

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Albert Combrink takes us *Inside the Concert* with notes on the programme

Introduction

Works of travel and exploration: we will hear 2 Sonatas by Beethoven showing the vast distance a composer can travel between just two sonatas; a work from Liszt's years of travel and pilgrimage, and a work from 20 years later, recalling the same period of dreams dreamt and failed. The young Polish émigré in Paris – Chopin - whose 1st Scherzo has all the fire and revolution of a young man while two Nocturnes explore the poetic side which has made him a house-hold name.

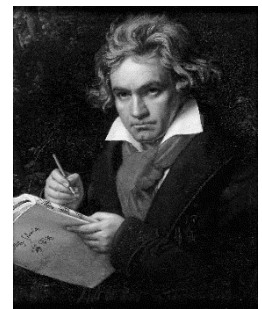
We are privileged to present the work of both a scholar and a pianist in this programme: von Arnim is a recognised Beethoven specialist, to an extent that he is artistic director of an International Beethoven Competition. He has also written a book on the life of Franz Liszt. His intimate acquaintance with the language of the composers, brings an absolutely unique view to his interpretation of some of the most iconic and lesser-known works of these composers in one programme. From the earlier Sonata Op.22 to the famous "Moonlight", we get Beethoven punctuating the end of his exploration of high classical form and turning his gaze onto the "beckoning light over yonder hill" of Romanticism. We follow that light, accompanying Liszt on his travels through Switzerland with Vallée d'Obermann and we recall those years in the dark Ballade #2. From Chopin's most belligerent Scherzo #1 to the rarified dreamworld of the Nocturnes Op.9, we meet two sides of occasionally type-cast as the less fiery of the great romantic composer-pianists

The International Beethoven Piano Competition Vienna is Austria's oldest international piano competition and ranks among the most renowned music competitions today. Founded more than 60 years ago, it is hosted by the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. The artistic director is Jan Jiracek von Arnim. He says: "The quality of the interpretation of Beethoven's immortal masterpieces is a key element for the artistic reputation of musicians."

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 11 in Bb major, Op. 22

Composed in 1800, Beethoven considered this work to be the best of his early sonatas, so much so that he started referring to it as a 'Grand Sonata' – which soon would be the title that distinguished the larger four movement sonatas from those with only three. Beethoven had come to Vienna to study with the old master Joseph Haydn, and his early sonatas are all homages to the classical form and the models presented by Mozart and Haydn. But Beethoven could hardly help himself but continue an unstoppable trajectory of growth, added complexity and size. With this sonata, Beethoven brings his period of high 'Classicism' to a close – and the next sonatas would be opening the door to Romanticism.



1. Allegro con brio (Fast and Cheerful with life and panache)

A surprisingly typical Sonata form is presented. Simple ideas are developed into more significant statements. This reflects Beethoven's particular gift as a composer and would lay the foundation of the great Beethoven Symphonies from No.5 upwards. The themes as presented in the Opening 'A' Section are not simple, but the materials in and of themselves are designed to be developed, stretched and augmented: These unison thirds (which become slightly tipsy when presented in syncopation), rolling tremolos and broken octaves, etc, all undergo dramatic changes in the Development Section. For example, the loud Octaves become mysterious and almost inaudible, when presented low in the bass, as single notes.

Beethoven also clearly marks the end of the Exposition and Development sections with clear ‘full stop’ cadences, making the architecture straight-forward to follow. The Recapitulation is an almost identical repeat of the Exposition. Beethoven was not concerned here with exploring any new forms - he is summing up the Classical Sonata.

2. Adagio con molto espressione (Slowly with much expression)

Written ten years before the birth of Chopin, Beethoven writes the closest thing to a Chopin Nocturne the world had yet heard. Soft pulsating chords set a reflective, nocturnal mood, over which a quasi-operatic melody sings. Beethoven, as a pianist, was famous for his exquisite *Cantabile* playing – where the smooth, legato style impersonates a human voice by means of the piano - literally hammers hitting metal strings – and he exploits it fully in the even darker middle section. There is no Coda, indicating a desire to keep the architecture simple and uncluttered.

