

50 Years of the H.C. Bodmer Collection at the Beethoven-Haus

A “gallant present of twofold value”

**Special exhibition at the Beethoven-Haus Bonn
29th May – 3rd September 2006**

28th May 2006 marks the 50th anniversary of the death of the Swiss Beethoven collector Hans Conrad Bodmer (1891-1956). With extraordinary idealism and material engagement Bodmer succeeded over four decades in putting together the largest private Beethoven collection there has ever been. He bequeathed it to the Beethoven-Haus, which he considered was best able to care for and scientifically evaluate the collection, as well as having the facilities to exhibit it to the general public. His bequest is one of the greatest acts of patronage in the world of music. In 1956 there was justified talk of a “second founding” of the Beethoven-Haus Society, because its collection, which had been growing continuously for 67 years, was suddenly tripled in size. It is with deepest gratitude that the Beethoven-Haus dedicates this special exhibition to the memory of its great benefactor.

(The special exhibition begins in Room 7 on the first floor) H.C. Bodmer divided his collection, which is devoted entirely to Beethoven, into 10 sections. The focal point of the collection is formed by Beethoven’s letters, and indeed Bodmer was able to collect almost half of all Beethoven’s original letters. Particularly outstanding among the more than 400 letters is a series of 13 love-letters written to Countess Josephine Deym in the period 1804-1809 (**showcase 1**). Bodmer was able to acquire these hitherto unknown letters, which are of great importance in Beethoven’s biography, in 1949. The letters show how intensely Beethoven courted the widowed countess, who, as the mother of four small children, felt herself capable only of entering into a platonic relationship, but not a “sensual” one. Beethoven was drawn strongly towards her: “How many times, dear J., have I fought with myself to avoid breaking the ban I imposed upon myself – but to no avail. A thousand voices keep whispering to me that you are my only friend and my only sweetheart”. Although at first there was hope that these letters would provide the solution to the puzzle of Beethoven’s “Immortal Beloved”, unfortunately that was not the case. Nevertheless it is a highly interesting correspondence and at Bodmer’s instigation a commented facsimile edition was published in 1957.

After Bodmer’s death the Beethoven-Haus was able to acquire fragments belonging to this omnibus volume and to

a letter Beethoven wrote to his household advisor, the well-known piano-maker Nannette Streicher, in which the composer eloquently airs his anger at his household staff: “All the devilry began again yesterday morning, but I made short work of it by throwing the heavy arm-chair beside my bed at B.’s head (the kitchen maid Baberl), which procured me peace for the rest of the day”.

(Showcase 2) By far the bulkiest document which exists in Beethoven’s handwriting is the draught of a petition to the Vienna Court of Appeal, where for many years he fought a bitter battle with his despised sister-in-law over the guardianship of his nephew. The handwriting itself shows how much energy he put into the matter, which was for him of tremendous importance.

Of all the autograph scores in his collection, the Swiss patriot H.C. Bodmer was probably proudest of the earliest one: the six variations on the Swiss folksong „Es hätt’ e’ Buur e’ Töchterli, mit Name heit es Babeli, sie hätt’ e’ paar Zöpfli, sie sind wie Gold, drum ist ihm auch der Dusle hold“, which Beethoven composed while he was still in Bonn.

On the wall you can see two pencil drawings from 1818 by August von Kloeber for a lost portrait of Beethoven and a crayon drawing from 1822 based upon it. In the middle is the geneological tree of the Counts of Waldstein, a member of which family, Count Ferdinand Waldstein, was particularly close to Beethoven during his youth in Bonn.

(Showcase 3) One of the most important pieces of the Bodmer Collection is without doubt the autograph score of the Sonata Opus 53 dedicated to Waldstein, upon which many traces of the process of composition are to be found. During Bodmer’s lifetime and at his expense, an elaborate facsimile of this manuscript, which was first displayed on loan here in 1953, was published by the Beethoven-Haus. The reproduction was praised by H.C. Bodmer’s brother Martin, himself a prominent collector, as well as the then German Federal President Theodor Heuss.

(Showcase 4) Bodmer also possessed the original manuscript of the Sonata for piano and violin in C minor Opus 30 No. 2, which Beethoven later dedicated to the Czar of Russia. Ten years ago a private American collector presented the Beethoven-Haus with a violin which had belonged to Beethoven and upon which the work was most probably played for the first time and which had subsequently come into the possession of Stefan Zweig. A few weeks ago a CD was released on which this very instrument is used again after 204 years to play the same work.

