Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

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2026–2027 SEASON



BEETHOVEN PIANO SONATAS II

Thursday, November 5, 2026, at 7:30 pm and
Friday, November 6, 2026, at 7:30 pm

Daniel and Joanna S. Rose Studio at CMS

The Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center
70 Lincoln Center Plaza, 10th Floor
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The Chamber Music Society is deeply grateful to Board member ***Paul Gridley*** *for his very generous gift of the Hamburg Steinway & Sons model "D" concert grand piano we are privileged to hear this evening.*

The Chamber Music Society wishes to express its deepest gratitude for ***The Daniel and Joanna S. Rose Studio****, which was made possible by a generous gift from the donors for whom the studio is named.*

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CMS Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

BEETHOVEN PIANO SONATAS II

THURSDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 5, 2026, AT 7:30
FRIDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER 6, 2026, AT 7:30
▸ 4,758TH & 4,759TH CONCERTS
Daniel and Joanna S. Rose Studio at CMS

Gilles Vonsattel, piano

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Sonata No. 4 in E-flat major for Piano, Op. 7, "Grand Sonata" (1797)
- Allegro molto e con brio
- Largo, con gran espressione
- Allegro
- Rondo: Poco allegretto e grazioso

Sonata No. 8 in C minor for Piano, Op. 13, "Pathétique" (1798)
- Grave—Allegro di molto e con brio
- Adagio cantabile
- Rondo: Allegro

Sonata No. 11 in B-flat major for Piano, Op. 22 (1800)
- Allegro con brio
- Adagio con molto espressione
- Menuetto—Trio
- Rondo: Allegretto

Lighting for this program was designed by **Joshua Benghiat**.

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Photographing, sound recording, or videotaping this performance is prohibited.

Notes on the Program

BY NICKY SWETT

Ludwig van Beethoven

Sonata No. 4 in E-flat major for Piano, Op. 7, "Grand Sonata"

- Baptized December 17, 1770, in Bonn (likely born December 16)
- Died March 26, 1827, in Vienna

Composed in 1797

- These are the first CMS performances of this piece.
- Duration: 28 minutes

Ludwig van Beethoven lived in Vienna for three and a half decades and rarely spent more than a couple of years at the same address. Scholars don't know where his exact residence was for the stretch between 1796 and 1799, but they do know that it was close to the home of Ana Barbara Keglević, a Croatian aristocrat who went by the name Babette. Beethoven gave her regular piano instruction, and as her nephew recalled, "It was one whim, of which [Beethoven] had many, that, living as he did vis-à-vis, he came to give her lessons in morning gown, slippers, and night cap." Though he never married, Beethoven was a flirt and something of a hopeless romantic, and he had numerous short-lived infatuations. His connection with Countess Babette may have been one of these, and as a token of their relationship, whatever it was, he wrote his Piano Sonata in E-flat major, Op. 7, for her. On the title page, he referred to it as a "Grand Sonata," in part because it contained four movements rather than three, and in part because it was published on its own in an era in which it was far more common to release solo piano works in sets and collections. It is a testament to the success of Beethoven's earlier opuses that his publisher, Artaria, was confident that a single sonata of this sort could sell.

The pounding, repeated bass notes in the opening measures of the Op. 7 Sonata make an appropriately symphonic statement for a work aspiring to sound "grand." A whimsical sequence of ideas follows, including a wonderful, optimistic secondary theme. It begins as a uniform chorale, and then individual voices peel off from the mass, skipping along as the others continue to sing, until the group has fully dispersed into a polyvocal street scene.

In the *Largo*, one of Beethoven's astonishing early slow movements, he writes a melody full of breathy pauses. When things become more continuous in the second part of the phrase, the sense of line and lyricism is much greater than if the whole tune had been played in a single, uninterrupted string. Toward the end of the movement, in a reprise of these pause-filled measures, Beethoven fills in the gaps with a high cry—a strange, desperate voice from nowhere that signals urgency. The middle of the movement is an interlude in A-flat major, in which the piano's left hand has a popping, staccato (short and stopped) bassline and the right hand plays a passionate, legato (smooth) melody. The sorrowful, descending, diminished arpeggio that serves as an exit to this section starts staccato, and then some of it is played again smoothly, as if the two overlapping approaches to articulation from the previous section have been disentangled and are being presented as one long sequence.

