

Ensemble for the Romantic Century

presents

Beethoven: Love Elegies

Wednesday and Thursday, 25 and 26 May 2011, 8:00 PM; pre-concert lecture at 7:00 PM
Leonard Nimoy Thalia at Peter Norton Symphony Space, 2537 Broadway at 95th St.

Written by *Eve Wolf*

Directed by *Donald T. Sanders*

Production and Costume Design by *Vanessa James*

Lighting Design by *Beverly Emmons*

Stage Management by *Louise Hollander*

Cyrus Moshrefi as Beethoven

Angela Calcaterra as Josephine von Deym, Marzellina, Leonora

Jonathan H. Schileman as Wegeler, Court Banker Braun

Jillian Stevens as Frau von Bernhard, Charlotte, Giullietta Guicciardi

James Manzello as Carl Czerny, Florestan

Eve Wolf, piano

Randall Scarlata, baritone

Harvey Sachs, lecturer (Wednesday)

James Melo, lecturer (Thursday)

Eve Wolf and **Max Barros**, Artistic Directors

James Melo, Musicologist in Residence

Donald T. Sanders, Director of Theatrical Production

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Cover: Some of the women in Beethoven's life

1. The wife of Count Moritz Fries (the Count was a dedicatee of several of Beethoven's works); **2.** Countess Brunsvik, dedicatee of the Piano Sonata in F sharp major, Op 78; **3.** Giulietta Guicciardi, dedicatee of the "Moonlight" Sonata; **4.** Countess Erbody (née Countess Nitzky); **5.** Baroness von Westerholt, his piano pupil in Bonn and his "Werther love"

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN
(1770-1827)

Fidelio: Overture (opening and closing)—recorded sound
Chicago Symphony, Sir George Solti conducting

Neue Liebe, neues Leben, op. 75, no. 2

Der Kuss, op. 128

Seufzer eines Ungeliebten und Gegenliebe, WoO 118, no. 1

Piano Sonata in C-sharp minor, op 27, no. 2 (“Moonlight”)
-- Adagio sostenuto
-- Allegretto
-- Presto agitato

INTERMISSION

Busslied, op. 48, no. 6

Fidelio (excerpt from Act II)—recorded sound
Introduction, *Gott, Welch’ Dunkel hier*”

Piano Sonata in F minor, op. 57 (“Appassionata”)
-- Allegro assai
-- Andante con moto
-- Allegro ma non troppo—Presto

Fidelio (excerpt)—recorded sound
“*Komm, Hoffnung, lass’ den letzten Stern*”
Hildegard Behrens, soprano

An die Hoffnung, op. 94

PROGRAM NOTES

Music is the mediator between the spiritual and the sensual life.
(Ludwig van Beethoven)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) dispenses any introduction. Together with Mozart, he is unquestionably one of the most mythologized composers in the history of Western music, and the perpetual popularity of his music has given rise to a plethora of aesthetic adjectives to describe it: transcendent, heroic, universal, sublime, telluric, demonic, powerful. The man who composed such music was very practical, self-assured, demanding, sometimes rude, often eccentric, unkempt, and eternally seeking the fulfillment of love through a meaningful and lifelong relationship. Beethoven's life was marked by a number of pointed dualities, all of which had a profound effect on his creative process. Foremost among them was his pretence to an aristocratic birth, a deception that he allowed to take root among his Viennese colleagues, patrons, and admirers for many years. When he arrived in Vienna, he led people to believe that the particle "van" in his name was as indicative of a noble birth as the German "von". This was far from true. In fact, the Dutch "van" is a completely non-hierarchical particle, indicating nothing more than geographical origin or family lineage, without any hint of aristocratic blood. Beethoven allowed the Viennese public to believe that the two particles were equivalent in their meaning, and the truth was revealed only in 1818, when Beethoven was forced to acknowledge that his nephew Carl (for whose custody he was fighting) was not of noble birth. The court then decided to inquire about Beethoven's own birth, and he had no choice but to reveal that he, too, was not of aristocratic lineage.

