Piano Sonata No. 1 in F minor, Op. 2 No. 1
Allegro
Adagio
Menuetto: Allegretto
Prestissimo

History has it that Beethoven held little store for the tuition he received from Haydn following the former's arrival in Vienna in 1792. Haydn, though, regarded him as a totally devoted pupil, who, he predicted, would 'in time become one of the greatest musical artists in Europe', and he was proud to call himself his teacher.

During the composition of the three sonatas of Op. 2 Beethoven was in fact receiving tuition in counterpoint from Albrechtsberger, while Haydn was away in London, but he did give Haydn the honour of dedicating them to him on his return. They are the works of a pianist who was a distinguished and honoured guest in the 'salons' of Viennese society. No. 1 (1795), with its virtuosic and brilliant manner (particularly in the finale), shows Beethoven revelling in his skill at the keyboard.

Despite that, being the first of the cycle, it is also the one that most budding young pianists have attempted in their day, and much of the first movement is texturally transparent, with only two main voices.

Structurally it is straightforward, with a pair of easily identifiable principal themes: the opening arpeggio idea and its more legato inversion over bobbing quavers. The Adagio moves to the tonic major key, F, and is typical of Beethoven's slow movements in which a simple, unadorned melody is subjected to ever greater expansion and elaboration through runs of fast notes and extended ornaments. The straightforward but delightful minuet is followed by an exhilarating finale, with triplets rarely letting up their incessant energetic runs.

Piano Sonata No. 2 in A, Op. 2 No. 2
Allegro vivace
Largo appassionata
Scherzo: Allegretto
Rondo: Grazioso

Beethoven's first three piano sonatas were dedicated to the figure who had inspired him to move from his home town of Bonn to Vienna, Joseph Haydn. No. 2 is notable for the way we see Beethoven already treating his musical material as motifs more than themes: the first movement opens with a succession of these ideas, a mixture of arpeggio and scalic figures. The slow movement is an expressive Largo in which the piano etches out an accompaniment like a pizzicato double bass. The playful scherzo has a more lyrical trio at its heart, while the finale is a wide-ranging rondo, marked "grazioso" (graceful), but finding room for more rhythmic energy in the central episodes.

Piano Sonata No. 3 in C, Op. 2 No. 3
Allegro con brio
Adagio
Scherzo: Allegro
Assai allegro

While the influence of both Haydn and Mozart is evident in this Sonata (see Op. 2 No. 1, Recital 1), the first movement is in fact an elaboration of a quartet movement dating from Beethoven's youth in Bonn, a reminder of which is the four-part texture of the opening. This first movement has a wealth of material, each subject group having at least two ideas. The coda, which begins with a cadenza, brings the movement to a brilliant finish.

The Adagio is in E major, with a long central section in the tonic minor. There are three themes, the second two appearing first in the minor then, towards the end, in the major. The noble first theme is varied only on its third and final appearance. The scherzo is characterised by its quasi-fugal style and the playful emphasis of weak beats in the bar. The finale is a sonata-rondo in which the central episode acts as a development and the first theme and first episode take the form of first and second subjects.

Piano Sonata No. 4 in E flat, Op. 7
Allegro molto e con brio
Largo, con gran espressione
Allegro
Rondo: Poco allegretto e grazioso

With each new sonata written in the 1790s, Beethoven pushed further against the received bounds of the medium. Op. 7, his seventh, if one includes three works written at the age of 12 (catalogued as WoO 47 and not generally included in the 'canon'), was the largest to date, lasting half an hour and thus longer even than the Appassionata. It was written in 1796-7 for one of his most gifted piano pupils, the young Countess Babette von Keglevics. She lived so close to the composer in Vienna that he is said to have turned up to her lessons quite often in his slippers.

But there is nothing so laid-back about his E flat major Sonata. The use of repeated notes as a feature in three of the four movements gives the music a momentum of its own, as well as a unifying feel. The opening Allegro molto e con brio is one of Beethoven's broadest sonata structures, yet also one of his most virtuosic. Its mood-changes are perfectly placed and its themes make memorable use of the 6/8 metre, particularly when he affects to ignore the bar line in the coda.

The slow movement provides a change of mood, in key (C major) as much as in texture, with, after the swift, action-filled Allegro, a dramatic use of silence. The third movement is not designated as a minuet, but with its trio in the unusual key of E flat minor it performs very much the same function as the traditional dance-music interlude. The finale is one of Beethoven's most songful - an unusual characteristic for a rondo, admittedly, but the composer provides plenty of contrast, particularly in the stormy episodes, while ending the work in a shimmering pianissimo.

Piano Sonata No. 5 in C minor, Op. 10 No. 1
Molto allegro e con brio
Molto adagio
Finale: Prestissimo

Composed in 1796, this Sonata is an early example of Beethoven's unique symphonic style. Its organic mode of composition looks ahead to that of the Fifth Symphony (also in his Pathétique key of C minor). Yet all three movements also have a Classical quality, and it seems likely that Mozart's C minor Sonata K457 (1785) was used as a model, though the Beethoven is more rough-hewn and youthful in spirit.

The organic quality of the Allegro is seen in the frequent recurrence in different guises of the two principal ideas of the opening theme: an extended rising triad and a falling scalic figure. Indeed, these features permeate the whole work: in the Adagio the leaping triadic figure is transformed as part of the main theme and provides the outline for the fast runs of the episodes, each time followed by a descending scale. The first subject of the sonata form finale, too, is based on a short bar-long phrase rising up a position of the triad on each repetition. The short development contains the famous anticipation of the motto-theme of the Fifth Symphony.

