

## **LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)**

### **Sonata No.1 in D Major for Violin and Piano, Op.12, No.1**

Beethoven's first sonata for violin and piano is far less familiar than the later, nicknamed ones, like the *Spring Sonata*, Op.24 or the *Kreutzer*, Op.47. Perhaps because of that, Beethoven's imaginative ideas come across with striking freshness. All the signatures of his early style are present: regular four- and eight-bar phrases; sudden changes of dynamics; flashy runs and arpeggiation. The latter are particularly evident in the piano part, because in the late 1790s, this type of work was regarded as a piano sonata with accompaniment of violin. Nevertheless, the violin gets its share of rapid ascending scales and nicely articulated triplet passages. It also introduces some of the thematic material.

The first movement is forthright. Its opening unison fanfare derives from D-major triads. The second theme provides contrast with a series of descending four-note figures, asked by piano and answered by violin. An extended trill ushers in the closing theme, a chorale with exclamation points. The development plays with all three ideas before returning decisively to the initial fanfare.

Beethoven's second movement is a fine set of variations in A-major that demonstrates how thoroughly he had mastered variation technique, even this early in his career. The finale is a bouncy and cheerful rondo in 6/8. Beethoven's restriction to three movements was unusual during a period when he favored imposing four movement structures, particularly in the piano sonatas. His limitation of all the Opus 12 sonatas to three movements indicates a willingness to accommodate an audience with sheer entertainment. That his music is also crafted in a highly skilled manner is our additional bonus.

## **LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)**

### **Sonata No.3 in A Major for Cello and Piano, Op.69**

As a composer of sonatas, Beethoven's richest legacy is the monumental collection of 32 sonatas for piano. He composed a number of duo sonatas as well, however, greatly enriching the repertoires of both violin and cello. The five cello sonatas are particularly special because Beethoven was the first major composer to recognize the cello as a significant solo instrument. Though he wrote no cello concerto, in the five sonatas he emancipated the instrument from any residual Baroque associations as a mere continuo component.

Op.69 in A Major is the middle sonata. The two early ones were published together in 1796 as Op.5; Op.69 was composed in 1807 and 1808 and published in 1809; and the two relatively late ones date from 1815 and were published simultaneously in 1817 as Op.102. Thus the A Major sonata gives us a good sense of Beethoven in full maturity, at the height of his powers, but before the monumental late works that so puzzled his contemporaries.

He worked on the sonata simultaneously with the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the Mass in C, Op.86, and the two Piano Trios, Op.70. The sonata bears a dedication to Baron Ignaz von Gleichenstein, who was the German secretary in Vienna's Imperial War Department. In addition to being an excellent cellist, Gleichenstein was Beethoven's closest friend from 1807 to 1810 and handled many of his business affairs. Sadly, the friendship was ruined by their respective pursuit of two women, the Malfatti sisters. Beethoven's wooing of Therese Malfatti was unsuccessful; Gleichenstein married her sister.

Beethoven's spacious writing in Op.69 obviously predates any stress in his relationship with his friend, for the sonata overflows with a sense of relaxation and good humor. In spirit it looks forward both to the Violin Concerto and the Archduke Trio. The unaccompanied cello theme that opens the first movement establishes both a leisurely atmosphere and the sense of cello as significant partner in the music-making. Indeed, the occasional cadenza-like commentaries, wide range of the instrument exploited by the composer, and the splendid interplay of thematic material between the two instruments, bespeaks enormous growth on Beethoven's part from the Op.5 sonatas. Op.69 is specially noteworthy for its lively, syncopated second movement in A minor. Also, the slow introduction to the finale, (which, like the first movement, is a full-fledged sonata form movement) adds greater weight to the last movement and precludes the need for a separate slow movement.

## **ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK (1841-1904)**

### **Dumky Trio, Op.90 (1891)**

Imagine a violin sonata comprising only minuet/trios. Or a symphony that consisted solely of variations. The likelihood is slim; one of the principles that has governed multi-movement works from the Baroque suite through the present day is variety of form. Why, then, did Dvořák choose to write a piano trio with six movements that were all *dumkas* (or more accurately *dumky*, the Czech plural)?

The concept was not without precedent in chamber music. No less a composer than Joseph Haydn chose to arrange his *Seven Last Words of our Saviour on the Cross* for string quartet. Published as Haydn's Op.51, that work comprises seven *adagios*, each lasting about ten minutes. Thus Dvořák's six *dumky* are in good company.

Further, in all fairness to Dvořák, the *dumka* is by definition a varied form. Of Ukrainian origin, it became quite fashionable in Poland and Bohemia during the 19th century. It derives from the Slovak noun *duma*, which derives from verbs denoting thinking, pondering, even brooding. *Dumky* are narrative, with sections of lamentation and melancholy alternating with parts that are more lively. This type of movement crops up frequently in Dvořák's music.

This piano trio thus contains a full range of tempi and moods. The lament that opens may function as a kind of slow introduction, or as a refrain that recurs later in the movement. Each movement is in a different key (the sequence of tonalities is E minor, C-sharp minor, A Major, C minor, E-flat Major, and C minor), and each contains sufficient chromaticism to confuse or at least challenge the most musical of ears.

Four of Dvořák's movements divide into two distinct parts (binary form); the others share more in common with rondo or ternary form. Duration for each *dumka* varies from about four minutes to nearly seven minutes, with the second and third movements (*Poco adagio/Vivace* and *Andante/Vivace*) clocking the greater length. He connects the first three movements with the designation *attacca subito* [without pause], thus lending them a collective larger design in the trio's overall scheme.

Dvořák maintains a prevailing mood of thoughtfulness and introspection in his six movements; however, he varies them with sections that sometimes sound positively joyful, even reckless. He gives the cello a prominent role throughout, a fact possibly attributable to its first interpreter, Januš Wihan, for whom Dvořák also wrote his cello concerto. The *last* thing we should think of in this trio is a series of dirges, for there is considerable fire in this music. Rather, the *Dumky* trio reveals the complexity of the composer's personality. Dvořák's genius manifests itself equally in his innovative approach to the piano trio genre, and in the impressive variety he brings to his self-imposed formal restriction.