

Recording Review of Beethoven Piano Sonatas

1. Introduction

One of the greatest composers of all time, Ludwig van Beethoven is a celebrated artist whose musical compositions have transcended time and generations. A German composer and pianist, he is well known as a Classical musician and child prodigy. Beethoven mastered his craft at an early age composing numerous symphonies, concertos and sonatas. As a virtuoso pianist, his innate talent helped him gain fame and recognition in the 18th century. However, his works are still widely studied and appreciated today; being able to compose in various musical genres. Beethoven is famous for his nine symphonies including thirty -two piano sonatas. The range and scope of his work integrated classical and romantic elements especially in using the piano as an accompaniment to other musical instruments (Lockwood, 2005).

Beethoven's early work was influenced by Mozart, another great composer of his time. Nevertheless, he developed his own style through experimentation with some citing that he was more ambitious compared to other composers. It is important to note that in spite suffering from deafness in his adulthood, Beethoven was able to compose most of his greatest works. This included piano concertos and sonatas. His music reflected his passion to the arts as he persevered being more innovative in his craft. His later compositions are known to be more expressive and intellectual. In this manner, his piano sonatas have become his most successful works being a testament to overcoming his illness. He eventually became nearly deaf, which prevented him from performing publicly. Significantly, he never stopped composing best remembered for his strong work ethic and enigmatic character. Beethoven was forward thinking being a musician that was not bound to social norms and expectations. This helped secure his coveted title as one of the world's greatest composers of all time (Lockwood, 2005).

2. Analysis

The album Beethoven : Piano Sonatas contains nine songs, the most famous of which are Piano Sonata No.8 In C Minor, Op.13 - "Pathétique" Grave - Allegro Di Molto E Con Brio, Piano Sonata No.8 In C Minor, Op.13 - "Pathétique" Adagio Cantabile 6:22, Piano Sonata No.8 In C Minor, Op.13 - "Pathétique" Rondo (Allegro), Piano Sonata No.14 In C Sharp Minor, Op.27 No.2 "Moonlight" Adagio Sostenuto, Piano Sonata No.14 In C Sharp Minor, Op.27 No.2 - "Moonlight" Allegretto, and Piano Sonata No.14 In C Sharp Minor, Op.27 No.2 -"Moonlight" – Presto (Beethoven, 1990). I selected this album being a long-time admirer of his works. Furthermore, I wanted to experience his composition and listen to the depth of quality in his music. Moreover, as Beethoven is famous for Pathétique and Moonlight I wanted to conduct a thoughtful evaluation of his work. I wanted to understand his musical style and influence. More importantly, I wanted to unravel the mystery behind the popularity of these particular compositions.

Pathétique was one of his early works wherein strong elements of Mozart's influence can be found. Written in C minor, the young Beethoven composed an impressive and tragic sonata. The notes are spaced allowing the music to follow seamlessly from tracks one to three. It contains a motif line having three movements beginning from a slow pace in Grave evolving to Allegro Di Molto E Con Brio, which has a faster pace. It ends in quick singing style in Rondo wherein one can infer that the composer is using a story tale method with an introduction, body and end. The second track is an exposition, which can be likened to a plot as he shares his tale with ranging tremolo octaves using C Minor and E-flat minor. As such, it is a unique piece being graceful and lyrical that was unusual for his time (Cooper, 2008).

These three tracks have a suspenseful element starting from a solemn introduction towards E-flat major and G minor. It is meant to be listened in succession as it has a repetitive element from the previous tracks. As such, while being predominantly in C minor Beethoven interjects surprising elements of other tonic keys. This creates a united and harmonious melody with an unorthodox and unexpected use of notes and vibrato. In this manner, the first three songs move with separated by modulation while creating a triplet rhythm. It even includes A-flat major that is somehow found within the sonata. It has a forceful yet gentle tone applying sforzando and rondo episodes. Undoubtedly, *Pathétique* has become popular because of the note movements especially with his use of tempo metre, timbre and texture. It is a grand masterpiece with a pathos opening, lyrical mid-section and dramatic finale. This is achieved with his use of rondo that creates a basic pattern and rhythm. The tonality and harmony of the songs support a thematic idea wherein Beethoven makes use of couplets and digressions. It has a divergent element that adds texture and form wherein the notes contrast each other (Cooper, 2008).