Piano Sonata No. 6 in F, Op. 10 No. 2
Allegro
Allegretto
Presto

Beethoven dedicated the three sonatas of his Op. 10 to the Countess Anna Margarete von Browne. Her husband, Count von Browne-Camus, was an officer (of Irish descent) in the Russian Imperial Service in Vienna and himself a generous patron of Beethoven's between 1797 and 1803. He received a number of dedications of his own and, following the gift of these sonatas to his wife, he presented the composer with a riding horse, which Beethoven characteristically forgot until he received a large bill for fodder.

Op. 10 No. 2 is the shortest among Beethoven's early sonatas. He dispenses with a slow movement, instead dividing a Haydnesque first movement and a mock fugal finale with an Allegretto that has the characteristics of a minuet, for all its minor-key earnestness.

Piano Sonata No. 7 in D, Op. 10 No. 3
Presto
Largo e mesto
Menuetto: Allegro
Rondo: Allegro

In the late 18th century it was customary to publish works in multiples of three and Beethoven typically worked on the triptych of his Op. 10 simultaneously between about 1796 and 1798. No. 3 is undoubtedly the finest of this set - the music historian Ernest Walker summed it up: 'the individuality of style is absolute and unchallenged, the structure of all the movements is mature and flawless.' These movements are a rigorously constructed opening Presto, a slow movement whose intensity, in Beethoven's own words 'expressed a melancholic state of mind... [portraying] every subtle shade, every phase of melancholy', a minuet and trio and lively finale.

Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor, Op. 13 (Pathétique)
Grave - Molto allegro e con brio
Adagio cantabile
Rondo: Allegro

This Sonata represents one of the few cases in which the popular title came from the composer himself - its full name is 'Grande sonate pathétique' (pathetic in the sense of 'suffering', rather than the English sense of 'pitiful'). It was written in 1798, a time when Beethoven was beginning to become aware of his encroaching deafness and yet was leading a relatively contented domestic life.

Six years earlier he had arrived in Vienna and was taken in as a member of the family by Prince Karl Lichnowsky, who at once introduced him to Austrian aristocratic society, where he found enduring friends and benefactors and soon forged for himself a reputation as a virtuoso improviser at the keyboard. Beethoven dedicated the Pathétique Sonata to Lichnowsky, who in return gave him a valuable quartet of Italian string instruments and shortly afterwards secured for him an annuity of 600 florins.

The dramatic Grave introduction to the Pathétique is the most powerful opening to any of his sonatas to this date and its music becomes an intrinsic part of the movement through its reappearances at the beginning of the development and coda. There is an almost 'orchestral' texture to much of the piano writing, with chords marked forte-piano at the opening and a timpani-like left-hand accompaniment to the Allegro's main theme.

The Adagio cantabile is in one of the simplest of forms: three statements of a heartfelt theme separated by short episodes and followed by a brief coda - there is no attempt at development as such. The Sonata ends with a straightforward rondo that, despite its minor key, only recaptures the general character of the rest of the work in the sforzando chords of the coda, the remainder being more delicate and even humorous.

Piano Sonata No. 9 in E, Op. 14 No. 1
Allegro
Allegretto
Rondo: Allegro comodo

The first sonata of Beethoven's Op. 14 makes a lyrical counterpoint to its predecessor, the PathÃ©tique. Along with the second in G, it was astutely dedicated to Baroness Josefa von Braun, whose husband was court theatre director in Vienna and thus provided the key to the composer's orchestral ambitions - it was the Baron who allotted Beethoven the date and venue for the premiere of his First Symphony in 1800. The E major Sonata is one of the best documented in Beethoven's sketchbooks, which date its composition to 1798-9. Two years later he was persuaded to rearrange it for string quartet, transposing it to the key of F major.

Op. 14 No. 1 is a modest work in three movements. The first opens with a spacious theme that stretches itself upwards through an octave and contrasts with the step-by-step chromaticism of the second theme. Although not marked as such, the E minor middle movement has the character and form of a minuet, with an intimate trio in the major. The finale is an amiable rondo ('comodo' effectively translates as 'comfortable') which finds Beethoven playing with sudden dynamic changes.

Piano Sonata No. 10 in G, Op. 14 No. 2
Allegro
Andante
Scherzo: Allegro assai

The two sonatas of Beethoven's Op. 14, written within a year of the Pathétique and published in the same month of 1799, make a matching pair. Both are in three movements, both in major keys and both provide a lyrical contrast with the heady emotions of Op. 13. No. 2, indeed, finds the composer at his most playful, particularly when it comes to tricks of metre and rhythm.

The opening Allegro almost feels its way into a main theme, even fooling the listener as to where the bar line falls, as its broken figures coalesce into a more tangible melody. The movement features one of Beethoven's more elaborate development sections and, after the return of the opening music, comes to an end in a mood of contentment. The middle movement is a set of variations on a simple, staccato theme - Beethoven at his most congenial, though he ends with an attention-grabbing joke worthy of Haydn. The finale, unusually, is a pastoral-style scherzo, but one in rondo form rather than the more common scherzo-and-trio layout, and with a main idea that disconcertingly sounds as if it is never sure whether it has two or three beats to the bar.

