The Op.13 sonata in C minor, the Grande Sonata Pathétique, is the first of Beethoven's works to have achieved general popularity. It is also one of the very few of his works whose title was given to it by the composer himself. It is an example of a "characteristic" work designed to evoke a particular mood –in this case pathos–
but whether it has any connection with the death of his childhood friend Lorenz von Breuning around the time of its composition is a matter of speculation. The sombre Grave and urgent Allegro sections of the first movement contrast with the serene
Adagio Cantabile that follows. The Rondo Finale contains material that was originally sketched for a piano trio showing Beethoven's capacity for adapting musical ideas
originally conceived for other instrumental forces.

The Op.53 Sonata in C major, the "Waldstein", begun in 1803 when Beethoven was sketching the Eroica Symphony is the first of the so-called "middle period" sonatas characterised by their grandeur of scale and conception. He had recently taken delivery of a new Erard piano with an extended keyboard and he makes occasional forays into the hitherto unknown territory of its extremities. The first movement is marked by contrasts: in its dynamics, the movement between the upper and lower registers and between the subdued but relentless rhythm of the opening theme and the serenity
of the second subject. Beethoven had originally composed a long Andante movement but replaced it with a short 28 bar Introduzione with a fragmentary theme which moves straight into the Rondo finale (the original slow movement was published separately as the Andante favori,WoO57). The Rondo is characterised by the extreme virtuosity of the writing especially in the prestissimo coda with its long trills, octave glissandos and abrupt changes of dynamics. Beethoven dedicated the work to his old patron
Count Waldstein but whether this was in grateful memory of his support over ten
years previously in Bonn or was prompted by some more recent benefit is unknown.

Schubert composed his Four Impromptus, D. 935, in December of 1827 just after completing another set of four that summer or fall, D. 899—all possibly as pieces for himself to play at musical gatherings or soirées. Publisher Tobias Haslinger was initially responsible for calling these now-famous pieces Impromptus, with Schubert's permission, when he issued the first two of the earlier set (later op. 90, nos. 1 and 2) in December 1827. Though Haslinger announced the publication of the entire first set for the following year, Nos. 3 and 4 did not appear until 1857, by then published by Tobias's son Karl. The manuscript of D. 935 shows Schubert himself already calling the pieces Impromptus, and his intention that these follow the first set as a sequel shows in his numbering them 5 through 8. This set was not published, however, until Diabelli issued them in 1839, eleven years after Schubert's death.

The designation impromptu had been used before by Bohemian composer Jan Václav Voříšek for pieces modeled after the poetic piano miniatures by his teacher Václav Tomášek called eclogues. Schubert surely knew the piano pieces of both these composers—he probably knew Voříšek personally—and he no doubt also knew Beethoven's first set of bagatelles, which were

pioneers in the field of short freestanding piano pieces. The word impromptu suggests spontaneity, and it is possible to imagine Schubert creating these gems as he extemporized at the keyboard, yet their sophistication suggests that considerable thought went into them.

The scope of the D. 935 Impromptus, the first in particular, contributed to the delay in their being issued, because publishers wanted shorter, easier, and therefore "more marketable" piano pieces. The declamatory minor-mode opening of the first Impromptu sets the tone for an imposing rather than trifling piece, yet it still manages to sound improvisatory. Two contrasting ideas—one with gentle pathos and one with brilliance—complete this first-theme group, which brings on a tender second theme in the relative major. So far Schubert gives the impression of a sonata form, so much so that Schumann called it "obviously the first movement of a sonata." Schubert then inserts a dreamlike section that might be considered the closing of an exposition except that it unfolds unhurriedly as an entire piece in itself—in two parts, each repeated (binary form). Scholar John Daverio aptly called this section a "Dialogue without Words" because of its exchange between treble and bass; it has also been labeled a trio section or an episode.

Completely avoiding a development section, Schubert recaps all of these sections, now grounded "properly" in the home key (both major and minor), and concludes with a brief recall of the dramatic opening theme. Despite the piece's nods to sonata form—or to sonatina form (abridged sonata form with no development) or to abridged sonata-rondo form—Schubert imperturbably followed his own muse in designing its large-scale parallel proportions.

The second Impromptu contrasts outer sections of simple chordal texture supporting a tender melody with a central trio of nonstop arpeggiated triplets over rocking bass, in which heard or implied melody lines seem to emerge. Both the outer sections and the trio are comprised of two parts, the second of which in each case provides dynamic contrast and some luscious harmonic surprises.

For the third Impromptu Schubert borrows and slightly alters a simple theme he had used twice before—in his incidental music for Rosamunde and the slow movement of his A minor String Quartet—and treats it to five variations. Lighthearted for the most part, the variations take an impassioned turn in the minore third variation and end with a pensive variant of the theme.

In the fourth Impromptu, one of Schubert's most brilliant and unusual movements, he adopts a Hungarian style—a rarity for him even though he had spent two summers working for the Esterházy family in Hungary and must have been familiar with the Hungarian or Roma/Gypsy style as it flourished in Vienna. Shifting triple and duple meter, syncopated accents, long-short rhythms, sections of contrasting tempo, fluid harmonies, certain scale passages, and melodic embellishments all point to that style, which Schubert knew was fitting for an improvisatory-sounding piece. Even though this Impromptu bears signposts of a scherzo-trio-scherzo organization, the proportions again bear Schubert's original stamp with the "trio" spinning out at more than twice the length of the "scherzo" and a coda longer than the closing "scherzo" section. Schubert concludes with one of his most daring pianistic features—a rapid-fire descending scale spanning six octaves.