

BEETHOVEN MOONLIGHT

Beethoven piano works
volume one

Ronald Farren-Price



move

Sonata No. 7 in D major, Opus 10 No. 3 (1796-98)

- 1** Presto 7'17"
- 2** Largo e mesto 10'23"
- 3** Menuetto and Trio: Allegro 3'01"
- 4** Rondo: Allegro 4'23"

Sonata No. 14 quasi una Fantasia in C-sharp minor, Moonlight, Opus 27, No. 2 (1801)

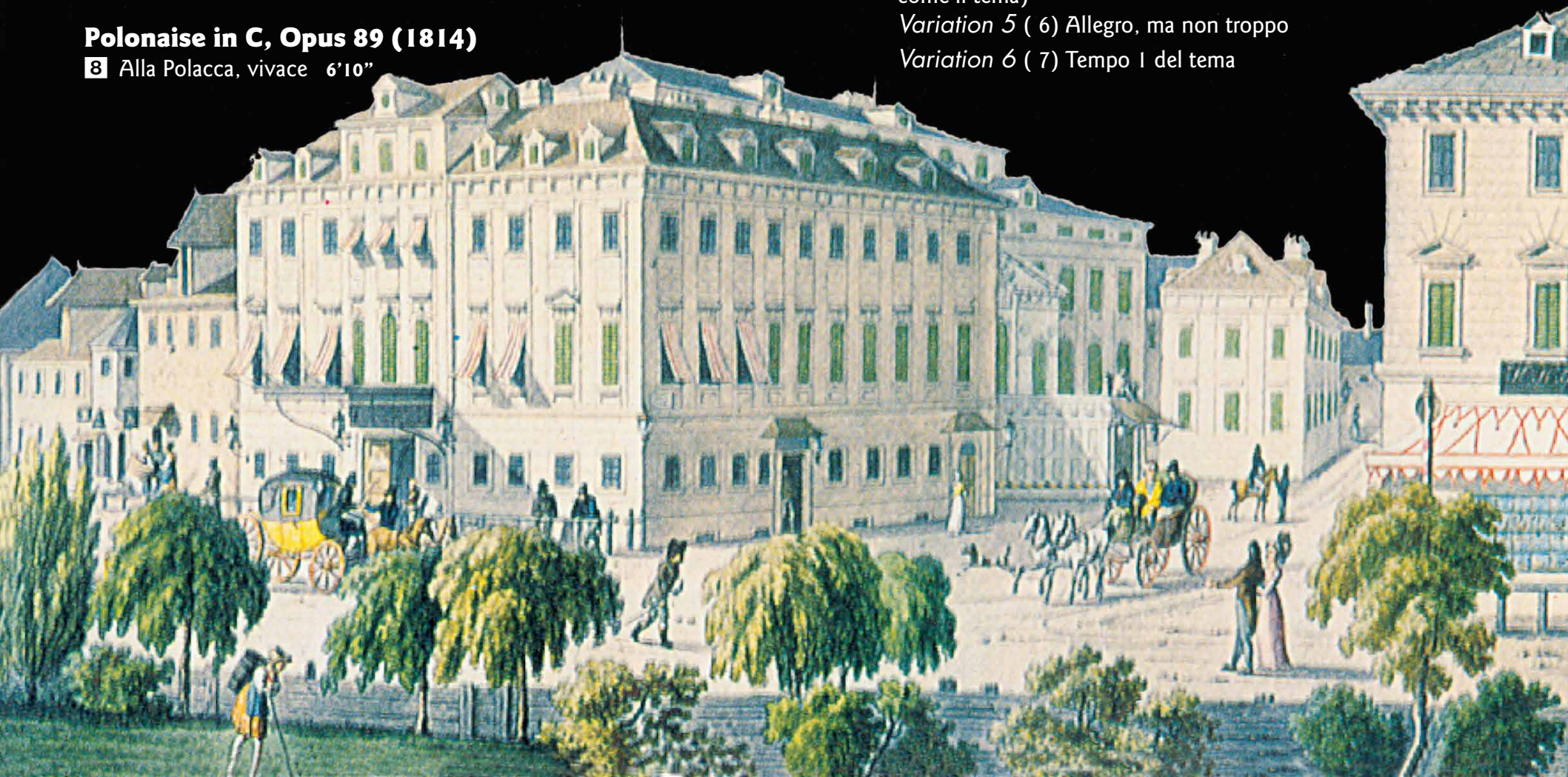
- 5** Adagio sostenuto 6'24"
- 6** Allegretto 2'36"
- 7** Presto agitato 8'10"

