Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

7 Fantasies, Op.116
Capriccio (Presto energico)
Intermezzo (Andante)
Capriccio (Allegro passionato)
Intermezzo (Adagio)
Intermezzo (Andante con grazia et intimissimo sentimento)
Intermezzo (Andantino teneramente)
Capriccio (Allegro agitato)

Carte became significant in music only after the widespread dissemination of published music became the norm. Haydn, for example, never gave what we now refer to as his keyboard Sonatas that title until 1770, by which time he had already written around 30. And as Brahms explained to his publisher, his interest in writing short piano pieces to be published as collections made it difficult to come up with suitable titles; “I regret I cannot call these ‘Monologues’ or ‘Improvisations’, not with the best will in the world. All that seems to be left is to call them ‘piano pieces’. People will still be able to pick out their favourites”. As it was his publisher, Simrock, decided instead to call the seven pieces to which Brahms was referring as “Fantasias” when he published them in November 1892. They had been written at various times over the previous year or two.

None of the individual pieces is actually called a “Fantasia” - three of them are called Capriccio and the others Intermezzo – and as Ivor Keys wrote so colourfully in his 1989 survey of Brahms music, the composer “had evidently expended his imagination on the pieces, rather than their titles”. There is certainly plenty of imagination in the pieces, and Keys notes that all seven are connected by the use of a pattern of falling 3rds which combine to create the outline of a chord of the seventh. What also connects these seven pieces is the fact that they represent a final shift in Brahms’s compositional output into the realms of deeply personal statements that reveal as much about Brahms the man as they do about Brahms the musician.

The first Capriccio launches into an intense, often dark, and decidedly quirky sound-world in which syncopation and off-set melody/accompaniment figures feature prominently. The piece has been described as possessing “dark Goyaesque demonic power”, and is the most disturbed and agitated of the set.

The second, Intermezzo, inhabits an altogether more introspective world, with the melancholy of the opening interrupted by a delicately pattering idea in a higher register. The piece ends in a more calmly reflective mood.

The third, Capriccio, combines the monumental Brahms of his youthful piano works with nobility and drama, a chorale-like central section introducing an almost religious aspect between the nervous arpeggios of the outer section. (Brahms’s very final keyboard work was a set of 11 organ preludes on Lutheran chorales.)

The fourth, fifth and sixth, all called Intermezzo, have been likened to a giant three-section slow movement in a set of pieces which can be regarded as almost symphonic in overall construction. The first of these was originally called “Notturno”, and contains a reference to his song “Es träumt mir” of 1866. The second, which starts out in E minor is, despite its lengthy Italian direction, heavily imbued with
harmonic dissonances and complex rhythmic ideas. It only really finds some kind of resolution at the very end when it moves into Brahms’s self-proclaimed “key of love”, E major. This tonality continues into the deeply expressive, calmly moving chordal final Intermezzo, possibly the most popular piece from the Op.116 set.

The set concludes, as it began, with a Capriccio in D minor. No longer dark or demonic, as the opening one was, this is a reminder of Brahms’s virtuoso pianism in its whirling toccata-like figurations. It ends with a fortissimo flourish.

https://www.loc.gov/resource/molden.0932.0/?sp=1
Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Piano Sonata No.33 in C minor, Hob.XVI:20
Moderato
Andante con moto
Finale (Allegro)

In 1709 a Florence-based instrument maker, Bartolomeo Cristofori, invented a “gravicembalo col piano e forte”. Within 20 years he had modified it to such an extent that it contained all the essential elements of a modern-day piano with one exception; a metal frame strong enough to support both the pressure of the strings and the weight of the hammer action. That came along in 1770 with the work of a German organ builder, Johann Stein, who developed a piano action sufficiently light to enable the player to produce subtle dynamic shading and a wide expressive range. Stein exhibited his work in Vienna, where many other keyboard makers had been experimenting with methods to produce a suitably light and responsive touch to make the so-called “Forte-Piano” a viable musical instrument. And it was in Vienna that Haydn first played Stein’s new piano.

Haydn claimed to be “no wizard on any instrument”; adding, however, “I was not a bad keyboard player”. History has tended to take Haydn at his word, but all the evidence points to these statements as being modest understatements from a man who was most certainly an accomplished keyboard player. He had studied the harpsichord from the age of six, and as a choirboy in St Stephen’s Cathedral Vienna it was almost certain that he received instruction on the organ. His appointment as vice-Kapellmeister to the Esterházy family included contractual duties to serve as keyboard player, and the interest he showed in Stein’s new piano is the interest not of an outside observer but of someone with a profound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of keyboard instruments as seen from the player’s point of view. And we know that he performed many of his own keyboard concertos and sonatas himself.