This deception that Beethoven perpetrated for so long is significant in many respects, including his relentless pursuit of women who were far above his social class. Beethoven's behavior in this regard is puzzling on many levels. There is no doubt, for instance, that he had a highly superior understanding of his own worth as an artist, something about which very few people would raise any reservations. Even among his earlier critics, there was a tacit acknowledgment of Beethoven's tremendous artistic prowess and originality, and very soon his most ardent detractors were forced to give way to the recognition that Beethoven's place in history was already secured. Because of this unshakable belief in his artistic superiority, Beethoven may have felt that his self-worth would be sufficient to erase social boundaries and open the doors for him to have access to the women he coveted. He was mistaken. For a young woman of a high social and aristocratic position at that time, it would be unthinkable that she would descend so far in the social ladder as to marry someone without any noble lineage as Beethoven was, no matter how great and admired an artist he was. Besides, even in the event of a young woman being brave enough to breach all the limits of social hierarchy, her family would certainly intervene with all available resources to prevent the marriage from taking place.

Under such circumstances, Beethoven's hopes of marrying high in the social scale were doomed to failure. On a more subtle level, there is also the question of how strongly he really desired to enter into a formal marriage of the kind that was the norm in Vienna in the early 19th century, which was, in many respects, a social and financial contract that carried a number of obligations with it. It is clear from Beethoven's letters and other personal writings that he would be profoundly disturbed in his creative process if he had to embrace the kind of life that a married man would have to have at that time. He valued his music too highly, treasured his creative process too much to allow anything (even the love of a devoted wife) to interfere with it. This may seem paradoxical in light of Beethoven's repeated attempts to secure a marriage, but we should not discard the possibility that a strong component of his motivation was the desire to achieve a higher social status by marrying a woman from the aristocracy. It is significant, for example, that the overwhelming majority of the dedications that Beethoven attached to his works in the first two decades of his life in Vienna were to titled aristocrats, while dedications to musicians are so few as to be irrelevant.

Beethoven's attitudes toward women could be very puzzling. The poet Franz Grillparzer (who delivered the funeral oration for Beethoven) recounts an incident that happened when Beethoven was spending time in Heiligenstadt, the city where he wrote that very moving document directed to his brothers, the "Heiligenstadt Testament". According to Grillparzer, Beethoven was struck by the beauty of a daughter of a decayed farmer called Flohberger. From that day, he made a point of passing the farm every day. He would stop at the gate to contemplate the buxom young woman hard at work, looking at her with the curious expression that he evinced when his feelings were aroused. The young woman (Fräulein Liese) eventually confronted him and scared him away for the moment, but next day he would return to look at her with the same determination. This incident highlights the inherent dichotomy and ambiguity in Beethoven's relationship to women: at the same time refined and almost coarse, idealistic and earthy, spiritual and sensual. These dualities would continue to shape Beethoven's emotional life until the end.

Many historians seem to think that, not long after Beethoven wrote the celebrated letter to the "Immortal Beloved" (which is in fact a conflation of three separate letters written in the morning and evening of June 6, and the morning of June 7, 1812) Beethoven finally gave up any attempts at marriage. Personal writings from the time seem to suggest that he began to put all his hopes in his music, seeing his creative process as the realization of all his affective aspirations. On many occasions he reminded himself to "live only in my art", since he concluded that he had been unlucky in the life of the senses. This dichotomy between an idealized companion and his inability to find such a companion is another of the dualities that can be detected throughout Beethoven's life. Other instances include his courting of aristocrats as potential patrons while at the same time harboring disdain for such social hierarchies; or the fact that, the more his

personal life became unruly, disordered, and eccentric, the more his compositional process became fastidious, meticulous, and obsessive in its details.

There is plenty of documentary and anecdotal evidence that Beethoven's love life was constantly swaying between two extremes: long-lived passions that dominated him completely for several years, and passionate flare-ups that grew cold almost as soon as he caught them. It is generally agreed that there were two or three women in his life who meant a great deal for him and with whom he was in love for quite a long time. It is significant that he treasured the letter he wrote to the "Immortal Beloved" until the day of his death, holding on to it as a kind of love talisman. To this day, no one is sure who the "Immortal Beloved" was, although recent articles by Maynard Solomon have proposed Antonie Brentano (1780-1869), the daughter of a renowned Austrian diplomat, as a likely candidate. This theory has been disputed, partly because a few other candidates come to light. Among the possible "Immortal Beloveds", the case has been made in favor of Therese von Brunswick (1775–1861), Josephine von Brunsvik (1779–1821), Countess Marie Erdödy (1779–1837), and the singer Amalie Sebald (1787-1846). It is very likely that we will never know the truth, unless some unambiguous document surfaces that will settle all the doubts once and for all.

