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Hailed by critics for his “virtuoso playing,” British violinist Andrew Smith has appeared in concert and recital at home and abroad, including here in the U.S. at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center and in Chicago’s and Detroit’s orchestra halls. Andrew’s multifaceted career combines performance with teaching and recording. An accomplished chamber musician, he was artistic director of the Stamford International Music Festival and is now executive director of the Suzuki Music Schools. In addition to his work in classical music, where he has premiered works by some of the leading composers of our time, he records for television and film completing over 50 projects annually.

A native of Bulgaria, Elina is a classical/contemporary pianist with a special interest in Alexander Scriabin, whose complete published piano music she has been performing for the past few years. As a Fulbright scholar she graduated from the Master’s and Doctoral Program at Manhattan School of Music in the studio of Dr. Solomon Mikowsky. Elina has taught at Sacred Heart University and Suzuki Music School of Westport, and was recently invited to be a guest lecturer at Warsaw University. She has appeared as a recitalist at Carnegie’s Weill Recital Hall and Alice Tully Hall in New York; the Steinway Gallery, and Klein Auditorium in Connecticut; the National Palace of Culture and Bulgaria Hall in Sofia, Bulgaria; Selb Concert Hall in Germany; and the Universität für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Wien, among other venues. Elina has appeared as soloist with various orchestras and is the recipient of prizes from national and international competitions.

In a preliminary conversation with Andrew and Elina, before commencing this interview, I mentioned that as an amateur violinist, having struggled my way through Beethoven’s 10 violin sonatas over the years, I probably have a more intimate knowledge of them than does the average listener; and so I wanted to steer the interview towards specific aspects of these works that pertain to details of their stylistic, expressive, and communicative devices. Since all but two of Beethoven’s violin sonatas are relatively early works, and only one of those two, the last one, is a relatively late work, I wanted to explore them in chronological groupings.

To be honest, Beethoven’s violin sonatas have always struck me as being outliers of a sort in relation to his other immediately contemporaneous works. For starters, he played both violin and viola (in addition to the piano, of course), yet his first sonatas for a string instrument were for cello. That can be explained by Beethoven’s visit to the Berlin court of King Wilhelm II of Prussia in 1796, where he composed his op. 5 Sonatas for the pleasure of the cello-playing monarch. But it wasn’t until Beethoven was firmly settled in Vienna that he penned his first violin sonatas—the op. 12 set of three—between 1797 and 1798, which he dedicated, unsolicited, to Antonio Salieri; and then only as a way of currying favor with the Austrian Imperial Kapellmeister and of gaining an “in” with the city’s elites.

Although those first three violin sonatas make bold statements of independence over the piano and violin sonatas of Mozart in terms of technical demands and dramatic

expression, they still adhere closely to classical models. Consider, for example, that the “Pathétique” Piano Sonata was composed at exactly the same time, and what a daring work it is in its exploration of the Romantic Sturm und Drang aesthetic.

So my first question is for Elina. How would you characterize the differences in the piano writing and technique in these first three violin sonatas compared to that in the exactly contemporaneous “Pathétique” Sonata?

Elina: Beethoven may have been socially clumsy and awkward, but when it came to his music he was well aware of what to write, who to dedicate it to, and for what purpose he was composing. At the time that he wrote the violin sonatas, while in his late 20s, he was still following the traditions established by his predecessors Haydn and Mozart in the genre of chamber music—albeit with typical Beethovenian boldness, perceptively and intentionally moving away from those traditions, by boosting all the familiar devices up a couple of notches. For even though these violin sonatas were intended for light entertainment at a music lover’s salon, they depart significantly from the prevalent norms; here the violin and piano are equals, an unusual dynamic at a time when this type of music was light on both parts, the violin usually accompanying the piano with very little individuality of its own. At the very outset with the first sonata of the set it becomes clear that these would be pieces written for professional musicians, or at the very least for very dedicated amateurs. This forms one of the first obvious links with the “Pathétique,” which continues to pose plentiful technical challenges for even the most accomplished modern performer. Of course when writing for the piano, his main instrument—and Beethoven had already made a name for himself in Vienna as a virtuoso keyboardist, both as an interpreter and an improviser—he did intend to perform these pieces himself. The piano sonatas were an opportunity for him not only to display his abilities; they were also a place to experiment, push the boundaries, and refashion sonata form to his purposes. This, to me, accounts for one of the main differences between the opp. 12 and 13, the very *raison d’être* of the pieces themselves, their very purpose. The violin sonatas were entertaining pieces harking back to an established tradition and maintaining it, as best Beethoven could, given his wild and unruly nature, while the “Pathétique” allowed for an exploration of new compositional techniques and forms.

I find that this premise is also strongly supported by Beethoven’s choice of keys for the violin sonatas versus the following piano work. He was to develop a very special relationship with the key of C Minor—the key of the “Pathétique”—over the course of his life, a relationship that can be traced back to his third trio of the op. 1 set, published in 1795. Beethoven was a known admirer of Mozart’s C-Minor Piano Concerto, K 491, one of only two in a minor key by the older composer. Beethoven’s reverence was such that on one occasion, walking with Johann Cramer in Vienna and hearing Mozart’s C-Minor Concerto performed in the distance he stopped to exclaim, “Cramer, Cramer! We’ll never be able to do anything like that!”

Beethoven intended for his opus 1 Piano Trios to introduce him to the world and carefully groomed these pieces to serve as his first official publication; picking the key of C Minor for the last trio of the set may have been no coincidence, as that key was

commonly associated with tragedy, according to the Italian violinist Francesco Galeazzi, and fit for depicting “mournful, ominous, and lugubrious actions.” Based on those sentiments alone, the last trio is not the work of a young aspiring artist trying to please, as are the first two of the set, but the confident statement by a composer perfectly aware of his genius and declaring it to Viennese musical society, unafraid to rattle a few listeners emotionally. Upon hearing it, Haydn, his mentor at the time, advised him to hold the piece back from print, warning that the public was perhaps not yet ready for such innovation. Maybe Haydn was subconsciously voicing his own fear, anticipating that Beethoven would overshadow him in posterity. In any case Beethoven didn’t heed his old teacher’s well-intentioned advice and went ahead with including the trio in the set. It was precisely the C-Minor Trio that had the most effect on the Viennese with its stormy, barely contained pathos, one that would mark some of Beethoven’s best-known works in that key from that moment on.

