Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)  

Timing – 14:00  

Eleven Bagatelles, Op.119  
1. G minor. Allegretto  
2. C major. Andante con moto  
3. D major. A l'Allemande  
4. A major. Andante cantabile  
5. C minor. Risoluto  
6. G major. Andante — Allegretto  
7. C major. Allegro, ma non troppo  
8. C major. Moderato cantabile  
9. A minor. Vivace moderato  
10. A major. Allegramente  
11. B♭ major. Andante, ma non troppo  

The generic title “Bagatelle” (Kleinigkeiten in German) to imply a short, inconsequential, piece of music, first appeared in Paris around the end of the 17th century - François Couperin included one in his second book of harpsichord pieces in 1717. It was not until 1797 that the title came to be used in Germany, and just six years later, Beethoven first applied it to a set of seven short pieces written, he claimed, between 1782 and 1802. He used it again for a second set of 11 published in 1823, but written at various times, and without any real expectation that they would be published together, over the previous two decades.  

This was a time when the piano was emerging as the preferred instrument for amateur domestic music making, and Beethoven was keen to profit from it. Books of instruction pieces were in high demand, and his friend, the Viennese-based publisher, Friedrich Starke, was preparing one of his own, which appeared in 1821 under the title Wiener Piano-Forte Schule. He invited Beethoven to contribute, and Beethoven wrote five short miniatures for him.  

While he was busy with both his Ninth Symphony and the Missa Solemnis, Beethoven was approached by his Leipzig publisher, Carl Peters, to compose a set of piano miniatures. Unwilling to break off from his current project, he simply gathered together an assortment of piano miniatures which he had written over the past 20 or more years, added the five from Starke’s piano tutor and wrote just one (no.6) for the new publication. He sent them off in February 1823 and was met with a stiff letter of rejection from the publisher; “I have had them played by several people and not one of them will believe they are by you. I asked for Kleinigkeiten, but these are really too small , and in addition, most of them are so easy that they are unsuitable for more advanced players, and for budding pianists there are, from time to time, passages which are too difficult”.  

Unwilling to undertake any more effort into what he clearly considered musical trifles, Beethoven sent them off to various publishers in Bonn, Paris, St Petersburg and Vienna, all to no avail. However, even before sending them to Peters, he had sent them off to his former pupil, Ferdinand Ries, then living
in London, instructing him to dispose of them as best he could. His hope was that an English publisher would buy them as new works before news reached London that they had already been published in Germany. In the event, it was the London-based composer, pianist, piano-maker and publisher Muzio Clementi who issued them first, on 3rd June 1823, as “Trifles for the Piano-Forte, consisting of Eleven Pleasing Pieces Composed in Various Styles by L. Van Beethoven”. He paid 25 guineas for them which, to put it in context, was a little over half of what another English publisher offered Beethoven for his Ninth Symphony.

Clementi assigned them no opus number, but in an age (rather like our own) when copyright seems more honoured in the breach than the observance, they quickly reappeared in various editions across Europe. A Paris version, which appeared in December 1823, assigned them the opus number 112, as did a Viennese one which appeared a short time later. The attribution of Op.119 only came about when they were published by yet another Leipzig publisher, Breitkopf & Härtel, in 1855.
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Four Piano Pieces, Op.119

1. Intermezzo in B minor (Adagio)
2. Intermezzo in E minor (Andantino un poco agitato)
3. Intermezzo in C major (Grazioso e giocoso)
4. Rhapsody in E♭ major (Allegro risoluto)

Brahms chose to end his piano composing career with 20 short pieces published as four sets; Opp.116 and 117 in 1892 (Seven Fantasias and Three Intermezzi) and Opp.118 and 119 in 1893 (Six Pieces and Four Pieces respectively). It is clear from these pieces that Brahms was deliberately drawing his career as a composer for the piano to a close, for throughout them we find references to earlier works and especially, in the Op.119 set, to his very first published works for the instrument. Dominating these final Pieces is a piano genre which Brahms had made very much his own, the Intermezzo.

