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## Faculty Recital

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CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY  
*Conservatory of Music*

presents a

Faculty Recital

The Beethoven Cello  
and  
Piano Sonatas (Part Deux)

Roger Lebow, cello

Phillip Young, piano

March 1, 2008 • 8:00 P.M.  
Salmon Recital Hall

## Program

Sonata in G Minor, Op. 5 No. 2

- I. Adagio sostenuto e espressivo; Allegro molto  
più tosto presto
- II. Rondo: Allegro

## Intermission

Sonata in D Major, Op. 102 No. 2

- I. Allegro con brio
- II. Adagio con molto sentimento d'affetto
- III. Allegro fugato

## PROGRAM NOTES

Glance through an early 19th century music catalogue and you will find literally hundreds of works by dozens of unknown composers. While few would advocate an undiluted evening spent in listening to this now-forgotten literature, how dearly one would like to be able to hear with the ears of a music lover from the turn of the 19th century, and to hear the Beethoven cello sonatas as if for the first time, in all their startling and audacious originality.

The Classical-era literature for cello is small: before the present works, there were but the two well-known concerti by Haydn and nothing at all from Mozart (save a fragmentary *Andantino* and an even more fragmentary concerto sketch). There was, to be sure, a considerable body of works written by cellist-composers. Among these, the most noteworthy, both musically and for their technical advances, were the concerti and sonatas (extant works including 11 of the former, 34 of the latter) by the widely-traveled Luigi Boccherini of Lucca, Vienna, Paris and Madrid, only a few of which, regrettably, still enjoy a richly-deserved place in the repertoire.

Boccherini's sonatas were modest in scale, modeled on the slender proportions and binary forms inherited from the high Baroque. Instead, the focal point of these elegant and often harmonically precocious works was the display of Boccherini's supernally-virtuosic abilities: these were pieces that, more than any other music before that time, represent a comprehensive catalog of the of the cellist's technical wares. As a player in particular, the Italian cast such a long shadow that although Beethoven never met Boccherini, most of the important cellists in his orbit—the Duports, Anton Kraft, and Romberg, all of whom we will herein encounter—knew and esteemed him, and were inspired by his example.

In any case, it would fall to a firebrand pianist to invent the cello sonata as we know it; and indeed, Beethoven styled his first sonatas “*Deux Grandes Sonates pour le Clavecin ou Piano-Forte avec un Violoncelle obligé.*” A particularly vivid account of the playing that informed these earliest works comes from one who had occasion to observe Beethoven over the course of many years, his student Carl Czerny: “No one matched him in the speed of his scales, double trills, leaps, etc. (not even Hummel). His posture while playing was ideally calm, noble and good to look at, without the slightest grimace (though he did begin to bend forward as his deafness increased). His fingers were very powerful, not long, and flattened at the tips by much playing; because, as he told me, he had practiced prodigiously as a youngster, usually until well past midnight.”

In the Op. 5 sonatas in particular the piano writing is of transcendent difficulty, and certainly calculated for maximum effect upon its audience. To learn about this intended audience we must turn to Berlin, and the seat of the Prussian monarchy. Like most world leaders of today, King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia was an avid cellist. The king continued the remarkable cultural tradition established by his father, Frederick the Great (a flutist, composer and, most famously, the dedicatee of Bach's *Musical Offering*), by drawing many of Europe's preeminent composers and performers to his court. His political legacy has long been eclipsed by the catalog of pieces composed for him, a list that includes Mozart's three great String Quartets, K. 575, K. 589, and K. 590, all featuring the cello as co-equal with the first violin; Haydn's Op. 50 (“Prussian”) String Quartets; numerous chamber works by Boccherini; and Beethoven's first two cello sonatas.

It was during a rare concert tour in 1796 that Beethoven would appear before Friedrich Wilhelm, playing among other things these cello sonatas, which he had evidently composed during his trip expressly for the occasion. It has long been supposed that his partner had been the eminent French soloist, Jean Pierre Duport, first cellist in the royal orchestra and the king's cello tutor. Recent research by the American cellist and scholar John Moran has demonstrated that the sonata companion was quite likely his younger brother, Jean Louis Duport. Jean Louis was the famous figure whose études every cellist knows, whose treatise on the cello remains a cornerstone of its pedagogy, and whose prowess caused the great Voltaire to exclaim, "You have turned an ox into a nightingale."

Beethoven evidently enjoyed some success in Berlin. He would stay in the Prussian capital a month, during which time he and Duport also performed his newly-minted Twelve Variations on Handel's "See, the Conquering Hero Comes," a transparent homage to the king (and perhaps one other variation set). Beethoven was immoderately proud of his reward, a gold snuffbox filled with gold coins given him by Friedrich Wilhelm, saying, "...it was not an ordinary snuffbox, but such a one as it might have been customary to give to an ambassador."

The sonatas, published back in Vienna the following year as Op. 5, and dedicated to Friedrich Wilhelm, were Beethoven's first works for piano with another instrument, and with their later companions became the models for the great works to come in the genre, those sonatas by Mendelssohn, Chopin, Brahms, et al. that comprise the core of the repertoire. The 26-year-old Beethoven's knowledge of the cello was comprehensive. He was a very good violinist and played viola in the electoral orchestra in Bonn; but more important, he had been able to divine the

capabilities of the cello firsthand from his fellow north German, Bernhard Romberg, who had joined the Bonn orchestra in 1790 and become his close friend. By all accounts, Romberg was among the greatest cellists of all time, and among the most important cellist-composers. (And despite the cellist's curmudgeonly dismissal of Beethoven's music—he openly derided the "Razumovsky" Quartets, and rejected Beethoven's offer to write a concerto for him, telling him he preferred his own concerti—Beethoven would uncharacteristically maintain his old friendship with Romberg throughout his lifetime.) Romberg was himself significantly influenced by Boccherini (and within several years would make a pilgrimage to Spain to visit him); and Beethoven too may have known the Italian's music from the extensive holdings in the electoral library.

