Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)

Piano Sonata No.53 in E minor, Hob.XVI:34
Presto
Adagio
Vivace molto (innocentemente)

In keeping with our semester-long theme of Telling Stories, Paul Lewis opens this recital with a tale of mystery, theft and deception. When was this Sonata written, for whom was it written, how many Sonatas had Haydn written before or after it, for which instrument was it originally conceived, and can we be sure that Haydn actually wrote it in the first place?

We should say straight away that no serious authority has convincingly questioned Haydn’s authorship of the work. Between 1800 and 1806 Breitkopf & Härtel published a 12-volume Oeuvres Complettes de Joseph Haydn, prepared partly with the composer’s assistance which contained 34 keyboard sonatas, including the E minor we hear today. That has seemed sufficiently strong evidence to convince most that this is an authentic Haydn work. The association with Haydn
was reinforced over much of the next century when the E minor Sonata appeared in a frequently-reprinted collection of 20 Haydn Piano Sonatas – which seems to have been the basis of the work’s continued popularity with pianists today.

But already we are seeing the next mystery unfold. How many Sonatas did Haydn write, and where does this one come in the chronological sequence? In 1917 Karl Päsler set about editing as many Haydn keyboard sonatas as he could find. There were certainly more than the 34 included in the Breitkopf & Härtel edition, and by 1933 he had uncovered 52 of them and placed them in a chronological order which Anthony van Hoboken adapted when he drew up his authoritative catalogue in 1957. In that chronology, the E minor Sonata was listed as no.34. In the 1960s, Christa Landon, wife of the great Haydn scholar H C Robbins Landon, started a systematic survey of Haydn’s Sonatas, and while she revealed that several were almost certainly not by Haydn, she also uncovered firm evidence of several that had been lost. She came up with a chronological sequence of 62 Sonatas, in which the E minor was listed as no.53.

To understand why all this mystery has shrouded Haydn’s keyboard sonatas, we need to remember that throughout the 1760s and 1770s, when he began writing them, Haydn was a servant of the Esterházy family, living largely isolated from the outside world mostly (from 1766) in the great palace of Esterháza, set in a marshy depression among the remote hills of western Hungary. As Rosemary Hughes so poetically puts it, "Prince Nikolaus’s choice of the unhealthiest locality in the whole of his domain for the erection of his new residence was dictated largely by his passion for duck hunting, but also, perhaps, by the urge to impose his will and personality on the most intractable material. In winter, icy north winds swept across the surrounding marshes, which in the warmer months teemed with
insects...and subjected the local inhabitants – Haydn included – to recurring fevers”. In such isolated conditions, whatever Haydn wrote generally stayed within the walls of the palace, and manuscripts quickly succumbed to the damp rising inexorably from the marshy lands around. Some visitors, however, obviously copied out the music Haydn had written for them and took these copies away with them when they returned to their own homes.

The 1780 Artaria edition of six Haydn Keyboard Sonatas

It was through these unverified copies that Haydn’s reputation began to spread. With the sudden upsurge of interest in domestic keyboard playing by amateurs, fuelled by the rise of the piano, publishers started casting around for suitable music, and in 1779 the Viennese publisher Artaria made contact with Haydn and, with his agreement, published some of his keyboard sonatas in 1780. Other publishers were less scrupulous. In 1783 the London publisher Robert Birchall began issuing, without Haydn’s knowledge, a collection of volumes entitled “Sonatas for the Piano Forte or Harpsichord”. Mostly, these drew on illicitly obtained manuscripts taken from those who had visited Esterháza, bulked up by Sonatas by lesser composers who, for a fee, wrote under the name of Joseph Haydn. On 15th January 1784 Birchall advertised the fifth “sett” in the series, which comprised three probably genuine Haydn Sonatas, the third of which was the E minor Sonata Paul Lewis plays today.