(Showcase 5) Together with the majority of the autograph cadenzas of Beethoven’s piano concertos Bodmer also possessed the solo part of the 2nd Piano Concerto and the first edition of the complete orchestral score. They formed the basis for a new publication of the work within the framework of a new edition of Beethoven’s complete works published by the Beethoven Haus, which was begun 50 years ago due mainly to Bodmer’s moral support.

(Showcase 6) During the forty years in which Bodmer was active as a collector, no complete autograph score of a Beethoven symphony came on the market. He must therefore have been delighted to have acquired the coda of the scherzo and the trombone parts for the 9th Symphony. Among the rare portraits of Beethoven at work composing are those by Johann Peter Lyser and Franz Hegi. They are actually works of fantasy but they show nicely how posterity visualised Beethoven’s love of nature in relation to his work as a composer. The collection contains a beautiful and unique coloured version of the page by the Swiss etcher Franz Hegi which was used uncoloured in 1834 by the General Music Society of Zürich as the frontispiece of their 22nd New Year publication. H.C. Bodmer’s brother Martin had chosen Johann Wolfgang von Goethe as a focal point of his “Library of World Literature”. H.C. Bodmer possessed the autograph score of Beethoven’s musical version of Goethe’s “Neue Liebe, neues Leben” (“New Love, New Life”) Opus 75 No. 2, which was published in 1809.

(Showcase 7) The autograph of the Piano Sonata in A flat major Opus 110 represents only a temporarily valid version of the final part. Bodmer’s very last acquisition, which he made in March 1956 shortly before his death, also concerns this Sonata – a letter to the music publisher Maurice Schlesinger in Paris.

(Showcase 8) The last large manuscript in Beethoven’s handwriting is the autograph parts for the String Quartet in F major Opus 135, which he wrote down five months before his death. Bodmer acquired it from the music publishing family Hinrichsen and he was later able to complement it with the score of the first movement. The parts are particularly valuable because Beethoven normally delegated their writing to copyists, which he was not able to do in this case. In 1953 Bodmer presented the Beethoven-Haus with a page of the “Bolero a due” from the “Lieder verschiedener Völker” (“Songs of Different Peoples”), the second part of which was already in the museum’s possession.

(Room 8, 2nd Floor, left showcase) Documents from the Bodmer Collection form a thread which now runs through the entire permanent exhibition at the Beethoven-Haus and Room 9 is dedicated entirely to the collection. The left showcase in Room 8 contains the letter of 1st July 1801 to Carl Amenda in which the composer confessed his deafness to his close friend. Eventually he was forced to make use of so-called conversation booklets. On display is the booklet used on 9th September 1825 during an opulent dinner in a Viennese tavern after a private performance of Beethoven’s String Quartet in A minor Opus 132.

The **right showcase** next to the grand pianos contains the miniature portraits which until recently were believed to be of Countess Anna Maria Erdödy and Giulietta Guicciardi, two ladies often mentioned in connection with Beethoven’s “Immortal Beloved”. Beethoven took particular care of both miniatures, which were found after his death and came into the possession of his school-friend Stephan von Breuning.

(Room 9) In 1953, Bodmer was able to acquire not only the two miniatures, but also Beethoven’s writing desk, cashbox, folding desk and compass from the heirs of Stefan Zweig, surely one of the highlights of his very successful career as a collector.

The pencil drawing by Joseph Weidner **on the left-hand wall** shows Beethoven taking a walk. Weidner’s picture is supplemented here by Beethoven’s original walking-stick, which has been in the possession of the Beethoven-Haus since 1898. The elegant portrayal of the strolling composer may well be realistic, but the way in which he absent-mindedly swings the heavy cane as if it were a baton, can be considered to be an element of caricature.

The **right showcase** contains the earliest known painted portrait of Beethoven, which was done by the Danish artist Christian Horneman in 1802. Beethoven gave it to Stephan von Breuning two years later as a token of his regret and his willingness to seek reconciliation after a hefty quarrel. The composer’s writing desk occupied a central position in the “Beethoven Room” in Bodmer’s house in Zürich. He “decorated” it as he believed it would have looked in Beethoven’s lifetime. He placed two volumes of a music magazine on it, upon which Beethoven had repudiated an arrogant criticism of one of his works with the drastic comment “ach du erbärmlicher Schuft, was ich scheie ist beer, als was du je gedacht –“ (“Oh you pitiful wretch, my excrement is better than any of your thoughts”).

