

**Willem Ibes**  
*piano*

**A BEETHOVEN TRIPTYCH**  
**THREE INSTRUMENTAL CANTATAS**



**Opus 101**  
**IMMORTAL BELOVED**

**Opus 111**  
**CREDO**

**Opus 110**  
**CHRISTMAS 1821**

## Ante Scriptum

Over a period of some twenty years the Sistine Chapel was restored to its original splendor. All the talk — over the centuries — of a brooding Michelangelo à la Rodin's "Thinker" went up in smoke, the smoke that, accumulated from soot, grime, and thousands of candles lit and burning over the centuries, had obscured Michelangelo's original work.

Not just the art historians, who had written so eloquently and compassionately about the harsh fate of the Renaissance Master, expressed their outrage; the hue and cry came from all quarters about the sacrilege perpetrated not so much on the painter but on our perception of him: impossible that the poor man bent like a "bow from Syria" high up on the scaffold on orders from his patron, could have painted the fa-mous ceiling in all those exuberant, vibrantly happy colors.

Just so, ever since the early 1800s, people have burned candles for Beethoven and the wrinkles on his face have gotten deeper, the unruly hair more fierce looking and the man — as we like to do with God — made into an image of our own imagination.

The Beethoven I discovered in my research over the past dozen years is light years removed from the herald of the Eroica and Fifth symphonies who vigorously proclaims the ideals of Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood and throws the gauntlet of human will and defiance at Fate; this is the Master we all know and of course like to identify with.

In the three piano sonatas written fifteen, twenty years later, recorded here and described in this essay, we encounter a man who has gone through a profound transformation; for quite a long time I did not know what to do with him.

In the "Immortal Beloved" sonata, Opus 101, Beethoven is in love, with the fervor of a teenager, the poignancy of a grown man whose last hope for conjugal bliss has been rudely dashed, and with the creative energy of a genius who "wills" to create in his art what has eluded him in terrestrial life.

In the first movement of the last piano sonata, Opus 111, I found to my great astonishment — and contrary to universal popular and professional opinion — a composer not obsessed with the harsh blows destiny had dealt him, but joyously affirming his faith, his Credo, in the God "Who has never deserted me." What Michelangelo wrote at the death of a friend applies as well to the second and last movement of this sonata: "Only one divine being lives in Heaven and he creates beauty without human help." Both artists know themselves to be instruments of the Ultimate Creator.

Perhaps the greatest surprise was to find in the penultimate piano sonata, Opus 110 (number 31 of the total of 32 sonatas for the instrument), Beethoven in love — not with a woman, not with an almighty loving Father, but with the person of Jesus; a love almost embarrassing in its piety and fervor, exhilarating in its childlike, joyous and at times wild abandon, joined in the third movement by a poignant *De profundis* “Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord.”

What a challenge Beethoven presents in these three works: daring us to be fully human — and vulnerable — daring to trust and, all clever insinuations of our ego and hubris to the contrary, allowing ourselves to become and love like little children. A mighty task for performer and listener alike!

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## Preamble

Around the beginning of the new millennium I went to the Beethoven Haus in Bonn to present Dr. Brandenburg, the director, with my discoveries in Beethoven’s piano sonata Opus 101. The secretary of this illustrious Institute was not very encouraging: “It is easy to put a text to instrumental music,” Ms. Grigat said. Dr. Brandenburg was equally unimpressed. I could hardly blame him for a lack of enthusiasm as I, an unknown professor from a musicologically undistinguished Midwestern university, sought to share my iconoclastic theory — that in this sonata, dedicated by Beethoven to his “dear esteemed Dorothea-Caecilia,” a motto, a name, “Dorothea,” lay carved as in granite in its in-nermost being.

External evidence, introduced to the musical world by George R. Marek’s *Beethoven: Biography of a Genius* and endorsed by the well-respected H. C. Robbins Landon, led me to look for internal evidence to support Mr. Marek’s findings that the famous and elusive “Immortal Beloved” was no other than Dorothea von Ertmann, the dedicatee of Opus 101.

Of course Ms. Grigat could not be more right. Anyone with the least bit of imagi-nation (the more the better) can put a text to any instrumental piece of music in one lazy afternoon and this is, truly, an abominable practice if applied to a great work. Nonetheless, if I meet Ms. Grigat again, I will argue that there is a difference between “putting a text to an instrumental composition” and, in a sustained labor of many years, receiving the grace to “discover” the text that the composer had in mind. I did not “put a text” to Beethoven’s great 28<sup>th</sup> piano sonata, nor did I have the slightest intimation that the work carried a motto *überhaupt*, but, after intensive analysis, that



text, that name, revealed itself to me. Without years of effort and my special brand of analysis at which I had rather spontaneously arrived, this “Aha” moment could not have occurred.

Simply stated, this new sort of analysis is based on looking first and foremost at the mathematical, the metrical-proportional properties of a motif, rather than, for example, its melody, harmony, or rhythm. I began looking at the length of the motif and especially its placement within the measure, that is, whether it starts on a strong(er) or weak(er) beat. The length of the motif can, of course, be altered by the devices of diminution and augmentation, and it comes as no surprise that Beethoven’s late sonatas with their wealth of counterpoint exhibit these traits in abundance. In music, the “motif” is what constitutes the basic idea, the “Eidos,” the “Gestalt” of a composition. The four-note “victory” motif of the opening of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony is a famous example. The whole first movement is derived from that pregnant idea as a tree grows out of a small seed.

Second, I had come to understand how in pre-romantic music the motif and the musical phrase are almost always contained within the bar-line(s) and do not — as late 19<sup>th</sup> century editors succeeded in making us believe — spill across. I call that the “romantic virus.” Without this understanding, that is without being able to correctly delineate motifs and phrases, my mathematical/metrical kind of analysis would have been doomed to failure.

Third, I took recourse to using a text to understand what happens to a motif when a composer of Beethoven’s stature starts to work with it, to comprehend more clearly the peregrinations of that seed as it creates a full-blown organism. Beethoven himself provided me with the following gem. His secretary, Schindler, says the composer advised putting a fitting text under a difficult-to-understand passage and to sing it: “... *rieth ferner bisweilen passende Worte einer streitigen Stelle unterzulegen und sie zu singen...*” Unwittingly I followed the composer’s advice!

When a composer uses a text in a Lied or opera, we have no problem, because it is a *fait accompli*; however elaborate the piano part may be, there is a person who is singing. Some find Beethoven’s Ninth symphony a bit more problematic: why in heaven’s name spoil the purity of that music with Schiller’s text, but again, *soit*, it is Beethoven who did it, and rather than being openly critical we think it is wiser to accept it. However, a text, phrase, word, or name in a piano sonata by this revered genius is more than most of us want to put up with, pure and simple blasphemy. But let me drop the bomb straight away. All three of the late Beethoven sonatas recorded on the accompanying compact disc incorporate a *soggetto cavato*, a compositional technique developed in the Renaissance.

Beethoven's use of the device was nothing new. By applying it in these later works, he actually planted his feet firmly in the fertile soil of the Flemish/Dutch ancestors who had perfected this art (his grandfather was the first Beethoven to move from the Low Countries to the Rhineland in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century). It is, by the way, hardly accidental that in these same years (1818, 1819) Beethoven perused the musical library of his student, friend, and patron, Archduke Rudolph of Austria, in order to consult the models of the past, and that he expresses himself in terms of the greatest admiration for their solidity of construction (*Festigkeit*) and gratitude for the profit that the art of his own day may derive from them.

Spanning the ages, the composer takes in hand the torch that had shone so brightly in centuries past. He inherited it from a rich lineage which, attaining a first pinnacle in the works of Johannes Ockeghem, had blossomed to further sublime heights in Josquin des Prés, the quintessential musical genius of the Renaissance. This "Little Joe of the Fields" had welded into harmonious unity the twin worlds of contrapuntal mastery and musical expressiveness for which he is still admired today. ("He is the Master of the notes; the others are mastered by them" wrote Martin Luther.)

The same can certainly be said of Beethoven who, with iron willpower and single-mindedness, forged even the most recalcitrant polyphonic material to his expressive purposes. The similarities between these two sons of the Low Countries are numerous and — though separated by three centuries — both shared fully the high Renaissance ideal of a most detailed probing of a text so as to arrive at its most comprehensive, faithful, and deepest expression. What Hermann Finck wrote of Josquin's art in his *Practica Musica* of 1556 applies equally to Beethoven when he writes of the former's ability "to fit the notes to the words of the text, in order to render their meaning and mood with the greatest clarity."

