

FILIPPO GORINI
piano

YUKIKO WATANABE (b.1983)

Chronorings (2026)

(approx. 5 minutes)

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Sonata in B-flat major Op. 106 (*Hammerklavier*)

Allegro

Scherzo. Assai vivace

Adagio sostenuto

Largo-Allegro risoluto

(approx. 45 minutes)

- Intermission -

FRANZ SCHUBERT (1797-1828)

Four Impromptus Op. 90 D 899

I Allegro molto moderato

II Allegro

III Andante

IV Allegretto

(approx. 30 minutes)

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Yukiko Watanabe

Chronorings

Chronorings is inspired by the image of tree rings, where different layers of time coexist within a single structure.

The work is based on a simple musical idea: a chord that gradually descends chromatically. Through a process of “cellular variations,” this material

repeatedly expands and contracts, shifting between intricate textures and broader musical gestures. These transformations invite the listener to experience different scales and perceptions of time.

Drawing inspiration from David Hockney's use of multiple perspectives and the miniature landscapes of Japanese bonsai, the piece explores how changes in scale and perspective can transform our perception of time. Different temporal layers coexist, creating a musical landscape in which intimate details and larger structures continuously reframe one another.

Ludwig van Beethoven

Sonata in B-flat major Op. 106 (*Hammerklavier*)

It has often been remarked that Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* sonata of 1819 is a work more respected than loved. Many admire it as magnificently "expressive," but few hold it to be "beautiful" in the classical sense. Its status as a monument of Western classical music is justifiably founded on the sheer grandeur of its musical ideas and the vast expanse of emotional space that these ideas both define and occupy: the explosive heroism of its first movement, the wilful caprice of its scherzo, the profound lyrical introspection of its *Adagio*, and the dazzling intellectual vigour of its massively intricate fugal finale.

The sonata is dedicated to Archduke Rudolph of Austria, the youngest son of Emperor Leopold II, a longtime friend and former student of Beethoven. An earlier sketch reveals that Beethoven had originally planned the dramatic opening of this sonata as the melody of a birthday greeting, for chorus, addressed to the Archduke with the Latin words: *VI-vat, VI-vat Ru-DOLPH-us!* (Long live Rudolph!)

But bypassing for a moment the high-minded dedication of this work, its extraordinary length (the *Adagio* alone is more than a quarter of an hour) and its vast emotional range, if we lift the lid and look at the compositional "plumbing" that ties it together, we find something very odd. We find the musical interval of the *third*, occurring over and over again, from the small-scale patterns of its melodies to the large-scale harmonic organization of its grand formal outlines. The musical space defined by three scale steps occurs so often, in fact, as almost to qualify as a constructive principle in this sonata, the steel rods in its reinforced concrete, if you will. When Beethoven thinks of what kind of melody to create, he thinks of using thirds. When he wonders what tonality to modulate to for the next section, he thinks that three notes away might do the job. When he thinks of the key to put the next movement in, he puts it three notes away. While he is careful not to be too obvious about it — his choices are always effective *musically* — one thing is clear: the man has thirds on the brain.

The work opens with two arresting statements in the *Vivat Rudolphus* rhythm, each initiated by a cannon echo booming up from the bass and proclaimed by a brassy fanfare in the high register. These gestures cover virtually the entire range of the piano of Beethoven's time, and they lay out the extraordinarily wide tonal range within which his musical thoughts will travel in this sonata.

The work's wide *emotional* range is hinted at, however, by the immediate change to a more lyrical tone of utterance, expressed in a much smaller tonal range, leading to a thoughtful pause. In a handful of bars we have gone from the explosive to the intimate, and we then head back into heroic territory as the opening salvos take centre stage again. A surprising cadence awaits, however, in D major, that grabs our attention, and as the dominant of G major, it leads us into that key for the second group of themes.

