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Vol. II

**BEETHOVEN**  
Complete Piano Works

**Alfredo Perl**

# BEETHOVEN

## Complete Piano Works

Piano Sonata No. 12  
in A-Flat Major, Op. 26 (1801)

- I. *Andante con variazioni* 7:25
- II. *Scherzo. Allegro molto* 2:55
- III. *Marcia funebre sulla morte d'un eroe* 5:45
- IV. *Allegro* 3:01

Piano Sonata No. 13  
in E-Flat Major, Op. 27/1  
'Quasi una fantasia' (1801)

- I. *Andante – Allegro* 5:11
- II. *Allegro molto e vivace* 2:00
- III. *Adagio con espressione* 2:53
- IV. *Allegro vivace* 5:47

Piano Sonata No. 14  
in C-Sharp Minor, Op. 27/2  
'Moonlight' (1801)

- I. *Adagio sostenuto* 5:26
- II. *Allegretto* 2:10
- III. *Presto agitato* 7:51

Piano Sonata No. 15  
in D Major, Op. 28  
'Pastorale' (1801)

- I. *Allegro* 10:28
- II. *Andante* 7:13
- III. *Scherzo. Allegro vivace* 2:18
- IV. *Rondo. Allegro ma non troppo* 5:02

Piano Sonata No. 16  
in G Major, Op. 31/1 (1802)

- I. *Allegro vivace* 6:44
- II. *Adagio grazioso* 9:42
- III. *Rondo. Allegretto* 6:46

Piano Sonata No. 17  
in D Minor, Op. 31/2  
'The Tempest' (1802)

- I. *Largo – Allegro* 8:52
- II. *Adagio* 7:52
- III. *Allegretto* 6:58

Piano Sonata No. 18  
in E-Flat Major, Op. 31/3  
'The Hunt' (1802)

- I. *Allegro* 8:38
- II. *Scherzo. Allegretto vivace* 5:31
- III. *Menuetto. Moderato e grazioso* 4:17
- IV. *Presto con fuoco* 4:50

5 Variations on "Rule Britannia",  
WoO 79 (1803)

- Thema. Tempo moderato* 0:42
- Variations 1–5* 4:02

7 Bagatelles, Op. 33 (1802)

- No. 1 *Andante grazioso quasi allegretto* 4:20
- No. 2 *Scherzo. Allegro* 2:45
- No. 3 *Allegretto* 2:31
- No. 4 *Andante* 2:52
- No. 5 *Allegro ma non troppo* 3:02
- No. 6 *Allegretto quasi andante* 3:09
- No. 7 *Presto* 2:04

6 Variations on an  
Original Theme, Op. 34 (1802)

- Theme. Adagio* 1:33
- Variations 1–6* 11:26

15 Variations and a Fugue, Op. 35  
'Eroica Variations' (1802)

- Introduction. Allegretto vivace* 3:27
- Variations 1–15* 15:42
- Finale. Alla Fuga. Allegro con brio* 5:10

32 Variations on an  
Original Theme, WoO 80 (1806)

- Theme. Allegretto* 0:17
- Variations 1–32* 10:21

7 Variations on  
"God Save the King", WoO 78 (1803)

- Theme* 0:59
- Variations 1–7* 7:20

# BEETHOVEN

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Piano Sonata No. 21  
in C Major, Op. 53 'Waldstein' (1803)  
I. *Allegro con brio* 10:53  
II. *Introduzione. Adagio molto* 4:01  
III. *Rondo. Allegretto moderato – Prestissimo* 10:17

Piano Sonata No. 22  
in F Major, Op. 54 (1804)  
I. *In tempo d'un menuetto* 5:28  
II. *Allegretto* 6:24

Piano Sonata No. 23  
in F Minor, Op. 57  
'Appassionata' (1805)  
I. *Allegro assai* 10:10  
II. *Andante con moto* 5:36  
III. *Allegro ma non troppo – Presto* 8:26

