Deux-Elles

DXL 1168

Appassionata

Volume 8

Beethoven Piano Sonatas

Martin Roscoe

Piano Sonata in F minor Op. 57 'Appassionata'

1. Allegro assai 9:32
2. Andante con moto - 6:18
3. Allegro ma non troppo - Presto 7:48

Piano Sonata in E flat Op. 81a 'Les Adieux'

4. Adagio - Allegro 7:02
5. Andante espressivo - 3:34
6. Vivacissimamente 5:54

Piano Sonata in A Op. 101

7. Etwas lebhaft und mit der innigsten Empfindung. Allegretto ma non troppo 4:19
8. Ziemlich lebhaft. Marschmässig. Vivace alla Marcia 6:16
9. Langsam und sehnsuchtsvoll. Adagio ma non troppo, con affetto - 2:20
10. Zeitmass des ersten Stücks. Tempo del primo pezzo - Geschwinde, doch nicht zu sehr und mit Entschlossenheit. Allegro 8:03

Producer	Mike George
Recording Engineer	Patrick Naylor
Booklet Notes	Martin Roscoe and Mike George
Cover Design	Frank Parker, A Creative Experience
Booklet Design	S.L. Chai

Recorded in Potton Hall, Suffolk, Op. 57 on 19th February 2011; Op. 81a on 10th January 2013; Op. 101 on 22nd July 2010.

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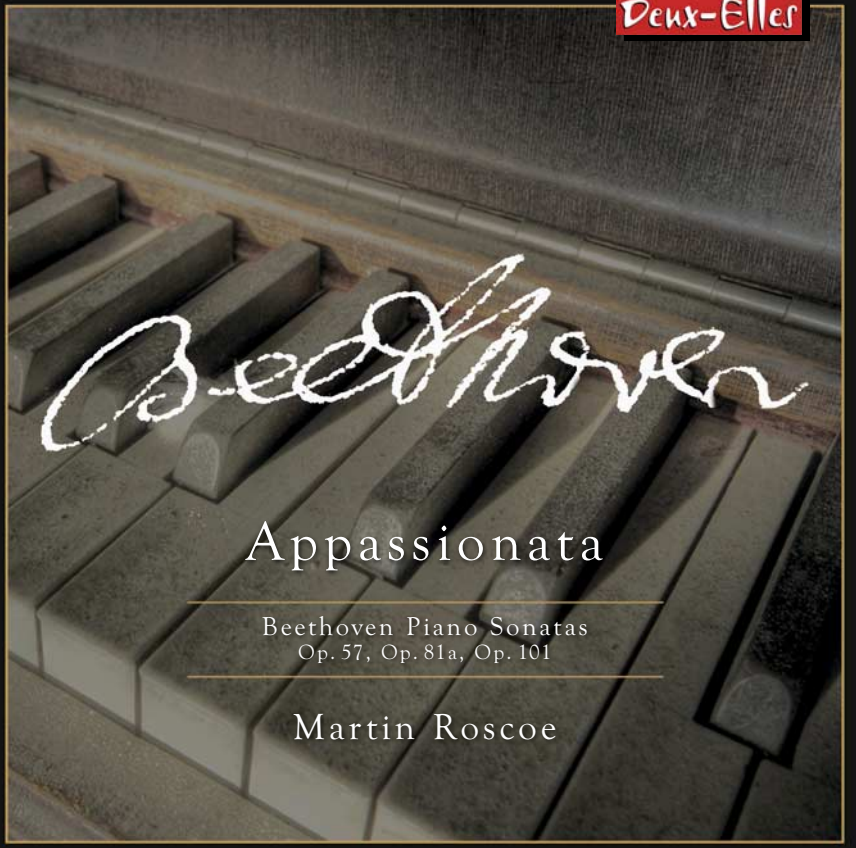

Beethoven Piano Sonatas *A conversation between performer and producer*

Mike George - I remember you telling me about thirty years ago about being on a competition jury with the late British conductor Sir Charles Groves and hearing a performance by one of the competitors of the work that begins your volume 8; Sir Charles turned to you and said "that would have made everyone sit up in 1805." Perhaps some of our twenty-first century attuned ears take it in too easily. What would have been so earth-shattering about this Sonata for an audience back then?

