

# Beethoven Explored

Volume 5

Sonatas for Piano with Violin  
Op. 12 Nos. 1-3

Andreas Romberg:  
Sonata for Piano with Violin  
Op. 9 No. 2

Peter Sheppard Skærved  
Aaron Shorr



métier

## Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827):

**Sonata for piano and violin in D major, Op. 12 No 1** **19.48**

1	I	<i>Allegro con brio</i>	8.33
2	II	<i>Tema con variazioni: Andante con moto</i>	6.41
3	III	<i>Rondo: Allegro</i>	4.34

**Sonata for piano and violin in A major, Op 12 No 2** **16.18**

4	I	<i>Allegro vivace</i>	6.10
5	II	<i>Andante, più tosto allegretto</i>	5.23
6	III	<i>Allegro piacevole</i>	4.45

**Sonata for piano and violin in E flat major, Op 12 No 3** **19.02**

7	I	<i>Allegro con spirito</i>	8.28
8	II	<i>Adagio con molt' espressione</i>	6.25
9	III	<i>Rondo. Allegro molto</i>	4.09

## Andreas Romberg (1767-1821):

**Sonata for piano and violin in B flat major, Op 9 No 2 ("Schottische")** **14.58**

10	I	<i>Allegro non molto</i>	7.19
11	II	<i>Larghetto cantabile</i> 'There's could kail in Aberdeen'	3.33
12	III	<i>Allegretto</i> 'Down the burn, and thro' the mead'	4.06

total CD duration **70.10**

Peter Sheppard Skærved violin  
 Aaron Shorr piano



msvcd 2007 (digital version msv 72007)

## Beethoven – The Op. 12 Sonatas for Piano and Violin

In a letter written to Nikolaus Zmeskall von Domanovecz, Beethoven discussed some of negotiations with Artaria & Co., concerning the publication of his new sonatas for piano with violin, which would be his Op 12. The letter included a 'note to self':  
"I simply must remember to give a copy to Salieri."

Beethoven's connection with the *Hofkapellmeister*, Antonio Salieri, stretched from 1793, when he began taking lessons with him in the art of Italian word-setting. This resulted in a wonderful (and almost unknown) group of madrigals for a *capella* voices. Beethoven continued taking lessons with Salieri until at least 1802. In January 1799, Beethoven composed a set of variations based on the duet 'La stessa, la stessissima' from the 'Maestro de Cappella's' opera *Falstaff*, or *le Tre Burle*, which was premièred at the Vienna *Hoftheater* on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of that month. On the 12<sup>th</sup> January, the *Wiener Zeitung* announced the publication of the three new piano/violin sonatas, dedicated to Salieri, by his student, Beethoven.

Beethoven's three Sonatas Op 12, mark the beginning of an extraordinary group of works which would climax with the Op 96 Sonata which he completed at the end of 1812 for performance by the Archduke Rudolph and the great French virtuoso (and Napoleon's personal violinist), Pierre Rode.

The first three sets of Piano/violin sonatas (Op 12, Op 23-4, and Op 30), however were all conceived with the talents of Ignaz von Schuppanzigh in mind. The earliest reference that we have to a performance of one of the Op 12 *Sonatas* is a performance which Beethoven and Schuppanzigh gave on the 29<sup>th</sup> March 1798. Upon arrival in Vienna in 1792, Beethoven sought out the young violinist for violin lessons. Previously his violin teacher in Bonn had been the venerable Franz Anton Ries (leader of the Bonn Electoral Orchestra); he shared these lessons with Stephan von Breuning. Von Breuning's son, Gerhard, who tended Beethoven in the last months of his life, reported that Beethoven and his father had used the Fiorillo *Etudes* in these violin lessons.

