

TERESA NEFF: May I introduce Susanna Ogata who is the assistant concert master for the Handel and Haydn society. She will be playing the violin. And Ian Watson-- we say fortepianist, but that doesn't really cover all the bases. Right? Organ, harpsichord, piano, fortepiano.

If it's a keyboard, Ian can play it, I think is what we're going to say here.

IAN WATSON: [INAUDIBLE] red spots on middle C.

[LAUGHING]

TERESA NEFF: They will perform, as you can see on your program, two of the Beethoven Sonatas for fortepiano and violin. The first will be in A Minor. We will have a chance after that for a little question and answer. Then Ian will do the first movement of the A flat piano sonata to just show us what this instrument can actually do. And then another break for some question and answers.

And we'll finish up with the Kreutzer Sonata. So, join me in welcoming Ian and Susanna.

[APPLAUSE]

[TUNING]

TERESA NEFF: No repeats.

PAGE TURNER: Got it.

IAN WATSON: Are you sure?

[MUSIC - BEETHOVEN]

[APPLAUSE]

IAN WATSON: Thank you. So for those of you who were expecting something else, that must have been a bit of a shock.

[LAUGHTER]

This does not sound like that at all. And it's a great pleasure to be here, to play this music, using these instruments. These are the instruments which Beethoven definitely would have recognized or he would certainly recognize them if he walked in now and heard them.

This instrument is like a snapshot of the instrument that was around in 1803 or so. And pianos change very, very quickly, like in the way your iPad, iPod, everything changes and is out of date in six months. So pianos were very, very similar at the time. A terrific development-- a very fast development-- took place. We use these original instruments not as some sort of academic exercise or to polish up relics in a museum, but to try to get back to or try to recreate the sort of white hot moments of creation which Beethoven experienced or created himself.

And we find it much easier to do that using the right instruments. If you look at Beethoven's music, it's riddled with sforzandi, for example, a sort of forced tone, which doesn't seem to make a lot of sense on an instrument like this, which most piano teachers discourage you from making it what they think of as an ugly sound on a modern piano, because this piano is designed to be even from the bottom to the top.

And it's the evenness and the creaminess of it in Mozart and other composers which is deemed to be one of the major features of it. This piano does completely the opposite. It's actually totally uneven from the bottom to the top. And I think it imparts a feeling, a much more direct and sort of red blooded element and a rather sort of sharp edged element to a lot of classical music, which is lacking in later pianos.

So it's a lot of fun to play and it's what Beethoven had in mind. And so I just wanted

to just show you a couple things on this piano which are of interest. And the base, for example, the whole thing is made of wood, so there's no metal in it at all. The touch is very, very light, which takes a bit of getting used to as you've probably heard. But it is very light and very, very simple action if you look at it. I'm sure some of you want to look at it afterwards.

It's very, very simple and looking very delicate but actually it's very robust. I'm not a small person, I can really put some weight into it, as did Beethoven, too. Although he was more successful in breaking things than me. So the bottom of the piano, for example.

[PLAYING LOW NOTES]

There's a sort of buzz. You know, this tremolando thing. Steibelt, who was a pianist at the time, he was supposed to have made his audiences shutter--

[TREMOLANDO]

--with his tremolando. Well, you can't do that on the modern piano, it doesn't sound the same.

[TREMOLANDO]

Sort of buzz to it. And the middle has a kind of a sturdiness. And the top--

[HIGH NOTES]

It's sort of a delicate bell-like quality. So these various elements from the top to the bottom. And also, for those of you who can't see, but there are no pedals on this piano. Except there are. They are under here. And there's the usual, as it were, sustaining pedal. Same as the modern piano. But there's another lever here which is called the moderator, which basically brings felt up onto the strings and dampens them and creates this really--

[QUIETER NOTES]

I hope to demonstrate a few moderator movements later on. But that's the sort of sound there. So there's a huge variety of color within the large dynamic range. So I'm going to play the first movement of the A flat Major Sonata. The "Funeral March Sonata," so called, just to demonstrate a lot of these elements to you. And you can hear how it brings some really interesting dimensions to the music.

[MUSIC - BEETHOVEN, "PIANO SONATA NO. 12 IN A FLAT MAJOR, OPUS 26"]

[APPLAUSE]

IAN WATSON: So I think it's a pretty good demonstration of what the range of sound one can get out of this piano. So, yes, Teresa?

TERESA NEFF: Well, I think maybe we can take a few minutes and chat.

