

Beethoven's Violin Sonatas

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) - Violin Sonata No. 8 Op. 30/3 (1801-02)
Allegro Assai; Tempo di menuetto, ma molto moderato e grazioso; Allegro vivace

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) - Violin Sonata No. 5, "Spring" Op.24 (1800-01)
Allegro; Adagio molto espressivo; Scherzo: Allegro molto; Rondo: Allegretto ma non troppo

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) - Violin Sonata No. 9, "Kreutzer" Op.47 (1802-04)
Adagio sostenuto – Presto; Andante con variazioni; Presto

Beethoven's father taught him the violin and the piano at an early age, so by 1789, he was playing the viola in the electoral court and theatre orchestras in Bonn where his father was a singer at the court of the Archbishop-Elector. But for Beethoven keyboard playing always took prime place.

Beethoven's violin sonatas are nearly all relatively early works. An incomplete sonata dating from 1790-92 seems to be inspired by Mozart's sonatas, and Beethoven's first complete sonatas date from when he was still studying with Haydn. The first nine sonatas all come from 1798 to 1804, a period when he was just establishing himself in Vienna and developing a reputation as a keyboard improviser, whilst the premieres of his first two symphonies, in 1800 and 1803, marked him as one of the most important composers of his generation.

By the time that Beethoven came to start writing violin sonatas in the 1790s the idea of the accompanied sonata, with the violin subservient to the piano, had fallen out of favour and both violin and piano came to be equal partners, though often with the piano dominating. Beethoven's first four sonatas are each in three movements and are typical of the 18th century. It is with *Sonata No. 5*, which is in four movements, that Beethoven makes the greatest advance in violin writing, and with the three sonatas Opus 30 (nos, 6, 7 & 8) Beethoven comes to a parting of the ways with his predecessors. No. 9 is the largest in scale and most demanding of the sonatas, and the final one would only follow after a gap of 10 years.

The *Violin Sonata No. 5* 'Spring' was published in 1801 and dedicated to Count Moritz von Fries, a patron to whom Beethoven also dedicated two other works of the same year—the C major string quintet and the fourth violin sonata—as well as his later seventh symphony. The opening theme of the first movement is one of Beethoven's most endearing, whilst the other material in the movement is a little more robust. The second movement, *Adagio*, is based on a single delicate theme, whilst the *Scherzo* is short, based on a strong rhythmic idea. The Finale is a rondo with another melodious main theme. The work's nickname is not Beethoven's but was added later.

The *Violin Sonata No. 8*, is the third of Beethoven's Opus 30 set. Written between 1801 and 1802, and published in 1803, the sonata was dedicated to Tsar Alexander I of Russia. The opening *Allegro* is lively and robust, the minuet begins as something Mozart might write but Beethoven develops this in new ways, whilst the finale is light-hearted and pastoral.

The *Violin Sonata No. 9* was originally dedicated to the Afro-European violinist George Bridgetower as *Sonata mulattica composta per il mulatto Brischdauer [Bridgetower], gran pazzo e compositore mulattico* (Mulatto Sonata composed for the mulatto Brischdauer, great madman mulatto composer), and Bridgetower and Beethoven premiered it in 1803. Shortly after, the two fell out and Beethoven removed the dedication, giving it instead to violinist Rodolphe Kreutzer, the finest violinist of the day, who disliked the piece and refused to play it!

The work is in three movements and lasts over 40 minutes, double the length of a traditional violin sonata. Similarly, the work is of far greater technical difficulty than earlier sonatas. The work opens with a slow introduction leading to an angry minor key *Presto*, with both instrumental parts of equal

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difficulty. The music of the introduction returns as a poignant coda. The slow movement is a set of variations on quite a placid theme, whilst the finale is virtuosic and exuberant.

610 words