Piano Sonata No. 11 in B flat, Op. 22
Allegro con brio
Adagio con molta espressione
Minuetto
Rondo: Allegretto

Of all his early sonatas, Beethoven was most proud of this work in B flat, though it has perhaps never had the popularity of some of its companions in the cycle. It was completed in 1800 and published two years later, Beethoven assuring his prospective Leipzig-based publisher in colloquial German that 'Die Sonate hat sich gewaschen' - 'The Sonata has washed itself', which the great musical analyst Donald Tovey likened to the English phrase 'takes the cake'. (Incidentally, as an indication of the composer's sometimes hazy connection with everyday life, he dated this letter '15 January, or thereabouts'.)

Like a much later Sonata in B flat, the 'Hammerklavier', it is a large-scale work - indeed Beethoven labels it a 'Grande Sonate' - and effectively brings his period of high Classicism to a close. From here on experimentalism would rule. That said, the first movement manages to hold its own while rarely presenting us with something as recognisable as a melody. For that we have to wait until the slow movement, which presents a florid line over a throbbing accompaniment. The last two movements are more conservative: a regular minuet and a typical Viennese rondo.

Piano Sonata No. 12 in A flat, Op. 26 (Funeral March)
Andante con variazioni
Scherzo: Allegro molto
Marcia funebre sulla morte d'un eroe
Allegro

Beethoven's second compositional phase, often known as his heroic period, is most obviously exemplified in the Eroica Symphony of 1803-4. But, as the slow movement of his Op. 26 Piano Sonata shows, thoughts of expressing a kind of Romantic heroism in his music were in his mind as early as 1800.

The Sonata's immediate inspiration was probably a visit to Vienna in 1800 by the German-born, London-based piano virtuoso Johann Baptist Cramer, whose playing of his own works and those of his teacher Muzio Clementi caused quite a storm. Beethoven felt the need to compete with this virtuosity and wrote a number of works that began to break away from the more Classically oriented sonatas of the 1790s, towards the mature second-period style.

One innovation, seen in Op. 26 and the two sonata fantasies of Op. 27, was the attempt to expand away from the traditional confines of the sonata, here by beginning with a set of Andante variations, though the three remaining movements conform to the standard type of scherzo, slow movement (the funeral march, later to be played by a brass band at Beethoven's own funeral) and rondo-finale.

Along with a number of works from this period, including the *Pathétique* Sonata , Op. 26 is dedicated to Prince Karl Lichnowsky, Beethoven's foremost patron with whom he had been living more or less as a member of the family since his arrival in Vienna in 1792.

Piano Sonata No. 13 in E flat, Op. 27 No. 1
Andante - Allegro
Allegro molto e vivace
Adagio con espressione
Allegro vivace - Presto

The two most pressing concerns for Beethoven in 1801 were his encroaching deafness and his preoccupation with 'a dear fascinating girl who', he wrote, 'loves me and whom I love'. This was the Countess Giulietta Guicciardi, a 16-year-old pupil of his who later in fact married another composer and moved to Italy. The effects on Beethoven of both this rejection and his deafness culminated in October 1802 in the famous 'Heiligenstadt Testament', a desperate farewell to the world, but his spirits recovered enough within the month to dispel thoughts of suicide. Something of this 'elasticity of his nature', as Beethoven's biographer Thayer referred to it, is reflected in two of the four piano sonatas he had written the year before, in 1801, the pair of Op. 27. Here he departed from the established pattern of movements in a sonata and subtitled each work 'Sonata quasi una fantasia' (sonata in the form of a fantasia). Thus No. 1, despite being outwardly in four standard movements, is more of a continuous whole, with speed- and mood-changes within movements and a more fluid approach to key, thematic development and form.

Piano Sonata No. 14 in C sharp minor, Op. 27 No. 2 (Moonlight)
Adagio sostenuto
Allegretto
Presto agitato

The popular nickname of the 'Moonlight' for the second sonata of Op. 27 may be a fair title for the first movement, but the rest of the work contains some of the most turbulent music Beethoven ever wrote. Much has been said of Countess Guicciardi, or at least Beethoven's feelings for her, being the Sonata's inspiration, but, as she herself recalled, it was not dedicated to her until after another work intended for her had had to be reassigned to another patron.

This is again designated as a 'Sonata quasi una fantasia'. There is no standard fast first movement. Instead, the Sonata opens with a slow movement, a calm and poetic, virtually athematic Adagio sostenuto. It is followed without a break by a short D flat major scherzo, with a dramatic, syncopated trio, and the hectic, often ferocious Presto agitato concludes the Sonata in a mood about as far away from the Adagio as is possible.

Piano Sonata No. 15 in D, Op. 28 (Pastoral)
Allegro
Andante
Scherzo: Allegro vivace
Rondo: Allegro ma non troppo - Più allegro quasi presto

After the formal strides forward in his Op. 26 Sonata (see Recital 6) and the 'sonate quasi fantasie' pair of Op. 27 (see Recital 3), Beethoven appears to step back again with his next work in the medium, his D major Sonata, Op. 28. But since he seems to have worked on all four at the same time in 1801 any implication of 'progression', let alone 'regression', through these sonatas would be misplaced. Yet the work does revert to the Classical four-movement model. Its easygoing manner and geniality earned it the nickname of 'Pastoral' from his Hamburg publisher, a soubriquet that becomes particularly clear once one gets to the rustic charm of the finale. Before that come an expansive but generally relaxed sonata Allegro, an Andante with a sustained melody over a staccato, broken-chord bass and one of Beethoven's most humorous scherzos. Here, the composer plays with the simplicity of four repeated notes, descending through the registers of the piano, followed by a brief cadential phrase, while in the minor-key trio he manages to harmonise what is essentially a straightforward four-bar phrase six different ways.

