

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)
Sonata No. 8 in C minor, Op. 13,
“Pathétique” (1799)

“He was short, about 5 feet, 4 inches, thickset and broad, with a massive head, a wildly luxuriant crop of hair, protruding teeth, a small rounded nose, and a habit of spitting whenever the notion took him. He was clumsy, and anything he touched was liable to be upset or broken. Badly coordinated, he could never learn to dance, and more often than not managed to cut himself while shaving. He was sullen and suspicious, touchy as a misanthropic cobra, believed that everybody was out to cheat him, had none of the social graces, was forgetful, and was prone to insensate rages.” Thus the late *New York Times* critic Harold Schonberg, in his book about *The Lives of the Great Composers*, described Ludwig van Beethoven, the burly peasant with the unquenchable fire of genius who descended, aged 22, upon Vienna in 1792. Beethoven had been charged by his benefactor in his hometown of Bonn, Count Ferdinand von Waldstein, to go to the Austrian capital and “receive the spirit of Mozart from the hands of Haydn.” He did study for a short time with Haydn, then universally regarded as the greatest living composer, but young Ludwig proved to be a recalcitrant student, and the sessions soon ended, though the two maintained a respectful, if cool, relationship until Haydn’s death in 1809.

Among the earliest evidences of Beethoven’s uniquely powerful and daring genius is the Sonata in C minor, Op. 13, which the composer himself nicknamed “Pathétique” upon its publication in Vienna by Hoffmeister late in 1799. (The only other piano sonata to which he gave a sobriquet was the “Lebewohl” Sonata, Op. 81a, of 1810.) Beethoven’s music confirms that he used the word to connote something grander, craggier, more majestic than the submissive, melancholy meaning of the English “pathetic.” Indeed, the opening movement of this Sonata, with its symphonic breadth of expression, its hammer-blow ferocity and its shock-cut contrasts, is musical Romanticism already made manifest, a Herculean blow to the fading elegance of the waning century. That Beethoven could serve up such bold iconoclasm

to the Viennese nobility speaks not only of his artistic courage and self-confidence, but also of the sophistication of his listeners.

The primary emotion of the opening movement of the “Pathétique,” like Athena springing fully armed from the head of Zeus, is inherent in its first sound—a thunderbolt of C minor, whose tragedy is enhanced by the somber dotted-rhythm chords, the stark contrasts and the dramatic gestures that follow. The exposition is driven by a barely contained turbulence that rockets its main theme upward through the piano’s register and forces its second theme out of the expected major key into a troubled minor mode. The scalar closing theme—whose downward direction balances the main theme’s rising rocket—carries the expressive intensity to the end of the exposition. The music pauses on an unsettled harmony which leads (after the exposition’s repeat) to the amazing audacity of bridging to the development section by the recall of the powerful music of the introduction. The development section proper, compact and dramatic, refers mostly to a scrap of transitional material rather than to either of the two principal motives, and drives with irresistible force to the recapitulation and the return of the earlier themes. The introduction is once again invoked as the gateway to the coda. The movement ends with a final furious statement of the main theme.

The central *Adagio* (A-flat major) is from another expressive world. In form, it is a rondo (A–B–A–C–A), and “in poetic content,” according to Marion M. Scott in her study of Beethoven, “it is tragedy as the young feel it, with the glamour, urgency, even exaltation, of a *Romeo and Juliet*. And few southern love-scenes could be more softly glowing than Beethoven’s slow movement, with its almost unbelievable melodic loveliness and velvety tone.” The rondo-form finale returns to the first movement’s quick pace and C minor key, but it is more genteelly melancholy than passionately turbulent.