Martin Roscoe - Even by Beethoven's own extraordinary standards, Op 57 is one of his most striking and original works. Its intense emotion led to the unattributed nickname *Appassionata* around 1838, but the name really only tells part of the story. The visceral power, the tragic atmosphere and the many unique structural features all combine with that intensity to make the *Appassionata* arguably Beethoven's greatest and most-admired piano sonata.

The marking *Allegro assai* warns the pianist not to be too slow and the time signature's highly unusual; in instrumental music, I think Beethoven only used 12/8 rarely, for example, the second movement of the *Pastoral Symphony*, and the *Adagio* of his Op 127 String Quartet, both very different experiences! That metre enables Beethoven to create an almost double-dotted rhythm in the opening theme. This theme is very striking, being *pianissimo*, unharmonised and two octaves apart. The mysterious atmosphere continues with the same theme presented a semitone higher, followed by Beethoven's trademark "knocking of fate" motif in the bass, most notably in the Fifth Symphony but actually used throughout his output. A ferocious cascade is just the prelude to the first of many dramatic interjections.

MG - In some ways, though it's so far from his mentor, Haydn, I can still feel Beethoven trying to throw off his shackles even here. The music's confined to virtually a single theme, with the six bars that take the place of a contrasting idea still employing that same rhythmic shape. But what balm they bring!

MR - Indeed they do, briefly, on three occasions. In the up-tempo coda however, Beethoven gives us a furious minor key version of the same theme, before pounding alternating chords and a *tremolo* accompanying the five-octave version of the opening theme bring the movement to an eerie conclusion.

MG - How all that energy falls away into a quiet ending, but still seething! Beethoven sketched out some of this Sonata alongside plans for the music that became the start of the second act of his opera *Fidelio*, "Gott! - Welch Dunkel hier!" (God, how dark it is here!). The music of this first movement often seems to verge on moving towards that threshold of darkness, don't you think?

MR - It does, and in the same key of F minor too; both very forbidding, although the first movement of the Sonata has diabolical energy as well as darkness. Beethoven doesn't use F minor very much but he does seem to reserve it for some of his most intense expressions, other examples being the String Quartet Op 95, and the slow movement of the first *Razumovsky* Quartet.

The balm you refer to in the Sonata's first movement second theme presages the second movement, which is in D flat major. Here Beethoven gives us a simple chorale with three variations and coda, which links directly to the Finale. The theme is stated in a low register, which is kept for the first variation, but each variation halves its note-lengths and the second and third variations each move up an octave. These simple strategies produce a feeling of momentum and direction, even though the harmonic movement remains exactly the same. The coda plays with the different sonorities by flitting from one octave to another, until two diminished chords, one *pianissimo*, one *fortissimo*, first question and then shatter the serenity of this *Andante*.

MG - Yes, I'm sure there must be many sets of variations by a number of lesser composers that use this simple device of speeding up, driving along decoration by doubling the rate of the figuration. It wasn't something that Beethoven's immediate predecessors Mozart and Haydn did often, yet Beethoven's done it before

this in his piano sonatas and again in the final one, Op 111. It's the perfect subject for variations too, isn't it? You'd hardly call it a melody yet somehow lit from within, with that one glow in the harmony.

MR - Well, I can't immediately recall any examples of that same technique in any keyboard music by Haydn or Mozart, but Beethoven himself used it in one of his so-called 'Electoral' Sonatas, the third one in D (WoO 47 No 3), composed when he was only twelve!

I agree with you about the lack of a distinctive melodic outline in this movement, which is quite remarkable. Most sets of variations thrive on the ornamentation of the melody, yet here Beethoven is also very static harmonically, with only that single chord intruding on the D flat major harmony. It's a wonderfully calming movement, which we clearly need after the turbulence of that *Allegro* before it.

MG - You mentioned the unexpected end to this movement just now, that diminished chord which joins the variations to the Finale. It throws us into a maelstrom even more turbulent and concentrated than the first movement.

MR - Absolutely! Two other recently composed piano sonatas had ended similarly with a *moto perpetuo*, the *Tempest* Op 31 No 2 and the one written just before this one, Op 54. The character of each of these movements is quite distinct, however: both of these share an *Allegretto* marking and while in the *Tempest* the mood is obsessive yet melancholy, in Op 54, for the most part, we find Beethoven more genial and optimistic. Here in the *Appassionata*, Beethoven unleashes a torrent of demonic energy, almost entirely without interruption. Beethoven's pupil Ferdinand Ries recalled visiting the composer at his summer lodgings in 1804. One day, on a walk, Beethoven was distracted by a new theme which he kept humming. On return to his studio Ries tells how "he ran to the piano without even taking off his hat and stormed for an hour." Ries was expecting a lesson, but Beethoven dismissed him, saying he had more work to do! Only later

did Ries realise that he'd witnessed the birth of the Finale of the *Appassionata*.