Piano Sonata No. 16 in G, Op. 31 No. 1
Allegro vivace
Adagio grazioso
Rondo: Allegretto - Presto

Although published as a trio of works, the three sonatas of Op. 31, composed in 1801 and 1802, show great diversity in style and content and it is evident that Beethoven did not intend them to constitute a unity. No. 1 seems to be the result of a commission from a female admirer for a revolutionary sonata on new lines. When this request was conveyed to him through his Leipzig publishers Beethoven replied with both indignation and sarcasm: 'Are you out of your minds, gentlemen? To suggest that I should write a sonata of that sort? During the fever of the revolution, well, yes, that might have been possible, but now, when people are simmering down; Bonaparte has concluded a concordat with the Pope - such a sonata, now? - Heavens above! In these new Christian times, huh! - No, leave me alone, I shall do nothing of the kind. The lady can have a sonata of mine... but I won't follow her scheme.' So, true to his word, the resulting sonata (which is not even dedicated to the 'lady admirer') does not bear the slightest trace of revolution and is on the contrary bright and serene. Indeed, it stands out from its neighbours in Op. 31 by its conservatism and conventionality.

The main feature of the first movement is a figure in which the left hand is anticipated by the right by a semiquaver, as if Beethoven is making fun of bad pianists who can't play both hands simultaneously. The second movement is an Adagio grazioso in a rather nostalgic mood, full of trills, ornaments and free, arabesque-like runs. The cheerful finale is a sonata-rondo in which the first theme is developed in the central section and the first, triplet-dominated episode reappears in a recapitulation to confirm its status as a second subject.

Piano Sonata No. 17 in D minor, Op. 31 No. 2 (Tempest)
Largo - Allegro
Adagio
Allegretto

Compared to the vivacious lightness of touch in the first, G major Sonata of Op. 31, the second is, as its nickname suggests, a stormy work. The name, as so often in Beethoven's piano sonatas, was not the composer's own, but here he is said to have remarked "Just read Shakespeare's The Tempest", when asked what this work and the *Appassionata* (Op. 57) were meant to be about.

The first movement's volatile nature is immediately apparent through its frequent alternation of stretches of slow and fast music: a Largo, improvisatory arpeggio - like a question - and an ominous Allegro - the answer - that soon gains unassailable momentum. Although in a major key (B flat), the slow movement carries on the sombre mood, with fragmentary melodic ideas broken up by a muffled drum-like ostinato in the bass. The energy returns with the finale, a succession of almost unrelieved semiquavers and an obsessive four-note theme that, according to the pianist-composer Czerny, was inspired by a horseman galloping past Beethoven's window - not an image likely to bring The Tempest to mind, but one that at least catches the urgency of the composer's vision.

Piano Sonata No. 18 in E flat, Op. 31 No. 3
Allegro
Scherzo: Allegretto vivace
Minuetto: Moderato e grazioso
Presto con fuoco

Even though Op. 31 No. 3 was written in 1802, there is nothing about it to suggest that Beethoven was to write the famous Heiligenstadt Testament (his confessional statement verging on the suicidal) later the same year. On the contrary, it is a particularly relaxed work, except for the vivacious finale, which has earned the Sonata the nickname *The Hunt* (though this title is as inapt for the rest of the Sonata as is *Moonlight* to the rest of Op. 27 No. 2).

Although reverting to the four-movement form after the three-movement predecessors in Op. 31, the layout is unusual in having a moderately paced scherzo (in duple rather than the usual triple metre) replacing the traditional slow movement, and a gentle minuetto instead of the customary fast dance movement - this is not simply a case of the middle movements exchanging their positions.

The Sonata opens with a striking harmonic idea that begins on an ambiguous added-sixth chord and does not reach the tonic until the sixth bar. The falling fifth motif in the first bar becomes the motto of the first movement and provides a thematic link between the different elements of the first subject group. The scherzo, although true to its title in its playfulness, differs from what Beethoven usually means by the form - a vigorous expression of relentless energy. The melodious minuetto is contrasted with a trio composed almost wholly of chords alternating between lower and upper registers of the keyboard (later used by Saint-Saëns in his Variations on a Theme of Beethoven of 1874). The 6/8 hunting finale is in sonata form with continuous quaver movement dominating both subject groups, themselves unified by common material.

Piano Sonata No. 19 in G minor, Op. 49 No. 1
Piano Sonata No. 20 in G, Op. 49 No. 2

No. 19:
Andante
Rondo: Allegro

No. 20:
Allegro, ma non troppo
Tempo di menuetto

The opus number for this pair of piano sonatas is the only anomaly in the perceived chronology of Beethoven's cycle, for they date from around the time of Op. 7. The writing of No. 2 probably preceded No. 1 in 1797, but then the composer seems to have set them aside, for they only appeared in print in 1805 as 'sonates facile', or 'easy sonatas', after his brother had sent them off to a publisher without his knowledge. Perhaps Ludwig felt they were too low-key when set against the larger-scale works that soon followed from his pen and had intended to keep them for private use among his friends and their children. Beethoven certainly had no qualms about reusing the Tempo di menuetto finale of No. 2 as the basis of a movement in his Violin Sonata Op 30 No 3.