Without our noticing it, Beethoven, through all this, has been hammering thirds into our ears. The opening fanfares end ringingly and emphatically on two falling thirds (D to B flat and F to D). The melody of the lyrical passage which follows reverses these into a series of *rising* thirds (as little 3-step runs). And the D-major cadence is not coincidentally three notes up from the home key of B flat, and leads to G major, a key three notes down from it. (Normally the second theme area would be in the dominant, F major.) And as if to dispel all doubt, this second group of themes is largely occupied with a gracious series of descending running figures, figures that tumble by...thirds. And just to hammer the point home, the exposition ends with bluntly emphatic octaves in both hands, rising up three notes by step, with a big fat goose-egg pause at the end to let slower members of the audience catch up to the plot.

The development section begins by making much of the dramatic leap that began the work, but it soon settles down to put its main centre of interest — three little descending scale steps — through the wringer in an extended fugato in E flat (three notes down from G major). No one should be surprised, of course, when even these little three-step motives begin confronting each other in double...thirds. The recapitulation solemnly reviews the ground covered in the exposition, but after a climactic passage buzzing with double trills, adds a coda that resounds with the opening volley of *Vivat Rudolphus* to bring the movement to a close as it began.

Although Beethoven had not written a full four-movement piano sonata since Op. 31 No. 3, he shows in the second movement of this work that he had not lost his knack for writing quirky, whimsical scherzos. The opening is spun out miraculously from a single one-bar cell of melodic material — a perky third up, followed by a third down — that extends itself out in a series of harmonic sequences and then finds contrast in a moody trio in B-flat minor with rolling accompaniment. This trio burbles along with grim determination until it suddenly finds itself emerging into a disorderly near-riot that hammers its way up and down until issuing into a breathtaking keyboard-spanning run to the high register. After a cutesy little measured tremolo to add a bit of camp flair

to the proceedings (a twinkly sidelong glance at the audience would not come amiss here), we return to the opening material. But the tricks are not over. A stand-off breaks out in the coda over what the last note should be: B flat or B natural. After a lot of hammering, B flat ducks ahead at the last minute and crosses the finish line in the key the movement started in.

The *Adagio* is a gigantic sonata form, without repeat, in F# minor, enharmonically G-flat minor (three notes down from B flat). Exuding a grave tranquillity, its opening melody (which starts with a rising third, followed by two falling thirds) extends for a full 25 bars before contrasting material, scarcely less emotionally intense, appears. Despite its great length and generally subdued tone, it achieves a remarkable degree of variety through its many changes in texture and rises to a quite passionate level of expression through its operatic style of ornamentation. One notable feature is the use of *Bebung*, a pattern of off-beat repeated notes that reproduce the syncopated effect of sobs. In some passages the style of melodic variation is almost reminiscent of Chopin, but then Chopin's own style of ornamentation was also operatic, influenced as it was by the melodic style of Bellini. The extended filigree of 32nd notes in the development is the most magical passage of the movement, evoking perhaps a lonely nocturnal figure staring at the moon, cold and desolate but still admirably radiant.

The last movement, with its mighty fugue that weakens the knees of all but the most intrepid of pianists, begins with a palate-cleansing *Largo* of improvisatory character, spiritually much akin to the kinds of fantasias that Bach was wont to place before his titanic organ fugues. After many changes of tempo and mood, a series of high trills announces the arrival of the fugue subject, a half-note trill approached by leap from far below (parodying the opening fanfares of the first movement) followed by a series of small runs that descend by intervals of — you knew this was coming — thirds.

While Beethoven pursues his own musical agenda in this early-19th-century reinvention of the fugue, a musical form that had essentially died out with the deaths of Bach and Handel more than 50 years previous, he leaves us in no doubt that the time he had spent studying fugal procedure with Albrechtsberger and Haydn was not wasted. All of the most arcane contrapuntal devices and manners of treating a theme — augmentation, stretto, inversion, even *cancrizans* (playing it backwards) — sooner or later make their appearance in this mother of all fugues.

The performing pianist tasked with keeping all of this clear to listeners, a task that may reasonably be compared to juggling chainsaws while reciting Shakespeare, must not only balance sounds at the extreme ends of the keyboard, but often do so while playing extended trills paired with contrapuntal countermelodies — in the same hand!