LEWIS SPRATLAN (b. 1940)
Wonderer (2005)

American composer Lewis Spratlan, born in Miami on September 5, 1940, studied at Yale

University (BA, 1962; MM, 1965) under Mel Powell, Gunther Schuller and Yehudi Wyner, and attended seminars with George Rochberg and Roger Sessions at the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood (1966). Spratlan taught at Bay Path Junior College (1965–1967) and Pennsylvania State University (1967–1970) before assuming his present position on the faculty of Amherst College in 1970. He has conducted performing ensembles specializing in new music at Amherst, Tanglewood and the Yale Summer School of Music and Art, and has also been active as an oboist. Spratlan’s creative output includes the Pulitzer Prize-winning opera *Life Is a Dream* (after Calderón), chamber and instrumental music, a Mass and other works for voices, orchestral compositions and electronic pieces. Among his distinctions are an award from the Massachusetts Arts and Humanities Foundation, First Prize in the Alvin Etlar Memorial Competition, First Prize in the Rockefeller-New England Conservatory Opera Competition, First Prize in the New England Composers Orchestra Competition, an NEA Grant, a Guggenheim Fellowship and several residencies at the MacDowell Colony. Spratlan’s recent commissions include: *Of Time and the Seasons*, for soprano Lucy Shelton and Boston Music Viva; the one-act opera *Earthrise*, for the San Francisco Opera, on a libretto by Constance Congdon; *Streaming*, for piano quartet, a centennial commission for Chicago’s Ravinia Festival; and *Wonderer*, for pianist Jonathan Biss.

The composer has kindly provided the following thoughts on his creative outlook: “I am lucky to be writing now, because this is an era uniquely hospitable to stylistic cross-influence, rivaled only by the early 18th century.... Thus, a nudge towards jazz, gamelan, Sibelius, calypso, Muzak or Boulez can be organically incorporated into the flow of a piece and contribute its freshness as would a fresh harmony or instrumental sonority; its special contribution, though, is its cultural message, no matter how blatant, subtle, ironized or negated. The cultural thumbprint makes its mark and becomes one of the strands of interest in the piece.... In my own case, in addition to what you might expect in the way of lineage—chant through Brahms, Debussy, Mahler, Schoenberg,

Stravinsky, Bartók, Stockhausen, Ligeti, Carter, et al.—I have drawn much from Mussorgsky and Scriabin, jazz (especially T. Monk, C. Mingus, M. Davis, J. Coltrane, A. Braxton), Ives, South Indian Music, various Latin musics (I grew up in Miami), Zappa, Captain Beefheart and the minimalists, especially Steve Reich.”

Spratlan writes of *Wonderer*, composed in 2005 on a commission from the Borletti-Buitoni Trust for pianist Jonathan Biss, “A kind of treble ‘big bang’ spawns elements of this little universe, focusing at last on the footsteps of our Wonderer. These, in multiple guises, mark this quizzical and bemused figure’s presence throughout the piece, as various objects, actions and feelings are encountered. The music following the ‘big bang’ offers possibilities for continuing, but each comes up short somehow until a quick *perpetuum mobile* coheres and prevails. It is interrupted by a country waltz—maybe overheard, maybe remembered—that confronts the real pain beneath stylized car crashes and stolen lovers. The ensuing slow music is inspired by the *Andante con moto* of Beethoven’s Fourth Piano Concerto, which, by legend, evokes Orpheus calming the raging beasts through song. In the finale, a four-bar ostinato takes on three distinct temperaments, the first groping and noncommittal, the second grandiloquent and spectral, the third hyper-generic Latin pop. Each is revealed gradually, like a developing photograph or a jigsaw puzzle. But fragments of musical DNA from earlier in the piece keep us wondering even as the Wonderer’s footsteps reach apotheosis.” *Wonderer* was premiered on February 15, 2006, in Portland, Maine.