Both are two-movement works, each lasting under ten minutes. No. 1 pairs a sober Andante with a lively, 6/8 rondo, No. 2 a straightforward sonata allegro with the aforementioned gentle minuet.

Piano Sonata No. 21 in C, Op. 53 (Waldstein)
Allegro con brio
Adagio molto
Allegretto moderato - Prestissimo

Beethoven's association with Ferdinand Ernst Gabriel, Count Waldstein, goes back to the composer's days in Bonn, where they were both connected to the Electoral court. It may well have been Waldstein's connections in Vienna that gave Beethoven the opportunity to go to the Austrian capital in 1792 to study with Haydn: "With the help of assiduous labour," goes Waldstein's famous farewell note, "you shall receive Mozart's spirit from Haydn's hands."

A little over a decade later, Beethoven repaid the Count with the dedication of one of his greatest piano sonatas. His compositional skills had risen rapidly since he had arrived in Vienna (though with little thanks to Haydn, as things turned out) and by the early years of the 19th century he was breaking new ground with every work. In 1803 he wrote his most revolutionary symphony to date, No. 3, the Eroica , and the Waldstein Sonata followed later the same year. As well as pursuing the example of the Symphony in terms of greater scale, it marked a new era in Beethoven's pianistic writing following his acquisition of a new érard piano with its extended range.

Despite the novel nature of the Sonata's content, here are the usual three movements: a lively, dramatic Allegro con brio, a mysterious, moody Adagio (Beethoven originally wrote an Andante, which was published separately as the Andante favori) and a spacious rondo.

Piano Sonata No. 22 in F, Op. 54
In tempo d'un menuetto
Allegretto - Piü allegro

It might seem surprising to find this little two-movement sonata sandwiched between two of Beethoven's grandest offerings, the Waldstein and the Appassionata. It is true that it rarely gets performed outside complete cycles of the sonatas, but there's nothing conventional or even low-key about it, certainly compared to his earlier two-movement works. Along with the Triple Concerto, it was sketched in 1804 seemingly as relief from the troublesome time he was having writing his opera Leonore, the first version of Fidelio.

The first movement is 'in the tempo of a minuet', but has little in the way of dance-like gentility, once the opening phrase is out of the way. It has more the character of a rondo, with increasingly thunderous episodes separating the presentations of the main theme. The second movement is a moto perpetuo, with barely a break in its run of semiquavers. Variety and development are provided by a constantly changing harmonic palette, since, apart from the odd chord and octave doubling, the music is in only two parts throughout. Only with the faster coda does the texture fill out more substantially.

Piano Sonata No. 23 in F minor, Op. 57 (Appassionata)
Allegro assai - Piü allegro
Andante con moto
Allegro ma non troppo - Presto

> "I would never have believed that I could be so lazy as I am here. If it is followed by an outburst of industry, something worthwhile may be accomplished."

So wrote Beethoven from the Austrian spa town of Baden to his piano pupil Ferdinand Ries on 24 July 1804. His brother secured a lodging for him in the village of Döbling just north of Vienna and, as if the above letter spurred him into action, he spent the rest of the summer working on two piano sonatas, Op. 54 and Op. 57. He went for long walks in the nearby Vienna Woods, one of which is recalled by Ries:

> "We went so far astray that we did not get back to Döbling until nearly 8 o'clock. He had been humming, and more often howling, always up and down, without singing any definite notes. When questioned as to what it was he answered, 'A theme for the last movement of the sonata [Op. 57] has occurred to me.' When we entered the room he ran to the pianoforte without taking off his hat. I sat down in the corner and he soon forgot all about me. He stormed for at least an hour with the beautiful finale of the sonata. Finally he got up, was surprised that I was still there and said, 'I cannot give you a lesson today, I must do some work'."

The subtitle for the Sonata was the publisher's addition, but Beethoven did not for once see cause to object. It is certainly his most impassioned work and his most violent musical utterance. Although it is unlikely that a specific event inspired it, he had recently quarrelled with one of his closest friends, Stephan von Breuning, so on a local scale the sonata might be seen as Beethoven venting his anger. But the work goes further than that. It is a defiant challenge to the world, or, as the composer Hubert Parry said, "Here the human soul asked mighty questions of its God and had its reply."

It has in fact inspired more comment than perhaps any other piano sonata of its period. Lenin, for example, while recognising his shortcomings as a music critic, wrote:

> "I know nothing that is greater than the Appassionata; I would like to listen to it every day. It is marvellous superhuman music. I always think with pride - perhaps it is naïve of me - what marvellous things humans can do."

After the expectant introduction to the Allegro assai, the first movement proceeds with virtually unrelenting vigour and, for the first time in a Beethoven sonata first movement, the customary exposition repeat is done away with, so as not to hold up the argument. The Andante is like the calm between two storms and is a set of variations on a theme that is more harmony than melody. The final Allegro follows without a break, but rather seems to continue where the first movement left off. It is another movement of passionate violence, culminating in a shattering Presto coda of drama and defiance.

