Composed – Lost – Planned

Beethoven's early instrumental concertos and the cadenzas

A special exhibition at the Beethoven-Haus Bonn 28.11.2013 – 19.2.2014

Every lover of music is familiar with Beethoven's five piano concertos and his violin concerto, whereas his triple concerto for violin, cello and orchestra op. 56 is consigned more to the shadows. It is not widely known that he composed additional concertos and had begun with the composition of more. Nor do Beethoven's cadenzas to his own concertos, and much less those he wrote to a piano concerto by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, attract the attention which they deserve. With the help of original documents which are being displayed publicly for the first time, this special exhibition gives an insight into that area of his work.

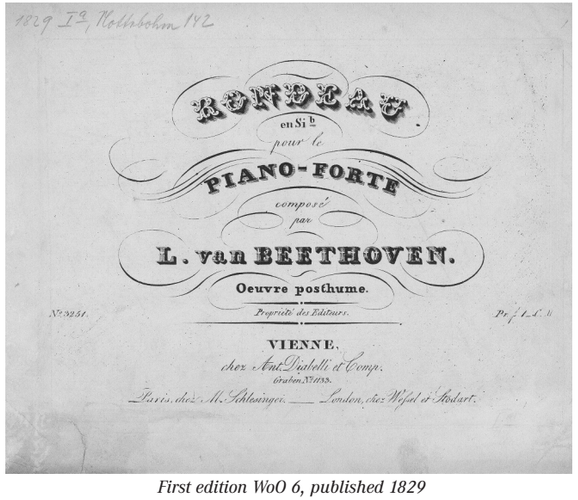
Early instrumental concertos

(Room 7, Showcase 1) During his early life in Bonn, Beethoven regularly performed piano concertos as a soloist. At that time it was quite normal to showcase as soon as possible one's own compositions. The piano concerto in E-flat major WoO 4, of which only the piano part survives today, was presumably written in 1784, when the 13 year old Beethoven was granted a regular position as a court musician. In the previous year he had undertaken his first and only concert tour in the style of the young Mozart – to The Hague (an aspect of the city hangs on the wall).

(Showcase 2) The concerto for violin and orchestra in C major WoO 5 was written during his last years in Bonn. Only a fragment of the first movement still exists today. At the time this first movement at least was probably complete. When he made this early attempt at composing a violin concerto, it was Beethoven's intention to also produce a transcription for piano, as indeed he later did with the famous violin concerto in D major op. 61. A romance for flute, bassoon, piano and orchestra in E minor (Hess 13), a work for three soloists, was well developed but never completed.

The early violin concerto first appeared in printed form in 1879, in a version completed by the celebrated Viennese violinist Joseph Hellmesberger sr. He dedicated the first edition to Gerhard von Breuning (whose portrait hangs on the wall), who from childhood onward was a friend of Beethoven's and who in 1889 was made an honorary member of the Beethoven-Haus Society.

(Showcase 3) For his second piano concerto in B flat major op. 19, which he began in Bonn and completed in Vienna, Beethoven drafted a rondo for the third movement during his time in Bonn, which he then finished shortly after moving to Vienna. Chronologically the second piano concerto, this work actually originated earlier than the concerto in C major op. 15, which we know today as the first piano concerto. The piece was published posthumously. For its publication Beethoven's pupil Carl Czerny (his portrait hangs on the wall) completed the solo part, which had not been fully developed by the composer, and added cadenzas.



First edition WoO 6, published 1829

(Showcase 4) The two beautiful but technically relatively undemanding romances for violin and orchestra in G major op. 40 and in F major op. 50 fall in a broader sense into the category of concerto. The original manuscript of the romance in G major was once in the possession of the great violinist Joseph Joachim, the first honorary president of the Beethoven-Haus Society.

Beethoven never published his oboe concerto in F major. It has completely disappeared, except for the beginnings of the movements as they were noted down by the music publisher Anton Diabelli on the sheet of paper displayed here. The work was composed during Beethoven's days in Bonn and is tailored specifically to suit the court orchestra, which had in Georg Liebisch and Joseph Welsch two excellent oboists. He revised it during his first year in Vienna under the guidance of his teacher Joseph Haydn. Haydn instructed him in the technique of constructing and developing larger works. The concerto is mentioned in a report of 23rd November 1793 from Haydn to the Prince Elector, in which he enumerated the progress being made by his pupil.

(Showcase 5) Beethoven repeatedly made notes on fantasising. At that time improvisation was very popular, and it played an important part in the first concert arranged by Beethoven himself (a poster hangs on the wall opposite). The subject was also covered in contemporary piano schools. Daniel Gottlob Türk (1802) lists 9 rules for the composition of a cadenza, e.g.: "A cadenza need not be erudite, but novelty, wit, a richness of ideas etc. belong nevertheless to its indispensable requirements." He also refers to the transition: cadenzas had previously been improvised, but now they were conceived, arranged and practised. A quarter of a century later, Carl Czerny, the most important piano teacher in Vienna in the first half of the 19th century, mentions improvisation only briefly, and cadenzas in that context not at all. The heyday of fantasising was already past. There followed a time when musicians, when they were also composers, wrote cadenzas to other people's works and also published them.