Polonaise in C, Opus 89 (1814)

- 8** Alla Polacca, vivace 6'10"

Sonata No. 30 in E major, Opus 109 (1820)

- 9** Vivace, ma non troppo; Adagio espressivo 4'08"
- 10** Prestissimo 2'46"
- 11** Theme and variations 13'36"
 - Theme (1) Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung (Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo)
 - Variation 1 (2) Molto espressivo
 - Variation 2 (3) Leggiermente
 - Variation 3 (4) Allegro vivace
 - Variation 4 (5) Etwas langsamer als das Thema (Un poco meno andante cioè è un poco più adagio come il tema)
 - Variation 5 (6) Allegro, ma non troppo
 - Variation 6 (7) Tempo I del tema



Sonata No. 7 in D major, Opus 10 No. 3 (1796-8)

Sonata No. 7 is undoubtedly the greatest of the three sonatas which comprise Opus 10. While acknowledged still to show some influence of the older sonatas of Muzio Clementi (1752-1832), the structure of the movements and general conciseness of the ideas are without question Beethoven's own. Written when Beethoven was about 27, all three sonatas of this opus are dedicated to Countess Margarete von Browne, wife of Count Johann George von Browne-Camus, one of a number of generous patrons who assisted Beethoven during his early years in Vienna.

The Presto first movement **1** opens with a bold unison subject of striking simplicity and energy which immediately generates a sense of urgency. This motif and its outburst of energy recurs throughout the movement in a multiplicity of guises: indeed the movement seems almost monothematic if its subject matter is thought of as energy and urgency. The second movement **2**, the Largo e mesto (slow and sad), was immediately admired for its emotional range and depth of expression, a subtle portrait of melancholia. The Beethoven scholar and biographer Maynard Solomon hears in its nuances of shadows and darkness a forecast of the 'disintegrating passages at the close of the Eroica funeral march.' The short third movement **3**, with its sweet and cantabile minuet and witty trio, is a perfect foil to the profundity of the previous movement. The last movement **4** is notable for the three-note rising motif which opens and reappears with playful regularity. Almost Haydn-like in its humour, the finale ends quietly with

syncopated chords, a filigree of chromatic scales and then a gossamer flurry of notes up and down the piano, like a magician's wand casting the sound into the depths of silence, out of which the opening of the sonata had earlier been magically drawn.

Sonata No. 14 quasi una Fantasia in C-sharp minor, Moonlight, Opus 27, No. 2 (1801)

Romanticism and popularity can breed contempt and corrupt opinions. Of the thirty-two sonatas for piano by Beethoven, the *Moonlight Sonata* is undoubtedly one of his most popular works and the best known of the sonatas. Its evocative title, given by the poet Rellstab, adds a romantic aura that has seduced generations of listeners. It is linked with rumours of an unsuccessful love affair for Beethoven. These are matters which can induce a blasé attitude towards this work. But this sonata, for all its popularity and its suggestive title, is a truly original creation, both profound and exhilarating, an inspired work of the highest order. The music transcends everything that can be said about its three contrasting sections.

Throughout the three movements the twin poles of Beethoven's distinctive sound world are locked together, that of a sacred depth within each note, even in loud passages, and a profane violence in each note, even in quiet passages. In the first soft notes of the opening there is a tension, an uneasiness, a sense of constrained energy, just as at the very end there is a calm noble spirituality amidst the swirling turbulence. Mendelssohn played the *Moonlight Sonata* about forty years after it was written, to an audience which had not heard the piece before. He recorded

that everyone was overcome with emotion.

