

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 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. 8 in C Minor, Op. 13 (“Pathétique”)**

The title, to whom part of the initial success of the work is due, came with a great marketing intuition to Franz Anton Hoffmeister, the opera’s first publisher, in December 1799. This title provoked positive reactions in Beethoven, who recognized the adjective *Pathétique* as correct. Schiller’s essay *On the Pathetic* had only been published six years earlier, focusing on the so-called pathetic sublime. In Schiller’s view, the pathetic is the true essence of the sublime – artistic effect productive of the strongest emotion the mind is capable of feeling – and only through the representation of suffering nature is this sublime achieved. There are two basic conditions for the pathetic sublime: firstly, a vivid representation of pain that excites *pietas* (piety), and secondly, the representation of resistance to pain that arouses the moral conscience.

This juxtaposition between the expression of inner pain and the resistance of the moral conscience is the central expressive idea throughout the *Sonata in C Minor, Op. 13*. For the first time, the opening *Allegro* is preceded by an introduction in *Grave*, which immediately imposes a severe and pitiful setting of deep emotional pain. The key of C Minor, after the *Trios No. 3* of *Op. 1* and *Op. 9*, and after the *Sonata Op. 10, No. 1*, begins to become an increasingly obvious *topos* of the mournful Beethoven: the heroic challenge to fate. The sighing, almost resigned entreaty is immediately followed by the *Allegro di molto e con brio*, where the heroic reaction takes place, with moral opposition that resists pain and fights it. The second subject, with its modulating path beginning in E-flat Minor, a Minor third above the root tonality and always in a Minor mode, almost seems like the staging of a actual moral trial: the virtuosic movement of the right hand, which crosses over with the left, expresses the accusing tone in the four bass notes, while sings the plea for mercy in the sorrowful high-pitched response. The troubled modulating journey finds no peace: the meaning of the pathetic expression in this movement is not the victory over pain and the consequent triumph of the hero, but the very representation of this challenge, which in fact continues undaunted and in a dramatically surprising manner until the last chord.

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The imploring prayer takes on a conversely abandoned and cathartic tone in the second movement, *Adagio cantabile* in the form of a Rondo in A flat major. Following the pathetic drama of the first movement, the catharsis is represented here, namely the sacred purification of the soul or, as Aristotle argued, the purification from one's own passions in witnessing a tragedy. It is certainly not an easy and unhindered exercise, however: the Minor-mode sections that alternate with the main theme, the first in F and the second in A-flat, sound like an infiltration of doubt into the contemplative abandon of the main theme.

The decision to use the three-movement layout for this sonata has nothing to do with its concert value but finds reason in the need to provide coincidental and collected unity in a work of such broad and complex expressive value. This is confirmed by the *Rondo*, where the theme – built exactly on the second subject of the first movement – is immediately recognizable, creating unity and coincidence that would have been more complex in a broader layout. This *Rondo* is a return to the pathetic challenge, but in this case with the cathartic spirit of purification derived from the *Adagio* in the background: in the conscious acceptance, the opposition is no longer heroic, and the pain itself does not hurt so tragically anymore.

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

Beethoven's entrepreneurial attitude must have been quite refined, considering the publication history of the two Sonatas, *Op. 14*. Originally supposed to form a triptych with the *Pathétique*, the separate publication is not only justified by expressive values, but also by the financial and social benefits of different dedicatees. Thus, *Op. 13* is dedicated to Prince Lichnowsky, while the two smaller *Op. 14* sonatas are dedicated to Baroness Josephine von Braun. In addition, she and her husband, both pianists, bought a one-year exclusive on the entire *Op. 14* according to Barry Cooper. Indeed, completed in autumn 1898, the two Sonatas were announced for printing in the *Wiener Zeitung* just on December 21, 1799 – three days after the announcement of *Op. 13*.