In Beethoven’s overall output, the key of C Minor is reserved for special occasions, and he uses it for works intended to contain a certain message, one that cannot be easily dismissed or ignored. Whether we think of the “Pathétique,” the op.18/4 String Quartet, the Third Piano Concerto, the Fifth Symphony, or his final piano sonata, these works all inhabit a unique expressive realm, one that transcends everyday life, carefully molded by Beethoven to awaken our deepest artistic sensibilities. The “Pathétique” opens with a declamatory, assertive French overture, immediately setting the stage for something serious, noble, and laden with fate. By comparison, the violin sonatas of op. 12 are much more amicable and light-hearted, fulfilling the main requirement of music at the time: to provide entertainment. Even so, Beethoven doesn’t spare the performers an opportunity to shine with highly virtuosic writing in all three, placing great demands on both violin and piano. The op. 12 set are clearly designed on an equally grand scale as the piano sonata, even though devoid of the immediate emotional heaviness of the “Pathétique.” Even so, they are perfectly substantial works in their own right. A long variation set stands in for the slow movement of the First Sonata, and the Third Sonata shines with scintillating virtuosity in its outer movements. Of the three, it is the Second Sonata that offers a bit of carefree respite with its playful, pastoral mood, calling for an allegro piacevole finale. The Second Sonata ends on a relaxed, humorous note, more Haydn than Beethoven, all sunshine and ease. It is jarring then, to think of the opening chord of the “Pathétique” following only one sonata after, as nowhere within op. 12 (save for maybe the minore variation in the second movement of the First Sonata) does Beethoven point to the Sturm und Drang that characterizes the solo piano sonata. Op. 13 is prophetic, foreshadowing the evolution to come; in that sense, to me, it is much closer to the Seventh Violin Sonata with its tempestuous tremolos and growing and abating storms — or even the “Kreutzer” for that matter, with the recitative-like opening that marks the first movements of both the op. 47 Violin Sonata and the “Pathétique” — than any of the three of the early op. 12. Op. 13 is a much more complex work, imbued with intricate psychological drama that is lacking in the violin sonatas.

I would ask a related question of Andrew. How you characterize the differences between Beethoven’s writing for the violin in these early sonatas and Mozart’s last violin sonatas, composed 10 years earlier? One thing, I notice, for example, is the greater separation of

the violin part from the piano part. To be sure, there are still lots of places where the two instruments come together in unison or octaves, but it seems to me that when Beethoven does that, it's more to make a dramatic point than it is to simply have the violin double the piano in a "play-along" way. In other words, at many points in Mozart's sonatas, the violin is simply non-essential; if it dropped out, it wouldn't matter, but not so in Beethoven's sonatas.

Andrew: From the outset of the op. 12 Sonatas, I see a composer filled with urgency to establish his persona. Gabriel Banat has published some fascinating comparisons of Beethoven's violin writing and the virtuoso French concertante style of the 1770s, and I think there are some very valid points that connect Beethoven's violin writing back beyond Mozart's late sonatas. That is not to deny Mozart's legacy and the importance of these works to the genre, but to suggest that Beethoven's friendships with the professional violinists of his era probably made him more aware than most of the violin's recent history and where Mozart lay within it.

It's always been clear to me that in these early Viennese works, Beethoven's ego bubbles at the surface in a slightly self-conscious way. While establishing his compositional credentials he can't help but litter pieces such as the op. 12 set with passages of extreme virtuosity, making them beyond the reach of amateurs of the day and, by default, establishing his professionalism. It's not just the dazzling nature of the passage work that sets the op.12 Sonatas apart, it's the elements of compositional experimentation—the juxtaposition of themes in the development section of the First Sonata's Allegro con brio, the rhythmic offset between the piano and violin at the end of the Allegro vivace of the Second Sonata. And it's not that Mozart can't. It's that Beethoven doesn't cloak this virtuosity in any finery. He puts it out there without excuse; it's so part of his dialect and, as such, was deemed startling by some and gauche by others. Reading the first reviews of these works, this was exactly what contemporary ears seemed to hear—clever but rather brusque and distasteful. To modern ears, we tend not to hear that newness in quite the same way and the basic tenants of harmony, form and melody are not so far removed from Mozart's.

I have always been interested that these op. 12 Sonatas were published time and again throughout Europe within a few years of first appearing. While there were violin sonatas composed by contemporary composers at the time, it seems as though there must have been a real public thirst for violin sonatas after Mozart.

To my mind, one of the more striking aspects of these early sonatas is Beethoven's approach to rhythm, which is more dramatic, more forceful, more fanciful, and more difficult than what one encounters in Mozart. And I'm not just talking about off-the-beat accents and sforzandos, one of Beethoven's signatures, but of some very tricky interplay between the violin and piano. An example that leaps out at you begins at the end of bar 45 and continues through bar 53 in the first movement of the A-Major Sonata, op. 12/2. It's this passage in tripping 16th and quarter notes against triplets, exchanged between the violin and piano in an out-of-sync or off-kilter way, that's really hard to coordinate—and I must compliment the two of you for managing it about as accurately as I've heard

anyone do it. But the whole movement really seems to be about constantly throwing the listener off balance. Is the recurring eighth-note figure—sometimes ascending, other times, descending—on the beat or off the beat? What are your thoughts about this? You first, Andrew.

Andrew: The passage you mention in the A-Major Sonata was one of the few places that needed discussion. I have always felt strongly that the most interesting recordings of these works address these rhythmic novelties using articulation, and in the end it was changing articulation that helps this passage. I think that's very true throughout the op. 12 group. There is a level of variety in Beethoven's articulation that seems so entirely modern. In other words, Beethoven's rhythmic daring seems to stem from an intimate understanding of how his instruments speak.

Current thought is that Beethoven's violinists played with the older style classical bow and that it wasn't likely he had any exposure to the Tourte bow until well after 1800, when the Tourte bow became more common in Germany. Although it's not likely we will ever know exactly how the mass exodus from France in the 1790s affected playing trends in Germany, there is ample reason to think the Tourte bow was slow to catch on in Vienna. That fact is so difficult to comprehend since so much of Beethoven's rhythmic novelty and power seems to come from the characteristics of the modern bow. The articulation and power inherent in the Tourte bow and all the variety of attack it offers seem perfect for the rhythmic expression Beethoven demands. That same dilemma doesn't seem to play a role in Mozart's sonatas, which sparkle with both the Classical bow and the modern bow.

Elina: Although even as professional musicians we can never be completely certain as to what a composer intended, we can at least make educated, instinctual decisions regarding the interpretation of the music placed in front of us so as to render it in a convincing fashion. When dealing with a composer of Beethoven's caliber who is so self-assured, straightforward, and with such forceful inner motivation, it is always quite simple to come to a conclusion as to what he wanted, what he tried to achieve with a specific section, movement, or the full work itself. When playing Beethoven you never capture a sense of hesitancy in the music; it always speaks loudly and clearly for and by itself.

The way I see this whole sonata is as a playful escapade, flirtatious, light, and sunny. I think Beethoven didn't intend to so much throw the listener off with his rhythms and misplaced beats as he did to entertain the performers themselves. Around the time that he was writing these sonatas he met a Latvian violinist, Karl Amenda, who became a fast friend, and with whom Beethoven spent many a day playing through various pieces, these sonatas most likely among them. Beethoven was always looking to do something new, and here he probably singled out the actual relationship between the violin and piano, perhaps depicting the enjoyment he experienced when in the company of his new friend. Whereas in the First Sonata we opened up with a sonorous chord and then played in unison to introduce the theme, often accompanying each other politely, here the violin and piano are constantly engaged in a chase, one leading, the other following. I can almost hear the witty banter between Beethoven and Amenda. Violin and piano egg each

other on; there is a lot of interplay, with one instrument finishing off or echoing the other's musical thoughts and phrases. When the two instruments do play in unison it's with a mock seriousness that leads to nowhere overly dramatic, as at the end of the exposition and then again in the recapitulation. Everything dissipates quickly and continues with the whimsical rhythms set up by the opening. I think more than anything Beethoven is just having enormous fun, testing and then reaffirming the tight bond between the violin and piano parts, virtual stand-ins for him and Amenda. The violinist eventually left Vienna, but remained close to Beethoven's heart for long after. It was one of the lasting relationships in his life.