3. Menuetto (moderate dance)

Another ‘A-B-A’ structure follows, with a central *Trio* in a dark and contracting minor key. A good-humoured gracenote becomes a more-developed trill in double notes, but the well-behaved baseline keeps the Sonata in the realm of classical politeness. The Trio turns the trills upside down, creating rather dramatic passagework and jabs a few offbeat chords, but keeps the work within classical bounds. The furious “*Appassionata*” would show to where, in a few short years, Beethoven’s musical orbit would shift.

4. Rondo: Allegretto (Moderately fast, in Rondo Form)

Beethoven directly quotes a piano sonata that was popular in Vienna at the time- the Piano Sonata in E Flat by Ernst Wilhelm Wolf. Beethoven deliberately develops the themes more than the original composer and infuses them with a far deeper variety of emotional treatments: was Beethoven just inspired or deliberately making a point about the Classical Sonata? It could very well be, since this Sonata seems so determined not to allow any overgrowth – in emotional scope or formal flexibility – of anything that might not be termed “Classical”. Mozart’s ghost can be heard in the opening theme, but soon chromatic harmonies and melodies in octaves, show that Beethoven has also joined the dance, and as the rondo-sections alternate, these two spirits seem to jest and joust. This time there is a Coda, and it threatens to end softly and dramatically, but in the end, Classical Beethoven gives us a good old “Tonic-Dominant Full Stop”. Beethoven knew where the future was headed.

Here are thoughts by *Jan Jiracek von Arnim* – in his own words – on the work:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vJv-T_7_bQ&t=284s

Here is *Jan Jiracek von Arnim* playing this Sonata -

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jV_h_qqTO7k

Franz Liszt (1811-1886)



Composer, pianist, conductor and teacher, Franz Liszt undoubtedly was the proto-type for what we in the modern day understand as the quintessential “virtuoso”. In a phenomenon dubbed “Lisztomania”, he rose to a degree of stardom and popularity among the public for which there had been no precedent. He was a seasoned traveller, a compulsive editor – of his own works and those of others – and drew inspiration from a vast range of sources.

Vallée d’Obermann from *Années de Pèlerinage I (Suisse)*

French philosopher Étienne Pivert de Sénancour wrote a novel *Oberman* in 1804, which was not well-received by critics. The themes of the series of letters written by the main character, dealt with issues of

nihilism and aspiration: the hero, instead of feeling life to be vanity, recognises his own inability to truly be who he imagines and wishes himself to be.

Liszt's own travels through Switzerland in the late 1830s inspired his *Vallée d'Obermann*, first published in 1842 and later included in a revised version, in the first of his piano suites entitled *Années de Pèlerinage I (Suisse)* published in 1855. The principal theme: a descending scale figure, is subjected to chromatic and harmonic transformations that parallel those suffered by Sénancour's sensitive young hero. The falling figure permeates every page of the score.

Part 1 evokes the exhaustion which the apparently directionless wanderings and listlessness and dissatisfaction have caused in the young hero. An angelic middle section recalls how naively and simply the journey began, but trouble soon appears on the horizon. From songful contentment to the mad fury of a caged animal, the melody is re-harmonised in the final section, to give warmth and comfort before the courage of its own conviction drives the work to an exalting climax.

Ballade No. 2 in B minor

As part of Liszt's revolution in form, his technique of thematic transformation was one that would have probably the largest influence on future composers. Operatic grandeur, intimately recited poetry and vastly contrasting soundscapes characterise this work. Hymn-like melodies and stormy rumbles in the bass build beauty in the darkness in a work that is of larger stature than its reputation might suggest.

The ballad is based largely on two themes: a broad opening melody underpinned by menacing chromatic rumbles in the lower register of the keyboard, and a luminous ensuing chordal meditation. Every theme will be put through a set of technical and emotional changes until the luminous chords provide a contemplative close.

Hear Franz Liszt: Ballade No. 2 in B minor, S. 171 (1853) - performed live @Yale by Jan Jiracek von Arnim - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qklcXjUgleM>

Find Jan Jiracek von Arnim's book on Franz Liszt Here: <https://www.residenzverlag.com/en/buch/franz-liszt>

Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)

Polish pianist and composer Frédéric Chopin built and maintained worldwide fame based on what many described as "poetic genius". A contemporary of Liszt, much effort was made to stoke some kind of competitive element between the two, but the fact is that they were so different that they could both be regarded as the pre-eminent pianist-composers of the era.

