



Beatrice Rana piano

J.S. Bach

French Suite No. 2 in C minor, BWV 813

Allemande

Courante

Sarabande

Air

Minuet

Minuet – Trio

Gigue

Debussy

Pour le piano, L. 95

Prélude

Sarabande

Toccata

INTERMISSION

Beethoven

Piano Sonata No. 29 in B-flat Major, Op. 106 “Hammerklavier”

Grave

Scherzo: Assai vivace

Adagio sostenuto

Introduzione: Largo – Fuga: Allegro risoluto

Today's program will run approximately 90 minutes, including intermission.

Beatrice Rana appears courtesy of Warner Classics
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NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) **French Suite No. 2 in C minor, BWV 813**

One of the most popular forms of extended instrumental composition in Bach's time was the suite. For him and his contemporaries, a suite was generally a set of stylized adaptations of dances that had moved from the ballroom to a concert-room during the 17th century. The movements are contrasting in mood and character, but they are usually in the same key. Most of the dances have two sections, each of which is played twice, sometimes with improvised ornamentation or variation. When there are pairs of dances of the same type, after the second one has been played, the first is played again, but without repeating the sections within them.

Bach wrote well over two dozen suites, for orchestra, violin, cello, lute, and the keyboard. Some he called *partitas*, a term that came into use perhaps for no other reason than that they are works in several parts. Bach wrote the word *Overture* at the head of each of his orchestral suites, probably intending the title to do no more than describe the introductory movement.

In the 1720s, Bach began to work on three sets of keyboard suites that reached their final form gradually, over a period of several years. The grandest and the last completed are the six *Partitas*; those that precede them are six *English Suites* and six *French Suites*. The style and design of the suites in each of the three sets are consistent, although there is nothing particularly English or French about any of them; how they acquired these designations remains a mystery. Bach gave the suites known as *French* as a wedding gift to his young, musical wife, Anna Magdalena Bach. Keyboard suites had high educational value, and Bach, like his contemporaries, used them as tools for teaching music. He felt that this gift would enhance his wife's skills.

He did not call these works *French Suites*; one of Marburg's treatises in 1762 is perhaps the first reference to *Six French Suites*. The most prominent feature of the *French Suites* is the way Bach embraces the style *galant*, a light and elegant free homophonic style with rococo ornamentation. Often, he focuses on cantabile melody and idiomatic keyboard texture; to achieve this end, he carefully avoids the use of technically complex figuration, counterpoint, and thick texture. Since *French Suite No. 2* has no introductory prelude, in performing it himself, Bach might have begun with brief improvisation.

This suite opens directly with three of the four dances that were considered more or less obligatory for inclusion in suites. The first, an *Allemande*, originated in Germany and became popular as a dance throughout Europe. The longest movement in the suite, the *Allemande* is in binary form (AB). In the *Allemande*, and later, in the *Sarabande*, another traditionally homophonic movement, Bach uses very little contrapuntal writing.

The second dance, a *Courante*, came from Italy, where its name connoted “running,” for it was originally a lively dance performed in small, quick, running (or sometimes jumping) steps. This *Courante* is of the spirited Italian type. The third selection, a *Sarabande*, originated as a wild, lascivious dance, but after its introduction to Europe, in Spain, it was at first suppressed and then converted into a dance of slow and stately measure. Here the Sarabande and the Air balance each other perfectly. The Sarabande, the longer of the two, is languorous and elegantly embellished. The galanteries make up the second half of the suite; they are social dances that were still popular in Bach’s day. The *Air* is the first of these; a restrained and noble *Minuet* follows, and after it, a second *Minuet*. The suite concludes with the brilliant, final joyful jig (*Gigue* in French). Each of the movements is set in the home key of C minor.

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
***Pour le piano*, L. 95**

In 1901, Debussy completed a set of three brilliant pieces to which he gave the simple, modest title, *Pour le piano* (“For the Piano”), as though to emphasize that he had been away from the instrument for a long time. During the entire preceding decade, he had written almost no piano music but had concentrated on the String Quartet, the orchestral Nocturnes, and the opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, works in which his highly personal style had at last been brought to maturity. In this short suite we hear Debussy’s personal style at the piano for the first time. After this composition he was to write a new and important piano work almost every year until 1915.

As an innovator, Debussy received frequent criticism from critics. In 1911, the renowned New York critic James Huneker wrote: “It is impossible to conceive a finer vehicle of expression than that invented by Debussy through the simple yet original process of abolishing rhythm, melody, and tonality from music and thus leaving nothing but atmosphere.” Later critics and musicians did not share Huneker’s harsh judgement. Notably, the well-respected 20th-century pianist Claudio Arrau opined: Debussy was “one of the great geniuses. His music is absolutely unique. It’s like the music of another planet.”