Andante favori, WoO 57 (1803) 8:04

Prelude, WoO 55 (1803) 2:36

'Lustig und traurig', WoO 54 (1802) 1:56

6 Variations on an Original Theme, Op. 76 (1809)  
*Theme. Allegro risoluto* 0:35  
*Variations 1–6* 5:44

Fantasia in G Minor, Op. 77 (1809) 9:49

Piano Sonata No. 24 in F-Sharp Major, Op. 78 (1809)  
I. *Adagio cantabile – Allegro ma non troppo* 7:12  
II. *Allegro vivace* 3:01

Piano Sonata No. 25 in G Major, Op. 79 (1809)  
I. *Presto alla tedesca* 4:50  
II. *Andante* 2:21  
III. *Vivace* 1:58

Piano Sonata No. 26 in E-Flat Major, Op. 81a  
'Les Adieux' (1810)  
I. *Das Lebewohl. Adagio – Allegro* 7:01  
II. *Abwesenheit. Andante espressivo* 3:20  
III. *Das Wiedersehen. Vivacissimamente* 5:40

Polonaise in C Major, Op. 89 (1814) 6:13

Piano Sonata No. 27 in E Minor, Op. 90 (1814)  
I. *Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus mit  
Empfindung und Ausdruck* 5:24  
II. *Nicht zu geschwind und sehr singbar vorgetragen* 7:24

Bagatelle in A Minor, WoO 59 'Für Elise' (1810) 2:54

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## Alfredo Perl plays the complete piano works of Ludwig van Beethoven (Vol. II)

The second instalment of Alfredo Perl's complete recording of Beethoven's piano works spans the years 1801–1814. Already in early Beethoven literature (beginning with Wilhelm von Lenz), it became customary to speak of this as the composer's "middle" or "classical" creative period, preceded by a "first" phase from 1792–1801, beginning with Beethoven's move to Vienna, and followed by a "third" and final phase starting around 1815. (Although Beethoven was only 45 at that point, music historians – influenced by the last works of Mozart and Schubert – use the term "late style" irrespective of the composer's age, in order to denote a process of stylistic sublimation.) This tripartite division has proved both influential and problematic: it suggests an inexorable and logical progression of Beethoven from "revolutionary" to "classicist" to "romantic", yet obscures a compositional and aesthetic practice fundamentally defined by recourse to the past as well as foreshadowings of the future. This applies not only to Beethoven's working method – his intensive jotting of ideas in sketchbooks – but also to his shaping of musical temporality. Beethoven's piano music demonstrates with particular force the necessity of correcting and differentiating this stereotyped threefold model, since the composer-pianist identified with the works for his instrument in a special way. From the outset they became the setting for a complex experience of self and the world – works that deal with, on the one hand, the most intimate and personal experiences, and on the other, collective historical and political upheavals. Apart from the group of the last six string quartets (Opp. 127–133), there is no comparable spectrum of formal, technical, and stylistic experimentation in Beethoven's oeuvre as in his piano music. Yet it is no contradiction that within his piano writing the genres of the sonata and the variation predominate, for their very choice was bound up for Beethoven with the idea of a constant questioning of inherited traditions and conventions by means of the power of subjective imagination. The dual character of the piano – as both representative and monological instrument – was perfectly suited to this. The designation "quasi una fantasia" in the titles of the two sonatas Op. 27 expresses Beethoven's will to transgress boundaries, a will equally applicable to his variations. From Op. 34 onwards, Beethoven no longer adhered to the prevailing expectations of this predominantly brilliant and extroverted genre: he transferred the processual nature of the sonata onto the essentially static sequential principle of variation, thereby involving the listener in an entirely new way in the genesis of musical ideas. The tension arising from the interweaving of sonata and variation runs like a red thread through Beethoven's entire piano oeuvre, surfacing also in single pieces and collections of fragmentary ideas such as the *Seven Bagatelles* Op. 33 of 1802. Even in the *Fantasia* Op. 77 – said by Czerny to be based on one of Beethoven's improvisations and sharing material with the Fifth Piano Concerto Op. 73 – the dialectic between sonata and variation principles remains constantly perceptible.

