

"A splendid, large-scale recording...powerful and intense performance." *Audio*

DE 3009



BEETHOVEN PIANO SONATAS
OPUS 57, APPASSIONATA
OPUS 111, The last great piano sonata
CAROL ROSENBERGER
Bösendorfer Imperial
Concert Grand



"Ravishing, elegant pianism" *The New York Times*

DE 3009



LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
Sonata Op. 57 (Appassionata) [23:56]

- 1 Allegro assai (9:24)
- 2 Andante con moto — Allegro ma non troppo (14:24)
Sonata Op. 111 [26:55]
- 3 Maestoso — Allegro con brio ed appassionato (8:35)
- 4 ARIETTA: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile (18:08)

© © 1983 Delos Productions, Inc.,
P.O. Box 343, Sonoma, California 95476-9998
Made in U.S.A. • www.delosmusic.com

DDD

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO



BEETHOVEN PIANO SONATAS
OPUS 57, APPASSIONATA
OPUS 111, THE LAST GREAT PIANO SONATA
CAROL ROSENBERGER
BÖSENDORFER IMPERIAL CONCERT GRAND

SONATA OP. 57 (APPASSIONATA) (23:56)

1. Allegro assai (9:24)
2. Andante con moto–Allegro ma non troppo (14:24)

SONATA OP. 111 (26:55)

3. Maestoso–Allegro con brio ed appassionato (8:35)
4. ARIETTA: Adagio molto semplice e cantabile (18:08)

Total Playing Time: 50:51

For this recording we used two omni B & K condenser microphones, capsule #4134, and B & K preamplifier 2319S. The specially constructed low noise, low distortion power supply and line driver amplifiers were designed and built by John Meyer of Meyer Sound Laboratories, Inc., San Leandro, California.

The output of the line drive amplifiers was fed directly into the line level input of a Studer Model 169 Stereo Mixer, which was fed directly into the Digital Tape Recorder. The portable Studer console is battery-powered. There is no AC and therefore no chance of hum. The power supply for the Studer 169 console is a sophisticated battery charger.

The B & K microphones were originally designed for high pressure or very loud sound measurement. It is because of this design characteristic that the microphone is able to withstand the very high sound pressure level encountered in music. The highest quality music recording microphones will typically go into “crashing” i.e. gross distortion, at a sound pressure level of 120-130 dB SPL. The B & K microphones typically reach 3% distortion at 160 dB, thus giving approximately 30 dB headroom for peaks.

Stan Ricker

*Producer: Amelia S. Haygood
Balance Engineer: Stan Ricker
Recording Engineer: Bruce Leek
Assistant Producer: George Baker
Digital Recording, Editing and
Mastering by Soundstream, Inc.:
Richard Feldman, Sydney Davis
Jim Wolington*

*Bösendorfer Imperial Concert Grand
Piano Technician: Heriberto Lurgenstein
Recorded in Bridges Auditorium, Claremont, California,
March 19 and 20, 1981
In Memoriam: Webster Aitken 1908-1981*

Design: Tri-Arts, Inc.

“The piano is, after all, an unsatisfactory instrument,” Beethoven complained to his publisher upon completion of his last piano sonata, the sublime Op. 111. Beethoven’s frustration over the pace of the piano’s development during his lifetime is entirely consistent with a musical vision which was always focused beyond the limitations of contemporary instruments and performers. He continuously pushed the piano makers towards new developments in the piano’s dynamic range, strength of tone and resonance, and brought his innovative genius and catalytic energy to exploit each of these new developments to the fullest. Yet throughout his creative life he wrote, not only for the piano he knew, but far beyond it.

“His playing, like his compositions, was far ahead of his time” Carl Czerny observed, explaining that the weak-sounding instruments, especially those before 1810, “could not endure the gigantic style of his performance...” Czerny went on to say that “Nobody equalled him in the rapidity of his scales, double trills, skips, etc.... His bearing... was masterfully quiet, noble and beautiful, without the slightest grimace (only bent forward low, as his deafness grew upon him)... He made frequent use of the pedals, much more frequent than is indicated in his works...”

