

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN

Sonata No. 26 in E-flat Major ("Das Lebewohl"), Op. 81a

Edited by Stewart Gordon

About This Edition

Foreword

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) is often regarded as a link between the balance and clarity of Classicism and the emotional intensity and freedom of Romanticism.

In his 32 piano sonatas, he experimented constantly with structure and content. These works span a period of almost 30 years of Beethoven's mature creative life. He used the sonatas as a workshop in which to try out innovations, many of his compositional techniques appearing in the sonatas first and then later in chamber or symphonic works.

Beethoven provided the 1809 date for the completion of the first movement of the Op. 81a in his dedication: "The Departure—on 4 May, dedicated and written from the heart [to] His Imperial Highness." The dedication was to the Archduke Rudolf (1788–1831), the youngest brother of the Emperor Franz I (1768–1835), who became acquainted with the composer around 1807. Rudolf was an excellent pianist and had joined with two other patrons to provide the composer with an annuity of 4,000 florins early in 1809. Rudolf's departure was part of an evacuation plan for Viennese aristocracy, for Napoleon's army was threatening Vienna. Less than a week later, on May 11 and 12, the city underwent heavy bombardment, and Beethoven was forced to seek refuge in his brother Carl's cellar, covering his ears with pillows to shut out the cannon noise. Napoleon's armies occupied Vienna the following day.

The other two movements of the work, "The Absence" and "The Return," were written later, the work apparently being finished by February 4, 1810, for Beethoven offers several works, including this one, in a letter of that date to the Leipzig publisher Breitkopf & Härtel, specifically mentioning the titles of its three movements in a margin note.¹ In a subsequent letter dated



*Ludwig van Beethoven, 1815, by Joseph Willibrord Mähler (1778–1860)
Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna*

May 20, 1811, the composer writes in reference to this work, "Print the title as I have written it, both in French and German, certainly not in French only."² Breitkopf & Härtel published the work as Op. 81 in July 1811, but some issues used only German subtitles, others only French. Beethoven complained about using only French titles in a letter dated October 9, explaining, "For 'Lebewohl' means something quite different from 'Les adieux.' The first is said in a warmhearted manner to one person, the other to a whole assembly, to entire towns..."³ Subsequent Breitkopf & Härtel issues in 1817 and 1821 ignored the composer's wishes completely and used only French.

¹ *The Letters of Beethoven*, vol. I, ed. and trans. Emily Anderson (London: St. Martin's Press, 1961), p. 261.

² *Ibid.*, p. 322.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 337–38.

Dedicated to the Archduke Rudolf of Austria

Sonata No. 26 in E-flat Major

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Op. 81a

Das Lebewohl (Les adieux)

Adagio

- (a) The setting of the opening notes of this work to the word *Lebewohl* (Farewell) appears in both the autograph and the first edition. The notes of the musical motive are typical of patterns that were played on the post horn, an instrument of that period used by security personnel to announce arrivals and departures of coaches, music thus associated with traveling. The unexpected minor sonority at the onset of measure 2 establishes a mood of sadness, telling listeners that this particular departure is unhappy.
- (b) The two-note articulation of the dotted rhythm in the RH of measure 2 appears only at this one point in the autograph. It is shown a second time in the first edition, in the first half of beat 1 of measure 3. Hauschild, Taylor, and Wallner follow the first edition. D'Albert, Krebs, Martienssen, and Schenker apply the two-note slurs to the dotted rhythms in beat 2 of measure 8 and the second half of beat 1 in measure 9, a presentation that seems logical to this editor. Schnabel shows this arrangement also, but adds an extra two-note slur to the figure at the end of measure 9. Bülow, Casella, Köhler, and Tovey substitute various patterns of longer slurs. Arrau follows the first edition in measures 2 and 3, but shows longer added slurs for measures 8 and 9.
- (c) Three slightly different realizations of the ornaments in measures 3, 9, and 10 are suggested by the referenced editors:

Arrau and Schnabel:

measure 3:

d'Albert and Bülow:

Tovey:

- (d) Performers whose hands cannot stretch to the second and third LH eighth notes of measures 4 and 5 may opt to play them as part of RH chords, thus enabling the sustaining of the lowermost G's for their full value. Careful use of the damper pedal up to beat 2 of each measure may also be helpful.
- (e) The RH fingering in measure 5 (shown here in italics) appears in both the autograph and the first edition.

Das Wiedersehen (Le retour)

(a) Vivacissimamente

Im lebhaftesten Zeitmasse

The musical score is for a piece in 6/8 time, B-flat major. It consists of four systems of music. The first system (measures 1-3) begins with a forte (f) dynamic. The second system (measures 4-6) includes a 'dim.' marking and a circled 'b' at the end. The third system (measures 7-10) starts with a forte (f) dynamic. The fourth system (measures 11-16) starts with a piano (p) dynamic. The score is annotated with various editorial markings such as slurs, ties, and fingerings.

- (a) As in the second movement, the first edition shows tempo indications in both Italian and German. Both point to an extremely lively concept. Taylor and Tovey caution, however, against setting a tempo so fast that clarity of detail is compromised.
- (b) Hauschild interprets the marks on the LH falling thirds in measures 5–8 as ties, and, indeed, they look somewhat like ties in the first edition, being placed near the heads of the repeated notes. None of the other referenced editors regard these markings as ties, however, but rather as slurs for the falling thirds.
- (c) The slurring of the opening theme is reasonably consistent in the first edition for its three statements in measures 11–16, 17–22, and 23–28. All of the referenced editors follow it faithfully except Köhler (who rephrases the entire section according to his own idea). One can point to a few seeming inconsistencies, however. In measure 18, the first edition shows the six eighth notes under one slur, rather than two, as in measures 12 and 24. Most editors show two slurs in measure 18 as well, making the change without comment. In measure 16, the RH shows but a single slur, rather than two as in the LH of measures 22 and 28. The use of two slurs for the LH seems pianistic and in measure 28 is certainly justified by the sforzandi. Most editors simply follow this pattern without comment.