

**Beethoveni late piano sonatas I:  
The Sonata A major op. 101**

Special exhibition in the  
Beethoven-Haus, Bonn  
March 16<sup>th</sup> to May 5<sup>th</sup> 1998

Thanks to Mrs Anne-Liese Henle's bequest an especially valuable original manuscript has been added to the collections of the Beethoven-Haus. The autograph of the piano sonata A major op. 101 was the last still detectable autograph of one of Beethoven's piano sonatas privately owned. So it finally completes this section of the collections, that anyway had already been one of the main areas of interest, including the original manuscripts of the "Moonlight"-Sonata C sharp minor op. 27 nr. 2, the "Waldstein"-Sonata op. 53, as well as the Sonatas F sharp major op. 78 and G major op. 79, the Sonata E minor op. 90 - only acquired a few years ago – and one movement each of the last two Sonatas A flat major op. 110 and C minor op. 111. So two thirds of all preserved autographs of piano sonatas are now united in Bonn.

Beethoven had already started composing the Sonata A major op. 101 in spring 1815, but then he devoted himself to the two Sonatas for cello and piano op. 102. The main work at the piano sonata was done in the year 1816. The process of the composition is illustrated by two sketch-papers with sketches concerning the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> movement. They are of particular interest for the reason alone that this sonata is not only an immaculate masterpiece created by Beethoven, but also a significant step in forming his late style of composing. This step in a language of sound "not granted" up to then can be found paradigmatically in the first using of the Counter-E, a tone in the piano's deepest register, which could only be played with the absolutely newest instruments. This tone was so new and unusual that even Beethoven sometimes had problems to write it down correctly. This tone already occupied Beethoven in one of the sketchleaves, it returns as a separate notation on the title-page, at page 7 and at the last written page of the autograph, as well as in several other sources.

In the display case 1 you will see not only some very early stages of the composition – which partly still differs quite a lot from the final version. but also a letter written by Beethoven in July 1816 to the music-publishers Breitkopf & Härtel in Leipzig, in which Beethoven offers them the new sonata - long before it was finished. as he did so often. The autograph has the following title: "New Sonata for piano / by L. van Beethoven / 1816 / in the month / November". It is a fair copy, but nevertheless it contains a lot of additions made by Beethoven with pencil and red chalk (dynamic annotations, signs of

articulation, tone letters, etc.), some of which he himself has retraced with ink.

The autograph mainly shows the final version. The pages 22/23 are opened, with an extensive personally inscribed addition written with a pencil below right: "N[ota]b[ene]: the letters shall also be put below when engraved". But when the original edition was finally engraved this instruction was not put into practice. In the last but one accolade a big erasure can be seen, that has left a hole in the paper. It is the point where the Counter-E occurs for the first time - a note that even Beethoven was not able to write down without complications.

A letter concerning the same point written by Beethoven to the music-publisher Tobias Haslinger in the middle of January 1817, is added. Beethoven had just corrected a proof of the original edition. Consequently he informed the publisher of his wish to add in the original version some tone letters to the tones of the deep counter-octave occurring here for the first time. This wish was not put into practice in this form either. In a second letter Beethoven has told the publisher that he could do what he liked to concerning this problem, calling the publisher in a friendly and joking way "adjutant and second scoundrel of the empire".

In the display case 3 one specimen of the first print, the so-called original edition, can be seen, that has been published in February 1817 in the Viennese publishing-house of S.A. Steiner and Comp. It differs from the autograph in a number of passages, especially concerning the dynamic notations (f, p, sf, cresc.). When Beethoven corrected it, he has added titles to some movements, as well as some instructions concerning the performance, which are still missing in the autograph and which have neither been inserted there later on. That is what Beethoven had demanded in a letter: "in addition the words added in some places have to be observed and put into effect". By the way, Beethoven had asked Steiner the high fee of 60 Dutch ducats.

The original edition is dedicated to the pianist Baroness Dorothea Ertmann (1781-1849) highly estimated by Beethoven. The letter in which Beethoven informs the publisher of the precise words of the dedication on the title-page is shown as well as the letter with which Beethoven has sent a dedicated specimen to Dorothea Ertmann, expressing his great estimation for her art. Already in 1804 Beethoven had sent her New Year greetings.