IAN WATSON: Sure.

TERESA NEFF: The choice of the A Flat is perfect to show what this instrument can do in terms of voicing and bringing out different lines. And that makes me think about the violin sonatas or the sonatas for fortepiano and violin, which we should probably talk about that title. Why do we take it that way rather than violin sonata?

SUSANNA OGATA: Well, that's how Beethoven wrote them. I think with him as a pianist, you know, I think that was his primary-- maybe you can answer that question better, Ian.

IAN WATSON: I think it's probably got something to do, as far as that goes, that's is how he titled it. There are many other examples of that, of course, where it's keyboard and solo instrument. We always think of the accompanist as being

TERESA NEFF: [INAUDIBLE]

IAN WATSON: Well, you said it. Subsidiary in some way. It's just kind of the way that it's grown up. But I think there was certainly a time when the keyboard part was the most

important. But as far as Beethoven goes, I think he titled titled, certainly titled his first set of Cello Sonatas for fortepiano and cello I believe, he was trying to establish himself as a virtuoso pianist.

And the Piano Trio No. 1, which is his first published piece, has a very, very virtuosic piano part for him to say look, I'm a genius. Here I am, sort of thing.

TERESA NEFF: Yeah, right. And I can play it, too.

IAN WATSON: Yeah, right. So I think he had every right to put it that way around. So there's also kind of a conventional thing attached to that. But he felt too that really from the A Major Cello Sonata onwards that the parts were equal. So I'm not sure at what point the titles were switched, as it were. But I think it was pretty commonplace.

TERESA NEFF: Well, that leads to the violin. I mean, I don't think it's fair to say that in the A Minor or in Kreutzer that the violin is taking a backseat to the piano.

AUDIENCE: No. And especially in the Kreutzer it's really Concerto writing almost for both instruments really. Yeah.

TERESA NEFF: And what does that do in terms of your interactions as performers? Does that change anything for you as performers that the parts are now on a much more equal kind of prominence?

IAN WATSON: That's a good question. From my point of view, I do a lot of harpsichord continuo playing, which was called accompaniment by many. But I do a lot of that. And that's a particular function of supporting and harmonic and rhythmic support in a way. And it wasn't written down, of course. It just had figures which you follow.

This kind of notated writing requires something else.

It requires a lot more cooperation, in a way. I mean, if I'm playing the harpsichord in a Vivaldi sonata, let's say. The solo part is the one with the virtuosic elements to it. My part is very much to be the drab male. I am the drab male in this duo anyway. But that's another story. But with this music I think there is much more collaboration and cooperation that needs to happen and more rehearsal.

[LAUGHTER]

I mean, we've played these a few times now. Only, I had never really played them before, not much anyway. And so we just sort of feel now that we just sort of are getting into scratching the surface of it really in a way. There's so much to learn. But performing them is a learning process. So there's that element to it.

SUSANNA

Sorry, just to add to the question about playing as a team in these pieces. One thing

OGATA:

I find interesting is playing them on these instruments is a different experience even as far as collaboration in a way of the sound that comes out. And with the style back then, for instance, string players didn't use quite as much vibrato when they were playing these pieces.

And so I choose my vibrato-- I really think about where am I going to vibrate. It's not all over the place, certainly. And I find that that changes the whole sound together. I feel I'm a voice of the piano.

IAN WATSON:

There's also a resemblance of the sounds. I mean, they're not similar in a way, but there's a blending element to them.

TERESA NEFF:

They compliment each other.

IAN WATSON:

The compliment very well. Yeah.

SUSANNA

And I find that completely different from playing on a modern violin and a modern

OGATA:

piano. The sound coming out.

TERESA NEFF:

Can you say something about your instrument?

SUSANNA

Yes. Absolutely.

OGATA:

TERESA NEFF:

And then we'll move on to the Kreutzer.

SUSANNA

So at the time these pieces were written, which was the early 1800s, there was a lot

OGATA:

going on. People were tinkering around with the set up of a string instrument. But

the thing is, not everybody had access to what the newest and latest developments were. What we know for sure is that the lower three strings were gut strings. They had started to wind the G string with steel, but that still had a gut core.

And playing on the strings themselves, just the difference of a steel string to a gut string is completely different. You have to work a little harder on a gut string. They squawk. They can squeak. And if you're not treating them with care, they do that much easier. But I find that, when you get accustomed to using them, that they're so much warmer in a way than the steel string, which might, along with the set up of a modern violin, which the way it's set up is to produce more tension with the string, so you might get more power with a steel string and a modern set up of a violin. But, again, the warmth and color that can come from a gut string set up.