In the first decade of the nineteenth century Beethoven achieved his public breakthrough: throughout Europe he was regarded as the leading composer of instrumental music – not merely of his generation, but of the age as a whole. Yet this success was overshadowed by the progressive deterioration of his hearing, which precipitated an existential crisis attested by the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, addressed by Beethoven to his brothers in 1802. The commission he placed the following year with the Parisian piano-building firm Érard for a new grand piano – an instrument he would own for the next twenty-two years, though numerous modifications testify to his waning satisfaction with it – marks his emergence from that crisis. Compared with the southern German instruments of Stein and Walter, the Érard possessed an extended range of five and a half octaves, the English striking action rather than the Viennese action, and instead of two knee levers no fewer than four foot pedals (alongside the damper and *una corda*, two devices inherited from the harpsichord that altered the timbre, a lute stop and a muffler). These improvements left their mark on Beethoven's musical writing as well as on the pianistic demands of his subsequent piano works.

Of the fourteen sonatas contained in this set, composed between 1801 and 1814, at least six belong to the core repertoire of every pianist. Their popularity is reflected in the sobriquets – mostly not of Beethoven's own invention – by which they are known: the "Moonlight" (Op. 27/2), "Pastorale" (Op. 28), "Tempest" (Op. 31/2), "Hunt" (Op. 31/3), "Waldstein" (Op. 53), "Appassionata" (Op. 57), and "Les Adieux" (Op. 81a). Among the variation sets, a comparable status is accorded to the "Eroica" Variations Op. 35 and the

C minor Variations WoO 80. Yet the most famous piece of all – and a tenacious earworm – has become the piano miniature “Für Elise”. For Beethoven it may have amounted to little more than a finger exercise, but it nonetheless demonstrates his ability to conjure an entire musical world out of the simplest motives and gestures.

If one attempts to characterise Beethoven’s sonata production of these years as a whole, what stands out is the decisiveness with which he pursued the individualisation of his means. Op. 26 and Op. 27, No. 2 no longer begin with a sonata-allegro movement, but with a set of variations and a kind of prelude, respectively. The lyrical opening of Op. 28 represents a brilliant veiling of the tonic, such that the ostinato bass note “D” can be heard both tonically (leading to D) and apparently dominantly (leading to G). With Op. 31 Beethoven employed for the last time the tried-and-tested model of a triptych grouped under a single opus number, comprising two sonatas in major and one in minor, but now reinterpreted in an unprecedented way: his motivic-thematic thinking is directed towards the illumination of given “situations” in the opening movements. In Op. 31, No. 1 this consists of the rhythmic incongruence between right and left hand; in Op. 31, No. 2 the confrontation of quasi-vocal recitative and purely instrumental movement; and in Op. 31, No. 3 a subtle harmonic dialogue of question and answer. With Op. 54 the title “sonata” was applied for the first time to a two-movement structure, thereby linking back to the variable conception of the genre cultivated by his teacher Haydn. Friedrich Rochlitz, in his 1806 review for the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, which he himself edited, criticised the work as being “full of whimsical caprices” and of “quite ineffective peculiarities and contrived difficulties” – yet this appears not to have troubled Beethoven in the least. In the F-sharp major Sonata Op. 78 (with its extravagantly unusual choice of key), the E minor Sonata Op. 90, and his last Sonata in C minor Op. 111, Beethoven continued the two-movement design, though each time under entirely different premises. In the minor/major polarity of Op. 90 he was already exploring the dramatic potential of the duality of mode, a principle that would become so important for Schubert. Op. 81a brought yet another innovation: the performance instructions are given in German, and each of the three movements bears a distinctive verbal subtitle open to programmatic interpretation. Taken together, these amount to a virtual dramatic narrative with a specific biographical background. *Les Adieux* is, alongside the Sonatas Opp. 106 and 111, one of the major works Beethoven dedicated to his student, friend and patron Archduke Rudolph of Austria – himself a highly gifted composer.

