

Produced by Andrew Kazdin

GLENN GOULD BEETHOVEN SONATAS No.8 in C Minor "Pathétique" No.9 in E Major No.10 in G Major

Notes by James Goodfriend
Music Editor, *HIFI/Stereo Review*

There are, in particular, three things to remember about the sonatas that make up Beethoven's thirteenth and fourteenth *opéra*. The first is that they were composed in the 18th century, not the 19th. The second is that they were composed in Vienna, and for the consumption of the music lovers of Vienna. The third is that they were composed by Beethoven. It is the third point that keeps the framework established by the other two from adequately defining the music.

Assigning the sonatas to a particular time and place immediately tells us something about them: who would have played them, where, and for whom, for example. In 1798 and 1799, the respective publication years of the two opus numbers, the young man Beethoven was in constant attendance at the fashionable soirées of the Lichnowskys, the Lobkowitzes, and other noble Viennese families. The first performances of these sonatas, given almost certainly by the composer himself, would have taken place at such relatively small, exclusive gatherings, and not at all in a public concert hall. The playing of solo sonatas at public concerts was an invention of the 19th century.

The audience at the Lichnowskys' was both wealthy and intellectual, music being, at that time, a subject of concern to the moneyed classes, and the musical instrument was undoubtedly the finest then obtainable. But the finest obtainable Viennese piano of 1799 was a far cry from our own concert grands. Of course, it did not have the job of single-handedly filling a huge concert hall, but its tone was somewhat weak and tiny from our point of view, it had less than the current number of keys (Beethoven's own piano had sixty-one), and its bass notes had nothing like the solidity even of today's smaller pianos. It was, probably, closer in sound to a harpsichord than to a modern piano. In fact, the harpsichord itself was no stranger to many Viennese homes of the time, and the published editions of Beethoven's early sonatas (including the *Pathétique*) carried an indication that the works were suitable for either harpsichord or piano. A strange state of affairs, the *Pathétique* on a harpsichord. But we have a mistaken tendency to assume that all music brought itself up to date the moment Beethoven sounded his first note.

So much for where, for whom, and on what. *How* the sonatas would have been played is another matter, and

Side 1
SONATA NO. 8 IN C MINOR, Op. 13, "Pathétique" Grave: Allegro di molto e con brio (0:30) Adagio cantabile (8:42) Rondo: Allegro (13:46)
SONATA NO. 9 IN E MAJOR, Op. 14, No. 1 Allegro (0:30) Allegretto (7:30) Rondo: Allegro comodo (12:30)
Side 2
SONATA NO. 10 IN G MAJOR, Op. 14, No. 2 Allegro (0:14) Andante (7:30) Scherzo: Allegro assai (14:42)

All the works are in the public domain.

one not so easily defined. The typical (read: second-rate) Viennese sonata of the time was a matter of pleasant-sounding tunes connected by a lot of fast, flashy passage work, the whole mistakenly thought to be in the tradition of Mozart. The dominant influence on piano technique was Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. Such a sonata sounded very good on the light, fast, Viennese pianos, and was probably described, even in those early days, in terms of "showers of pearls." Into this atmosphere stepped the young Beethoven, with his manners like a peasant's and his heart on his fingertips. "He is no man; he's a devil," reported the pianist Josef Gelinek after competing with Beethoven. "He will play me and all of us to death. And how he improvises!"

It was no mere feather-fingered technique that provoked such reactions. Contemporary reports are almost unanimous in attributing to Beethoven's playing a deep emotional quality and an air of mystery and other-worldliness. Without taking a thing from his abilities as an interpreter, it is obvious today that it was as much what Beethoven played as how he played it that had such a powerful effect. Beethoven too took his technique from C.P.E. Bach, but what he explored in the sonata was not technique but drama, the kind of drama that is so immediately apparent in the *Sonata Pathétique*.

No disrespect devolves upon the *Pathétique* (the name is Beethoven's own) in mentioning that it had its predecessors. Both Beethoven himself in an early sonata, in F Minor (1783), and Jan Dussek's Sonata in C Minor, Op.

35, No. 3 (1793), employ a similar first-movement plan to that of the *Pathétique*: a slow, feeling-laden opening which, instead of merely serving as introduction, returns later in the movement with even greater dramatic effect. But the *Pathétique* was still so out of its time and place that it must have caused a major sensation at its first hearing: such unrelieved depths of expression could hardly have been anticipated by even the most sophisticated amateur in the audience. Even a pianist of the next generation, Ignatz Moscheles (born 1794), was warned that should he study the *Pathétique*, he would undoubtedly corrupt himself with "such eccentric stuff." Was Prince Lichnowsky grateful or bemused when Beethoven dedicated the sonata to him?

The two sonatas of Op. 14, dedicated to Baroness Josephine von Braun, wife of the director of the Theater an der Wien, are made of happier stuff, though no less solid. Beethoven's own comment on them, in speaking of extramusical indications many years later, is interesting: "When I wrote my sonatas, people were more poetic, and such indications were not necessary. . . . Everyone saw that the two sonatas of Op. 14 represented a struggle between two opposing principles, or an argument between two persons." The sonatas were sketched as early as 1795.

Op. 14, No. 1, has a particular interest for us in that Beethoven arranged it for string quartet in 1801-2, the only piano sonata of which he made such a transcription. Such concertos were quite typical of the time, but Beethoven was generally against them, and if one examines his example, one can see why. Any conscientious arranger would have stayed as close to the letter of the original as the techniques of the new instruments allowed, but Beethoven essentially recomposed the work. Mere functionality he despised; Beethoven's music had no other function than to be the best music he could write given the circumstances. It was this single-minded devotion to the nobility of music that immediately distinguished him from even the most talented of his contemporaries.

Other albums by Glenn Gould:

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Ludwig van Beethoven 1770–1827

Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor op. 13 “Pathétique”

c-Moll · en *ut* mineur

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 1 | I. Grave – Allegro di molto e con brio | 6:04 |
| 2 | II. Adagio cantabile | 4:46 |
| 3 | III. Rondo. Allegro | 3:44 |

Piano Sonata No. 9 in E major op. 14/1

E-Dur · en *mi* majeur

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------|------|
| 4 | I. Allegro | 3:55 |
| 5 | II. Allegretto – Trio | 3:32 |
| 6 | III. Rondo. Allegro comodo | 2:58 |

Piano Sonata No. 10 in G major op. 14/2

G-Dur · en *sol* majeur

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|------|
| 7 | I. Allegro | 5:18 |
| 8 | II. Andante | 7:57 |
| 9 | III. Scherzo. Allegro assai | 3:47 |

Total Time 42:21

Glenn Gould piano

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Producer: Andrew Kazdin

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LP Matrix: XSM 115603 [1–6], XSM 115604 [7–9] (stereo);

xLP 115601 [1–6], xLP 115602 [7–9] (mono)

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