As Beethoven wrote, "*Musik und Wort sind eins*" (music and word are one). The dichotomy between text and music that is the hobby-horse of our "pure-music" lovers is totally foreign to the Beethoven, who took pride in calling himself not a composer, but a *Tondichter* — a poet working with sounds rather than words; a man for whom the consummate probing of a text — implicit or explicit — forms the matrix, the bedrock of a Lied, a cantata, an opera, or ... the sonatas explored here.

What is a *soggetto cavato*? It is a text, a name, a "subject hollowed out," set to music in a larger work, akin to the image a sculptor may intuit hidden in a block of marble or granite. In a more simple form this technique stood at the cradle of polyphonic music when, in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, a Gregorian Chant fragment formed the *cantus firmus*, the "firm chant" basis, for the added one- two- and three voices by men such as Leonin and Perotin of the Notre Dame School in Paris. The *soggetto cavato* could be

of secular or religious nature and Renaissance composers did not shy away from using a secular tune (such as the famous “*l’homme armé*”) or the name of a patron (Josquin’s “Hercules Dux Ferrariae”) to form the foundation for the Catholic Mass. This sublime art is passed on from the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Netherlanders via Italian masters like Palestrina to reach new heights in the polyphonic works of J. S. Bach two centuries later.

Incidentally, Bach’s name (in German B = B flat and H = B natural) has formed, starting with Bach himself, the *soggetto cavato* of a host of compositions. Beethoven in his so-called third period, which begins with the piano sonata Opus 101, is the direct heir to this venerable tradition. The Master himself made numerous sketches of the name “Bach” for envisioned compositions; and in his piano sonata Opus 81a the composer had written the text “*Le-be wohl*” over the opening motif and used it, together with the melody, in all three movements. Do keep in mind that “*Le-be wohl*” is not just a title, as “Sonata Appassionata,” “Sonata Pathétique” or, for that matter, as Opus 81a is popularly known, “Les Adieux.” On the contrary, the composer writes carefully “*Le-be wohl*” over the first three notes of the sonata and the motif that is thereby outlined forms the DNA, in Plato’s term the “*idea*” — like the “victory” motif of the Fifth Symphony — for the whole work. So even though Beethoven chose not to divulge any of the texts for the sonatas on the disc accompanying this article, using a name or a text as *soggetto cavato* was common practice.

This is not a musicological treatise, so I will confine myself to this preamble and trust you will give me the benefit of the doubt. Please suspend judgment until I have put my discoveries in a book dealing with all of this in greater depth. I hope that my interpretation of these sonatas will speak more eloquently of my discoveries than a whole library of analytical detective work could.

## *Immortal Beloved* Opus 101 (1817 )

“Humans must therefore comprehend the so-called *idea* by going from the perception of the many to the *one* as it is apprehended in its totality by thought.”

— Plato, *Phaedrus Dialogue*

It took me a little over a year to grasp — “by going from the many to the one” — that the genetic code of the work is in its totality contained in the first two measures, and three more years to realize Beethoven’s secret intentions.

**Example 1**

First movement, measures 1 and 2

The musical score for measures 1 and 2 of the first movement of Beethoven's Opus 101 is presented. It is in G major (one sharp) and 6/8 time. The score consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "Do ro the a". The piano accompaniment has lyrics: "Do ro the a".

Yes, the *soggetto cavato* in Opus 101 is that single adored name, Dorothea, used — as only a Beethoven could and did with names of friends — in a thousand ways that totally defy a brief synopsis. After ten years of re-checking and probing, there isn't a shadow of a doubt in my mind that Baroness von Ertmann is indeed the Immortal Beloved. The letter containing these two words, "*unsterbliche Geliebte*," was found in a secret drawer after Beethoven's death. It was written in early July 1812 when the composer was forty-one and Dorothea von Ertmann, married at eighteen and Beethoven's student since 1802, ten years younger. The piano sonata dedicated to her, Opus 101, was finished four and half years later. Concerning this dedication, Beethoven wrote the publisher that quite by chance he happened on the dedication to his *lieben werthen Dorothea Caecilia*, his dear and esteemed Dorothea-Caecilia (Saint Caecilia is the patroness of music and musicians). Dr. Brandenburg from the Beethoven Haus, who wrote a commentary for Henle's splendid facsimile edition of Opus 101, expresses doubts, on the basis of this "quite by chance" (*der Zufall macht*) that the sonata had been composed specially for the Baroness.

I am slightly embarrassed to confess my lack of innocence in these matters; Beethoven did exactly what I would have done if I wanted to keep my secret safe. (There is no doubt this was the case — let us not forget that, besides a thousand other considerations, the Baroness was a married woman.) Would one have expected Beethoven to say: "For all these years I have not been able to forget you; this sonata is what was often intended for you"? He actually did write the second phrase "*was ihnen oefiers zuedacht war*" (so much for "quite by chance") but was prudent enough to leave out the first! I would argue that, on the contrary, a subterfuge such as this would provide extra external evidence supporting Mr. Marek's findings, not even mentioning the convoluted and clumsy way (at least in part intended for the *Bühne*, the outside

world) Beethoven — quite apparently ill at ease — continues with the dedication. Yet if one can “read” the text, external evidence becomes superfluous. The music speaks its secret ... eloquently.

My colleague Philip Welter transcribed the sonata for three voices and sparse piano accompaniment; I have often used extracts from this “cantata” arrangement to bolster my argument that the text throughout consists of but this single name, “Dorothea,” and its permutations. This *verbum* “Dorothea” doesn’t merely enable one to follow the pregnant opening motif of this sonata in all its myriad variations and transformations; it also reveals the character, the true “meaning” of each and every measure of its four movements. The name Dorothea does not lend itself readily to the use of solmization syllables for a *soggetto cavato*; what Beethoven does use — as he had done in Opus 81a — are the metrical/mathematical properties of the name, never sinning of course (he is re-examining Homer’s hexameters at this time) against the proper placement of the main meter-accents, always on Do and The(e), never on Ro and A. In its two measures (see Example 1 above), the opening bars of Opus 101 contain the sum total of the work, just as an acorn contains all the genetic material for an oak tree.

These measures in 6/8 time signature scan, the soprano with the tenor in inversion, the alto embellished, in four trochees (this is *not* an iambic meter), that name *Do–Ro–The–A–* and repeat it in the next two measures with soprano and tenor in inversion. These four measures together form the “antecedent,” which is followed by a twenty-one measures long “consequent.” I think all analyses so far have lost their way in the labyrinth of this very a-symmetrical musical period (Schenker and epigones — there are many of those! — even postulates three distinct thematic elements). On the contrary! Measures 5 and 6 begin with a yearning *Do–Ro–The–A–*; measures 7 and 8 have a poignant *Do–Ro–Do–Ro–* before the soulful *The–A–* in measure 9 is followed by a questioning *The–A–* in measure 10. Measures 11, 12 repeat *Do–Ro–The–A–*, answered by a high, descending, and sighing *The–A–* in measure 13. A rippling (all eighth notes) *Do–Ro–* in measure 14 is slowed down by the portato repetition *Do–Ro–* in measure 15 and seemingly concluded by the deceptive cadence on the sighing *The–A–* in measure 16.

(Note: the dashes after the syllables are to be read as a prolongation of each vowel sound through the third, respectively sixth-eighth note of each measure.)

Two more exclamatory *The–A–*’s make clear what this is all about: It is Beethoven trying, as vividly as possible, to remember, looking in high and low registers, to recall in greatest detail the woman he loved — and still loves — so passionately. After three more embellished, high/low, two-measure-group *Dorothea*’s the Master caresses her name twice, *espressivo e semplice* in unadorned dotted quarter notes in the dominant:



*DO RO THE A*. The short development — I play the syncopated bass notes in measures 41 and 42 as they are in the autograph, an eighth note followed by a quarter note, not the other way around — begins to take that name apart with alternating loud and soft *O Thea*'s, shortly thereafter followed by the passage that so aroused Brahms' admiration, a loud passionate outburst *Do-RoDo-Ro*, *Do-RoDo-Ro*, concluded by an exquisitely tender (piano dynamics) *Thee* (Beethoven does exhaust all the name's possibilities), two more *molto espressivo* loving, high/low imitative *Do-Ro*'s before Beethoven — like a Zen diver entering the water without causing a ripple — slips into the recapitulation.