Now, my violin is set up for a little less tension. I'm using a baroque classical bridge. And, again, there isn't a lot written, I have not found a lot of a definitive answer on what people were using, and that's because I really think that not everybody had, like I said, the access to the latest and greatest improvements of bridge, neck. Actually, it's interesting.

Also, the bow, I'm not using the modern bow. I'm using what's known as a classical bow, which is not quite as long as a modern bow. With an earlier bow, a baroque bow, you have a little more of an angle outward. And, again, that produces a completely different articulation. With the baroque bow you don't have maybe the sustaining power. This is something in between the modern bow and the baroque bow.

Where it's not as long as the modern bow, you get a little more sustain. But, again, maybe not the power of the modern bow. But it's funny because even Paganini who lived later in the 1800s, there's a picture of him playing on a transitional bow, not a modern bow. But the modern bow, by this point-- by early 1800s-- was out there, but not everybody-- maybe the greatest virtuoso-- I don't know who was playing them, they were out there, but not everybody.

And so it's interesting for me. I've been thinking about where do I come from. Do I

play on a modern bow? What do I play on? And I kind of like the feeling with this music, as Ian was talking about, the white hot intensity of the music at that moment. These people were coming from a tradition of baroque playing and this music is busting out in every possible way. It's asking the instruments to do the max and beyond of what they're capable of doing.

And to be a performer and play the music with these instruments where you're feeling like you're pushing the limits, for me, is so exciting. It's so exciting.

IAN WATSON: One thing about the bow, excuse the expletives on this, but obviously a lot people at MIT I'm sure can work out the physics of all this, but really the bow, as I understand it, the bow is even more important. People get kind of obsessed with the gut strings in period instruments. Actually the bow is probably at least as important as any of that because the baroque bow is shaped in a convex way, which means that the hairs of the bow are rather rigid, which means that it transmits much more accurately every movement of your hand onto the string.

Whereas the modern bow is shaped the other way, which means that hairs of the bow are more flexible. And you can actually play more long and smooth with a bow like that. So there's a huge difference between the two. And also what Susanna said about the power that one can get with this bow. But it's the articulation and the clarity. Because from a musical point of view, if you can't hear everything which is in a musical score, then it's self evidently wrong.

And I think we stand more chance of actually producing detail with these instruments than big sound producing, smooth, up and down instruments. That's how we feel about it. We hope you agree.

TERESA NEFF: With that in mind let's turn to the Kreutzer. And then we will open it up to questions and take it from there.

SUSANNA OK.

OGATA:

IAN WATSON: Yeah.

SUSANNA Oh, yes.

OGATA:

IAN WATSON: There are some disadvantages about playing these instruments, though. And that is they go out of tune very quickly.

[DISSONANT NOTE]

As you can hear. It's just one of those things. That's one of the reasons why instruments developed. But we think that it's worth it. You're going to have to get over that one. Sorry about that.

[TUNING]

[MUSIC - BEETHOVEN, "SONATA NO. 9 IN A MAJOR, OPUS 47 'KREUTZER'"]

[APPLAUSE]

TERESA NEFF: Wow. That was fantastic. Are you willing to take a few questions?

SUSANNA Absolutely.

OGATA:

IAN WATSON: Sure.

TERESA NEFF: Cool. Does anyone have any questions?

AUDIENCE: Yeah. What room in Boston do you like playing in? What's the best environment acoustically?

SUSANNA Which room do we like to play in?

OGATA:

AUDIENCE: Or anywhere.

SUSANNA The thing with Boston is there are so many nice places. You take that.

OGATA:

IAN WATSON: Can't answer that.

TERESA NEFF: Do you worry about size when you're dealing with these instruments and Beethoven?

IAN WATSON: Difficult questions. I don't know how to answer this. My brain is still halfway through the last movement. Let's see. Well, I would say that somewhere not too big. We just did a few concerts. We played in really small places. I mean, like, half the size of this.

And I think really this music is designed to be played in people's homes, where I think it would have a huge impact on people. It's like letting off a bomb in an enclosed space. It's really sort of a huge, huge impact. So I'd say the bigger the space, the less impact there would be. Difficult to say other than that. Yeah. Sorry about that. It's sort of a lame answer, but there we are.

AUDIENCE: The frame in the instrument is wood rather than metal?

