

The Hammerklavier Sonata is the last work that I studied with my great master Edwin Fischer, who was to die in 1960. At that time, he had offered me his book "Ludwig van Beethovens Klaviersonaten" with this dedication: "to the dear Paul Badura-Skoda, the predestined interpreter of these sonatas, affectionately dedicated by Edwin Fischer". But at that time I was still very far from playing this Sonata - the most difficult of all - according to my inner vision of it. It cost me years of efforts and trials before I was able to approach this ideal! At times I had the impression that I was fighting not for the Hammerklavier but against it. And sometimes I was so strongly gripped by the work that I wanted to write a book about it, a sort of synthesis of a structural analysis and a poetic commentary, with historical considerations on the process leading to its conception, and an approach to the problem of interpretation. This book has remained unfinished to this day but it has been a source of maturation for me.

Despite my familiarity with the pianofortes of Beethoven's time, I doubted for a long time that an adequate reproduction of opus 106 might be possible on an instrument of the period. For this Sonata, as no other, looks more resolutely towards the future and seems to anticipate the widest resources of the modern piano, its more expressive plenitude of tone, its singing high register and its more elaborate mechanism. I owe to the initiative and insistence of Michel Bernstein to have attempted such a daring experiment. I myself was surprised by the result: the insufficient volume of Conrad Graf's piano is compensated by its dramatic intensity, its amazing songlike expressiveness and a sometimes unimaginable richness of colours. We thus have additional evidence that even in his last creative period Beethoven was a realist to a much higher degree than is generally thought. Indeed the instrument is used here to its farthest limits, probably farther than its maker of genius could have envisaged. Beethoven's phrase "the piano must be broken" ("Brechen soll das Klavier!") takes its full meaning here.

I do not think that a pianist, were he the greatest, can assume by himself all the aspects of this Sonata. But if I succeed in conveying a significant part of this exalting and overwhelming musical experience, I shall have attained my goal.

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