

**ANDREA LUCCHESINI**

**piano**

**LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)**

**Sonata No. 14 in C# minor Op. 27 No. 2 (“Moonlight”)**

Adagio sostenuto

Allegretto

Presto agitato

(approx. 16 minutes)

**ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856)**

**Phantasie in C Major Op. 17**

Durchaus fantastisch und leidenschaftlich vorzutragen - Im Legenden-Ton

Mäßig. Durchaus energisch

Langsam getragen. Durchweg leise zu halten

(approx. 32 minutes)

Intermission

**FRANZ LISZT (1811-1886)**

**Sonata in B minor S. 178**

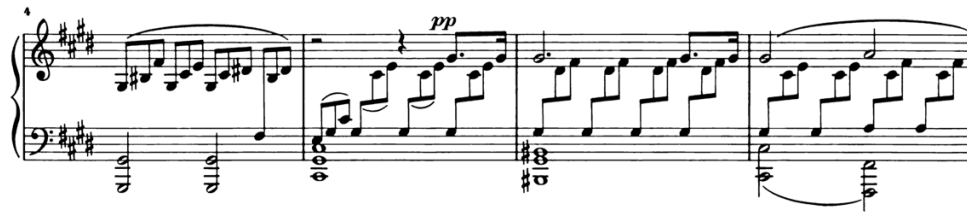
Lento assai – Allegro energico

(approx. 30 minutes)

## Ludwig van Beethoven

### Sonata No. 14 in C# minor Op. 27 No. 2 ("Moonlight")

When German poet and music critic Ludwig Rellstab (1799-1860) first compared Beethoven's C# minor *Sonata quasi una fantasia* to the dreamy glimmerings of Lake Lucerne bathed in moonlight, he was blissfully unaware of what pianist Edwin Fischer (1886-1960) would discover more than a century later. While examining a sketch in Beethoven's own hand, Fischer realized that the famous triplets and polyrhythmic overlay of this sonata's first movement were taken *directly* from the scene in which Donna Anna's father is killed by Don Giovanni in Mozart's eponymous opera. Far from being a peaceful and placid nocturnal dreamscape, this movement, in Fischer's words, was "a solemn dirge."



Viewed in this new light, it would be easy to see the 'tolling bell' dotted rhythm of this movement as funereal, a sibling to the same rhythm in Beethoven's *Marcia funebre* of his Sonata in A flat, one opus number back. Or to Chopin's own famous dotted-rhythm dirge, for that matter. And in this reading of the score the lacerating dissonances of the soprano line as the movement develops become more plangent, as well.

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Fortunately, the mood of suspended animation in grief that the first movement evokes is relieved by a consoling, dancelike *Allegretto* in the major mode, a scherzo & trio emphatically grounded in the swaying body-rhythms of its insistent syncopations.

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The pace picks up with a vengeance, of course, in the firestorm finale, the only sonata-form movement in this work.



If this music sounds scary, it's meant to. This is Beethoven "mad as hell, and not going to take it anymore," a fist-clenching, pound-on-the-table protagonist, bent on musical violence.

The *agitato* mood is unrelenting, what contrast there is being provided only by brief lapses into sullenness and simmering anger. At its climax, the movement explodes into a heaven-storming cadenza releasing lava flows of sonority across the entire keyboard.



Who could have foreseen that the first movement's quietly undulating broken chords, emblematic of resignation in the face of death, would form the template for the raging fury – very much alive – of those same broken chords in the finale?

## Robert Schumann

### Phantasie in C major Op. 17

Schumann's love life and his admiration for Ludwig van Beethoven interacted in a curious way in the composition of his C major Phantasie Op. 17, his largest and perhaps greatest work for solo piano. In 1836 the path of true love was not running smooth for young Robert as he pined in vain for his beloved Clara, the teenaged daughter of his teacher Friedrich Wieck.



The Phantasie's first movement was composed under the stimulus of these strong emotions and it expresses them in a spontaneous flow of soaring melodies and swirling rhapsodic left-hand accompaniments that only finds temporary respite in its mysterious middle section, labelled *Im Legenden-Ton* ('in the character of a legend').



That same year a civic project was launched to raise a memorial to Beethoven in Bonn, the city of his birth, and Schumann offered to raise funds with the publication of a “Grand Sonata” in three movements. The tribute to Beethoven may well have been conceived before the first movement was completed, however, as its *Adagio* coda features a quotation from the last song in Beethoven’s *An die ferne Geliebte*. This text of this musical quotation could easily have been intended for Clara: “Take, then, these songs [which I have sung for you].”

\* \* \*

The second movement is a stirring march of nostril-flaring patriotic fervour that alternates, in rondo fashion, its forthright opening theme with contrasting material in a sustained dotted rhythm.



This movement's coda is remarkable for its sequence of hair-raising leaps in opposite directions that test both the pianist's nerves and his bilateral visual perception.



\* \* \*

The last movement is a poetic reverie that drifts between the gentle unfolding of evocative harmonies, murmuring with intimations of melody in the inner voices, and more openly songful patches that create their own swells of passionate climax and subsiding emotion.



