Mandolin Music

BEETHOVEN HUMMEL

MARIA SCIVITTO mandolin
ROBERT VEYRON-LACROIX harpsichord & piano
MANDOLIN MUSIC
Beethoven - Hummel

Side One (25:09)

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

1. Sonata in G, WoO 44, No. 1 (2:14)
2. Andante in E flat, WoO 43, No. 2 (6:31)
3. Adagio in E flat, WoO 43, No. 2 (6:16)
4. Andante & Variations in D, WoO 44, No. 2 (9:55)

Side Two (17:38)

JOHANN NEPOMUK HUMMEL (1778-1837)

Sonata in C for Mandolin & Piano
1. Allegro con spirito (9:20)
2. Adagio in C minor (8:34)
3. Rondo (Allegretto piu tosto allegro) (4:17)

ROBERT VEYRON-LACROIX, harpsichord & piano

1. Allegro con spirito (9:20)
3. Rondo (Allegretto piu tosto allegro) (4:17)

MANDOLIN MUSIC

The mandolin, a member of the lute family which can be traced back to about 2000 B.C., has become the favored instrument of countless music-lovers who want to play an instrument that does not require great technical accomplishment, and who wish to learn it without much trouble and cost, and within a comparatively short time. Although the mandolin has been played by many people who do not even read music, there are also professional mandolin players who display their virtuosity with transcriptions of violin concertos. The mandolin, which as the instrument of peasants, laborers, and unskilled workers became an important social factor, has a venerable history. Several varieties were used in the 16th and 17th centuries, but the Neapolitan type, tuned like the violin (G-d-a-e’), emerged as the most important. The mandolin entered the orchestra of the opera, and the activities of virtuosos in the 18th century are documented by mandolin concertos by such men as Antonio Vivaldi and Johann Adolph Hasse.

Three successful opera composers of the late 18th century employed the mandolin as a prominent melodic instrument: Gluck in L’Amant jaloux (Paris, 1778), Paisiello in Il barbiere di Siviglia (St. Petersburg, 1782), and Salieri in Tarare (Paris, 1787). And Mozart, in Act II of Don Giovanni, wrote a part full of six-toe runs, broken chords, and arpeggios for the Don’s canzonetta; he knew that this would require a very proficient player, and he also knew that such a man would be at his disposal in Prague, where Don Giovanni was first produced (1787).

This was Johann Baptist Kucharz (1751-1829), organist, composer of organ concertos, operas, and ballets, and conductor of the Italian Opera in Prague. He belonged to the Prague Mozart circle and prepared vocal scores of the last five operas of Mozart, which were sold in hand-written copies. Kucharz’s hobby was playing the mandolin, which earned him a certain rénom, as well as students in high aristocratic circles.

Mandolin playing had become fashionable at the end of the 18th century, and sonatas for mandolin and violin, mandolin and cello, and for ensembles of bowed instruments and mandolin enjoyed a great vogue. Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, Beethoven’s counterpoint teacher and conductor at the venerable St. Stephen’s cathedral in Vienna, and the highly respected author of a textbook on composition (which was translated into French and English), did not consider it beneath his dignity to write a concerto for the mandola (a relative to the mandolin), and his most famous students, Beethoven and Hummel, also contributed to the mandolin literature. Four pieces by Beethoven have come down to us, and several others are known to be lost. The circumstances that prompted Beethoven to enter this field of composition are not clarified. One would assume that a young musician of 25 was out to establish himself as a pianist and composer in Vienna would not focus his attention on the mandolin.

In 1790, when Beethoven’s Op.1 (three trios for piano, violin, and cello), appeared, he made the acquaintance of the Bohemian violinist Wenzel Krumpholtz (1750-1817), who had settled down in Vienna and joined the opera orchestra. In spite of the difference in age, Beethoven and Krumpholtz became good friends. The latter was, like his fellow countryman Kucharz, a mandolin virtuoso. Ferdinand Ries, one of Beethoven’s piano students, tells us in his Biographische Notizen über L. van Beethoven that Beethoven had taken violin lessons from Krumpholtz, with whom he also conversed about his newest creations. The Bohemian violinist, one of the first to realize Beethoven’s greatness, enjoyed the confidence of the composer. In all probability, the close relationship between Beethoven and Krumpholtz may have led to the composition of two pieces for mandolin and harpsichord (the Sonatina in C minor and the Adagio in E flat, WoO 43, Nos. 1 & 2), and Krumpholtz undoubtedly gave Beethoven some technical advice in the creation of these works.

The combination of two plucked instruments is significant. Beethoven’s sonata is a work quite brilliant, and he also knew that his students would not be able to play it. His companion in the mandolin was Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837), later one of Beethoven’s piano students. Hummel wrote a part full of six-toe runs, broken chords, and arpeggios for the Don’s canzonetta; he knew that this would require a very proficient player, and also knew that such a man would be at his disposal in Prague, where Don Giovanni was first produced (1787).