In the spirited second movement's Scherzo section, the *Dorothea*'s fly high and low (with a noteworthy augmentation of the name under one long-held pedal). Here the composer takes himself on a high flight as well; in his imagination, he hop-skips with his beloved in the Tyrolean mountain meadows in a way not vouchsafed him in real life. The intimate Trio section, again of course savoring the name of the beloved, proves — with its intricate canonic counterpoint — Beethoven truly the progeny of Josquin and J. S. Bach. This Trio is followed by a repeat of the “Go, tell it to the mountains” Scherzo.

My first intimation that the name Dorothea is “carved out” (*cavato*) in this work, came in the yearning third movement, filled with infinite tenderness and a great sense of loss. I had started work on Opus 101 in 1994 and have a videotaped performance of a lecture/recital I gave in 1995. Therein I express my unbelieving wonderment: “It almost seems as if Beethoven is repeating here over and over the name of the Beloved, “Dorothea.” Then, after shaking my head, I continued, “I don't really think so,” and slowly trailing off, “but it certainly seems to fit perfectly.....”

Example 2  
Third movement,  
measures 5–11

The musical score for measures 5-11 of the third movement of Beethoven's Opus 101 is presented in two systems. The first system shows measures 5-7, and the second system shows measures 8-11. The score is in 2/4 time and features a piano accompaniment with vocal lines. The lyrics are: "Do-ro-the-a", "Do-ro thee", "do-ro The-a", "Do-ro-the-a", "Doro-the-a", "a-do-ro-te", "Doro the-a", "Do-ro-thea", "Doro the-a". The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, time signature, key signature (one flat), and dynamic markings like *molto* and *espressivo*. There are also performance instructions like "a" and "3" (triplets).

Dorothea's name fits indeed perfectly, not only the first three, but the fourth movement as well! At long last Beethoven comes here fully out in the open about a clever little twist he had already slipped into each of the previous movements. It is in this Finale movement that it becomes clear what the composer has been up to. He starts out, leading into the Allegro, with twice repeating — each time after significant rests — the last 1 ½ syllables of the name, *EA*—; contracts it three times to just *A*—. Then, after a *Presto* dive on *A*, he continues with a series of trills (all enunciating *A*). As the trills keep piping their *A*'s in the right hand, the left hand chimes in with an *A* that is immediately followed by a tentative *Do*. Long rest, one more *A Do*, long rest, and then the chase is on: *A(h) Do— ro— thee*. That is what I wrote in my first recording of the sonata in 1 9 9 8 “*A(h) Do— ro— thee*,” realizing only a year or so later the phonetic equivalence: *adoro te*, Latin for *I adore you*.

In this last movement, Beethoven uses not only the **structure** of the motif, but the **melody verbatim** as well, apparently not making it too obvious since, for almost two hundred years, nobody seems to have noticed: the changes in time signature, rhythm, dynamics, and especially tempo made for exciting detective work!

### Example 3

Comparison first movement, measures 1 and 2 (transposed to A) and last movement, measures 33 and 34 with upbeat

**Dorothea    adoro te**

Do \_\_\_\_\_ ro \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ a \_\_\_\_\_

a do \_\_\_\_\_ ro \_\_\_\_\_ te

Thus this last movement becomes a jubilant interplay between *Dorothee*, *Dorothea*, and *adoro te*, the bass in the second theme of this sonata-form rippling off one *Dorothee* after another, the soprano in long lines simultaneously exulting: *adoro te*, “*Dorothee*, I adore you,” followed by an exquisite change of meter-placement which gives a tender “flipping over” of the name to become *Theodora* (I am sure that Beethoven all the time was aware of the name’s etymology “Gift of God” and “God’s Gift”).

The fugue — which in former years I played with great solemnity (this is almost *de rigueur* for any fugue and especially one so tricky) — whispers its subject: *a do— ro— te—*, *a do—ro— Do—Ro—The—A—* (a mischievous trill here) (*Do* = eighth note rest)

*Ro—The—A* in secretive delight, eventually, after the composer had a heyday with adoring *Dorothea*’s everywhere, leading to a thunderous climax just before the recapitulation; in quadruple augmentation, the bass extols: *AA DOOOO ROOOO* (whom do you think?) and then, running all the way up the keyboard *TE—TE—TE—TE—* of course it is her!!

The wistful Coda seems to open like another fugue, but then just keeps on sighing *a do-ro-te—*, to conclude with another series (but never a dull moment, believe me!) of *adoro*’s and *Dorothea*’s. Introduced by a pianissimo *a-do-ro—*, it reaches a last joyous outburst in martellato fortissimo leaps (finally ending on the strong first beat of the measure to indicate that this time she is truly his): **DO—RO—O—THE** (eighth note rest) **E— A— !!!** As Romain Rolland remarks in reference to “To the distant Beloved” another work of this same period, in this Song cycle as well as in Opus 101: “the miserable man, deprived of happiness, frustrated in love, creates love, imposes it on fate, by the magic of his loving heart, by the miracle of his will.”

**Example 4**  
Last movement, measures 348 (whispered) to end: *ado-ro-DO-RO-THE-A*

a - do - ro - DO - RO - THE - E - A

*ff*

Do - ro - the - a DO - RO - THE - E - A

Yes, triple exclamation marks belong to these chords the way Beethoven would use them in his letters to one or another of his beloved Ladies Fair. Certainly none was fairer or more loved than Dorothea whom Kapellmeister Reichardt describes as “a beautiful tall woman of noble appearance and soulful countenance,” further commenting on her playing, “such strength united with the most intimate tenderness ... a soul sang at the end of each of her fingers.” The Master, Schindler relates, was especially impressed by the incomparable way she interprets the sonata dedicated to her, Opus 101, in which she is able “to grasp Beethoven’s most hidden intentions, as if they had been written *under her eyes*” (bold italics mine).

Almost as certain as I am that Dorothea, who reportedly excelled all other pianists in Vienna — both male and female — is the Immortal Beloved, I feel that “Thea” knew the secret, the “hidden intentions” of this *soggetto cavato*. The Master, never divulging anything “extra-musical” about either this or the other two sonatas, gives here incontestable testimony to the veracity of the pronouncement, in 1785, of his influential earliest teacher, C. G. Neefe: “The great and true artist paints and says nothing of it, the bungler tells us all and paints nothing.” Beethoven was of course no “bungler” and yes, he tells us nothing. Romain Rolland’s quotation of an anonymous “famous” composer is singularly apropos when he says that “in music one can say whatever one wants”: *on ne vous comprend pas* (nobody will understand). So much the better perhaps since it safeguarded Dorothea’s reputation!

## *Credo* Opus 111 (1821/1822)

When I finally finished with Opus 101, I took a closer look at Beethoven’s last piano sonata, Opus 111, composed in 1821/1822. After three years of my “proprietary” detailed analysis, aided immeasurably by the Master’s autograph in facsimile (though the Beethoven Haus had allowed me to hold the just acquired original manuscript of Opus 101 in my well-gloved hands), I was convinced that I had succeeded in decoding *its* DNA as well and that this work too emanates from a single cell, the two-measure motif with which Opus 111 opens. I know that without the composer’s autograph-facsimiles in hand (the manuscripts for all three sonatas still exist) I could not have come to an understanding of these works. All editions are rife with misrepresentations of Beethoven’s intentions for grouping of notes — the romantic “virus” at work — thereby making the text unintelligible. All performances of Opus 111 also suffer that sad fate because pianists tie the 32<sup>nd</sup> notes to the *following* strong(er) beat, instead of grouping them with the *preceding* double-dotted 8<sup>th</sup> note where they belong. In a letter to Karl Holz, Beethoven addresses a similar point when, discussing these small phrasing-slurs, he cries out in anger: “The notes are all there, but where is the meaning?”

If my name is Willem Ibes (pronounced E-bes) and someone were to write Willemi Bes (s)he would have all the correct letters, but the meaning of course would be gone ... and it would make me mad too! The “silence of articulation” in my name belongs between the *m* and the *I*; in Opus 111 they belong between the 32<sup>nd</sup> note and the note that follows (see Example 6 graph below).

When I first recorded the work in 1990, I spoke of the first movement as Beethoven's definitive *Auseinandersetzung*, his "coming to terms with" the tragic aspects of his life. Martin Cooper speaks of a "cry of agony ... agonized pressure ... grim struggle ..." I recently came across Mr. W. Meller's impassioned account of how this movement portrays Beethoven "on his death-bed, clenched fists ... with schizophrenic chords."

