

Deux-Elles

Beethoven

Waldstein

Beethoven Piano Sonatas Op. 7, Op. 49 Nos. 1 and 2, Op. 53

Martin Roscoe

Beethoven Piano Sonatas

A conversation between performer and producer

Mike George - These are the fifth to the eighth of your recordings of Beethoven's thirty-five sonatas, though given your concert appearances, these were recorded in two different periods, and you've recorded others at the same time and since. You're sharing more of your life with him than any other composer at the moment. What sort of bedfellow does Beethoven make?

Martin Roscoe - Yes, and that is without counting my performances and recordings of the Violin Sonatas with Peter Cropper, complete cycles of the Piano Trios (with Peter and Moray Welsh) and regular performances of the Concertos over many years.

I would say that Beethoven is at once the most searching, the most challenging and the most fulfilling of all composers. For me every piece is different; no two are alike. Furthermore one's view of each piece is likely to change and grow as time passes. I'm not sure I can say the same about many composers. Even after recording the *Pathétique* (Vol. 1), for example, my view of the piece has changed hugely during the thirty-plus performances I've given of it since; hence the search, the challenge and the fulfilment. An exciting process!

MG - How do you find the recording experience then? Do you end up 30-odd performances on wishing you could record it again?

MR - Yes I have frequently returned to one of my recordings many performances later and thought, "I wish I'd used more *rubato* there" or "Maybe I should have reinforced that shocking harmony with a stronger *sforzando*" etc. Perhaps it is self-revealing that I rarely think anything I've done, in terms of musical gesture, should be less obvious!

It's something that one has to accept about the recording process I think. One's relationship with any work changes and develops over the passage of time, especially if one is performing it frequently. Hopefully it grows and deepens ... in Beethoven's case, it is always important to search for new ways of communicating the power and richness of this music. Inevitably therefore a recording is a snapshot of a particular work at a particular time. I don't want to regard these recordings as some sort of document or final statement: everything is always changing.

MG - So to that ever-changing music: three of the Sonatas on this second volume date from the end of the eighteenth century; in spite of the high opus of 49, the two so-called "*Sonata facile*" are earlier pieces than that

number might suggest. Beethoven's brother looked after their publication and as they had remained unpublished until that time, one might assume that Beethoven did not want them to have a wider circulation. What's your view on that?

MR - It may be so, yet they are perfect small-scale works. Beethoven was not averse to trying something similar with Op. 79! In Op. 49, the inclusion of *facile* in the title immediately tells one that these are unambitious works technically and compositionally yet Beethoven is still able to imprint his own inimitable personality. For example, the *Andante* of the G minor Sonata is exquisitely beautiful; this is a key Beethoven turned to very rarely.

MG - And Beethoven returned to the Menuet of Op. 49 No. 2 in his Septet; he must have thought it at least worthy of another home ...

MR - It certainly has great charm and Beethoven occasionally did reuse material; the theme from his *Prometheus* ballet music re-appears in two other contexts.

MG - If technically easy, what musical challenges do this pair of works present?

MR - Getting the right characterisation in these slighter works isn't always so easy; it

is very easy to either overplay and inflate or underplay and enervate!

MG - The Op. 7 Sonata dates from 1796-7, roughly the same time as the Op. 49 Sonatas. But it's much more ambitious in scale than anything he'd attempted to date for the piano, with its appellation of "Grande Sonata" isn't it? **MR** - It's the second longest of all Beethoven's piano sonatas with all four movements being very substantial. It is also (marginally!) the most technically challenging of the sonatas written up to that point, so the title is appropriate!

MG - It contains what we might think of as Beethoven's first great slow movement, which hints of things to come ...

MR - Well I think it is an amazing slow movement but other people might say that Op. 2 No. 3 has a great slow movement too! In Op. 7, the richness of the sonority and the lengthy rests in the opening theme make a very special impression, as does the wonderful coda, which is to die for!

MG - And a dance movement that's neither a minuet nor a scherzo - what sort of point was Beethoven making here?

MR - Other Sonatas from this time (Opp. 10 No. 2 and 14 No. 1) have similar

movements. The character here in Op. 7 is not clearly either scherzo or minuet but again it is the scale which is most striking; the main section is almost a mini-sonata form in its own right.