Piano Sonata No. 24 in F sharp, Op. 78
Adagio cantabile - Allegro ma non troppo
Allegro vivace

Beethoven dedicated this Sonata to Countess Therese Brunsvik, who was once thought of as a leading contender for being the composer's mysterious "Immortal Beloved". Yet by the time these enigmatic references to a lover had begun to appear in his correspondence and conversation books, Therese had been out of his life for a couple of years and, indeed, it is she who seems to have been the more disappointed party when their relationship came to nothing in 1809. He, meanwhile, was more besotted with her widowed sister Josephine. Once Beethoven failed to respond to Therese's love for him, she found solace in a life caring for disadvantaged children and survived to the ripe old age of 86. The composer nevertheless treasured the portrait she gave him on her departure, inscribed with the words "To the unique genius, to the great artist, to the good man". But as the Beethoven biographer Marion M Scott commented, his Sonata was "a far more beautiful portrait than the painting".

It is certainly one of his most delightful works, featuring two of his sunniest movements and seemingly worlds away from the storms of the Appassionata , his previous sonata composed five years earlier. The first movement has a brief four-bar preface marked Adagio cantabile, less a traditional slow introduction than an upbeat to the sonata-form Allegro that follows. The vigorous finale makes great play with the contrasting gestures of its opening theme: a call to attention and a throwaway scalic idea.

Piano Sonata No. 25 in G, Op. 79
Presto alla tedesca
Andante
Vivace

This Sonata, together with its predecessor Op. 78 and the G minor Fantasy, Op. 77, formed a package of new works that Beethoven promised to the London-based publisher, pianist and composer Muzio Clementi in 1807. Beethoven had long admired the Italian-born musician and had even been influenced by him in his early piano sonatas, and it took a while for him to pluck up the courage to meet him. But there was an instant rapport, and Clementi agreed to take on a large body of Beethoven's music for the British market, commissioning the three piano works for a sum of £60.

Op. 79 was published as a Sonatine or "Sonate facile", though as usual there's sophistication behind the straightforward front. The first movement is in the style of a German folk dance popular at the time, effectively a predecessor of the waltz. It is followed by a gentle barcarolle-style Andante in G minor and an ear-catching rondo finale.

Piano Sonata No. 26 in E flat, Op. 81a (Les adieux / Lebewohl)
Das Lebewohl: Adagio - Allegro
Das Abwesenheit: Andante espressivo
Das Wiedersehen: Vivacissimamente

While a number of Beethoven's piano sonatas have titles (authentic or otherwise), Op. 81a is the only one to have a concrete extra-musical inspiration: the flight from Vienna of his patron the Archduke Rudolph (along with the entire nobility and their entourages) in anticipation of the French invasion of the city. In the light of the political situation, Beethoven was understandably indignant when his publisher, with an eye on the international market, insisted on giving it the French title, *Les adieux* , rather than his own German *Lebewohl* . In his next sonata (Op. 90) he would reject Italian tempo markings as being Napoleonic, and later even replace pianoforte with Hammerklavier.

Beethoven began the first movement of his E flat major Sonata in May 1809, just after the Archduke had left and a matter of days before Vienna was besieged by Napoleon's forces. During the siege he sheltered in a cellar with a pillow over his head to protect his already diminishing hearing. The other two movements were written in January 1810, following the Archduke's return. The published dedication reads: "On the departure of his Imperial Highness, for the Archduke Rudolph in admiration" - though his private dedication in the sketches refers to the Sonata as being "written from the heart".

The first movement, 'The Farewell', is dominated by a short motto of three descending notes, over which in the first bar Beethoven writes the three syllables Le-be-wohl. This motif furnished the material for both the first and second subject groups of the main Allegro, and while it adds an obviously programmatic element to the music it is, as he explained of the Pastoral Symphony, "not painting, but the expression of feeling". This can in fact be seen as the principle behind the whole Sonata.

The second movement, 'The Absence', expresses moods of both loss and consolation with its two contrasting themes, leading straight into the joyful 'Reunion' of the finale. This movement is in sonata form and contrasts a dynamic first subject and a more relaxed second subject with a distinctive bridge passage that alternates four-bar phrases of G flat major and F major, first in simple forte arpeggios and then in a more decorated piano form. Finally, a poco andante version of the first subject leads into an exhilarating coda.

Piano Sonata No. 27 in E minor, Op. 90

Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus mit Empfindung und Ausdruck
Nicht zu geschwind und sehr singbar vorzutragen.

Although Beethoven had written nothing for the piano for five years, this Sonata, Op. 90 (1814), has more kinship with the last group of masterpieces written between 1816 and 1822 (Opp. 101 , 106 , 109 , 110 and 111) than to earlier works in the cycle. Indeed, it parallels Op. 111 in the minor-major key contrast of its two movements, which Hans von Bülow remarked should be played respectively as though 'spoken' and 'sung'. This differentiation is further emphasised by the story that the dedicatee, Count Moritz Lichnowsky (brother of Karl), who had recently married a young Viennese dancer, asked Beethoven what the Sonata meant. He replied with "a boisterous laugh" that the first movement represented "a struggle between the head and the heart" (i.e. the Count's debate as to whether or not he should marry below his station), and the second "a conversation with the beloved", celebrating the happy union. But it does appear that Beethoven's intention in saying this was a joke with his patron, and it would be wrong to force any unnatural programmatic element upon the work.