Who could imagine how thunderstruck I felt in early 2004 when I *saw* it clear as day: *Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott*. The *soggetto cavato* in Opus 111 is none other than the text of Bach's famous Cantata: "A mighty Rock is our God." I call Opus 111 "Beethoven's Credo" because an 1825 fragment superimposes that text, *Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott*, on the Credo motif of Beethoven's great *Missa Solemnis*, written during and after Beethoven's work on this last piano sonata.

Example 5

Canon, 1825



Gott ist ei - ne fes - te Burg Gott ist ei - ne



Cre - do Cre - do

Credo from  
*Missa Solemnis*, 1823

Instead of the defiant Beethoven of earlier years ("I shall grab Fate by the throat"), here is the most deeply felt expression of his profoundly held belief. This is not a far-off Deity, this is "our" God, our loving Father, as in Rembrandt's great portrayal of *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, always eager to forgive, in fact not aware of forgiveness since his great Love shines away, does not even let our "failings" come to His consciousness.

I am no theologian, but since rethinking the work during the past five years, I feel its strong kinship with the mystical literature of Beethoven's (and my own) Low Countries. Certainly, I am not the first to ascribe these mystical properties to the second — and last — movement, but I don't think anyone has noticed that the first and second movement speak the same language; they are based on that same text and both speak of Jerusalem, the one the earthly City of God — on this side of the Great Divide — the other, the heavenly Jerusalem for which, in these later years, Beethoven increasingly thirsts.



The Introduction's first two measures lay it all open to the listener as Beethoven had done in Opus 101. *Ein' feste Bu—rg I—st* (both “Burg” and “ist” emphasized by *sforzandos*): *A mighty Ro—ck I—s* in the first measure is followed in the second bar by a lovingly measured *unser Gott* (Ou—r God). And here, in two vivid measures, the Stronghold stands, unassailable by either inner or outer doubt as an unwavering testimony to Beethoven's belief, his *credo*, his absolute “giving of the heart” — *cor do* (I give my heart) — one should say, of the actively directing of his heart to the One God.

It is the God of his childhood, neglected in the turmoil of passing years, but finally found here, no longer encumbered by worldly desires: our loving Father. Indeed this text is carved into the rock of these first two measures — and the whole rest of the work. As in the majestic landscapes of a great Chinese master, the first measure fills the huge canvass with a mighty brush-stroke of unsurpassed control and power, and the second measure breathes its counterpoint, *Unser* (Beethoven will repeat that “unser” in countless tenderly loving ways) *Gott* (Ou—r God) — not found in thunder, storm, or lightning, but softly calling, whispering to Beethoven (that second measure starts *piano*) from the gentle breeze where Elijah first encountered Him.

I found it very difficult to get away from a Beethoven with frowned brow and from a God who is powerful, but seems at a great distance from us common folk. I had to make tremendous changes in my *toucher*, spending many years — a work already long in progress — and thousands of hours that often seemed to be wasted to capture some of the marvelous ability of the pianists of my younger years (Kempff, Cortot, Horowitz, Gieseking, the incomparable Lipatti), to change the expression of an emotion by the way the keys are “touched.” It remains a source of marvel and challenge for me to discover how infinitely “hone-able” this art is and how, even on a mechanical instrument like the piano, one can patiently learn, by *l'art de toucher le clavecin* (the art of touching the keyboard), to communicate the most subtle emotional nuances. I had to live to a rather ripe age before making this attempt to interpret the first movement as Beethoven intended, a testament to his faith *in unum Deum*, a true, loving Father, of whom he writes these same years *Gott has mich nie verlassen* (God has never deserted me). It is up to you to judge if I succeeded!

So, instead of expressing bitterness, anger, rebelliousness, along the lines of “*A CRU— EL FATE— WAS— DEALT— TO— M E—*” the first movement of Opus 111 is a joyous — more than just intellectual — assertion of Beethoven's faith, a faith not in-born as it was in Bach, but arrived at after a strenuous journey. Martin Cooper, in “Beethoven: The Last Decade,” sums up concisely the trajectory of the composer who, “brought up formally as a Catholic Christian, ... came at the end of his life, through misfortune and illness, to understand the close connection between the religious sentiments and .... convictions of a lifetime and the fundamental teachings of the Church.”

**N.B. Please consult complete and updated version of Examples 6 and 7 below in "De-coding Portfolio" under Opus 111.**

### Example 6

Introduction = first movement with text



Example 7  
Arietta = second movement with (same) text

ARIETTA

ARIETTA.

Adagio molto semplice e cantabile.

L. van Beethoven, Op. 111

Realization by Willem Ibes

(see m. 134!)

Soprano

Un - ser Gott un - ser Gott ein' feste Burg ist Gott — ein'

*p*

Alto

Ein' feste Burg ist feste Burg ist Burg ist feste Burg ist

*p*

Tenor

Ein' feste Burg ist feste Burg ist feste Burg ist Gott — un - ser

*p*

Bass

Ein' feste Burg ist feste Burg ist feste Burg ist feste Burg ist —

*p*

S

feste Burg ist feste Burg ist feste Burg ist

1. Gott 2. Gott unser

A

un - ser Gott un - ser Gott — un - ser

1. Gott 2. Gott

T

Gott unser Gott un - ser Gott — un - ser

1. Gott 2. Gott ein'

B

un - ser Gott un - ser Gott

1. 2.

With this second movement we enter extra-terrestrial territory, the domain of the Trinity, unmistakably rendered by Beethoven in the 9/16 (three times three) time signature. The Arietta's most prominent theme flows seamlessly (one reason perhaps why no one noticed) out of the last two measures of the first movement, where they whisper a final tender "*un-ser- Gott*—" (in augmentation as they had done at the end of the Introduction).

Beethoven's late works overflow with counterpoint (different voices "speaking" at the same time, a marvel that Martin Luther had commented on) but I do not believe that many theorists, musicologists, let alone performers, have understood the complexity of what goes on in the Arietta — the theme for the marvelous variations in this second movement — and the variations themselves. Again the Autograph was indispensable for a complete understanding. Beethoven's handwriting in its unusually refined, delicate penmanship even expresses his meaning visually; it represents, like the Arietta itself, Grace Incarnate.

I performed the theme most of my life as a lovely soprano voice with interesting accompaniment. But here and in all the variations that follow there is more than **one** theme; there are **two** themes that jump from voice to voice: the first one "*unser Gott*" announced in the first movement's second measure, the other theme from the first movement's opening measure ("*ein*) *feste Burg ist*," and yes, in the later variations they are joined by a **third** theme, "*Gott*" all by Himself, in trills that seemingly escaped from earth's gravity. I hope the four-part setting above and my playing of the Arietta theme and variations on the accompanying CD will make that distinction — contrapuntal in contrast to harmonic or homophonic style — clear. The slurs in these late works (indicating how notes are grouped into motifs and motifs into sentences or phrases) are **all** phrasing slurs (Heinrich Schenker *non placet*). And so they are in this second movement. If Beethoven wants a legato articulation he doesn't use slurs but writes "legato" in the score.

Although hardly a day has passed without finding new clues and coming to an ever deeper understanding, it was a great surprise to discover — besides Bach's text — a second *soggetto cavato* hidden in Opus 111's vaults. Early in my research I had already had a hunch that Beethoven not only used Bach's *text* as the basis, the seed of this "Credo," but a good-sized segment of Bach's powerful *melody* and *rhythm* as well. The second half of the C major scale (or melodic minor) G-A-B-C-C-B of measures 12 and 14 of the first movement's Introduction always seemed a bit odd, as well as the smooth progression of the steady, confident full quarter notes in this "dotted-rhythm" environment. Early on I had associated this with the great Bach, but it was only after the discovery of the underlying text that everything fell into place. The first part of

Bach's theme is clearly discernible in measures 1 2 and 1 4 (with preceding up-beat), but lo and behold, the second part of Bach's forceful opening phrase is perfectly rendered in the soprano voice of the second movement, melody *as well as* meter and rhythm (the latter, taking into account the change from duple to triple meter).

#### Example 8

Comparison of the themes in Bach's Cantata (transposed to C) and Beethoven's Opus 111

**Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott**

**Bach**

Ein' fest - te Burg - ist un - ser Gott

**Beethoven**

Ein' fes - te Burg ist—

**1st Movement**

**Bach**

un - ser Gott

**Beethoven**

un - ser Gott

**2nd Movement**

Therefore, in this last sonata, Beethoven employs not just one, but two procedures that were commonly used in the Renaissance; the *soggetto cavato*, combined with the *cantus prius factus*, the use of a pre-existing or borrowed chant, as composers like Josquin and many others had done, for example, with the *l'homme armé* melody. Might one call that plagiarism nowadays?! I doubt that Bach would have objected!