THE PIANO SONATAS

Of all the genres cultivated by Beethoven, the piano sonata became his technical and aesthetic laboratory throughout his life. Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas are so central in his oeuvre, that it is possible to trace his entire stylistic development by studying them alone. Very often, when Beethoven found himself at the threshold of new technical and structural developments, he turned to the piano sonata as the ideal medium for embodying those new ideas, which he would eventually transfer to other genres. The musical achievement represented by the sheer range of keyboard techniques, colors, articulation, dynamics, textures, and formal procedures found in Beethoven's piano sonatas would be enough to enshrine him as one of the greatest Western composers. Not surprisingly, his 32 piano sonatas came to occupy a heralded position in the canonic repertoire of pianists all over the world. Already in the late 19th century there was a perception that these sonatas constituted a musical legacy of the greatest magnitude, prompting the great German conductor and pianist Hans von Bülow (1830-1894) to dub them the "New Testament of piano playing" (the "Old Testament" being Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*).

Beginning very early in the 19th century, there developed a tradition of ascribing extra-musical and poetic titles to some of Beethoven's sonatas, a practice that undoubtedly reflected the rich and highly nuanced aesthetic impact of these works. Invariably, these poetic titles were added later by critics, publishers, and poets, and therefore do not indicate Beethoven's original intentions.

Nevertheless, these titles have remained as veritable signatures of the works to which they were attached, so much so that there is a perpetual danger of believing that Beethoven was responsible for them. The “Moonlight” and the “Appassionata” sonatas are a case in point, since neither of the titles was given by Beethoven himself.

The *Piano Sonata in C sharp minor, op. 27, no. 2* is the second work in a set of two related sonatas that Beethoven published in 1802, adding the subtitle “*quasi una fantasia*” to the first sonata in the set. This designation could apply equally as well to the second sonata, known to posterity as the “Moonlight” sonata. By adding the designation “*quasi una fantasia*”, Beethoven wished to call attention to some unorthodox features shared by both works, which distance them from the traditional patterns of the classical sonata. In the case of the “Moonlight” sonata, it was the opening slow movement that appeared most original to Beethoven’s contemporaries, but even after more than two centuries it never fails to strike the listener with its unique character. Written in a style of profound introspection and lyrical contemplation, the movement is marked to be played pianissimo throughout (*sempre pp e senza sordino*) to which Beethoven added further directions: “*Si deve suonare tutto questo pezzo delicatissimamente e senza sordino*” (This entire piece must be played very delicately and with pedal). Beethoven’s pedaling indication clearly accommodates a high degree of flexibility in the use of the sustaining pedal in order to create the hazy and somewhat blurred atmosphere that he envisioned as part of the character of this movement. In Beethoven’s time, the rate of decay of the sound in the pianos available to him was much greater than in the modern pianos, and it is conceivable that the entire first movement could be played with the sustaining pedal held down throughout (a technique that Chopin reportedly suggested for his *Berceuse op. 57*). In the modern, more powerful pianos, the same effect can be achieved through a more judicious use of the pedal to allow the strings to fully vibrate by sympathetic vibration, an effect that was new at the time and which Beethoven obviously wants in this piece.

After this dreamy and intimate first movement, the minuet that follows (“*Allegretto*”) brings with it the elegance of a Viennese dance, inflected by Beethoven’s very careful use of accents and syncopation. Hearing this benign minuet and its lulling trio, it is impossible to fathom the violent storm that arrives in the last movement. Liszt, in a moment of superb insight, called this central movement “a flower between two abysses”. While the abyss unveiled in the first movement is the depth of one’s contemplative soul, the abyss of the last movement is a veritable portrayal of a mind in the throes of some frenzy process. The keyboard is called upon to release all its pent-up energy in the form of mounting arpeggios that crash with great violence at their climaxes. These are followed by scale passages that are equally violent, full of crashing accents and breathless syncopations. Ironically, this unleashed fury is cast in the most ordered and rationally constructed formal model of the classical period: sonata form. Thus, in the layout of its three movements, the “Moonlight” sonata

substantially revises the expected patterns of the classical sonata. It dispenses with the opening movement in sonata form, and replaces the traditionally light last movement (usually a rondo or theme and variations) with the true sonata form movement that would be expected as the first movement.

The “Moonlight” sonata received its name from a critical review by the poet Ludwig Rellstab (1799-1860) who was inspired by the beauty of a moonlit night on Lake Lucerne. The sonata was dedicated to the young Countess Giulietta Guicciardi, and the prominence of the note “G” (her initials) that opens the theme of the first movement has prompted some to seek in it a reference to Giulietta as one of the candidates for the role of “Immortal Beloved”. This is pure speculation, however, since we do not have enough documentation to decide the matter of the “Immortal Beloved” in one way or another.