This amicable dialogue is further developed in the second movement, now in A Minor, the piano opening with the theme, the violin responding a few measures later, this call-and-response structure maintained to the end. The third movement, an *Allegro piacevole* rondo, truly lives up to its name with its harmonious disposition and respectful interchange between the instruments. In many ways I see this sonata as firmly indebted to Haydn, presenting Beethoven at his most young, innocent, and mischievous. I perceive his rhythmic surprises as both a compositional device and a way to rethink the ensemble, but they are not disruptive, nor intended to be. They just speak of an ease that comes from feeling completely comfortable in the other's presence, like one feels in an ideal relationship.

Then there are the harmonic vagaries. In the same movement, how does one analyze what happens beginning in bar 27? I take this to be the beginning of the modulatory bridge passage to the second theme, which is heading, appropriately and classically, as it should, to E Major for a movement whose home key is A Major. But good grief, look at those sudden, unprepared B's and E's with an insistent D \sharp in the piano's left hand bass. Common practice theory books would likely designate this as one or another chord belonging to the augmented sixth family—German or French—with the D \sharp in the bass forming an augmented sixth with the B \sharp above it in the violin part and right hand of the piano. But what a jolt it is to the ear. I won't say that Mozart never used augmented sixth chords. Beethoven didn't invent them; They were discussed by Rameau as early as 1722 in his *Treatise on Harmony*, and one finds them in Bach's works as well; but Beethoven seemed to find them especially useful to produce shock, the musical equivalent of an expletive. Would you agree?

Elina: Yes, this is definitely a moment where Beethoven prepares for a transition to E Major for the end of the exposition. He just takes a while to get there. The French augmented sixth resolving into C \sharp Major in mm. 28–30 is the starting point for an exciting tonal detour which Beethoven accomplishes through a string of secondary dominants leading to various keys. There is playfulness to his manner, as if he can't find the right key, although on several occasions he leads us on that he has decided to settle somewhere. He does this with humor, as when he uses a D7 chord functioning as a secondary dominant to G on which he firmly lands with a *sf* at bar 34, reiterating the dominant-to-tonic sequence again in the following bar, complete with the *sf* marking on G. Instead of staying there though, he changes his mind and repeats the whole procedure of introducing a secondary dominant to a new key, this time landing heavily on F,

emphasizing it through the *sf* marking and repeating the dominant-tonic C7 to F, as he did in the previous instance. He loses his resolve yet again and embarks on yet more transitional keys. At measure 62 he is still undecided, with two diminished sevenths, notorious for being able to resolve into a number of tonalities, here the first on D#, the second on A#. Finally, with a flourish on B7, Beethoven establishes us in E Major. Or, so we think. We have to meander yet a little bit more, this time in unison and quite chromatically in search for our key before an extended dominant-to-tonic exchange in bars 84–87 finally lands us securely in the new key of E.

Beginning to break up what we now term traditional sonata form, Beethoven used this exposition more as a development section than a simple transition from home key to dominant. You are absolutely right, the tonal vagaries are astounding, but shock isn't the word I would use for what Beethoven may have been after; I don't think he intended to imbue this section with a portentous message by a jolt to the ear and evading expectations, not based on the overall nature of this piece. I find these transitional passages more comical than anything else, a joke of a master improviser who here gives us a little bit of an idea how his musical mind works; touching upon and exploring various possibilities, taking violinist, pianist, and audience on a lively ride through a bunch of keys before fulfilling our Classical-style expectations. Haydn in his last piano sonata also indulged in tonal experimentation and strange modulations; at a time when the tuning systems allowed for keys to still have individual character and color, this approach probably had even more impact than we can appreciate today.

Andrew: I would agree. We speak of Beethoven's musical boldness as somehow tied to his increasingly brusque character or the growing inner conflicts caused by deafness. I think that these explanations are not just simplistic but do a great disservice to our understanding of his position in history and how conscious he was of manipulating the listener.

As he liked to point out, he took it upon himself to be well educated and well read. In the 1790s, German artistic discussion was alight, fueled by the French Revolution. I think from the start this musical dialect of challenging the listener was a conscious attempt to create a dialect that bypassed the rather sophisticated international style of Mozart and reinvent a more German dialect that echoed the aesthetic of earlier movements such as *Sturm und Drang* and *Empfindsamer Stil*, where surprise, innovation and invention were the hallmarks of artistic genius. Even before op. 12, descriptions of Beethoven's performance style suggests that drama, surprise, reverie, and shock were an important part of his musical language and it is interesting to see these become more and more part of his compositional style.

For me, there is an overarching theme that ties op. 12 to op. 96. To paraphrase Liszt, Beethoven's music doesn't fall into three periods, as we often class it, but into two styles—those works that follow convention and those in which his artistry redefines convention based upon the needs of the music. I see a single artistic dilemma running through his music and becoming more distilled and more important. The violin sonatas, perhaps because they are outliers in what we view as the canon of his works, really help

highlight this dilemma most intimately as a cycle. Beethoven's career is marked by his gradual understanding of the musical elements inherent in Goethe's "self-actualizing wholeness of an organic form." In op. 12 we see it in artifice as Beethoven tries to marry harmonic, rhythmic, and gestural novelty within the confines of existing form, and by op. 96 we understand that these tools have become part of a more deeply integrated form of expression in which form is married with function.

Let's look at something less jarring—indeed something exquisite beyond any telling of it—that occurs in the second movement of the E \flat -Major Sonata, op. 12/3. Of the three early sonatas, this one is my favorite. The two outer movements are full of Beethoven's rambunctious and rumbustious funning, but the slow movement is of breathtaking beauty. Here we have for the first time, at least in the violin sonatas, an example of the technique César Franck would famously put to use years later in the third movement of his own Violin Sonata, the sustained lyrical, intensely emotional violin line over sweeping arpeggios in the piano. But it's not just the moving dialogue between the instruments that takes the breath away; again, it's the harmonic shift, only this time heart-rending, as measure 18 meltingly undermines the C-Major tonality with a B \flat and slips ravishly first into F Minor and then into D \flat Major at bar 24.

But what I really want to talk about here is something else, something which occurs three measures later, on the last beat of bar 27. Here the violin has an expressive little gesture of a dotted eighth-note followed by two 32nds, a sort of ornamental half-turn. A pet theory of mine about Beethoven's music is that its expressive power and emotional communicativeness are bound up in a kind of code or gestural language, in which the listener receives the message and interprets it according to his or her own perception. You always know when Beethoven is telegraphing something of special significance that he wants to make a point of because he returns to it later and in a way that you can't help but make the connection. Take that little ornamental half-turn at the end of bar 27. Now look at the very last measure of the movement. There it is again, an echo and a reminder of what you heard before, and a little stab in the heart. It's code that means something to Beethoven, and he's telling us that, but it's up to us as individual listeners to decipher the meaning of it for ourselves. I note in your performance that you give that final measure extra weight and significance with a slight ritard and hesitation just before the two 32nd notes, investing the figure with an extra degree of poignancy. Clearly, you've thought about this as well. The gestural aspect of Beethoven's musical speech becomes more and more prominent as one proceeds through his later works, but can you think of any other examples in these first three violin sonatas?