MG - It seems to me that Beethoven had found a new *type* of energy in this Sonata; on an emotional level it would weaken the first movement to have had the exposition repeated - wasn't this the first of his sonatas where this repeat is missing? - and yet, unusually, in the Finale he writes "the second part twice," asking for a repeat of the development and recapitulation. What was Beethoven trying to do here? In performance, it must be a heroic ask for the pianist at that point.

MR - There is certainly a unique type of emotional energy in this work. This was indeed the first Piano Sonata to omit a repeat of the first movement's exposition, but the C minor Violin Sonata Op 30 No 1 (which also has a stormy character) omits too. There are other examples in later works (Opp 59 No 1, 90, 101, 110 and the Ninth Symphony). But there are no other examples in Beethoven's output of repeating of the entire development and recapitulation as in the last movement of the *Appassionata* (that is, in movements when the exposition is not repeated). It certainly cranks up the tension to breaking point before Beethoven then introduces a completely new theme in the *Presto* coda, with devastating effect. And yes, it tests the pianist's emotional stamina to the limit!

MG - In many ways, Beethoven hit a brick wall after this Sonata, didn't he? There's a gap of four years after finishing the *Appassionata* before the next trio of piano sonatas, Opp 78, 79 and 81a were written in quick succession, in the matter of a few months.

MR - Well, Beethoven might have been avoiding piano sonatas between Opp 57 and 78 but he certainly wasn't idle! The Fourth Piano Concerto - can there ever have been a more extraordinary juxtaposition of compositional next-door neighbours than the *Appassionata* and the G major Concerto? - the three *Razumovsky* Quartets, the Violin Concerto, three Symphonies (Nos 4-6), a Cello Sonata, two Piano Trios, the Emperor Concerto, the Mass in C and the Choral Fantasy, all

written between the *Appassionata* and Op 78!

And then there was his immense struggle writing his only opera *Leonore/Fidelio*, which occupied a huge amount of his time, plus the uncertainty and stress caused by the totally unstable political situation in Europe and the coming and goings of various invading armies ... which brings us neatly to the next Sonata on the disc, Op 81a, the one known as *Les Adieux*.

MG - In fact, *Les Adieux* was the next Sonata begun, and that title didn't find favour with Beethoven.

MR - It's Beethoven's most personal and his only programmatic piano sonata too. Napoleon's army invaded Austria in April 1809 and soon threatened to reach Vienna. Those who could afford to left the city. Among them was Archduke Rudolph, Beethoven's student, friend, mentor and patron, who left with the rest of the Emperor's entourage on May 4 and didn't return until the following January. Beethoven was moved to write this *Lebewohl* (*Farewell*), *Abwesenheit* (*Absence*), *und Wiedersehn* (*Return*) Sonata, with the word *Lebewohl* written directly above the first three notes, a motif which dominates the whole first movement. His publisher suggested that, in order to sell more copies, the French title should be on the cover; understandably, Beethoven was very unhappy about this, in view of the French invasion causing his friend to leave Vienna! He insisted that all his original German titles were included in the publication, along with the exact dates of Rudolph's departure and return, yet ironically *Les Adieux* stuck.

MG - It's clear his friend's absence weighed genuinely on Beethoven: the tick-tock accompaniment that starts the central *Andante* perhaps expresses how slowly time passed for him while the burst of joy at the start of the *Finale* is an uninhibited display, apparently composed in anticipation of the Archduke's return. There's some of Beethoven's most intricate piano writing in this Sonata too.

MR - The joy you refer to in the last movement of *Les Adieux* has the most

virtuosic writing in Beethoven's sonatas so far, even eclipsing the challenges of the Waldstein and the *Appassionata*, while there are two notoriously treacherous passages in the first movement too. The desolation in the central movement's very striking in its own way, and the Sonata's concentration as a whole is quite remarkable, a huge array of emotion in less than 17 minutes.