Just at the point, though, when both hands are chasing trills high and low at a firecracker pace, a moment of calm arrives, a moment in which the skies seem to open and a heavenly melody in even quarter notes descends from on high to spread soothing oil on the troubled waters of contrapuntal discord. But not 30 bars later, however, the old contrapuntal itch returns, and Beethoven begins to combine his fidgety fugue subject with this new peace negotiator in the texture, sweeping it along into the vortex of swirling melodies and melody fragments, with the omnipresent buzzing of trills leering incessantly through the texture with dogged persistence.

In the end, the trills win out. Beethoven concludes his sonata by reducing our focus down to the most ear-catching motives that have marked its first and last movements in a great series of leaping octaves that trill and trill and trill their way to a final cadence.

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Franz Schubert

Four Impromptus Op. 90 D 899

The *impromptu* is just one of a number of small-scale instrumental genres arising in the early 19th century, known under the collective title of “character pieces.” Cultivated by composers of the Romantic era, these pieces present a simple musical idea in an intimate lyrical style with the aim of evoking a particular mood or moment of personal reflection, spontaneously experienced and immediately communicated.

The typical construction is a simple three-part form (A-B-A), with a middle section that contrasts in mood or emotional intensity with the outer sections. The eight impromptus that Schubert composed in late 1827 are classic examples of the genre and indeed are the first pieces bearing the name “impromptu” to establish themselves permanently in the repertoire.

Schubert’s Four Impromptus D 899 (frequently referred to as Op. 90) are vivid examples of Schubert’s talent for creating songful melody and of his innovative approach to keyboard texture.

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The *Impromptu No. 1 in C minor* is the longest of the set, its expansive range of moods and textures being more typical of a sonata movement than of a character-piece miniature. The drama begins early, in the opening bar, with a firm **ff** octave yielding to the **pp** of the lonely, almost whimpering little tune that follows, strangely forlorn and introspective despite its march-like rhythm.



After its assertive potential is explored, a more songful variant arrives to captivate the ear in the major mode, ending with a melodic turn figure that spawns its own lyrical discussion.



The middle section offers contrast more in texture than in thematic content as it works through the two related themes in the manner of a formal sonata development, rife with fretfully pulsating accompaniment figures.



Sonata-like, as well, is the resolution of the accumulated dramatic tension in the major-mode ending of the “recapitulation.”

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A more simply contrasted pair of emotions is explored in the *Impromptu No. 2 in E-flat*, which juxtaposes the carefree running-scale passages of the opening



with a more emphatic middle section dominated by vigorous emotional outbursts.



Developments in the design of the Viennese piano made possible the extreme pitch range of the right-hand scalar passages, which Schubert exploits to create thrilling crescendos in the high register.

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The *Impromptu No. 3 in G-flat* is sheer heaven on earth, presenting as it does a lyrical vocal melody over melt-in-your-mouth harmonies laid out in a gentle but ever-moving accompaniment pattern that perfectly paints the fluttering of the human heart.



While its middle section dips dramatically into the dark shadows of E-flat minor, gloomily murmuring with rising calls of concern up from the bass regions



it nevertheless maintains the same rippling flow of triplets in the accompaniment that eventually lead it back to the opening key of G-flat and the placid mood with which it began.

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Impromptu No. 4 in A-flat major begins with a buoyant cascade of broken chord figures that appears almost to be winking in merriment, despite its minor-mode setting — all the more playful because of the mock pathos in the soothing chords following that seem to say: “Just kidding, folks.”

IV



Meanwhile, two glorious melodies accompany it on its path, one in the baritone range of the left hand,



the other a luxuriantly deep-breathing melody in the alto range of the right hand, an eminently hummable tune ideal to accompany a fervent sudsing of the underarms in the shower.



The Trio middle section worries obsessively over a melody of semitone rises and falls, its accompaniment fretting in pulsing, anxious sympathy with these deliberations.



But in the end, the major mode wins over after the opening material is recalled to lighten the mood once again.

Donald G. Gíslason 2026