Although at least 15 are known to have been lost, the 47 surviving keyboard Sonatas listed by Anthony van Hoboken in his comprehensive catalogue of Haydn’s works span the years 1760 to 1795 and effectively trace many of the key developments in piano design. His first sonatas were for either harpsichord or clavichord (Haydn did not use the word Sonata to describe these until 1770), and several were also intended for performance on the piano. But just seven were for piano alone. In these seven sonatas Haydn clearly relished the unique characteristics of the piano: the bigger sound created by both its large soundboard and the strings being hammered rather than plucked, and its ability to produce abrupt and extreme dynamic contrasts. Although not published until 1780 when it was given the dedication to the sisters Franziska and Marianna von Auenbrugger (two young sisters with a reputation in Viennese society as gifted pianists) the C minor Sonata actually dates from 1771, shortly after Haydn’s first encounter with Stein’s new piano. This was the first of Haydn’s sonatas to be
specifically composed for the piano. In some editions it is listed as Sonata 20, in others as no.36 and in the most recent (and reliable) Urtext edition it is described as Sonata No.33.

Haydn himself described this Sonata as his “longest and most difficult”. Unusually all three movements are in what is commonly referred to as Sonata Form, the 1st movement, with its somewhat fragmentary melody, its abrupt changes of speed and dynamic and its frequent switching between major and minor tonality is one of Haydn’s most forward-looking creations. Indeed, these features, as well as the plaintive use of parallel 3rds and 6ths in this movement may well have had a subconscious effect on Brahms, who made such devices very much the hallmarks of his piano style.

As if to balance this feeling of looking forward, the 2nd movement seems to hark back to the early years of the 18th century with its heavily ornamented melody, its linear texture and its continually moving bass line. Again, perhaps, it exerted a subconscious influence a century later on Brahms, with its frequent use of syncopation and what we might describe as staggered melody/accompaniment progressions.

The most astonishing feature of the highly animated 3rd movement occurs in the Recapitulation when the hands cross in a sudden explosion of violence – an effect never possible on either the harpsichord or the clavichord – before the work ends abruptly in an almost despairing mood.

https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/501788


https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1984_34/
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Seven Bagatelles, Op.33
Andante grazioso quasi Allegretto
Scherzo (Allegro)
Allegretto
Andante
Allegro ma non troppo
Allegretto quasi andante
Presto

Some of the first descriptive (as opposed to generic) titles for keyboard pieces came with the publication in 1717 of François Couperin’s L’Art de toucher le clavecin. It was in that publication that we first find the word Bagatelle used to describe the character of a piece of music as being a trifle and of no real musical or artistic consequence. It took 80 years for the title to be adopted by German composers (who were, by nature, rather more serious when it comes to music), by which time Beethoven had probably already written some of the seven which appeared in print as his Op.33 in 1803.

Generally it is thought that these seven short pieces, all happy in mood and all in a major key, were composed during the years 1801 and 1802. These are the years when Beethoven had recently settled in Vienna and was enjoying increasing success at both a social and professional level. In November 1801 he wrote of his love for a “dear charming girl” (Giulietta Guicciardi, then aged 17, whom he had recently taken on as a pupil and to whom he later dedicated the “Moonlight” Sonata), and while 1802 saw his hearing deteriorate to such an extent that he wrote the famous “Heiligenstadt Testament” as an expression of his inner turmoil, it was also the year in which publishers were beginning to clamour for his work and compete with each other in bidding for new ones. It was the call for a collection of small piano pieces from the Bureau des Arts et d’Industrie that prompted Beethoven to assemble these seven miniatures from a portfolio of small pieces already completed, and often written with no intention of publication.

Beethoven’s sense of humour was, in the words of Martin Cooper, “the kind that friends tolerate not because it is amusing but because they associate it with the good humour and happy moods of the man they love and adore”. That humour sometimes found an outlet in private jokes conveyed through music; he wrote a chorus in 1801 called Lob auf den Dicken (“Praise to the fat one”) which pokes fun at the portly violinist Ignaz Schuppanzigh, while another vocal work of 1820, Bester Magistrat, ihr friert (“Dear Magistrate, you are freezing”) facetiously addresses the Vienna magistrate with whom he sparred during some extended legal proceedings. As Cooper tells us, “these pieces are not works of art but spontaneous effusions of mood within a social context”. So it is with these seven Bagatelles, and while the object of their humour is not known, there is ample evidence to suggest that some of these, at least, were aimed affectionately at Viennese acquaintances.
I. Andante grazioso, quasi allegretto (E flat): This graceful and ornately decorated piece with its occasional technical figures, extended scale figures and staccatos may well have been a portrait of his pupil Giulietta.

II. Scherzo. Allegro (C): Sudden changes of dynamic and articulation as well as the abrupt move to the minor in the central section, the continually ascending scales of the Trio, and the final fading away into silence, give this a quirkily humorous character.

III. Allegretto (F): With its sense of telling a story, this superficially simple little piece catches us out with its alternation between F major and the distant D major.

