

# The special power of Beethoven's sonatas

## Music

World Expo 88 On Stage:  
Beethoven Piano Festival  
Roger Woodward, pianist  
Brisbane Concert Hall

PATRICIA KELLY

WORLD Expo 88 On Stage is providing such a variety of excellent arts and entertainment that it barely leaves time to visit the carnival of leisure pursuits in the site adjoining the Queensland Performing Arts Complex.

Having feasted on French music in the Messiaen Festival, it is now time to contemplate the wonders of Beethoven and his piano music.

Australian pianist Roger Woodward is presenting all 32 of Beethoven's sonatas in a series of eight recitals, not a novel undertaking to be sure, but one that makes extraordinary demands on the soloist's technical, physical and intellectual stamina.

That he can simply attempt the task is marvel enough, but that he can do so with a consistent excellence, as displayed in the opening program, is cause for high praise.

## Virtuosity

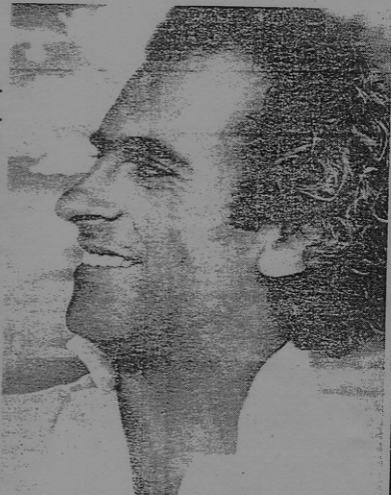
Although separated by the centuries, the works of the Messiaen and Beethoven probably have more similarities than differences. Both composers were impatient with old concepts and sought a new language to express music ideas that sprang from a world of changing mentality.

Both strived to unite and then transcend mind and nature to attain ultimate joy and serenity.

Through these qualities the present festivals of both composers leave the realm of academic exercise and arrive at rich spiritual heights.

No longer do we hear subjects and episodes, pedal-points and recapitulation any more than we see joints and joins when looking at a fine building. When a true artist is at work it is the unified whole which strikes an aesthetic response.

Woodward allowed us to experi-



Roger Woodward . . . affection of a true disciple

ence Beethoven's piano sonatas in this light.

He gauged his material well. If the opening movement of the first sonata the F minor Opus 2 No 1, sacrificed dramatic content to virtuosity, he quickly adjusted the mood and handed over the remainder to Beethoven. He took care not to announce the subjects with such emphasis that the balance and flow of the whole was upset.

Woodward shows the breadth and depth of the collection, although his reticence, almost to the point of introspection, in the adagio movements raises the question of the appropriateness of such gentility, in spite of its captivating loveliness in the pianist's hands.

These tender moments melded into contrasting torrents of aggressive outbursts. There was

plenty of brio and bravura in Sonata No 3 in C major although Woodward made an earnest game of the scherzo movement before bringing the sonata to a scintillating close.

He approached Sonata in E flat major Opus 7 with the affection of a true disciple, finding individual solutions to technical problems to create the brilliance of chromatic writing and poetic grace that mark this sonata.

We can never know how Beethoven himself would have performed his sonatas - with their special power to draw us to curious and imaginative speculation in a way no other music does. But the contribution of a Woodward, whose wonderfully detailed program notes indicate the depth of his understanding of and love for the man and his music, is really a treasure in music's store.