It is not often noted that Beethoven was an accomplished string player until his hearing began to fail. There is some evidence of his having given viola recitals in Den Haag in his mid-teens, and he played viola in the remarkable Bonn Court Orchestra. It was only natural

that that he would seek out a violin teacher upon arriving in Vienna. It is, after all, clear that one of his motivations in coming from Bonn was, initially, study – it was expected that he would return to the electoral court in Bonn a more skilled musician (having “received the spirit of Mozart from the hands of Haydn”). As well as his lessons with Salieri, he sought out Haydn to study composition, and took counterpoint lessons with Johann Albrechtsberger; this resulted in a series of three wonderful contrapuntal string works (based on Albrechtsberger’s own style) in 1794-5.

But Schuppanzigh, who had been a child prodigy, was in his late teens when he and Beethoven met. I suspect that their collaboration (even if it had begun with Beethoven seeking technical help), immediately became a youthful friendship. The earliest references to Schuppanzigh in Beethoven’s letters indicate a playful, even rough-housing friendship. In a letter written to the Johann Nepomuk Hummel in 1799, Beethoven noted: “You will find Schuppanzigh here too, and we shall both rough you up, club you and shake you so that you will have a truly excellent time.”

I am not sure that the relationship really survived maturity and Beethoven’s sense of his own importance. By the end of their collaboration, much of Beethoven’s communications with Schuppanzigh, who was widely ridiculed for his weight problems, read uncomfortably like bullying.

These relationships provide a fascinating undertow for the recasting of the Piano/Violin sonata genre, which Beethoven announced with his Op 12 set. Despite the fact that these three sonatas are technically, as least, still for keyboard with accompaniment, Beethoven had allowed the ground to shift. The sonatas were not Beethoven’s first published works for this medium. In 1793 ‘Artaria & Co.’ published a major single movement work for piano and violin: *12 Variations on the Theme ‘se vuol ballare’* (Le Nozze di Figaro) ‘Opus 1’ in 1793, shortly after Beethoven’s arrival in Vienna. However, in 1795, the same publishing house released his *Three Piano Trios* as a new ‘opus 1’, implying that Beethoven was ‘wiping the slate clean’ of his juvenilia. The *se vuol ballare* Variations (dedicated to Eleanor von Breuning, Stephan’s sister), most likely were begun in Bonn and finished upon arrival in Vienna. They hold to the traditional model of piano-violin writing: the keyboard carries the majority of florid material and melody, and the violin functions like the inner player in a string quartet, a viola or second violin. This means that it was quite practical to play the piece leaving it out, rendering the work ideal for *amateur* market.

The *Op 12 Sonatas* fit within none of these parameters; from the very first notes it is clear that this is music which bursts the confines of the salon – the interweave of piano and violin parts goes far beyond generic notions of ‘soloist’ and ‘accompaniment’. The result is far from the word of polite chamber music; this music which essays, at various moments, the impact of opera, of concerto, even of symphony, unlike any of the previous 11 *opii*, all of which are chamber music or piano sonatas.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1799 the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* reviewed Beethoven’s charming Op 11 (the *Piano Trio in B Flat Major*) favourably: “This trio ... makes quite a good ensemble on the *fortepiano*...”, although admonishing the young composer to “write more *naturally* than artificially.”

On the 5<sup>th</sup> June, the same journal published an exasperated review of the new *Piano/Violin Sonatas* Op 12: “After having worked his way through these quite peculiar sonatas, overladen with strange difficulties, [the reviewer] must admit that ... he felt like a man who thought that he was going to walk with an intelligent friend through an inviting wood, but was detained at every moment by hostile thorn bushes, and finally emerged, weary, exhausted, and without enjoyment.”

Music reviewing, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century consisted of sitting at the piano or even clavichord, with a stack of new publications to hand, and sight-reading. I can only imagine the bewilderment of this reviewer, having survived the “rare modulations” of the first two sonatas, upon confronting the titanic difficulties of the first movement of Op 12 No 3. This, most likely inspired his outburst: “...a piling of *difficulty* upon difficulty so that one loses all patience and enjoyment.” Beethoven demands ever-escalating levels of virtuosity as the cycle progresses. By this movement, both piano (which, according to convention, is the *concertante* instrument in this context) and violin, are indulging in finger-crunching runs, which recall some of the virtuoso extremes that are to be found in the three *String Trios* Op 9.

