

Programme Note by Chris Darwin: please use freely for non-commercial purposes

**Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)**

**Piano Sonata No 21 in C, Op 53 ('Waldstein') (1804)**

*Allegro con brio*

*Introduzione: Adagio molto - attacca*

*Rondo. Allegretto moderato – Prestissimo*

Count Ferdinand Ernst Gabriel von Waldstein, a Viennese aristocrat living in Bonn, was instrumental in helping the young Beethoven to revisit Vienna, permanently as it turned out, in 1792. Beethoven had composed the music for a ballet that Count Waldstein was producing in 1791, *Ritterballet*, and had allowed the Count to pass it off as his own. Beethoven may well have used this deception as a bargaining tool for his return to Vienna. Waldstein recognised Beethoven's potential and famously inscribed in his leaving book: "*With the help of assiduous labour, you shall receive Mozart's spirit from Haydn's hands.*" Beethoven did indeed study under Haydn but the relationship was not beneficial to either party. Haydn was bewildered by Beethoven's new compositions, and Beethoven, somewhat uncharitably, refused Haydn's request to have "Pupil of Haydn" inscribed in the title of his Op 1 Piano Trios. He perhaps regarded the epithet as true but irrelevant, since he claimed not to have learned anything from Haydn.

Twelve years later, Beethoven was riding high, embarking on the first of the huge works of his "middle" period, the Eroica Symphony Op 55, and the Op 53 piano sonata. Waldstein, in contrast, was in difficult circumstances. He had persistently tried to persuade the Emperor of the need to defeat Napoleon and was banished from Vienna for his troubles. He had then bankrupted himself funding an army to try to achieve privately what the Emperor would not. Impoverished, he had returned to Vienna in disguise. Beethoven, perhaps out of a mixture of pity and gratitude, dedicated his new sonata to him.

In 1803 Beethoven had taken delivery of a new piano from Erard with a number of new features including: an additional half-octave range *F'-c''''*, pedals rather than knee levers to raise the dampers, and increased sonority in the bass. All these features influenced the Waldstein sonata and his even more dramatic Op 57, the "Appassionata". The Waldstein is the first Beethoven sonata to have *ped* markings, and they are more frequent and rapid than was possible with knee levers. It also uses a single voice in the bass where previously Beethoven might have needed octaves to give sufficient sonority. Maynard Solomon comments:

*"With the Waldstein [sonata] ... Beethoven [created] sonorities and textures never previously achieved. He no longer limited the technical difficulties of his sonatas to permit performance by competent amateurs, but instead stretched the potentialities of both instrument and technique to their outer limits. The dynamics are greatly extended; the colours are fantastic and luxuriant, approaching quasi-orchestral sonorities."*

Much the same could be said of the stretched technical demands of his contemporary Op 59 Razumovsky String Quartets.

The Waldstein sonata sees a significant change in the relationship between the slow and final movements. Beethoven originally composed a 9-minute Andante second movement, but, in response to the criticism that the sonata was too long, replaced it with the present 28-bar *Introduzione*. The original became the free-standing *Andante Favori*. The new movement acts as a dramatic introduction to the last movement, so that the sonata feels like a two-movement work. This form caught on, and appears over the next six years in the *Appassionata* and *Lebewohl* sonatas, the violin concerto, and the last two piano concertos. The *Introduzione* also presages the orchestral introduction to the dungeon scene in *Fidelio* composed a little later.