IAN WATSON: Yeah. Yeah, it is. And I think for that reason that they are susceptible. That coupled with the lightness of the action. And the strings are thinner, of course. And the whole thing is much more susceptible. It's like a harpsichord. They go out of tune. They're very susceptible to humidity especially as much as temperature.

SUSANNA Ideally before we would play the Kreutzer we would have a re-tune. Because they
OGATA: would go.

IAN WATSON: Yeah. This music really beats up the instruments. I mean, it is music like that which caused developments to happen in the instruments. People like Beethoven and Liszt, of course. I think Liszt had two guys standing on either side of the piano pulling out the broken strings. It's people like that who create progress-- so called progress anyway. I think this is really wonderful to hear this music played on an

instrument like this.

Gives a whole different perspective. Yeah. Go ahead.

SUSANNA We're working on a project to record these pieces for fortepiano and violin.

OGATA:

IAN WATSON: What's it called? Beethoven-project.com.

SUSANNA Beethoven-project.com if you're interested in joining us on our way.

OGATA:

IAN WATSON: Yes. Especially if you'd like to give us money.

AUDIENCE: Will that been be available to us to hear?

SUSANNA Yes.

OGATA:

IAN WATSON: Oh, for sure. Yeah, it's going to be a commercial recording.

SUSANNA The first one we're going to record in June. Actually these two pieces that we played

OGATA: today.

IAN WATSON: Yes. Trying to get them up to scratch.

AUDIENCE: By who were these instruments crafted? Where and when?

IAN WATSON: This particular one?

AUDIENCE: Mm-hm.

IAN WATSON: This was made by a guy named Paul McNulty who seems to have cornered the market on making this particular type of instrument. I believe this is modeled on a Walter. Copy. It's a copy of a Walter instrument from 1803. And Walter was a prolific maker. And I think he had some sons, as well. So Paul McNulty made this one and there are other makers.

But I think he's sort of cornered the market on it. He makes us a fine instrument. Some are a bit clunky. People make copies. It's very difficult to copy an instrument and to make it sound like an instrument. There was a time when people made harpsichords and they weren't that good. And they say, well, of course, we just copied exactly what they did. It must have sounded like that.

Similarly with the fortepianos, they just made a copy and they sounded a bit clunky and dull. And they say, well, that must have been how they did it, but actually instruments like this prove that they had a huge sort of resonance and color. A good instrument.

TERESA NEFF: And that one's from about 15 years ago?

IAN WATSON: Yeah. I'm not sure.

TERESA NEFF: I think it's from about 200?

IAN WATSON: Yeah. It could well be. Yeah.

AUDIENCE: What's the tuning on that piano?

IAN WATSON: The tuning? I'm not sure which-- there's a temperament on it. That's what you mean, right? The tuner who's not here, unfortunately, knows which temperament he tune it to. It's not equal temperament because we don't do equal temperament. That's another feature of the modern piano, of course, is they tend to be tuned generally in equal temperament because the idea is that you can play reasonably well in most keys.

But historical tunings are definitely the way to go. And I'm not sure what temperament this has been tuned in, but it certainly is in one. Its difficult to tell by ear.

AUDIENCE: Does that mean it's tuned for a key?

IAN WATSON: It does mean that it's tuned for a key. Yeah.

AUDIENCE: So this is tuned for A?

IAN WATSON: It's tuned for--?

AUDIENCE: For A.

IAN WATSON: Well, you can tune them for a mixture of different keys. It depends on which note you start on, I think is partly the thing. I mean, historic tunings and temperaments-- I'm sure you know something about it-- but it's a very complicated subject. Basically if you tune pure fifths and pure fourths, you don't get an octave. That's basically what it is. And there's a bit left over.

Well, that bit left over, they tend to distribute throughout the keyboard. You can either load it up on one key and make all the others sound sweet, or you can distribute it throughout the whole length of the keyboard, which gives you equal temperament. It's that sort of thing. So I'm not sure how they divide it up, the little bit extra bits on this one. But it sounds quite sweet except for that

[DISSONANT NOTE]

one.

[LAUGHTER]

**SUSANNA
OGATA:** And they're also tuned slightly lower than you would be at modern pitch, which would be at A440. This is A430. Again, it all effects the color and the sound.

I don't know if you were curious about my instrument as well. I'm playing on a Klotz, which there were a family of Klotz makers in Mittenwald in Germany. And this is Josef Klotz and is a 1792. Who knows, maybe it passed through the Beethoven family.