Several letters to the publisher prove that Beethoven himself saw after many details concerning the text and the form of the original edition. One problem was the best German translation for the

Italian term "Pianoforte". Finally Beethoven decided that it should be "Hammerklavier".

The Sonata op. 101 was published as the first number of a new series "Museum für Klaviermusik", in which the publisher wanted to include only especially demanding and artistically worked out piano music. He explains this in a "Musikalische Anzeige" ("Musical Announcement") that precedes the edition. As a critique of the work in the 'Wiener Allgemeinen Musikalische Zeitung' (Magazine for Musical Affairs in Vienna) shows, the contemporaries were very conscious about the solitary greatness of this work in comparison to the generally known piano music of this time. The reviewer praised the originality, the interesting, elaborate and artistic arrangement and finish of completely new ideas and the inexhaustible richness of the composition. The artistic contrapuntal arrangement of the finale is praised especially high. In a later review a reference to Bach can be found - really not wrongly. At the page next to it an announcement of the publisher Steiner can be found about a new edition of "Kunstwerke im strengen Stil" ("Artworks in strict style"). including the Well-Tempered Clavier of Johann Sebastian Bach. Especially in context with the late piano sonatas, in which contrapuntal structures play a special role. Beethoven has in fact studied Bach's collection of models. as a copy of the Fugue C minor of volume II of the Well-Tempered Clavier BWV 871 shows. It originates from this time. presumably Beethoven has produced it in context with the composition of the next piano sonata, the "Große Sonate für das Hammerklavier" B major op. 106. (display case 5)

The exhibits in display case 6 shortly refer to the development of the piano-making at Beethoven's time. In the course of a few decades there was (parallel to the development of the piano music itself) a tremendously fast further development of the pianoforte, which aimed at more strength and more richness of tone, as well as at a bigger compass of keyboard. At the time when Beethoven was young the pianofortes. built more lightly and therefore much more weakly in tone, had a range of 5 octaves, which was extended after 1810 up to 6 ½ (see the price-list of the year 1817 of London's piano-maker John Broadwood & Sons, who gave a pianoforte with 6 octaves CC-c''' to Beethoven as a present in the same year [see the instrument built in the same way in room 8], and the blackboard from Carl Czerny's "Vollständiger theoretisch-praktischer Pianoforte-Schule" op. 500 [1839]). Only the completely newest instruments had the Counter-E demanded by Beethoven in this sonata (interestingly not before the 4<sup>th</sup> movement) and at the same time the e'''' in treble at disposal. To differentiate the sound diverse

modulations were used, which were to regulate with the help of pedals. At the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> movement of the Sonata op. 101 Beethoven demands the "shift", the "una corda". Instead of three (or four) strings per key only two or in this case even only one string becomes struck. This results in a thin, spherical sound, rich on overtones. Beethoven was very open-minded about these innovations. He has discussed them with all Viennese piano-makers he knew or he was friend with. By this time Vienna was an eldorado of the art of piano-making. A "classified directory" of 1822 includes not less than 64 piano-/organ-makers. Beethoven had an especially close relation to Johann Andreas Streicher, two letters of whom dating from 1818 in which he says something about his instruments and about Beethoven, are exhibited.

We can get hints for an interpretation that copes with the style of the Sonata op. 101 in Carl Czerny's "Über den richtigen Vortrag der sämtlichen Beethoven'schen Klavierwerke" (Volume 4 of his piano method op. 500 [1842]) (display case 7). Czerny, himself Beethoven's pupil from 1801 to 1803, had close contact to Beethoven in 1816/1817. By this time he gave piano lessons to his nephew Karl. Beethoven knew that he produced piano-adaptations of some of the master's works. To thank him for that Beethoven gave him a dedicated specimen of the original edition of op. 101.

Beethoven stayed in contact with the publisher of the Sonata op. 101 for many years afterwards. For example T. Haslinger becomes mentioned in a conversation-book of 1825. In a document dating from the year 1822 Beethoven thinks about the right of an author to produce a revised edition of his works. Later on Haslinger has published a complete edition of Beethoven's works (which has stayed incomplete), after he had already made a calligraphic copy of Beethoven's works in 62 volumes. Haslinger himself also compiled a thematic catalogue of Beethoven's works.

ML/YB