

Beethoven! - to the 250th anniversary

Ludwig van Beethoven Six Bagatelles op. 126
 - Andante con moto
 - Allegro
 - Andante
 - Presto
 - Quasi allegretto
- Presto – Andante amabile e con moto – Tempo I

Sergei Prokofieff Sonata No. 4 op. 29
 - Allegro molto sostenuto
 - Andante assai
- Allegro con brio, ma non leggiere

Interval

Joseph Haydn Fantasy in C Hob. XVII:4

Ludwig van Beethoven Sonata in F minor op. 57 „Appassionata“
 - Allegro assai
 - Andante con moto
- Allegro man non troppo - Presto

A programme in honour of Ludwig van Beethoven on the occasion of his 250th birthday: a risky endeavour!

I have chosen four spotlights: two quite different works by the master himself and two glimpses from outside.

The end comes right at the beginning: the Bagatelles op. 126 are among the latest works Beethoven wrote for the piano. Already in a state of complete deafness, he composed six "trifles" in which we become acquainted en miniature with a veritable wealth of idiosyncratic characters. As if reading diary entries, we witness his whims, his sometimes grotesque humour, his devotion - let's hear for ourselves!

Music of the future follows: barely 100 years after Beethoven's Bagatelles, Sergei Prokofiev writes his fourth piano sonata. Here, the music is entrusted to a form - the sonata - in which Beethoven embarked on journeys like no other before or after him. Prokofiev dedicates this sonata to his beloved friend Maximilian Schmidthoff, whose suicide coincides with the composition of the work. In the third movement, Prokofiev counters the gloom and tragedy unfolding in the first two movements with a gesture that could have been underpinned by Beethoven's words in view of his incurable deafness: "I will reach into the jaws of fate, it shall certainly not get me down completely!"

The second half begins with maximum joy of playing and a pinch of cosiness: Joseph Haydn's Fantasy in C stands for the "inversely sublime" (Jean Paul). At the same time, it comes from the pen of Beethoven's admired teacher, highly esteemed colleague, friend.

From this sunlight, the beginning of the "Appassionata" leads us into shadowy twilight. Now it is Beethoven himself who unfolds a grand narrative. The pulse beats rapidly in the first movement, the music is electrified, nervous outbursts verge on ghostly stillness. Concentrated in the smallest motifs, Beethoven unleashes relentless dramatic energy that tolerates no delay even into the triple piano at the end of the first movement. Not until the beginning of the second movement do we find a calm. A chorale is heard, a hymn to peace, which, in variations, comes more and more into motion and yet leaves us harmonically at rest... until a finale begins suddenly, abruptly, without warning - a finale that knows only one direction. A rebellion in sound against a fate that is inevitable - where does this tremendous desire come from to experience exactly that again and again?

Leon Wenzel