On the basis that this was the first appearance in print of the work, scholars initially suggested it had been written around that time. Hoboken suggests it was composed “no earlier than 1780” and Landon “assumes it was composed in the
early 1780s”. Georg Feder, preparing an urtext edition of the Sonatas in 1972 put it earlier – at 1779 – while László Somfai, in his 1995 book *The Keyboard Sonatas of Joseph Haydn*, implies that Birchall had got hold of a manuscript dating back to 1773. But had the work been written during the 1770s, it would in all likelihood have been written for a specific (usually lady) performer and carried a dedication to her (as we see with the Artaria publication above). The fact that there is no such dedication on the copy Birchall published might imply a later date – after Artaria had started publishing Haydn’s music, he would have composed for publication rather than for a specific individual – except that it could well have been part of Birchall’s subterfuge to omit the dedication, thereby avoiding possible accusations of theft from its dedicatee (who would have been entitled to all income derived from the sale of the work).

The date of the Sonata’s composition also has implications for the instrument for which it was written. In 1770 a German organ builder by the name of Johann Stein exhibited his new pianofortes in Vienna, which would appear to be the first time Haydn ever got to know of the existence of the instrument. Consequently, the 30- or so keyboard sonatas Haydn had composed up to that date would have been conceived with the harpsichord, clavichord or organ in mind. In 1771 he seems to have been flirting with the potential of the new pianofortes, and by 1780 was writing specifically with that instrument in mind. Today, with the sound and range of these instruments so radically different and the playing techniques so totally in conflict with each other, keyboard virtuosi focus on just one instrument and have no real skill on the others. But in the latter half of the 18th century, the repertory for the instruments as well as their own unique technological development, was much more limited. As a result, composers were less concerned with the sound of their music and players less concerned with the intricacies of instrumental technique. When Haydn wrote his keyboard sonatas, the idea of generating specific sounds from specific instruments simply was not current; what mattered was a
presentation of coherent musical argument. In short, the story was in the music itself, not in the sound the music made.

Of course, we only have Birchall’s word for the fact that the work is by Haydn at all. Scholars, however, seem pretty convinced by the quality of the music that it is a Haydn original, and even for us listening to it, we can have little doubt that we are hearing a work by a supreme master of musical inventiveness, even if there are few definitive clues as to the instrument for which it was originally written. The opening of the 1st movement, with its upward arpeggios and clearly contrasted articulation, is typical harpsichord writing, while in the development section these arpeggios become thick sustained chords, much more typical of the piano. The fact that the rhythm of the opening figure continues virtually unbroken throughout the movement gives it a unity which analysts claim could only be the work of Haydn. Also in support of Haydn’s authorship is the wonderfully lyrical, richly decorative recitative-like right hand line of the 2nd movement, which retains thematic links with the first movement. The writing here might be said to be rather more pianistic, although to lavish great emotional depth on this (as some players do) is clearly to go against the very ethos not only of Haydn, but of the music of this age. Against that the 3rd movement with its simple (“innocent”) melody above a running bass figure, places us firmly back in the realms of true harpsichord music. Irrespective of its origins, this is one of the most enduring and popular of late 18th century keyboard Sonatas.
The story behind the first piece in today’s recital was the piece itself. Here, we have a piece which tells somebody else’s story; in fact, it tells three different stories. Beyond that, it tells the story of a composer whose thoughts were turning to his own death and to his enduring musical legacy.

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

3 Intermezzi, Op.117
No.1 – Andante moderato  
No.2 - Andante non troppo e con molto espressione  
No.3 – Andante con molto

The three Intermezzi Brahms published as his Op.117 in 1892 and which were given their first performances separately and in different cities (London, Vienna and Hamburg) the following year, were the last of 18 pieces Brahms wrote for piano solo called Intermezzo, a title he made almost his own over the course of the 14 years during which he wrote them. The title itself came about almost by accident when, submitting some pieces to his publisher in 1878, Brahms had been unable to think of a suitable title and asked for suggestions; Intermezzo being chosen since the pieces in question on that occasion did indeed serve as interludes between rather more substantial pieces. However, by the time he composed his final Intermezzi he had invested the genre with great emotional depth and even suggested to a friend that the three which constitute his Op.117 were “lullabies to my sorrow”; although he did not elaborate further on what the
causes of those sorrows were. It may be that Brahms was effectively bidding farewell to an instrument which had been his constant companion throughout his life (these were among his very last piano compositions), although all three also have a literary inspiration.