Beethoven's cadenzas to the piano concertos

As a performing pianist Beethoven wrote his piano concertos primarily for his own use. The cadenza in a solo concert (usually in the first and third movement) was the moment when the soloist could show his mastery of the highly esteemed art of free improvisation. He also had to demonstrate his virtuosity by executing technical wonders. However, because house-music amateurs in particular were rarely able to improvise an interestingly varied and masterly cadenza based musically on the themes of the movement, composers regularly wrote cadenzas for pupils or friends, either as a direct guideline or model, intended to help them produce their own cadenza. Beethoven achieved the balancing act between the necessity of serving an educational purpose, whereby he had if anything to comply with an established norm, and at the same time composing in one case the seemingly avant-garde, expansive and somewhat bizarre cadenza to the first movement of the first piano concerto op. 15, which broke drastically with tradition. Beethoven's sometimes very individually constructed cadenzas were subsequently to become the benchmark for important performers to show off their prowess with cadenzas of their own. Archduke Rudolph of Austria (his portrait hangs on the wall) took lessons in piano and composition from Beethoven, and it was for him that most of the 14 cadenzas, composed mainly in 1808/1809, to Beethoven's four own piano concertos and the concerto in D minor KV 466 by Mozart, whom he venerated, as well as to the piano version of his violin concerto, were intended. Additionally there is a so-called "lead-in" or mini-cadenza to the second repetition of the theme in the rondo finale of his fourth piano concerto as well as a transition from the second to the third movement and a lead-in to the first repetition of the theme in the rondo finale of the piano version of his violin concerto. Moreover, Archduke Rudolph was one of the composer's most important benefactors and had more works dedicated to him than anyone else, the first being the fourth piano concerto op. 58 in 1808. In the case of the fifth piano concerto, which was written at the same time as the cadenzas to the earlier concertos, Beethoven did not allow for any improvised cadenzas, but rather composed it to the first movement himself.

By comparison: there exist 64 cadenzas or lead-ins (transitions to the repetition of the theme in a rondo) to Mozart's 27 piano and violin concertos written by himself, mostly at a later date.

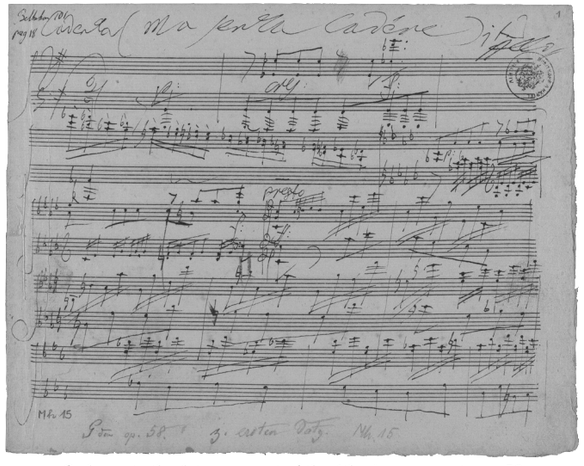
(Showcase 6) Beethoven composed the handwritten cadenzas to his first piano concerto in pairs, after the publication of the concerto. They are very different. Whereas some are concise and regular, the one to the first movement, (indexed H.C. Bodmer Collection HCB Mh12), is by far the longest (15 manuscript pages!). We can thus gain an impression of how Beethoven himself may have improvised: he bends or breaks the rule. Musically, this cadenza is among the most advanced pieces which Beethoven ever composed.

(Showcase 7) A sketchbook used in 1802/1803 also contains a draft for the improvisation of the cadenza in the 1st movement of the third piano concerto in C minor op. 37 during the first performance. Of course Beethoven himself was at the piano.

He overwrote one of three cadenzas to the first movement of the fourth piano concerto with a play on words "Cadenza (ma senza cadére)", referring to its degree of difficulty – ("ma senza cadere" = "but without falling").

If the cadenza to the first movement of the first piano concerto op. 15 was a breakout into freedom, then the cadenza to the finale of the fourth piano concerto op. 58 is all about the norm. It is kept particularly short, more resembling a transition than a cadenza, and is technically completely

undemanding. By contrast with the other two cadenzas, Beethoven is here showing his pupil Archduke Rudolph a minimalistic solution.



Cadenza to the 1st movement of the 4th piano concerto op. 58

“Lead-ins” (transitions)

Unlike cadenzas, the so-called lead-ins are composed transitions within the final movement. The final movement of a concerto is normally a rondo, in which the chorus is repeated a number of times. At the end of each interlude, before the return of the theme, the soloist leads back to the orchestra’s ritornello. This transition was normally improvised, but here it is composed to provide a model.