MG - It seems to me that the *Minore* contrasting section here must have made a huge impression on Schubert: the way its melody ghosts through its harmonies became a particular fingerprint of the younger composer - if you think of the second of the D. 935 set of Impromptus, for example - and here's Beethoven doing exactly that twenty or so years earlier.

MR - Exactly. And again in the first of the late piano pieces, D. 946.

MG - The *Waldstein* dates from the winter of 1803-4, and was written at great speed, it seems, so it comes from only about six years after the other Sonatas on this CD. But we're in a different world altogether, aren't we?

MR - Yes! Indeed the scope and ambition are in a totally different league from anything up to this point (although the *Eroica* Symphony was just around the corner!). It is worth bearing in mind that the piano itself was changing hugely at this time in terms of power and range, changes which Beethoven exploited to the full. The *Waldstein* is by far

the most technically demanding Sonata so far, with its flamboyant running passage-work, trills with melody on top and octave *pianissimo glissandi* (virtually impossible on a modern concert grand, because of the depth of action). We know from the outset that we are in for something new when the pulsating chords of the first four bars slip straight down a tone to B flat in bar 5. And from there on, the surprises never stop throughout the whole Sonata! When Beethoven removed the original second movement (the *Andante favori*), he replaced it with the *Introduzione* which, by virtue of its exploratory and fragmented language, must have sounded very avant-garde in 1804.

MG - I think you mentioned to me that the Sonata's known in France by the name *Aurore* ...

MR - That's right. It might be construed as being one of the first pieces of Romantic piano music: after the utterance of that *Introduzione* which struggles to find a coherent voice to express itself, Beethoven introduces the Finale's simple opening theme over a haze of pedal, a Romantic gesture, a shimmering if you like. Then Beethoven gives us his grandest and most complex Rondo of all; the *Prestissimo* coda is almost a movement in its own right!



Martin Roscoe is a versatile musician who flourishes in performance, whether as a concerto soloist, recitalist or chamber musician. He is an artist who endeavours always to serve the composer and the music. His enduring popularity and solid reputation are built on a deeply thoughtful musicianship which is allied to an easy rapport with audiences and fellow musicians alike. He has enjoyed working as a soloist under such eminent conductors as Sir Simon Rattle, Kent Nagano, Luciano Berio, Yan Pascal Tortelier, Sir Mark Elder and Mark Wigglesworth.

One of Britain's most prolific recitalists, Roscoe performs at the Wigmore Hall every season. His chamber music partnerships include some long standing collaborations with artists such as Tasmin Little, Steven Osborne, the Leopold String Trio and the Brodsky, Endellion and Lindsay Quartets.

Roscoe's numerous recording projects have included all the piano works of Szymanowski for Naxos, the complete piano music of Nielsen for Hyperion, and James Macmillan's *The Berserking* for Chandos. He has recently recorded the complete Beethoven violin sonatas with Peter Cropper for Sanctuary Classics and is now recording the complete Beethoven piano sonatas for the Deux-Elles label.

A respected and much loved member of the conservatoire teaching establishment, Roscoe has held positions at the Royal Academy of Music and, now, at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He is the Artistic Director of both the Beverley Chamber Music Festival and the Ribble Valley International Piano Week.

The Complete Beethoven Piano Sonatas

Martin Roscoe

Volume 1 *Pathétique* DXL1161

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Op. 10 No. 3
Op. 13

Volume 2 *Waldstein* DXL1162

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Volume 3 *Final Trilogy* DXL1163

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Volume 4 *Funeral March* DXL1164

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Volume 5 *In the beginning...* DXL1165

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Volume 6 *Moonlight* DXL1166

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Volume 7 *Tempest* DXL1167

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Volume 8 *Appassionata* DXL1168

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Volume 9 *Hammerklavier* DXL1169

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Piano Sonata in E flat major Op. 7

- 1 Allegro molto e con brio 8:26
- 2 Largo con gran espressione 7:44
- 3 Allegro 5:16
- 4 Rondo. Poco Allegretto e Grazioso 7:16

Piano Sonata in G minor Op. 49 No. 1

- 5 Andante 4:51
- 6 Rondo. Allegro 3:18

Piano Sonata in G major Op. 49 No. 2

- 7 Allegro ma non troppo 4:29
- 8 Tempo di Menuetto 3:33

Piano Sonata in C major Op. 53 'Waldstein'

- 9 Allegro con brio 10:07
- 10 Introduzione. Adagio molto - 3:37
- 11 Rondo. Allegretto moderato 9:56



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