MG - Again there's something of a pause in Beethoven's piano sonatas after this, before we reach the final Sonata on this disc, Op 101. After finishing *Les Adieux* in 1809, there's only one Sonata before this A major Sonata from 1816 and we're in a very different style of composition by then.

MR - Much has been written about where Beethoven's "middle" and "late" periods begin and end, but I share the view that there's much more of a transition from the one to the other in the compositions of the middle years of the 1810s than a clear divide, starting perhaps with the G major Violin Sonata Op 96 and perhaps ending with the *Hammerklavier* Sonata Op 106, encompassing the *Archduke* Piano Trio and the pair of Cello Sonatas Op 102 as well as this A major Sonata.

Although Op 106 is known as the *Hammerklavier*, Op 101 is also described on its title page as having been written "*für das Hammerklavier*." The bass compass had recently been extended on the latest instruments, so Beethoven was able, for the first time, to include a "contra E" to spectacular effect at the climax of the fugue which forms the last movement's fugal development section.

Unlike the colossus which is Op 106, Op 101 has something of the concision of *Les Adieux*, especially in the opening *Allegretto*, which has a beautifully warm lyricism from the first phrase, a phrase which gives the impression that the music's already been going on for some time, but has only just come within earshot.

MG - It's a rare work of Beethoven where dynamism takes a back seat for much of the time. Here his calmness and gentle authority draws us in, intimately. And even the syncopated chords do not ruffle the

tenor of the conversation. But we are rudely awakened with what follows …

MR - Beethoven springs a great surprise. It's been quite some time since Beethoven included a *Scherzo* in a Piano Sonata - Op 31 No 3 - but instead of a *Scherzo*, Op 101 explodes with a vigorous March dominated by obsessive dotted rhythms. There's quite a lot of counterpoint here, and Beethoven continues with that in the Trio's gentle canons.

It's also been quite some time since Beethoven wrote a full-scale stand-alone slow movement in a piano sonata (Op 31 No 2 was the last), and he continues that practice here in Op 101 with a few bars of heartfelt *Adagio* in A minor.

MG - This is in many ways the heart of the Sonata, much as it is in the *Waldstein*, fragile, delicate, tender, desolate, searching for a way forward. Beethoven referred to it - as he did the first movement - as a "reverie."

MR - It may be only twenty bars long, but this music's so much more than an introduction! However, Beethoven has another yet surprise for us, because after a short cadenza he quotes the Sonata's opening, haltingly, before plunging headlong into the energetic final *Allegro*. The optimism of this is questioned in the fugal development section, where Beethoven (in a precursor of the crazy fugue which concludes the *Hammerklavier* Sonata) challenges the performer's command of counterpoint to the extreme, while building towards the huge climax and the unveiling of the piano's new low E.

In an ever more distinguished career, Martin Roscoe's enduring popularity is built on a deeply thoughtful musicianship allied to an easy rapport with audiences and fellow musicians alike.

Martin has worked regularly with eminent conductors including Simon Rattle, Mark Elder and Christoph von Dohnányi and with leading orchestras including the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Hallé, Manchester Camerata, Northern Chamber Orchestra and with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. As one of Britain's most prolific recitalists, Martin has also performed regularly across Europe, the Far East, Australasia and South Africa. His chamber music partnerships include long-standing associations with Peter Donohoe, Tasmin Little and the Endellion and Maggini Quartets as well as more recent work with Jennifer Pike, Ashley Wass, Matthew Trusler, the Vertavo Quartet and the Cropper Welsh Roscoe Trio.

Martin is one of the most regularly played pianists on BBC Radio 3, including seven BBC Prom appearances. He has made many commercial recordings as well as this Beethoven series for Deux-Elles including the complete piano music of Nielsen and Szymanowski, as well as four discs in the Hyperion Romantic Piano Concerto series.

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Teaching has always been an important part of Martin's life and the development of young talent helps him constantly to re-examine and re-evaluate his own playing. He is currently a Professor of Piano at the Guildhall School of Music in London. Martin is also Artistic Director of the Manchester Chamber Concerts Society, Ribble Valley International Piano Week and Beverley Chamber Music Festival.

Martin lives in the beautiful English Lake District, a wonderful place that provides inspiration and relaxation, and enables him to indulge his passions for the countryside and hill-walking.

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Martin Roscoe

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