Andrew: I couldn't agree more with your description of gestural motives. The music thrives off them and the instances are almost too many to describe. One could say that the legacy of motivic development that Beethoven left composers is itself the legacy of gestural development derived from performance. The same has been said of C. P. E. Bach, of whom he was particularly fond. You see it from the first disjointed theme of the op. 12/1.

It has always struck me as odd that even before Beethoven had written op. 1 he had a small but influential group of admirers that only grew as he published more. Although it seems contradictory, it might even be said that Beethoven's early fame oddly outstripped the pace of his published works before 1800. My explanation for this was that the early idolatry that surrounded him comes in part from the way his performance style spoke to his audiences. As a performer his ability to communicate and to improvise must have been akin to Liszt's. In performance, gesture is everything. When his compositions emerged, that gestural element most likely had significant meaning to his followers—the code we now ascribe to Beethoven. We feel it today because it rings true, as good art should, but to speak properly it must jump from the page and live in a performance.

With that in mind I have always felt that to perform Beethoven well you must have both a clear sense of purpose and a willingness to improvise. I am still never sure what I will do in the conversation with the piano at the end of the slow movement of the D-Major Sonata or the direction we might take in the slow movement of op. 12/3. And to some extent that is what keeps these sonatas alive in the hundreds of performances on record out there. Elina and I have played these sonatas as a cycle so many times that the immediacy of performance is part of our interpretation. The motives are all gestural and presenting them with clarity and purpose is the stage play we call performance. Some of our interpretation is organic, some of it catches us both by surprise, and I have to say that very little of it was discussed, except perhaps our tempos which developed over time.

When we came to the recording, we laid down the entire set of 10 sonatas in three days. I am not sure if it is a record, but I think it gives a refreshing sense of immediacy and unity that are not always present in some more manicured recordings.

Elina: I personally see the figure you are pointing out more as an appoggiatura than an ornamental turn, and this movement is brimming with this sighing gesture. In the two instances you are referring to, Beethoven lovingly surrounds the main notes of G and C respectively from below and above, creating a singular mood, one primarily of expressivity, longing, yearning for the ideal. This movement is full of these sentiments, and I find the expansiveness of this adagio, the spatial distance between the piano and violin to be especially elevating, almost heavenly. The rhetorical passages toward the end make it all the earthier, as if after a short dialogue with fate a resignation occurs. The last and final "sigh" then becomes wistful and doubly poignant. But in a broader answer to your question, there are many places in the first two sonatas where the typical Beethovenian organic development from the smallest of gestures can grow into a movement as profound as the second in the op. 12/3. In the First Sonata Beethoven follows through on the idea of themes built out of chords. All movements consistently open with a bold chord and develop from there; the Second Sonata has the echo-like call and response structure in all of its movements, especially audible in the middle movement with the third movement likewise picking up on this idea, very literally. And the op. 12/3 in question is consistently virtuosic, with a lot of figuration in all of its sections. Probably because of his legendary mastery in the art of improvisation, Beethoven was capable of detecting the unifying possibilities of one small element and immediately perceiving how it could hold an entire movement or work together. Despite

his facility in extemporizing, though, we know that he composed carefully, with many revisions, and tried out numerous ideas before deciding on the lines along which a work should unfold. This meticulous approach never makes the music feel in the least belabored. When all is said and done, one senses that each movement, each sonata must be just so, all the parts fit together so well.

Okay, let's move on to the next two sonatas—the No. 4 in A Minor, op. 23, and the beloved “Spring” Sonata (No. 5) in F Major, op. 24, each of which received its own opus number only because each was published separately. But the two were actually intended as a pair; both were dedicated to Count Moritz von Fries, a wealthy patron of the arts and an important supporter of Beethoven. The composer also dedicated his String Quintet in C Major, op. 29, of that same year (1801) to Fries, and later, also his Seventh Symphony. In addition to these two violin sonatas, the years 1800–01 saw the composition of Beethoven's groundbreaking op. 18 set of six string quartets and the “Moonlight” and “Pastoral” Piano Sonatas. But the two violin sonatas could not be more different from one another. The Fourth Sonata, like Wednesday's child, is “full of woe”; while the “Spring” Sonata, like Monday's and Tuesday's children, is “fair of face” and “full of grace.” To say that the A-Minor Sonata is the precursor in miniature, the demon seed, if you will, that gave birth to the “Kreutzer” Sonata is to state the obvious. Both works share the same A-Minor/Major tonality, both, once again, telegraph a similar message in gestures using the same patterns of intervals, and both are taut, tense, and violent.

In contrast, the “Spring” Sonata is—well, spring-like. Even its more vigorous passages are more spirited and exuberant than they are frantic and menacing. In the Adagio of the “Spring” Sonata, we have, once again, a passage of transcendent beauty similar to the passage we discussed in the slow movement of the op. 12/3 Sonata. Here we have an example of one of Beethoven's favorite harmonic ploys, which is to modulate by thirds, in this case from B \flat Major down a third to G \flat Major, except that he doesn't really modulate in the conventional sense. He simply cadences on a B \flat chord in bar 37, and in the next bar introduces D \flat into the harmony, as the violin now plays the movement's main melody—which originally began on D \natural —a half-step lower beginning on D \flat , with adjustments made along the way (A \flat s and C \flat s) to bring the passage to a cadence on G \flat in bar 45.

There are two especially fascinating things about this passage, however. One is that Beethoven alerts the listener to what is about to happen three bars before it does, when in bar 35, the violin has two 16th notes, A, A, followed by a leap of a diminished seventh up to G \flat . That little figure heard throughout the movement, but never up to a G \flat like that, is a pre-warning.

The other aspect of this movement I find fascinating is the way in which Beethoven finds his way back from the G \flat -Major passage described above to the home key of B \flat Major. When the cadence on G \flat comes at bar 45, our ears are now attuned to hearing D \flat s throughout this passage. So we think we're hearing a D \flat on the long-held note in the violin in bar 46. But Beethoven hasn't written it as a D \flat ; he has written it as a C \sharp , D \flat 's

enharmonic equivalent. This is not the place to argue that on a string instrument the two notes are not exactly the same. On the piano, they are, and Beethoven is taking advantage of this to effect an enharmonic modulation back to the key of B \flat Major. Because the note is spelled as a C \sharp , it now resolves up a half-step to D \natural —no more D \flat s—and in another two bars we find ourselves home. Without equal temperament tuning, which allows every note to be enharmonically equivalent to its adjacent note, and the modulatory potential this enables, none of the great music we love and revere from Bach onwards would have been possible, save perhaps for Terry Riley's *In C* or Benjamin Franklin's string quartet for open strings.

How do you approach performing two sonatas, the Fourth and the Fifth, which are so different in every way they would seem to be by two different composers? And what are the different technical challenges each presents?

Andrew: I have to say for me the Fourth is the little child I want to protect, so I have to take issue with you. I find it totally fascinating, mostly because of its juxtaposition to the op. 24 which is everyone's easy favorite. Yes, it's unorthodox and a little hard to grasp, and yes the contrasting movements may not be totally successful as a concept, but the two sonatas were composed virtually together and most likely intended as two piano sonatas in a single opus, evolving in different directions as they came out of sketch form. The evolution into two highly contrasting violin sonatas really brings this period of Beethoven into sharp focus. For this reason the Fourth has always been important for me. Equally important is the need to perform it side by side with op. 24 so they can be understood together.