The first sonata, in E major, features a unique three-movement structure, surprisingly lacking a slow movement. The dramatic principle and philosophical quest that were the basis of *Op. 13* are absent, favoring an

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idyllic pictoriality with an elegiac character. Here, Beethoven's style recalls the past generations for a more refined melodic approach, fewer sudden contrasts, and gallant affection taking center stage. Moreover, Beethoven's usual focus on thorough thematic development is minimized. To clarify this idea further, the piece opens with an idyllic ascending progression in E major interacting with a dubious chromatic theme in B major. But at the end of the exposition of the first movement, Beethoven notes in one of the preparatory sketches "*ohne das Thema durchzuführen*," that is, "without developing the theme." So, after a brief attempt to expound the first subject in A Minor, an unprecedented singing lament begins, with a theme in octaves and a rapid arpeggiated accompaniment. The emerging, mysterious stasis marked only *piano* and *pianissimo* transforms into an amusement as the tenor and soprano joke around trying to imitate the initial theme. This is the transition to the recapitulation, where the opening theme truly comes back with a development of texture and dynamics: full chords in the right hand, rapid scales in the left hand, creating an effect of *tutti*, to draw the attention before the initial serene elegance is reconstituted.

According to Anton Schindler, the *Allegretto* indication of the second movement was interpreted by Beethoven in a very surprising way, as he used to perform it in a very "spirited" manner. This could suggest this *Allegretto* is a special reworking of the Minuet form, where thematic cells of two bars in ternary time are inserted in a lively and unsettled setting. The Trio is marked *Maggiore*, opening with a glimpse of gallant thematic serenity in C major before the return with the Da Capo to the opening section in E Minor – confirming the Minuet form. The *Rondo* of the third movement brings back the serene idyllic spirit of the first movement, closing the sonata with an affable spirit similar to its opening.

In 1802 the *Bureau des Arts et d'Industrie* in Vienna and the publisher Simrock in Bonn published a version for string quartet of the *Sonata Op. 14, No. 1*. Of all the sonatas, this is the only transcription for quartet by the composer's own hand. Discussing this version in a letter to the publisher Breitkopf & Härtel, Beethoven argues that "only the composer himself or a man of the same inventiveness and skill" can succeed in transcribing for strings a piano work. Mindful of the complex work of transcription, he claims he only did it "because he was earnestly entreated", and that he is "convinced that no one else could do it with

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ease.” These words might demonstrate how, even though Beethoven’s writing often encompasses inspiration and texture typical of instrumental, symphonic or quartet styles, its originality lies precisely in its aesthetic and technical connection with the keyboard, which is taken beyond its limits in refined and unexpected ways.

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

Beethoven’s secretary and first much-criticized biographer Anton Schindler questioned the composer about the content of the two Sonatas, *Op. 14* still in 1823. According to Schindler’s report, the composer claimed that both Sonatas of *Op. 14* have as their subject “a dialogue between a husband and his wife, or a lover and his mistress.” In particular, in the second sonata “this dialogue, with its signification, is very forcibly expressed, the opposition of the two principal parts being more sensibly marked than in the first sonata. By these two parts, Beethoven intended to represent two principles, which he designated the entreating and the resisting.” However, while in *Op. 13* they were connected to moral consciousness, acquiring a philosophical dimension as an inner pain and force of resistance, here on the contrary the two principles have a theatrical character, embedded in a gallant setting.

The beginning of the first movement, *Allegro*, already contains two oppositional principles beneath its seemingly placid façade: the two voices move in opposite directions, descending in the right hand, ascending in the left, and for the first four bars the meter of the measure is shifted, creating a metric illusion. The result is almost playful, painting a lyrical character with a comic vein. Already a few measures later, we can recognize the entreating principle, which tenderly seems to beg the beloved to be heard with a repeated, insistent note, repeated more quickly in a comic manner. The scene seems clear: we are in front of an *opera buffa* love duet. In creating this setting, Beethoven revisits compositional techniques typical of Haydn’s early sonatas, such as the appoggiatura with thirds in the right hand to which the broken octave in the left hand responds, or the syncopated structure between the bass and a middle voice or soprano, opting for a piano timbre typically of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Precisely the second technique described is used extensively in the Andante, one of the earliest examples of a theme with variations included in a sonata by Beethoven. The conclusion of this movement also presents another element from Haydn: a series of pianissimo chords, interspersed with pauses, followed by a thunderous fortissimo chord, which Charles Rosen associates with the conclusion of the first movement of the *G Major Sonata Hob. XVI/40* by Haydn.