Bach's God is not identical to the God of Rembrandt or Beethoven, nor can the rather stolid "Burg" of the one be compared to the infinitely "malleable," "giving" Rock of the others. The God of Beethoven's Christian and specifically Catholic faith is a multifaceted all-embracing God with a lot of mixed colors living happily in His big heart. I cannot help but discern in the jazzy third variation the God whom King David celebrated, dancing around the Ark of the Covenant as it is brought with exuberant musical pageantry to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. People were offended: David the King, dancing like a commoner! But both David and Ludwig must have been possessed of the Spirit Plato describes, and that makes the carriers of that Spirit a little crazy "when they see (in the objects of this world) a resemblance of Eternal Being." In this third variation, cascading and rising large waves expound, always perfectly matching, in all its details, the mathematical proportions of the Arietta theme, "*un-ser- Gott—*" and shelter within the wings of each beat (three to the measure), the joyously shimmering riverlets of "*(ein) feste Bu—rg ist.*"



The late Beethoven works certainly reveal a man who, “by going from the perception of the many to the one” has *seen ta onta*, the totality of Being. Besides giving us an insight into the composer himself and his work, they offer to us a glimpse of that Ultimate Reality to which only the greatest thinkers, philosophers, artists, writers, and saints have, looking through a glass darkly, gained access. Sharing their vision they have brought back the Reality to which the great mystics have pointed: “That What Is,” true Being. It is here, behind the world of shadows and appearances which hold us enthralled, that The Real is remembered. The conviction of this vision made the study of music one of the pillars of Athenian liberal arts education.

Today the espousal of the same vision can give depth to our own individual and collective lives as well. In Beethoven’s case that vision was certainly “paid for” as was, incidentally, Rembrandt’s, in “a life-time’s death in love, Ardour, selflessness and self-surrender” (T. S. Eliot: “Four Quartets”). That seems to be the price required for the un-doing of our congenital amnesia, so we may come (*Phaedrus Dialogue* again) to “the remembrance — anamnesis — of those things that were once seen by our soul when still connected to God.” To that Reality Beethoven’s Opus 111 points: “At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless .... at the still-point, there the dance is ... and there is only the dance.”

In Opus 111 (I am confining myself to the late piano sonatas and not even mentioning, for example, the later quartets), in this last of Beethoven’s piano sonatas, we can experience Silence in the process of being made audible by means of Sound; it is the late Rembrandt where the light shines from within outward; it is the Void of the Tao, Mother of all Things. Yes, in Opus 111 Beethoven discovered the other shore; it is this most unlikely Zen Master’s answer to a student’s quest for Enlightenment: “Listen carefully, there you may enter.” Here is Beethoven’s most heartfelt invitation to leave behind the world where we are “distracted from distraction by distraction” and enter into the timeless.

Knowing this text and having succeeded in applying it properly to almost every measure of the sonata (a little detective work needs to be done yet) has yielded an unexpected bonus. It has enabled me to let go of any lingering negative feelings I had toward the composer for burdening struggling pianists like myself with the murderous trills of the second movement’s last variation. It has in fact granted me the grace I needed to wholeheartedly **forgive** Beethoven; I know now that all these trills utter the word “*Gott*” in mystical contemplation, while the voice beneath and at times above them (all assigned to the right hand), tenderly caresses “*Un-ser Gott—, un-ser Gott—, ein’ feste Burg is Go—tt, ein’ feste Burg ist, feste Burg ist, feste Burg ist Gott—*”

I am at peace realizing that the countless hours I practiced them were devoted to mastering heavenly rather than, as I had thought in years past, fiendish trills! And while all this is going on in the right hand, the left hand is not left idle (wouldn't one wish!) but adds to the heavenly chorus with numerous festive triplet-repetitions of the "*feste Burg*" that comforted Beethoven on his life's journey. The last three measures proclaim *un-ser Gott, un-ser Gott, un-ser, un-ser*, then, getting softer with the motif in a significant inversion, *der Blick nach oben*, the glance directed upward, and an equally significant subtle change to the duple rhythm of the first movement, they whisper in disarmingly simple trust and affirmation "*unser Gott-, unser Gott-*, dwindling to a barely audible last, brief, "*unser Gott-*." The rest is silence. ... Music, an art which takes its departure in and from the world of time, Chronos, leads us here, as its highest calling, to Aion, Eternity, the Fullness of the Present.

## *Christmas* Opus 110 (1821)

The late Beethoven is one who has acquired the deepest interior knowledge, not only in the realm of the Spirit, but of the affective life as well; there is no sentimentality in his feelings and its subjectivity is not given free reign but brought under the control of a sovereign intellect.

Serenity, peace, wisdom, joy: what hasn't Beethoven "realized" in these late works? On the last page of his *Orthodoxy*, Chesterton writes that perhaps the least understood and the most hidden trait in Jesus' life was his "mirth." Mirth is of course very much akin to Joy, an interior joy not so easy to come by.

Now Beethoven certainly didn't set out in his life to acquire Joy. The young Beethoven has other fish to fry, other goals he wants to achieve; his ego is too strong to have been willing to accept it, even if the joy he will later thirst for were handed him on a golden platter. "Strength is the morality of men and it is mine as well" he is reported to have exclaimed as a young man. Well, life sometimes has a way of dealing with that kind of hubris. For Beethoven — and I guess for most of us — it is a path we would rather avoid and we do not tread it willingly. But *nolens volens* (willy-nilly that is the ambiguity of human nature) Beethoven changed his compass, wrested it from its firm direction towards power, self, pride and pointed it, among other realms of the spiritual life, toward *Freude* (Joy). He sings of it — feeling himself at one with all of humankind and using Schiller's famous Ode — in the last movement of the Ninth Symphony. Deliberately turning away from the goals the three other movements had proposed, he sets course towards Elysium.

And Joy is what he brought back for us, the wine presser, as he felt himself to be, distilling the divine nectar that nourishes body and soul, rich food for human's dual nature. Beethoven was not alone in this pursuit; the goal of Joy appears frequently in his contemporaries as well (rather less frequently in our own world I believe; we may by and large have given up on it).

Before continuing I want to make one thing crystal clear. Mr. W. Mellers (the aforementioned Mr. Mellers of "Beethoven on his deathbed ... clenched fists") who is also the author of *Bach and the Dance of God*, writes the following in his Preface to *Beethoven and the Voice of God*: "Since some reviewers of 'Bach and the Dance of God' accused me of distorting Bach's music in order to preach a sermon in support of the True Faith, I should perhaps state unequivocally that I am not and never have been a Christian. ... I have tried to understand, on the evidence of their music, what Bach and Beethoven believed." As unequivocally as Mr. Mellers, I want to state that, yes, I do share that faith of Bach and Beethoven, but, like him, I proceed on the evidence of Beethoven's music and not on the basis of a religious or any other priori. *Ipsa facto* it doesn't make one iota of difference whether one is a believer or an atheist to be moved by this music that plumbs the depths and scales the heights of the human heart and spirit.

When after long study and analysis — "wasting time" as the Zen masters like to say ... "conscientiously" — it happened again that, in T. S. Eliot's "unattended Moment" another *soggetto cavato* popped up for Opus 110, some of my friends suggested — in good humor — "Ibes must have *soggetti cavati* on his brain." I submit that it isn't really Ibes who has *soggetti cavati* on the brain, but rather the great Master himself who took a never-ending childlike delight in punning, word-plays, setting names of friends to music, proving again and again the truth of his lapidary "*Musik und Wort sind eins*" (music and word are one). An incredible amount of nonsense has been, is, and will be written about all of these works. Had I died ten years ago, I would have been one of the many. Certainly perseverance, hard work, and luck shaped these discoveries, but more than anything else, I believe it was Grace.

Not so surprisingly — since in his final decade, Beethoven became increasingly interested in religious, specifically Catholic Church music and penetrated ever deeper into the secrets of Bach's unsurpassed contrapuntal art — the text that presented itself for this penultimate piano sonata was that of another Bach work, the motet "*Jesu meine Freude*" ("O Jesus my Joy").