The American musicologist and pianist William Kinderman has argued that Beethoven’s engagement with Napoleon Bonaparte should be regarded as a central point of reference not only for the *Eroica Variations* Op. 35, but also for the Sonatas Opp. 53 and 57. Napoleon was the epoch-defining figure of the age, who began as a revolutionary and failed as an emperor in his attempt to subjugate the whole of Europe. In the *Eroica Variations*, in the eponymous Third Symphony, and in the ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus* (composed during Beethoven’s Bonn years), there emerges alongside Beethoven’s initial fervent identification with the “hero” Bonaparte a second dimension: the self-stylisation of Beethoven the artist as a mythological figure of Prometheus, who rebelled against the gods and bestowed upon humankind the civilising fire of science and art. The concluding fugue of the *Eroica Variations* (based on the *basso del tema* from the ballet) symbolises the power of inspired genius while at the same time paying homage to the Baroque era; in its fusion of unbridled energy with supreme technical mastery, this fugue may also be understood as a blueprint for the fugues of the *Hammerklavier Sonata* and the *Diabelli Variations*.

Kinderman therefore situates these two sonatas in close relation to Beethoven’s only opera, *Fidelio*, which he began working on at the same time (1804). In this light, the *Waldstein Sonata* can be described as a journey “rising from darkness to enlightenment and freedom.”<sup>1</sup> The opening of the Adagio introduction – which replaces the original Andante – with the lowest note of the keyboard, the great F, can be interpreted as a political metaphor for the ascent from the darkness of the dungeon to the ever-brighter heights of the ensuing C major Rondo, which at the time constituted Beethoven’s longest sonata movement to date. (The climax of the dazzling influx of light – the famously notorious octave glissandi at the movement’s conclusion – transcends the limitations of the grand piano action, and served as inspiration for Weber in the *Konzertstück* Op. 79, Liszt in the Second Piano Concerto, and Brahms in the *Paganini Variations* Op. 35.) In the *Appassionata*, whose key relations as minor subdominant or tonic reference both Op. 53 and Op. 54, Kinderman hears instead an echo of the *Marseillaise*. Its characteristic opening, the rising and falling major triad on the word “patrie” (fatherland), is taken by Beet-

hoven as the starting point for the sonata, but transposed into the deepest registers of the keyboard and darkened into minor. Even more strikingly, the lyrical theme of the first movement in A-flat major is rhythmically and intervallically modelled on the segment of the *Marseillaise* melody that evokes the “jour de gloire”, the day of revolutionary glory.

Immediately after the Sonata Op. 57, Beethoven composed the *32 Variations in C minor*, WoO 80, which remained his last published piano work until 1809. They continue to puzzle performers and listeners alike, given the intoxicating and breathless alternation between extremes of virtuosic display and touching simplicity. The theme was inspired by an aria from the opera *Das unterbrochene Opferfest* by the Munich composer Peter von Winter, which had also enjoyed popularity in Vienna during the 1790s; yet what Beethoven created from this model was entirely unforeseeable. The unforeseen as an aesthetic category was already present in 1803 in the *Variations on ‘Rule Britannia’* (a patriotic song by the English composer Thomas Arne, from a 1740 incidental music), where the simple, memorable theme is immediately followed by a first variation darkened chromatically. In the *Variations on ‘God Save the King’* from the same year, the direct succession of the strikingly contrasting Variations 4 and 5 anticipates the kind of anamorphic (distorted) transformations later found in the *Diabelli Variations*. Beethoven’s piano works of these years abound with examples of such playful subversion of audience expectations – whether in the enigmatic, deceptively naïve *Lustig und traurig Bagatelle* or in the Janus-faced, simultaneously parodic and poetic *Polonaise* Op. 89. The flashes of humour therein may have served Beethoven as a kind of therapeutic coping strategy; in the sense of Jean Paul, they also bridge the gap between the banality of earthly existence and the unattainable sphere of the divine and sublime. This could also be the guiding idea behind the Variations Op. 76 on a deliberately primitive, clamorous “Turkish March”, written as a response to the French occupation of Vienna in 1809. Throughout the work, the theme undergoes a process of increasing refinement, before the march unexpectedly reappears in its original form after the seeming conclusion, thereby putting into question all the compositional labour previously undertaken in what Jürgen Uhde terms “purposefully differentiated coarseness.”