It is important to note how rondo helps *Pathétique* create identical three-measure melodies, which range from high F to B natural three octaves below. As such, its forte dynamic is evident wherein the theme contains four measures to comprise the chords. In this way, a cadence occurs as the song rises and falls perfectly with its rondo use. It blends continuously, which even contains a mysterious quality, as the songs seem to end with a final closure. In this manner, Beethoven's *Pathétique* has a tight knit theme as the rondo composition is unusual with notes repeating in A flat and G that has pitch measurements to give a sense of dramatic pause. The songs create a natural syncopation and cross rhythm allowing the audience to feel the composer's emotive quality (Cooper, 2008).

In analysing *Pathétique* using the three planes of listening, one can quickly surmise the sensuous quality of his composition. Beethoven's work demands attention as listeners are able to appreciate the instrumentation and quality of the sound. In my research, I began to understand the depth of his work as he masterfully juxtaposed notes and rhythms. He approached music in a novel and interesting way making him famous for his unorthodox approach to music. As such, the *Pathétique* captures one's attention affecting the audience's emotion with its story telling quality. In this way, Beethoven is popular because of his expressive works. It is intellectual being able to engage the audience's feelings. The *Pathétique* may have different meanings to listeners depending on their experience. This is indicative of its versatility to appeal to all types of music lovers. Furthermore, the songs allow one to visualize not only the composer's perspective but also their own.

In listening to the music, I was able to feel different ranges of emotion most especially romance, delight and sadness. Beethoven is able to create a dream like quality in his work that encourages listeners to have their own interpretation to the songs. It can be seen as a form of escape that also engages audience to critical thinking. Significantly, not many composers can create such a masterpiece wherein listeners are able to appreciate music in all three planes. Most music composed today requires lyrics in order to delight audiences or even move them to intellectual thought. However, the beauty of classical music is its timelessness in combining art and knowledge. It is more than the notes or understanding the musical elements. It is complex and dynamic even for musicians who are able to learn the mechanics of re-playing Beethoven's works. As such, performing Beethoven's *Pathétique* requires more than mastering the techniques of piano playing. Performers must be expressive using their own feelings to retell an ingenious body of work.

3. Conclusion

Beethoven: Piano Sonatas is highly recommended as the songs are versatile. It contributes to the appreciation of classical music wherein one can find enjoyment in listening to his compositions. All of the songs blend together to create a vibrant and harmonious melody. It allows classical music to be more approachable and can be used as an introduction for first time listeners to the genre. Significantly, the purpose of the album is to pay an homage to Beethoven as a virtuoso pianist. It glorifies his works noticeably written more than two centuries ago. In this way, piano sonatas can be used for pleasure especially forging an emotional tie with listeners. Beethoven's unforgettable compositions can be technically analysed using the ten elements of music, which helps one understand the note difficulty and depth. However, the songs are actually sensuous and emotive, expressive and romantic. As I listened to each of the tracks, I learned of his unorthodox playing style as each track shows his storytelling style. Moreover, as the songs are meant to be listened continuously it provides a meaningful escape giving listeners a chance to dream and even hope.

In this manner, I learned much about classical music as it has a romantic aspect. The genre is not boring wherein I have a deeper insight on the challenges of composing a musical piece. Beethoven's music is enlightening wherein there is much more than face value. His works are hauntingly beautiful and exciting at the same time. He reveals himself enough as the audience are given the opportunity to witness his creativity and genius. More importantly, his piano sonatas appeal to human emotion allowing listeners to reflect and reminisce. As such, one learns to greatly appreciate the genre embracing its serendipitous quality.

Bibliography:

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