### **Romberg: Sonata for Piano and Violin in B flat major, Op. 9 No. 2**

Andreas Romberg’s *B flat Sonata* demonstrates the conventional relationship expected between keyboard and violin in the (non-‘continuo’) sonata genre. The piano part is florid, whilst not over-demanding. The violin, although not subservient, confines itself to gentle

lyricism, and the virtuosic flights that the player is invited to try are confined to lower positions. It would be easy to suppose that Andreas Romberg's approach to the violin was limited, but a glance at his virtuosic solo *Caprices, Op. 32* for the violin will soon put one right; he was a player of enormous virtuosity. These three *Sonatas* (without Opus Number) were written for a specific kind of violin playing, aimed at the music-buying *amateur*.

Another clue is provided by the use of Scottish lyrics in the second and third movements. It seems that Andreas Romberg had laid hands on Volume two of the James Johnson's *Scottish Musical Museum*, a series of volumes which appeared between 1786 and 1803, and to which Robert Burns was a contributor and editor from the second volume. Andreas Romberg used two melodies from the Johnson's collection, and the first line of each 'sang' is printed in the piano part. The first 'sang', 'There's Cauld Kail in Aberdeen' (which Robert Burns attributed to the Duke of Gordon) appeared in the second volume of the 'Musical Museum', published in March 1788. This melody was one of the 429 Scots and Welsh melodies set by Joseph Haydn for George Thomson (Hob.XXXIa.;55bis), a few years before Beethoven's first arrangements for Thomson, who was in many ways the successor to James Johnson. Beethoven never used any explicitly Scottish material in his piano/violin sonatas, although movements such as the finale of the *G major Sonata Op 30 No 3* come very close to this idiom, furiously popular in Europe in the wake of the Ossian/Macpherson phenomenon. The melody of Romberg's finale is "Down the burn, and thro' the mead", which appeared in Volume Two of the *Scottish Musical Museum*, published in 1786. I am not sure that Romberg ever heard much Scottish piping, but the piano writing underpinning the folk material is perhaps an evocation of what Romberg imagined it was like – it's perhaps a little gentler than the reality.

Beethoven and Romberg shared a history as string players. In 1790, Andreas and his cellist cousin Bernhard joined Beethoven in the electoral court orchestra in Bonn, led by Beethoven's erstwhile violin teacher, Franz Anton Ries. Anton Reicha was also playing flute in this extraordinary ensemble. I suspect that the interchange between the brilliant younger members of this *Kapell* laid the foundations for the effective *Werkstatt* which Beethoven successfully instituted with his team of string players in Vienna in the years following his arrival there in 1792. These collaborations laid the ground for the innovations of the cycle of piano/violin sonatas from 1798 to 1812.

## **The musicians**

**Peter Sheppard Skærved** is the dedicatee of over 300 works for solo violin, by composers including Hans Werner Henze, Judith Weir, Michael Finnissy and Poul Ruders. He is the leader of the pioneering Kreutzer Quartet, Viotti Lecturer at the Royal Academy of Music, and regularly tours in over 30 countries.

Peter curated a large scale exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in 2011, and is at present collaborating on projects with the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Library of Congress, Washington DC. He is the only living violinist to have performed on violins which belonged to Paganini, Viotti, Kreisler, Ole Bull and Joachim. For more information and live recordings, go to [\*\*www.peter-sheppard-skaerved.com\*\*](http://www.peter-sheppard-skaerved.com)

**Aaron Shorr** settled in the United Kingdom in 1984, and has since established an international career as soloist, chamber musician and teacher. As well as appearing as soloist at London's South Bank in over thirty concertos, he has toured extensively as a recitalist and chamber musician worldwide.

