**Program notes:**

Beethoven was the first great composer of cello sonatas, and he remained really the only one until Brahms wrote two at the end of the 19th century, and then in our own time Martinu wrote three. Aside from a few individual works by other composers (Grieg, Rachmaninoff, Shostakovich, Barber, and Britten), that about sums up the entire sonata repertoire for this particular combination. It's a difficult medium, because the low notes of the cello tend to get covered by the bass of the piano, and balance between the two instruments is always precarious.

Beethoven's cello sonatas evolved from the solo piano sonata form. Mozart seems to have initiated this development with his sonatas for forte-piano with violin *ad libitum,* followed by his sonatas with violin *obligé*. In 1796, Beethoven met and was greatly impressed by the celebrated French cellists Jean-Pierre and Jean-Louis Duport. It is likely that Mozart's violin *obligé* sonatas inspired Beethoven to try something similar to play with one or both them

The complete set of Beethoven’s cello sonatas neatly correspond with the commonly accepted categories of the composer's life’s work—the so-called early, middle, and late periods. The two Op. 5 sonatas and the three sets of cello variations are from the very heart of the early period, a time when Beethoven was assimilating the traditions inherited from Haydn and Mozart while developing his own personal and unique voice. The third cello sonata, Op. 69, written during the height of Beethoven’s characteristically independent middle period, is contemporaneous with the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies. The last two sonatas, Op. 102, are from the very threshold of the third period, and foreshadow many of the changes that that period brought, including the compression of emotion and the inward-looking introspection of the late quartets.

**Sonata in C major, Op. 102, no.1**

Beethoven's last two sonatas for cello and piano, Op.102, were composed between the end of 1812 and 1817, during which time Beethoven, ailing and overcome by all sorts of difficulties, experienced a period of literal and figurative silence as his deafness became profound and his productivity diminished. Following seven years after the A Major Sonata No. 3, the complexity of their composition and their visionary character marks (with the immediately preceding piano sonata Op. 101) the start of Beethoven’s "third period."

The short, almost enigmatic 4th Sonata demonstrates in concentrated form how Beethoven was becoming ready to challenge and even subvert the sonata structures he inherited from Haydn and Mozart.

Its overall structure is possibly unique in Beethoven's works, comprising just a pair of fast sonata-form movements, each with a slow introduction. Both movements recall the long-established convention of a slow introduction to a brisk main section in sonata form, but with significant modifications.

In the first movement the introductory portion entirely lacks the portentiousness of a conventional slow introduction, consisting of a brief elegiac theme repeated several times without change of key and largely unvaried; it concludes with an elaborate cadence in C major that is then contradicted by the sonata portion being in the relative minor, largely avoiding the key of C major except at the opening of the development.

The second movement opens more in the manner of a traditional slow introduction, and eventually leads to a sonata-form portion in the "correct'" key of C. However before this point is reached, the opening material of the sonata reappears for a final, almost ecstatic variation; a procedure paralleled elsewhere in Beethoven's work only in the drama of the fifth and ninth symphonies.

**Sonata in G Minor, Op. 5 No.2**

The two cello sonatas of Op. 5 share many characteristics. Each begins with an introductory adagio leading into a sonata-form allegro and ends with a rondo finale. But if the first of the set, in F major, is distinctly "Mozartean" in inspiration, the second in G minor, is more than a little "Handelian," and understandably so.

Both were written in 1796 at the court of King Friedrich Wilhelm II in Berlin, where a production of Handel’s *Judas Maccabaeus* was on offer at the Berlin Singakademie the same year that Beethoven visited. King Friedrich Wilhelm was a charter member of the Handel fan club, having introduced George Frederick’s oratorios to the Prussian capital. And he was more than a passable cellist, having been taught while still a princeling by the virtuoso court cellist Jean-Pierre Duport, for whom the Op. 5 sonatas were written. What more attractive model to take for a sonata to be performed with Duport in front of the King himself?

What Beethoven admired most in Handel was his ability to evoke an emotion, or construct an entire dramatic scene, out of the merest scrap of a motive, such as the three-note descending phrase that occurs so often in *Judas Maccabaeus.* Angus Watson finds that this motive structures much of the melodic material in Beethoven’s G minor sonata, as well. But more telling still is Beethoven’s pervasive use of dotted and double-dotted rhythms in the sonata’s opening *Adagio sostenuto ed espressivo,* in clear imitation of the French overture (also in G minor) that begins Handel’s oratorio.