Beethoven also saw in the developing piano its lyrical

potential, and in his works demanded from it a new sustained lyricism. He once insisted in a letter that “one may sing on the pianoforte, too, if one is but capable of feeling.” As early as his first visit to Vienna, he commented that even Mozart’s style of playing was not *legato* enough for his taste. Czerny writes revealingly that “Beethoven’s performance of slow and sustained passages produced an almost magical effect upon every listener, and, so far as I know, was never surpassed.”

Beethoven turned repeatedly to the piano in working out new musical ideas, and the thirty-two sonatas he wrote for the “unsatisfactory instrument” document his awesome creative growth. They form a monumental *oeuvre* which established the piano sonata for all time as a large and important form, no longer second to the symphony as in the works of Mozart and Haydn. This unparalleled body of work, at once ground-breaking and the peak of achievement in form and balance, is largely responsible for establishing the piano itself as a significant solo instrument.

Standing out as milestones, even among the magnificent thirty-two, are the Sonatas op. 57 and op. 111. At the time of its publication in 1806, the op. 57, titled “Appassionata” by the publisher, was considered by Beethoven to be his finest work to date. The op. 111, called by

Beethoven's biographer Wilhelm von Lenz the "Testament-Sonata," was the master's great farewell to the piano sonata, his final statement in that form. Both sonatas are large-scale dramas of heroic proportions. Both shake aesthetic foundations, and point to a new musical world. Yet these works, like most of Beethoven's creations, explore to the fullest the basic tonal relationships and make these relationships yield their greatest expressive power, their purest vital force. Each sonata is a sonic exploration as well, stretching the confines of the instrument, and demanding of the piano its ultimate expressive range and intensity. Beethoven's use of the extreme registers of the piano is visionary in both sonatas. As profound dramas must, these works have their dark sides. But both have a radiant spiritual dimension, set forth in each sonata in a set of variations on a theme of great simplicity yet rich in implication. The Opus 111 *Arietta's* theme and variations probably represent the most eloquent transcendent expression achieved even by Beethoven in this form.

A staggering wealth of masterpieces came into being during the years immediately following the personal crisis movingly described by Beethoven in his Heiligenstadt Testament of 1802. In addition to the *Appassionata*, the *Waldstein* sonata, the Fourth Piano Concerto, The *Eroica* Symphony, the *Rasumovsky* Quartets and *Fidelio* all stem from this period. Beethoven's passionate belief in his art, his conviction

that artistic creation was for him a moral obligation, won out over the despair he felt at his increasing deafness. Impatient with the art-as-entertainment views in fashion earlier in the eighteenth century, he held the profound conviction that art had a moral purpose, that it was a purifying and ennobling force in human life. In the service of an ever higher art, of an ever more encompassing expression, he was willing to devote a painstaking kind of work which in itself is awe inspiring. His creations were, as Charles Rosen put it, "the result of a meditation and a labor almost unparalleled elsewhere in music." John Gillespie goes on to say: "He arrived at a simple theme after numerous preliminary sketches, but from this unadorned theme he created a world of experience...Beethoven's melodies possess a transcendent individuality. In them all human experience – love, heroism, sadness, ecstasy, joy – are lyrically delineated."

The *Appassionata* has, along with Beethoven's other sonatas, been the subject of countless volumes of analysis and poetic description. Donald Francis Tovey wrote about the work's "eminently tragic tone." Others perceive the tragedy to be mastered, or at least balanced, perhaps by the sheer life energy with which the sonata abounds. Lenz found it "something more than a volcanic explosion." Heinrich Schenker constructed of it one of his most elaborate graphs, depicting the germ, bones, and flesh of this remarkable creation.