Cadenzas of other composers and performers to Beethoven’s concertos

(Showcase 8) Muzio Clementi’s s “Musical characteristics” op. 19, first published in 1787, contains preludes and cadenzas written in the style of composers of piano music who were particularly famous in his time: Haydn, Mozart and Clementi himself, of course, but also the not yet “rediscovered” Leopold Kozeluch, Johann Franz Xaver Sterkel and Johann Baptist Vanhal. Cadenzas are offered here as neutral models, without motivic allusion to any specific work.

In the 19th century well-known composers and performers such as Johannes Brahms, Clara Schumann and many others made a point of writing and publishing cadenzas to the famous concertos of the First Viennese School. The cadenzas were judged by critics on the basis of their appropriateness of style and length.

Beethoven’s violin concerto D major op. 61 and its cadenza

(Room 12 on the ground floor, Showcase 1) At the suggestion of the London-based music publisher Muzio Clementi (his portrait hangs on the wall), Beethoven reworked his violin concerto op. 61 into a version for piano and orchestra. Whereas Beethoven did not provide a cadenza for the violin concerto, he composed one for the piano version. Even today violinists regularly play cadenzas of their own, in which they rearrange Beethoven’s piano cadenza for the violin. Beethoven also composed a “lead-in” from the andante to the rondo, i.e. a transition from the second to the third movement.

The piano cadenza to the first movement is unusual, and not only on account of its length (12 handwritten pages!). The piano part is accompanied by a second manuscript, a specially composed part for timpani. An accompanying part for a cadenza is unique in piano literature. But in fact it made sense here to have the piano accompanied by timpani. At the start of the concerto they have played a prominent role: the work begins with four solo timpani beats.

In addition to the transition here on display from the second to the third movement, written over with “lead-in from the andante to the rondo”, Beethoven also composed a transition back to the third entrance of the rondo theme, which we already know from the fourth piano concerto. In the original version for violin the composer only specifies an obligatory cadenza for the third movement. The concerto was first performed by the violinist Franz Clement. Since the composition was not finished until shortly before the performance in a concert arranged by Clement himself for the 23rd December 1806, he had more or less to sight-read the solo part, and of course he improvised the cadenzas. Clement could already look back on a brilliant career as child prodigy. He had gone at a very young age – like Mozart before him – on extensive tours abroad.

(Showcase 2) Joseph Joachim (portraits of him hang on the wall), the éminence grise of the German music scene in the second half of the 19th century, was considered the outstanding performer of Beethoven’s violin concerto and he became famous overnight with a performance of it when he was 13 years old. Until then the concerto had been considered unplayable or unrewarding. Joachim improvised several cadenzas to this work, but also composed some.

Plans (not followed up) for instrumental concertos

(Showcase 3) During his whole life Beethoven continually drafted outlines for instrumental concertos. However, after 1809 he never completed another work of that genre. There was no lack of plans: the eighth symphony, composed in 1812, had originally been planned as a piano concerto. Three years later he began a piano concerto in D major, but never finished it. Beethoven had initially written his piano concertos for his own use as a concert pianist. When his increasing deafness made public performance as a pianist impossible, the “commercial base” of the concertos had more or less ceased to exist.

Joachim-quartet, etching by F. Schmutzer, 1904

A sketch sheet on unperformed works from his last years in Bonn contains not only sketches and technical exercises for the piano, but also a written-out cello part. This could belong to the concluding part of a concerto, for it begins with a fermata (or pause) which in instrumental concertos gives notice of the cadenza. This concerto could possibly have been the “Romance cantabile” for piano, flute and bassoon accompanied by two oboes and strings (Hess 13) (see also Showcase 2 in Room 7).

(Showcase 4) In his sketchbook from 1812, which also contains the previously mentioned drafts for the eighth symphony, on page 42r in the top four lines he sketches first ideas for a piano concerto in G major, which was to receive an “adagio in E flat (major)” as slow middle movement. From line 6 he then changes to: “concerto in G (major) or E minor”. At the bottom he notes down two further planned compositions: “Polonaise for solo piano” and “develop ‘Freude schöner götter Funken’ as an overture”. Beethoven did compose the polonaise two years later for the Russian Empress Elizabeth Alexeievna. The completion of the overture took from 1809 to 1814, but the plan to incorporate Schiller’s ode was not carried out.

(Showcase 5) Among the planned, but not actually written instrumental concertos are:

Romance cantabile for piano, flute and bassoon accompanied by 2 oboes and strings (Hess 13), 1790-1792

Sinfonia concertante in D major for violin, cello, piano and orchestra, 1802

Second attempt at a triple concert in G major, autumn 1803

Piano concerto in F minor, 1808

Piano concerto in G major, 1812

Piano concerto in D major (Hess 15), 1815

ML/NK

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