This was Johann Baptist Kucharz (1751-1829), organist, composer of organ concertos, operas, and ballets, and conductor of the Italian Opera in Prague. He belonged to the Prague Mozart circle and prepared vocal scores of the last five operas of Mozart, which were sold in hand-written copies. Kucharz’s hobby was playing the mandolin, which earned him a certain rénom, as well as students in high aristocratic circles.

Mandolin playing had become fashionable at the end of the 18th century, and sonatas for mandolin and violin, mandolin and cello, and for ensembles of bowed instruments and mandolin enjoyed a great vogue. Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, Beethoven’s counterpoint teacher and conductor at the venerable St. Stephen’s cathedral in Vienna, and the highly respected author of a textbook on composition (which was translated into French and English), did not consider it beneath his dignity to write which, however, closes in a serious vein. The Sonatina was not published until 1912, the Variations as late as 1940. These pieces are not great music, but they are valuable miniatures that fit well, biographically and stylistically, into the period of Beethoven’s Opus 1, his first sonatas, the String Trio in E flat, the song Adelaide, and the Piano Concerto in B flat.

In a marked contrast to the four small-scale pieces of Beethoven, the Sonata for Mandolin and Piano by Johann Nepomuk Hummel (1778-1837) is a fully-fledged three-movement work. Hummel’s musical education has hardly a counterpart. As a boy he lived two years with the Mozart family in Vienna and was instructed by the master. In his early teens he successfully concertized in Germany, Denmark, Holland, and England. He worked briefly with Clementi in London and studied counterpoint with Johann Georg Albrechtsberger (1736-1809) at the same time and also tutored Beethoven. Hummel also received occasional counsel from Salieri and from Haydn — whose position as Kapellmeister to Prince Esterhazy at Eisenstadt he later held (1804-1811). The relations between Beethoven and Hummel were at times very friendly, and as court conductor in Weimar (1818-1837) in the days of Goethe, Hummel championed the cause of Beethoven. He had no official relations to the poet, since he assumed his duties after Goethe had given up the direction of the court theater, but Hummel played frequently for him.

Hummel’s once very popular compositions are unduly neglected today. Schubert valued them highly, and it is known that he wished to dedicate to Hummel his last three piano sonatas. Hummel was a genuine mandolin with the pianoforte. The designation “sonatina” is intriguing, as this short adagio movement, cast in ternary form with a short coda, bears hardly any relationship to Classical sonata form. Probably Beethoven’s first attempt to write music for mandolin, the Sonatina was considerably excelled by the Adagio in E flat, which is a sonata movement with exposition, development, and recapitulation. The possibility that Beethoven adapted himself of earlier melodic material for these pieces — the Sonatina in particular could well be a transcription of a song or similar composition — cannot be discounted. He never contemplated their publication. The Sonatina was first published in the article on the mandolin in the first edition of Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians (1874), and the Adagio in E flat appeared first in 1887 in the supplement to the complete edition of Beethoven’s works.

In 1796, Beethoven journeyed to Prague, where he was introduced to Countess Josephine Clary, a well-traveled singer and mandolin student of Kucharz, whom Beethoven probably met on this occasion. He generously favored the lady by writing for her the concert aria Ah! perdidi, revising the Adagio in E flat “pour la belle Josephine,” and composing another one-movement sonatina for mandolin and harpsichord in C major and a set of variations (WoO 44, Nos. 1 & 2). For the former, the designation rondino would be more appropriate, for the piece follows the formal design A-B-A-C-A.

In the Andante con variazioni in D major, both instruments share the spotlight. In the first variation, running triplets belong to the mandolin, in the second, to the harpsichord. The sixteenth-note figuration of the third variation is produced by both instruments. The harpsichord leads in the fourth and the mandolin in the sentimental, even passionate fifth (in the minor). A merry dance in polka rhythm appears in the concluding variation.

JOSEPH BRAUNSTEIN
Ludwig van Beethoven
(1770-1827)

Pieces for Mandolin & Harpsichord
1. Sonatina in C, WoO 44, No. 1 (2:14)
2. Sonatina in C minor, WoO 43, No. 1 (6:31)
3. Adagio in E flat, WoO 43, No. 2 (6:16)
4. Adagio & Variations in D, WoO 44, No. 2 (9:55)

MARIO SCIUTTINO, mandolin
ROBERT VEYRON-LACROIX, harpsichord
Johann Nepomuk Hummel
(1778-1837)
Sonata in C for Mandolin & Piano
1. Allegro con spirito (9:20)
2. Andante moderato (3:52)
3. Rondo (Allegretto più forte allegro) (4:37)

Maria Scivittaro, mandolin
Robert Veyron-Lacroix, piano