Mountains of pages have been written describing in exhaustive detail the architectural and motivic fusion in the work. The sonata's rhythmic dynamism, its startling harmonic and pianistic innovations also provide an endless source for the analytic and poetic mind. It is fascinating, even spine tingling, to contemplate in metaphorical and analytical terms these structural, harmonic, melodic, rhythmic wonders, and the fusion of them all, and to savor apt poetic descriptions of the work's emotional content. But fortunately for us all, Beethoven's work speaks directly to the entire being. Intuitively we sense the magnificent architecture, we respond totally to the drama, the complexity / simplicity / unity of his expression. Though greater familiarity and study always reveal new wonders in these works, Beethoven's communication is so powerful as to be virtually inescapable on all levels. When Beethoven's friend and first biographer Anton Schindler inquired of the master as to the meaning of the *Appassionata*, Beethoven reportedly replied: "Read Shakespeare's *Tempest*." Some feel that this may have been a quick answer to an unanswerable question. On the other hand, the image of Beethoven as Prospero—unleashing and controlling the elements in the service of his singular art—is an appealing one.

The *Appassionata's* opening theme has been called dark, bleak, windswept, tragic, expectant, mysterious, disturbing. There is an element of grandeur in its large propor-

tions. Its mobile dotted rhythm gives it remarkable fluidity, and the trembling trill which sinks back to the main tone is full of meaning. As with most of Beethoven's themes, its implications become clearer in the course of its experience. Even so, to assign it a single word or emotion must always be superficial, for it probably expresses, as most important music does, a root common to many emotions. Such a fleeting theme can be complex as a moment of life, and yet intelligible as an instant's powerful insight. We experience this theme in light and shadow, in its softer and in its sterner aspects. In the very second phrase of the movement, Beethoven sounds the theme a half-tone higher than original, a bold stroke which as Tovey points out was shocking to Beethoven's contemporaries. Equally shocking must have been the explosive outbursts of fortissimo chords (00:39, 05:31) which could be said both to interrupt the theme and to reveal its inherent capacity for violent emotion. How moving, even inspiring, the theme becomes during the development section of the movement (03:01) when it strengthens into an impassioned declaration, each statement carried forward invincibly by its propulsive accompaniment. Two especially beautiful visions of this theme are the beginning of the long coda (07:22) when it sounds in the low bass balanced by a high treble which Tovey described as "flickering in sympathy," and the final arch of *f* minor at the very end of the movement, which, animated by a tremolo, spans a wide range of the keyboard and gradually fades to a hush.

Also part of the basic thematic material is the famous “fate” motive, (three shorts, one long) first heard as quietly suspenseful, foreboding, and in the course of its development, becoming more powerful and insistent (01:53, 04:44, 06:52).

One recognizes immediately that the flowing second theme, singing over a rich bass figure (01:19, 04:04, 06:18) is the first theme’s counterpart—its balance, its optimistic side. Similar in rhythm, spacing, and shape, it has a warm glow in contrast to the starkness of the original. But it, too, has a passionate potential which is realized in its statement in the coda (07:38), where it builds in intensity to a series of erupting broken chords and sweeping arpeggios which take over the keyboard.

The second movement has a still, meditative theme (09:33) which has about it something of the hymn and at the same time more than a hint of the majestic march. Beethoven thought of D flat major, in which key this movement is set, as a lofty tonality. He was once quoted as referring to Klopstock’s poetry as beginning “at too lofty an elevation. Always *Maestoso*, D flat major! But he is great and uplifts nevertheless...” The critic who first reviewed the *Appassionata* in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (July, 1806) was made very uneasy by the revolutionary outer movements of the sonata, but had to admit that he was captivated by the slow movement: “...I say that if you do not feel such music to go from heart to

heart, one of us has none!”

Beethoven gradually illuminates this simple theme in the course of the variations, each of which doubles the motion within a constant pulse, thereby retaining and heightening our awareness of the framework while allowing us to discover the beautiful things it can hold. He also used this technique in the *Arietta* of the op. 111.