The sonata is an extraordinarily visual piece, a hard act to convey on a recording! Its full effect has to be seen (imagined in a recording) as much as heard. Indeed its form is a kind of progress from the visual stillness of the opening to the wild visual energy of its close. At every stage the performance must convey that progress to the eye as well as to the ear. At the beginning of **5** there is such stillness of movement that the performer appears not to be playing. As the first movement progresses, body movement is gently introduced and the hands increase the range of their passage over the keyboard. The wonderful second movement **6**, a scherzo and trio, takes this sense of movement further. It is an inspired aural and visual creation, balanced perfectly between the keyboard restraint of the first movement and the fire of the third movement. The last movement **7** is an eruption of such flamboyant movement over the whole keyboard that it suggests the music will rush out of control like a bolting horse.

8 Polonaise in C, Opus 89 (1814)

Beethoven dedicated the Polonaise to Empress Elisabeth Alexiowna of Russia. The descriptive tempo marking at the head of the score is Alla Polacca, vivace.

The work is from the time of the Congress of Vienna at the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars when the monarchs, aristocrats and politicians of Europe met in Vienna to settle the peace. During the brief period of the congress Beethoven achieved celebrity status and was paid homage by many distinguished foreign visitors. It has been a contentious issue ever since, as much as

it was to some of Beethoven's contemporaries, whether the aloof but vain Beethoven sought out flattery or was the disinterested receiver of glittering attention. Some of his compositions from that time are dismissed as if they are 'cash for comment' compositions, such as the cantata *Der glorreiche Augenblick* (The Glorious Moment), written for the Congress of Vienna, and the symphony *Wellington's Sieg oder Die Schlacht bei Vittoria* (known as *Wellington's Victory* or the *Battle Symphony*), dedicated to the Prince Regent of England, later King George IV.

Beethoven was given an audience with the Empress of Russia and received a gift in return for the Polonaise and its dedication. The piece is just one of many that indicates the composer's ties of patronage to the Russian aristocracy and imperial family. In 1803 he dedicated the three Opus 30 violin sonatas to Czar Alexander, and there are the three Razumovsky Opus 59 string quartets. The Polonaise, whatever the circumstances at the time of its dedication, is no mere flimsy pot-boiler or pianistic throw-away. It is difficult and challenging and has a flowery élan, present from the cadenza-like flourish that opens the piece and throughout the rhythmic pomp of the polonaise, but however virtuosic and demanding it might appear, and even serious, it is not at the expense of giving pleasure to the listener.

Sonata No. 30 in E major, Opus 109 (1820)

The sonata was written when Beethoven was 50 and about two years after the monumental *Hammerklavier* sonata. Though it might seem the opposite to that great work in the extended musical time-frame of its ideas (the entire sonata

is only as long as the slow movement of the *Hammerklavier*), the relatively short E major sonata does share and develop one important feature that permeates the *Hammerklavier*, that of elaborate counterpoint, which must surely come from a reinvigorated interest in Bach.

Though the sonata is in three movements, it is now thought that it began as a two movement work, to which the first movement, conceived separately perhaps as a bagatelle, was added. There is, however, a unity to the sonata because, it appears, Beethoven reworked the other two movements to incorporate note sequences from the added first movement.

The first movement **9** has a unique structure of two alternating and contrasting sections, each of which is developed in their successive reappearances. The opening Vivace section, a delicate, restless and fragile web of sound, lasts only eight bars when on a cadence it is interrupted by the Adagio espressivo section, an exalted yet emotional fantasy that dissolves into arpeggios and running scales. The initial delicate theme returns and is expanded towards a greater intensity of feeling that overwhelms the gossamer character of its first appearance at the start of the sonata, whereupon the Adagio section returns, also developed with heightened intensity. The third and final appearance of the delicate opening includes a transformation of the subject as simple, deeply felt chords, as if to prefigure the opening theme of the last movement of the sonata.

The second movement **10** is a scherzo-like display of strange, spidery figures and weird contrasts. The bass line of the opening becomes a principal feature in the middle of the movement when it is presented in various types of canon

and then as a musical palindrome. At this point the opening reappears and the whole first section is further developed, ending with an abrupt but reflective coda.