The third movement, a rolling *Allegro*, establishes a pastoral mood. The easygoing atmosphere is occasionally disturbed by high-pitched outbursts that bring to mind the bleating of sheep, a sound that might creep into a walk in the countryside. The idyllic scene is disturbed by a sudden squall in the form of the anxious, minor-key trio, which is strictly textural: there is no melody, only

turbulent arpeggiations that subside when hints of the sunny *Allegro* emerge.

The finale is a rondo based on a graceful, friendly, and moderately paced theme. Franz Schubert ended many of his piano sonatas with such slow-tune rondos, and he certainly looked to this piece and to other medium-tempo finales by Beethoven as models. Like Schubert, in the last movement of the Op. 7 Sonata Beethoven doesn't vary the refrain too much. On the third and fourth renditions, he makes a few adjustments, but he trusts that this music has enough internal strength that we will be happy to hear it again and again. The work ends with a short, touching *Abschiedszeit* or "Moment of Farewell," a closing trope that served to conclude acts of many of Mozart's operas. The piano's left hand babbles along with quick arpeggiations, while the right hand plays simple melodic fragments in charming, grace-note octaves, repeating the cadential harmonies until it is finally time to say goodnight.

Ludwig van Beethoven

Sonata No. 8 in C minor for Piano, Op. 13, "Pathétique"

- Baptized December 17, 1770, in Bonn (likely born December 16)
- Died March 26, 1827, in Vienna

Composed in 1798

- First CMS performance on December 10, 1988, by pianist Lee Luvisi
- Duration: 17 minutes

Since the late 19th century, scholars of Ludwig van Beethoven's music have been pondering the special affinity he displayed for the key of C minor, especially early in his career. In his first decade of publishing, he released a piano trio, two piano sonatas, a string trio, a string quartet, a violin sonata, and a piano concerto, all in a key that was not very common in music of the 18th century. He also used C minor for major works later in his career, including his Fifth Symphony (1808), his Choral Fantasy (1808), and his final Piano Sonata, Op. 111 (1822). "The pieces for which he has employed it are, with very few exceptions, remarkable for their beauty and importance," noted the influential musicologist George Grove in his 1898 book on Beethoven.

The Piano Sonata in C minor, Op. 13, which he completed in 1798, is a paradigmatic example of the extroverted and extravagantly passionate approach he took to writing in this key. Indeed, his publisher proposed emphasizing the work's tragic character by appending to it the title *Grande sonate pathétique*, for which Beethoven gave his approval. The introductory *Grave*, with its severe dotted rhythms and dramatic pauses between statements, recalls the slow first movements of Baroque-era church sonatas. When the movement proper begins, it is a burning *Allegro molto e con brio* featuring an abrupt, explosive, ascending arpeggio for a first theme and a twisting, turning, highly ornamental secondary theme, also in a minor key. The stark *Grave* returns twice, once at the start of the development section and once during the coda, giving the music the feeling of an improvisation from an earlier era that has managed to include all the components of a late 18th-century sonata movement.

The sonata features one of Beethoven's most cherished slow movements, a warm *Adagio* in A-flat major based on a theme that brims with simple, aching longing. He develops the tune patiently, with small intervals first, followed by larger intervals in the middle, and then small intervals again at the end. This simple structure, combined with Beethoven's use of just a few chromatic notes and unexpected leaps, renders the music unforgettable. Drawing on models of Joseph Haydn, he varies the theme each time it

returns, endowing it with lilting triplets at the end that give this initially pure melody an air of fluttering, romantic hopefulness and desire.

Beethoven said nothing explicit about his uses of C minor, but he did reveal some of his feelings about the key in a short piano bagatelle he wrote in 1802, in which a section in C major is marked "lustig" or "joyful," while a bustling C-minor passage is "traurig" or "sorrowful." Most of his pieces in C minor contain a push and pull between these two modes, prompting one to wonder if a work will follow a minor-to-major, tragedy-to-triumph trajectory like that which we find in the Fifth Symphony, or whether it will close with the harsh bite of a minor chord. The opening movement of the "Pathétique" Sonata notably abstains from these antics, remaining decisively in a frightful, even brutal C minor. The finale, on the other hand, plays more of these games, feigning a resolution in C major close to the end of the movement before cleverly reverting to a final statement of the urgent, C-minor refrain. A few measures from the end, we hear a warm, sighing rendition of the main theme in the key of the endearing slow movement, but then Beethoven writes a final, indignant descent in minor, slamming the door on another of his stormy C-minor masterpieces.

