

FACULTY ARTIST SERIES

**BEETHOVEN:
COMPLETE
PIANO SONATAS**

ALEXANDER KOBRIN, PIANO

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

PROGRAM

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

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

When the 25-year-old Beethoven was about to publish his first three piano sonatas, his musical training was already somewhat advanced and his experience certainly not empty. In that 1796, Beethoven was famous in Vienna as an amazing young pianist and incredible improviser at the keyboard. Nevertheless, his intention was to move his “creating act” on to the more important and complex field of composition, to impose himself in the society as a composer. If his first publishing experience, dating back to when he was eleven years old with the *Three Sonatas WoO 47*, were a trace of an extraordinary talent still being guided by his teacher Christian Gottlob Neefe, with *Op. 2* he is already aware and radically convinced of his own musical goals. First among them is the seriousness of embarking on such a complicated path as the decision to elevate the Hausmusik to the dignity of Konzertmusik. In fact, with the *Trios, Op. 1* and the *Sonatas, Op. 2*, Beethoven presents works in the ambitious form in form movements, usually reserved for the symphonic style and the quartet: works with a concert character. In contrast, trios and sonatas were an expression of the Hausmusik and were characterized by three movements. The direction taken by Beethoven imposes the exposure of his self-expression in broader and more decisive contexts and beginning a process of upliftment of instrumental music. The direction taken by Beethoven requires the elevation of instrumental music to wider and more relevant contexts, thus leading to the rise of a new process of self-expression.

The words with which Count Waldstein prepared the young Beethoven for his new Viennese life are certainly very famous: “...by constant application, you may receive the spirit of Mozart from the hands of Haydn”. The *Piano Sonata No. 1 in F minor, Op. 2 No. 1* is in some ways a concrete example of this famous phrase, as it shows musical material traceable to Mozart that Beethoven used in his lessons with Haydn to understand counterpoint and the development of a first movement sonata. In fact, the subject of the first movement – an F minor ascendant arpeggio which traces the so-called Mannheim Rocket, a compositional pattern invented by Joseph Stamitz of the Mannheim School – was probably discovered by Beethoven in Mozart's Symphonies in G minor, the beginning of *K. 183* and the finale of *K. 550*, in which we find the same expressive gesture of the ascending minor arpeggio with very similar technical-rhetorical characteristics to those of *Op. 2 No. 1*. In addition, a sketch dating from 1793 with the first draft of the exposition of this Sonata has come down to us. In the margin, the words, “...other six months of counterpoint – and he will be able to work as he likes”. In his reconnaissance and transcription of this document, Eusebius

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Mandyczewski argues that the commentary can be traced back to Haydn, who was thus guiding Beethoven in the development of what was to be his first *Op. 2 Sonata*.

If the first movement is a short sonata-form in which we recognize the chrisms of drama, with a tonality never used by Haydn and Mozart in sonatas such as F minor, the second movement, *Adagio*, is in contrast to the ornate slow movement of the galante style, typical of Haydn and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. Beethoven takes the entire *Adagio con espressione* from the *Piano Quartet WoO 36 No. 3*, written in 1785 at the age of fifteen, adding new episodes and experimenting with new piano techniques, such as the crossing of left and right hands in the episode in D.

The rococo style driven by Haydn evolves into seriousness and severity in the *Mennetto Allegretto*, in whose trio in F major Beethoven takes up the contrapuntal style already proposed in the first movement, creating expressive-compositional parallels between movements that will be typical of his personal style.

In the concluding *Prestissimo*, the horse is unbridled, free to run and express itself without rigid patterns to follow. We find here the first real drop of Beethoven's distillate, in the radical proposal of all his wild expressive range. He succeeds in tracing a feature already famous in Vienna in his improvisations: the contrast between a frenetic, wild virtuosic spirit and moments of surprising, cantabile, self-reflexive calm. With this contact between his creative improvisational temperament and his expressive skills at the keyboard, he concludes the first sonata of the cycle with a youthful sense of conquest.

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

Within the triptych, the second sonata plays the humorous and graceful role, setting with a charming, eloquent tone, increasingly conscious and original. Yet within this framework Beethoven finds room for varied, sometimes surprising characters, and above all for the first truly rigorous counterpoint in Beethoven's Sonatas: the three-voice canon of the central part of the first movement.

