

FACULTY ARTIST SERIES

**BEETHOVEN:  
COMPLETE PIANO  
SONATAS**

ALEXANDER KOBRIN, PIANO

September 1, 2023—May 1, 2024  
Hatch Recital Hall



**EASTMAN**  
SCHOOL OF MUSIC  
UNIVERSITY of ROCHESTER

# PROGRAM

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Friday, September 1, 2023

Hatch Recital Hall

7:30 PM

**Piano Sonata No. 1 in F Minor, Op. 2, No. 1** Ludwig van Beethoven

Allegro

(1770-1827)

Adagio

Minuetto: Allegretto

Prestissimo

**Piano Sonata No. 2 in A Major, Op. 2, No. 2**

Allegro vivace

Largo appassionato

Scherzo: Allegretto

Rondo: Grazioso

**Piano Sonata No. 3 in C Major, Op. 2, No. 3**

Allegro con brio

Adagio

Scherzo: Allegro

Allegro assai

Alexander Kobrin, piano

# PROGRAM

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Sunday, October 1, 2023

Hatch Recital Hall

3:30 PM

**Piano Sonata No. 4 in E-flat Major, Op. 7**      Ludwig van Beethoven  
Allegro molto e con brio      (1770-1827)  
Largo con gran espressione  
Allegro  
Rondo: Poco allegretto e grazioso

**Piano Sonata No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 10, No. 1**  
Allegro molto e con brio  
Adagio molto  
Finale: Prestissimo

**Piano Sonata No. 6 in F Major, Op. 10, No. 2**  
Allegro  
Menuetto: Allegretto  
Presto

**Piano Sonata No. 7 in D Major, Op. 10, No. 3**  
Presto  
Largo e mesto  
Menuetto: Allegro  
Rondo: Allegro

Alexander Kobrin, piano

# PROGRAM

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Wednesday, November 1, 2023

Hatch Recital Hall

7:30 PM

**Piano Sonata No. 8 in C Minor, Op. 13,  
"Pathétique"**

Ludwig van Beethoven  
(1770-1827)

Grave—Allegro di molto e con brio  
Adagio cantabile  
Rondo: Allegro

**Piano Sonata No. 9 in E Major, Op. 14, No. 1**

Allegro  
Allegretto  
Rondo—Allegro commodo

**Piano Sonata No. 10 in G Major, Op. 14, No. 2**

Allegro  
Andante  
Scherzo: Allegro assai

**Piano Sonata No. 11 in B-flat Major, Op. 22**

Allegro con brio  
Adagio con molta espressione  
Menuetto  
Rondo: Allegretto

Alexander Kobrin, piano

# PROGRAM

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Friday, December 1, 2023

Hatch Recital Hall

7:30 PM

**Piano Sonata No. 12 in A-flat Major, Op. 26**     Ludwig van Beethoven

Andante con variazioni (1770-1827)

Scherzo: Allegro molto

Maestoso andate: Marcia funebre sulla morte d'un eroe

Allegro

**Piano Sonata No. 13 in E-flat Major, Op. 27, No. 1**

Andante—Allegro—Andante

Allegro molto e vivace

Adagio con espressione

Allegro vivace

**Piano Sonata No. 14 in C-sharp Minor, Op. 27, No. 2**

Adagio sostenuto

Allegretto

Presto agitato

**Piano Sonata No. 15 in D Major, Op. 28, "Pastoral"**

Allegro

Andante

Scherzo: Allegro vivace

Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo

Alexander Kobrin, piano

# PROGRAM

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Thursday, February 1, 2024

Hatch Recital Hall

7:30 PM

**Piano Sonata No. 16 in G Major, Op. 31, No. 1**      Ludwig van Beethoven

*Allegro vivace*

(1770-1827)

*Adagio grazioso*

Rondo: *Allegretto—Presto*

**Piano Sonata No. 17 in D Minor, Op. 31, No. 2, "Tempest"**

*Largo—Allegro*

*Adagio*

*Allegretto*

**Piano Sonata No. 18 in E-flat Major, Op. 31, No. 3**

*Allegro*

Scherzo: *Allegretto vivace*

Menuetto: *Moderato e grazioso*

*Presto con fuoco*

Alexander Kobrin, piano

## PROGRAM NOTES

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*A careful study of these works will transform us,  
for Beethoven will become our teacher and  
lead us to develop our own personalities and characters.*  
— Edwin Fischer