Aaron Shorr has recorded for Guild, Naxos, Metier, Olympia, NMC and Meridian. His recordings of Beethoven with duo partner, Peter Sheppard Skærved, have won universal acclaim. He has also enjoyed close associations with composers and has given countless premieres and performances of works, including those by Hans Werner Henze, John McCabe, George Rochberg, Sadie Harrison, David Matthews, Paul Moravec, Elliott Schwartz, Jorg Widmann, Michael Alec Rose, Jeremy Dale Roberts, Judith Bingham, Rory Boyle, Marek Pasieczny, and Sidika Ozdil. Aaron is currently Head of Keyboard at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

## **Antonio Stradivari-1734 'Habeneck' violin**

### **A personal note by Peter Sheppard Skærved**

This violin has been part of my musical life since I was 12. I had been sent for lessons with Ralph Holmes (1937-1984), about whom I knew nothing. I have never forgotten that first encounter with his playing and this instrument, which he played until his untimely death 6 years later.

Antonio Stradivari (1644-1737) had an extraordinarily long making career. The first instrument to bear his label, made on the bench of the Amati family workshop where he was apprenticed, was made when he was sixteen years old, in 1660. 74 years later, he was still making, and produced this extraordinary violin. The label inside reads "made in his 91<sup>st</sup> year". It has an astonishing reddish-varnish, and a one-piece back of unsurpassed beauty. The table of the instrument is markedly asymmetric, but this is not mark of the maker's waning powers, but rather, as often happens, that the front twisted slightly when it was hung up after having been cut.

The violin has an extraordinary history, and I find that at least as exciting as the maker. It was the instrument played by the great French virtuoso, first generation graduate of the new Paris Conservatoire, Francois-Antoine Habeneck (1781-1849). Habeneck was the founder of the Société des Concerts (later 'L'Academie Royale de la Musique'), and music director at the Paris Opera. He was the last great musician to direct major orchestral works from the violin, this violin, and in that capacity, he collaborated with Paganini, Liszt, Mendelssohn, Meyerbeer, and Berlioz – the list is endless. But suffice to say this instrument is the fiddle from which the première of the 'Symphonie Fantastique' was directed.

In the years that I was privileged to play on it, it inspired many composers. David Matthews, Nigel Clarke, Sadie Harrison, Jörg Widmann, Michael Finnissy, all wrote me works inspired by its unique qualities.

But it was the first meeting with Ralph Holmes that seared the sound of this violin into my memory and imagination. His music room in Beckenham was small, and stuffed full of the art and antiques he collected. Sketches by Lord Leighton jostled with oils by Elizabeth Frink, Native American beadwork, 18<sup>th</sup> Century Tools, a square piano, and thousands of art books. With the two pianos, there was barely place to stand. But Ralph played to fill the Albert Hall. The sound was and is unforgettable. Allied with this violin, he found a uniquely human voice, with all of the strength and weakness that we associate with Callas, with Hotter, with Bessie Smith. There was a truth to his playing that I have not experienced since, and playing this violin, I can only aspire to.

The instrument forms part of the collection of the Royal Academy of Music, London, where it can be seen in the Strings Gallery of the Museum.

**Andreas Romberg**



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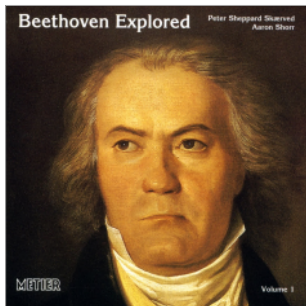
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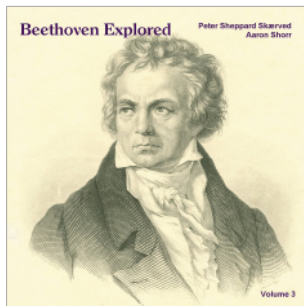
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