Obviously Beethoven understood the dilemma he had created because he separated the two. My guess is he realized the sales potential of op. 24 from the outset, designing it to be pretty from every angle; the four-movement structure, its beautiful long melodies, its easy-natured rondo and cheeky scherzo. All make it easy to listen to, a pleasure to perform, and probably an easy money-maker. Everything about op. 24 speaks to a work Beethoven wanted to highlight. Why sully its sales potential by pairing it with op. 23? But if Beethoven wasn't convinced by op. 23, why complete it and publish it? I like to think it's because op. 23 may have held a different significance for him.

You are right that the A-Minor sonority really ties the character of the Fourth Sonata to the Ninth, but the Fourth really serves an entirely different purpose in the cycle as I see it. It's not a revolutionary piece like the "Kreutzer." The *Sturm und Drang* style of the outer movements frames the oddest of tongue-in-cheek *Andantes*. I have always been struck by Beethoven's love of C. P. E. Bach, and I see in the Fourth Sonata a reference. In the cult of *Empfindsamkeit* that we associate with Bach's music the contrasts of expression from humor to drama were seen as marks of veracity of expression. As I look at the Fourth Sonata I see Beethoven tipping his hat to the past while at the same time looking forward to the future in the very public expression of "Spring" Sonata.

When we put the recordings together as a set, this was a discussion we had with producer Bruce Mahin. Opp. 23 and 24 are two sides of the same coin—a crossroads in

Beethoven's output as he emerges from a more private side to the more public and expressive face of the "Spring" Sonata. When you produce a Beethoven violin sonata cycle on CD, it can be squeezed onto three CDs with a little trimming and rejigging. We wanted to present them as if we were performing them in a cycle. As a composer himself, Bruce really understood that need. He left opp. 23 and 24 on a single CD as they were conceived, and we have produced a four-CD boxed set that I think honors the works individually as well as together. I think listening to them this way makes much more sense.

Elina: Christian Neefe, as a teacher, one of the most important people in Beethoven's early life and trustworthy guide in his development as a composer, encouraged his pupil to explore and study various moods and feelings, his very own as well as those of the people around him. I don't find it strange at all that Beethoven could write two sonatas so radically different. He himself was notoriously mercurial in nature, antagonistic one moment, apologetic and remorseful the next. The *Empfindsamer Stil* in music was still a current movement at the beginning of the 19th century with its constantly shifting sentiments, often in the very same movement. Especially because Beethoven was planning to publish these two sonatas together I would be surprised if he didn't aim for a big contrast in character. Playing these sonatas and allowing oneself to be carried to and fro and sometimes away by these waves of emotion is of course the aim and ultimately the extreme pleasure of being a performer! The technical challenges obviously would be to be in agreement with your partner as to the nature of the sonatas generally, allowing for the music to unfold logically and organically along its dramatic arcs. It is actually in these two sonatas and the following set that I begin to feel that Beethoven had summarized his intentions from the last violin sonatas as well as all the other works he had written up until then, and was now reducing everything to a more concentrated and focused vision. In that respect the A-Minor, op. 23, Sonata is very compact; both its outer movements have very clearly delineated ideas that don't stray from the course, both the presto and the rondo are driven and laden with a seething fury that help carry them along. The middle *Andante scherzoso* is elegant and patient, by contrast, as if a diplomatic mediator is trying to break up the fight. The many rests throughout the texture of the movement seem to give both parties ample time to "think things through." Beguiling dialogues between violin and piano add to the sense of harmony and an effort to put differences aside. The last movement, a stormy rondo with cadenza-like *adagio* passages which attempt to break up the storm, and fermatas that temporarily hold it at bay, continue the "mediating" idea of the middle movement. I can easily see this sonata as an opera, with the slow movement portrayed by a female character, the outer movements depicted by two hot-headed men. Would it be a stretch to see those two sonatas as character pieces, one mock-angry, the other over-the-top light-hearted?

Because the "Spring," then, is a much more agreeable sonata, it balances out the storm from op. 24, disperses the clouds, and ushers in a benign, pastoral mood. Beethoven even makes sure the movements are in accord! There is no *Sturm* or *Drang*, hardly any harsh contours and contrasts; all the movements are in major keys and they flow seamlessly from one to the other, all painting idyllic scenes, one more beautiful than the last. I also detect some cyclic unity. The turn figure from the first movement appears in the

consequent movements, albeit in different rhythmic reinterpretations, and courses through the entire sonata like a bubbly country brook. This is the first sonata in which Beethoven introduces a scherzo third movement, one so witty and short it comes across as an aphorism. The rondo finale balances out the fairly long first movement, creating a wonderful sense of closure. It's as if for a moment at least, everything is all right in Beethoven's world, and this sonata rightfully bears the name of the season that is commonly associated with renewal and rebirth. If I were to describe it in one word, it would be "optimistic." I definitely see this quasi-set as a breaking point, a moment when Beethoven was still paying homage to the Classical sonata of Haydn and Mozart but intending to take his leave of it, for the first time engraving his own particular and quite prominent mark on the form.

Elina, how does the piano writing in these two violin sonatas now compare to the "Moonlight" and "Pastoral" Piano Sonatas that Beethoven composed at the same time?

Elina: Both the "Moonlight" and the "Pastoral" Piano Sonatas are not your typical sonata in terms of form. Both have opening movements that are not straightforward fast movements but are rather slow and contemplative, ruminative, sedate. In the "Moonlight," the tempo marking is even Adagio! Here it's the finale that takes center stage with its surging arpeggios and unstoppable energy, dispelling the mood from the beginning. Although the "Moonlight" suggests an obvious comparison to the op. 24 in terms of character, I am more interested in seeing how Beethoven perceived form at this stage of his development and how this will find expression in the next, more mature violin sonata set.

The "Pastoral" Sonata also turns convention on its head. Although the first movement is marked Allegro, the music itself calls for more time and comes across more as an Andante. The opening theme is expansive, rising up slowly from below, waking up gradually, as if emerging from a cocoon like a butterfly. To me it's like the rising sun on a lovely morning. The second movement adds a note of pathos, both with its minor key as well as the disparate articulation between the hands. Mournful and filled with chromaticism, its dotted rhythms recall a funeral procession. This heaviness doesn't have a precedent in the "Spring" Sonata, which otherwise has much more in common with this sonata rather than with the op. 27/2. The number of movements in the "Pastoral" and the addition of a scherzo again invite a pairing with the "Spring." The finale of the Piano Sonata with its pedal point on D and its bagpipe drone strengthens the link with spring, nature, and general depictions of rural scenes. Beethoven loved the outdoors, and in this sonata he celebrates the unity between humanity and nature, the harmony between body, mind, and soul, effortlessly and with a masterly touch. The only detectable sadness and resignation lie in the Adagio of the op. 27/2 and the slow movement of the "Pastoral."