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Schumann's three-movement “sonata” was eventually published in 1839 under the title *Phantasie* and the monument to Beethoven in Bonn was indeed built, thanks to a generous top-up of funds on the part of Franz Liszt, to whom Schumann's work is dedicated.

The unveiling took place in 1845 – with the young Queen Victoria no less, in attendance.

## Franz Liszt

### Sonata in B minor S. 178

“This is nothing but sheer racket ... it’s really awful,” wrote pianist Clara Schumann on first hearing Liszt’s B minor Sonata, dedicated to her husband Robert. The pre-eminent Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick couldn’t have agreed more. Blending high dudgeon with feigned condolence, he scornfully sneered: “Whoever has heard that, and finds it beautiful, is beyond help.” Suffice it to say, Liszt’s piano sonata was not welcomed into the canon with open arms, but something more akin to raised pitchforks.

The problem may well have been that in writing this sonata, completed in 1853, Liszt was going 'against brand'. Long known for his *programmatic* works—each with a story to tell, and thus a built-in framework for interpretation—Liszt had shocked many in the musical world by composing a piece of *absolute* music, a work based purely on the interplay of abstract musical ideas. His Sonata in B Minor came across as an impenetrably dense musical hairball of intertwined motives, in a single-movement format that seemed to combine the characteristics of both a sonata-form movement (exposition, development, recapitulation) and the four-movement layout of a complete sonata (sonata allegro, slow movement, scherzo, finale). In this he was undoubtedly influenced by Schubert, whose *Wanderer Fantasy* with a similar unified design he had recently arranged in a version for piano and orchestra.

Binding Liszt’s sonata together is the process of *thematic transformation*, i.e., changing the character of musical themes while retaining their essential identity, their melodic outline. The multiple personalities of the *idée fixe* theme in Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique* is an early example, and Wagner’s use of *leitmotif* is a later development of the same technique. So to follow what Liszt is doing in this sonata, you need to follow the four major themes he is shape-shifting as it proceeds.

The first three are spelled out on the first page of the score. The work opens with a pair of slow, descending scales of an exotic stamp.

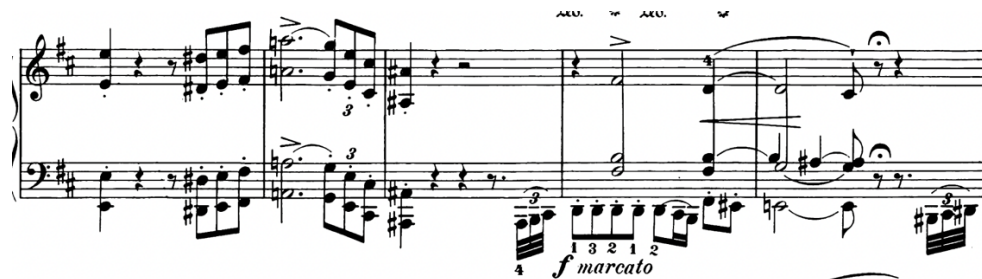


Then comes a forthright theme hammered out in double octaves beginning with a bold downward leap and ending with a diminished 7th arpeggio.

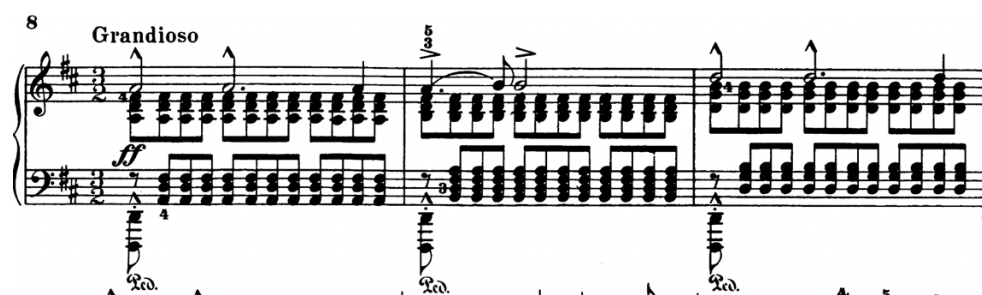




Finally, the bass gruffly growls out a rascally little motive down low, rife with repeated notes.



The transformations begin immediately as these three themes spawn passage after varied passage of keyboard textures, all motivically interlinked, until a solemn, chorale-like fourth theme of slowly rising melody notes arrives over a pulsing carpet of sonorous chordal harmonies to complete the line-up.



In the course of this sonata, the list of 'transformations' seems limitless. The gruff growling theme of repeated notes is transformed, among other things, into a dreamily delicious, Liebestraum-like lyrical melody in the 'slow movement' section. The bold theme in double octaves is tamed and brought to heel as the subject of an extended fugato in the following 'scherzo'. And the chorale-like theme abandons its dignified 'churchy' solemnity and acquires major rhetorical muscle, elbowing its way into your eardrums as an important protagonist in the piece. Meanwhile, the slow descending scales that opened the work recur as boundary markers delineating major sectional divisions.

Liszt's B minor Sonata is now recognized as one of the most important keyboard compositions of the 19th century, and the very complexity of its structuring—the quality that caused so much antipathy at its first publication—is now the chief reason it is so widely admired.

Donald G. Gíslason 2023