



## **Richard Goode, piano**

### **March 23, 2024**

#### **PROGRAM NOTES**

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*Support for the program notes is generously provided by Roberta Viviano.*

#### **LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN**

(BONN, 1770–VIENNA, 1827)

#### **Bagatelles, Op. 119, Nos. 6-11 (1820-22)**

Monumentality is a term often invoked when assessing Ludwig van Beethoven's legacy, thanks to his nine remarkable symphonies. However, Beethoven's decades-long fascination with piano miniatures, or *Kleinigkeiten* (trifles), as he often referred to them, displays his interest in thematic compression and the creation of new pianistic textures. The tenth Bagatelle in the Op. 119 set is a mere thirteen measures; the shortest piece that Beethoven ever composed. The origin of the term Bagatelle, which is now typically regarded as a short piano piece with no set form, actually dates back to a French Baroque chamber music work by Marin Marais. Suite I of his *Pièces en trio* contains a movement entitled 'Labagatelle' (1692).

Beethoven's three sets of Bagatelles (Opp. 33, 119, and 126) exhibit a wide stylistic terrain and often adopt dance rhythms, ranging from traditional Baroque dances (e.g., Allemande, Minuet, Siciliano) to Austrian folk dances and the nineteenth-century waltz. Goode omits the first five Bagatelles in the set from his performance because they were composed early in Beethoven's career and are not representative of his late style, attributes of which are highlighted in the following discussion of the large-scale works that follow.

## Piano Sonata No. 30 in E Major, Op. 109 (1820)

Beethoven's last three piano sonatas—Opp. 109, 110, and 111—set the standard for his Romantic successors. Beethoven's late style with respect to the piano sonata genre is highly virtuosic, profoundly introspective, and structurally innovative; qualities that are emulated in Romantic piano sonatas by Franz Schubert, Frédéric Chopin, and Franz Liszt. At this point in his life Beethoven was deaf and he interestingly became preoccupied with structural frameworks that *look* very distinctive on manuscript paper: fugue, and theme and variation form.

Although the first movement of Op. 109 is technically a sonata form, it flows rhapsodically. A bright and sparsely textured first theme, introduced in 2/4 meter in the first nine measures, contrasts with a longer improvisatory-sounding theme, marked *adagio espressivo*, which shifts to 3/4 meter and is laden with chromaticism. Beethoven places a strong emphasis on contrast in this movement, but the ramifications are not immediately clear. Then, we hear another sonata form as the second movement unfolds, leading listeners to retrospectively perceive the opening movement as an introduction to a two-movement piece. The second movement, also quite fleeting in comparison to the lengthy final movement, introduces the parallel minor (E minor) in a stormy fury. This is again interrupted momentarily by a contrasting passage in the development section that stalls the rhythmic momentum and shifts from an arpeggiated to a chordal texture. The third movement, a lengthy theme and variation form, begins with one of Beethoven's most touching melodies, a tranquil hymn, to be executed as "songlike, with the greatest inwardness of feeling." Six variations follow, each of which has a distinctive character, and alludes to motives, rhythms, and textures that are introduced in the previous two movements. In the 1820s, Beethoven becomes even more preoccupied with unification across movements, as the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, articulative, registral, and textural qualities heard earlier in the piece are further manipulated in the variation set.

### 33 Variations on a Waltz by Diabelli, Op. 120 (1823)

In 1819, Anton Diabelli, a Viennese composer who founded a music publishing firm with Pietro Cappi, composed a short waltz in C Major and sent it to eminent composers based in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, asking them to compose a variation on his theme. About 50 composers, including Carl Czerny, Franz Liszt (eleven years old at the time), and Franz Schubert responded, enabling Diabelli to publish a “patriotic anthology” in 1824. Beethoven composed twenty-three variations (one is not included in the final manuscript) in 1819 prior to abandoning work on the piece until 1822, when he composed another eleven variations. The *Diabelli Variations* were published in the spring of 1823.

Simplicity and monumentality coalesce in one of the most complex pieces ever composed for the piano. Outdoing J.S. Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* in sheer number of variations, a performance of the piece takes about an hour. The ingredients in Diabelli’s theme are basic, verging on kitsch: a waltz in the key of C major that begins with a grace note on the upbeat and gains momentum through catchy syncopation. In the first variation the waltz morphs into what Beethoven scholar William Kinderman describes as a “mock-heroic” march. Parody is the most piquant of Beethoven’s added ingredients, and its prominence in the *Diabelli Variations* recalls the manner in which Beethoven employed parody in his Op. 35 *Eroica Variations* (1802), poking fun at his own banal theme from the finale of his Third Symphony. The second variation, marked *leggiermente* (lightly) is also very striking as the articulation is consistent throughout the entire variation.

Variations three and four were conceived as a pair early on in the compositional process and introduce contrapuntal textures. Variations five through seven build intensity as Beethoven varies the waltz’s original accent patterns and adds virtuosic flourishes, such as dense textures, arpeggiated passagework, and trills. The passionate eighth variation features wide-spanning arpeggiation in the left hand and is followed by a quirky variation in C minor, an invention on the grace note upbeat. The tenth variation expands on the theme’s scalar descents while the eleventh transforms the

snappy grace note turn into ruminative triplet figurations. In the twelfth variation chromaticism blurs the theme's melody to create sonic tension.

Beethoven's expressive use of long silences, another humorous touch, in variation thirteen brings us back to a more recognizable version of the theme. Variations fourteen through nineteen explore pianistic textures in a range of different tempos, evoking both sublime and heroic topoi.

An unexpected shift occurs in variation twenty, as Beethoven produces suspense with an enigmatic slow variation in 6/4 meter. Where can the piece possibly go from here? Is it nearing completion? No, the waltz theme returns with a vengeance in variation twenty-one. Variation twenty-two is a comic quotation of W.A. Mozart's "Notte e giorno faticar," Leporello's opening aria from *Don Giovanni* in which he complains of having to work too much. The brilliant style reappears in variation twenty-three followed by a pensive fughetta in variation twenty-four. Variation twenty-five in 3/8 meter portrays the whirling of the waltz in the left hand. The piano alludes to the ethereal timbres of the harp in variation twenty-six. Variations twenty-seven and twenty-eight bring this section to a wild halt.

Modulation to C minor in variation twenty-nine ushers in a melancholic mood for the next three variations, which are slow and meandering. A modulation to E-flat major marks the entry of an incredible triple fugue in variation thirty-two. Beethoven makes references to J.S. Bach, G.F. Handel, and W.A. Mozart in the concluding section of this piece. Curiously, the piece ends as it begins, with a dance, but it is a minuet, not a waltz. Beethoven's final variation is a sentimental outpouring that looks back to the eighteenth-century dance, perhaps to represent the historical time that he embarked on his compositional journey, illustrating yet again how the imaginative reconfiguration of older techniques is central to his late compositions of the 1820s

*Program notes by Jessica Payette, Associate Professor of Music at Oakland University.*