

## Notes on the Program

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### **Ludwig van Beethoven: Piano Sonata No. 29 in B-flat Major, Op. 106** **(“Hammerklavier”)**

A work of truly Homeric proportions, Beethoven’s *Hammerklavier* Sonata demands that both the performer and the audience have faith in Beethoven’s credo: “What is difficult is also beautiful, good, great and so forth,” words that the composer lived by and often repeated. It is a difficult journey indeed—a Mount Everest for pianists and audiences alike. The *Hammerklavier* is the longest of Beethoven’s sonatas and took him eighteen months to compose, between the years 1817 and 1818. It marks a return to the four-movement form for the first time since his Piano Sonata Op. 31, No. 3. In fact, in a letter, Beethoven even referred to it as a sonata of five movements, at the time considering the *Largo* introduction before the finale as a separate movement. The title *Hammerklavier* refers to the German name for the pianoforte. While it was originally also used for Op. 101, the name is now used only to refer to Op. 106.

The entire work is brutally concentrated, with everything evolving out of the opening leap of a third (plus a few octaves), a low B-flat to a D in the middle of the keyboard. This third relationship lays down the foundation for the work and informs the trajectory of the sonata’s entire tonal structure and all its melodic workings. Another central element of this piece is the large-scale juxtaposition between B-flat and B-natural. The struggle between these two tonalities is most obvious in the second movement, where there is a tense altercation between the two, until the B-natural is heard in almost violent (perhaps sardonic) defiance fifteen times rapidly, after which the B-flat-major theme is heard once again. However one might interpret this juxtaposition between the two most unrelated of keys (B-flat major having two flats and B minor have two sharps), we can infer something about Beethoven’s own thoughts from one of his sketchbooks, where he wrote, “B minor, black key.” Alfred Brendel writes that against B minor, “B-flat major is perceived as the key of luminous energy.” He further brings to light that the two notes that are common between the two scales are G and D; these two tonalities act as “deliverance and consolation” between the two extremes.

A powerful rhythmic fanfare opens the sonata. A sketch reveals that the original idea contained the words “Vivat, Vivat, Vivat Rudolphus!” and demonstrates that the dedicatee of the work, Archduke Rudolf, was clearly in Beethoven’s mind from the very beginning. It is punctuated by silences, not unlike Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. Immediately following this vigorous declaration is a contrasting flowing and lyrical section, motivically derived from the first statement. The development is highly fugal and modulates according to thirds. For further reading, Charles Rosen goes into great detail in his seminal work, *The Classical Style* in understanding the role of thirds in this sonata.

The scherzo that follows is, according to Rosen, “a parody of the first movement.” As much as it is light and ephemeral, it is in equal portions manic. The trio offers a moment of dark lyricism in the parallel key of B-flat minor. This scherzo’s extraordinary sense of compactness gives way to the most expansive and spacious of slow movements, “a mausoleum of the collective suffering of the world,” according to Wilhelm von Lenz. The opening measure of an ascending A to C-sharp in octaves was an afterthought—added only later to clarify, once again, the third relationship. The first section is a hymn of the deepest solemnity—one must listen to it with profound stillness and reverence to grasp its monumental arches and hushed vastness. After a fleeting, transcendent-

tal shift to G major, a taste of the Benedictus from the *Missa solemnis*, Beethoven asks the pianist to take off the soft pedal, and the music opens up into a Bellini-like operatic aria that seems to search the heavens, intensified with trills and melismata. A third section descends into deep, resonant bells, in D major, a dialogue between the resonant bass and the soprano, while the left hand accompanies between the two extremes. A sudden stilling of the atmosphere marks the commencement of the development section, which traverses a chain of descending thirds. A full recapitulation then ensues, but it begins now enlaced in a halo of thirty-second notes, as in the variation movements from the Piano Sonatas Op. 109 and Op. 111. The most heartbreaking climax of the movement is reserved for the coda, after which a shortened version of the opening is heard, followed by a resolution, not in spirit, but tonally, *ppp* and in F-sharp major.

The introduction to the last movement begins with Fs in broken octaves, a semitone below the preceding F-sharp-major chord, and almost prelude-like. Charles Rosen calls it “The Birth of Counterpoint, or The Creation of a Fugue.” One literally hears a fugue coming into being, primordial, and eventually intensifying until it breaks out into trills. The fugue proper begins with a leap in the left hand, a third plus an octave, a direct reference to the opening of the first movement. William Kinderman writes that the fugue “seems not to affirm a higher, more perfect or serene world of eternal harmonies, as in Bach’s works, but to confront an open universe.” The subject of the fugue, in all its elemental force, is the longest in the history of fugues and, as Vladimir Feltsman points out, consists of 108 notes. This number in itself is highly significant and symbolic in both nature and in mystical traditions. The fugue is massive, in seven sections (another significant number), and nearly encyclopedic in its use of fugal techniques. One hears the extensive subject in inversion (upside down), retrograde (backwards), augmentation (slower), diminution (faster), and stretto (coming in one on top of the other). The retrograde is especially noteworthy, as it is in the “black key” of B minor and set apart in character. A Palestrina-like D-major episode is another moment of marked contrast, evoking Beethoven’s setting of “in nomine Domini” from the Benedictus of the *Missa solemnis*, as noted by William Kinderman and Jürgen Uhde.

