

Ludwig van Beethoven: Piano Sonata in F# major, Op 78

- I. Adagio cantabile – Allegro ma non troppo
- II. Allegro vivace

Even though this sonata was composed only 3 years after one of his most well-known works, the “Appassionata”, it is unlike its preceding sonata. This two-movement sonata, composed in 1807, is introspective with hints of playfulness here and there. Known as the “A Thérèse” sonata, it is dedicated to Thérèse von Brunswick. Although the relationship between the both of them is not clear, she may have been one of his students, or clients.

The first movement opens with a soothing, tranquil four-bar introduction marked Adagio cantabile. Not long after, the music kicks off in a light and playful manner while maintaining a lyrical quality. There are times when the music interjects with syncopations, dynamic contrasts and brief silences which contributes to the movement’s witty element.

The second movement is more energetic and mischievous compared to its prior movement, with the very first chord being a big surprise and a question mark; the wittiness previously hinted at taking off in full force. The two-note figure is the star of this movement, creating a buoyant, playful feel, sometimes even making both hands chase after each other. Beethoven’s sense of humor is not lost amid intimacy and lyricism.

Robert Schumann: *Papillons*, Op. 2

Papillons, which stands for “Butterflies” in French, is a series of 12 short ballroom dances inspired by Jean Paul’s novel titled “Die Flegeljahre” (which translates to “The Awkward Age”). While the music was not written after the novel, Schumann did take inspiration from specific events in the novel and wrote short cross-references for almost every movement. The movements depict the scene at a masquerade ball and it revolves around 3 main characters; two brothers, Walt and Vult, who both have feelings for the same woman, Wina, and how they would fight to win her heart. The two brothers had very different personalities, Walt was pensive and dreamy, while Vult was more spirited and resolute – which was similar to the two alter egos that Schumann created, known as Eusebius and Florestan.

The piece begins with an invitation to the masked ball, which Walt was overjoyed to receive. Shortly after, Schumann transports us to the ball which he paints for us, which seems to be very grand and fanfare-like, with a series of insistent octaves mimicking the sound of brasses. Both brothers eventually meet and have their fair share of quality time with Wina, before getting pulled away from the ball for a brief moment by Vult who wanted a costume swap with Walt. Walt, being a nice brother, agreed, to which Vult swiftly changed without saying a word of thanks.

Vult reappears, and dances with Wina; the both of them dancing a Polonaise (movement 11). However, being in Walt's disguise, he soon realizes that Wina loves Walt. Heartbroken, he leaves the ball as the sounds of the ballroom gradually grow fainter and fainter.

Sergei Prokofiev: Piano Sonata in F minor, Op. 1

This single-movement piano sonata was written in 1909 when Prokofiev was a mere 16-year-old student at the St. Petersburg Conservatory of Music in Russia. Being an earlier work, this sonata follows the traditional structure of having an Exposition, Development and Recapitulation section. It is more melodic, and consonant compared to his later sonatas. However, just because it is an early work, it certainly does not shy away from being full of captivatingly exuberant energy while having a certain poise to it.

This piece captures one's attention immediately, opening with thunderous octaves in the left hand which then seamlessly dissipates into the main theme of this sonata. Unlike the short introduction, the main theme is lyrical and yearning while alternating between moments of breathless mutterings. The second theme is lighter and more contemplative, but it's not for long before the music embarks on its journey to the peak. The music slowly builds up over the course of the Development section and eventually arrives at the point of greatest emotional intensity, sitting on the key's dominant chord. It rings in the air for a while, almost as if giving the listener time to process the great ascent to the music's climax. Fragments of the main theme return, and it continues in a similar fashion to the beginning, before ending triumphantly in the home key of F minor.