About the *Four Etudes for Ursula*, Tobias Picker writes: "In order to understand something of my attitude toward the *Four Etudes for Ursula*, I would like the listener to know that I have been composing piano music for Miss Oppens for twenty-two years. It is just as thrilling [for me] today to be asked by Ursula Oppens for a piece as it was when I was a very young composer. The first three etudes were composed in the fall of 1995 and the fourth in the fall of 1996. Of all the pieces I have given her, these four etudes seem to stand apart in both our minds. [After her first reading of them, Ursula said:] 'With these etudes you've made a double portrait of our long, crazy, wild, funny, serious, musical friendship.' [Those] adjectives may apply to these little studies, but it is a thing beyond the call of friendship which drives Ursula Oppens's intrepid muse into the outer reaches of technical difficulty and my musical imagination."

Beethoven's *Sonata No. 27 in E Minor, Opus 90* is imbued with romantic notions: intimateness, elusiveness, poignancy, gentleness, and even happiness. The colliding harmonic structure within the first movement perplexed many of Beethoven's intellectual friends. In trying to explain the work to his patron, Count Lichnowsky, Beethoven is purported to have said, "This movement is a dispute between the head and the heart." In contrast to the compactness of the first movement, the second is more rambling and episodic, but its sections are closely allied to one another and never depart from the prevailing song-like character.

Beethoven's *Sonata No. 28 in A Major, Opus 101*, the first of the great five last sonatas, was published in 1816. It may best be described as a *Sonata-fantasia*, particularly in the light of the instructions Beethoven provides in the score, which call upon the pianist to exercise considerable imagination—"with deeply felt emotion," "like a lively march," "yearning," and "with determination." Beethoven goes beyond the restrictions of sonata form to produce a highly contrapuntal work that never surrenders its lyric elements. He enters into a new world of expression, encompassing both the majesty of the symphonic ideal and the intimacy of chamber music.

-Program notes by Elmer Booze

Concerts at The National Gallery of Art Under the Direction of George Manos

February 1998 1 National Gallery Orchestra Mozart: Symphony No. 41 George Manos, conductor Mahler: Adagietto from Symphony No. 5 Suite: "Much Ado Korngold: About Nothing" 8 Hugh Sung, pianist Clementi: Sonata in B-flat Major Gaspard de la nuit Ravel: Mussorgsky: Pictures at an Exhibition 15 Kolja Blacher, violinist Sonata in A Minor Schumann: Jessica Krash, pianist Prokofiev: Sonata No. 1 Brahms: Sonata in A Major Ravel: Oiseaux tristes from Miroirs Tzigane 22 Talich String Quartet Quartet, Opus 131 Beethoven: Quartet in D Major Mozart: Janáček: String Quartet #1 March

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed.

Delius:

Dvorák:

Schumann:

On Hearing the

Symphony No. 1

Spring

First Cuckoo in

Scherzo capriccioso

1 National Gallery Orchestra

George Manos, conductor

For the convenience of concertgoers the Garden Café remains open until 6:30 pm.

The Fifty-sixth Season of

THE WILLIAM NELSON CROMWELL and F. LAMMOT BELIN CONCERTS

National Gallery of Art



2256th Concert

URSULA OPPENS, pianist

Sunday Evening, January 25, 1998 at Seven O'Clock West Building, West Garden Court

Admission Free

PROGRAM

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Sonata No. 17 in D Minor Opus 31, No. 2 ("Tempest") (1802)

Largo - Allegro Adagio Allegretto

Tobias Picker (b. 1954)

Four Etudes for Ursula (1996)

Washington Première Performance

INTERMISSION

Beethoven

Sonata No. 27 in E Minor Opus 90 (1814)

I. Mit Lebhaftigkeit und durchaus mit Empfindung und Ausdruck II. Nicht zu geschwind und sehr singbar vorzutragen

Beethoven

Sonata No. 28 in A Major Opus 101 (1816)

Allegro ma non troppo Vivace alla marcia Adagio, ma non troppo, con affetto Allegro

