Ludwig van Beethoven

Complete Works for Cello and Piano

Erling Blöndal Bengtsson, Cello
Anker Blyme, Piano

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The cello sonata with piano accompaniment is a relatively recent phenomen in the history of music. It is true that innumerable cello sonatas were composed during the baroque period, but they were sonatas with figured bass accompaniment rather than duo works as such. Vivaldi, for one, has a number to his credit.
Consequently, Ludwig van Beethoven's (1770-1827) cello sonatas, as the first actual duo works for the cello and a keyboard instrument, are of considerable historical importance - besides being wonderful pieces in themselves. Actually, our terming of the five Beethoven sonatas as cello sonatas is not quite accurate, for he himself, in accordance with the custom of his time, called them sonatas for piano with violoncello accompaniment, just as Mozart, for instance, had called his violin sonatas sonatas for piano with violin accompaniment. With Beethoven, however, the melody instrument is accorded a greater degree of independence than was the case with sonatas for a string instrument and piano of earlier times. It may just be a matter of chance that Beethoven wrote no fewer than eight works for cello and piano (the five sonatas and three sets of variations), for they were all the result of the composer's personal acquaintance and friendship with the leading cellists of his day, from commoners to noblemen and even royals.
The five sonatas fall into three groups, which lie in quite separate periods of the composer's life and work. The first two sonatas, op.5, were composed during 1796 and 1797, about the same time as the first two piano concertos, and were dedicated to King Friedrich Wilhelm II. The op.69 sonata, dedicated to Baron Ignaz von Gleichenstein, was written between 1806 and 1808, during which period the fourth, fifth and sixth symphonies, the G Major piano concerto and the violin concerto as well as the Rasoumovsky Quartets and the music for Coriolan also saw the light of day. And the last two sonatas, op.102, were composed in 1815, or about the same time as the Hammerklavier sonata, and were dedicated to Countess Maria von Erdödy.
The three sets of variations were all composed between 1796 and 1801: the variations on a theme from Handel's Judas Maccabaeus date back to 1796, the year of the first two sonatas. The work was dedicated to Princess Maria Christiane von Lichnovsky. Of the two sets of variations on themes from Mozart's Magic Flute, the earliest is Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen, from 1798, whereas Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen, written for Count von Browne, dates from 1801.

Sonata for violoncemao and piano in F Major, op. 5 no. 1.
Adagio sostenuto; allegro
Rondo. Allegro vivace

Sonata for violoncello and piano in G minor, op. 5 no. 2.
Adagio sostenuto e espressivo - Allegro molto più tosto presto
Rondo. Allegro

Once Beethoven had firmly established himself in Vienna he seldom ventured away. But in 1796 he set off on one of his few concert tours - to Prague, Dresden, Leipzig, Berlin and (perhaps) Budapest. In Berlin he was received at the court of King Friedrich Wilhelm II where he met cellist Jean Pierre Duport, who was the principal cello of the court orchestra and conductor of their concerts. According to the poet and composer Christian Friedrich Daniel Schubart, Duport was a first-rate cellist: "Such is the magic power of his playing that you will hardly be able to find his match in Europa. He steers his bow as if through a storm and lets the notes rain down. He dares the giddy heights beyond the fingerboard and finally fades away in the most delicate flageolet notes imaginable". Beethoven's first two sonatas were written with Duport in mind. King Friedrich Wilhelm II was very much a music enthusiast. Haydn had dedicated his six Op. 50 quartets to him in 1787, and Mozart wrote three quartets for him during 1789 and 1790. He himseld played the cello, and his enthusiasm for the instrument is evidenced by the names of the musicians associated with him: Jean Pierre Duport and his younger brother Jean Louis, and Luigi Boccherini to mention a few. After a performance of Beethoven's sonatas the King gave the composer a gold snuffbox: "No ordinary snuffbox," as Beethoven commented, "... but a snuffbox such as a king gives an ambassador".
In the manuscript Beethoven called his first two sonatas Sonatas for harpsichord or piano with violoncello accompaniment. They must have sounded different in those days: we know at least that the cello part was often played on a violin. The problem of balance between the two instruments remains a difficult one to resolve. The style of the op. 5 sonatas resembles that of the early piano sonatas, but the structure is modified. Both sonatas begin with long adagios which serve as an introduction to these two-movement works, but in fact these adagios are too long to be considered merely slow introductions to the allegros that follow. They may, then, be regarded as brief first movements of three-movement sonatas.

The F Major sonata begins with a dramatic arioso that anticipates the themework of the allegro. Before the coda there is a brief cadenza, and the final movement is a brilliant rondo.

The G minor sonata opens with an impassioned adagio that is followed by a regular sonata allegro. The final movement is a bright rondo.