The young composer had found an inconstant teacher in Haydn, certainly not systematic and continuous, so when he set about organizing his imminent second trip to London, it was Haydn himself who advised Beethoven of a new teacher. This figure was found in the Kapellmeister of Stephansdom – St. Stephan's Cathedral, Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, who was then the most famous counterpoint teacher in Vienna. Very devoted teacher, pedant and systematic, Albrechtsberger had a good relationship with Beethoven, whom he met three times a week,

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becoming one of the most influential figures in his musical education, of which this canon is one of the earliest examples.

In the humorous discourse of this first movement, freer and surprisingly daring in its modulating bridges, and with its atypical way of concluding in pianissimo dying away, the counterpoint sounds burlesque-ly, like a comic episode of teasing the seriousness, typical of the improviser Beethoven.

The breaking point of the sonata, which deviates from the system character, is undoubtedly the *Largo maestoso in D major*. Already, the indication “maestoso” betrays the orchestral solemnity sought by Beethoven, who creates in this movement a parallel that will become increasingly decisive in his research at the keyboard: the relationship between variety in the timbral palette and introspective research. In experimenting with new sonic possibilities of the Viennese fortepiano, such as the pizzicato of the basses, the numerous trills, the picturesque stormy episode, Beethoven offers in this movement a glimpse of interiority, in which he does not conceal metaphysical nostalgia.

The third movement, one of the first revolutionarily entitled *Scherzo*, returns the canons of the tale to the humorous *galant*, in a simple and free manner, contrasted by the harsh and dissonant spirit of the *Trio in A minor*. This introduces the more galant, almost Arcadian setting of the *Rondo grazioso*, in which Beethoven with great character and affability modulates the development. The broadening of form in these early works is found in experimenting with the relationships between the various movements, creating a broad formal and discursive coherence that spans the entire duration of the work. In this *Sonata in A major*, one such element is the finale which, reprising a pattern seen in the exposition and reprise of the first movement, concludes in a diminuendo, allowing the piece to conclude by dying away.

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

As with the *Trios, Op. 1*, Beethoven reserves the place of honor of the last space for the most important work in the triptych. It is no coincidence that the brilliant and virtuosic sonata, wilder and more gestural, comes right at the final spot, as if it were the last movement of a single work. Moreover, it is no coincidence that it is precisely in this most digital, physical, and wild space, just as it was with the *Prestissimo* of the first sonata, that Beethoven appears most at ease, managing to weave a discourse of absolute brilliance that also invades the slow, lyrical movement. The imposing, unyielding character and technical audacity of the keyboard virtuoso make these brilliant spaces the battlefield of choice for Beethoven, who experiments here with how the timbral possibilities of the instrument can be exploited with new technical mechanisms.

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Composed between late 1795 and early 1796, it thematically picks up on the *Piano Quartet WoO 36 No. 3*, as was already the case for the *Adagio* of the first sonata of *Op. 2*. The approach to the keyboard, from the very first measures, seems more that of a London keyboard virtuoso like Clementi than of a Viennese composer: the use of thirds, octaves and orchestral-like chords recall the powerful Broadwood pianos and concert halls for which Haydn had written the London last three sonatas. This virtuosic character on a Viennese piano, with its much more restrained sound and weaker mechanic, was highly revolutionary and traces a line that links this sonata more to Clementi and Dussek than to Mozart and Haydn.

If the first movement approaches the keyboard virtuosically seeking an orchestral sound, the second is written in reverse in the character of a string quartet and in the form of a rondo with coda. This *Adagio* is surprisingly in E major, creating a third-major relationship between the first and second movements, as between the first and second sonata of the triptych. The tonality leads Beethoven to create a nocturnal atmosphere, in which the crystalline texture is developed with technical virtuosity such as the overlapping of the two hands and the important use of octaves, showing how brilliance can still paint a reflective and lyrical setting.

The *Scherzo*, in the form of a Minuet and Trio, opens with an ironically imitative episode, similar to what happened in the development of the *Op. 2 No. 2* first movement. The pungent staccato and the extensive use of anacrusis expressively convey a sense of dangerous lightness. The contrasting timbres and the conclusion in the low register dying away continue Beethoven's exploration of the sonic possibilities of the instrument and his experiments on the conclusions of movements in the dissolution, dispersion of sound in *diminuendo*.

The humor, virtuosity, and proud, ardent spirit on which this sonata was based return in a lively and fiery fusion in the last movement. Edwin Fischer, commenting on the technical difficulties of this movement “full of gloriously ebullient music”, adds that they can only be addressed only “by aiming at that balance between tension and relaxation wherein lies the solution of most of life's difficulties.” If we accept the idea handed down by tradition of the inflexible, instinctive, and revolutionary young Beethoven, one has to wonder: would he have agreed with this statement about life?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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'Antheron, 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

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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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