



The Sixty-seventh Season of
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin
Concerts

National Gallery of Art
2,696th Concert

Till Fellner, *pianist*

December 7, 2008
Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm
West Building, West Garden Court

Admission free

Program

Sonatas by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Sonata no. 16 in G Major, op. 31, no. 1 (1801–1802)

Allegro vivace

Adagio grazioso

Rondo: Allegretto; presto

Sonata no. 17 in D Minor, op. 31, no. 2 (“Tempest”) (1801–1802)

Largo; allegro

Adagio

Allegretto

INTERMISSION

Sonata no. 18 in E-flat Major, op. 31, no. 3 (1801–1802)

Allegro

Scherzo: Allegretto vivace

Menuetto: Moderato e grazioso

Presto con fuoco

Sonata no. 28 in A Major, op. 101 (1816)

Etwas lebhaft, und mit der innigsten Empfindung

Lebhaft; marschmäßig

Langsam und sehnsuchtsvoll

Geschwind, doch nicht zu sehr und mit Entschlossenheit

This concert and the subsequent concerts in Till Fellner’s Beethoven sonata cycle have been made possible by a generous grant from the Billy Rose Foundation.

The Musician

Born in Vienna, Austria, Till Fellner began his piano studies with Helene Sedo-Stadler and went on to study with Alfred Brendel, Meira Farkas, Oleg Maisenberg, and Claus-Christian Schuster. In 1993 Fellner gained world-wide recognition by winning first prize at the prestigious Clara Haskil International Competition. Since then he has performed with many of the world's most famous orchestras and appeared in major concert halls and at important festivals in Europe, Japan, and the United States. For his National Gallery debut in February 2007, Fellner played sonatas by Beethoven and Schubert and the three-part inventions of Johann Sebastian Bach. That concert was named by critic Charles Downey as one of the season's ten best in Washington.

Fellner has worked with many leading conductors, including Claudio Abbado, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Christoph von Dohnányi, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Heinz Holliger, Marek Janowski, Sir Charles Mackerras, Sir Neville Marriner, Kent Nagano, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Leonard Slatkin, Claudius Traunfellner, Franz Welser-Möst, and Hans Zender. Fellner plays regularly in a trio with Lisa Batiashvili and Adrian Brendel and appears in Lieder recitals with Mark Padmore. Fellner has just completed a series of performances and recordings of all of the Beethoven piano concertos with Kent Nagano and the Montréal Symphony. The latest release among his numerous CD recordings is J. S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, Book 1, on the ECM Records label. With this concert, Till Fellner launches a project in which he will play all thirty-two Beethoven piano sonatas in Washington in a cycle that will span seven concerts. He will also play the complete cycle in London, New York, Paris, Tokyo, and Vienna. The cycle in Washington is sponsored jointly by the Embassy of Austria, the Embassy Series, and the National Gallery, and continues on Saturday, March 8, 2009, with a recital at the Austrian Embassy in which Fellner will play the sonatas of opus 2 and opus 57.

Till Fellner appears at the National Gallery by arrangement with Kuenstlermanagement Till Doench, of Vienna, Austria.

Program Notes

The custom of playing Beethoven's complete piano sonatas in a consecutive series of concerts began with the great German pianist Artur Schnabel, who played them on seven successive Sundays in 1927 in Berlin to mark the centenary of Beethoven's death. Since then, other eminent pianists have played Beethoven sonata cycles, although none in the concentrated time span in which Schnabel presented his cycle. Alfred Brendel, for example, used the 48-week span of the 1982–1983 concert season to present his seven-concert Beethoven cycle.

Each of the pianists who has taken on this enormous task has had a unique approach to the order in which the sonatas are presented. Schnabel alternated sonatas of varying periods and moods. Andras Schiff played the sonatas in chronological order in a cycle he presented between 2006 and 2008, desiring to show the logical development and evolution of Beethoven's creativity. Till Fellner plans to present sonatas that Beethoven published together (for example, op. 31, nos. 1, 2, and 3) in a single concert, insofar as possible.

Memorizing and performing these thirty-two sonatas is the pianistic equivalent of climbing Mount Everest or running a marathon race. They encompass the entire period of Beethoven's compositional career, and range from sunny youthful works to the intense anguish of his troubled later years. Using the periods of composition that are commonly applied by musicologists to Beethoven's works—early (before 1801), middle (1802–1816), and late (1816–1827)—one finds fifteen sonatas in the first period, twelve in the second, and five in the third.

