

Mitsuko Uchida

Piano

Tuesday, February 21, 2023 | 7:30PM





Dear Friends,

In Mitsuko Uchida's words: "Every day of my life that I am allowed to play Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and the music of our own time is a gift from somewhere. If heaven exists it's heaven." For us, to have this extraordinary musician back to perform Beethoven's last three piano sonatas is, indeed, a musical heaven—an exquisite combination of monumental music performed by one of the most revered artists of our time. Of all of Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas, the final three are especially hallowed for the astonishing emotional ground that they cover, from utter anguish to complete exhilaration, communicated through breathtaking virtuosity. To hear Beethoven's final thoughts on the piano sonata as a genre in Uchida's venerated hands is a defining moment in Princeton University Concert's 129-year history.

This special event is just one of a variety of musical experiences, both new and timeless, that we continue to have together this season, as artists connect with our audience in different ways. Whether it is exploring how music sustains us through illness on our Healing with Music series, championing black writers and composers with celebrated tenor Lawrence Brownlee (March 8), or meeting other classical-music lovers by participating in Do-Re-Meet, a new set of social events for music-lovers, there is something for everyone at PUC, and everyone is welcome.

What ties all of our offerings together, in addition to exceptional music-making, is a deeply held belief that the timeless relevancy of classical music is an integral part of our contemporary world.

I hope you enjoy yourself this evening, and I invite you to join us many more times this season.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marna Seltzer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping "M" and a long, trailing "S".

Marna Seltzer

Director of Princeton University Concerts

Tuesday, February 21, 2023 at 7:30PM • Richardson Auditorium, Alexander Hall

Mitsuko Uchida

Piano

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

*At the artist's request, the audience is asked to refrain from applause
after Sonata No. 30, Op. 109.*

Sonata No. 30 in E Major, Op. 109

Vivace ma non troppo—Adagio espressivo

Prestissimo

Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung. Andante molto cantabile ed espressivo

Sonata No. 31 in A-flat Major, Op. 110

Moderato, cantabile molto espressivo

Allegro molto

Adagio ma non troppo—Fuga, Allegro ma non troppo

INTERMISSION

Sonata No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111

Maestoso—Allegro con brio ed appassionato

Arietta. Adagio molto semplice e cantabile

For the health of our entire community of music lovers, masks at our performances are strongly encouraged.

About the Program

By Professor Scott Burnham ©2023

Beethoven's last three piano sonatas—Op. 109, Op. 110, and Op. 111—have often been treated as a coherent trilogy: not only were they composed around the same time, in the first few years of the 1820s, but they are often performed together and discussed together. From the ingratiating opening of the first movement of Op. 109 to the time-stopping lyricism of the finale of Op. 111, the eight movements of these three sonatas create an intriguing ensemble profiling many registers of the human experience through astonishing contrasts of style, genre, and locution.

“These three sonatas create an intriguing ensemble profiling many registers of the human experience through astonishing contrasts of style, genre, and locution.”

As the primary works for piano of Beethoven's legendary late style, a style often deemed the epitome of artistic lateness, these sonatas are relentlessly progressive in matters of continuity and form. But in a charged antinomy typical of his late style, they also engage with musical procedures of previous generations, such as fugue and variation. There are two fugues in the final movement of Op. 110, and the finales of both Op. 109 and Op. 111 are variation forms. Beethoven radically transforms each of these earlier practices: his late-style fugues are notoriously uncompromising in terms of dissonant energy, and his variation forms do not present the usual series of increasingly elaborative variations that invite listeners to sit back and enjoy the details, but rather explore their themes in a foundational way that has the effect of finding an entire cosmos within an unassuming theme.

In a fascinating contrast to this search of the depths, Beethoven also emphasizes the sheer materiality of the musical surface in these sonatas. The most striking way this plays out is with the trill. In the musical style Beethoven inherited, trills have a well-defined role. They signal the imminent resolution of a big cadence and thus serve as a somewhat noisy way to mark some of the larger stations of the musical form. But late Beethoven takes this fleeting bit of conventional noise and transforms it into a sonic landscape. When extended in this way, trills can offer a mystical melding of stasis and motion, in which time stands still in all its plenitude.

Sonata No. 30 in E Major, Op. 109

Here Beethoven begins without preamble: the door opens, and we are drawn into a pleasantly animated texture that quickly becomes loud and dramatic. This notably brief opening movement is a rare compression of the leisurely and the fraught. And no sooner does Beethoven gently close the door on this intriguing scene, then the Prestissimo scherzo bursts in with an explosion of E minor. After some quietly questioning utterances in its middle Trio section, the scherzo theme bursts in again, only to stomp off at the end.

