

BEETHOVEN

Symphony No.2
in D major

Symphony No.7
in A major

Arr. Franz Xaver
Scharwenka for
piano duet

Tessa Uys
Ben Schoeman
piano duo



The nine works that comprise Beethoven's symphonic output were written over a period of a quarter of a century, from 1799 to 1824, a period which saw several of the most far-reaching and turbulent events in Europe's history, events which are frequently considered to have shaped Beethoven's art in emotional and expressive terms. Such a claim may be disputed by Beethoven specialists, believing his encroaching deafness during that time caused him to recede further into the deepest recesses of his mind, unencumbered by outside influence, yet Beethoven was never ignorant of what was going on in the wider world – any more than any of his contemporaries would have been. More importantly, for sure, the developments within his later music could not have taken place without the preparation, as it were, of those of his works that were written when his hearing and social converse were reasonably straightforward.

Perhaps the most extraordinary single fact about Beethoven's nine symphonies is that they are each entirely individual masterpieces, each unlike any of the other eight but which – singly, and as a totality – could not have been written by any other composer. Beethoven is always Beethoven, and no-one else; nor does his music 'remind' us of other composers in its vast expressive range: the events, the 'arguments', in any Beethoven work, invariably arise from within the music itself, and not through some outside, extra-musical consideration.

In that regard, Beethoven's music – his symphonies in particular – cannot be said to 'reflect' life, for Beethoven knew that there is no life in a mirror. The inner life of his music comes from the music itself, not through extra-musical applications, reflecting a creativity epitomised by Shakespeare in *All's Well That Ends Well*: "The thing which I am shall make me live".

Of the nine symphonies of Beethoven, the **Second Symphony in D major**, Op.36, is possibly the least known, its relative (if only relative) neglect tending to obscure the work's qualities. There are several unique facets surrounding this masterpiece, one being the year in which it appeared, 1802. Beethoven's personal life was then at a low ebb, plagued by uncertainty and self-doubt, brought about by the growing realisation that his incipient deafness was worsening (though he did not become profoundly deaf until the summer of 1818). Against this personal background of uncertainty and despair, it is all the more astonishing to hear a work so positive and full of life, tingling with vitality and energy: the product of historical factors and artistic achievement surely never equalled by any other composer.

The symphony was completed in 1802, after a relatively lengthy gestation period. In his First Symphony, which appeared in 1801, Beethoven demonstrated his command of what we now call the 'Classical' symphonic period – that which was developed by Haydn (and, somewhat later, by Mozart and others) in the previous half-century, into a four-movement, fully orchestral work. Customarily – though not invariably – the first movement of a symphony was prefaced by a slow introduction before the main *Allegro*; a slow movement would follow, succeeded by a third in lighter mood (if not invariably so). This third movement would almost always be cast as a Minuet in 3/4 time, succeeded by a finale often containing elements of rondo structure (a faster theme which comes 'round').

However, by 1802 the deterioration in Beethoven's deafness was becoming more apparent. As we may readily imagine, this was the worst possible affliction to strike any musician, and Beethoven knew it: in October of that

year, he poured out his bitterness and frustration to his brothers in a written document, known as the *Heiligenstadt Testament* – named after the town, noted for its restorative climate, where he lived for some months.

What is so remarkable is that whilst Beethoven was baring his soul to his family and close friends, his creative faculty *at the same time* enabled him to compose his brilliant and confident Second Symphony, building on the mastery of form he had shown in its predecessor and in his earlier string quartets and sonatas for violin and for piano. If Beethoven's daily life was to be a struggle against his ever-worsening affliction, his creativity was to grow with ever-increasing confidence and mastery. It remains an extraordinary example of the power a human mind can exert when challenged by – and in overcoming – situations that at first appear hopeless; yet, as Beethoven stated in a letter to Franz Gerhard Wegeler in November 1801 – “For me, there is no greater pleasure than to practice and exercise my art”.

Beethoven's Second Symphony has tended to be overshadowed by his Third Symphony (the *Eroica*), which followed in 1803-04, but the original features of the D major work demand attention, the most striking of which is the *Scherzo* – the first time any movement in any symphony had been so designated. Although a *Scherzo* movement entered the symphonic repertoire with this work, such a movement was not unknown, nor was it then making its first appearance in Beethoven's music.