The first variation (11:24) increases the motion by means of a syncopated bass line which lags behind the treble, thereby creating a gentle pull between the two. It maintains the same register as the theme. The second variation (12:50) moves up an octave and doubles the motion with a tranquil, flowing treble figure in sixteenths. The third variation (14:16) moves up yet another octave, its radiant figuration now in thirty-seconds. When the theme returns in simple form after this variation (15:30) it is heard without repeats. Instead of the expected final D flat major chord, Beethoven drops in a whisper to a diminished seventh chord unfolding in a slow arpeggio, (16:27) which creates the suspense of an unknown direction. The same diminished seventh chord, this time abruptly arpeggiated, shatters once and for all the peace of D flat major.

More diminished seventh chords, hammered again and again in a gut-wrenching fanfare, announce the third movement. The entire movement is breathtaking in its

sweep and motion. The swirling figures, the sprays of arpeggios, the insistent chordal attacks, the breathless agitated melodic motives that try and try to come to rest only to be driven onward, create a sense of forward motion that is almost relentless. And yet Beethoven's dynamic rhythms give it an energy that a mere headlong rush could not sustain. This movement is also in sonata form, and, as in the first movement, Beethoven does not repeat the exposition. This time, however, he repeats the development and the recapitulation, extending the driving force of the movement.

The one moment of suspended animation in the entire movement occurs in the development, after a furious octave passage movement (18:50) followed by broken chords which rip in bunches from bass to treble, and gradually subside into a soft cloud of the same diminished seventh which put us in suspense at the end of the second movement and started all the fury at the beginning of the third. The shape of the cloud shifts into a cluster of dominant seventh chords all up and down the keyboard—a coloristic effect of the kind generally credited to the Impressionists—and finally a rhythmic shove back to the swirling figure marks the recapitulation (19:36).

The insistence of the attacking chords heard earlier in the movement is unchecked in the *Presto* coda (23:10). The pulls and tugs which created such tension in the rest

of the movement are gone, and the motion is out flat. The swirling figure shoots out from sforzandos, climbing higher and higher, and finally careens down the keyboard over a roaring bass to the three final chords.

The inspiration for this powerful finale came to Beethoven on one of his famous long walks. According to Ferdinand Reis's account, "...we wandered so far afield that we did not get back to Döbling, where Beethoven was living, until nearly eight o'clock. The whole time he had been humming, and sometimes howling, to himself, his voice going up and down, without singing any definite notes. When I asked him what it was he answered: 'A theme has occurred to me for the last movement of the sonata' (in F minor, Op. 57). When we entered the room, he ran to the piano, without even taking off his hat. I sat down in the corner, and he soon forgot about me. For at least an hour he thundered out the magnificent finale of the sonata. When he finally got up, he was surprised to see me still there, and said: 'I cannot give you a lesson today, I must go on working'."

Beethoven dedicated the *Appassionata* to his friend and patron Count Franz von Brunswick, the brother of two women to whom Beethoven was emotionally attached at the time, Therese von Brunswick and Josephine von Deym. The dedication of the towering Sonata op. 111 evidently caused its composer some indecision. Beethoven did most of the work on the op. 111 in 1821, and the au-

tograph is dated January 13, 1822. It was not until July of 1823, however, that he wrote to his student and patron the Archduke Rudolph: "Y.I.H. seemed to find pleasure in the Sonata in C minor, and therefore I feel that it would not be presumptuous if I were to surprise you with its dedication." The publisher's first reaction to one of the most sublime works in the piano literature was to ask if the copyists had forgotten to send the third movement. The sonata was published in 1823, not only by Schlesinger but in two pirated editions, all of which were full of mistakes. It is touching to learn that Beethoven took great pains to have the mistakes corrected, not only in the legitimate edition but also in the two pirated versions.

The reviewer for the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* greeted the appearance of the op. 111 with the recognition that it was indeed history-making, even among Beethoven's masterpieces, although he found its special quality difficult to put his finger on: "By far the most extraordinary movement of this Sonata is the last...because in its curious features—though by no means in melody, modulation and the like—it goes beyond anything in pure piano music which has ever come before us..." Beethoven himself felt that his last five piano sonatas bore little relationship to what he had written up until that time, that they represented a higher level of achievement. The Sonatas op. 109 and 110, as well as much of the *Missa Solemnis*, come from the same

creative period as the op. 111. All of these supreme masterpieces share an exalted mood, a spiritual expression, a distillation of life's essence.