Ludwig van Beethoven

Sonata No. 11 in B-flat major for Piano, Op. 22

- Baptized December 17, 1770, in Bonn (likely born December 16)
- Died March 26, 1827, in Vienna

Composed in 1800

- These are the first CMS performances of this piece.
- Duration: 24 minutes

Beethoven's exchanges with his various publishers are full of blustering, slightly off-kilter banter. The letters he wrote to Franz Anton Hoffmeister, a composer who ran his own printing press in Leipzig, contain a nigh indecipherable mix of irony, defensiveness, ingratiation, false humility, sincere pride, and quasi-philosophical ramblings. One exchange that began in December of 1800 has Beethoven addressing him as "My Dear Brother in Art" but also reminding him that most publishers "grind us [composers] to death." In the next letter, Beethoven acknowledges that the business side of music is a grim necessity, and says, apparently with notes of flattery directed at Hoffmeister as a composer, that he is happiest "when works of art do turn out profitable, [and] they fall to the share of true artists, rather than to that of mere tradesmen."

The correspondence in question was about a bundle of compositions that Beethoven offered to Hoffmeister for publication, including the Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat major, Op. 19; the Septet for Winds and Strings, Op. 20; the First Symphony, Op. 21; and the Sonata in B-flat major, Op. 22. Strikingly, he quoted the same fee for the septet, symphony, and sonata, only proposing a lower fee for the concerto because it was a revised early work. In his letters, he acknowledges that larger-scale pieces might fetch Hoffmeister a higher price per unit, but he insists that the sonata has every bit as much merit: "This Sonata is quite something, my dear brother."

One the great strengths of Beethoven's early sonata movements is his use of energetic and long transitional passages. In much 18th-century music, such passages served the potentially quotidian function of getting from one key area to another, leading to a highly rhetorical halt or "caesura" that clears the air before a new theme is presented. Beethoven makes transitions an expansive and immersive part of the listening experience, often writing bespoke themes that hover above uncommitted

harmonic backdrops and creating thrilling, complex drives to subsequent sections. In the first movement of the Op. 22 Sonata, he writes a stirring transition full of varied textures and energy levels that carefully bridges between the flighty, playful main theme and the prayerful but subtly swinging secondary theme.

Such transition passages create an interesting quandary in the recapitulation section of a sonata-form movement. Recapitulations ostensibly reiterate the material from the beginning of a movement, but instead of having two themes in two different keys, both themes occur in the same key. The transition passage thus doesn't need to modulate anymore, and so it could almost be jettisoned. Beethoven instead tends to use it as an opportunity to do something surprising and highly expressive. In the sweet, songlike slow movement of the Op. 22 Sonata, the transition from one theme and key to another in the exposition is elegant but unremarkable. The equivalent passage in the recapitulation section, on the other hand, features an extraordinary turn to a minor key and a sequence of surprising, expressive harmonies that nonetheless manage to keep us in the same tonal region.

The supple minuet is full of motifs that Beethoven derives from the dominant figurations and rhythms found in the work's first movement. This kind of subtle thematic integration across movements is something he consciously worked on in his Op. 18 String Quartets, which he composed shortly before this sonata, and which helped him to develop an extremely economical and coherent style of writing that stuck with him for the remainder of his career.

In the sonata's closing *Rondo*, he alternates a lyrical, Mozartian theme with more playful sections that are cued in by a capricious, trilling motif. In a central episode, this figure takes on a demonic quality as a result of a change in key and of Beethoven's use of jarring chords like the so-called "Neapolitan," a chromatic harmony that in this context feels like a precipitous drop off a tonal cliff. Despite such wide-ranging departures, he always makes his way back to the easygoing refrain, which we hear four times over the course of the movement in lightly varied guises.