(Showcase opposite the writing desk) The earliest notification of Beethoven’s death is a letter written on 27th March 1827 by the Viennese music publisher Tobias Haslinger to his colleague Nikolaus Simrock in Bonn, which contained a printed invitation to Beethoven’s funeral. Bodmer possessed six locks of Beethoven’s hair, which had been cut off while the composer was still alive or on 27th or 28th March, when his corpse was laid out in his apartment.

(The special exhibition is continued at the end of the round tour on the ground floor)

(Showcase 1) Another part of the collection contains studies which Beethoven transcribed from works of other composers. Shown here are transcriptions of two works by Johann Sebastian Bach and a fugue taken from Johann Joseph Fux’s treatise on counterpoint “Gradus ad Parnassum”. Beethoven praised Bach as being the “immortal god of harmony”.

(Showcase 2) Of particular importance even though they are only partly in Beethoven’s own handwriting, are the copyists’ manuscripts which have been revised by the composer and thus often represent the final version of an opus. On display is a manuscript which is part of a larger omnibus volume and in which Beethoven has developed the third version of his opera “Fidelio”.

In 1816 the Bonn music publisher Peter Joseph Simrock visited Beethoven in Vienna to acquire new works for his publishing house. This resulted in the publication of the sonatas for piano and violoncello Opus 102, the last two to appear for that publishing house, which had its offices diagonally opposite the Beethoven-Haus. Simrock’s visit refreshed memories of old friends in Bonn, and Beethoven gave him his latest portrait so they would be able to “look at him from time to time”. Simrock asked if he could cut off a lock of Beethoven’s hair as a souvenir and mounted it onto the portrait. On display is the handwritten manuscript of the cello sonata which Beethoven gave Simrock as the model for his engraving, and a valuable addition which did not come into the possession of the Beethoven-Haus until this year: a copy of the first print-run of this edition, which also contains the composer’s handwritten corrections written in the margin with the comment that he had found another mistake, “ein Böcklein aus S. Stall” (“a howler from out of the S. stable”), although in this case he was wrong, as a comparison with the handwritten manuscript proves. This is a play on words typical for Beethoven. “S.” could be taken to mean either Simrock or “Sau” (“Sautall” = pigsty or figuratively: “shambles”)

(Showcase 3) The Bodmer Collection also includes three large sketchbooks and a large number of loose pages. On display here is a sketchbook from 1819/1820, which had once belonged to Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. In the course of a year Beethoven filled 35 pages of this book with numerous sketches for all five movements of his Missa Solemnis. It also contains sketches for the Diabelli Variations Opus 120. The sketches were published by the Beethoven-Haus in 1968 and 1972 as part of a series. Deciphering and understanding Beethoven’s sketches is one of the most challenging tasks for musicologists. No other composer allows such a direct view of his method of working. Whereas the original manuscript of what later became known as the “Moonlight Sonata” has been in the possession of the Beethoven-Haus since 1898, Bodmer was able to add a sketch for this piano sonata as well as a facsimile published in 1921 to his collection. Three years ago the sketch was published together with the autograph in a new facsimile edition by the Beethoven-Haus. Bodmer’s copy of the old facsimile has been signed by such noted musicians as Eugen d’Albert, Arturo Toscanini, Felix Weingartner etc.

(Room 12: Showcase 4) Bodmer possessed numerous manuscripts which had previously had prominent owners. On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the death of Robert Schumann in Bonn-Endenich we are displaying a letter written by Beethoven, on which Schumann himself noted that he had received it on 5th January 1838 as a present from the secretary of the Society of the Friends of Music in Vienna. Although as a collector Bodmer concentrated entirely on Beethoven, he could not pass over an example of Schumann’s handwriting. In the summer of 1848, to celebrate the seventh birthday of his oldest daughter Marie, Schumann had put together eight of his own compositions for piano, six of which he later included in his “Album für die Jugend” (“Album for the Young”). Eight single notesheets with short piano adaptations of works by Bach, Händel, Mozart, Schubert and two by Beethoven have also survived. This journey through the history of music is crowned by “Eine berühmte Melodie von L. van Beethoven” (“Famous Melody by L. van Beethoven”), which in fact is the “Joy” theme from his Ninth Symphony.