We are then transported from worldly commotion to otherworldly composure, with Beethoven's introspective variation theme, marked "Gesangvoll, mit innigster Empfindung" ("songlike, with the most intimate feeling"). Beethoven's variations, though few in number, move through vastly different worlds both relaxed and vigorous, with ingenious figurations and counterpoint, ultimately settling into the sixth and final variation, which begins calmly but soon becomes increasingly rhythmically animated. At the peak of this animation, three different time scales sound at once: sustained trills in the middle upper register combine with cascading figures in the left hand, while the theme's melody marks a slower beat at the top of the texture. And then all this sound slowly funnels back into the quietude of the opening theme itself, which now glows as though with a lifetime of experience. And here Beethoven may be directly invoking Bach's Goldberg Variations, in which the theme also returns at the end and with similar effect.

Sonata No. 31 in A-flat Major, Op. 110

Like Op. 109, this sonata also consists of three movements with a Scherzo in the middle. Marked both "cantabile" and "molto espressivo," the first movement's opening theme begins modestly but soon reaches an upper-register climax before dissolving into the rapid figuration that will characterize much of the movement. Beethoven follows this fascinating mélange of lyrical melodies and busy textures with a brief Scherzo that arises from a decidedly earthier place in the human realm. It is believed to be based on a couple of vulgar folk songs, including one whose text begins with "I'm a vile slob; you're a vile slob." Packed into the middle of its two minutes of wild energy is a giddy and vertiginous Trio section.

All of which leads to one of the most remarkable constructions in Beethoven's entire output. The quietly slow meditation at its outset gives way to the

sound of a quasi-operatic recitative, introducing a repeated accompaniment over which a despairing melody sounds. Beethoven marks this interpolated song “Arioso Dolente.” This is followed by a fugue on a version of the first movement’s theme, which closes dramatically by sinking back to the quiet despair of the Arioso, now a step lower in pitch. After this second Arioso ends, a series of enigmatically repeated chords on the same harmony lead into another fugue, marked “gradually coming back to life” and turning the subject of the first fugue upside down. This second fugue brilliantly combines both slowed-down and sped-up versions of its subject, while moving ever upward into a manic *jouissance* of sound. And thus Beethoven’s bravely direct narrative of despair and renewal has moved from dolor to ecstasy. But we cannot stop at this breathless peak; we have yet another set of experiences ahead of us.

Sonata No. 32 in C Minor, Op. 111

In his final sonata, Beethoven needs only two fully explored musical soundscapes—one in minor and one in major, one plunging forward, one burrowing inward—to express an entire macrocosm of music. After some raucous shouts that announce the beginning of the first movement, Beethoven seems to improvise his way to its primary theme, which is both edgy and verbose. Several more relaxed episodes interject, but the overall effect is one of driven intensity. At the very end of the movement, a quiet coda opens into the peace of a widely spread out C-major chord—as though the sonata were now poised, after all that turmoil, to receive its most profound message.

And that message comes in the form of another variation movement, whose theme Beethoven calls an Arietta, instructing the performer to play it slowly, simply, and lyrically. The two prominent descending motives at its outset have been heard to say “Fare thee well” (and by no less than Thomas Mann, in a celebrated passage from his novel *Doktor Faustus*). From the slow breathing peacefulness of its theme, the finale’s variations move through striking stages of activity and register to a central moment that lifts away from the temporal process of the variations, finds a place of pure materiality again among trills, changes key for the first and only time in the movement, and then gently touches the very top and bottom of this new world. Beethoven then guides everything back into a fulsomely animated variation in the home key that moves to a final variation of quiet awareness, with trills ringing all round.

And thus the Arietta says farewell not only to Op. 111 (which is why the sonata needs no further movements) but also to Beethoven's run of thirty-two piano sonatas. We will also hear it say farewell to tonight's concert, thus profiling the continuity of these three final piano sonatas, offered by a composer who confided his innermost musical thoughts to the piano as to a diary. We will hear the stunning range of his musical humanity, as he gives voice to the earthy and the sublime, the unsettled and the serene. There are no conventionally easy answers here, none of the finalizing denouements of either tragedy or comedy. What we hear instead are both the refractive challenges and the soul-embracing rewards of Beethoven's rare honesty as a composer and as a human being.



DO-RE-MEET

SOCIAL EVENTS *for* MUSIC LOVERS

Sunday, March 26, 2023

1PM: Speed Dating • 4PM: Find Your Friends

*followed by performances by the
Chiaroscuro String Quartet at 3PM & 6PM*

Want to add to your music-loving friend Liszt?

Connect with others who love classical music in guided speed-meeting sessions before hearing one of the world's greatest string quartets together.

Tickets and more information
puc.princeton.edu/do-re-meet
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About THE ARTIST



MITSUKO UCHIDA Piano

One of the most revered artists of our time, Mitsuko Uchida is known as a peerless interpreter of the works of Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, and Beethoven, as well for being a devotee of the piano music of Alban Berg, Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern, and György Kurtág. She is Musical America's 2022 Artist of the Year and a Carnegie Hall *Perspectives* artist across the 2022/23, 2023/24, and 2024/25 seasons. Released to critical acclaim in 2022, her latest recording of Beethoven's Diabelli Variations was nominated for a GRAMMY Award and won the Gramophone Piano Award.