Deux Nocturnes, Op. 9 (1 and 2)

Chopin dedicated his Three Nocturnes Op.9 of 1832 to the Belgian concert pianist Marie Pleyel: Parisian born and married to the heir of the Pleyel Piano manufacturing business, and later Head of The Piano Department at Brussels Conservatoire.

Nocturne in B-flat minor, Op. 9, No. 1

While the left hand plays the quintessential *Nocturne* accompaniment (6 whole crotchet beats per bar divided into 12 even half quavers in relatively straightforward *Arpeggio* patterns), it is the startling rhythmic freedom of the melody in the right-hand that is the main feature of this work. The right hand moves with freedom, occasionally in patterns of seven, eleven, twenty, and even twenty-two, creating extremely complicated polyrhythms, and yet the art is to make it sound natural and vocal as if created by a human voice. A large ternary structure allows for a contrasting middle section.

Nocturne in E-flat minor, Op. 9, No. 2

Written pretty much in the shape of a modern pop-song, this must be one of Chopin's most well-known nocturnes. The "A, A, B, A, B, A, Coda", corresponds to verses and choruses with a short bridge at the end! The melodies are presented simply at first, but embellishments become more complex with each return to previously heard material.

Etude in C sharp minor, Op. 10 No. 4 - *Presto con fuoco* (Very Fast with Fire)

Sometimes nicknamed "The Torrent", this Etude was written in 1830, as part of the first of two sets of studies for the piano. A perpetuum mobile in fast semiquavers takes off in the first bar and does not let up until the final note. Like all the other Etudes, this is in A-B-A form. It is a bravura study for velocity and lightness in both hands. Interestingly Chopin gave no pedal instructions to the pianist, leaving that element up to the discretion of the performer.

Listen to Nocturne in B-flat minor, Op. 9, No. 1 played by Jan Jiracek von Arnim - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPUclv_Wlc0

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata "Moonlight" No. 14 in C-sharp minor Op.27 No.2 (Sonata *Quasi una fantasia*)

The year 1801 saw Beethoven diving dramatically into new musical waters: form and structure become elements for experimentation rather than stylistic guides, unusual and exotic keys are tackled with boldness and quasi-programmatic elements ring the changes for the new Beethoven sound of the new century. An improvisatory impulse is felt more strongly than before in his work. The title "Moonlight" was not Beethoven's own but came from the German critic and poet Ludwig Rellstab who said the first movement reminded him of the Lake of Lucerne by moonlight. Never mind that two movements still had to be described and that Beethoven had never been to Lucerne, he never heard this work referred to by this title as it was affixed only 5 years after his death by an editor eager to make a few more sales as he was up against all the colourful titles of Liszt, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Chopin.

The key is unusual: Mozart never wrote anything in C# minor, Haydn only once. And all three movements stay, unusually, in the same key. (The second movement is written in D Flat purely to simplify the reading). The main formal experiment here is to have the last movement as the main emotional weight and size rather than the first. Also, Beethoven does not exploit contrast within the movements as he would do elsewhere: each movement therefore inhabits a singular emotional world without doubt or contrast.

At the opening of the first movement, Beethoven included the following direction in Italian: "Si deve suonare tutto questo pezzo delicatissimamente e senza sordino" (*This whole piece ought to be played with the utmost delicacy and without dampers*) but since Beethoven was not only already going deaf, we also have to deal with the fact that the piano pedal was still an evolving piece of technology. It would simply be too much to keep the pedal down all the way. Regardless of the decisions made by the pianist, it is clear, that what we hear today and what Beethoven heard - or wanted to hear - is not necessarily the same. Much scholarship and much guesswork and much reliance on good (i.e. persona) taste is involved.

1. Adagio Sostenuto (Very slow and sustained)

Unbroken placidity of larger movements would later become trademark Beethoven. The Violin Romances, or the slow movements of both the *Emperor Concerto* and the *Triple Concerto* and even the first quartet from his opera *Fidelio*, represent these islands of stillness in which tiny harmonic movements predominate without disturbing – predating modern minimalism by one and a half centuries.

2. Allegretto (Rather Fast and lively)

A relaxed *Allegretto* – described by Franz Liszt as “a flower between two chasms” provides no emotional challenge, and at most, we are allowed to eavesdrop on a pleasant conversation between two old friends taking some fresh air while their better halves are inside dancing a little Minuet to which someone had forgotten to write a Trio.