Returning to the question of whether it is justified to speak of a “classical” middle period in Beethoven’s œuvre, the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Riemann Musiklexikon* (1922) offers the following definition: “Classical is a work of art that time’s destructive power cannot touch; since proof of this quality can only be provided by the course of time, there are no living classics, and all genuine classics were regarded in their own time as romantics, i.e., as spirits striving beyond the pattern and template.” Thus, it is not objectively verifiable characteristics of a work, but its endurance into the future and its in principle immunity to societal change that are decisive. Beethoven’s music has fulfilled this criterion for more than two centuries, and perhaps it was this very quality that Riemann – who devoted his life to the study of Beethoven and, among other works, produced a three-volume analysis of all the piano sonatas – had in mind. The final sentence, which alludes to the reception of Beethoven during his lifetime, bears this out. For E.T.A. Hoffmann, in his famous 1810 review of the Fifth Symphony, Beethoven was indeed the master “to whom, as an instrumental composer, no one could now challenge the foremost rank.” Yet Hoffmann also emphasised that his music “awakens the levers of awe, fear, terror, and pain, and that infinite longing which constitutes the essence of Romanticism. Beethoven is a purely romantic (and therefore truly musical) composer; and it may be for this reason that vocal music, which does not allow for indeterminate longing, [...] succeeds less well for him, while his instrumental music rarely appeals to the masses.” For Hoffmann, music became, at the moment it aimed at the “indeterminate longing” of the incomprehensible instrumental medium, a kind of language above language, elevating it beyond the concrete, representational arts of words and images. Even though the symphony represented the pinnacle of instrumental genres, Beethoven’s imaginative powers were expressed in the piano repertoire and on the medium of the piano with the greatest intensity and variety. The piano was the laboratory in which Beethoven continually tested his musical and poetic ideas, arriving at ever-new solutions whose individuality and originality, paradoxical yet convincing, have achieved a classical efficacy and permanence.

Wolfgang Rathert

Translation: audite

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Born in Santiago, Chile, in 1965, Alfredo Perl first studied with Carlos Botto in his hometown and later with Günter Ludwig in Cologne and Maria Curcio in London. Since his first performance at the age of nine, Perl has gone on to give numerous concerts all over the world, won major competitions and become one of the leading pianists of his generation.

Frequent performances in renowned concert halls such as Queen Elizabeth Hall and Barbican Centre London, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Munich Herkulessaal, Großer Musikvereinssaal and Konzerthaus Vienna, Tokyo Opera City, Teatro Colón Buenos Aires, Sydney Opera House, Konzerthaus and Philharmonie Berlin, Semperoper Dresden, Gewandhaus Leipzig, Alte Oper Frankfurt and the Tonhalle Düsseldorf bear witness to Perl's artistic format. He is also a welcome guest at renowned festivals such as the Bath International Music Festival, the Schwetzingen Festival, the Rheingau Musik Festival, the Beethovenfest Bonn, Kissinger Sommer and the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival.

A remarkably versatile artist, Alfredo Perl has played with many renowned orchestras, including the London Symphony and Royal Philharmonic Orchestras, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Tokyo Symphony Orchestra as well as Melbourne and Sydney Symphony Orchestras.

In 1997, Perl made his debut at the BBC Promenade Concerts at the Royal Albert Hall in London and also performed the complete Beethoven piano sonatas in London (Wigmore Hall), Santiago de Chile and Moscow. At the same time, his first recording of the 32 sonatas, alongside the *Diabelli Variations*, was released, which he has now re-recorded for this project. In addition to his highly acclaimed Beethoven recordings, Alfredo Perl's extensive discography includes piano works by Schubert, Schumann and Liszt, as well as the complete Ravel piano music. He recorded Chopin's 24 Préludes on DVD for BBC Television.

Alfredo Perl is piano professor at the Hochschule für Musik Detmold and was artistic director of the Detmold Chamber Orchestra until 2022, alongside whom he was awarded an Echo Klassik prize in 2015.

## ALFREDO PERL PIANO



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