### **Piano Sonata No. 16 in G Major, Op. 31, No. 1**

On October 6, 1802, Beethoven wrote a letter to his brothers Kaspar Karl and Nikolaus Johann expressing his growing distress and desire for isolation. Never sent and only found after the composer's death, this letter is a true psychological confession that went down in history as the Heiligenstadt Testament. Beethoven revealed the growing weakness of his hearing, which had slowly isolated him from society and forced him "to live completely alone," and the pain of appearing to others rude and unpolite. Driven by the feeling of imminent death, Beethoven appears to farewell his brothers before a suicide. Indeed, on October 10, he wrote on the reverse side of the document: "Thus, then, I take my leave of you, and also with sadness...As autumn leaves fall and wither, so my hopes are ruined." However, Beethoven's deep faith in art overflows from the entire document, so much so that we can find between these lines the revelation that sheds light on what will keep him clinging to life more than anything else: "Art! Only Art deterred me. How could I leave the world before I had produced everything I felt to be my calling?"

As in Aeschylus' famous phrase "πάθει μάθος" (learning from adversity), Beethoven makes this moment of imbalance between psychological despair and success as a composer one of the most decisive turning points of his originality. The creative reaction led him to complete, during 1802, his *Symphony No. 2, Op. 36, Violin Sonatas, Op. 30, Piano Variations, Op. 34* and *Op. 35* and, finally, *Piano Sonatas, Op. 31*. The first of these sonatas is so satirical, playful, and caricatured as to suggest that one of the decisive values of the art that kept Beethoven alive was that of downplaying. The effervescence and vitality of the musical discourse, expressed with brilliance at the keyboard that appears almost carefree, ward off seriousness and heaviness. On the contrary, it almost seems the whole work intends to poke fun at that music that takes itself too seriously.

The *Allegro vivace* opens with an astonishing gesture: the right hand anticipates the left hand by a sixteenth, creating a rapid acciaccatura with a disturbing effect. Constantly repeated, the gesture becomes the caricature

## PROGRAM NOTES

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of a pianist whose hands cannot play together. The alternation with subdued cadences played coordinated makes the scene even more comical, as if, now and then, the pianist's practice takes effect, and his hands manage to play together. A popular dance theme interrupts with an insistent syncopated rhythm the satirical scene. The extravagant alternation between the two hands and the jaunty bass accompaniment paint a village scene, paradoxically mixing with the compositional seriousness of the challenging modulating path. Between virtuosity and grotesque gestures, the scene returns to the uncoordinated pianist, concluding with extreme comedy. According to Rosen, "if a piano recital were not so desperately serious an affair, ...it would make the listeners laugh."

In the *Adagio grazioso*, the humor shifts to Italian voice technique, with a whimsical, satirical picture full of exaggerated flourishes, warbles, and diminutions. The theme is paraphrased from the aria *Mit Wurd' und Hobeit* from Haydn's oratorio, *Die Schöpfung*, already in the opening transformed by the first irreverent trick: the melody attaches on an exaggerated trill, suggesting an overblown throttled warble. Just as a good singer in the Italian bel canto tradition would use every wizardry in his baggage to enchant the audience with the variation of an aria, so Beethoven engages in a great variety of keyboard tricks, perfectly rendering the satirical idea of virtuosic exaggeration. Again, Beethoven's intent is not to elevate or evoke seriousness but to desecrate and play wittily with "high" culture.

The mocking and provocative tone pervades the *Rondo: Allegretto*, only seemingly innocuous and serene. In the *Adagio* preceding the coda, the theater even becomes overt, with pantomime-like gestures that remain unresolved and suspended before the hastily resolving finale typical of comic theater. Musicologist Arnold Schering gave rise to heated controversy and attacks when, in the 1930s, he bizarrely declared that he had incontrovertibly discovered the literary sources that had inspired Beethoven in composing many of his instrumental works. *Sonata No. 1, Op. 31* was by Schering associated with Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* – a bold connection that will be up to the listener to find or not to find in the work's comic vein.

## PROGRAM NOTES

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### Piano Sonata No. 17 in D Minor, Op. 31, No. 2, “Tempest”

In his second volume of *Life of Beethoven*, Anton Schindler reports a series of anecdotes and conversations with the composer concerning the piano sonatas. One of the most famous and influential narrates: “I requested him to furnish me with the keys to two sonatas, that in F minor, *Op. 57*, and that in D minor, *Op. 29 [31]*. His answer was, “Read Shakespeare’s *Tempest*.” While the sonata, *Op. 57*, went down in history as “*Appassionata*”, without reference to Shakespeare, the *Sonata in D Minor* became famous in the 19th Century precisely as “*The Tempest*”. Although various letters and testimonies confirm Beethoven’s passion for Shakespeare, the title of *Sonata No. 2, Op. 31* generated more myths than certainties. Some scholars have bravely sought bold connections between the plot and themes of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and the sonata. Others are skeptical of Schindler’s anecdote, like Charles Rosen: “Beethoven is supposed to have claimed that this work came from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*; if so, he cannot have read anything beyond the title.” However, as Fischer argues, this title “does not help us very much – it merely tells us that nature’s demons, wind and water, have a hand in this movement.”