The two grand-scale movements of the Sonata op. 111 affect most who experience them as an unsurpassed expression of the two planes of human existence: the first movement, in C minor, the heroic life struggle; the second, in C major, total affirmation and transcendence. Lenz, who first named the op. 111 the "Testament Sonata," called the two movements "Resistance" and "Resignation," and others have suggested that "Transfiguration" would be a more appropriate characterization of the second movement. Virgil Thomson, in describing the op. 111's "special palette," wrote of "the whole gamut of dynamic violence and delicacy and deep song, with its undercurrent of musical meditation..."

The opening *Maestoso* introduction to the first movement sets the stage for a statement of earth shaking importance. One could describe the three double-dotted opening proclamations as Jovian thunderbolts which cause the earth to tremble. They could also be thought of as leaps into the abyss, for, as three different diminished seventh chords in a row, they represent a tonal unknown. The direction is at this point known only to the mastermind behind the grand design. Still in double-dotted chords, we are taken through a wide expanse of shifting ground—inexorably bound for some distant, un-

known goal. We are still in suspense when we have reached the dominant tonality (01:11), and are made uneasy by the after-shocks of offbeat accents in the moving bass line. A distant rumble (01:47) grows in intensity until it sweeps furiously to the movement's tonal center (01:56). The last furious sweep is reiterated with even greater intensity as it becomes part of the uncompromising three-note motive from which much of the movement is built. We are allowed to absorb the severe message of that motive before it is repeated as part of the fugal subject which is announced next, and which does not in the least soften the impression of the original. The entire movement is jagged, emphatic, turbulent, tempestuous, fist-shaking, furious, lonely, grand, heroic.

Two immense melodic death-defying leaps from high treble to low bass and from low bass back to high treble (02:51) which lead into the second theme leave us in no doubt as to the epic proportion of emotion expressed in this movement. The second theme, harmonically suspended in space with its graceful cadenza, is a fleeting glimpse from afar of loveliness and calm. From this theme's further elaboration in the recapitulation (06:48) we understand, if we did not the first time, that there is an attempt to linger in the realm of the second theme's relative calm (07:15). But this attempt is unsuccessful, and we are drawn relentlessly back to the movement's feverish motion (07:28). The rhythmic tug Beethoven creates here with the five against two rhythm, in a gradual

acceleration of motion, gives a powerful suggestion of being pulled along against one's will.

The fugal development section (05:29) begins with a quiet but decisive statement in octaves whose resolve is reinforced by the augmentation of the basic motive and a final trill which seems to make each statement an unarguable one. At the same time the trill begins to shake the ground wherever it appears, especially as it reaches farther and farther into the lower regions. A powerful crescendo heightened by a syncopated bass line, and ascending jagged blocks based on the three note motive (05:53), lead back to the recapitulation (06:03) with the fugal subject announced this time in forceful octaves.

Sharp, violent chords still reverberating from the last climactic buildup announce the remarkable coda (08:01). Gradually as these chords lose their fury a calming new melody appears just long enough to reassure us with a brief benediction before it comes to rest lightly on a C major chord. Only with the beginning of the heavenly *Arietta* do we understand this coda as a bridge from C minor to C major, from one plane of existence to another, from the temporal to the spiritual—or however one chooses to define the extremes expressed in this sonata.

Remarkable as is the first movement, in the final analysis it seems a foil for the magnificent *Arietta*. Dramatically, it establishes the scope, the breadth of the sonata so that

the *Arietta's* profound transcendent vision will be understood in all its implications. Perhaps the more the first movement shatters, the more the *Arietta's* calm radiance uplifts; the more disturbing the first movement's questions, the more reassuring the *Arietta's* exalted answer.