Despite its mere two movements, there is nothing small-scale about this sonata. The austere and pathos-filled *Adagio*, dominated by a descending scale pattern and marked by many dramatic pauses, is just one of the ways in which Beethoven adds structural heft to this sonata. The exposition of the immediately following sonata-form movement virtually overflows with melodic ideas: there are two in its first theme group and two in its second, while the development section erupts with an intensity of emotion and virtuosity of piano writing that hint at Beethoven’s mature "heroic" style. Capping off the first movement is a coda in which Beethoven lets his instrumentalists mull over what they have just played for the last time before the movement ends, rather grudgingly.

After all that drama, Beethoven serves up a good-natured rondo finale with a sturdy opening refrain tune of small range that manages to thump and twinkle in turn. With a repetitive structure playfully phrased in alternating fragments of *forte* and *piano,* it drums its way into your head to become the most memorable melody of the movement. The intervening episodes, and even the refrain theme itself are continually developed and varied—sometimes cast in the minor mode, sometimes with the instruments chasing each other in canon—as if in a sonata movement. This finale overflows with rhythmic vitality, due to a near-constant chatter of rapid passagework on the part of both piano and cello.

—Adapted from a note by Donald G. Gíslason

**Seven Variations on a Theme of Mozart, WoO 46**

Of Beethoven’s three collections of variations for cello and piano, two were written on themes from Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute). One of these is the set of variations on the duet "Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen" (“In men, who feel love”), dating from 1801. Here the music is laid out in such a way that the two instruments are in essence equal partners. It is especially delightful to follow the dialogue of the duet, with the piano in the role of Pamina and the cello answering it as Papageno. In the ensuing variations Beethoven once more demonstrates his gift for structural clarity, producing extremely attractive exchanges which combine the instruments in both light-hearted play and dramatic rivalry. A strong contrast is provided by the mysterious minor-key variation, which presents the cello in its low register but conserves transparency of texture thanks to the sensitive piano writing. In the coda to the final variation Beethoven springs the surprise of letting the opening theme blossom anew before the brilliant conclusion on two imperious chords. Here is yet more evidence of the mastery Beethoven deployed in his outstanding contribution to the cello repertoire.

—Adapted from a note by Daniel Müller-Schott (tr. Charles Johnston)

**Sonata in A major, Op. 69**

The single Sonata of Op 69 was sketched in 1807, some ten years after the Op 5 pair and concurrently with the Fifth Symphony. The dedication was to Count Ignaz von Gleichenstein, a Secretary at the War Department and a trusted friend of the composer. It had been performed for the first time a month earlier, in March 1809, by the cellist Nikolaus Kraft (a member of Schuppanzigh’s famous string quartet) and Baroness Dorothea von Ertmann, one of the greatest of the first generation of Beethoven pianists.

The lyrical A major world of this third Sonata conveys as well as any other work of the period the self-confident mood that Beethoven was in during the latter half of the first decade of the nineteenth century, before his life was disrupted by the French invasion of Vienna in the middle of 1809. The first movement opens rather like the slightly earlier Fourth Piano Concerto with, in this case, the cello entering softly and unaccompanied with a theme that gradually builds to a short piano flourish, repeated with the roles reversed. A vigorous bridge passage leads to the second subject, a combination of rising scales and downward arpeggios, again repeated with the instrumental roles inverted. The triplets of the bridge return with the codetta to the exposition which is dominated by an attractive idea new to the movement. The development concentrates on the music of the first subject which in a shortened form eventually opens the recapitulation, before reappearing at the end of the movement. There follows the only Scherzo of these Sonatas and it is typical of the form as Beethoven developed it during his middle period, with its length approaching that of the outer movements, achieved by repeating the almost waltz-like ‘trio’ between three statements of the syncopated main scherzo theme. The slow introduction to the finale is shorter than those to the first movements of the two earlier sonatas, with more of a cantabile continuity to it. The Allegro vivace recalls the opening of the first "Razumovsky" Quartet in both the configuration of its opening theme and in its sunny mood which continues into the restrained second subject where cello and piano alternate short phrases.

—From a note by Matthew Rye