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The final movement is curiously titled *Scherzo*, even though this typical form is expanded with episodes of surprising thematic development. Metric manipulation is the main element, as at the beginning of the first movement. The comic element here is precisely the metric disorientation, the shifted accentuation, making the musical discourse unpredictable and surprising. The tone is rustic, peasant, and in its nobler expressions it becomes pastoral, while the accompaniment emphasizes on the intervals of fifths and sixths at the bass recalls the sound of horns and bagpipes. In this playful, rural setting, Beethoven creates a feeling of remembrance, which in a playfully elegant way evaporates, fading away.

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

The transition from one century to another often takes on special psychological significance. At the same time, the risk in historical analysis is to employ historiographical strategies to simplify complex moments, generalizing a mere change in dates to more complex stylistic features typical of distinct periods. The transition between the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the 19<sup>th</sup> century for Beethoven is a prime example, and the *Sonata in B-flat Major, Op. 22* is of fundamental importance in this discourse. Composed in 1800, it is the main piano work at the center of the group of compositions straddling the two centuries. These include the revision of the *First Piano Concerto, Op. 15*, the *Horn Sonata, Op. 17*, the six *String Quartets, Op. 18*, the *Septet for Winds and Strings, Op. 20*, and finally the *First Symphony in C major, Op. 21*. Regardless their year of composition – that happens to be between two centuries – these works are fundamental experiences in the development of Beethoven's later, more revolutionary aesthetic.

According to Charles Rosen, the *Sonata, Op. 22* “demonstrates Beethoven's absolute mastery over all the conventions of the Viennese style,” from technical brilliance to expressive virtuosity, from lyrical style to elements of the concerto style. The first movement is a perfect example of condensing technical exercises and motivic elements that are typically 18<sup>th</sup>-century. Scales, arpeggios, and passages on thirds – for which technical exercises are noted by Beethoven among the sketches to this sonata – are integrated as decorative elements with short melodic motifs. The result is a genuine *divertissement à la Clementi*, albeit in a large sonata form with a flawlessly balanced architecture.

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The *Adagio con molta espressione* represents the expressive climax of the work, in a structure that combines two similar formal and stylistic features of different origins. On the one hand, the typically Viennese solo concerto, where there are moments when the thematic exposition of the sonata form halts for the entrance of the soloist's section. On the other hand, the *da capo aria*, where the soloist introduces the thematic material and varies it with very complex diminutions and embellishments in the reprise. The fusion between the two elements is reflected in a finely contrapuntal pianism, where the manipulation of piano texture and dynamics defines this movement as the product of virtuosity of timbrical and instrumental variety.

Initially unplanned, and thus the last movement to be composed among the four, the *Minuet* restores this sonata to the broad four-movement structure. With regular form and elegant character, the Minuet features a central section marked by striking contrasts, with sudden crescendos and chords in orchestral tutti. The *Trio in G Minor*, striking in its restrained yet highly incisive drama, occupies a special place in the reception of this sonata, as it was quoted by Schumann in 1839 in an *Intermezzo* of the *Humoresque*, *Op. 20*.

Beethoven's compositional fervor at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century led to overlapping compositional periods, occasionally blending ideas. For instance, the earliest sketch relating to this sonata concerns the theme of the *Finale* and appears among the drafts of the *Quartet Op. 18, No. 6*. As Barry Cooper points out, "it was evidently conceived as one of several possible finale themes for this quartet." On the contrary, the theme became the foundational idea for the *Allegretto* which concludes *Op. 22* with a traditional Viennese-style Rondo. With this balance of simplicity and nobility, technique and elegance, form and refined narrative, ceremoniousness and tenderness, Beethoven bids farewell – at least chronologically – to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

—Federico Ercoli

*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, 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

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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

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

## 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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