However, even though it was not so unexpected that another Bach text formed the blueprint of this piano sonata, it was a surprise that it had something to do with the Second Person of the Trinity. I knew of Beethoven's trust in God. I was well aware of

his love of “the eternal feminine” (only the love with Dorothea seems to have been consummated among equals), but Jesus? On the contrary, I knew of Beethoven’s crude remark about Jesus being just another Jew hanging on a Cross (he shared a generous dose of the prevalent anti-Semitism that eventually exploded in its full evil consequence — of which Beethoven would have had a stomach-turning horror and revulsion — in Auschwitz and Dachau). So the last thing my rational mind would have come up with is to associate Beethoven with anything having to do with Jesus. Yet, there it was and it wouldn’t let me off the hook: *Jesu, meine Freude*.

This is what I found out about Beethoven and his relation to Jesus. Schindler writes that at about the time Beethoven began working on these last sonatas and his great *Missa Solemnis* (“Solemn Mass”), finished in 1823, someone brought to him the German text of a Mass the Master had composed in 1807. In an early version of the Catholic Church’s turn to the vernacular in the 1960s, the Latin text had been translated and paraphrased into German. Schindler relates that, as Beethoven read the paraphrased text — by a not altogether great poetic talent — he became more and more agitated and eventually began to weep louder and louder. Schindler: “This was the only time I ever saw Beethoven cry.” What provoked Beethoven’s abundant tears was the section in the Gloria (of the Ordinary of the Mass) that speaks of Jesus, as the One who takes away the sins of the world, gathering in, searching out, comforting, calling to the lost sheep of Israel: “Come to me all ye that are laden and I will give you rest.” “That is exactly how I felt it,” the composer stammered. No man was ever more tight-lipped about both religious and amorous matters; we have already spoken of his silence concerning the latter and for the former the Master’s curt statement suffices: “about the thoroughbass and religion no discussion is possible.” It is only in his music that all secrets are revealed and nothing held back.

So it is that, among Beethoven’s secrets, there was his attachment to the person of Jesus, the Redeemer, the Savior of mankind. I must mention one other interesting anecdote. In his own hand the composer writes on the title page of the finished manuscript (he made changes later) the date of completion: December 25, 1821. So here we have it, Beethoven’s birthday present to the infant in his crib, the Jesus who comes to symbolize for him *Freude*, joy in both good times and bad times, Jesus, truly a Man for all Seasons whom Beethoven goes ever deeper in his heart to discover.

As mentioned earlier in this article, immediately prior to the composition of these last two sonatas, Beethoven frequents the library of his patron, Archduke Rudolph, to learn from his great predecessors (Beethoven never stops learning!) and he writes him-self the following note: “In an effort to write true church music consult all the choral works of the monks etc. ... in the best translations with the most exact prosody of all psalms and catholic chants.”

Beethoven became acquainted with Gregorian chant (I am grateful to Franz Prassl, Professor of Gregorian Chant in Graz, for corroborating this) through Venetian editions, and the consequences for the interpretation of especially this sonata Opus 110 are far reaching.

If I may digress briefly, one of the disadvantages under which pianists labor is that we deal with a horizontal instrument, that is, we are tempted to experience “melody” as if it is going either left (towards the bass) or right (towards the treble); endless technical exercises à la Mr. Hanon, only exacerbate this propensity and unfortunately we cannot conveniently put a piano on its left side like a huge accordion! Pianists of course are not tone-deaf — unable to hear pitch differences — but by and large we are left–right rather than low–high players; we find it difficult to hear and think vocally, which in turn means that we miss out one of the most powerfully expressive ways by which music conveys meaning. Particularly in this sonata Opus 110 with its marvelously elaborate melismas (many notes to one syllable), the inability to hear “melody” — and this holds for the listener as much as the performer — lays waste to one of the most powerful means the art of music possesses to stir the soul of man.

In parentheses, the German language has many marvelous ways to adapt and slightly alter words: *Ein'* is the same as *Eine*, *Freude* the same as *Freud'*, *feste* as *fest'*, *unser* as *unsere* or *unsre*, *Dorothea* as *Dorothee* and *Theodora*. The whole sonata Opus 110 is derived — again like Opus 101 and Opus 111 — from the motif, the seed planted in the first two measures. This first movement overflows with peacefulness and exudes *Freude* in the form of a loving gentleness. Beethoven writes in the score a term he uses on no other occasion: “*con amabilità*.”

Example 9  
First movement, measures 1–6

Sonate.

L. VanBeethoven, Op.110  
am25. Dezember1821

Je - su mei - ne Freu - de Je - - - su mei - ne

*p* con amabilità  
(sanft)

Freu - - - de Je - su mein' Freu - de

*p*

Je - su mei - ne Freu - de Je - su mei - ne Freu - de



All four voices (this is, as in the Arietta of Opus 111, four-part counterpoint) sing the text in the first two measures, and repeat that in measures 3 and 4. Do not mistake the 16<sup>th</sup> note figures that undergird the soprano line in the following measures for a simple harmonic accompaniment. No, they softly continue to whisper in paired sixteenth notes: *Je-su mei-ne Freu-de* (see above) after which cascading broken chords evaporate the theme further into thirty-second notes. A last contraction of the two-measure motif into a one-measure *Jesu meine Freude* as was, incidentally measure 11 — introduces us to the second theme which further proclaims that Joy, with a particularly touching emphasis somewhat later on the word *meine*: “*meine, meine Freude*” (my, my Joy), repeated and leading to a climax in both height and depth, a “*Freude*” that ranges from top to bottom.

The second movement, based on two folksongs, the second one a rather bawdy ditty, proclaims that same Joy à *haute voix*, unbridled and with countless humorous touches. I had concluded, after extensive study of this movement that, at the end of the Trio, one measure may inadvertently have been left out and I have added the measure in this recording, as I showed in my article “Beethoven’s Piano Sonata Opus 110 in A-flat Major: The Mystery of the Missing Cats” (*Headwaters*, 2006; or, see “The Mystery of the Missing Cats” on my Website). Now, however, after having studied the sonata in its entirety, I realize that my suspicion, already expressed in the article, proved to be correct. The real text Beethoven had in mind was none other than “*Jesu, meine Freude*.” I have now come to the unshakable conclusion that no “60 cats” were missing, and no mystery exists; I promise to make amends if I ever make another recording of Opus 110!

The whole third movement is cast in one of the most widely used Baroque structures, the Recitative and Aria (*casu Arioso*). Anyone who has ever listened to Bach’s Passion according to St. John cannot but be struck by the similarity between Beethoven’s recitative and the heart-rending passage where, after having denied Christ three times: “I don’t know that man” Peter hears the cock crow, and realizes his betrayal. The Evangelist sings the recitative “*und Petrus ging hinaus und weinete bitterlich*” (and Peter went out and wept bitterly). No words can describe the impact of this recitative or of the aria that follows in both the Bach Passion and this Beethoven third movement.

How can Joy and the deepest Grief co-exist? On the plane of everyday life they exclude each other. On the plane Beethoven has attained in these late works, they paradoxically strengthen one another: Grief becoming more poignant, Joy more transcendent. After an almost stark and terse opening statement, like a proposition to be followed by a more probing explication (I am playing it as indicated in the score

*Adagio ma non troppo*, **not** *Lento*), the three times repeated “*Jesu mein(e) Freude*” is followed by a moving Recitative. The Master brings out a color palette of unsurpassable variety and beauty in the loving melismas of this recitative, *Jesu*, emphasizing, ***meine***, *Freude*, immediately followed by its diminution (all under one pedal) and the brief repeat of *mein’ Freude*.

Example 10  
Third movement, measure 4

There follows the perhaps most enigmatic passage Beethoven ever penned. Learned authors have described it as “*Bebung*,” learned authors have denied it. I propose — and my detailed analysis should make it perfectly clear — that in these repeated, first accelerating then decelerating high paired A’s, the composer is sighing, as throughout human history millions upon millions of believers have done *Jesu*, O Jesus, faster and faster *Jesu*, *Jesu* (five times repeated), slowing down five more times and gradually becoming softer *Jesu* (in augmentation) *meine* and in measure 6 *Freude*.