The last movement **11** is a set of variations on a slow, hymn-like theme that resembles a sarabande, a stately slow dance that had a special place in Baroque suites (the  points on this track correspond to each variation). The deeply moving theme and its six variations, which concludes with the return of the theme, is like a meditation on the *Goldberg Variations* of Bach. Beethoven's musical development was based on playing works by Bach, a feature of his development which separates him from Haydn, Mozart and Schubert. By the age of twelve he could play the 48 preludes and fugues, and it was probably his ability to perform and interpret Bach's keyboard works which attracted his first powerful musical patron sometime soon after he settled in Vienna. This was the influential Baron Gottfried van Swieten (1733-1803) at whose concerts the 'old styles' of Handel and Bach were regularly presented. The profound variations of this sonata, which make such a show of reworking the 'old styles' of counterpoint and song, are probably Beethoven's greatest set of variations and stand as one of his greatest movements in the serious style, so earnestly cultivated by van Swieten.

The first variation transforms the theme into an expressive and drawn-out song (as did variations 13 and 25 of Bach's *Goldberg Variations*), with falling sighs and aching semitones, all placed high above rich soft chords in the bass. The second variation, surprisingly, is like a refashioning of the first movement (and also suggests an affinity with Bach's variation 29), with two contrasting

and repeated sections. The third variation is a vigorous canon with ascending and descending figures pitted against each other in contrary motion. The fourth variation suggests all those flowing variations in Bach's great Goldberg work; it is a recollection of lost beauty, something remembered from the past. The fifth variation, strikingly suggestive of Bach's canon variation 18, is a complex canon with countersubjects, one of which hints at contrapunctus 8 and 11 of Bach's *Art of Fugue*. Some of Beethoven's variations run one into the other, which is the case with variations five and six. In variation six there begins a transformation of the original theme into trills and other musical filigree (again, to refer to Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, like the 'trilling' variation 28). Beethoven, through this variation, moves the work into a realm of transcendental splendour, out of which, as with the *Goldberg Variations*, the original theme returns, as if in another and higher realm of existence.

Beethoven dedicated the Sonata in E major to Maximiliane Brentano. She was the daughter of Antonie Brentano who is now accepted as the 'Immortal Beloved' of Beethoven's maturity and to whom he dedicated the *Diabelli Variations*. In his letter of dedication to the young Maximiliane, and through her he was probably discretely addressing her mother Antonie, the sick and pained Beethoven wrote of 'the spirit which unites the nobler and finer men of this earth and which time can never destroy.' This sonata expresses that spirit which time can never destroy.



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Beethoven was born in Bonn on 16 December 1770. When he died on 26 March 1827 at the age of 57 he left a legacy of music which continues to dominate concert programming today. Indeed, the music of Beethoven is ever present in the modern world and is as much turned to for the celebration of great events, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall when the Ninth Symphony seemed the only fitting music, as it is for an intimate sharing of sensibilities, such as a couple listening to the first movement of the *Moonlight* sonata. That his music lives so strongly today and for such widely differing purposes is proof beyond doubt that he was an extraordinary creative artist. It is also an extraordinary situation that his music does permeate modern life. This might be more fully appreciated by distancing Beethoven from his past by as many years as separate our present from Beethoven's time. Such an equivalent period of time would require us to imagine that music composed in the 1560s to the late 1590s would have continued as a living, even dominating, force in Beethoven's time. Those were the decades of Orlando de Lassus whose courtly and religious music had been completely forgotten by the time Beethoven was born.

Beethoven began as a highly skilled and idiosyncratic performer and became a composer through hard work. He was sheltered and supported by an aristocratic group and his position in Viennese musical culture can only be described as elitist. A secret police report of 1824 alludes to the narrow and aristocratic basis of both his support and appreciation.

The recital. . . did not serve to increase enthusiasm for the talent of this composer, who has his partisans and adversaries. In opposition to his admirers, the first rank of which is represented by Razumovsky, Apponyi, Kraft, etc., . . . who adore Beethoven, is formed an overwhelming majority of connoisseurs who refuse absolutely to listen to his works hereafter.