The titles of the *Pour le piano*’s three sections, “Prélude,” “Sarabande,” and “Toccata,” echo titles of the music of two centuries before: we associate them with the Baroque suite of dances rather than the beginning of the 20th century. Here they function to provide Debussy with a source of inspiration rather than imitation. This is music of great originality in color and texture, in harmony and rhythm, and in formal organization. It is brilliant and virtuosic and full of pianistic effects. The movements are headed not with Debussy’s usual, colorfully descriptive titles but instead with nearly neutral, impersonal designations borrowed from the Baroque suite. Debussy was heir to Baroque and Neo-Classical procedures that included development in such a way that a theme that has become a familiar object becomes turned, constantly presenting a new view of itself. He deliberately avoided the charged emotional aspect of the German Romantic tradition of the

late 19th century and instead sought models from the late 17th and 18th centuries. In doing so, he created works that were refined, delicate, and, at times, felt distant or aloof.

The opening *Prélude, Assez animé et très rythmé*, is energetic and virtuosic, but it does not sound at all like its Baroque forebears. This first movement, a *Prélude*, takes its power and vitality from Debussy's fresh rhythms and new scales and from his skillful contrast of running figures, smashing chords, brilliant glissandos, and finally, a cadenza that utilizes the whole-tone scale.

Next comes a Sarabande, *Avec une élégance grave et lente*, (with a grave and slow elegance) which dates, in an earlier incarnation, back to 1894; it was revised for this suite. It is a newly stylized version of the solemn and stately old Spanish dance. Although it conforms to the rhythmic pattern of the dance and to the old binary form, it also emphasizes new harmonies, especially parallel seventh chords. This movement with its calm mid-section had been composed several years earlier than the other parts of the work. Pianist Angela Hewitt quotes the early 20th-century French critic and composer Émile Vuillermoz, who said Debussy played this sarabande "with the easy simplicity of a good dancer from the sixteenth century." Feeling it "sounds both antique and modern at the same time," she includes it among her favorite works.

The work ends with a brilliant Toccata, *Vif*, perpetual-motion music, a real virtuoso piece that is unyielding in its technical demands and never runs out of energy. Finally, it brakes to a stop.

Ricardo Viñes, who had learned of the work from his friend Ravel, performed the premiere in 1902. A well-known story tells of Debussy hearing a famous pianist play this final movement in 1917, and, when Debussy was asked about the performance and the pianist's interpretation, he answered: "Dreadful. He didn't miss a note." "Shouldn't you be happy then?" he was asked. "Oh, not like that," he replied.

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

Piano Sonata No. 29 in B-flat Major, Op. 106 "Hammerklavier"

Between 1816 and 1826, a decade of originality, idiosyncrasy, invention, and expressivity unparalleled in the career of any other composer, Beethoven wrote a series of unsurpassed masterpieces: five piano sonatas, five string quartets, the *Missa Solemnis*, and the Ninth Symphony. During the period just before these compositions began to appear, his output had been slim, as the works of his middle years had exhausted the possibilities of the forms he had inherited from Haydn and Mozart. Withdrawn and separated from much of the rest of the musical world by his increasing deafness, Beethoven conceived and wrote a body of musical literature almost seemingly without root in history and tradition, a new music of his own invention. The word had gone around in Vienna that Beethoven had written himself out, that like Haydn in his old age, he was reduced to making

folk song arrangements because he was incapable of doing anything else. When he heard these rumors from a disciple, Beethoven said, "Wait a while. They'll soon learn differently."

One of his many new ideas around this time was to use the German language in his publications, instead of the French and Italian that convention required. He did not apply this principle consistently in the case of the late piano sonatas, perhaps because he was distracted by the problem of what to call the instrument itself. In Germany, at the time, usage was vague and varied. When he decided on the title *Hammerklavier* (literally "hammer-keyboard," because the sound is produced by little hammers that strike the strings), he used it in the titles of three sonatas, but it has adhered only to this one.

Beethoven began to write this sonata in the autumn of 1817, while he was also occupied with his *Missa Solemnis* and with preliminary ideas for a ninth and possibly even a tenth symphony. He intended the *Missa Solemnis* to celebrate the elevation of his gifted pupil and generous patron, Archbishop Rudolf, an Austrian Emperor's younger son, to the post of Cardinal of Olmütz (now Olomouc in the Czech Republic) on June 4, 1819. It seems to have become obvious to Beethoven quite early that the Mass could not be finished in time. In fact, it turned out to be four years late. Beethoven had to cast around for something with which to honor or flatter Rudolf. Instead of a Mass, the composer sent Rudolf the two completed movements of this sonata, apologizing for the unfinished state of the whole and claiming that in his heart he had always intended the sonata for His Imperial Highness. He then rushed the sonata to completion so that it could be published, and the first edition, issued in September 1819, already bore Rudolf's new title.