Between the composition of the First and Second Symphonies, Beethoven wrote no fewer than 12 sonatas – eight for piano and four for violin and piano. Amongst those dozen works, four contained *Scherzo* movements. Clearly, by

the time he came to write the Second Symphony, Beethoven had reached the point where he felt the time was right for an orchestral *Scherzo*.

Yet in the Second Symphony Beethoven by no means discards the expressive achievements of its predecessor: the First begins with a slow introduction of 12 bars, *Adagio molto*, leading to the main *Allegro con brio*. The Second Symphony does likewise, but here the introduction is expanded to 34 bars, albeit in triple time. The D major Symphony is, therefore, from the start, broader in expression, more adventurous in expanding that introduction, although the first *Allegro con brio* subject is very similar in pulse in both symphonies – the accent falling squarely on the first half of the bar. The Second Symphony's slow movement, marked *Larghetto* and in A major, is cast on quite a broad scale; unusually in $\frac{3}{8}$ (the implication being not to take the pulse too slowly). This movement has sometimes been likened to an extended pastoral study, as if looking back in Beethoven's output to the so-called (not by Beethoven) *Pastoral* Piano Sonata, Op. 28 of 1801 (also in D major and also containing a *Scherzo* movement), and forwards to the F major *Pastoral* Symphony (No.6) of 1808.

The Second Symphony therefore builds on the achievements of its predecessor as well as revealing new structures. It was Beethoven's profound creativity and the organic growth within his music which drove him more than the vexatious daily handicap of his gradual hearing loss. What was *not* lost was the power and originality of the music he drew from his inner ear.

Beethoven's hearing was good enough for him to conduct the concert which contained the premiere of the Second Symphony. This took place

at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna on 5 April, 1803. An all-Beethoven programme, it also included the First Symphony, the C minor Piano Concerto (Beethoven as soloist, conducting from the keyboard) and the oratorio *Christ on the Mount of Olives*. The new symphony received a mixed reception: one critic described the work as “very beautiful”, but another claimed it as “a hideously writhing, wounded dragon, refusing to die, writhing in agonies and... bleeding to death”.

However divided the press reaction, the work itself made an immediate impact, for within a few months Beethoven’s friend and secretary Ferdinand Ries made a version of the symphony for piano trio. This could only have been accomplished with Beethoven’s approval (and occasional input); the trio version appeared with the orchestral score and parts, with the same opus number, 36, early in 1804.

By the time Beethoven completed his **Seventh Symphony in A major**, Op.92, eight years had passed. In enumerating the constant stream of masterworks that he composed during that period – the *Eroica*, C minor and *Pastoral* Symphonies, Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos, *Fidelio*, the three Op.59 quartets, piano sonatas – amongst others – the scale of his achievement becomes clear: by 1812, the entire musical world was anticipating more great music from the indomitable composer.

The scale of the Seventh Symphony is extraordinary, but the musical interest is heightened by Beethoven introducing, for the first time in his music, what might be termed a ‘double-tonic complex’. This concept is not as frightening as might at first appear. What Beethoven does in his Seventh Symphony is to take the basic tonality of the work – A major – and to ‘shadow’ it, so to

speak, by the key a major third below, F major. Now, in strict Classical terms, a tonality is established by reference to its dominant (a fifth above), so in the case of A major, we can expect E major to feature at significant points, thereby reinforcing A – which Beethoven also does. But he similarly ‘shadows’ E major with the key a major third below – C major – thereby producing a ‘double tonic complex’.

Thus we have a wonderfully flexible ground-plan of a ‘home’ key shadowed by another, which is *not* Classically related to it. Imagine Beethoven’s creative fire being ignited by this simple but completely new stratagem – in the first movement, driven by an almost constant 6/8 ‘dum-di-dum’ rhythm and exploring the new tonal regions, which surely astonished the work’s first listeners. Beethoven resolves all doubt and returns to Classical precepts in the finale, wherein his speed of thought in the movement’s immense outpouring of energy finally establishes A major – all other keys now vanquished.

Clearly, with such an innovative score, Beethoven poses further challenges to his interpreters – technical as well as musical. For example, the *Vivace* of the first movement is not merely some amiable dance but a pulse that strides across the world like Hercules, the *Allegro con brio* finale unleashing a veritable volcano of energy. Nothing like this had ever been expressed in music before.