BEETHOVEN
Sonata No. 30 in E major, Op. 109 (1820)

Beethoven composed the Op. 109 Sonata between May and September 1820 in the Austrian village of Mödling, south of Vienna, where he had rusticated for the two previous summers (though he had to find new lodgings that year since his landlord of 1819 refused to rent to the stone-deaf composer again because of his “noisy disturbances”). These country residencies were times of spiritual and creative retreat for Beethoven, when, according to his amanuensis

and biographer, Anton Schindler, he was “rapt away from the world.” Sketches for the Sonata appear among those for the *Credo* and *Benedictus* of the *Missa Solemnis*, an appropriate balance of the personal and public manifestations of the transcendent visions he was seeking to embody within the creations of his last years. The Sonata was published by the Berlin house of Schlesinger in November 1821 with a dedication to Maximiliane Brentano, the daughter of Franz Brentano (a Frankfurt merchant who acted as the composer’s agent with the publisher Simrock) and Antonie Brentano (whom Maynard Solomon in his study of Beethoven convincingly identified as the “Immortal Beloved”). “A dedication!!!,” Beethoven wrote to Maximiliane on December 6th. “Well, this is not one of those dedications that are used and abused by thousands of people. It is the spirit which unites the noble and finer people of this earth and which time can never destroy. It is this spirit which now speaks to you and which calls you to mind, and likewise your beloved parents—your most excellent and gifted mother, your father imbued with so many truly good and noble qualities and ever mindful of the welfare of his children.... The memory of a noble family can never fade in my heart. May you sometimes think of me with a feeling of kindness. My most heartfelt wishes. May heaven bless your life and the lives of all of you forever.”

The dominant emotional state of the outer movements of the E major Sonata is optimism and joy, which is thrown into relief by the stormy central *Prestissimo*. The opening movement is the epitome of Beethoven’s distillation of the sonata principle in his late works: the two themes (the first, fast, flowing, diatonic, arpeggiated; the second, slow, ruminative, chromatic, chordal) are given in bare, economical juxtaposition, without introduction or transition. The development section is a seamless, superbly directed elaboration of the main theme that reaches its peak at the moment the recapitulation begins. The second subject returns before the movement ends with a luminous coda built upon the principal theme. The fiery *Prestissimo*, which serves as the Sonata’s scherzo and its emotional foil, is also in sonata form, though, unlike the opening movement,

its themes are little contrasted with each other. The finale, twice the length of the first two movements combined, is an expansive set of six variations founded upon the hymnal two-part theme presented at the outset. An ethereal restatement of the theme, virtually a benediction to the entire work, brings the Sonata to a sublime close.

ARNOLD SCHOENBERG (1874–1951) Six Little Pieces, Op. 19 (1911)

The modern world came to its maturity when the Guns of August thundered across Europe in 1914. Maturity does not emerge in a single day, however, and the start of the First World War was only the political confirmation of fundamental changes in science, philosophy and art that had been pressing hard on Western society for at least the three preceding decades. Sigmund Freud published his landmark work, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, in 1900. Albert Einstein advanced his theory of relativity in 1905, only two years after the Wright brothers first hung in the air in their mechanical marvel of canvas and bailing wire. In the arts, the changes were no less profound. Isadora Duncan danced in the ruins of the theater of Dionysus in Athens in 1904; the establishment of the epoch-making Ballet Russe followed the first collaboration of Fokine and Diaghilev in 1907. The hall of the Viennese Secession was built in 1898; the Fauves held their first exhibit in Paris in 1905. Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger*, to which the Cubist movement is often traced, dates from 1907; Kandinsky painted his first abstract canvas three years later. And in 1909, Arnold Schoenberg thrust music into this new world by abandoning the old system of musical tonality in his path-breaking compositions, *The Book of the Hanging Gardens* and *Three Piano Pieces*, Op. 11.