Sonata for violoncello and piano in A Major, op. 69.
Allegro ma non tanto
Scherzo. Allegro molto
Adagio cantabile; allegro vivace

The initial ideas for the A major sonata are to be found in Beethoven's sketchbook from 1803. The work was actually composed in 1807 and 1808, and the first performance was given in Vienna on March 5th 1809. The cellist was Nikolaus Kraft, son of Anton Kraft, for whom Haydn had composed his D Major cello concerto. The younger Kraft had been a student of Duport's.
The sonata was dedicated to Baron Ignaz von Gleichenstein, an amateur cellist himself. Once it had been published, Beethoven sent a copy to Gleichenstein with the inscription Inter lacrymas et lustum (between tears and sorrow), an allusion to the Napoleonic war. The first movement is introduced by the cello, which plays the main theme without accompaniment. Later the movement reveals a wealth of themes which are developed and worked through with great thoroughness. The second movement is a concentrated scherzo without any repeats. There is no slow movement as such: the only slow section in the sonata is the introduction to the carefree finale allegro, the sonata's third and last movement.

Sonata for violoncello and piano in C Major op. 102 no. 1
Andante; allegro vivace
Adagio; tempo d'andante; allegro vivace

Sonata for violoncello and piano in D Major op. 102 no. 2
Allegro con brio
Adagio con molto sentimento d'affeto; allegro - fugato

The last two cello sonatas were composed during a period when Beethoven's creative powers were very much at low ebb and his work progressed slowly. And yet, these two sonatas were completed within a relatively short timespan. This time, Beethoven's interest in the genre had been aroused by the cellist Joseph Linke, or Lincke. He was a member of Prince Rasoumovsky's quartet and a close friend of Beethoven's. When the Prince's palace burned down and he was obliged to dismiss the members of his quartet, Linke was engaged by Countess Maria von Erdödy, a delicate but beautiful woman with whom the composer had a very close relationship. He called her his "confessor". The Countess was also a recognized amateur pianist, and indeed the two op. 102 sonatas were written especially for her and Joseph Linke.

In the manuscript Beethoven describes the C Major work as a "free sonata" because of its unusual, highly concentrated form. There are again only two movements, both of which have slow introductions. But both introductions are longer than might be expected of a slow introduction to an allegro: that of the first movement is a calm andante which leads into a brusque allegro in A minor, while the second movement begins with a rhapsodic adagio that is followed by an andante variation section, leading into a rhythmically vital and polyphonically pointed allegro vivace finale. The first movement of the D Major sonata starts with the energetic main subject, which is followed by a contrasting, lyrical second subject. The adagio is the only independent slow movement in the entire set of sonatas, free and rhapsodic of form. The finale, Allegro fugato, follows without a break. It is the first of the great fugues that were to characterize Beethoven's later output.

Variations on a them from Handel's Judas Maccabaeus WoO 45

Beethoven's first set of variations for cello was composed in 1796, at about the same time as the op. 5 sonatas. He got to know the theme while staying with Baron van Swieten, but the work was dedicated to Princess Maria Christiane von Lichnovsky.

Variations on Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen from Mozart's
The Magic Flute. Op. 66

The high opus number of this work is misleading, as it was actually composed as early as in 1798. It was the first Beethoven work to be formally reviewed, and the contributor to the Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung (March 6th 1799) was decidedly unimpressed: "Herr Beethoven is less fortunate in his Variations ... during the modulation, for instance, he permits himself jumps and other absurdities that are anything but beautiful...Whatever way I listen to and consider such passages, they are and remain coarse, and the more ambitious and unusual they get, the coarser they become."

Variations on Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen from Mozart's The Magic Flute. WoO 46.

Beethoven's last variations for cello were written in 1801 and bespeak his development since his earlier works in this genre. The cello part is considerably more independent. The work was dedicated to Count von Browne.

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Translation: Per Sommerschield

When at the age of three **Erling Blöndal Bengtsson** was given a violin by his father, his immediate instinct was to position it between his knees. However much his father protested, he could not be persuaded to hold it under his chin. The boy was adamant, and just six months later he gave his first public recital, on a viola with an end-pin attached to it.
Seven years later he was allowed to make his debut with an orchestra in Copenhagen's Tivoli Concert Hall where, in the summer of 1992, Erling Blöndal Bengtsson was celebrated on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, the fiftieth anniversary of his debut, and as the greatest living Danish cellist – if not one of the finest anywhere, with his bright, slender tone, at once elegantly nimble and glowing with concentration and pained recognition.
"The born cellist" is no hackneyed cliché when applied to Blöndal Bengtsson. He found it all so easy that he could make do with one hour's practice a day as a child - and indeed no more was asked of him by his violinist father and exceptionally musical mother, an Icelandic woman straight out of the ancient sagas.
In 1948, just sixteen years old, Erling Blöndal Bengtsson travelled to Philadelphia to take up studies with the pre-eminent cellist of the time, the Russian-born Gregor Piatigorsky. Just one year later he became Piatigorsky's assistant at the Curtis Institute of Music, and the year after that he had succeeded him as teacher at the Institute.
He stayed in the United States for five years before letting himself be tempted back to a teaching job at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen. He was appointed professor at the age of 29, and has during the course of a career spanning almost 40 years become a role-model for a whole family of young cellists playing in Denmark and abroad, while at the same time tending his own soloist career.
Between 1958 and 1978 he was also attached to the Swedish State Radio School of Music in Stockholm; he was a professor at the Musikhochschule in Cologne from 1978 to 1982, and continues regularly to give masterclasses in U.S.A., England, Switzerland and Scandinavia.
In 1990 he moved back to the United States to take up a professorship at one of North America's leading centres of music, The University of Michigan School of Music in Ann Arbor.
Blöndal Bengtsson's repertoire is just as all-encompassing as his teaching activities. Much of it has been recorded; the complete Bach solo suites (DACOCD 331-332) solo works by Reger and Ysaÿe (DACOCD 372), Kodály, Dallapiccola, Henze, Hindemith, Khatchaturian (DACOCD 425), Piatti and Niels Viggo Bentzon (DACOCD 478), cello concertos by Boccherini, Haydn (DACOCD 416), Schumann, Dvorák (DACOCD 411), Lalo, Saint-Saëns and Tchaikovsky (DACOCD 422), but also much contemporary music. His insatiable curiosity about modern music has resulted in the first performance of a number of Scandi-