Beethoven's next three violin sonatas—the Nos. 6, 7, and 8—were again published as a set of three under the opus number 30 and come with an amusing anecdote attached, though I doubt at the time that Beethoven was amused. Tsar Alexander I, with a reputation for patricide and murderous marauding in the Caucasus, found himself in Vienna in 1802. Where Beethoven saw an opportunity for money to be made, moral

considerations were secondary; and so, he quickly composed the three opus 30 Sonatas, dedicating them to Alexander with the understanding that payment would be forthcoming. It wasn't; the Tsar departed, leaving Beethoven with nothing but an alleged diamond ring as thanks for his efforts. But as the saying goes, "Don't get mad, get even." Long story short, Alexander visited Vienna again in 1814, this time accompanied by his wife, the German-born Empress of Russia, Elizabeth Alexeievna. She was gaga for polonaises and, after much cajoling and 50 ducats, she prevailed upon Beethoven to write one for her. As noted in a previous review, in 1814, a ducat would have had a value equivalent to \$160 in today's dollars, which means that the money-is-no-object Empress paid Beethoven \$8,000 for a five-minute musical bauble, quite possibly the most expensive five minutes of music in history. But Beethoven wasn't done with his revenge. As Alexander and Elizabeth made ready to depart, he tactfully reminded the Empress that her husband had never made good on his debt for the three violin sonatas, and so, out of embarrassment, she paid Beethoven for the sonatas as well. Having waited 12 years to collect what he was owed, I'm surprised that Beethoven didn't demand interest on top of the original amount.

Popular lore has it that among Beethoven's symphonies the odd-numbered ones—3, 5, 7, and 9—are the great works, while the even-numbered ones—2, 4, 6, and 8—not so much. I would take issue with that, especially with regard to the "Pastoral" Symphony (No. 6), which is a highly innovative and timeless masterpiece. The odd-vs.-even paradigm seems to fit the violin sonatas somewhat better though, for in this op. 30 group, we have the No. 6, which doesn't seem to have a very distinctive or memorable profile and is the weakest of the lot, along with the No. 8, which, like the later symphony of the same number, is a rowdy, raucous, rib-tickling musical joke. Once again C Minor proves to be Beethoven's key of Sturm und Drang in the highly agitated and angst-ridden Seventh Violin Sonata, interestingly written at the same time as the equally storm-tossed D-Minor "Tempest" Piano Sonata.

While still relatively early (1802), the Violin Sonata No. 7 strikes me as having all the earmarks and fingerprints of what we identify as full-blown, middle-period Beethoven. What are your thoughts about the three op. 30 Sonatas? Would you agree or disagree with my assessments of their stature within the overall canon? What are their most salient and distinguishing features for you?

Andrew: The Seventh Sonata is definitely an epic and I see its sound world as more modern and Romantic than Sturm und Drang, which for me is an early Classical style. We must remember that although op. 30 dates from 1802, as early as 1798 there was a feeling among critics that Beethoven's music was beginning to strain classical balance in a more personal and Romantic manner. Sonata No. 7 is more like the brooding aesthetic of the artist Casper David Friedrich for me. I am reminded of the "Spring" Sonata with its four-movement format. In both, I see Beethoven paying extra attention to craft a work that will stand as a monument, and the four-movement format seems to fit well with his sense of a modern violin sonata. The challenges of performance are much like the "Kreutzer"; it's a huge work to perform.

Although many violinists see the Seventh and Ninth as the consummate recital pieces, I think that looking at the op. 30 Sonatas one at a time is to overlook how Beethoven first intended them, as a set. It's interesting, though maybe not unusual, that after the "Spring" Sonata he goes back to publishing three works in a single opus. In the op. 30, each work is certainly a beautiful work of art in its own right and can be easily programmed outside of the set. It's a mark of how far he had brought the form of violin sonata that each work in op. 30 is a classic.

But for me, the real art in op. 30 is the pacing between each sonata. The custom to listen to entire sets of works in a concert is now long gone but it was very common in concerts of the period. When you hear op. 30 presented in a single sitting, as Elina and I have done many times, their beauty really comes to light. The Mozartian charm of the Sixth Sonata and its stunning slow movement is the perfect amuse-bouche for the strength and power and sheer length of the Seventh Sonata. And after the main course, the delight of the Eighth Sonata, with its graceful waltz straddled by two champagne courses, is the perfect end to any evening. You are totally right that with op. 30, Beethoven transforms the violin sonata into an art form for the first time. Without op. 30, you have to wonder if the violin sonatas of Schumann or even Grieg would have been possible.

Elina: I personally love this set. Maybe with the distance of time, listening to it now, I perceive it in a very different way than when we were performing it actively with Andrew and during the recording. I sense so much freedom, unbridled imagination and pure joy! When we were playing it though, it was more difficult to experience it so viscerally. The music is challenging. It's filled with technical difficulties, rhythmic quirks, and interpretational quandaries. But overall how rewarding this music is! The originality of Beethoven's writing, although hinted at in his previous sonatas, really comes to fruition here. When you really think about it, neither of the previous sets is typical; the first three sonatas of op. 12 were written for pianoforte and violin rather than the other way around, but in no way does the writing for the violin suggest accompaniment. The second pseudo-set was characterized by bold personalities and moods—although both sonatas are written in quite conventional form—but the two pieces then complement each other perfectly by balancing one another out. They are almost like a couple that fights a lot, but can't live apart!

When we were playing the op. 30/1, I remember one of our key issues was setting the right tempo and pace of the first movement. In many ways it reminds me of the "Pastoral" piano sonata, in both character and mood, unfolding slowly, despite the Allegro tempo marking. It was capturing that essence of static movement that was really hard to do, and speaks of a maturity that is much more internalized now, a less-is-more kind of aesthetic that will become typical of Beethoven in his late years. The second movement of the A-Major is one of the most beautiful of the entire set of 10. I often get lost in its timelessness, its effortless beauty. And the variation finale is just perfect, a form Beethoven had used before in op. 12/1 and will use again in the last two sonatas. In the sixth variation, the theme transforms gradually until unleashing fully in the allegro final variation, one so breathtaking in its undisguised and uncontainable joy.

The op. 30/2 can be viewed as one of Beethoven's typical C-Minor works, designed on a grand scale, virtuosic, difficult, and revolutionary. I detect a march in the first movement, not surprising given the political unrest in Europe at the time with Napoleon's armies leaving fear, destruction, and death in their wake. The whole movement is bold and defiant, a personification of Beethoven himself. Nowhere in the violin sonatas up until then had he demanded so much from the pianist, the final coda in octaves, *f*, *ff*, *sf* throughout, requiring a massive sound. The second movement, with its stately chordal theme soon gives way to arpeggios and filigrees, with a declamatory, free section towards the end. The whole movement requires much concentration, forethought, and planning to render it coherently and to hold it together. The scherzo lets loose with abandon, punctuated by accents and syncopations that are typically Beethoven, and the finale just sweeps you up in its frenzy. This sonata grabs you by the throat from the very start and doesn't let up until the final chords, whirling with a level of energy unprecedented in the violin sonatas until then.

The third sonata of the set departs from this anguished state with three movements full of wit, spinning figuration, lilting triple meters. The first movement of the G-Major seems to wind up in the first few measures with a unison passage in the violin and piano and then just keeps moving, on the created inertia seemingly, until the very end. The 6/8 meter gives it a dance-like quality picked up by the Tempo di minuetto second movement, which is quite long, so a minuet in tempo only, not so much in form. The trio section picks up speed a little and adds some humorous touches with the accented off-beats in the piano part, irreverently disrupting the violin's melody. The third movement has a folksy feel to it, with the pedal points on G and D underlying almost the entire movement, the figuration in the upper voice depicting a lively country dance, grace notes and trills alternating with *sf* and *subito* dynamics to add to the spontaneity and liveliness of this finale.

