

Beethoven Op.110 Sonata

- I **Moderato Cantabile**
- II **Allegro molto**
- III **Adagio non troppo; Fuga**

Society has always maintained a very confused relationship with Beethoven. Now that he is universally revered, almost as the epitome of 'serious classical music' it is often difficult to form a real and personal appreciation of his music. Beethoven himself aided this unfortunate process by composing piano sonatas which (while it was understood would be sold mainly to talented amateur pianists) contained fingering and passage-work of a technical complexity which discouraged and later barred this same class of musician from performing his music. From the very earliest sonatas he shows an uncompromising pursuit of his own expression, experimenting freely with form and piano technique, refining the Viennese phrasing and harmony of Mozart and Haydn (whom he greatly admired) into an ever more condensed and intense language. There is also an increasing pace through his sonatas, both rhythmically and dramatically, which is driven to the very limit in sonatas such as the *Waldstein*, *Appassionata*, *Hammerklavier* and *Les Adieux*.

By 1821 and the composing of Op.110 Beethoven is literally shaking the bars of the cage in terms of form and self-expression. Though much of this 'late' music sounds contemporary even to our 21st Century ears, the Op. 110 sonata is surprisingly moderate in content: one could take any bar in isolation and fail to notice anything particularly shocking. The depth of this work's expressive power lies in the weirdness in which Beethoven puts his ideas and his phrases together. Even in the opening '**Moderato Cantabile..**' there are strange haltings and meanderings, followed by improvisatory bursts of confidence; switchings from quartet-style themes to orchestral tuttis and crescendi; sudden myopic focusing on one detail which is there and then developed to the exclusion of all else. This suspension of belief is continued with a sharp contrast of mood as the II movement '**Allegro molto**' is a brutal scherzo in duple time; again in the III movement **Adagio non troppo** with an outpouring of grief in the form of Arias and Recitatives; finally in the restrained episodes of the **Fuga** which, together with a return to the Aria of the III movement, make up the Finale. This confusing of the listener or 'holding in the air' produces a magical intensity to this late music, as we wait in a bewildered state for a conclusion or even some sense of release; and yet, with an inspired touch, Beethoven succeeds through the sheer conviction of his writing in making 'all well' again. Even in the experiments and compacted form of this Op.110 sonata we are led unerringly through to the final coda and to experience in Beethoven's vision an after-effect of logic and sense unique to this period of his writing.

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