It all started with Beethoven. At a rehearsal for the final of the 2007 Tivoli International Piano Competition I met pianist Yaron Kohlberg for the first time. We quickly got talking and he asked me to make “funny faces” at him during the performance of Beethoven’s Emperor Concerto (from my principal cello chair in the Tivoli Copenhagen Phil), in order to “keep him off competition stress”, as he put it. And that’s what I did. He played with tremendous energy, while at the same time managing to return a silly grin or similar. We decided to play through some repertoire during the next few days and quickly formed a friendship as well as a musical partnership, both of which seemed to constantly develop, especially around our great mutual inspiration, L. v. Beethoven.

Beethoven’s works for piano and cello are among the most loved and performed works in the cello literature. The titles of the first editions, however, designate the cello as an “accompaniment” to the piano, and Atarias edition of the two sonatas Op. 5 specifies “Violoncelle obligé,” meaning that according to the publisher the work can be played with or without a cello!

At this point in history, the cello was far less popular than the piano, and the titles were undoubtedly chosen to increase sales. In addition, it seems there were fewer prominent cellists in Beethoven’s time than today – not many cellists were able to play the instrument such as the Duport brothers, Ferdinand Ries or Joseph Linke, whom the sonatas were written for.

Personally, though, I have no problem accepting the piano as the more important partner in these works. In our day, self-promotion seems to be all the rage. When tired of featuring yourself on social media it can be absolutely wonderful to sink down into the world of Beethoven’s music, such as the works for piano and cello, where being number two is a virtue, although this particular role involves plenty of detours into the spotlight so to speak.

Beethoven’s music has been absolutely crucial to me as a musician. I have been listening to it, reading and thinking about it, practicing and performing within this complex musical universe for over 20 years, but I am still sure of only one thing: Beethoven is timeless. Ever surprising and refreshing, infinitely durable. One of the signature movements on this CD is the scherzo from the third sonata in A major. Three repetitions of the same thematic substance in A minor and A major, a brief coda and … game over. A perfect discourse that by means of two colors gives us an example of the eternal repetition of human existence: contrasting diversity and joy then a brief farewell. In Yaron Kohlberg’s words – perhaps a more upbeat description – you could also call it *hard rock*!

*Toke Møldrup, December 2019*