On the whole I find Beethoven to be working within familiar frameworks and using reliable devices to achieve predictable reactions in the listener, and these three sonatas seem to offer three different states of mind: the balanced Classical in the Sixth Sonata, the aggressive and militant in the Seventh, and the light-hearted country dance in the Eighth. Effectively falling into these states as one plays these three in a row is both the challenge, and the goal of this diverse set.

It was only a year or so after completing the op. 30 group that Beethoven would come to write his biggest, boldest, and most daring violin sonata of all, the "Kreutzer," (No. 9), so named because it was rededicated to Rodolphe Kreutzer, one of the leading violinists of the day, after Beethoven had a falling out with the work's original dedicatee and violinist who premiered the sonata, George Bridgetower. The year was 1803, the same year that saw completion of two other works in the genres of symphony and concerto—the "Eroica" Symphony and the C-Minor Piano Concerto (No. 3)—in which Beethoven was also experimenting and pushing the envelope, as he expanded the scale of his works and began to move away from strictly Classical forms into more fully Romantic territory.

It's interesting, too, that at this juncture Beethoven starts to become more circumspect about composing works in the same genre, unless he feels he has something new and different to say. Thus, the dates and opus numbers of works of the same genus, with a few notable exceptions, begin to grow farther and farther apart. After the Third Piano Concerto, op. 37, of 1803, for example, a work which is still formally in a Classical mold, he would not complete another piano concerto, the No. 4, op. 58, until 1807, revising it in 1809; and when he did, in both content and form, it was transformative, remaking the concerto in full-fledged Romantic vein.

The "Kreutzer" Sonata, like the Third Piano Concerto, marks a cutoff point in Beethoven's production of works of a given type. With the "Kreutzer," Beethoven had gone as far as he could with the violin sonata genre up to that point, and there would not be another violin sonata unless and until he had something new and different to contribute.

Clearly, the "Kreutzer" Sonata poses technical challenges no Classical-period violin sonata before it posed. In the second movement alone, in the second variation, Beethoven takes the violin up to the dizzying height of C7, three octaves above middle C, practically off the end of the fingerboard. Perhaps Locatelli in his *L'Arte del violin* made a point of taking the instrument up that high, but to the best of my knowledge, before the "Kreutzer," not even Paganini explored such stratospheric heights.

The "Kreutzer" is also incredibly explosive, violent music, with whiplash-like bow strokes and double-stopped pizzicatos calculated to rip the strings right off the violin, and the piano doesn't go unscathed either. On the intensity scale, it's a Category 5, right up there with works such as the "Appassionata" Sonata and the F-Minor, op. 95, String Quartet. Beethoven's original punning dedication, politically incorrect by today's standards, read, loosely translated: "A sonata of mixed colors, for the mulatto Bidgetower, big crazy person and mixed-up composer." Beethoven also acknowledged that the work was "written in a highly concertante style, almost in the manner of a concerto." In other words, the "Kreutzer" had transcended the boundaries of a sonata; it was now something else.

Because of its "concertante" nature, it seems to me that the hardest part of bringing off the "Kreutzer" successfully—beyond mastering it technically, of course—is achieving the right balance between the violin and piano parts, both of which require the players to knock the hell out of their instruments. I probably should have asked you this earlier, but what are the instruments you play in these performances?

Andrew: I play on a Cremonese violin dating from around 1790. It is labeled G. B. Cerutti and it tends to puzzle and fascinate most of the experts I have shown it to in London, Chicago, and New York. It has as a rather unique asymmetrical shape all of its own. One dealer exclaimed, "Whoever it was, he must have been drunk when he made this."

Elina: That's a great question, because it's good to keep in mind what these sonatas would have sounded like on the instruments of Beethoven's day. Even just over the course of his life the pianofortes that he composed, performed, and improvised on were constantly evolving, and while gradually coming closer to the modern piano, they were ultimately quite different from what we had on hand for the recording. As a respected composer and musician, Beethoven was often given pianos on loan or as gifts by the various instrument builders in Europe at the time, with his valuable suggestions on how the pianos could become better often put into practice. Most of his advice would cover his specific needs. He had a preference for the Viennese makers of German origin, Johann Andreas Streicher and Johann Andreas Stein, but their instruments were often not robust in sound enough for him, especially as his deafness progressed. Sébastien Érard built instruments that came with a heavier action, an expanded range, and in 1803 offered an *una corda* pedal allowing for sound effects that Beethoven had only been dreaming about until then. There was much more variety among the pianofortes back in those days, each maker creating instruments with distinct tonal qualities, even within a single instrument's ranges. Most of the pianofortes Beethoven used at the time were also outfitted with a fourth pedal which created quite a spectacular aural effect, one that cannot be recreated now on a modern instrument. In any case, Beethoven wrote music using everything the pianofortes could provide at any given stage of his creative process, utilizing every small innovation to the fullest. Obviously, the finale of the "Waldstein" or the first movement of the "Moonlight" Sonatas come to mind, where Beethoven wrote in damper pedal markings that today would sound grotesque if interpreted literally but were quite appropriate for the instruments at the time.

So, in many ways, the piano part of the "Kreutzer" is the epitome of that robustness Beethoven was seeking, and perhaps he needed to meet his match and foil, the virtuoso Bridgetower on the violin to not only conceive of this sonata but to pull it off as he does here. In every way the two instruments are equals, in both the technical demands as well as the sound they are required to produce. But balance is everything when you are playing with another instrument, or in a larger ensemble. The Steinway D in the Performance Hall at the Covington Center for the Arts at Radford University we used for the recording, the product of numerous tweaks and improvements over the past centuries, had the capacity to provide the gamut of nuances, from the monumental heft, through the roundness and warmth of sound, to the ethereal beauty for this behemoth of a work.

How would you describe this music? What is your interpretation, your read on the "Kreutzer" Sonata?

Andrew: I must say that my read of the "Kreutzer" Sonata has been very influenced by my exchanges with Gabriel Banat. His stunning book on the Chevalier Saint Georges really raises many questions, uncovering so much about an era that the French Revolution has shrouded, but leaving so many more questions in the air.

The sonata's genesis and conception owe so much to Beethoven's relationship with the "mulatto" violinist George Bridgetower that it seems almost impossible to separate the piece from its mythical first performance. A 45-minute violin sonata of such power and

emotional depth; where could Beethoven have thought up such a plan? Does the piece truly exist without Bridgetower? Certainly his memory engulfs the piece for me. What turns history on its head for me is that Bridgetower was not the only “mulatto” virtuoso setting trends in Europe. Saint Georges was at the forefront of the Parisian concert scene, leading the French musical establishment before the arrival of Viotti. Although different in age, can Saint Georges and Bridgetower really never have met in London or Paris? Is it possible that two such celebrated violinists of the era were not influenced by each other, even indirectly? If so, then Saint Georges’s concertante style may be more a part of this work than is credited.