IV. Andante (A): Another affectionate portrait of Giulietta? Marked “dolce” this presents a graceful theme with a subdued central section in which the heart feels as if it is beating in A minor (the first stirrings of love?).

V. Allegro ma non troppo (C): An athletic and playful romp full of fountain-like upward arpeggios and glittering descending triplets, which suddenly gets stuck as it approaches the end.

VI. Allegretto, quasi andante (D): Beethoven headed this with the phrase “Con una certa espressione parlante” (“Rather like a speaking voice”) along with the tempo indication, and the brightly focused theme seems the epitome of openness and directness of expression. A final coda over a repeated D provides a most tranquil ending.

VII. Presto (A flat): Quickly reiterated thirds form the basis of this vigorous rustic-style clog dance, which ends with an abruptness which seems almost rude.

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Piano Sonata No.62 in E flat, Hob.XVI:52
Allegro
Adagio
Finale (Presto)

By 1788 Haydn had spent over a quarter of a century in the service of the Esterházy family, living in relative isolation at the remote former hunting lodge in the hills and forests of western Hungary which served as the family’s residence. His reputation as a composer might have spread across Europe but, according to one press report of the day, he lived in “a miserable apartment in the barracks, in which are his bed and an old spinet” and received “a pittance which the most obscure fiddler in London would disdain to accept”. That year he received a visitor from London, one Gaetano Bartolozzi, a London-based art dealer, who informed Haydn that his music was both greatly admired and very popular in England. Hearing this, Haydn expressed a wish to visit England, but it was not until Prince Nikolaus Esterházy died in 1790 and his successor had immediately dismissed Haydn from his service, that Haydn was in a position to accept an invitation from Johann Peter Salomon. Haydn arrived in England for the first of two extended visits on 1st January 1791.

Acknowledging Bartolozzi’s role in attracting Haydn to London, Salomon had invited him to Haydn’s first London concert, and the two men quickly developed a warm friendship which saw Haydn act as witness to Bartolozzi’s wedding. This took place on 16th May 1795 at St. James’ Church, Piccadilly, during Haydn’s second visit to London, the bride being Therese Jansen, a piano pupil of Muzio Clementi. Writing in 1934, Oliver Strunck observed that although Clementi regarded Therese as one of his three best pupils (the others being John Field and J B Cramer), “she seems never to have appeared in public”. Strunck noted that “so far as musical biography is concerned, she is an unknown quantity”, and set about finding as much as he could about her. He learnt, for example, that Bartolozzi and Therese had met for the first time less than four months earlier at “a musical party at Colonel Hamilton's, and the proposed match proved immediately acceptable to all concerned”, and that under the patronage of “Earl Spencer and Lord Mulgrave, [she] began teaching that beautiful and graceful art. Several of the very highest families benefitted by her instructions, and she was eminently successful; so much so, indeed, that she and her brother, Mr. L. Jansen realized rather more than two thousand pounds per annum”. All the same, the musical world might well have forgotten all about Therese Jansen-Bartolozzi had it not been that Haydn wrote two of his last three Piano Sonatas for her. (It was believed until recently that all three were for her, but current research suggests that Sonata No.61 was written for a certain Maria Hester Park, a London-based engraver.)
The Sonata in E flat, no.62 in Christa Landon’s chronological catalogue, was composed in 1794, but not published for another four years. It seems likely that Haydn allowed Therese to profit from the Sonata he had written for her before offering it himself to a Viennese publisher, who published in 1798 carrying a dedication to Magdalena von Kurzbeck, a close companion of Haydn in his later years and a competent pianist in her own right. In 1799, the Sonata was published in London, possibly at Therese’s instigation, carrying the dedication to herself.

The 1st movement asserts itself with an imposing opening statement tempered by some lighter, delicate passagework. Much of the movement’s character is centred around the alternation of light, playful figures and bold, dramatic statements.

An exotic change of key, up a semitone to E major, adds spice to the 2nd movement, which opens with a stately, hymn-like theme. The change of key seems to have unsettled the music, which periodically slides away into even more remote harmonic areas before being dragged back to E major. Frequent repetitions of the dominant note (B) fail to anchor it firmly in E major, and as the various episodes take us into ever more chromatically-flavoured territory, so the music takes on a more playful character. It seems that Haydn has to keep reminding himself that this is supposed to be a serious middle movement, and not another piece of musical fun.

Haydn’s best joke is to reinforce the return of E flat major for the 3rd movement by beginning it with a series of quickly repeated Gs – a note not to be found anywhere in E major. The German conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler once commented that “the joys of life are captured in handfuls in Haydn’s music”, and that is certainly the case with this ebullient and vivacious finale. Contemporary testimonials to the nimble fingers and fluency of Therese’s playing seem to be borne out by this highly virtuoso writing.

http://www.cobbecollection.co.uk/collection/42-haydns-grand-piano-2/