Bodmer also possessed a substantial number of first editions. Those which have handwritten dedications or other comments by Beethoven are particularly valuable. In 1795 the first edition of Beethoven’s Opus 1 was published, three piano trios which the young composer considered to be his first fully valid work. The copy on display contains a list of

subscribers’ names, many of which have been underlined by Beethoven, who initially sold the edition in Vienna on his own account. In this way the Viennese aristocracy were able to sponsor the 24 year old composer by buying the edition in larger quantities. **Showcase 6** contains his contract with the publisher Artaria, which Beethoven had been able to negotiate very favourable for himself. Such contracts were for Beethoven uncommon pieces of luck and today copies of them are exceedingly rare.

Outstanding among the first editions, even if it was published posthumously, is the deluxe edition of the cantata “Der glorreiche Augenblick” (“The Glorious Moment”) Opus 136, which Beethoven had composed on the occasion of the Congress of Vienna. The copies dedicated to Emperor Franz I, King Friedrich Wilhelm III und Czar Nikolaus I are particularly elaborate and may be considered to be the most beautiful music edition printed in the 19th Century. Bodmer was also able to acquire an autograph cover of a transcription of the work from the Mozarteum Foundation in Salzburg.

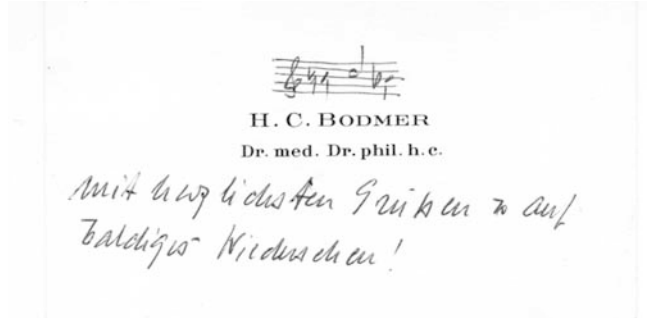
The bookcase contains a number of treasures from Bodmer’s extensive Beethoven library, including the earliest biography, which appeared only a year after the composer’s death, and valuable music magazines which wrote about Beethoven during his lifetime.

The three small showcases (**showcases 5, 7 and 8**) and the right half of the bookcase contain documents pertaining to H.C. Bodmer and his short but intensive relationship with the Beethoven-Haus. Bodmer was born in 1891 into one of Zürich’s noblest and wealthiest families. Even as a child he was seized by a great enthusiasm for Beethoven, which never waned during a lifetime of collecting. He studied music and composition, and later medicine. In 1932 he became a member of the Beethoven-Haus Society, although he did not visit the house until 20 years later, on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of the maestro’s death. Bodmer himself described his visit to Beethoven’s place of birth and his inspection of the collection as the pivotal experience in his preoccupation with Beethoven. He consequently entrusted the Beethoven-Haus with the scientific evaluation of his collection. In the same year he was made an honorary life-member of the society and also received an honorary doctorate from Bonn University. 21 outstanding items from his collection were displayed here for the first time in 1953. Bodmer always remained modestly in the background. His only publication was an article about the autograph score for the trombone parts of the Ninth Symphony which appeared in a programme of the Zürich Concert Hall. He had a close bond of

great mutual respect with German Federal President Theodor Heuss, based on their common esteem of the novelist Hermann Hesse, of whom Bodmer was a lifelong benefactor. Showcase 8 contains the autograph of the poem which Hesse “sent on” to his deceased patron.

That which H.C. Bodmer’s brother had prophesied and hoped for in 1953, actually became reality in 1956 when the fruit of four decades of intensive collecting, the H.C. Bodmer Collection, returned “home” to the place where everything had begun: Beethoven’s birthplace. For 50 years now the collection has, in the words of Martin Bodmer, “acquired its full value and a far richer life through the fortunate connection with the Beethoven-Haus (...)”. Thus the many millions of people who have visited the Beethoven-Haus in the course of the last fifty years, those who will do so in the future as well as the one million people who last year alone visited our digital archive in the Internet (www.beethoven-haus-bonn.de, Studio/Digital Archive) have every reason to appreciate with due respect and gratitude Bodmer’s efforts to conserve and care for a significant part of Beethoven’s material and spiritual heritage.

M.L.



Beethoven-Haus Bonn
Bonngasse 20
D-53111 Bonn

www.beethoven-haus-bonn.de

A richly illustrated catalogue of the exhibition is available in the museum shop.