In the end the “Kreutzer” Sonata stands as an anomaly within the sonata cycle, so unique in its own right, so shrouded in legend that it is only fair to judge it from a purely musical perspective. When I first heard the set of variations at the heart of the sonata, I cannot express how I felt. In my opinion, they are some of the finest variations in Beethoven’s entire output. I see them as the emotional center of the work, and I see the two outer movements as a huge counterfoil to its depth. Our recording of the variation movement for this release was performed in a single take. I think that helps with the pacing of the movement.

Elina: It is very hard for me to write or talk about music in a way that matches what I actually feel about it. No matter how elaborate or eloquent the words, the best way I commune with music is by actually playing it and laying out my “read” first hand, doing my best to convey it to the audience. I will start with what I know about this sonata, and add some thoughts of my own.

The “Kreutzer” stands out from the other violin sonatas, and interestingly enough it was partially conceived before he actually set out to write it. In a way, Beethoven composed it backwards, very much as he did his “Eroica” Symphony. At the time he was composing the “Kreutzer,” Beethoven had the finale for it already written. Originally, this final movement had been intended as the closing one for the Sixth Sonata, op. 30/1, but on closer inspection he found it too big for the scale of that earlier work. Putting it aside for later use, in essence he built the entire “Kreutzer” around it, composing the first and middle movements to be equally imposing and of comparable proportions.

Despite his falling out with Bridgetower, which caused the rededication of the sonata to Kreutzer, I think the former violinist was instrumental for the creation of this piece. It is unique as a violin sonata just based on its scale alone. Because of its size it allows for the development of an eclectic mix of styles, inspirations, forms, ideas, and keys. Beethoven throws it all in there: fantasia elements with the slow introduction to the first movement and extreme changes of tempo, from Adagio sostenuto to Presto; the introduction in A Major but the movement proper mostly in A Minor; a sonata intended for two instruments, but more of a double concerto really, where each instrument can rightfully consider itself the soloist; and a monumental coda that brings in the Adagio for a final time before unleashing in abject fury, ending firmly in A Minor. And this is just the first movement!

The middle movement, again in variation form (was he influenced by the Sixth Sonata and pointing back to it, indirectly?) has moments of such otherworldly beauty and is so extensive, it could easily be a stand-alone piece, its own self-contained gem. The first variation breaks up the solemnity of the theme with its trills, playful articulation, triplets, and off-beat accents, placing the piano in the spotlight; the second variation then features the violin in a lively head-long rush, ending in the high register. The *minore*, with its sinewy chords winding up and down, on several occasions landing on the Neapolitan sixth chord, counters the joviality of the previous two variations, adding a somber and serious feel. What follows with the last variation and coda is simply heavenly. My favorite of all the variations, it creates a sense of timelessness for me. And what a simple concept! An Alberti bass in the treble, over which Beethoven superimposes trills, turns, mordents, a number of different ornamentations, variations within the variations, first in the piano, then in the violin while the piano supports it with a simple harmonic chordal bass. The filigrees are so stylish, simple, and clean; they run through the entire variation, which despite being the last one, and in theory destined to be the most complicated, when stripped down to its essence remains merely delicate and tender. The coda following the last variation brings back the improvisatory quality of the first movement, with the violin and piano diverging off to the extreme ends of the melodic range: the violin climbing ever higher, the piano plumbing the depths of the keyboard. Again, I get the sense of space and distance, as if you can feel the entire universe embraced between these two extremes.

The finale is by comparison very earthy, concrete here. A jarring chord in the piano breaks us out of the reverie, and the violin picks up a skipping theme that Beethoven develops almost canon-like between the two instruments. This movement is a trip to play; once we get going it's very hard to stop. Only the 2/4 alternating with the 6/8 meter gives the movement some pause, but this is only temporary and for a few measures only. The *Adagio* towards the end helps to connect all the movements together in a thought that courses through the entire sonata, adding a free, contemplative moment; but the coda soon takes over, ending the sonata firmly in A Major with running arpeggios.

Beethoven could have very well said his farewell to the violin and piano sonata genre right there and then, on that high note, but I don't think that would have been quite like him. Since we have been drawing comparisons between his solo piano and violin sonatas throughout this interview, it seems pretty telling to me that he concluded his writing for the piano with the six bagatelles of op. 126, not the op. 111 or the equally colossal Diabelli Variations; the C-Minor Sonata, most notable for exploring variation form in a way that hadn't been done before, and maybe not since. The search for the ideal, which inspired and characterized Beethoven's entire existence, would have demanded a balance, a counterweight to the temperamental "Kreutzer." And I personally can't think of a better way to end the set than with the op. 96, in many ways close to the subtle and exquisite final trifles, as he called them, the piano Bagatelles. Playing up this dichotomy, this battle between eccentric and sublime, expansive and contained, earthy and ethereal, must have struck him as necessary. I can envision the aged and wizened deaf composer finally coming to terms with life's inevitable vicissitudes and heavy ironies, ones that he had survived so successfully, and well, through his music.

Finally, we come to the 10th and last of the violin sonatas, op. 96, a sonata I half suspect may never have been written had Beethoven been left to his own devices. After the “Kreutzer,” I think he had come to the end of the line as far as the form was concerned and probably felt he had nothing further to add to it. But this final sonata, composed in 1812, was occasioned by Beethoven’s piano student and patron, Archduke Rudolf, who looked forward to performing a new sonata with famed French violinist Pierre Rode on his visit to Vienna.

What one notices immediately in this sonata is the complete change in style. In fact, it has more than a little in common with its immediately adjacent opus number, the “Archduke” Trio, op. 97, of 1811. Both works seem to convey feelings of rapt solemnity and “ethereal serenity,” opening the window more than a crack on what is to come in the late piano sonatas and string quartets. These are works in transition, but it’s a transition that would come slowly, as Beethoven now entered into a lengthy period of greatly reduced activity, though far from complete hibernation, as some have suggested.

We know also that in part, at least, Beethoven custom-tailored the technical aspects and musical content of this last violin sonata to the French playing manner and preferences of Rode, who was not a flashy player. This, too, accounts for the sustained lyricism of the violin part. Obviously, this sonata is a very different animal from the “Kreutzer” Sonata, requiring an entirely different approach. Talk to me about that approach and how you modified your bowing, fingering, and vibrato to suit the character of this very different and very beautiful sonata.

Andrew: I was lucky enough to study with a wonderful Viennese violinist, Erich Gruenberg, whose playing of the sonatas was very influential on me. He recorded them with the pianist David Wilde and the recording is quite unique. It was Erich who first introduced me to the 10th Sonata, and I knew it before I knew many of the other sonatas. Erich’s playing has a magical color to it; he has a renowned recording the Quartet for the End of Time by Messiaen where the last movement is the most sublime I have heard it played. As I listen to myself play the 10th, I always try to channel his approach, a unique blend of tone color and phrasing. For this reason, the 10th Sonata is my favorite. Like the music itself, playing it brings back wonderful memories of things held dear.

Based on my experience of Erich’s playing, tone color and articulation were always the avenues through which I approached each of the sonatas as I learned and performed them. Having a bookend view of the sonatas was very useful to understanding the middle sonatas. In much the same way, I came to the “Kreutzer” Sonata much later and I am so glad I did, since I hope I approach it more musically.