduction. The original manuscript states that this is a "free sonata" and indeed, each of the

faster movements are introduced by slow introductions. The first allegro, however, is in a decidedly simple sonata form with coda. By restating the introduction to the first movement in the andante introduction to the second movement, allegro vivace, Beethoven gives a cyclical, complete feeling to this sonata. CPE Bach was known to use a similar technique in his cello concertos.

The fifth, D major sonata is the only one to begin with the piano on its own. As the piano cascades down with scales, the cello answers in an ascending arpeggio. Again, who would have thought a simple arpeggio could be so beautiful? After the only full slow movement he wrote in the cello sonatas, Beethoven segues into a fascinating fugue. He thoroughly admired Bach and was known to use fugues on a number of occasions. The grosse fugue and the last movement of the Op. 110 piano sonata to name a few. Here in one of his letters to Cappellmeister Hofmeister, we can read about his infatuation with his predecessor:

That you wish to publish the works of Sebastian Bach rejoices my heart, which beats in unison with the high art of this forefather of harmony.

This particular fugue introduces a second theme halfway through the movement and this is placed on top of the original theme. His sense of humour and fun and surprising ability to see the beauty in a world he could not hear is highlighted with his treatment of syncopation. He constantly plays with offbeat accents and this continues right up until the final bars.

The three sets of variations were written in the space of about ten years covering the time he was first experiencing his hearing loss. Beethoven seems to have been more comfortable with writing variations on other composers' themes (writing a total of 21 sets in his lifetime) rather than arranging their works for other instrumentation. He wrote to the publishing house Breitkopf & Härtel:

... With regard to arrangements, I am heartily glad that you decline them. The unnatural mania at the present day, to wish to transfer pieces for the pianoforte to string instruments, which in every way are so different, ought to be stopped. I firmly assert that only Mozart himself could transfer his pianoforte music and the same of Haydn; and without placing myself on a level with these two great men, I make the same assertion with respect to my pianoforte sonatas ...

His admiration of Mozart was clear and his affection for variations well known (if for no other reason than his mammoth Diabelli variations). In these three sets of variations, the cello is shown as a more virtuosic instrument than the sonatas. Beethoven explores a relative equality between the instruments (perhaps with the exception of the G major Judas Maccabaeus variations) and they make delightful companions to the sonatas.



Zoe Knighton is a founding member of Flinders Quartet and has toured internationally through Sweden, Canada and the UK. Flinders Quartet appears regularly at Australian festivals as well as their own celebrated subscription series. The group has commissioned many works and continues to be a champion of Australian Chamber music. *Flinders Quartet...whose players give such care and unanimity of musical thought to Australian Chamber Music.* (Peter McCallum, Sydney Morning Herald)

They create wonderful new synergies, setting sparks flying as player bounced

off play with the skill, simpatico and exhilaration of a jazz combination. (Patricia Kelly, Courier Mail)

In 2008, Zoe founded the Melbourne Chamber Feast as a biannual festival and in 2009 was the Artistic Director of the Montsalvat twenty concert series. She was an adjudicator for the 2009 Asia Pacific Chamber Music Competition and regularly acts as panel member and assessment advisor.

Having studied with Jill Kahans, Nelson Cooke and Christian Wojtowicz, she has herself become a passionate pedagogue. Zoe Knighton has been invited to present at the Australian Teachers Association conference and with Flinders Quartet regularly tutors for many national organisations including the Australian Youth Orchestra, Musica Viva as well as The University of Melbourne. Zoe coaches chamber music and cello studies at the Victorian College of the Arts and the University of Melbourne. In demand as soloist, she has performed concertos numerous times with Melbourne orchestras and continues her Bach series every year. She has been guest lecturer at the Tasmanian Conservatorium of Music and guest principal cellist with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra.

www.flindersquartet.com

Winner of the 2006 Australian National Piano Award, pianist Amir Farid has been described as a *highly creative musician – a pianist of great intelligence and integrity. He brings strong musical substance to all that he does, imbuing it with his own particular experience and understanding, and who in a well-populated field...distinguishes himself for all the right reasons.*

Throughout his career, Amir has been working and developing under the guidance of Professor Ronald Farren-Price, with whom he completed a Bachelor of Music (Honours) and Master of Music degree at the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne. He also attended the Australian National Academy of Music where he studied with Rita Reichman, Geoffrey Tozer and Timothy Young. In 2009, he graduated with distinction as a Scholar supported by the Gordon Calway Stone Memorial Award at the Royal College of Music London, studying with Andrew Ball.

He has performed concerti with the Sydney Symphony, Melbourne Symphony, Melbourne Chamber Orchestra, Orchestra Victoria, Australian Youth Orchestra, Melbourne Youth and ANAM Orchestras, including Rachmaninoff's 2nd Piano Concerto at the Sidney Myer Music Bowl with the Melbourne Symphony in front of a capacity 13,000 strong crowd.

As a chamber musician, Amir is pianist of the acclaimed Benaud Trio, winning the Piano Trio prize at the 2005 Australian Chamber Music Competition, and with



whom he undertook a residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada. As an accompanist, he was winner of the prize for best pianist at the 2006 Mietta Song Recital award, and the 2007 Geoffrey Parsons Award.

Amir is the recipient of various awards and scholarships, including the Australian Music Foundation, the Ian Potter Cultural Trust, the Royal Overseas League, the Swiss Global Artistic Foundation, the Tait Memorial Trust and the University of Melbourne's Donovan Johnson Memorial Scholarship.

www.amirfarid.com

As a duo Zoe Knighton and Amir Farid debuted at Melbourne Recital Centre in 2009 and have since released two CDs on the Move label, performed in the ABC Sunday Live series, the Saturday Sessions (ABC), the Port Fairy Spring Music Festival and throughout regional Victoria. As well-known chamber musicians in Australia's premiere ensembles, Knighton and Farid bring a wealth of experience and onstage rapport to their partnership and performances, and are enjoying increasing demand for their intimate and sensitive live performances.

... a well-balanced partnership indeed.

(Clive O'Connell, The Age)

... the phrasing is remarkably sensitive ... (D. Moore, American Record Guide)

... Knighton and Farid make a sensitive and attentive duo. (Phil Vendy, 2MBS Fine Music Magazine)

CD1

- 1 7 Variations in E flat major** on the theme "Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen" WoO 46
from the opera *Die Zauberflöte* by Mozart 10'26"

Sonata No. 1 in F Major, Op. 5 No. 1

- 2** Adagio sostenuto – Allegro 18'43"
3 Rondo: Allegro vivace 7'27"

- 4 12 Variations in G major** on the theme "See the conqu'ring hero comes" WoO 45
from the oratorio *Judas Maccabaeus* by Handel 14'14"

Sonata No. 3 in A major, Op. 69

- 5** Allegro ma non tanto 13'33"
6 Scherzo: Allegro molto 5'47"
7 Adagio cantabile – Allegro vivace 8'45"

CD2

- 1 12 Variations in F major** on the theme "Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen" op.66
from the opera *Die Zauberflöte* by Mozart 10'59"

Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 5 No. 2

- 2** Adagio sostenuto e espressivo – Allegro molto più tosto presto 17'29"
3 Rondo: Allegro 9'33"

Sonata No. 4 in C major, Op. 102, No. 1

- 4** Andante – Allegro vivace 8'23"
5 Adagio – Tempo d'Andante – Allegro vivace 7'27"

Sonata No. 5 in D major, Op. 102 No. 2

- 6** Allegro con brio 7'07"
7 Adagio con molto sentimento d'affetto – attacca 10'09"
8 Allegro – Allegro fugato 5'00"

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