According to Czerny, *Sonata No. 2, Op. 31* represents the perfect composition: “The unity of the ideas and of the tragic character, the artistic form, which is disturbed by no episode, and the romantic and picturesque nature of the whole, will never fail to produce the greatest effect when the fancy of the play.” Since its appearance, this Sonata has become one of the most celebrated and beloved, not only because of its legendary and imaginative connection with Shakespeare but also because of its unpredictable drama, the surprisingly fused form between improvisational genres and precise architecture, and its evocative narrativity.

The opening is among the most discussed and controversial conceived by Beethoven, since it combines two opposing metrical indications – *largo* and *allegro* – and two opposed states of expression. The initial ascending arpeggio is the typical preluding gesture, with a consequent improvisational quality. This arpeggio creates a state of suspension, surprisingly broken by an agitated thematic fragment. The listener moves along an unstable path that gives no points of reference. Shortly after the beginning, the bass theme appears, followed by the soprano’s plaintive comment, and a more comprehensible form finally seems to emerge. But,

## PROGRAM NOTES

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again, the initial episode surprisingly returns at the beginning of the development, questioning the form and narrative that seemingly had come to life. This dimension of complicated definition, which seems to have simultaneously definite and indefinite contours, is summarized by Carl Dahlhaus as a “processual character...a process of coming into existence.”

In a parallelism with the first movement opening, the *Adagio* begins with an arpeggio in the same register. Similarly, the lack of a definite theme is again the entrance into a process of research, formation, and the evolution of something still undefined. It soon becomes clear, however, that the leading theme is precisely this indefiniteness, which suddenly becomes the narrative foundation of a lied. Yet, when this conviction now seems clear, the second theme appears. According to Adorno, this theme “is not simply a beautiful melody..nor is it distinguished by exceptional expressivity...Against the dark, diffuse backdrop of what has preceded, the accompanied upper voice that characterizes the second theme acquires its dual character of reconciliation and promise.” This is a musical episode that removes all certainty while at the same time makes new ones acquired, so much so that it is called precisely by Adorno a “consolatory passage,” which in some ways is “...like the sentence from Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*: ‘Hope descended from the heavens like a star’.”

The idea of becoming and the process of formation at the core of the sonata embodies in the third movement a “perpetuum mobile”, an ostinato passage that on its surface remains the same, but it is a new perspective on evolving and changing. The syncopated impulse of the ostinato passage creates through its constant repetition an effect that Rosen calls “hypnotic.” Its brief interruption and the insertion of new dramatic elements such as octaves and sforzandi depicts even more vividly the disturbing inability to respond about becoming and evolution that permeates the entire sonata until its closing – circularly mirroring its opening – in a descending arpeggio.

## PROGRAM NOTES

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### Piano Sonata No. 18 in E-flat Major, Op. 31, No. 3

In mid-1802, Beethoven received a letter from the Swiss composer and publisher Hans Georg Nägeli, with the proposal to open a series entitled *Répertoire des Clavecinistes*. The previous year, the Zurich publishing house had presented Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* to launch the series "*Musikalische Kunstwerke im strengen Style*" ("Works of musical art in the strict style"), and then wanted to focus on piano works "...in the grand style, of great scope, with diverse differences from the usual sonata genre." Beethoven agreed to write three sonatas, even granting a discount from the price he demanded until a few months earlier: 100 ducats, 30 less than the usual price. Nevertheless, there was no shortage of discussion regarding payments, and Beethoven received all the ducats just in August and delivered the three sonatas by the end of 1802. But Nägeli published only the first two, hoping to sign a new deal for a fourth sonata. Beethoven, for his part, had been greatly altered by the lack of accuracy of Nägeli edition of the first two sonatas, full of errors and even with added bars. For this reason, he declined all requests for further collaboration, and the *Sonata in E-flat Major No. 3, Op. 31* remained unpublished until 1804.

Long known by the apocryphal title "*The Hunt*," the E-flat major sonata is the only one in *Op. 31* to be composed in four movements, and surprisingly without a slow movement. The joviality and freshness of the themes move far away from somber or dramatic themes, preferring a rural setting painted by woodwind and horn imitation.