Schoenberg’s music from 1909 until 1913 was dubbed, much to the composer’s ire (which was considerable), “atonal.” The term was intended to mean that these works abandoned the traditional, dominating central pitch and its hierarchy of chords that had defined musical tonality and structure since at least 1680. (Schoenberg’s argument against the word contended that “atonal” meant “without tones,” and that was utter non-

sense since his music used the same tones—differently disposed, of course—as did that of Mozart.) Having abandoned the old tonal conventions, with their generative powers not only for close-range melody and harmony, but also, in the inevitable magnetism of the central pitch to draw the work to a satisfying close, for long-range musical architecture, Schoenberg’s greatest challenge was to invent a new technique to control not just chords and themes but also form, and he later admitted that “at first it seemed impossible to compose pieces of complicated organization or great length.” He came to realize that this revolutionary organizational principle might be found in the manipulation of a carefully defined group of pitches and intervals that could be developed throughout the work, creating both variety and unity. This is the method that he tried out in his aphoristic *Six Little Pieces*, Op. 19, composed between February 18 and June 17, 1911; the last movement was inspired by the death of his friend and mentor Gustav Mahler. (Schoenberg’s student Anton Webern was dealing with the same problem in exactly the same “miniaturized” way at that time.) Despite their brevity, hardly more than a minute each, these *Six Pieces* are potent and highly concentrated in their expression—the composer’s biographer H. H. Stuckenschmidt suggested that “each note is endowed with the weight of an experience.” Schoenberg’s next work was the epochal *Pierrot Lunaire*. Except for the *Three Songs* of Op. 22, *Pierrot* was last music he was to write for the next decade, the crucial time when he withdrew from active composition to formulate the hard-won technique with which he could command the tones of his atonal world—the twelve-tone or serial system.

ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810–1856) Fantasy in C major, Op. 17 (1836, 1838)

“Ruins,” he called it, “the most passionate thing I have ever written—a deep lament for you.” Thus did Robert Schumann explain the content and genesis of the Fantasy in C major to his beloved Clara Wieck following a bitter period of separation imposed by the girl’s tyrannical father in 1836. Friedrich Wieck of Leipzig was one of the most renowned piano pedagogues of his day, ea-

gerly sought out for the discipline and efficacy of his teaching by talented students, including Schumann, who placed himself under Wieck’s stern gaze in 1829. Schumann showed such promise that Wieck took him into his household for full-time instruction, and there the twenty-year-old musician worked up not only the obligatory scales and études, but also an infatuation for young Clara, whom Wieck was grooming for the life of a piano virtuoso. Love developed slowly but steadily between the couple—Clara was nine years younger than Robert—and it was sufficiently advanced by the mid-1830s to cause Papa Wieck serious concern. Schumann by that time had abandoned hopes of a career as a concert pianist, and had turned instead to composing and editing the fledgling music journal *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, endeavors that Wieck judged offered slim prospects for producing an appropriate marriage partner for his daughter, who was just then beginning to establish her international reputation.

Early in 1836, Wieck shipped the still-underage Clara off to Dresden to get her away from Schumann, but Robert followed his beloved there and won a declaration of mutual love from her. When Wieck learned of this development, he retrieved Clara to Leipzig, and forbid her further contact with Schumann in person or even by letter; Wieck filled the void by spawning unfounded rumors of new liaisons intended to make the lovers distrust each other. Schumann, referring to the volatile emotions that troubled him throughout his life, later wrote to Clara about those days, when he was afraid not just of losing her, but even his reason: “Being unable to learn anything about you, I wished, with all my might, to forget you. It was at that time that we had become strangers to one another. I was resigned. Then my old suffering burst out afresh, and made me wring my hands. Often at night I would implore God: ‘Grant me at least one night of tranquility in which my mind would not give way.’” Despite the unsettling anxiety of those months, Schumann’s creativity was fiercely fired by the mingled pain and hope, and in June 1836, he began the superb Fantasy in C major, into whose opening movement, which he titled

Ruins, he wove a quotation from Beethoven's song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte*—"To the Distant Beloved"—to summon the vision of the cloistered Clara. He inscribed a poem by Friedrich Schlegel at the head of the score as a message to her: *Through all the tones/In earth's many-colored dream/There sounds one soft long-drawn note/For the one who listens in secret.* Clara and Robert remained faithful and determined through those difficult months, and by early the next year, they had resumed their correspondence. They were engaged in August 1837—by surreptitious letter—and finally married three years later, on the eve of Clara's 21st birthday, having weathered Friedrich Wieck's ceaseless barrage of litigation to keep them apart.