Program notes © Nicky Swett

About the Artist



MARCO BORGGREVE

Gilles Vonsattel

A "wanderer between worlds" (Lucerne Festival), and an "immensely talented" and "quietly powerful pianist" (*New York Times*), Swiss-born American Gilles Vonsattel is an artist of extraordinary versatility and originality. Recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant, laureate of the Honens, Cleveland, and Dublin competitions, and winner of the Naumburg and Geneva competitions as well as the 2016 Andrew Wolf Chamber Music Award, he has appeared with the Boston Symphony, Tanglewood, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic, Gothenburg Symphony, San Francisco Symphony, and Detroit Symphony Orchestra, while performing recitals and chamber music at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Ravinia, Tokyo's Musashino Hall, Wigmore Hall, Bravo! Vail, Music@ Menlo, the Gilmore festival, the Lucerne festival, and the Munich Gasteig.

As a soloist he has also appeared with the Warsaw Philharmonic, Calgary Philharmonic, Edmonton Symphony, l'Orchestre Symphonique du Québec, Boston Pops, Nashville Symphony, Musikkollegium Winterthur, Staatskapelle Halle, and L'orchestre de chambre de Genève. Chamber partners include musicians such as James Ehnes, Frank Huang, Ilya Gringolts, Nicolas Altstaedt, David Shifrin, David Finckel, Stefan Jackiw, Jörg Widmann, Gary Hoffman, Carter Brey, David Requiro, Paul Huang, Anthony Marwood, Paul Neubauer, Paul Watkins, Philip Setzer, Emmanuel Pahud, Karen Gomyo, David Jolley, Stella Chen, and Ida Kavafian. He has appeared in concert with the Emerson, Pacifica, Orion, St. Lawrence, Ebène, Danish, Miró, Daedalus, Escher, and Borromeo Quartets. Deeply committed to the performance of contemporary works, he has premiered numerous works both in the United States and Europe and worked closely with notable composers such as Jörg Widmann, Heinz Holliger, and George Benjamin. His recording for the Honens/ Naxos label of music by Debussy, Honegger, Holliger, and Ravel was named one of *Time Out New York*'s 2011 classical albums of the year, while a 2014 release on GENUIN/Artist Consort received a 5/5 from *FonoForum* and international critical praise. His solo release (2015) for Honens of Scarlatti, Webern, Messiaen, Debussy, and George Benjamin's Shadowlines received rave reviews in *Gramophone*, the *New York Times*, and the *American Record Guide*.

Recent highlights include a performance of Carlos Chávez's Piano Concerto in Carnegie Hall's Stern Auditorium with The Orchestra Now, a debut at Mainly Mozart in San Diego, and a critically acclaimed recording of music by Richard Strauss and Kurt Leimer with the Bern Symphony Orchestra and Mario Venzago for the Schweizer Fonogramm label. In 2025, Vonsattel began a three-year complete Beethoven Piano Sonatas cycle for Camerata Pacifica. He will perform the entire cycle over the 2026–2027 season for both Music@Menlo and CMS.

Mr. Vonsattel received his bachelor's degree in political science and economics from Columbia University and his master's degree from the Juilliard School, where he studied with Jerome Lowenthal. He is Professor of Piano at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Gilles Vonsattel is a Steinway Artist.

About the Chamber Music Society

Founded in 1969, the **Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center (CMS)** brings the joy of chamber music to more people than any other organization in the world. Under the artistic leadership of cellist David Finckel and pianist Wu Han, the multi-generational and international performing artist roster of more than 140 acclaimed musicians enables CMS to present chamber music of every instrumentation, style, and historical period.

CMS reaches a global audience with more than 150 performances each season—at its Lincoln Center home (both in Alice Tully Hall and the Daniel and Joanna S. Rose Studio), in free community concerts throughout New York City, and on tour around the world. CMS also offers a wide range of master classes, lectures, and educational programs to engage and inform listeners of all ages, backgrounds, and levels of musical knowledge. Through the Bowers Program, a competitive three-season residency, CMS develops the next generation of classical music leaders, offering exceptional young professional musicians the opportunity to participate in every facet of the organization's activities.

CMS's robust digital presence, which reaches millions of viewers and listeners annually, includes a weekly national radio program, heard locally on WQXR; a partnership with Apple Music Classical; and appearances on SiriusXM's Symphony Hall channel and *In Concert with CMS* on PBS ALL ARTS. Additionally, CMS hosts an online archive of more than 2,000 video recordings of performance and education videos free to the public, as well as extensive digital learning resources.

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CMS Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center

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