If the Intermezzo had originally been an inconsequential piece intended to fill in the gap between acts of an opera or movements of a larger work, by the time Brahms brought the genre to its culmination, he had transformed it into an expression of deep, yet intimate emotions. The Intermezzo in B minor is an intensely introspective work which, as Brahms pointed out in a letter to his long-term friend and confidante, Clara Schumann (pictured below), “teems with discords. It is exceptionally melancholy, and to say ‘to be played very slowly’ is not sufficient. Every bar and every note must be played as if ritardando were indicated, and one wished to draw the melancholy out of each one of them, and voluptuous joy and comfort out of the discords”. Clara responded, saying that she revelled in the discords, and describing the piece as “a grey pearl”, something which she suggested looked as if it “were veiled” but was “very precious”.

Initially the Intermezzo in E minor seems more lively, with its stuttering repeated notes, displaced left hand and right hand movement, and sense always of straining at the leash. But, in the words of Misha Donat, it “undergoes a sea-change in the middle…allowing it to assume the guise of a tender melody”. More than anything else, this melody is a gentle and reflective Waltz, an almost nostalgic return to a musical form Brahms had much favoured in his piano music of 30 years earlier; his 16 Waltzes Op.39 of 1865 had been one of his most enduring successes.

Taking its cue from the end of the previous piece, the Intermezzo in C opens in the major key and has something of a dancing character to it, the rhythm derived from the staccato repeated chords of the very opening. Almost playful in its character, this, Brahms’s final Intermezzo, seems to sweep away any lingering sense of melancholy, paving the way for the ebullient and almost forceful Rhapsody in E♭ which not only concludes the Op.119 set but represents Brahms’s final published utterance for the piano. Clara Schumann suggested that its use of five bars was “Hungarian” (possibly another recollection of his early career, - Brahms first rose to fame as a composer through his two sets of Hungarian Dances of 1858 and 1868). The implications of the key of E flat major, associated with the heroic since Beethoven’s Third Symphony, are not lost on Brahms, whose writing here has heroic proportions. Again to quote Donat, “the music appears to spiral out of control” as it
approaches its final unequivocal cadence in the key of E flat minor. We should note that this is the same key with which Brahms began his career as a composer of the piano with his *Scherzo* Op.4 of 1851.
Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)  

Piano Sonata No. 47 in B minor, Hob.XVI:32  
Allegro moderato  
Menuet  
Finale (Presto)

Of the 62 keyboard Sonatas Christa Ludwig identified in 1963 as being by Haydn, and numbered in assumed chronological sequence by her husband, the pre-eminent Haydn scholar H C Robbins Landon – for these recitals we adopt Robbins Landon’s numbering – only eight are in a minor key. Interestingly enough, these are scattered fairly evenly across Haydn’s keyboard sonata output, the earlies minor key Sonata being no. 19 in E minor, written in 1765, the last being no.53, also in E minor, dating from 1784. Attempts by some scholars to link Haydn’s relatively uncharacteristic move into minor tonality with the movement known as “Storm und Drang” is therefore questionable, since most accept that Haydn was compositionally attracted to Storm und Drang only between around 1768 and 1775. However the only Sonata in B minor Haydn composed – indeed, this was a key he seemed to avoid, casting just two of his string quartets (op.33 No.1 and Op.64, no.2) and none of his symphonies in it – was written during his Storm und Drang period, having been composed between 1774 and 1776.

For the uninitiated, Sturm und Drang (“storm and stress”) was a fashion in German culture during the 1760s and 1770s in which the expression of conflicting emotions was all the rage. Composers employed syncopated rhythms, dramatic pauses, wide melodic leaps and poignant harmonies as a means of doing this, but most particularly, they employed minor tonalities to create an aura of unease and tension. We might also point out that around this time the piano, with its ability to us dynamics and articulation as expressive tools, was emerging as the preferred keyboard instrument in the domestic environment. The concept of being able to express emotional turmoil and personal feelings through music played in an intimate environment was upon us. However, whether Haydn intended this Sonata to be played on the clavichord, the harpsichord or the piano we can only guess; convincing arguments are to be made for each of these instruments. Certainly the title page of the first (1776) edition of six sonatas, of which this is the last, describes them as being for cembalo, a word usually believed to imply a harpsichord, that word seems to have been used only by the publisher, reflecting more the market preference than the musical character.