Though it was his infatuation with Clara that provided the spark to begin the C major Fantasy, it was another powerful influence in Schumann's creative life that helped bring the work to fruition—Ludwig van Beethoven. In 1835, eight years after Beethoven's death, the administrators of the composer's hometown, Bonn, organized a subscription to erect a monument commemorating the city's most famous son. Calls went out to the German musical community to offer support for the project, and Schumann reprinted the monument committee's request in the April 1836 edition of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* and authored a four-part essay titled "Monument for Beethoven" for the journal two months later, at just the time that he was undertaking the Fantasy. By the end of the summer, the work had transcended its original personal, confessional purpose and become associated with the campaign for the Beethoven memorial. By December, Schumann had added to the original opening movement, *Ruins*, two others, which he called *Trophies* and *Palms* to note the heroic stature Beethoven's successors accorded to him; he later changed the names to *Triumphal Arch* and *Constellation*. During 1837, Schumann proposed to two publishers, Kistner and Haslinger, that his "Sonata for Beethoven" be issued in a special edition as a fund-raiser, but got nowhere. He finally placed the piece with Breitkopf und Härtel, and made some final revisions to the score in January 1838; it was published in March or April of

the following year. Though the Fantasy did not generate any revenues for the Beethoven memorial, Schumann did dedicate the score to Franz Liszt, whose time and money were essential to completing the monument, which was finally unveiled in Bonn in August 1845, the 75th anniversary of Beethoven's birth. Schumann was too ill to attend the ceremony.

Though the opening movement of the Fantasy, which Schumann instructed should "be interpreted in a fantastic and passionate manner," is founded upon traditional sonata form (with a nostalgic central episode marked *Im Legendenton*—"In the Style of a Legend"—replacing the conventional development section), the distinguished pianist and scholar Charles Rosen noted in his book on *The Romantic Generation* a revolutionary structural/emotional process here that moves beyond the customary dynamics and balances of the traditional Classical form: "[The movement] begins with great tension, descends toward resolution and is frustrated, moves to a point of greater tension, and initiates the process over and over again. The structure is like a series of waves, starting with the climax, losing momentum each time, and then beginning again.... Schumann's radical innovation was a new large sense of rhythm conceived as a series of waves, crucial to later composers like Wagner and Strauss." The second movement is an assertive and technically demanding march, which Liszt greatly admired and Clara said made her feel "hot and cold all over.... Many images are evoked.... It strikes me as a victory march of warriors following a battle, and the [more subdued] central theme makes me think of young maidens in a village, all dressed in white, each with a wreath in her hand to crown the warriors kneeling before them." The finale is a spacious, serene slow movement of exquisitely subtle light and shadow that seems to suspend time itself.

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Twenty-five-year-old American pianist **Jonathan Biss** has already proved himself an accomplished and exceptional musician with a flourishing international reputation through his orchestral and recital performances in North America and Europe. Noted for his intriguing

programs, artistic maturity and versatility, Mr. Biss performs a diverse repertoire ranging from Mozart and Beethoven, through the Romantics to Janáček and Schoenberg, as well as works by contemporary composers.

Mr. Biss has performed with most major North American orchestras, including the Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Cincinnati, Chicago, Dallas, National, Pittsburgh and San Francisco symphonies; the Los Angeles and New York philharmonics, and the Metropolitan Opera, Minnesota, National Arts Centre and Philadelphia orchestras. Abroad, he has performed with the BBC Symphony; the Gulbenkian Orchestra; the BBC, Essen, Israel, Munich, and Rotterdam philharmonics; and the Staatskapelle Berlin.

