NOTES BY KEN MELTZER

JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)
Violin Sonata No. 1 in G Major, Opus 78 (1879)
I. Vivace ma non troppo
II. Adagio
III. Allegro molto moderato

JOHN CORIGLIANO (b. 1938)
Sonata for Violin and Piano (1963)
I. Allegro
II. Andantino (with simplicity)
III. Lento (quasi recitativo)
IV. Allegro

INTERMESSION

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)
Violin Sonata No. 7 in C minor, Opus 30, No. 2 (1802)
I. Allegro con brio
II. Adagio cantabile
III. Scherzo. Allegro
IV. Finale. Allegro
to the movement’s initial theme. Against this are set two figures—an augmentation of the movement’s primary theme and, in combination with that, a 5/8 rhythmic ostinato utilized originally to accompany a totally different earlier passage. All three elements combine to form a new virtuoso perpetual motion theme which is, of course, subjected to further development and elaboration.

— John Corigliano

Violin Sonata No. 7 in C minor, Opus 30, No. 2 (1802)

Ludwig van Beethoven was baptized in Bonn, Germany, on December 17, 1770, and died in Vienna, Austria, on March 26, 1827.

(Approx. performance time: 25 mins.
SMF performance history: 3/26/11)

In the first years of the 19th century, during what then appeared to be the height of his career, Beethoven started to experience difficulties with his hearing. In April of 1802, on the advice of his doctor, Beethoven relocated to the beautiful country village of Heiligenstadt, where he remained until the early fall. During his stay in Heiligenstadt, it appears Beethoven experienced a further decline in his hearing. Beethoven was forced to confront the possibility, even the likelihood, that he would become totally deaf. It was, of course, the cruelest joke fate could play upon Beethoven. He would soon become a virtuoso pianist unable to perform in public, and a composer unable to hear his own music.

It is not surprising that Beethoven spent much time contemplating the meaning of his life. One of the products of this soul-searching process was the document known as the “Heiligenstadt Testament,” written in October of 1802. Addressed to his two brothers, the Testament was found among Beethoven’s papers after the composer’s death in 1827.

In the “Heiligenstadt Testament,” Beethoven confessed:

I was on the point of putting an end to my life—The only thing that held me back was my art. For indeed it seemed to me impossible to leave this world before I had produced all the works I felt the urge to compose; and thus I have dragged on this miserable existence—a truly miserable existence...

In the decade following the “Heiligenstadt Testament,” Beethoven responded with ferocious, unflagging energy and determination. During this extraordinary period, Beethoven composed such masterpieces as the Symphonies Nos. 3-8, the Fourth and Fifth (“Emperor”) Piano Concertos, the “Razumovsky” String Quartets, the “Waldstein,” “Appassionata” and “Les Adieux” Piano Sonatas, and the composer’s only opera, Fidelio.

That fateful year of 1802 was remarkably productive as well. Compositions include the Symphony No. 2, Opus 36, the variations for solo piano, Opus 34 and 35 (“Eroica”), and the Piano Sonatas, Opus 31, Nos. 1–3. In 1802, Beethoven also composed three Sonatas for Violin and Piano, Opus 30, Nos. 1–3. Beethoven dedicated the Violin Sonatas to Tsar Alexander I of Russia. Beethoven, a great advocate of democracy, admired the Tsar’s enlightened policies. In 1814, during the Congress of Vienna, Beethoven met the Empress of Russia. When she learned that the Tsar had never acknowledged Beethoven’s dedication of the Violin Sonatas, she gave the composer a gift of 100 ducats.

I. Allegro con brio—The piano offers a furtive presentation of the opening movement’s first principal theme. The violin follows suit, and the tension mounts to a stormy, fortissimo outburst. The mood quickly changes, as the violin introduces a sprightly march, played over the piano’s staccato accompaniment. The exposition closes with the violin’s melancholy, flowing melody. Repetitions of the opening portion of the first principal theme serve to launch the development. The music builds to the fortissimo start of a varied recapitulation. Once again, the nucleus of the first principal theme opens the final coda section that brings the movement to a furious close.

II. Adagio cantabile—The piano immediately presents the hymn-like central theme of the Sonata’s slow-tempo movement. The melody serves as the basis for a series of rapt and lyrical episodes. Toward the close, the repose of the Adagio is shattered by a series of fortissimo ascending scales. Calm returns in the final measures, with the violin’s alternation of pizzicato and bowed notes providing a lovely coloristic effect.

III. Scherzo. Allegro—The Scherzo movement, in C Major and in 3/4 time, opens with the piano’s introduction of the jaunty principal theme. The central Trio offers a more flowing melody, but one that still maintains the amiable mood of the opening section. A reprise of the Scherzo concludes the third movement.

IV. Finale. Allegro—Rumblings in the piano’s lower register serve to launch the Finale’s recurring principal theme, closing with furtive staccato descending steps. Although the Finale is set in the key of C minor, portions radiate warmth and even a sense of playfulness. A virtuoso Presto coda brings the Sonata to a brilliant conclusion.

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