The *Piano Sonata in F minor, op. 57*, known as the “Appassionata”, belongs to Beethoven’s middle period and has long been considered one of his towering achievements in the genre of the piano sonata. It was composed over a relatively long period of time, stretching from 1804 (preliminary sketches) to 1806, and was published in 1807 with a dedication to Count Franz von Brunsvik. As with the “Moonlight” sonata, the title “Appassionata” was not given by Beethoven, but by the firm of Kinsky-Halm, the publisher of a four-hand arrangement that appeared in 1838. The nickname may have been suggested by Beethoven’s later use of the term “Appassionato” as the heading of the slow movement of the *Hammerklavier Sonata, op. 106*, and in the first movement of his last piano sonata, *op. 111*. As with the “Moonlight” sonata, generations of pianists and music lovers who have been drawn to this powerful work cannot avoid the desire to seek musical clues that may justify this posthumous baptism. Sir Francis Tovey, in his analyses of Beethoven’s sonatas, describes the “Appassionata” with his characteristic feel for nuances of meaning:

This sonata is a great hymn of passion, of that passion which is born of the never-fulfilled longing for full and perfect bliss. Not blind fury, not the raging of sensual fevers, but the violent eruption of the afflicted soul, thirsting for happiness, is the master’s conception of passion. To Beethoven the difference between ideal happiness and what mundane life offers as a substitute to true happiness is so violent as to rouse his sensitive nature to almost brutal outbursts. But in all of Beethoven’s passionate outbursts there is a moral element, a conquest of self, an ethical victory. And this is true of the Sonata *op. 57*, this deeply personal avowal and one of the most moving documents of a great and fiery soul that humanity possesses. (from *A Companion to Beethoven’s Pianoforte Sonatas*, 1931).

The “Appassionata” opens with a brooding, mysterious motive whose rhythm is borrowed from the Scottish folk song *On the Banks of Allen Water*. In Beethoven’s treatment, what was originally a happy and rather pastoral rhythm is

transmuted into an unmistakable foreboding and impending doom. After two measures, however, this gloomy motive is tempered by an imploring gesture, and the dichotomy embodied in these few opening measures is developed into a structure of mighty proportions and dramatic power. Still in the first movement, one hears another ominous-sounding motive, a four-note figure that will become more famous as the head motive of the Fifth Symphony. The richness of dramatic and psychological allusions in the first movement of the “Appassionata”, as it unfolds through a bewildering succession of keys and motivic transformations, has proved to be an inexhaustible source of musical and hermeneutic commentary that shows no signs of abating. Lewis Lockwood, in his most recent biography of Beethoven offers a very searching interpretation of this movement:

One metaphor is that of a great journey in which the traveler knows what the ultimate goal must be but is soon derailed, then recovers and eventually proceeds to the final destination, but does so by means that do not allow the deviation to be forgotten, since resolving it has become the point of the journey. Another parallel exists with sexual arousal, postponement of fulfillment, and eventual fulfillment. Analogies with psychological models of childhood events lost to memory and later remembered through analysis in adulthood also come to mind. (*Beethoven: The Music and the Life*, 2003).

The ensuing second movement, a theme and variations of deceptive calm and composure, provides an welcome interlude before another storm is released in the last movement. Part of the calming effect of the slow movement derives from its choral-like texture and clearly punctuated gestures, all of which unfold within a time-scale that is immediately and concisely apprehensible. In this movement, Beethoven displays that mastery for concentrated economy that will become a hallmark of his late style, and which seems to transform purely musical gestures into intense psychological and philosophical statements. The uncontrollable nervous energy of the finale bursts onto the scene after a brief moment of heightened suspense. In an instant, through Beethoven’s relentless insistence on a harmonically ambiguous chord as a pivot for modulation, the quiet oasis established by the second movement vanishes forever. It has been noted by several commentators that the finale of the “Appassionata” is one of the very few instances in Beethoven’s sonata-form movements in which tragedy has the upper hand. Here, contrary to the balancing optimism of the second theme in the first movement, there is no solace. The musical momentum rushes toward its denouement with the finality of a catastrophe that cannot be averted.

