

## Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) — Sonata in A-flat, Op. 110 (1821)

The Sonata in A-flat Op. 110 was the only sonata composed by Beethoven during the year 1821, which would also be the thirty-first and penultimate sonata for the piano he would compose over an almost lifelong relationship with the sonata genre.

Already busy with the largest of his late period compositions—the Ninth Symphony, *Missa Solemnis*, and the Diabelli-Variations—Beethoven was asked by the publisher, Schlesinger, for three piano sonatas; what resulted were the three sonatas: Op. 109, 110 & 111, with Op. 109 already composed prior to this request. The sonata Op. 110 was sent late to the publisher, signed off by Beethoven on Christmas Day 1821, several months past the expected due date, presumably due to Beethoven's condition of jaundice, perhaps already an indication of his declining health.

This sonata shares much of the graciousness and warmth with the previous sonata, in E major. But here in the Sonata Op. 110, the emotional range spans much further during the course of the three movements, including: amiability, sympathy, humour, angst, operatic despair, culminating with utmost triumph and resolve.

The first movement, marked *Moderato cantabile molto espressivo* (moderate tempo, singing, very expressive), and *con amabilità* (with amiability), shows Beethoven at his most delicate and at times impressionistic. Sweeping arpeggios trace the range of the keyboard, later be combined with the reinstatement of the main theme.

The second movement, whilst the majority is in a minor key, presents a mischievous and humorous scherzo and trio. The melodic material for the opening second could be linked to two light-hearted German folk songs; the first '*Unsere Katze hat Kätzchen gehabt*' (our cat has had kittens), and '*Ich bin lüderlich, du bist lüderlich, wir sind alle lüderlich*' (I am slovenly, you are slovenly, we are slovenly). The trio is filled with dynamic contrasts and further playfulness.

The multi sectioned third movement, contrasts the plaintive with the victorious. Beginning in an episodic mood, with frequent tempo and textural changes, the *Klagender Gesang* (mournful song) presents some of the saddest music imaginable, similar in mood to *Dido's Lament* from Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. Rising from the lowest possible level of melancholy, is a fugue, the theme formed of gently rising fourths. From this fugue, the *Klagender Gesang* returns, this time marked *Ermattet* (exhausted) and even more grief-stricken, only to be finally conquered by a revival of the major key, which brings the sonata triumphantly to its close.

This is the only sonata by Beethoven without a dedication. The Sonata was originally planned to be dedicated to Ferdinand Ries, Beethoven's student and secretary, but upon seeing a new piano concerto by Ries, Beethoven accused Ries of plagiarism and removed the dedication. Later, the dedication was intended for Antonie Brentano, considered by scholars to be Beethoven's "immortal beloved", but Beethoven's letter reached the publisher too late, so was published without dedication.

Eden Walker, Winter 2017