Throughout his life, Beethoven resented the overwhelming popularity of his Septet, Op. 20. What was praised as “beautiful” was no longer of interest to him—he sought something deeper, something closer to “truth.” Kinderman suggests that, like the *Eroica* Symphony, the *Hammerklavier* draws inspiration from the Prometheus myth. As Prometheus was forced to suffer due to his gift to humanity, Kinderman writes that “the *Hammerklavier* Sonata implies an analogous narrative progression of heroic struggle and suffering, leading to a rebirth of creative possibilities.”

## **Karlheinz Stockhausen: Klavierstück X**

*“I think there have always been different kinds of artists: those who were mainly mirrors of their time, and then a very few who had a visionary power, whom the Greeks called augurs: those who were able to announce the next stage in the development of mankind, really listen into the future, and prepare the people for what was to come.” —Karlheinz Stockhausen*

Karlheinz Stockhausen, one of the most influential and enigmatic composers of the past century, was truly a visionary that carved his own path. Born in 1928 near Cologne in Germany, his mother was admitted to a mental asylum when he was four years old, and when he was seventeen his father was killed in World War II. He studied piano and music pedagogy at university, but

only in his last year did he discover his desire to compose. An important member of the influential Darmstadt School of composers, he was extremely involved in electronic music and later founded the Stockhausen Courses in Kürten, which run to this day. His website states that “Stockhausen’s entire oeuvre can be classified as ‘Spiritual Music.’” He believed that he was from the planet Sirius, and when he died in December of 2007, he was survived by two wives. His largest composition is *Licht: Die sieben Tage der Woche* (“Light: The Seven Days of the Week”), a twenty-nine-hour opera in seven parts, composed between 1977 and 2002, which includes not only numerous singers and orchestra with synthesizer, but also a string quartet that is to perform in a helicopter situated above the concert hall.

Out of his large output of 376 compositions, fourteen are for the piano. These works are none other than his Klavierstücke, of which he once said, “They are my drawings.” What originally started as four pieces for piano, written in 1952 during his studies with Olivier Messiaen, turned into a much larger cycle. Stockhausen planned for twenty-one pieces that would be organized in sets of 4 + 6 + 1 + 5 + 3 + 2, and where each set would have a cyclical or unifying element, but ultimately, he stopped after nineteen. After he completed the second set of six pieces (Klavierstücke VI to X) in 1961 (after numerous revisions) and the single Klavierstück XI in 1957, he went on a hiatus from these works. It was not until 1979 that he resumed writing eight more pieces, now abandoning the idea of the original sets and also the medium altogether. His Klavierstücke XII, XIII, and XIV are part of his cyclical opera, *Licht*, while XV, XVI, XVII, XVIII, and XIX are electronic music for the synthesizer—an instrument he often hailed as the successor of the piano.

From the onset, Klavierstück X bursts into an exciting and climactic opening, presenting all of its ideas amalgamated together. Stockhausen does not indicate a tempo and only instructs the performer to play the whole work “as fast as possible” while keeping the duration of the notes proportionate. As a result, the performance time for the piece varies widely. The sonic landscape of Klavierstück X is filled with tone clusters and cluster glissandos (for the latter, fingerless wool gloves are often used by performers). The complexity of events happening simultaneously lessens over time, and as the dust settles from the initial outburst, each idea is separately explored and concentrated on. Musicologist Ed Chang describes the piece as a “big initial explosion of clusters and glissandi, followed by a series of smaller explosions, each with their own substructure.” Stockhausen brings about the idea of contrast by opening with disorder, and with time, as the piece progresses, the musical ideas become more organized. One way this is achieved is by repeating certain character elements that become more familiar to our ears with time. Clusters and glissandi clusters are the focus point and are developed in short sections that are interspersed with long silences. Those lengthy repose play an important structural role and are filled with the harmonic resonance from the previous sounds, adding kaleidoscopic colors to each moment of stillness. Throughout this serial work, Stockhausen uses different variables, such as dynamics, range, order versus disorder, and duration and character of chords, to develop his ideas. Almost every one of these variables is organized in groups of seven (e.g., the piece contains seven possible dynamics: *ppp*, *pp*, *p*, *mf*, *f*, *ff*, and *fff*). As the work reaches its conclusion, the pitch range gradually expands vertically and leaves the listener with one last isolated cluster, a faint memory of the initial explosion.