Example 11  
Third movement, measure 5

I have played this sonata countless times and of course tried to make sure that all the repeated notes were there, crescendoing, decrescendoing, and so on. Only now am I beginning to *feel* what I am playing, what Beethoven is saying. Keep in mind that Beethoven was incapable and intolerant of any kind of sentimentality that the many times repeated use of the name Jesus may suggest to us. This is not a mechanical repetition of Jesus' name; it is, as in the so named "Jesus prayer," a bringing down of the mind into the heart, emphasizing the meaning of the name "Jesus" and in that sense different from a mantra. If I may briefly quote from the classic 19<sup>th</sup> century text *The Way of the Pilgrim*: "Many so-called enlightened people call this frequent offering of one and the same prayer as useless and even trifling ... they do not know how this frequent service of the lips becomes a genuine appeal of the heart, sinks down into the inward life."

Bismarck once remarked that if he could listen often enough to Beethoven's Eroica Symphony he would become a heroic man. Listening, often enough, to these late Beethoven works — not with the brain but with the heart — cannot help but lead one deeper into the spiritual reality that is Beethoven's great gift to us all.

After what must be the most poignant C flat in the history of music (on the name "Jesus" in measure 7) we enter the "*Klagender Gesang*," the sorrow-filled sung/spoken "*Arioso dolente*" (these are Beethoven's own indications). Beethoven, in line with centuries of contrapuntal masters, does not write what is often thought of, and played as a harmonic accompaniment to this sublime "Sorrowful Lament." No, following once again in the moving footsteps of the great Bach, each measure of the bass line repeats — as in the sixteenth notes of the first movement — in a steady ostinato pattern (but this is Beethoven, military regularity is not where this *Gesang* is at) with tears and cries: *Jesu, meine Freude* within each measure. Overarching these single-measure groups, the architectural plan lays out in quadruple augmentation its four times four-measure ostinato pattern *JE—SU—MEI—NE—FREU—DE—* measure after measure until the end. The soprano, unfolding in long lines that had formed Bach's trademark, in "*sanglots entrecoupés*," intermittent sobbing, gives wings to this "Sorrowful Adagio" and takes us on a journey, ever farther, ever deeper into the human soul and the grief she bears. Every single note here forms an intense probing of each word of the text: *Jesu; meine; Freude* and every note has been paid for with Beethoven's own tears and blood.

Example 12  
Third movement, measures 9–12

Je - - - su mei - ne Freu - - - - - de

*p*

Je - su mei - ne Freu - de

JESU

MEINE

Je - - - su Je - su mei - ne Freu - - - - - de

*p*

Je - su mei - ne Freu - de

FREUDE

The fundamental identity between the first movement’s opening two measures and the beginning two measures of this Arioso — the one in major, this one in minor — has been recognized by other analysts. No one, however, has realized that the first two measures of the sonata (see Example 9) form the matrix for every single subsequent measure of all four movements as was the case with the other two sonatas on the accompanying CD; the work’s whole *argument* grows organically and seamlessly from that original seed without anything “added to it” until, as we will see, in the last movement.

I mentioned earlier in this analysis my surprise at discovering Bach’s **text** as the basis, the *soggetto cavato*, of this Opus 110. A delightful wonder awaited me when I looked up the score of Bach’s motet “*Jesu, meine Freude*” and found that, as in the last piano sonata Opus 111, Beethoven, good detective-story writer that he is, had in this penultimate sonata “hidden” Bach’s **melody** as well. Bach (1685–1750) himself had borrowed it, giving full credit to Johann Crüger who composed the chorale melody (1653) and to Johann Franck who had written the text (1650). Bach uses the melody — with or without text — in over a dozen of his own vocal and instrumental works; both text and melody have been set countless times since 1653, up until at least late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by composers as diverse as Handel, Telemann, Smetana, Reger, and of course — neither last nor least, secretly and surreptitiously! — Ludwig van Beethoven.

Incidentally, this motet was one of six authenticated funeral motets Bach composed for the Thomas Kirche in Leipzig — and this certainly explains the minor key. The similarities between Bach’s melody and the opening of the Arioso in Opus 110 are obvious (see Example 13). Indeed, Jesus is Beethoven’s Joy in happy and sad times, as it had been for Bach, Crüger and countless men and women over the ages. The last line of Franck’s text reads “Still you remain, even in suffering, O Jesus, my Joy.”

**Example 13**  
Comparison between Bach’s Chorale melody “*Jesu, meine Freude*” and Beethoven’s “*Arioso dolente*,” measures 9–10

J.S. Bach:  
Jesu, meine Freude  
BWV 227 Chorale

Je - su mei - ne Freu - - - de.

Transposition of  
Chorale Melody

Je - su mei - ne Freu - - - de.

Beethoven Sonata  
Op. 110, Mvt. III  
Arioso dolente

Je - su mei - ne Freu - de.

Beethoven presents us with yet one more reference to J. S. Bach. As mentioned above the name “Bach” corresponds in German to the following solmization syllables: B = B-flat; A = A; C = C; H = B. This is Bach’s “signature” also known as the cross-motif. In measures 21 and 22 of this third movement we find Bach’s name (transposed one tone lower), put in prominent relief in the soprano voice: A-flat (*Jesu*) – G (*meine*) – C-flat (*Freu*) – B-flat (*de*) as an homage to the Baroque genius as well as a sign of devotion, on Beethoven’s part, as it had always been for Bach, to Jesus Christ and his cross. It would not be difficult to see here Beethoven, kneeling at the foot of that cross, weeping for his own failings. It may seem — on the surface — that a great composer penned here a beautiful piece of music. Nothing would be farther from the truth. Here is a man, averse to any kind of cheap teary-eyed sentimentality, opening his heart, his soul as an act — that is what Beethoven understood his *œuvre* to be about — of service to humanity.



This brings us to the last movement, the great Fugue. Everyone I have ever read asserts that the last movement's fugue subject is "clearly the same" as the first movement's theme. Unfortunately the misconception that melody and harmony form the main determinants of what is the same and what is different has unremittingly marred most analysis — and not only of Beethoven! If we look at melody in a superficial way, the first movement's theme *seems* to be the same as that of the last movement's fugue. There are indeed descending intervals of a third and ascending fourths. But, as often happens, this resemblance of pitches is meaningless when we try to understand the work. The books and articles perpetuating this approach remind me of Plato's Allegory of the Cave where the prisoners fixate on the shadows cast on the wall in front of them and judge this to be higher, that to be lower, this to be faster, that to be slower, this to be the same, that to be different *ad infinitum* without ever turning around and try to see the source of which the images on the wall are only the reflections. All we need to do is follow Beethoven's advice and put a text to a questionable passage. Try under-laying "*Jesu meine Freude*" to the fugue subject — it is simply impossible.

A correct analysis shows that the first movement's theme is indeed present in the fugue but as the countersubject, dancing around the fugue's subject. Interestingly enough, Beethoven who was wont to let his "ideas" gestate sometimes for decades before bringing them into the daylight, had written a note in a 1817 sketch book for projected compositions "[create] a new subject ... which can then, by the repetition of the first theme, serve as countersubject." In this last movement the composer simply turns this around and lets the two-measure opening motif serve as the countersubject for the new fugue subject.

And what may the fugue's *subject* then be? I was guided by a chance re-reading of Romain Rolland's *Beethoven* and it can be found in Barry Cooper's *Beethoven* as well. Immediately prior to the composition of these last two sonatas, Beethoven writes, besides the note to examine old-Catholic Church music, a plan for a future composition: "Adagio Cantique/Devout Chant in a Symphony in the old modes, either on its own or as an introduction to a fugue – Herr Gott dich loben wir alleluia ..." Mr. Cooper comments that several features of the Finale of the Ninth Symphony (with the Ode to Joy!) are alluded to here, as well as "the use of voices and *the all-embracing nature of the text in an instrumental work*" (italics are mine).

Now Beethoven never wrote the gigantic work he contemplated in this note, no great choral *Te Deum* (the text for this famous Latin hymn in German is "*Herr Gott dich loben wir*" (Lord God **we** praise Thee). Instead, he writes, in the last movement of this piano sonata Opus 110, a *Te Deum* in the first person on the text "*Herr Gott dich lob' ich, alleluia,*" and it is, as he had planned, a fugue of sizeable proportions.

Once aware of this note, the realization that this particular text forms the *soggetto cavato* for the fugue of Opus 110 became as simple as  $2 + 2 = 4$ . Beethoven employs the text here in this last movement — speaking as always from his own deepest feeling and experience — after recovery from a serious illness: “Lord God I praise Thee alleluia” (the literal translation from the German would be: Lord God Thee praise I, alleluia). And, as with the other *soggetti cavati* I discovered, the text reveals beyond a doubt the meaning of what Beethoven is saying here. I hope once again that a careful listening will convince the reader of the veracity of my theory more than a thousand words could.

