



Beethoven's Violin Sonata Op. 23: Freedom of Interpretation in Passages of Formal Anomaly

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Abstract

L. van Beethoven's Violin and Piano Sonata Op. 23 in A minor (1800-1801) is a multi-movement sonata that has three unexpected formal events: two occurring in the *Presto* (movement one) and one in the *Allegro Molto* (movement three). These formal anomalies, discovered through the creation of form diagrams, present potentially challenging moments of interpretation for performers.

The question this research project addresses is whether or not the three areas of formal anomaly allow performers more freedom in personal interpretation than normal formative events. In order to evaluate relative freedom of interpretation during these areas, I analyzed five chamber recordings. I created in-score analysis of each performance in which every detail was recorded. As part of my analysis, I organized the five recordings into either the "classical" or "romantic" performance traditions, based on the use of rubato and dynamics. For ease of comparison my findings were put into a table showing tempo markings, the use of rubato, and dynamics during each of the three areas of formal anomaly. While the analysis of the data is still ongoing, my initial discovery does show that in the third movement, *Allegro Molto*, some performers do vary from the original score with dynamics when the "C" theme from the Development returns unexpectedly in the Recapitulation.

Methodology

This research project began with the choice of including Op. 23 in my Junior Recital Program. As a Violin Performance major, part of my training includes researching other performances to in turn make my own performance stronger. The findings of this research project will give me concrete evidence that will allow my own performance to grow.

Step 1- Formally analyze the sonata. Form diagrams show crucial elements such as primary and secondary themes, tonal areas, and allows us to see how each specific movement compares with standard form classification. This step illuminated the three areas of formal anomaly.

Exposition				Development				
Am	a	transition	B	codetta	A'		C	RT
				a	"Folk Dance"	a		
m. 1-20	M.20-24	M.25-42	m.43-53	m.54-74	m.74-94	m.95-113	m.114-177	m.178-203
i		v ¹	V	i	i	i	VI	V

Recapitulation						
A	"Tarantella"	T*	"Folk Dance"*	RT	A'	Codetta
m.204-223	m.224-247	m.247-267	m.268-293	m.284-303	m.304-323	m.324-332
i	i		m.276 C from Dev. re- turns	m.294 on V from RT in Development	i	i

T- transition

RT- Retransition

¹ The music settles on the "v" in m.39

*Listener expects this passage to be followed by A.

Formal Anomaly 1-The first of these unexpected occurrences is found in the *Presto* movement. In the development, there is a proper retransition in preparation for the return of the first theme from the exposition (measures 120-164). Beethoven returns to the correct key but uses the wrong theme, creating a false recapitulation.

Formal Anomaly 2-The second unexpected occurrence is also found in the *Presto*, but during the coda. Beethoven takes motivic ideas from the first theme for only one measure (m. 223) and continues with thematic material from the false reprise that occurred in the development (223-243). This is unusual because the use of the thematic material from the development is not typically seen in the recapitulation. The more common practice would have been to include material from the exposition.

Formal Anomaly 3-The third area is found in the third movement, the *Allegro Molto*. During the recapitulation (m. 203-232), Beethoven unexpectedly includes the C theme from the development section. He then follows the C theme with the A' theme. This is unusual because in sonata-rondo form the A theme in the recapitulation is usually followed by the B theme, not the C theme.

Step 2-Create in-score analyses of what each of the five chosen performances do during the formal anomaly. My score analyses especially focus on the use of rubato and dynamics. I collated my findings in tables to allow for ease of comparison. This step also includes identifying the performance as either Classical or Romantic interpretations.



Excerpt from *Allegro Molto*; Mutter

Step 3-Compare the data to determine if the three areas of formal anomaly do in fact allow for freedom in personal interpretation.

Test Study 3
Allegro Molto, use of the C theme from the Development during the Recapitulation, m. 268-301 (especially focusing on 268 with the C theme returning)

Performer	Initial Tempo	During Formal Anomaly	Use of Rubato*	Use of Dynamics Other than specifically noted	Performance Style
Grumiaux/Haskil	70	70	Yes, 274	Exaggerated pp/ cresc and dim.	Classical
Perlman/Ashkenazy	84	84	Yes, accl. in Tarantella section, last two measures	No	Classical
Zukerman/Neikrug	78	78	Yes, just before the C theme returns	No	Classical
Mutter/Orkis	80	80	Yes, 268-275 stretches tempo significantly, as well as phrase endings	pp for the C theme, huge cresc. to A theme	Romantic
Stern/Istomin	84	84	Yes, 268 and phrase endings	Exaggerated subit- to pp in 268	Romantic

*Rubato (Italian for "robbed") is defined as the speeding up and subsequent slowing down of the tempo. Rubato is used to enhance the expression in the music by phrasing certain passages as determined by the performer. There are two ways in which rubato is used; the first is when the main beat remains the same but little changes are made to beat subdivisions and the second is when the tempo changes longer than a few notes, usually resulting in a ritardando that was not written in the score.

Findings

The conclusion to my research is still in process. I have identified a 'control group' in the *Allegro Molto* and have used it to compare to the third Formal Anomaly. This 'control group' occurs when the new theme, C, in the development appears. This is considered such because the development is expected to have a new theme in a Sonata-Rondo form. When the C theme returns again in the recapitulation, it is unexpected. Some performers, such as Mutter and Zukerman, chose to play the occurrence in the recapitulation differently than when they first did in the development. This discovery shows that during unexpected formal events, performers do in fact choose to vary from what the composer wrote giving them freedom in their interpretation.

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