TERESA NEFF: And what's been done to your instrument? Was it ever made into a more modern instrument and then taken--

SUSANNA That I don't know, but this has definitely been taken back. It's got a historical neck.

OGATA: Again, so it's a lower tension. It's got a baroque bridge on it currently.

TERESA NEFF: And your finger board is shorter?

SUSANNA Slightly shorter. Slightly shorter. Yeah. But the whole thing is slightly-- On a modern
OGATA: violin this would be a little longer neck and angled back slightly more.

TERESA NEFF: Did that effect how you're playing high? Because at certain points in the Kreutzer you're in the stratosphere.

SUSANNA Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, the whole feel is just completely different than on my
OGATA: modern instrument. And so it just takes lots of work to get used to. The whole feeling of it, the weight of the bow on the string and not crashing or squawking, it's a completely different feel. And it's exciting because you don't get a chance to play with this instrument-- the fortepiano-- and experiment with this kind of thing.

To play what those composers heard back then. It's just so great to be able to do it. It's eye opening.

AUDIENCE: This meant to be an easy question but maybe it's even banal. I wonder how you feel as you're playing. And right after, you're simply exhilarated. But maybe a little exhausted.

SUSANNA For me I'm mostly exhilarated after I play. I feel like it's hard to wind down a little bit.
OGATA:

IAN WATSON: It depends. I wish I'd played better.

[LAUGHTER]

TERESA NEFF: I think we have time for one more question.

IAN WATSON: Yeah?

AUDIENCE: I'm thinking about how the audience interacts with the musicians and the music now versus how it was back then. I heard, for example, that in big performances it used to be that the audience would applaud during the concert.

IAN WATSON: Interesting one. That's a good one.

AUDIENCE: [INAUDIBLE]

IAN WATSON: That's a really easy question. Actually I wasn't there, so I don't know how they reacted.

[LAUGHTER]

But I think there is a lot of examples of what they did do. And I can give you a really good example, actually, of the changes which have been made. That is, for example, in Handel's time, people used to be playing cards and eating their dinner and shouting. I think they even told the musicians to keep the noise down while the opera was going on because they couldn't hear--

TERESA NEFF: Well, you could close the curtains of your box.

IAN WATSON: Right. Right, right, right. All that. I don't see the point of paying a lot of money to go to the opera and then closing the curtains on your box so you don't have to look at it. So that's one thing. But I remember being at an opera, whatever it was, "Marriage of Figaro," or whatever it was. It was a comic opera. I remember laughing out loud because it was funny and someone going "shh!"

It's supposed to be funny. And so I think there's an odd-- I get the feeling-- I don't know-- but maybe I get the feeling that things are changing a bit. I have no problem at all about people applauding between movements. I think that in Mozart's time there's much more-- if he did a great lick on the piano I think people might have applauded like in a jazz club. They applaud the boring bass solo. I don't know.

But I think that's how it was.

SUSANNA There are a lot of formalities now and it's just kind of sad.

OGATA:

IAN WATSON: It's just silly really.

SUSANNA I mean, when you think that the Kreutzer sonata was finished about three hours
OGATA: before the concert and they were sight reading in the concert. That piece. And the violinist was looking over--

IAN WATSON: The violinist had never seen the piece before.

SUSANNA And he was off the manuscript over the shoulder of Beethoven.
OGATA:

IAN WATSON: Can you imagine what that sounded like?

TERESA NEFF: Beethoven writes in a very messy hand.

SUSANNA Yes.
OGATA:

TERESA NEFF: I can't imagine.

IAN WATSON: So I think another point, when we tend to think of-- and they are great works of art-- but Mozart, for example, he wrote commissions. He never had a job hardly. He got booted out of it very quickly. He just wrote on commission. And he wrote letters to his father saying that he'd found a D Major symphony in the bottom of a chest somewhere.

He said, it's actually quite good. I don't remember writing it at all. This is the Symphony No. 35, the "Haffner," which is one of the more well known ones. He didn't even remember writing it. And yet you see books this thick written about the Haffner symphony. Mozart himself couldn't remember writing it. And so I think that you he was just sort of knocking out a piece of work at the time and forgot about it and went on to the next one.

It's an interesting way of being.

TERESA NEFF: Well, I hate to say this but we are at the end of our class. And would you join me in thanking Susanna and Ian?

[APPLAUSE]

And I'm sure if you guys want to check out the piano.