That literary inspiration is explicit, however, only with the first. At the head of the score Brahms included a quotation from a German translation by Johann Gottfried Herder of “Lady Anne Bothwell’s Lament”, an anonymous Scottish folk ballad;

“Sleep softly, my child. Oh gently sleep!
It grieves me so to see thee weep.”

The melodic line is warmly embraced by the surrounding texture (much in the nature of the small child shown in the picture above), that texture comprising chords of real pathos and profound sorrow. It is interesting to note that the central section is in the rare (for Brahms) key of E flat minor, a tonality described in 1806 by Christian Schubart, a German writer who pondered long over the specific “colours” and qualities of different tonalities, as possessing “a sense of anxiety felt
by the soul in its deepest distress, brooding despair and the blackest depression. If ghosts could speak, their speech would approximate this horrible key”.

It seems likely that the second, restless movement, which always seems to be running downwards like the cascading of tears, was also inspired by “Lady Anne Bothwell’s Lament”. The story goes that Bothwell’s lover (and cousin), Sir Alexander Erskine, had been killed in battle in 1640, and her father, the Bishop of Orkney, had dissuaded her from suicidal thoughts; although history seems to indicate that the ballad dates back to the 16th century. This Intermezzo is also cast in a remote key – B flat minor - which Schubart describes as “discontented with itself and with everything; preparation for suicide sounds in this key”.

Memorial to Victor Galbraith in Middletown, Ohio.

The third (C sharp minor, which according to Schubart suggests “penitential lamentation, intimate conversation with God, sighs of disappointed friendship and love”) presents a sombre march-like theme in stark octaves which could be seen as portraying the story of a soldier about to face the firing squad, as recounted in this poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow;

Under the walls of Monterey  
At daybreak the bugles began to play,  
Victor Galbraith!  
In the mist of the morning damp and grey,  
These were the words they seemed to say:  
"Come forth to thy death,  
Victor Galbraith!"
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

33 Variations on a Waltz by Diabelli, Op.120

Our next story starts in 1802 with a political decision which many suggest was driven by corruption and greed. That was the year in which Prince-Elector Maximilian IV Joseph of Bavaria embarked upon his “Secularization” policy. Having served as a colonel in the French army he was a keen supporter of the enlightened reforms which followed hot on the heels of the French Revolution. Needing money to support his reforms of the army and education in Bavaria, he seized the lands and finances of many of the religious establishments, and forced the closure of the state’s many monasteries and religious foundations. In 1803 the axe fell on the monastery at Raitenhaslach, and the monks and those training for the priesthood were thrown out to fend for themselves in the secular world. Among those expelled and forced to fall back on their own resources was a 22-year-old novitiate by the name of Anton Diabelli. He had been born in Salzburg and although from an early age he had been intended for the priesthood, he had received music tuition in Salzburg from Michael Haydn, brother of Joseph. Music, therefore, was his only marketable skill, and he moved to Vienna where he called on his musical training to take on pupils while doing some composing. He also found employment as a proof-reader with a Viennese music publisher, and became so fascinated by the whole world of music publishing that he took a keen interest in it and in 1818 formed a partnership with Pietro Cappi to create the music publishing firm of Cappi & Diabelli.
The firm established their reputation by feeding into that appetite for piano music to be played at home by amateurs which was such a feature of the story concerning the Haydn Sonata with which Paul Lewis began this recital. But while other publishers were issuing serious music, Cappi & Diabelli shrewdly saw a niche for themselves in producing simple arrangements for piano of popular pieces of the day, such as comic songs, dances and themes from popular operas. Diabelli did some of these arrangements as well as composing a few light trifles of his own. His real genius, as it turned out, was not in arranging or composing, but in marketing. And ever eager to find new avenues by which the firm could increase its profile and profit, in 1819 he hit on an ingenious idea which was, inadvertently, to produce one of the greatest single works in the entire piano repertory.
Following the withdrawal of the French after the Congress of Vienna in 1814-5, Vienna went through a rapid period of industrialization and expansion aimed at restoring the city to one of the great power-houses of Europe. Diabelli’s idea was to tap into this mood of patriotic fervour by getting all the major composers associated with the city to write a short variation on a "patriotic" waltz Diabelli himself had written especially for the purpose. It was to be issued in a series of publications called *Vaterländischer Künstlerverein*, part of the proceeds of which were to be given to the widows and orphans of Viennese soldiers killed during the Napoleonic Wars. In all 51 composers (and important figures with an interest in music) were invited to contribute a variation. These included Beethoven, Schubert, Czerny, Hummel, Kalkbrenner, Kreutzer and Moscheles as well as Franz Xaver Wolfgang Mozart, Archduke Rudolph of Austria, the Prince of Dietrichstein, Baron von Lannoy and Baron von Mosel, At Czerny’s request, his pupil, the eight-year-old Franz Liszt, also contributed a variation (which was to be his first ever published work). The resulting composite work was published 1824, but missing from it was the variation solicited from Beethoven. A suggested reason for this omission is given by Alfred Kalischer in his collected edition of Beethoven’s letters made in 1926. The receipt of Diabelli’s request along with a copy of the Waltz, “suddenly awoke in him a remembrance of the collective vocal settings of the text “In questa tomba oscura” of the year 1808. At the same time the master recalled all the bitterness which was caused thereby. He now declared that he had resolved never again to take part in a collective work. In the present case the triviality of the theme invited ridicule. Hence he seemed to have declined the invitation”.