This monumental sonata belongs to the group of Beethoven's late works that came to define the very idea of "masterpiece," and in many ways, it is an inexplicable feat of the creative imagination, one that challenges every performer to plumb its depths and to rise to its great heights. With its diverse emotions, its technical requirements, and its length, it exceeded the demands of any sonatas that had been written before it.

Its influence has been long and profound. Mendelssohn imitated it in a sonata in the same key, which he wrote at the age of sixteen and withheld from publication, and it was imprudent of his friend who prepared the posthumous edition to assign to it the same opus number, 106, as Beethoven's. Young Brahms, too, when only twenty years old, showed the weighty influence of the "Hammerklavier" Sonata in his very first published work.

The first pianist to risk playing this sonata in public (at a time when sonatas were still understood to be intended for domestic music-making, not part of the concert repertoire) was apparently Liszt, whose performance of it in Paris in 1836 had a profound effect on Berlioz. Later, musicians tried to convert the sonata into a huge symphony, but even the best of the orchestral versions, the one published in 1926 by the great Beethoven conductor-composer Felix Weingartner (1863-1942), fails to prove that the content transcends the medium. In the end, perhaps

nothing bears comparison with this sonata except the String Quartet, Op. 130, in the same key, that Beethoven completed several years later, which (in its original version) had a related, but different, sequence of movements, ending in a huge fugue. Knowing that the great size of the sonata made it difficult to comprehend, Beethoven said that it would occupy the minds of pianists for fifty years, and in accordance with his suggestion, the publisher of the first English edition broke it up into two pieces.

The *Allegro* first movement opens directly with its two-part principal subject. The first part, a chordal figure can only be described as hammering; the second, which follows immediately, is a flowing melody in a contrapuntal texture. Keys shift; new ideas make their entrances and establish their relative weights, all subject to discussion and development and recall with altered relationships among them until the movement's forceful conclusion.

Next comes a Scherzo, *Assai vivace*, which is relatively compact in scale. It has a contrasting central section in the minor mode, and it makes a sudden shift to duple meter and to *Presto* tempo before the return of the opening. The Scherzo is a relatively brief interlude before the next large-scale piece, a huge slow movement, *Adagio sostenuto*, which, even at its quiet start, must be played "passionately and with great feeling." Its overall shape resembles that of the first movement, but the ideas here are essentially lyrical rather than heroic, less percussive certainly. In some places it is almost operatic; in others, it is ecstatic. A German Romantic scholar-critic with whom, even in our very different time, it is difficult to disagree, called it "the most sacred spot in the holy temple of Beethoven's art."

The transition from the slow movement to the finale, *Introduzione: Largo - Fuga: Allegro risoluto*, is made possible with an *Introduzione* that is basically slow, *Largo*, but is interrupted and then falls back, before the music speeds up to *Allegro risoluto* when a gigantic fugue in three "voices" begins, with the fugue subject so altered in its course that it almost takes on the character of a set of variations. Beethoven explained that "making a fugue is no art... but fantasy also claims its right." At the same time, changes in key and changes of subject reflect the basic, first-movement sonata-allegro structure. Just before the end, the music slows briefly, refers again to the music of the opening fugue-subject, and then closes with rhythmically displaced references to its trills and even to the first movement's chords.

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Beatrice Rana piano

Beatrice Rana has been shaking the international classical music world, arousing admiration and interest from concert presenters, conductors, critics and audiences internationally.

Beatrice performs at the world's most esteemed concert halls and festivals including the Berlin Philharmonie, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Carnegie Hall, Barbican Centre, Philharmonie de Paris, Vienna's Konzerthaus and Musikverein, Boston's Symphony Hall, LA's Walt Disney Hall and Hollywood Bowl, and Washington, DC's Kennedy Center.

She collaborates with conductors such as Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Jaap van Zweden, Sir Antonio Pappano, Manfred Honeck, Klaus Mäkelä, Gianandrea Noseda, Fabio Luisi, Riccardo Chailly, and Paavo Järvi, among others, and with orchestras including the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, Bavarian Radio, Munich Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Academy of St Martin in the Fields, Orchestre de Paris, Santa Cecilia Orchestra, Filarmonica della Scala, and NHK Symphony.

Rana records exclusively for Warner Classics. All her recordings have received international acclaim. In 2023, Beatrice presents her fifth album featuring Clara and Robert Schumann's concertos with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Yannick Nézet-Séguin.

In 2013, Beatrice won Silver and the Audience Award at the Van Cliburn competition. In 2011 at age 18, she won First Prize and all special prizes at the Montreal International Competition. Beatrice began her musical studies at age four and earned her piano degree under the guidance of Benedetto Lupo at the Nino Rota Conservatory of Music in Monopoli. She then studied with Arie Vardi in Hannover and again with Benedetto Lupo at the Accademia di Santa Cecilia.

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Beethoven | Quartet in F minor, Op. 95 "Serioso"

Haydn | Quartet in D Major, Op. 50, no. 6 "The Frog"

Bridge | Quintet in D minor, H. 49

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