navian cello concertos, many of which are also dedicated to him, including those of Niels Viggo Bentzon, Vagn Holmboe, Herman D. Koppel, Jan Maegaard (DACOCD 415) and Jon Nordal. He has played the Danish premieres of concertos by Britten, Barber, Khatchaturian, Delius, Lutoslawski and Walton, and indeed the latter two have themselves conducted performances with Blöndal Bengtsson as soloist.
He is concertizing extensively in Europe, the United States, and the former Soviet Union, and he has appeared with all the main Scandinavian orchestras and numerous foreign ones, including the Royal Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, St. Petersburg (formerly Leningrad) Philharmonic, and the Salzburg Mozarteum, with conductors such as Sir Malcolm Sargent, Pierre Monteux, Nicolai Malko, Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt, Paavo Berglund, Sixten Ehrling and Yuri Temirkanov. And Blöndal Bengtsson's audiences value him. He is a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music and has been awarded the Danish "Discophile" prize of 1958 and the Hyam Morrison Medal for Cello in Gold in 1957, among many other prizes. He is also First Knight of the Danish Order of Dannebrog, and Commander of the Icelandic Order of Falcon.

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English translation: Per Sommerschield

Anker Blyme was born in 1925, and studied at the Royal Danish Music Conservatory in Copenhagen. He made his debut in 1945. He studied in Paris in 1949-50, and taught at the Funen Conservatory, The Jutish Conservatory in Århus, and from 1960 to 1995 at the Royal Danish Conservatory, where he was appointed to a professorship in 1974. From 1986 to 1989 he served as principal at the conservatory in Copenhagen.
Anker Blyme has appeared as a soloist and chamber musician in most of Europe, and played in the first performance of works by composers including Leif Thybo, Ib Nørholm and Niels Viggo Bentzon.
Anker Blyme's recordings include Niels Viggo Bentzon's 4th Piano Concerto, the complete piano works of Niels Wilhelm Gade, Debussy's 24 Préludes (DACOCD 505), chamber music by Gade, Lange-Müller, Heise, Holmboe and Nielsen, and the piano works by Vagn Holmboe (DACOCD 502). In 1997 his recordings of Bernhard Lewkovitchs's piano works was published (DACOCD 475).
Anker Blyme has received a vast number of awards in Denmark and abroad, and he also writes about music.

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2 CD

DACOCD 333 CD 1

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770 - 1827)

Sonata No. 1 in F Major, Op. 5 No.1 (1796)

[1] Adagio sostenuto - Allegro *18:16*
[2] Rondo. Allegro vivace *7:01*

Sonata No. 2 in G minor, Op. 5 No.2 (1796)

[3] Adagio sostenuto e espressivo - Allegro molto più tosto presto *16:02*
[4] Allegro *9:16*

[5] **12 Variations (in G Major) WoO 45; (1796)** *12:02*
on the Theme from the Oratorio "Judas Maccabaeus" by George Friedrich Handel

[6] **7 Variations (in E flat Major) WoO 46; (1801)** *8:44*
on the Theme "Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen" from the Opera "Die Zauberflöte" by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

DACOCD 334 CD 2

Sonata No. 3 in A Major, Op. 69 (1807-08)

[1] Allegro ma non tanto *12:26*
[2] Allegro molto *5:14*
[3] Adagio cantabile - Allegro vivace *8:15*

Sonata No. 4 in C Major, Op. 102 No. 1 (1815)

[4] Andante - Allegro vivace *7:41*
[5] Adagio - Allegro vivace *7:06*

Sonata No. 5 in D Major, Op. 102 No. 2 (1815)

[6] Allegro con brio *6:57*
[7] Adagio con molto sentimento d'affeto - Allegro fugato *12:54*

[8] **12 Variations (in F Major) Op. 66 (1798)** *9:43*
on the Theme "Ein Mädchen oder Weibchen" from the Opera "Die Zauberflöte" by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

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2 CD

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