This past summer, in addition to a return engagement at the Ravinia Festival, Mr. Biss made his debut at seven international music festivals: Aspen, Hollywood Bowl, New York's Mostly Mozart, Tanglewood and London's Mostly Mozart, as well as the Risor Festival in Norway and the Schleswig-Holstein Festival in Germany. In past seasons, he has performed at Caramoor, Bad Kissingen, the Spoleto Festival in Italy, Klavier-Festival Ruhr in Germany and at Verbier.

In September, Mr. Biss opened the 2005–2006 season in performances with the San Francisco Symphony conducted by Michael

Tilson Thomas and the New York Philharmonic conducted by Lorin Maazel. Among his other return engagements this season are appearances with the Atlanta, Boston, and New Jersey symphonies, as well as debuts with the Houston, Nashville, St. Louis and Seattle symphonies.

This season, he will also give recitals in numerous cities in the United States and Europe, including Berkeley, Chicago, Philadelphia, Amsterdam, Milan, Brussels, Toulouse and Paris. His recital repertoire includes a new work, *Wonderer*, by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Lewis Spratlan, which was commissioned for Mr. Biss by the Borletti-Buitoni Trust.

An enthusiastic chamber musician, Mr. Biss has been a member of Chamber Music Society Two at Lincoln Center, a frequent participant at the Marlboro Music Festival and has toured with "Musicians from Marlboro" on several occasions. He has appeared at the Jerusalem Chamber Music Festival and frequently collaborates with such chamber ensembles as the Borromeo, Mendelssohn and Vermeer quartets. This season, he will perform with Miriam Fried and the Mendelssohn String Quartet, as well as with the Borromeo Quartet, performing in New York for The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, in Ft. Collins, Denver, Salt Lake City and Kansas City.

Mr. Biss's first commercial recording—a CD on the EMI label comprised of Schumann's *Davidsbündlertänze*, Op. 6, and Beethoven's Fantasy in G minor, Op. 77, and Piano Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57, "Appassionata"—has won wide acclaim. The *Los Angeles Times* called Mr. Biss "a serious, accomplished artist who puts the composer before the player," the *San Francisco Chronicle* called this a "brilliant debut release," and the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* remarked that this "recording is a clear signal that a master is emerging."

Mr. Biss made his New York recital debut at the 92nd Street Y's Tisch Center for the Arts in 2000 and his New York Philharmonic debut under Kurt Masur that same season. Among

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the many conductors with whom he has worked are Marin Alsop, Daniel Barenboim, Herbert Blomstedt, James Conlon, Charles Dutoit, James Levine, Neville Marriner and Pinchas Zukerman.

Jonathan Biss represents the third generation in a family of professional musicians that includes his grandmother, Raya Garbousova, one of the first well-known female cellists (for whom Samuel Barber composed his Cello Concerto), as well as his parents, violinist Miriam Fried and violist/violinist Paul Biss. Growing up surrounded by music, Mr. Biss began his piano studies at the age of six, and his first musical collaborations were with his mother and father. Mr. Biss studied at Indiana University with Evelyne Brancart and at The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia with Leon Fleisher.

Mr. Biss has served as an artist-in-residence on NPR's *Performance Today* and has been rec-

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ognized with numerous awards, including the 2002 Gilmore Young Artist Award, Wolf Trap's Shouse Debut Artist Award, the Andrew Wolf Memorial Chamber Music Award, Lincoln Center's Martin E. Segal Award, an Avery Fisher Career Grant and the 2003 Borletti-Buitoni Trust Award. He was the first American chosen to participate in the BBC's New Generation Artist program. Most recently, Jonathan Biss was named the winner of the 2005 Leonard Bernstein Award, which he received at the Schleswig-Holstein Festival.

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