The sonata-form first movement is virtually monothematic in its adherence to the descending figure of the opening bar. The falling semitone (particularly G-F sharp) dominates the first and second subject groups and much of the episodic work in between. For example, the codetta leading into the recapitulation is made up simply of eight bars of the notes G-F sharp-E in different rhythmic configurations, culminating in the return of the first subject which itself begins with these notes.

Bülow suggested that the tempo marking for the second movement ("not too fast, singing") was designed to counteract the habit of pianists rushing through any movement in rondo form as if they were rondeaux brillants. It is in fact a rather gentle movement, both in its smooth, flowing line and in its predominantly low dynamic level. The principal rondo theme, heard four times in all, begins with the notes E-F sharp-G sharp, an inverted major form of the main figure of the first movement thus highlighting the thematic integrity of the whole sonata.

Piano Sonata No. 28 in A, Op. 101
Allegretto, ma non troppo
Vivace, alla marcia
Adagio, ma non troppo, con affetto
Allegro

The designation "for the Hammerklavier" has long since only been applied to Beethoven's B flat major Piano Sonata published as Op. 106 , but the composer also assigned it to this slightly earlier work in A. As Beethoven's biographer AW Thayer wrote,

> "The suggestion had gone out that German composers substitute German terms in music in place of Italian. With characteristic impetuosity, Beethoven decided to begin the reform at once, although it seems to have involved the re-engraving of the title page of the new sonata."

Thus *pianoforte* became *Hammerklavier* and the movement headings, too, were given in German. Why the Italian soon crept back into use in this work is not known, but the very word *Hammerklavier* seems more appropriate to the massive pianism of the later work: Op. 101 is an altogether smaller-scale Sonata.

It was written in the summer of 1816, which Beethoven spent in the town of Baden, just south of Vienna. He dedicated it to his favourite piano pupil, Baroness Dorothea von Ertmann: "Receive now what was often intended for you and what may be a proof of my affection for your artistic talent as well as your person," he wrote to her in February 1817, when he sent her a copy of the newly printed music. Yet for all the warmth of this dedication and the charm of much of the music, this was not a happy period in Beethoven's life. In January 1816, following the death of his brother, he had assumed guardianship of his nephew Karl and there ensued constant battles with the boy's mother and with the boy himself. Apart from the two 'Hammerklavier' sonatas, Op. 101 and Op. 106 , Beethoven's compositional output was negligible until he was forced temporarily to surrender his guardianship to Karl's mother in 1819.

For all its intimacy, however, the Sonata in A can be properly regarded as the first of his great final group. It shares with the Hammerklavier and the summatory trio of Opp. 109-11 a desire to weld together the form of sonata with the contrapuntal principles of canon and fugue. The work begins subtly, indeed tonally obliquely, since its first phrase is in the dominant of the ostensible key of the work, and almost sounds as if the music had been flowing already. This almost conversational opening movement is followed by an abrupt change of mood in the form of a lively march with a more pensive trio section. The brief slow movement is a withdrawn Adagio, marked to be played throughout with the so-called 'soft pedal', and leads, by way of a brief recall of the Sonata's opening, to the joyful Allegro finale, a movement dominated by contrapuntal writing and incorporating a fugal exposition in its development.

Piano Sonata No. 29 in B flat, Op. 106 (Hammerklavier)
Allegro
Scherzo: Assai vivace
Adagio sostenuto
Largo - Allegro risoluto

No two of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas are alike. Even more than in his string quartets, which similarly span his creative life, he seemed to make new strides in form and motivic development in each work. Yet the last five sonatas stand apart from the rest, in the same way that the late quartets do from their predecessors. Opp. 101 , 106, 109 , 110 and 111 enter new levels of scale and ambition - and all were intended by Beethoven to be published with the designation "for the Hammerklavier", the German equivalent of 'pianoforte', though only Op. 106 appeared in print with this instruction. It is also the most imposing of the five, with a slow movement alone that exceeds the length of many of his early sonatas.

The *Hammerklavier* Sonata was written in 1817-18 and dedicated to Beethoven's staunchest patron, Archduke Rudolph of Austria - the massive chords at the very opening were written to suggest the words "Vivat, vivat Rudolphus!" The powerful momentum achieved by this theme is maintained right through the first movement, which still manages to fulfil the general demands of sonata form.

Even the brief scherzo breaks the bounds of the form Beethoven had already himself established in other works, with several changes of tempo and metre and an almost improvisational flow. The slow movement, too, has its own sense of spontaneous creation. At nearly 25 minutes, it is the longest Adagio Beethoven ever wrote and is a set of variations in the relatively remote key of F sharp minor. Compared with the extrovert first movement it has the feeling of a very personal, intimate musing on the simple chordal theme, though there are some dramatic passages. The finale is an example of Beethoven's greatest formal preoccupation in these late sonatas - fugue; apart from the introduction and coda, the writing is entirely contrapuntal.

Piano Sonata No. 30 in E, Op. 109
Vivace, ma non troppo. Sempre legato - Adagio espressivo
Prestissimo
Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo

Some 20 of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas pre-date the period of his fullest maturity during the early 1800s. Although even these works were often more experimental than anything by Mozart or Haydn, it is with the great series beginning with the *Waldstein* in 1804 that his most original thoughts are found. By the time of his last three sonatas, Opp. 109, 110 and 111 , composed in 1820-22, he had turned the medium from what had originally been an early form of home entertainment into a profound, deeply personal statement. All three seem to inhabit a world away from the world, going beyond the mere exploration of pianistic technique to express something inward and introspective in Beethoven's creative personality.

