

## Notes:

### **Piano Sonata No. 7 in D Major, Op. 10 No. 3 – Ludwig van Beethoven**

Written in 1798, the seventh sonata in D Major is Beethoven's third in the set of Op. 10.

This sonata is arguably one of the most complex and also the longest of these three; it is the only one to contain four movements. The Op. 10 sonatas are some of the most experimental during Beethoven's early compositional period and demand a great deal of virtuosity as well as control. While on the level of immediacy the first movement of the seventh appears frivolous, it is indeed crafted with adroit precision. There is a sprawling ambiguity of its themes, yet concerted gestures provide the definitive material to be developed later on as such. Omnipresent descending figures consistently begin by falling a half step below. They are insistent, appearing again and again manipulated through syncopation, retrograde, and tonicization, and lay the groundwork for every proceeding movement after the first. The second movement is prescient in its Romantic foresight, a precursor to the later Beethoven sonatas and the influence the composer himself would have on the sensitive and enigmatic works of the Romantic period. Transformations in texture and color seem to wield gravity, a counterweight to the levity that pervades the remainder of the seventh sonata. Coming out of the parallel minor key, the third movement serves as an enlightened transition back to the major tonic. It proceeds with eloquent humor and grace as a minuet, a dance form popular in the 18<sup>th</sup> century likely to appear in the inner movements in many Classical sonatas. Finally the fourth movement appears in the shape of a Rondo imbued with a scherzo-like quality. Its vivacity and coyness are the comic relief of the sonata. It concludes with an unassuming shrug after multiple displays of virtuosity. A work from the piano repertory regarded with such a level of importance manages to feign an air of indifference, as if not taking itself quite so seriously. Beethoven proves again to be a master aptly skilled in contradiction.

### **Piano Sonata No. 4 in C Minor, Op. 29 – Sergei Prokofiev**

Prokofiev crafts this sonata through dense and jagged harmonies coupled with disarming lyricism. The sonata was published in 1918 after reworking an assortment of his older writings. It was officially dedicated to his friend Maximilian Schmidthof who committed suicide in 1913, and while the sonata is not programmatic in nature, it does embody a gloomy, forlorn, and serious character cognizant of this event. The rich and often dissonant harmonies that Prokofiev uses, as well as truncated melodic quips, give it an earthy quality that feels surprising and raw. In the first movement, syncopation, imitative voices, uneven phrase lengths, and sudden shifts in register create an unsure yet inexhaustible drive to the ends of cadences. Marked *serioso*, the second movement demonstrates indomitable power, its intense chromaticism engulfing space and provoking deep introspection, but saving room for devastating bombast in the final movement. Intense chromaticism prevails until it slyly elides into the piece's greatest juxtaposition, a moment of tender and melodious serenity resembling something of a fusion between Beethoven and the later melodies of Shostakovich. Even the penultimate section marked *tranquillo* cannot dissuade the final statement from maintaining a disposition of detachment and steely determination, as if wrought of any empathy the piece could have once been capable of. The third movement is an outburst of pent-up energy, breaking out of a shroud of darkness. Breathless perpetual movement creates a motoric drive laced with joy. This jubilation is eventually distilled into a moment of respite with another glimpse at Prokofiev's distinctive gift for lyricism. The movement then launches back into the fray with even greater force, charging toward a finale with sporadic intentions and glissandi-like chromatic scalar figures that seem to defy any sense of meter. One last acerbic chord marks the end of a work that began as a dirge in militaristic fashion and concludes as a form of intimidating entertainment.

### **Ballade No. 3 in A-Flat Major, Op. 47 – Frederic Chopin**

Frederic Chopin initially decided after an education from the Warsaw Conservatory that he would commit to a musical career concertizing as a pianist, yet he quickly settled comfortably among the elevated social classes of Paris in 1821 providing private lessons, composing, and performing in quaint mainstays around the city. It was in Paris where he encountered the likes of Liszt, Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Hiller, and Paganini, prominent contemporaries realizing through music the various tenets of a new intellectual phenomena described as the Romantic movement, with Chopin's name to eventually rise to the forefront of associations with that era, his contribution to piano repertoire making an indelible impression on the course of music history. While Chopin's contemporary Robert Schumann might have taken a more wholistic approach in adopting aesthetics of the Romantic movement by repeatedly incorporating literature as source material for his compositions, Chopin concurrently occupied another sphere of a procedural dichotomy. Chopin committed himself almost entirely in a secular fashion to the self-contained expression of character pieces, a genre of Romantic innovation. The virtue and subjectivity of Chopin's music can be extracted solely from the manuscript itself, intellectual yet never amassing the same scale of esoteric myth taken on by Schumann's character suites. However, one collective endeavor of Chopin's competes with this notion: his development of the Ballade genre, a new outgrowth of the character piece suggesting a corollary to the literary Ballad that recounts historical events to earth-shattering effect. The A-Flat Major Ballade is the most lyrical of the 4 Ballades, proving to be an episodic journey. The first motive, initially appearing *mezza voce*, is quickly subsumed, only to provide the occasional and subtle reminder of its presence until it erupts full force in the last climactic episode of the Ballade. Another descending motive is quickly established as foundational for the Ballade's narrative progression, oscillating between plaintive and triumphant characters. A virtuosic development section proceeds with clever modulation tantamount to the rhythmic agitation building up rippling tension, to finally be released in a fulfilling coda. The third Ballade is mesmerizing in its innovative form that capitalizes on simple melodic ideas extrapolated to a point just short of being verbose. While no true literary source may be evident, the work conjures ancient sentiment and a legendary imposition.