

Leonidas Kavakos: Beethoven
First Album for Sony Classical Celebrates Beethoven's 250th Birthday



Release Date: October 18, 2019

Beethoven's Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 61 with Kavakos as both Soloist & Conductor

Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra

Septet Op. 20

National Airs with Variations, Op. 105 and Op. 107

[Stream the Album \(not for publication, press only\)](#)

Leonidas Kavakos is a rare example of a “complete” musician among the violinists of the present day. One of the most sought-after soloists today, he regularly performs with leading international orchestras under the most high-profile conductors. He is also a convincing advocate of the repertory for violin and piano and is a passionate chamber musician. More recently, he has additionally taken up conducting. All of these aspects of Leonidas Kavakos's artistic activities are reflected in this [double-CD featuring works by Ludwig van Beethoven](#). This is also the first recording by Kavakos, who was born in Greece in 1967, to be released under the terms of his new exclusive contract with Sony Classical.

The works on this album, which were chosen to celebrate the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth, are taken from each of the composer's three creative periods. In addition to the Violin Concerto and the popular early Septet, listeners have an opportunity to discover a miniature rarity. The *National Airs with Variations* date from 1817–18 and were written for piano and flute or violin ad libitum. These were occasional pieces intended for the commercial music market.

Central to this album is the **Violin Concerto**. Although Leonidas Kavakos has been performing it for many years under some of the world's most eminent conductors, frequently conducting it from the violin, a recording of this cornerstone of the repertory and touchstone for all violinists has so far been missing from his extensive discography. Between 1985, when he was still in his late teens, and 1988 he won three important international competitions, initially making his breakthrough when he won the 1985 Sibelius Competition and following up this success by winning the 1988 Paganini Competition and the 1988

Naumburg Competition. As a recording artist Kavakos has championed not only virtuoso violin music but also all manner of rarities. The major violin concertos from Mozart to Dutilleux are currently central to his interests.

Known for his lean tone and for his emphatically clear but never over-pointed phrasing, Kavakos has a very decisive view of the Beethoven Concerto: “The emotions in Beethoven’s music are extremely rich and personal. They reveal a big heart that is filled with the courage to challenge the world. We encounter a man capable of being not only polite but also very coarse. His world is typified by inner conflicts and powerful confrontations. In my own view it is impossible to approach Beethoven by means of stylized emotions – ‘pure’, controlled and, as it were, disembodied intonation is not enough. Beethoven leaves the eighteenth-century perspective far behind him and looks resolutely ahead.”

As a result, Kavakos does not take his cue primarily from historically informed performance practices, even if there are many ways in which he finds such ideas stimulating. Instead, he is seeking his own way forward between a traditional “Romantic” reading of the work and one that is historically informed. It is only logical, therefore, that in the present interpretation he combines his violinistic aims with his passion for conducting and takes complete charge of the performance and of the way in which it is shaped. The present recording, in which he not only plays the violin but also conducts the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, stems from his residency with the orchestra, during which time he gave a series of performances in Munich’s Gasteig Concert Hall. The concertmaster throughout this series of concerts was Anton Barakhowsky.

The Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra is not just one of the world’s elite orchestras, its players are also remarkable for their particularly sensitive performance style and for the sort of watchful alertness normally associated with chamber music. Kavakos, who has known his colleagues for many years, decided to use a relatively large body of strings for his recording, offering a broad range of possibilities in terms of both dynamics and tone colours. In addition to powerful *forte* outbursts, this choice also makes it easier to create a smooth patina and to produce subtly graduated shades of *piano*.

Kavakos’s spectacular cadenzas are based on the ones that Beethoven himself is believed to have written down in 1809 in his own copy of the piano version of the concerto that he prepared in 1807.

Kavakos’s residency with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra in 2018-19 included not only several appearances as a soloist but also a number of chamber recitals with select members of the orchestra. He has been a passionate chamber musician since his youth and has explored the whole of the chamber repertory in myriad formations with prominent partners at numerous festivals. “I’ve always loved the **Septet**. This is music that is full of humour and that conveys a feeling of joy rather than one of drama. It was incredible fun to rehearse this work with my wonderful colleagues from the orchestra.”

In choosing a selection of movements from the late ***National Airs with Variations***, finally, Kavakos slips into the role of the modest accompanist working alongside his piano partner of many years, the Italian pianist Enrico Pace, who, like Kavakos himself, was born in 1967. Both men have made many recordings together, including all of Beethoven’s violin sonatas, which they will be performing together as part of a tour marking the 250th anniversary of the composer’s birth. By adopting four different roles in the present release – conductor, soloist, first among equals and accompanist – Leonidas Kavakos illustrates Beethoven’s astonishing universality.