In the two Op. 5 sonatas, one is immediately struck by the utter self-assurance of the young composer. However mindful he was of his models—Haydn and Mozart; perhaps Boccherini—he was fearless in striking out in unexpected directions of his own.

Unlike any of Beethoven's violin sonatas or his early piano sonatas, both cello sonatas are cast in two broad movements. The first movement of each is a sprawling edifice, their outsized proportions threatening to burst the inherited sonata-allegro form. Each, too, is prefaced by a meditative Adagio introduction (in the case of the G Minor Sonata, the second of the Op. 5 set, a very expansive section indeed, over six minutes in length). The character of the first movement of the G Minor Sonata is a sharp contrast to the prevailing geniality of the First Sonata (and for that matter, to the second movement of this same piece), its tonality and restless energy evoking Mozart's famous works in that key. Each second movement is a rondo of a lighter character. The rondo of the G Minor Sonata is spacious: the outsize proportions of such a weighty

first movement demand a leisurely denouement. Where the first movement had been lowering and fraught with darker thoughts, the rondo is almost unremittingly good-humored and gamine.

...

For those who like to think of the composer's work falling into the sacrosanct Three Periods, the Beethoven cello sonatas are very obliging. Dating from the Early Period are the first two sonatas of Op. 5: charming, relatively conventional, Classical-style essays that cede the lion's share of the material to the piano. At the other end are the final two sonatas of the Op. 102 set—condensed, quirky and aphoristic: proper, card-carrying Late Period Beethoven.

And then occupying the Middle Period by itself is the grand, expansive Sonata in A Major, Op. 69, a monument of Beethoven's heroic style—though the hero of the piece is more Odysseus than Achilles. Op. 69 continues to enjoy the greatest popularity of the five sonatas, and probably of *any* cello sonata. We included it on our first program last October. If you were there, you undoubtedly loved it; and if not, you will therefore want to make a mental note never to miss another of our performances.

...

By the time of his two late cello sonatas, many objectives had changed for Beethoven. These were no longer virtuosic vehicles clamoring for attention in the musical marketplace. The composer no longer had anything to prove, and the adulatory reception accorded the Seventh Symphony in December 1813 had assured him of financial security for the rest of his life.

The two sonatas of Op. 102 were dedicated to Countess Marie von Erdödy, a pianist of sterling qualities, and a close friend who had often advised the composer in personal and business matters (for which Beethoven jokingly called her his "father confessor"). The sonatas were written in 1815, and were probably given as a peace token commemorating the rapprochement of the two following an lengthy falling-out. They were first performed by Joseph Lincke, who was in service to the Erdödys but was more famous as the cellist of the celebrated Schuppanzigh Quartet, the group that would premiere Beethoven's late quartets and many of Franz Schubert's. Lincke joined the group in 1808, replacing Anton Kraft, who was quarreling with Ignaz Schuppanzigh (Beethoven taking the violinist's side), and in so doing, became the first noted string quartet cellist. A contemporary wrote, "Linke [sic] treats his instrument as well as anyone in a quartet can ever manage it. He overcomes all difficulties, fits in so smoothly into the whole, and plays with so much feeling and expression, that one could not wish for him to give more." Lincke's stewardship of the Op. 102 sonatas is entirely fitting: these are pieces that, in their kindred stylistic features, keep company with the late string quartets.

The details of the premières are unknown, and it seems likely that it was heard *en famille* with the Countess and Lincke performing.

The C Major Sonata (which we performed back in October) is a quirky little gem, among the shortest of all of Beethoven's sonatas. The D Major Sonata, by contrast, is a fully-fleshed three-movement work. Both sonatas look ahead to the late quartets. The traditional tonic-dominant polarity has been larded with a radically-construed association of keys that the eighteenth century would hardly have countenanced. The

texture of the music has become pervasively contrapuntal—even the accompaniment is thematic. Most important, the emotional landscape has changed, becoming at once both more rarified and more engaging, more transparent.

Even though the D Major Sonata is a groundbreaking harbinger of the new, it is alone among the Beethoven cello sonatas in hewing to the proportions of the “proper” three movement Classical architecture. The first movement is in sonata form, the themes fragmentary, the textures kaleidoscopic, the moods volatile and Protean. In its key and affect, the second movement recalls the slow movement of the “Ghost” Trio, Op. 70, No. 1. This is one of those cherished late Beethoven slow movements that give access to the innermost utterances of one of the most profound of souls.

The transition from the second to the third movement—the fugue growing almost imperceptibly out of the ebbing Adagio—is a particularly brilliant dramatic maneuver, one which Gustav Mahler would crib nearly 90 years later in his Fifth Symphony. This finale manages miraculously to straddle the seemingly contrary worlds of scholarly rigor and schoolboy raillery. Partway through the music pauses, and Beethoven introduces yet another theme, which is at length woven into a double fugue with the original subject. This new theme (though carved out of the contours of the main subject) is actually a *maggiore* version of the famous fugue subject used both in Handel’s, “And with His Stripes We Are Healed” from *Messiah*, and in the Mozart Requiem. This is both a purposeful homage to two of Beethoven’s lifelong heroes, and an advertisement of his rightful inclusion in their exalted company. Masterful edifices such as this recall the words of Beethoven’s onetime counterpoint teacher, an earnest Viennese named Albrechtsberger: “He has learned nothing, and will never do anything properly.”

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