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Ludwig van Beethoven, Cello and Piano Sonata No. 3 in A major, Op. 69

In 1808, German composer Ludwig van Beethoven completed both his fifth and sixth symphonies, which were met by enormous acclaim in his home city of Vienna. Despite his besetting deafness and social isolation, he had gained the respect of the Viennese nobility and the admiration of the public. It was out of this context that the Cello and Piano Sonata in A major was written.

Dedicated to his close friend and supporter Baron Ignaz von Gleichenstein – a German aristocrat and amateur cellist – the piece is abundantly joyful and uplifting. The first movement begins with the cello stating the first theme, which is somewhat reminiscent of the opening theme of Beethoven's "pastoral" sixth symphony. As if we are already going on a journey (perhaps to the countryside, which Beethoven adored), the cello line suggests a modulation to the dominant key of E major within the first six bars, and then the piano takes over and plays the theme again after a brief cadential flourish. Next, it is the cellists turn for a cadenza, and then Beethoven plunges us into a stormy transition in the key of A minor before bringing us round again to the delightful second theme in E major, which is passed between the cello and the piano. The development brings more storms and several "kaleidoscopes" of harmony before bringing us around again to the main theme, recapitulated by the cello and overlaid by ornamental triplets in the piano. After a restatement of the second theme material in the home key of A major, the movement ends with one last grand statement of the main theme by both instruments, and a brilliant coda.

The *Scherzo*, meaning "jest", is in the key of A minor, and has a main theme that begins one beat early to the strong downbeat of the triple meter. This creates an awkward and boorish character which is passed between the two instruments, and contrasted by a sweet and cheerful B section. These two contrasting sections alternate several times before the movement ends with a mischievous coda.

The third and final movement of the sonata begins with a gorgeous adagio introduction in E major. First the piano plays the theme and the cello accompanies with a lyrical counter-melody, then the roles switch, and after a very brief cadenza, the cello leads us into the spirited finale in A major. Here Beethoven demands the utmost virtuosity from both instrumentalists as he weaves through E major, A minor, D minor, C major, F major, and finally recapitulates both of the movement's themes in A major and brings them to a grand conclusion.

From humble roots in Bonn, Germany, where his alcoholic father had forced him to practice at the piano for hours on end and his kind mother had died when he was sixteen, Beethoven was – by the end of his life – considered by many to be the greatest composer of his day. In an age in which musicians were generally employed by the church or patrons of the nobility, Beethoven had achieved the status of a formidable artist who demanded respect by the sheer power of his music and his personality. Franz Schubert, who was a torchbearer at Beethoven's funeral, remarked, "Who can do anything after Beethoven?"

Antonín Dvorák, *Gypsy Songs*, Op. 55, No. 4, “Songs My Mother Taught Me”

“Songs My Mother Taught Me” was written by Czech composer Antonín Dvorák in 1880, at a time when he was receiving increasing international recognition. He had recently won the Austrian State Prize three times for his works, and had caught the attention of the established German composer Johannes Brahms. Perhaps it was this increasing fame and fortune that inspired Dvorák to reminisce about days gone by, and to write this song, which is based on a poem by Adolf Heyduk. The poem, translated from Czech by Natalia Macfarren, reads as follows:

Songs my mother taught me,
In the days long vanished;
Seldom from her eyelids
Were the teardrops banished.
Now I teach my children,
Each melodious measure.
Oft the tears are flowing,
Oft they flow from my memory’s treasure.

Dvorák’s setting of the poem pits a triple meter in the piano against a duple meter in the voice (or cello), creating tension between the swinging triplets of the accompaniment and the slower and more deliberate eighth notes of the melody. It is as if the vocal line is trying to slow the other down to dwell upon the past, but is itself eventually swept along, and joins in the triplet meter at the end of the song.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, *Six Romances*, Op. 6, No. 6, “None but the Lonely Heart”

Russian composer Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky wrote “None but the Lonely Heart” late in the year of 1869 as the last of six romances for voice and piano. He dedicated the song to the soprano Alina Aleksandrovna Khvostova, and based it on a poem by the German writer, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Here is an English translation as heard on the 1945 Frank Sinatra single “None but the Lonely Heart”:

None but the Lonely Heart
Can know my sadness
Alone and parted
Far from joy and gladness
Heaven’s boundless arch I see
Spread out above me
Oh, what a distance drear to one
Who loves me
None but the lonely heart
Can know my sadness
Alone and parted far
From joy and gladness
Alone and parted far
From joy and gladness

My senses fail
A burning fire
Devours me
None but the lonely heart
Can know my sadness

In early 1868, Tchaikovsky met the Belgian soprano Désirée Artôt while she was visiting Russia. The two began an affair, and although they were enamored with one another, and even became engaged, their relationship was difficult because of disapproving family and friends, as well as Artôt's touring career. In September 1869, Artôt married the Spanish baritone Mariano Padilla y Ramos, dealing a devastating blow to Tchaikovsky. Several months later, he wrote his Six Romances for voice and piano, and though we do not know for sure that the event inspired these songs, it was certainly fresh in his memory.

Franz Schubert, Sonata in A minor for Arpeggione and Piano, D. 821

In the year 1824, Austrian composer Franz Schubert was caught up in a popular trend involving a new instrument called the *arpeggione*. Invented in 1823, it is similar in size and shape to the cello, but its six strings are fretted and tuned like those of a guitar. Schubert had a friend named Vincenz Schuster who was already a proficient player of the new instrument, and it is likely that his *Arpeggione* sonata was composed for Schuster. Ironically, the instrument itself became obsolete and out-of-style within a decade, and the piece was not published until 1871 – forty-three years after Schubert's death. However, Schubert's sonata has since reached levels of fame far beyond its intended instrument. Today, it is considered standard repertoire for the cello and the viola, and has been arranged for many other instruments as well.

The first movement is written in standard sonata form, with a melancholy first theme in A minor, and a positively sparkling C major second theme. After a stormy development section and a recapitulation of the first theme, the second theme returns in the key of A major. In his second movement, Schubert gives us a taste of his tender and sentimental *Lieder*, or songs, for which he was known. After several "verses", the beautiful E major song is interrupted by foreboding suggestions of A minor, and a brief final cadenza leads directly into the third movement. The third and final movement is in rondo form, with a recurring light-hearted theme in the key of A major, and virtuosic episodes that suggest peasant or gypsy song and dance.

Schubert died in 1828 at the age of thirty-one, and although it is unfortunate that his *Arpeggione* Sonata was not published in his lifetime, it is not surprising. In fact, the majority of his works were not published until many years after his death, as he was not very well known to the public during his life, and performed his music mostly in private gatherings with his friends. His mother died when he was fifteen, and he never married. The subjects of love and sorrow are common themes in his vocal compositions, and he is quoted as having said, "No one to understand the other's sorrow, no one to understand the other's joy. We believe that we can reach one another, but in reality we only approach and pass each other by. What torment for those who realize this." Still, he seemed to find in music a channel to the divine, saying, "It sometimes seems to me as if I do not belong to this world at all. I deplore music that engenders in people not love but madness: which rouses them to scornful laughter instead of lifting their thoughts to God." And, "Anyone who loves music can never be quite unhappy."