



hélène grimaud
BEETHOVEN

concerto no. 5 "emperor" | piano sonata no. 28

staatskapelle dresden
vladimir jurowski



LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN (1770–1827)

**Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 5 in E flat major,
op. 73 "Emperor"** [38'18]

Es-dur · en mi bémol majeur

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| ① | 1. Allegro | [20'09] |
| ② | 2. Adagio un poco mosso – <i>attacca</i> : | [8'05] |
| ③ | 3. Rondo. Allegro | [10'04] |

Piano Sonata No. 28 in A major, op. 101 [20'58]

A-dur · en la majeur

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| ④ | 1. Allegretto, ma non troppo | [4'11] |
| ⑤ | 2. Vivace alla Marcia | [5'59] |
| ⑥ | 3. Adagio, ma non troppo, con affetto | [3'21] |
| ⑦ | 4. Allegro | [7'27] |

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BEETHO

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A PHILOSOPHER AT THE PIANO

The French pianist Hélène Grimaud is among the most sagacious of today's keyboard artists – a philosopher at the concert grand. Now she has taken on Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto, a milestone in the piano literature, and produced something out of the ordinary: instead of a bombastic oil painting about the Napoleonic wars, instead of the conventional hollow pathos, instead of blood, sweat and tears, we hear thoughts, reflections and ideas. Grimaud delivers the contemporary version of a classic. Beethoven's last piano concerto in her hands becomes a work of musical extremes, a journey of the soul through the vales of worldly despair and over the peaks of ideologies. A musical journey to a world viewed from a melancholic interior – and a journey in time from Beethoven's world to ours.

Sound for Hélène Grimaud means room for thought – a place where anything is possible, where the world can be taken apart to be put together in a new form. And yet the pianist remains true to her idol Ludwig van Beethoven. No composer better described the current *Zeitgeist*; none extended

existing formal boundaries so far in attempting to depict the struggle between the private individual and the world order.

Following a concert, the pianist explains why the composer is one of her heroes: "He had to struggle with the problem of living at a time of discord, riven with disruption and contradiction, with too many battles being fought on too many fronts. The truths that held one day were already passé by the next. But none of that prevented him, ill and nearly deaf, from



adhering to his musical universalism. Beethoven was prepared to overturn old forms and conventions in order to discover something new. It was not the world that was 'out of joint', but the language being used to make sense of it." For Grimaud, this is the real challenge of Beethoven for our time: the doubting individual views a world gone out of kilter; to bring it back under control, he requires music.

"One can hear the struggle in Beethoven's compositions", says Grimaud, "in the way he wrestles with every note, with every chord. He conceived the world in a way that I find absolutely contemporary, not to say modern. We also live in a world we can hardly comprehend, one in which confusion exceeds the grasp of its overriding complexities. We also desperately long to give form to this world. Beethoven showed us that working to repair the fissures and flaws in human existence can result in beautiful music. In his search for a heaven on earth, he was always prepared to stand the world on its head."

For a long time, Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto was interpreted as a heroic battle painting. For Hélène Grimaud, too, it represents a piece of contemporary history – not a historical illustration of the past, however, but a work of "philosophy cast in music, a philosophy that sets out to neutralize human contradictions." And that represents a show of strength.

"Beethoven is one of the most fascinating of all composers who straddle two periods," says Grimaud. "Of course he was formed by the classical figures of the Viennese School, but he also brought their ideas to culmination, especially in the Fifth Piano Concerto, and broke new ground." This development can also be heard – an extremely introspective and lyrical form of



it – in the Sonata op.101 dedicated to Beethoven's pupil Dorothea von Ertmann, which Grimaud has also recorded.

Beethoven in his symphonies and piano concertos fused the private with the political, the internal with the external, and it is this individualized, almost literary view of the single human being in the world that fascinates the pianist: "When you read Beethoven's letters, you get to know someone with misanthropic tendencies, who often reacted brusquely and rudely, who was easily disillusioned and offended by others – but who, at the same time, in his sensibility, developed an incredible strength. As questionable as Beethoven's behavior may at times have seemed, he firmly believed that things could also be different – that they could be better. His music is marked by these assertions and disappointments, and by a nearly endless sense of hope. He articulated the ambivalence of every individual, which is why Beethoven's music affects us so directly and disconcertingly, while also seeming so hopelessly optimistic."

Something genuinely new in her Beethoven interpretations is Grimaud's handling of the composer's effects, which for her are never ends in themselves but extreme pronouncements that only attain their full impact when they crash against one another: "I think that the real idea of Beethoven's music is to be found where the extremes collide," she says. "It's not about hollow pathos or empty, unquestioning, marching heroism, not about misanthropic melancholy or an affected world-weariness." Grimaud prefers to listen for the overtones, to expound theses in order immediately to develop antitheses.

All monumentality is subordinated by Grimaud to the search for meaning. "This piano concerto is like a wild animal," says Grimaud, "for which one has incredible respect. That respect compels you to study it, and in the end this animal reveals itself as a teacher – as a teacher who challenges you to consider things for yourself. One who, through the overwhelming form with which the interpreter has to contend, forces her to reflect on her own contradictions and bring them into an individual form – forces her to transcend her own limits and toss old preconceptions over board. Beethoven compels the artist to acquire knowledge, because in his music the emotional must be developed out of the philosophical logic. With emotion alone, one doesn't get very far."

For Grimaud Beethoven was a creature of passion – and a human being who constantly attempted to find forms for this passion. When you hear Grimaud's "Emperor", the work's heroic attributes take on a new significance. For this pianist, heroes aren't the ones who make history. They are not to be found on the battlefield. Her heroes attempt to bring order to the world as they encounter it. Moreover, their deepest emotions are dedicated to lending form to the present. They challenge themselves for the sake of the world. In this sense, Grimaud's new Beethoven also represents the birth of a wise new hero.

Felix Müller

(Translation: Evan Richardson)

