

Beethoven

Sonata in A Major

(The Kreutzer Sonata)

Opus 47

Played by

Hephzibah and Yehudi Menuhin



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Ludwig van Beethoven

(1770-1827)

THE musical talents of a grandfather who was Kapellmeister at Bonn, and of a father who sang tenor in the Electoral Choir, flowered into genius in Ludwig van Beethoven. He was seventeen when Mozart, hearing him play, remarked, "He will give the world something worth listening to." The truth of this prophecy is borne out by Beethoven's position as a composer. Through his development of the symphony and sonata forms of Haydn and Mozart, he became a figure supreme in the world of music.

His works have been divided into three periods: The first, in which he was still largely an imitator of Haydn and Mozart; the second, in which he was at his prime, individualized and following his own marvelous blending of qualities of imagination and intellect; and the third, which was regarded as a striving after the unattainable, and which was not appreciated until fifty or more years after his death.

THE SONATA

The Kreutzer Sonata is the product of Beethoven's second period. Its first performance was at a private concert in 1803, at which Beethoven played the piano part and Bridgetower the violin. The latter was a mulatto, at one time under the patronage of the Prince of Wales, who claimed that Beethoven intended to dedicate the Sonata to him, but that after a quarrel over a girl, he changed his mind. At any rate, the composer dedicated the sonata to the young violinist by whose name it is now identified, who, at the time of its first performance, was a resident of Vienna.

FIRST MOVEMENT

Adagio sostenuto — Presto

The movement opens with a thoughtful introduction — in major — begun by the unaccompanied violin, continued by the piano and then, as the two instruments are joined, coming to a meditative pause on two tones, often repeated. It is from these two tones that — as the mode changes to the minor — the main theme of the movement suddenly springs in the trenchant staccato of the violin. This continues and hastens to a climax, after which a second theme is heard about two and one-quarter inches from the beginning of Record One. Amid the agitation one phrase, first played by the piano alone (end of first record), is striking because of its fine melodic sweep, and an earnestness and vigor typical of Beethoven. Directly after this significant melody the first part of the movement — the exposition — comes to its stormy end.

There is a moment of calm, then (beginning of Record Two) the rapid tempo returns and this same melody undergoes manifold transformations.

Heard at first softly it grows to an agitated climax. There is a sudden relaxation followed by another climax, and the music having again subsided into a mood of pathos, the first theme returns and is succeeded by the second theme, at first tranquil, then tumultuous. During its impassioned progress (Record Three) the principal theme is again heard, now hammered forth with tragic insistence. The music mounts with ever growing impetuosity, and then there is a sudden and profound tranquillity. The introduction is recalled in a moment of solemn meditation, after which an unexpected rush of rapid scales and crashing chords ends the movement.

SECOND MOVEMENT

Andante con variazioni

The movement opens (Record Four) with the presentation of the theme, in dialogue fashion, by the two instruments. The simplicity and melodic loveliness of the melody are unforgettable — a theme of such tenderness, such exalted beauty that its mood is nearly that of worship. And this lofty spirit permeates all the fanciful flights of the intricate patterns traced in tone during the succeeding variations.

In the first variation (last third of Record Four) a more flowing motion is introduced. Now played by the piano, the melody of the theme is made bright with trills and mordents while the violin makes piquant comment with a little chirping figure. With the beginning of the second variation (Record Five) the theme becomes more richly adorned, but is still plainly discernible under the rapidly reiterated notes of the violin, which, towards the end of the variation, mount in ecstatic flight to the highest realms in the instrument's range.

Contrasting with these ethereal tones, the third variation (beginning about one and one-quarter inches from the commencement of Record Five) plunges into the gloom of the minor mode. The brightness of the major returns with the fourth variation (Record Six), which is the most extended and fully developed of all. In it the theme becomes iridescent and finally fades away in luminous heights (first quarter of Record Seven). There follows closely joined to this an extended coda. The original tranquil mood of the *Andante* now returns, and, while reminiscences of the theme are heard in a series of broadly sweeping melodic curves, the movement sinks into repose.

THIRD MOVEMENT — FINALE

Presto

The Finale of the Sonata brings, naturally, a return to the original tonality of A Major and, as a contrast after the quiet meditation of the middle movement, a rush of unrestrained gaiety. After an attention-arresting chord from the piano (middle of Record Seven), the composer rushes us headlong into a mood of high animal spirits. At first there are simply two melodic lines with the violin at times predominant, at others the piano. As the movement progresses it gains in richness and fullness, and (near the end of Record Seven) a second theme enters, more striking in melodic line, and more buoyant

in rhythm. When the ever mounting vivacity seems to have reached its limit, there is a moment of quiet; then, with a sudden trill and a rapid flight of scales ending in the lower register of the piano, the exposition closes (end of Record Seven).

Development of the themes follows, continuing with the same breathless rush. The second theme is discoursed upon alternately by the piano and violin, changing from minor to major, with sudden loud ejaculations amid the surrounding softer passages. There is a moment of stormy frenzy, answered by the quiet reappearance of a fragment of the first theme of the movement, and as the mood grows calmer this seems to dissolve into a vague formlessness. At the moment when the melodic thread seems about to vanish altogether, the first theme returns in its animated form, played by the violin against the rapidly moving background of the piano (one-eighth inch after the beginning of Record Eight). From this point the movement follows the lines of the exposition. Yet there is no mere repetition: new vivacity, new sonority are given to every phrase. Even the quiet measures near the close add to the effect, for during these the composer seems to pause in thought over the first theme, and thus a fresh momentum is bestowed on the return of the rapid tempo. And so, ever spurring itself energetically onward; constantly revealing new and brilliant facets of tone, the movement, and with it the Sonata, rushes to its triumphant close.

THE ARTISTS

The Kreutzer Sonata is performed by Yehudi Menuhin and his sister Hephzibah. Yehudi, a figure before the public since childhood, requires no introduction here. His sister, aged fourteen, is a talented artist in her own right. Although it is not the intention of her parents to allow Hephzibah to follow the professional career which her talent warrants, she made her debut in Paris in October, 1934, playing with her illustrious brother.

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Sonata No. 42 in A Major (Mozart)	Hephzibah and Yehudi Menuhin
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