3. Presto Agitato (Very fast and agitated)

The stormy character of the movement is achieved through broken chords and arpeggios based on the basic chords of the key of C# minor. (An interesting Youtube experiment involved playing this work in the major key, and it becomes almost comical and cartoonish, but Beethoven seemed to know exactly what depths he could mine from this rarely used key). Lively and skilful outbursts make for some exciting listening. Beethoven's heavy use of accented *sforzando* (*sudden*) notes, together with just a few strategically located very loud *fortissimo* (*very loud*) passages, creates the sense of a very powerful sound in spite of the predominance of soft *piano* (*quiet*) markings throughout.

Here are thoughts from *Jan Jiracek von Arnim* – in his own words – on the work:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=woaAkYYOO_M&t=19s

ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Born into a family of musicians, pianist Jan Gottlieb Jiracek von Arnim was described by BBC Music Magazine as one of the leading pianists of his generation.

At the age of ten, he won first prize at the Steinway Competition in Hamburg and made his formal debut the following year in his home town of Hannover (Germany) with a piano concerto by Mozart. As a graduate of the Berlin University of the Arts, he studied with Hans Leygraf and Alfred Brendel, among others.

A top prize winner at the Busoni Competition (Italy) and Maria Canals Competition (Spain), he received special honors and awards for his interpretations of the music of Ludwig van Beethoven and Olivier Messiaen.

Jan Jiracek von Arnim was one of the winners of the Tenth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition (USA), which marked the beginning of his international career. Jan Jiracek von Arnim has since performed throughout Europe, including recitals at the Herkulesaal Munich, the Philharmonie Berlin, Salle Cortot Paris, Palau de la musica Barcelona, the Tonhalle Zurich, the Konzerthaus Vienna, the Musikverein Vienna, the Musikhalle Hamburg and the Gewandhaus Leipzig, as well as with orchestras such as the Berlin and St. Petersburg Philharmonics Orchestras, the Cologne Chamber Orchestra, the Vienna Chamber Orchestra and the Northern Sinfonia of England. Jan Jiracek von Arnim has been featured on several European radio and television stations, including ZDF, BBC, SFB Berlin, Deutschlandradio, Radio Hilversum, Radio Stockholm, and Radio France, as well as on NDR as a soloist with the NDR Symphony Orchestra.

In 2001, he was appointed Professor of Piano Performance at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna, Austria, making him the youngest tenured professor in the history of this university.

His students are first prize winners of major international piano competitions.

Jan Jiracek von Arnim is currently a guest professor at the Elisabeth University of Music in Hiroshima (Japan) and at the China Conservatory in Beijing. He was a visiting professor at the Yale School of Music in 2022 – 2023.

He regularly gives masterclasses in North America, Asia and Europe.

From 2017 – 2023, as successor to the legendary pianist Wilhelm Kempff, he taught the annual “Beethovenkurs” at the “Casa Orfeo” in Positano, Italy, where selected international piano talents are taught in the German and Austrian tradition of Beethoven interpretation.

Upcoming projects include performances and teaching activities at the 2024 Summer Academy of the Mozarteum Salzburg, the 2024 Chopin Festival in Duszynki, Poland, the 2024 Tianjin Juilliard Piano Festival in China, the 2024 International Piano Festival in Hangzhou, China, as well as several masterclasses in Japan.

Mr. Jiracek von Arnim is frequently invited as a juror to international piano competitions, including the Hamamatsu International Piano Competition in Japan, the Busoni International Piano Competition in Italy, the Tchaikovsky International Piano Competition for young musicians, the Shenzhen International Piano Competition, and in 2024, the Montréal International Piano Competition and the China International Music Competition in Beijing.

Since 2011, he is the Artistic Director and Chairman of the International Beethoven Piano Competition Vienna, one of the most prestigious piano competitions in the world.

His biography on Franz Liszt (Residenz Verlag, Austria) was described by the renowned newspaper DIE PRESSE, Austria, as “the very best Liszt biography”.

Jan Jiracek von Arnim is a scholarship holder of renowned foundations such as the “Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes”. In 2020, he was named a “Paul Harris Fellow” of Rotary Foundation. He is also an honorary citizen of Fredericksburg, Texas (USA).