The 1st movement seems to look back to the harpsichord music of the north German and French schools of the early 18th century, with its ornamented line, thin linear texture and regular rhythmic figurations which include numerous scale passages implying the layered echo effects of a two manual harpsichord rather than the dynamic gradations of the early pianos. The 2nd movement with its
gracefully flowing line accompanied by the most discrete and sparse of accompaniment gestures also seems to belong more to the world of the harpsichord than the piano, yet the central B minor trio section, begins to introduce a textural richness and breadth of expression more suited to the piano. On top of that the contrast between the graceful minuet and its hefty Trio is as dramatic an example of Storm und Drang as you find in any Haydn keyboard Sonata. The 3rd movement begins as if it is to be a fugue, and certainly enjoys the reiteration of a single note, but the movement ranges through such a field of textural and emotional conflicts that it seems almost to out-Beethoven Beethoven.

The 5½ octave grand piano by Longman and Broderip which Haydn played in London between 1794 and 1795 and which he liked so much he shipped back to Vienna with him.
Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Piano Sonata No.59 in E♭, HobXVI:49
Allegro
Adagio e cantabile
Finale – Tempo di Minuetto

Rather like the Beethoven Bagatelles with which Paul Lewis opened this recital, the three movements of Haydn’s E flat major Piano Sonata were not written at the same time, were not originally conceived to be a single work and were initially rejected by a Leipzig music publisher – Breitkopf & Härtel. More than that, they demonstrate the kind of unscrupulous business dealings which were rife amongst composers of that time.

In 1789 Breitkopfs had asked Haydn to compose six keyboard sonatas for them, but their advance advertising elicited so little interest, that they only took one (Sonata No.58) from Haydn. He had already composed two movements for the second of these Breitkopf Sonatas (the opening Allegro and a closing Minuet) and whether he had originally intended adding a third (Sonata No.58 comprises just two movements) we do not know. However, he presented these to Maria Anna Gerlischek (usually known as Nanette), who was housekeeper to Haydn’s employer, Prince Nicholas Esterhazy, and he dedicated the score to her.

However, all the evidence points to Haydn carrying on something of an illicit affair with the wife of the Prince’s personal physician. That woman was Maria Anna von Genzinger (pictured below), and she was herself a very capable pianist. In 1790 Haydn added a central movement to the work, and presented it to her with the following letter; “This sonata was destined for Your Grace a year ago, and only the Adagio is quite new, and I especially recommend this movement to your attention, for it contains many things which I shall analyse for Your Grace when the time comes; it is rather difficult but full of feeling. Mademoiselle Nanette must know nothing of the fact that this sonata was already half completed, for otherwise she might get the wrong impression of me, and this might be disadvantageous for me, since I must be very careful not to lose her favour”.

Despite its relatively innocuous opening, the 1st movement is full of drama and tension, the fluttering opening figure becoming a driver for some extravagant harmonic byways and at one time taking on a decidedly militaristic feel. Dramatic pauses and sparse texture also lend a feeling of anger which is rare in Haydn’s music. The 2nd movement – which Maria, herself a very capable pianist, suggested to Haydn was “somewhat difficult” - is clearly an expression of intimate affection with its delicately turned, graciously ornamented melodic phrases. A disturbed central passage in minor tonality gives a hint as to the depth of Haydn’s feelings. The 3rd movement releases all the tension which has underpinned the previous movements – it is a simple, direct and utterly charming
movement which exploits many of the features revolutionary on the pianos of Haydn’s time.