New York City native URSULA OPPENS first studied piano with her mother, Edith Oppens, and went on to study with Leonard Shure and Guido Agosti. A distinguished alumna of Radcliffe College (where she earned the bachelor's degree in English literature and economics) Miss Oppens went on to become the first woman Chief Marshall at Harvard's 1990 commencement exercises. She completed her master's degree at the Juilliard School of Music, where she studied with Felix Galimir and Rosina Lhévinne. Under the auspices of The Young Concert Artists Guild, she made her New York debut in 1969 at Carnegie Recital Hall. Among her many awards are the first prize at the 1969 Busoni International Piano Competition; the 1970 Diploma d'Honore of the Accademia Chigiana; and an Avery Fisher Career Grant in 1976. She received the 1979 Record World Award for her recording of Rzewski's *The* People United Will Never Be Defeated, which was released in 1993 by Vanguard Classics and subsequently received a Grammy nomination.

Miss Oppens has appeared as soloist with some of the nation's leading orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the symphonies of Baltimore and Seattle, to name only a few. She has presented recitals in New York's Town Hall, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Orchestra Hall in Chicago, and the Kennedy Center, and played at the National Gallery in 1974 and 1991. On the latter occasion, she substituted on short notice, with great success, for pianist John Browning. Miss Oppens has also been heard in recital and concerto performances in many of Europe's major music centers, including the BBC Broadcasting House and Queen Elizabeth Hall in London, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, and in Stockholm, Brussels, Geneva, Bonn, Vienna, and Barcelona. She has won equal acclaim as an interpreter of the standard repertoire and as a champion of contemporary music. Her performances are marked by a powerful grasp of the composer's musical intentions and an equally powerful command of the keyboard. Miss Oppens' discography reflects her dedication to music of differing styles and periods. Her most recent record awards are for her Music and Arts recording of American Piano Music of Our Time, a two-CD set featuring John Adams' Phrygian Gates, Elliot Carter's Night Fantasies, and works by Julius Hemphill and Conlon Nancarrow. Miss Oppens currently holds the position of John Evans Distinguished Professor of Music at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. A Steinway artist, she appears at the National Gallery by arrangement with Colbert Artists Management of New York City.

Beethoven completed his seventeenth piano sonata in the spring of 1802, during a stay at Heiligenstadt, near Vienna. That year was a fateful one for him, with the onslaught of increasing deafness. The mental and emotional strain almost prevented him from continuing his life's work. Nevertheless, during this same period of intense frustration he embarked on a new creative path, beginning with the Sonata, Opus 31. The upheavals ("tempests") of the opening movement are expressed in wide melodic skips and sudden changes of tempo. However, the sonata's salient feature is its compactness. The Largo - Allegro movement begins with a conversation between the high and low registers, with pithy whispers heard through the caterwaul of the wind. The emotional pitch of the music gradually escalates to a storm, but the movement closes with a recitative that is cloaked in affliction. The Adagio (the apogee of the sonata) luxuriates in rich and profound emotion and can be seen as the most significant movement of its type that Beethoven wrote up to that point. The mood of the *Finale*, with its constant use of chromatic harmony, is tragic, with an oscillating sixteenth-note figure creating a driving sensation in the manner of a perpetuum mobile.

Composer and pianist Tobias Picker gained his first experience at the keyboard as a teenager, when he was pianist for the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance. As a young adult, he studied composition with Charles Wuorinen at the Manhattan School of Music, receiving his bachelor of arts degree in 1976. He completed his masters degree under Elliot Carter at the Juilliard School of Music. Mr. Picker, writing in almost every musical genre, has contributed greatly to the contemporary musical literature, which in turn has garnered him a well-deserved place among the leading American composers. "A genuine creator with a fertile, unforced vein of invention...and one of the most gifted, individual, and unschematic of our young composers," wrote Andrew Porter in the New Yorker. His long list of compositions includes, among others, three piano concertos, three symphonies, concertos for solo instruments and orchestra, a melodrama entitled The Encantadas, song cycles, and several orchestral tone poems. Picker's recently composed opera, Emmeline, was given its world première by the Santa Fe Opera to sold-out houses, prolonged standing ovations, and international critical acclaim. *Emmeline* was broadcast as part of PBS' Great Performances Series on April 2, 1997, and will receive its New York première at the New York City Opera on March 31, 1998.