Example 14  
Fugue, measures 1–11

Herr Gott dich lob' ich

*sempre p*

Herr Gott dich lob' ich al-le-lu-ia Je-su mei-ne Freu-de Freu-

al-le-lu-ia al-le-lu-ia Herr Je-su

- de Je-su mei-ne Freu- - de Freu- - de Je-su

Gott dich lob' ich al-le-lu-ia

Freu-de Freu-de Freu-de

mei-ne Freu- - de Je-su mei-ne Freu- - de

The *arioso dolente* makes a second appearance in the key of G Minor, “*ermattet, klagend*,” “exhausted, lamenting,” the chromaticism even more heart-wrenching, the human soul able to speak the unspeakable only because it knows itself supported, surrounded, grounded, understood by a loving Friend. I found it helpful to listen at times to the Passacaglia bass as foreground and the Lament itself as background in order to enter the spirit of this *Arioso dolente* more fully.

The shift to the key of G Major is dramatic: slowly, disbelieving at first, but the full chords gradually growing more and more forceful, life is returning. This brief extraordinary passage is followed by the fugue’s inversion, *una corda* “gradually coming back to life” as Beethoven writes in both Italian and German. I see a crocus peaking its little head out of the winter snow, hardly daring to believe, that, yes, spring, new life is here, finally.

Textual restraints prevent me again from explaining all of this fully, but do listen to the fugue with that in mind: the *subject* “Lord God Thee praise I, alleluia,” the accompanying *countersubject*, running over, under and alongside this personalized *Te Deum*, delightedly dancing and singing: “O Jesus, my Joy, *Jesu meine Freude*.” For the music cognoscenti I may add this little bit on Beethoven’s contrapuntal wizardry. A short way into the inversion of the fugue, Beethoven clothes the *countersubject* with the melodic garb of the subject (not of course with the same metrical accents!), in a kind of friendly stretto with the *subject* in augmentation. Soon this frolicking in the spring sunshine with the fugue theme in inversion comes to an end; the fugue subject lands solidly straight up on its feet — loud, in the bass and in the original key of A flat Major — the right hand extolling *Jesu meine Freude* (it is incidentally in this passage that I first realized the identity of the *countersubject*). Then the dancing and praising starts in earnest: “*Herr Gott dich lob’ ich alleluia / Jesu meine Freude*.” As a pianist I am again a bit pained that Beethoven, as in Opus 111, apparently gave no thought to the limits of either the instrument or the performer. He, like King David of yore, must have been completely oblivious of his surroundings (*casu* interpreters and instrument) not caring what people thought, what was or was not possible, not realizing that a piano has only 88 keys, a pianist only ten fingers, caught up in his ecstatic vision of that “large work for Chorus and orchestra — the orchestral violins etc. in the last movement are increased ten fold.”

It takes as little imagination to see here, in the fugue of Opus 110, the shepherds of Bach’s Christmas Oratorio joyfully streaming down from the hills of Judea, as it is to experience, in the Scherzo section of the second movement of Opus 101, Ludwig and Dorothea’s carefree dancing in the Tyrolean landscape.

## Coda

I believe it is accurate to say that until about 1817 Beethoven's conscious everyday life — apart from composing of course — centered around “the eternal feminine,” the powerful attraction of the opposite sex. Whether or not, as the French put it, *le démon du midi* had been permanently put to rest (we Anglo-Saxons leave the “demons” out and speak more circumspectly of mid-life crisis!), Opus 101 published in February of that year and the Song cycles interspersed with it, put an end to that preoccupation. I believe Beethoven himself was surprised when, in 1818, he said — upon being asked to write something heroic: “I have nothing but a spiritual subject (matter). But you want something heroic — I too like that; but I want to mix something spiritual with it.” However, what the rational mind of Beethoven “wants” recedes more and more into the background as the Spirit, never absent from his great work, reclaims pride of place.

Opus 101 was Beethoven's watershed — from now on his gaze is directed (as so vividly portrayed in the last measures of Opus 111) *nach oben*, upwards, toward the infinite. Whatever vicissitudes, illnesses, worldly cares may still assail him, the eternal lays claim to his allegiance, and strong, virile as his will power had always been, it is now unwaveringly set towards God. “O God above everything” he writes in his journal (1818) and urges himself, “put my only faith in Thine unchangeable goodness, O God.” What he writes about the *Missa Solemnis* applies as well to these two sonatas: “to awaken in the performer and in the listener religious feelings and to make these (feelings) permanent.” I doubt that a Ruysbroeck or Thomas à Kempis could have more succinctly described the purpose of their own writings.

It is a truism to say that we live in a world of consumerism, in the age of providing and ingesting information. Great works of art live on a different *plateau*. They invite us to meditation, reflection, to an ever more profound entering into the world of mystery and of interior silence. Even a hundred repeated hearings will not yield the essence of the late Beethoven works and knowing the *soggetti cavati* that are hidden in these three sonatas will only become an interesting musicological feat, essentially without meaning, unless we — performers and listeners alike — make the strenuous effort, digging deep below the surface, to come into intimate contact with what Beethoven himself achieved in a lifetime's conquering (Beethoven's words!) of self. It is only, as Saint Benedict says, by listening humbly and attentively “with the ear of the heart” that the mystery will, slowly, reveal itself, that the process of “awakening” can take place.

May I echo Beethoven's prayer: “From the heart, may it again go to the heart.”

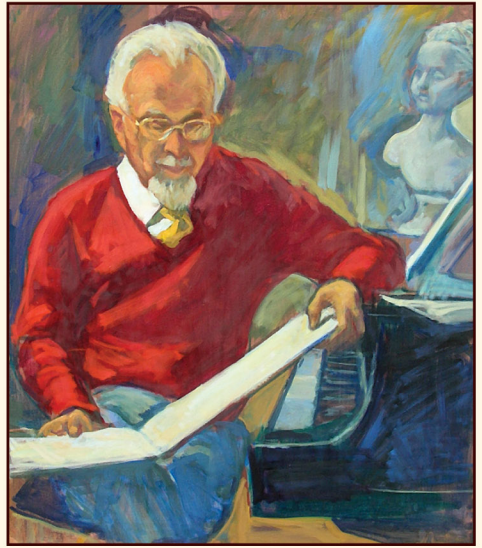
*Wim Ibes is Professor of Music.*

*"... an artist of the highest quality" - The Washington Post*

On the occasion of Willem Ibes's third appearance at Carnegie in New York and the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. in 1993, the late novelist Jon Hassler wrote: "Willem Ibes made his debut recital in New York and Washington, D.C. at the age of almost sixty! And by a man whom Marguerite Long, forty years earlier, had described as destined to be *un très grand pianiste*."

"Why the delay?" Hassler asked, ascribing a great part of the answer to the pianist's love of teaching at Saint John's University, a small, Benedictine, liberal arts college in Collegeville, Minnesota.

"Instead of a brilliant concert career as envisioned by his teacher," Hassler wrote, "[Ibes's] professional life seems to have been well attuned to a monastic tradition that goes back more than fifteen hundred years, offering a pattern of living that is quiet, unglamorous and, on the outside at least, uneventful, but with an opportunity for reflection, inner growth and development."



Willem Ibes studied at the Amsterdam Conservatory with Willem Andriessen, director of the institution, and graduated in 1952 with a degree for solo-piano performance. He studied in Paris from 1952 to 1955 with Marguerite Long. In 1957 he began teaching at Saint John's University. During the university's January term he often led groups of students in Zen study and meditation. Mr. Ibes holds the equivalent of the Doctorate in Musical Arts and a degree in philosophy from Saint John's University.

A frequent performer in solo recitals and as soloist here and abroad, Ibes made his Carnegie Hall and Kennedy Center debuts in 1990. Commenting on that debut, Joseph McClellan of the Washington Post wrote, "... one could not help wondering why his arrival has been delayed so long." On the occasion of his repeat performances on the East Coast, the Washington Post welcomed Ibes back as "an artist of the highest quality."

Willem Ibes has frequently appeared as piano soloist, with, among others, the St. Paul Chamber, Minneapolis Civic, Philadelphia Festival Orchestras, the Pueblo Symphony, the Manhattan Virtuosi, and orchestras in Europe and Asia. Besides concertizing in Europe he has, since 1990, returned almost yearly to the Far East for teaching and performing in Japan and mainland China.