The three sonatas of opus 31, composed in 1801 and 1802, are considered the first pieces of Beethoven's middle period. It was during this time that he began to move away from the classical form and to experiment with the mechanical and tonal improvements to the instrument that were being introduced by Conrad Graf (1782–1851), John Broadwood (1732–1812), and the other piano builders whose work Beethoven encountered. The sonatas of his middle period take liberties with the sonata form and present sonorities that serve the composer's imagination rather than fulfilling the expectations

of musical convention. The three sonatas of opus 31 make an effective triptych, since the first and third are relaxed in temperament and the second, in D minor, is darkly dramatic. Beethoven's most famous pupil, Carl Czerny (1791–1857), characterized the first movement of the *G Major Sonata*, op. 31, no. 1, as “full of energy, capricious, and wittily vivacious.” The second movement, *Adagio grazioso*, is replete with trills and coloratura passages and is reminiscent of similar keyboard works by one of Beethoven's teachers, Antonio Salieri (1750–1825). The third movement is a leisurely rondo, marked at its outset *allegretto*, which finishes with a fast-paced coda, marked *presto*.

The *Sonata in D Minor*, op. 31, no. 2, bears a nickname (“Tempest”) that comes from an account by another Beethoven pupil, Anton Schindler (1795–1864). When Schindler asked his teacher what thoughts lay behind this unusual sonata, Beethoven reportedly replied, “Read *The Tempest*.” The connection between the music and Shakespeare's play, if there really is one, is difficult to fathom, but the nickname remains with the work for posterity. The mysterious opening *Largo* yields to an urgent *Allegro* that is marked by frequent changes in tempo and dynamics. The second movement, *Adagio*, follows the sonata-allegro form, but Beethoven omits the development, returning quickly to the opening musical ideas as the movement ends. The final movement (*Allegretto*), also uses sonata-allegro form, but extends both the development and the coda beyond their expected length. Despite its lilting rhythm, it retains a somber character to the end, trailing off into silence as the sonata ends.

Ferdinand Ries (1784–1838), another pupil of Beethoven, also served as his secretary and copyist. In his memoirs, Ries recounts that Beethoven asked him to play the *Sonata in E-flat Major*, op. 31, no. 3, from a proof that had been returned to the composer by the Swiss publisher Nageli. As Ries finished the first movement (*Allegro*), Beethoven reportedly jumped from his chair and shouted, “Where the devil did you find that?” Apparently, someone on the publisher's staff had added four bars at the end of the movement, not satisfied with Beethoven's manuscript (or perhaps unable to decipher it). Needless to say, Beethoven insisted on a correction before the work could be published.

For the final sonata in this concert, Till Fellner turns to the profound works of Beethoven's late period for the *Sonata in A Major*, op. 101. It is dedicated to Baroness Dorothea von Ertmann (1781–1849), a capable amateur pianist who studied briefly with Beethoven and championed public performances of his sonatas. By the time she made his acquaintance in 1809, he was too deaf to perform in public, so the performances were undertaken by Ertmann and other pupils and former pupils who lived in Vienna. The *A Major Sonata* begins in a quiet, lyrical mood. The second movement (*Lebhaft; marschmäßig*) introduces a contrasting vitality, maintained by the persistent dotted rhythm. In the final movement, the composer turns again to the sonata-allegro form, which he transforms by the use of a grand fugue as the development.

Program notes by Sorab Modi

The Sixty-seventh Season of Concerts at the National Gallery of Art

December 2008–January 2009

All concerts in the West Building, West Garden Court*

DECEMBER

- 14 **New York Opera Society and Soloists from Norway**
Norwegian Christmas Festival Concert
- 21 **Alessandra Marc, soprano**
With the National Gallery Chamber Orchestra; Stephen Ackert and Dingwall Fleary, guest conductors; Danielle DeSwert and Lon Schreiber, pianists.
Music by Ernest Bloch and other composers. Presented in honor of *Oceans, Rivers, and Skies: Ansel Adams, Robert Adams, and Alfred Stieglitz*
- 28 **National Gallery Orchestra**
Manfred Knoop, guest conductor
New Year Concert

JANUARY

- 4 **National Gallery String Quartet with Menahem Pressler, pianist**
Music by Mozart and Schumann
- 11 **Ma'alot Wind Quintet**
Music by Barber, Ligeti, Mendelssohn, and Piazzolla.
Presented in conjunction with the *Mendelssohn on the Mall* anniversary celebration
Preceded at 6:00 pm by a preconcert talk by Christopher With on Mendelssohn's drawings (West Building Lecture Hall)
- 18 **National Gallery Orchestra**
Kenneth Slowik, guest conductor
Music by Mendelssohn and Schubert.
Presented in conjunction with *Mendelssohn on the Mall*
- 25 **Fine Arts Quartet**
String Quartets by Mendelssohn
Presented in conjunction with *Mendelssohn on the Mall*

* unless otherwise indicated

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

Please note that late entry or reentry of the West Building after 6:30 pm is not permitted.

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