Shortly after the conclusion of the Sonata, Beethoven used the first movement theme to compose the lied *Der Wachtelschlag* ("*The Song of the Quail*"). This assonance encouraged the popularity of the title, which referred to a hunting party, characterized in the first movement by the contrast between the imitation of natural elements, such as the singing and unpredictable flight of the quail at the beginning of the first movement, and contrasting elements, such as sudden forte all over the keyboard that would refer – according to the tradition – to gunshots. What the sonata is surprising for, however, is once again its ability to evade the listener's expectations with the balance between puzzling harmonic experimentation and conventional elements. In the *Allegro's* opening, for example, Beethoven does not make the tonal context clear, eluding the tonic and leaving tension chords suspended. Only a basic

## PROGRAM NOTES

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cadenza finally makes the pitch clear to the ear, juxtaposing the simple with the complex. According to Rosen, this sonata's beginning "is a dialogue, opposing passion and ironic mockery."

The *Scherzo* is a fanfare in binary time and with a witty character based on dynamic contrasts and staccato timbre. The irony does not cease with the basic idea but evolves, emphasized by eccentricities, such as unexpected gestures like groups of five fast notes alternately ascending and descending. Instead of a slow movement, Beethoven writes an intimate and lyrical *Minuet* with the indication *Moderato e grazioso*. According to Roman Vlad, "Far from having the appearance of a dance, it transfigures the metrical scheme of the Minuet to the point that it can be considered rather as a lyrical intermezzo." In contrast, the idea of the quick dance is characteristic of the *Presto con fuoco*, where the Tarantella rhythm proceeds incessantly and is accentuated throughout the piece. As Harry Halbreich argues, "This sonata, which began with a tender and anxious questioning, ends with a radiant affirmation of life."

— Federico Ervoli

*We acknowledge with respect the Seneca Nation, known as the "Great Hill People" and "Keepers of the Western Door" of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. We take this opportunity to thank the people whose ancestral lands the Eastman School of Music of the University of Rochester currently occupies in Rochester, New York.*

# PROGRAM

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Friday, March 1, 2024

Hatch Recital Hall

7:30 PM

**Piano Sonata No. 19 in G Minor, Op. 49, No. 1**    Ludwig van Beethoven  
Andante    (1770-1827)  
Rondo: Allegro

**Piano Sonata No. 20 in G Major, Op. 49, No. 2**  
Allegro ma non troppo  
Tempo di menuetto

**Piano Sonata No. 21 in C Major, Op. 53, "Waldstein"**  
Allegro con brio  
Introduzione: Adagio molto  
Rondo: Allegretto moderato—Prestissimo

**Piano Sonata No. 22 in F Major, Op. 54**  
In tempo d'un menuetto  
Allegretto—Più allegro

**Piano Sonata No. 23 in F Minor, Op. 57, "Appassionata"**  
Allegro assai  
Andante con moto  
Allegro ma non troppo—Presto

Alexander Kobrin, piano

# PROGRAM

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Monday, April 1, 2024

Hatch Recital Hall

7:30 PM

**Piano Sonata No. 24 in F-sharp Major, Op. 78**      Ludwig van Beethoven  
Adagio cantabile—Allegro ma non troppo      (1770-1827)  
Allegro vivace

**Piano Sonata No. 25 in G Major, Op. 79**  
Presto alla tedesca  
Andante  
Vivace

**Piano Sonata No. 26 in E-flat Major, Op. 81a**  
Das Lebewohl: Adagio—Allegro  
Abwesenheit: Andante espressivo  
Das Wiedersehen: Vivacissimamente

**Piano Sonata No. 27 in E Minor, Op. 90**  
Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus mit Empfindung und Ausdruck  
Nicht zu geschwind und sehr singbar vorgetragen

**Piano Sonata No. 28 in A Major, Op. 101**  
Etwas lebhaft, und mit der innigsten Empfindung: Allegro ma non troppo  
Lebhaft, marschmäßig: Vivace alla Marcia  
Langsam und sehnsuchtsvoll: Adagio ma non troppo con affetto  
Geschwind, doch nicht zu sehr, und mit Entschlossenheit: Allegro

Alexander Kobrin, piano

# PROGRAM

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Wednesday, May 1, 2024

Hatch Recital Hall

7:30 PM

**Piano Sonata No. 29 in B Major, Op. 106,**      Ludwig van Beethoven  
**"Hammerklavier"**      (1770-1827)

Allegro

Scherzo: Assai vivace

Adagio sostenuto

Introduzione: Largo—Allegro— Fuga: Allegro risoluto

**Piano Sonata No. 30 in E Major, Op. 109**

Vivace ma non troppo—Adagio espressivo

Prestissimo

Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung. Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo

**Piano Sonata No. 31 in A-flat Major, Op. 110**

Moderato cantabile molto espressivo

Allegro molto

Adagio ma non troppo—Allegro ma non troppo

**Piano Sonata No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111**

Maestoso—Allegro con brio ed appassionato

Arietta: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile

Alexander Kobrin, piano

## MEET THE ARTIST

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Gold medal winner of the 2005 Van Cliburn Piano Competition, distinguished pianist, **Alexander Kobrin**, has received wide acclaim for his emotional, technically inspired performances, placing him at the forefront of today's performing musicians.