Mitsuko Uchida has enjoyed close relationships over many years with the world's most renowned orchestras, including the Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Symphony, London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, and—in the United States—the Chicago Symphony and The Cleveland Orchestra, with whom she recently celebrated her 100th performance at Severance Hall. Conductors with whom she has worked closely have included Bernard Haitink, Sir Simon Rattle, Riccardo Muti, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Vladimir Jurowski, Andris Nelsons, Gustavo Dudamel, and Mariss Jansons.

Since 2016, Mitsuko Uchida has been an Artistic Partner of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, with whom she is currently engaged on a multi-season touring project in Europe, Japan, and North America. She also appears regularly in recital in Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, London, New York, and Tokyo, and is a frequent guest at the Salzburg Mozartwoche and Salzburg Festival.

Mitsuko Uchida records exclusively for Decca, and her multi-award-winning discography includes the complete Mozart and Schubert piano sonatas. She is the recipient of two GRAMMY Awards for Mozart concertos with The Cleveland Orchestra and for an album of lieder with soprano Dorothea Röschmann. Her recording of the Schoenberg Piano Concerto with Pierre Boulez and The Cleveland Orchestra won the Gramophone Award for Best Concerto.

A founding member of the Borletti-Buitoni Trust and Director of Marlboro Music Festival, Mitsuko Uchida is a recipient of the Golden Mozart Medal from the Salzburg Mozarteum and the Praemium Imperiale from the Japan Art Association. She has also been awarded the Gold Medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society and the Wigmore Hall Medal and holds honorary degrees from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. In 2009 she was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire. This is Mitsuko Uchida's third appearance at Princeton University Concerts.

SUPPORT US

Supporting Princeton University Concerts is critical to our future. Ticket sales cover less than half of the cost of presenting the very best in world-class music. Remaining funds come, in part, from our generous endowment, left to PUC by the Ladies' Musical Committee in 1929. We remain eternally grateful for the support of the Philena Fobes Fine Memorial Fund and the Jesse Peabody Frothingham Fund.

Other support comes from donors like you. We are grateful to the individuals whose support at all levels ensures that musical performance remains a vital part of Princeton, the community, and the region.

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22/23

SEASON



JESS GILLAM
Saxophone

CONCERT CLASSICS

Thursday, October 13 | 7:30PM

GENEVA LEWIS* Violin
AUDREY VARDANECA* Piano

Thursday, November 3 | 7:30PM

BRENTANO STRING QUARTET

Sunday, November 20 | 3PM

VIKINGUR ÓLAFSSON* Piano

Pre-concert talk by Professor Scott Burnham at 2PM

Thursday, February 16 | 7:30PM

ALEXI KENNEY Violin

Wednesday, March 8 | 7:30PM

LAWRENCE BROWNLEE Tenor
KEVIN J. MILLER* Piano

Thursday, March 30 | 7:30PM

JUPITER ENSEMBLE*

Thursday, April 6 | 7:30PM

ALINA IBRAGIMOVA* Violin
CÉDRIC TIBERGHEN* Piano

Thursday, April 27 | 7:30PM

EMERSON & CALIDORE STRING QUARTETS

PERFORMANCES UP CLOSE

Wednesday, October 26 | 6PM & 9PM

JESS GILLAM Saxophone
THOMAS WEAVER* Piano

Tuesday, December 13 | 6PM & 9PM

tenTHING BRASS ENSEMBLE*

Sunday, March 26 | 3PM & 6PM

CHIAROSCURO STRING QUARTET*

Wednesday, April 12 | 6PM & 9PM

CÉCILE McLORIN SALVANT* Vocals
SULLIVAN FORTNER* Piano

RICHARDSON CHAMBER PLAYERS

Sunday, November 13 & Sunday, March 5 | 3PM

SPECIAL EVENTS

Wednesday, February 1 | 7:30PM

JOYCE DiDONATO Mezzo-soprano
IL POMO d'ORO* Orchestra

Tuesday, February 21 | 7:30PM

MITSUKO UCHIDA Piano

HEALING WITH MUSIC

Thursday, September 29 | 7:30PM

INTRODUCING CLEMENCY BURTON-HILL
Exploring music's role in brain injury recovery

Wednesday, November 9 | 7:30PM

JOSHUA ROMAN Cello
Living with Long COVID as a musician

Thursday, February 9 | 7:30PM

FRED HERSCH* Piano
Exploring music's role after an AIDS-related coma

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Featuring The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

Saturday, October 22 | 1PM

MEET THE MUSIC, for ages 6–12

Saturday, May 20 | 1PM & 3PM

CMS KIDS, for neurodiverse audiences ages 3–6

AT THE MOVIES

Tuesday, October 11 | 7:30PM

FALLING FOR STRADIVARI

Wednesday, February 8 | 7:30PM

THE BALLAD OF FRED HERSCH

LIVE MUSIC MEDITATION

Matthew Weiner, Meditation Instruction

Thursday, September 29 | 12:30PM

ALEXI KENNEY Violin

Wednesday, October 26 | 12:30PM

JESS GILLAM Saxophone

Thursday, February 9 | 12:30PM

FRED HERSCH Piano

*Princeton University Concerts debut

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