The *Arietta's* theme and the chords in which it is set give a sense of spaciousness, both in the distance from bass to treble and in the unhurried placement in time. The chords are complete but open spaced, as if outlining something vast, whether that vast space is understood in an inner or an outer sense. Yet both the melody and the harmonic structure are of great simplicity. The *Arietta's* rhythm of the slow three, and the smaller three within each beat of that primary three, give it a flow even where it is so still as to be establishing eternal truth. One senses the stillness, peace and vast space, even while recognizing a slow, fundamental motion.

Arthur Schnabel referred to the first variation (10:32) as "circling stars." The sixteenth note which was part of the three-within-three of the theme (for example, the second note of the opening melodic fall), is now constant, filling in each pulse of the primary three and creating a gently syncopated swaying motion. The soft chromaticisms fill in more intimate detail, so that, in Schnabel's metaphor, we sense more of the galactic movement within the vast space of the theme. Or, if the theme represents inner peace, its transcendent truth transfigures more of our

personal experience.

The slow three is still before us in the second variation (13:59) but now the three-within-three is divided yet again, so that the pace within the primary three is doubled. The first variation's gently swaying syncopation now becomes a rhythmic push in the stepped-up pace of the second variation, and an undercurrent of excitement is building.

In the third variation (15:53) there is no more restraining the excitement, and joy bursts forth. Here the syncopations lend tremendous energy in rhythm which once again doubles the motion of the previous variation. And yet this exultant rhythm is still connected to the primary three. Firmly rooted in the eternal truth of that primary three, and of the strong harmonic framework of the theme, it expresses the ecstasy of affirmation.

After the powerful affirmation of the third variation, the fourth variation (17:33) brings back the calm of the *Arietta* theme, this time hovering over low bass figuration which transforms the thirty-second triplet motion of the preceding variation into a quiet tremolo. In contrast to the powerful downbeats of the preceding variation, the theme is stated gently on the offbeat, with only a silence on the downbeat. For the repeat of each strain of the theme (18:15, 19:24), the figuration moves all the way from the lowest register of the piano to the highest treble

regions. The lovely chromatic figuration in this upper region gives the variation an other-worldly character. The alternation of the gently pulsating bass and ethereal treble carry out the spaciousness of the *Arietta's* theme. Here again, the figuration is firmly rooted in the harmonic and melodic structure of the theme. We have a sense of another plane of experience, and yet of something we understand more and more profoundly. As each variation expresses another aspect of the basic structure, we become more sure of the meaning of the original statement. When we hear the opening melodic fall in this heavenly context (19:52), it is another kind of perfect affirmation from that of the third variation.

Extensions of the basic melody (20:07) lead to a series of trills over and under the same melodic fall. As the trilling treble climbs higher and higher to a climactic statement of the theme's apex (21:38), the bass descends lower and lower. Once again, we feel a sense of vastness as the high treble sings in lonely grandeur against its distant bass.

The characteristic melodic fall in a beautiful, extended modulating transition (21:51) winds expressively to the return of the theme (22:53). This statement's rich texture is woven from the three basic figurations established in the earlier variation. After the theme has sung again in

this context, the closing melodic fall—which by now we understand to be one with the opening fall—extends the closing of the magic circle again and again in an ecstatic climax, the climax of the entire *Arietta* (23:57). This intense and final affirmation melts into a heavenly trill in the piano's upper region, surrounding the theme with a radiant light. Richard Buhlig called this trill "the moment when sound ceases to be sound and turns into light." Beginning as an extended afterbeat to the trill, lovely high figuration winds slowly around the theme's apex once more (25:58), and finally descends in a calm scale to the keyboard's center. In a profoundly simple and all-encompassing ending, the melodic fall and its ascending tonal reflection reach, from all regions of the keyboard, toward the final resolution, a C major chord sounded so simply that it does not linger, but dissolves into stillness. Schnabel called the chord "arrival in Heaven." In the last moments of the *Arietta* it is as if, transported to the spiritual realm once and for all, we are given a last nod, a simple "yes."

© Carol Rosenberger, 1982