All three show Beethoven breaking the bounds of the traditional sonata by abandoning the traditional movement forms of the medium and exploring new ones. For example, variation technique and fugue usurp the more familiar 'sonata form', and the layout of the sonatas as a whole has managed to become both more condensed (Op. 111 has only two movements) and more diffuse, in the sense that traditional movement 'types' are no longer the cast-in-stone sureties of earlier works. This is particularly the case with Op. 109, where none of the movements are where one would expect them. The first alternates between two areas of music marked respectively Vivace and Adagio and, with the latter predominating, seems to be turning the slow introduction/allegro first movement form on its head. The middle movement, despite its tempo marking, has more of the characteristics of a first movement than the expected scherzo, while the finale, like that of Op. 111 , is a set of variations.

If the form seems diffuse, there is at least a sense of unity provided by the thematic material. The arabesque-like figuration of the opening Vivace hides within itself the main idea of the Prestissimo, as well as the theme of the variations. The arabesque soon leads into the first of the two improvisatory Adagio sections; only in the movement's coda does the latter's stepwise motion merge with the arpeggiated chords of the Vivace. The Prestissimo is in E minor - though, as we have seen, its melodic outline has already been prefigured in a major-key form in the Adagio opening. Unlike the other two late sonatas, there is no fugal writing as such in the present work, though this central movement instead explores elements of canon.

Where variation movements in early Beethoven sonatas usually kept to the basic pulse and form of the melody, gradually introducing increasingly decorative figuration, in Op. 109 his approach is much more wide-ranging. The tempo changes with virtually every variation (there are six in all). The third, for example, is based not on the theme's melody but on its original bass line, and the fifth is an extended Allegro with canonic writing to the fore. The sixth reverts to the tempo of the theme and features repeated notes that gradually quicken until they become a trill that finally dissolves into a last presentation of the theme in its largely unadulterated form.

Piano Sonata No. 31 in A flat, Op. 110
Moderato cantabile molto espressivo
Allegro molto
Adagio, ma non troppo - Fuga: Allegro, ma non troppo

The 'disintegration' of accepted sonata norms continues in Op. 110. It is ostensibly in three movements, but the last incorporates both slow movement and finale in alternation. The first movement is in sonata form, opening with a deceptively simple idea (marked - unusually for Beethoven, at this stage of his life - *con amabilità*), a theme that forms the basis for much of the motivic working of the whole Sonata. The second subject group is an amalgam of short ideas in E flat, one in the extreme high register of the instrument, another a brief alternation of rising scales and falling fifths, and the last a more gentle codetta idea that leads into a reprise of the first subject - which is in effect the brief, 16-bar development. The scherzo turns to F major, and is again remarkably simple in its outline and almost joky ideas. Its trio is in D flat major.

The real heart of this Sonata is its finale. It opens with a recitative, full of changes of tempo and figuration, before the Adagio proper gets under way - a *klagender Gesang* (tearful song) over incessant semiquaver chords. This leads straight into a three-voice Allegro fugue, and the genius of Beethoven's scheme becomes clear when the fugue subject recalls the outline of the opening melody of the first movement - a subtle association by suggestion rather than outright imitation. The fugue dissolves into the Arioso and returns with the fugue subject turned upside down, leading into a triumphant coda.

Piano Sonata No. 32 in C minor, Op. 111
Maestoso - Allegro con brio ed appassionato
Arietta: Adagio molto, semplice e cantabile

In his last sonata, Beethoven seems to have found the ultimate solution to the unity of form by resolving in one movement the conflicts of the other. The two movements contrast on a number of planes: major/minor, Allegro/Adagio, appassionato/semplice, sonata form/variation form, turmoil/ecstatic serenity, earthly/spiritual. The perfection of this two-movement form was not, however, immediately realised by everyone when it was written in 1822. Beethoven's publisher assumed a rondo-finale had got lost in the post when he received a sonata ending in a long Adagio. Later, when Beethoven's friend and biographer Anton Schindler questioned him, Schindler was given the reply that he "had not had time to write a third movement", which was conceivably true in that a sketch for an Allegro finale was apparently abandoned in order to complete the Missa solemnis. But most probably Beethoven came to the decision that another movement would have disrupted the character of the sonata as it already stood.

The Maestoso introduction, with its double-dotted chords, prepares the way for the energy and conflict of the main Allegro. Here the semiquaver movement is relentless, with only occasional dramatic pauses and *poco ritenente* interrupting the constant tossing about of fragments of themes between all registers of the piano. The movement finally comes to rest in a pianissimo C major - and that, in effect, is where the music remains through most of the Arietta. Here there is no conflict - tension is exchanged for sublimity. The simplest of themes is subjected to ever more complex subdivisions of metre, until by the third variation the calm of the original is transformed into euphoric abandonment (with an uncanny foreshadowing of 20th-century boogie-woogie). The fourth variation returns to a more static representation of the theme over a demisemiquaver bass pedal. The fifth variation that follows an episode of trills, with the only real excursion away from C major in this movement, uses the theme in its original form over a busier accompaniment. In the sixth and final variation the theme moves into the uppermost register, intertwining itself around a continuous trill on the dominant, G, the whole becoming ever more ethereal, followed by a short coda ending in a mood of calm contentment.