Mr. Kobrin is an active guest soloist with the world's leading orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, Tokyo Philharmonic, Orchestra Verdi, Russian National Orchestra, Belgrade Philharmonic, English Chamber Orchestra, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Dallas Symphony, Berliner Symphony, Swedish Radio Symphony, Birmingham Symphony, Warsaw Philharmonic, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

He has collaborated with such conductors as Mikhail Pletnev, Mikhail Jurovsky, Sir Mark Elder, Vassiliy Sinaisky, James Conlon, Claus Peter Flor, Vassiliy Petrenko and Bramwell Tovey.

He appears in recitals at major halls worldwide, including Carnegie Zankel Hall and Avery Fisher Hall in New York, the Kennedy Centre in Washington, Albert Hall and Wigmore Hall in London, Louvre Auditorium, Salle Gaveau and Salle Cortot in Paris, Munich Herkulesaal and Berliner Filarmonia Hall in Germany, the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatoire, Sheung Wan Civic Centre in Hong Kong, as well as Sala Verdi in Milan and many others. Other past performances have included recitals at Bass Hall for the Cliburn Series, the Washington Performing Arts Society, La Roque d'Anthéron, the Ravinia Festival, the Beethoven Easter Festival, Busoni Festival, the renowned Klavier-Festival Ruhr, the Festival Musique dans le Grésivaudan, the International Keyboard Institute & Festival, annual concert tours in Japan, China, and Taiwan.

Mr. Kobrin has recordings on the Harmonia Mundi, Quartz, and Centaur labels, covering a wide swath of the piano literature, which have received rave reviews. Gramophone Magazine raved about his Cliburn Competition release on Harmonia Mundi, writing that "in [Rachmaninoff's] Second Sonata (played in the 1931 revision), despite fire-storms of virtuosity, there is always room for everything to tell and Kobrin achieves a hypnotic sense of the music's dark necromancy."

In addition to the Van Cliburn, Mr. Kobrin has garnered top prizes from numerous international piano competitions including the Busoni

## MEET THE ARTIST

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International Piano Competition (First Prize), Hamamatsu International Piano Competition (Top Prize), Scottish International Piano Competition in Glasgow (First Prize).

Mr. Kobrin frequently serves as a jury member for many international piano competitions, most recently, the First International Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli Competition in Brescia. Other competitions include the Van Cliburn in Fort Worth, TX, Busoni International Piano Competition in Bolzano, Hamamatsu International Piano Competition, the Blüthner International Piano Competition in Vienna, E-Competition in Fairbanks, AK, and the Neuhaus International Piano Festival in Moscow.

Mr. Kobrin is a dedicated teacher and is passionate about his contributions to education both in the U.S. and abroad. In September 2023, he will join the faculty of the Conservatorio Svizzera Italiana in Switzerland as a visiting professor. Since 2017, Mr. Kobrin has served on the faculty of the renowned Eastman School of Music in Rochester, NY. From 2003 to 2010 he served on the faculty of the Russian State Gnessin's Academy of Music. In 2010 Alexander Kobrin was named the L. Rexford Distinguished Chair in Piano at the Schwob School of Music at Columbus State University, and from 2013 until 2017, he was a member of the celebrated Artist Faculty of New York University's Steinhardt School. Mr. Kobrin has also given masterclasses in Europe and Asia, the International Piano Series, and at the Conservatories of Japan and China. In 2020, he became co-director of Hiiumaa Homecoming Festival in Estonia.

Upcoming highlights include the Complete Beethoven Sonatas Project for Centaur Records and live performances at the Eastman School of Music during the 2023-2024 season.

Mr. Kobrin was born in 1980 in Moscow. At the age of five, he was enrolled in the world-famous Gnessin Special School of Music after which he attended the prestigious Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatoire. His teachers have included renowned professors Tatiana Zelikman and Lev Naumov.

Mr. Kobrin immigrated to the United States in 2010 and became its citizen in 2015. He currently resides in Rochester, NY with his family.

Mr. Kobrin is a Shigeru Kawai artist.



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