When Beethoven came from Bonn to Vienna in 1792 he was a provincial musician of talent. He set about, through enormous hard work, and by making the right connections, to get on top of music. Initially, this was through mastery of performance and the composition of works for the piano. By the end of the 1790s he started to gain mastery in other genres of composition. It was not until about 1803 that he started to develop his unique mastery of the orchestra as a medium for original music. An assessment of this progress might cautiously conclude that he did not quite master opera.

Compositions for the piano, through the sonata and many smaller characteristic pieces, was the first field of his mastery and originality. Beethoven invested a sense of great concentration in his piano works. He composed for a discerning and learned audience and made uncompromising demands on all around him, especially performers, a special feature of his music still felt (or feared!) by performers down to the present.

Through his playing Beethoven passed a conception of the performance of his works to a small circle of younger pianists around him, such as Carl Czerny. Czerny taught Liszt and Liszt became a great performer of Beethoven's piano music, specially of the *Hammerklavier* sonata and

the fifth piano concerto. Liszt in turn taught many younger pianists and imbued in them that serious dedication to the interpretation of Beethoven's keyboard works which is still very much at the heart of Beethoven performances. One of these pupils was Martin Krause, who in turn taught the young Claudio Arrau. And so this tradition stretching back to Beethoven has come down to the present day. Claudio Arrau in turn taught Ronald Farren-Price.

It is well known that Beethoven began to go deaf in his early thirties. The deafness increased to such an extent that it is unlikely he would have been able to hear his last works. It has always been a subject of wonder that he could create the new, unique and utterly personal sounds which infuse these later compositions. It is less well known that Beethoven suffered severe ill-health at different times of his adult life and especially in the last decade of his life. That someone could be so ill, and there is much independent evidence to negate any view that he was a malingerer or a hypochondriac, yet bring the concentration and independence of mind to go on creating so many lasting masterpieces is even more cause for wonder than that he was also deaf.

Ronald Farren-Price (b. 1930)

Ronald Farren-Price is a household musical name throughout Australia as a great Australian pianist. After his youth in Brisbane and study at The University of Melbourne, his international career began with his recognition by the legendary pianist Claudio Arrau under whose guidance his distinctive style of playing matured. It is a style where clarity of articulation, depth of expression

and firmness of touch are paramount, where a bold nobility is brought to each performance.

In addition to performing throughout Australia, Ronald Farren-Price is into his fifth decade of giving concerts overseas. He has appeared both in recital and as concerto soloist in the major concert halls of some forty countries. Among his noted appearances in Britain, Europe and the United States are those at Queen Elizabeth Hall London, Carnegie Recital Hall New York, Tchaikovsky Hall Moscow, Philharmonic Hall Leningrad (now St Petersburg), Musikhalle Hamburg and Brahmsaal Vienna. In South America, where he toured for the first time in 1989, he gave recital and concerto performances in Buenos Aires, Caracas and Valencia. He has also been a pioneer in bringing Australian performance to China, being invited since his first visit in 1986 to give recitals and master classes in Beijing and other cities; and to South-East Asia, including Vietnam where he played in the Hanoi Opera House.

His most notable success, indeed a unique success as an Australian instrumentalist, has been his 12 tours of the former USSR, spanning several decades. This is a feat which reveals his remarkable popularity in Russia. He has played in the finest musical centres of the USSR and in Leningrad he was called the Australian Richter, a supreme compliment.

As well as his career as a concert pianist, Ronald Farren-Price is a renowned teacher. For many years he was Head of Keyboard in the Faculty of Music at The University of Melbourne and was for a time Dean and an Associate Professor. He continues to teach as a Principal Fellow in the faculty following his retirement from the full-time staff in 1997. During recent years

he has travelled in Asia and New Zealand, performing, examining and giving master classes. His most recent appointment was for a short time as Acting Director of the National Academy of Music where his presence stimulated the finest younger Australian musicians.

Throughout his long concert and recording career Ronald Farren-Price has been a dedicated interpreter of Beethoven's piano music.

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Photograph of Ronald Farren-Price: Andrew Campbell

Portrait of Beethoven – page 5: Christian Horneman (1803)

Painting - page 2: Theater under Wien after J. Alt (c1815)

Recordings: Martin Wright and Thomas Grubb

Editing: Vaughan McAlley

Recorded at Melba Hall, University of Melbourne

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