Xaver Scharwenka may be best remembered today as a fine editor of many complete editions of the solo piano repertoire, but his reputation as virtuoso pianist, composer and teacher is almost completely forgotten. His own music is remarkable for the freshness and onward-momentum of its themes and the bravura with which they are presented. A truly excellent example of his profundity as a musician can be gleaned from his versions of all of Beethoven’s

nine symphonies for piano duet, wherein his treatment of the music itself reveals a profoundly aesthetic musical mind. At all times, this great musician treats Beethoven's music with respect, understanding and a genuine grasp of its essential features and expressive details. Whilst other editions of Beethoven's symphonies were generally available in the days before the rise of the gramophone and broadcasting, none can surpass – or even equal – those by this great musician.

As we have noted in previous commentaries for this on-going series of recordings, there is a strong defining line from Scharwenka back to Beethoven himself: Scharwenka's teacher, Theodor Kullak, was a pupil of Karl Czerny, who studied with Beethoven. This direct musical lineage cannot be gainsaid. It is a school of musical pianism and understanding coincidental to the development of the instrument itself.

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Tessa Uys and Ben Schoeman piano duo



Photograph: Zach Gerard

In 2010, Tessa Uys and Ben Schoeman established a duo partnership after being invited to give a two-piano recital at the Royal Over-Seas League in London. Ever since, they have performed regularly at music societies, festivals and at the BBC. In 2015, they embarked on their journey with the nine Beethoven Symphonies transcribed for piano four-hands by Franz Xaver Scharwenka. They are currently recording the complete Beethoven/Scharwenka Symphonies for SOMM Recordings.

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Tessa Uys

Born in Cape Town, Tessa Uys was first taught by her mother, Helga Bassel, herself a noted concert pianist. At 16, she won a Royal Schools Associated Board Scholarship and continued her studies at the Royal Academy of Music in London where she studied with Gordon Green. In her final year she was awarded the MacFarren Medal. Further studies in London with Maria Curcio, and in Siena with Guido Agosti followed. Shortly after this Tessa Uys won the Royal Over-Seas League Competition and was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music.



Photograph: Margit Schmidt

During the past decades, Tessa Uys has established for herself an impressive reputation, both as concert performer and as a broadcasting artiste, performing at many concert venues throughout the world. She has performed at London's Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre, Barbican and St John's Smith Square, and has played under such distinguished conductors as Sir Neville Marriner, Walter Susskind, Louis Frémaux and Nicholas Kraemer.

Impulse-music.co.uk/tessauys/

Ben Schoeman

Born in South Africa, Ben Schoeman studied piano with Joseph Stanford at the University of Pretoria and then received post-graduate tuition from Boris Petrushansky, Louis Lortie, Michel Dalberto, Ronan O'Hora and Eliso Virsaladze in Fiesole, Imola and London. He obtained a doctorate from City, University of London and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He won the First Prize in the 11th UNISA International Piano Competition, the Gold Medal in the Royal Over-Seas League Competition, the contemporary music prize at the Cleveland International Piano Competition, and the Huberte

Rupert Prize from the South African Academy for Science and Art. He has performed at Wigmore Hall, the Barbican Centre and Queen Elizabeth Halls in London, Carnegie Hall in New York, the Konzerthaus in Berlin, the Gulbenkian Auditorium in Lisbon, and the Enescu Festival in Bucharest. Ben Schoeman is a Steinway Artist and a senior lecturer in piano and musicology at the University of Pretoria.



Photograph: Zach Gerard

benschoeman.com  [@BenSchoeman1](https://twitter.com/BenSchoeman1)

Tessa Uys, Ben Schoeman *piano duo*

Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)

Arr. Franz Xaver Scharwenka for piano duet

	Symphony No.2 in D major*	[37:13]
1	I. Adagio molto – Allegro con brio	13:46
2	II. Larghetto	13:06
3	III. Scherzo. Allegro	3:33
4	IV. Allegro molto	6:48
	Symphony No.7 in A major	[41:55]
5	I. Poco sostenuto – Vivace	15:03
6	II. Allegretto	9:05
7	III. Presto	9:00
8	IV. Allegro con brio	8:47
	Total duration:	79:11

Tessa Uys *primo* Ben Schoeman *secondo*

*First Recording

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