In the two sonatas included in tonight’s program, Beethoven created two of his most consummate examples of an amalgam of musical structure, dramatic narrative, and psychological insight. These features are part of the reason for the enduring popularity of these works and their ability to draw us into some of the most personal musical journeys that we can experience.

THE SONGS AND *FIDELIO*

It has been remarked by several scholars that Beethoven was essentially a composer of instrumental music, a statement that is easy to confirm by comparing his towering achievements in this field with his far less influential forays into vocal music, *Fidelio* and the *Missa solemnis* notwithstanding. This observation carries no aesthetic or value judgment about the significance of Beethoven as a composer, but simply reflects matters of personal style and aesthetic outlook. It is fair to say that Beethoven himself realized where his best potential was, and he directed his creative energies more forcefully to those genres of instrumental music that are now canonical in the Western repertoire: the symphony, the string quartet, the piano sonata, and several forms of chamber and concertante works.

Beethoven's songs, with the exception of the justly celebrated song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte*, op. 98, are arguably the least known part of his oeuvre. And yet, there is enough evidence that Beethoven approached the composition of songs as a very rewarding and artistically fulfilling endeavor. The songs selected for tonight's program offer a varied panorama of Beethoven's views on love and sensuality (*Der Kuss*), the relationship between a human being and the Almighty (*Busslied*), the pain of unrequited love (*Seufzer eines Ungeliebten und Gegenliebe*), and the sustaining sweetness of hope (*And die Hoffnung*). Collectively, the songs cover a wide spectrum of emotions and display the elements of sensuality and spirituality that were so much intertwined in Beethoven's life. When listening to Beethoven's songs, one would do well to keep in mind the conflation of these sensual and spiritual elements, which is encapsulated in the quote at the head of these notes. In his songs, Beethoven showed a keen ear for text setting as a vehicle for psychological insight, and in this regard he significantly distanced himself from Haydn and Mozart. While the latter two were still immersed in the style of folk-song settings that embalmed songs as a genre suitable only for domestic and amateur music making, Beethoven's songs already adumbrate some of the more complex and subtle procedures of the Romantic lied, which will come to fruition in the works of Schubert. A glance at the poets that Beethoven chose to set in these songs suggests that he was well aware of contemporaneous developments in poetry, and in this regard he may be compared with Schubert, who was always attuned to the meaning of contemporary poetry.

Fidelio, Beethoven's only opera, engaged his creative energies with an intensity that is found in the creative process of only few of his other works. Altogether, there are 346 pages of sketches for the opera, and no less than 16 sketches just for Florestan's opening aria. All the textual and musical evidence confirms that Beethoven became fully—almost obsessively—absorbed in the composition of this work. Not only were the preparatory sketches voluminous, but Beethoven continued to work on the opera even after its premiere, making a number of

changes and revisions. The dramatic core of the opera is the portrayal of a devoted, sacrificing wife (Leonora) who takes desperate and risky measures to rescue her beloved husband (Florestan), wrongly imprisoned for political motives. In spite of Beethoven's heartfelt devotion to his only opera, the work was a failure upon its premiere at the Theater and der Wien on 20 November 1805. Part of the reason for the fiasco may have been the unfavorable political circumstances, with Vienna occupied by Napoleon's troops, an event that led the Emperor, his family, and the court to flee the city. However, not even Beethoven's most fervent admirers blamed the failure of the opera on external circumstances only. It was clear that the work had some inherent musical and dramatic flaws, which Beethoven sought to remedy in a number of revisions. In spite of all the problems that beset the opera from the beginning, it represents an important artistic and personal statement by Beethoven. In the opera, he embodied his most idealized view of marriage as the perfect union of two beings, one of whom represents Beethoven's conception of the ideal wife: humble but courageous, subservient but independent, devoted to her husband to the point of risking her own life, and altogether faithful beyond reproach. In fact, the title of the opera (*Fidelio*) is derived from Leonora's assumed name as she infiltrates the prison disguised as a man in order to rescue her wrongly imprisoned husband. In the context of tonight's program, the excerpts from *Fidelio* create a backdrop for the portrayal of Beethoven's own love life and the tragedy of his unfulfilled desire for a lifelong and faithful companion.

Love Elegies dramatizes many of the aspects of Beethoven's love life through a poignant, humorous, and emotionally intense script that merges with some of Beethoven's most personally expressive songs and piano works. In these pieces, as in so many of his other works, Beethoven lived a truer life than that afforded by the drab reality, and he embodied in them many of his beautiful elegies to love.

James Melo
Musicologist in Residence