![Diabelli's “Cobbler’s Patch” of a theme.](image-url)
However, a short time later Beethoven wrote to Diabelli suggesting that he might write his own set of variations on the theme, and suggested a fee of “at most 40 ducats” to which Diabelli readily responded by doubling the proposed fee to 80 and requesting no more than “seven or eight variations”. Although Beethoven dismissed Diabelli’s theme as a “cobbler’s patch”, he set to work with a vengeance in May 1823, completing first 10, then 20 and eventually 25 variations. “Still”, as Kalischer writes, “the end was not in sight. Diabelli began to get very anxious about the inordinate length of the work, and wanted it to be cut short, but the composer, who had on him a fit of composition, wanted to show all that he could make out of a fairly commonplace theme”.

The result was, of course, one of the most extraordinary works in the instrument’s repertory, and many would argue that it is not just Beethoven’s, but the greatest single composition for the piano; Hans von Bülow described it as a “microcosm of Beethoven’s art” while Diabelli himself, who published the work in June 1823, suggested that it was “a great and important masterpiece worthy to be ranked with the imperishable creations of the Classics”, and to be placed “beside Johann Sebastian Bach’s famous masterpiece in the same form”, the “Goldberg” Variations. (For once, a music publisher’s marketing blurb which almost underplays the music’s quality.) Its place in the pantheon of great art has also spawned stories of its own; the author Irene Dische cast her novel Sad Strains of a Gay Waltz in the form of a theme and 33 transformations, and in 2007 Moisés Kaufman’s play 33 Variations starring Jane Fonda as a musicologist suffering from a degenerative disease fighting against time to discover the true background to
Beethoven’s work opened in New York. As the English actor Jon Suchet puts it “The Diabelli Variations cover the whole range of human emotions. There is humour: in Variation 22 Beethoven quotes from the opening aria of Mozart’s Don Giovanni in which Leporello complains of having to work all night and all day. Variation 20 seems to take us down to the ghostly catacombs. The intricate double fugue of Variation 32 is thrilling; while the final Variation, a Minuet, is ethereally beautiful”.

Reams have been written on the psychology behind Beethoven’s ordering of the variations, and while deep study reveals many fascinating things, perhaps it is best to keep in mind Paul Griffiths’ unusually concise suggestion that after the statement of Diabelli’s “silly music” Beethoven’s variations “regularly combine play and poetry”.

Beethoven painted by Ferdinand Georg Waldmüllerin 1823