

Honors Thesis Proposal

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

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Goals and Description

In studying violin performance, one of the main goals is to perform the repertoire in a historically accurate manner, while at the same time developing the ability to convey personal expression through the music. In order to be able to construct a performance in this manner, it is imperative to research the historical background of the music and composer, recognize the form and style, understand performance practices, and subsequently put an individual mark on the performance itself.

The general goals of this research and creative project are (1) to analyze the form of Ludwig van Beethoven's Violin Sonata no. 4 Op. 23 in A minor, (2) to study the background of the composer during this particular time period in order to demonstrate how Beethoven's growth as a composer affected the form and style of the piece, (3) to study the performance choices of well-known violinists during the formally unexpected moments of the sonata, and (4) to enhance my own creative interpretation in light of this research. In particular, I want to discover whether these passages of formal unexpectedness allow for more freedom in musical interpretation.

Background and Methodology

The first step was choosing a piece of music to play and research. In MUCT 470 Form Analysis, Professor Thompson assigned a final project that included choosing a piece of music

from our repertoire, formally analyzing it and concluding with a brief paper describing the analysis. I decided to take that project, in which I chose to study Beethoven's Op. 23, and expand it to create my Honors Thesis project.

Another reason I chose this particular sonata was because I would be performing it for my Junior Recital in the spring of 2010. I had been learning the piece for my recital and thought that it would enhance my performance if I understood the underlying foundational form of the three movements from the sonata.

The second step in my project was the performance of the Op. 23 sonata. On April 4, 2010 I performed my Junior Recital, in partial fulfillment of my degree, and included Op. 23 in my program. Researching and studying the form of this piece enhanced my performance because understanding the structure enabled me to make informed decisions about the musical interpretation.

The final paper will include a brief historical background of Beethoven's life especially focusing on the years surrounding the composition of the sonata, a description of my own analysis as compared to those I found in my research, and the discussion of different musical interpretations in comparison to my own performance choices during three specified passages.

The first of these unexpected occurrences is found in the Presto movement. In the development section of the movement there is a proper retransition in preparation for the return of the first theme from the exposition (measures 120-164). Instead of returning to the first theme, Beethoven chose to go to the second theme—creating a false reprise.

The second unexpected occurrence I will be discussing is also found in the Presto movement during the coda section. Beethoven takes motivic ideas from the first theme for only one measure (m. 223) and continues with the thematic material from the false reprise that

occurred in the development (m. 223-243). Beethoven then returns again to the first theme (245-252). The addition of the material to the coda section from the false reprise is unusual. As a performer, making this seemingly disjointed coda seem musical presents a challenge.

The third area I will be focusing on is found in the third movement, the Allegro Molto. During the recapitulation (m. 203-323), Beethoven unexpectedly includes the theme (C) from the development section. He then includes the first theme (A) and concludes with the codetta. The inclusion of the C theme is highly unusual in a sonata-rondo movement.

My working hypothesis is that these specific areas allow the performer to have unique interpretations because of the unconventional way in which they were written. I will use these three passages to compare the personal interpretations of the selected violinists to determine what, if any, are the most common ways of interpreting those areas or if each performance is quite different. The focus of my comparison of these performances will be based on the use of dynamics and tempo (*rubato*).

Uniqueness of Project

My project is unique because it will compare my own creative performance with that of famous violinists. To my knowledge, no one has done a performance analysis of this work while specifically looking at the three areas.

Progress to date

I have analyzed Beethoven's Op. 23 violin sonata by making detailed form diagrams of each movement allowing me to identify the formal anomalies (the three areas as mentioned previously). On April 4, 2010 I performed the work in its entirety for my Junior Recital. I have also begun to prepare the Op. 24 "Spring" sonata as a point of reference to its counterpart, Op.

23. Because Beethoven wrote them so closely together, 1800-1801, I hope to glean a better understanding of the form of Op. 23 in comparison to that of Op. 24.¹ In drafting this bibliography, I have expanded my research to include historical information on Beethoven, other theoretical analyses of the piece, and musical interpretations from the premier violinists of the twenty-first century.

¹ Many authors, including Joseph Schmidt-Görg, Hans Schmidt, and Paul Nettl, remark that Op. 23 and Op. 24 have complementing features, such as key relations (Op. 23 is in A minor while Op. 24 is in A major).

Annotated Bibliography

Beethoven and History

Nettl, Paul. *Beethoven Encyclopedia*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1956.

Paul Nettel, a professor of musicology at Indiana University, goes into great detail compiling this reference book on Beethoven. The sections referring to the violin sonatas are important to my historical research because they give publication dates for the sonatas as well as dedication information. Nettel also includes brief descriptions of the sonatas regarding form and thematic material.

Schmidt-Görg, Joseph, and Hans Schmidt., eds. *Ludwig van Beethoven*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970.

This book is a compilation of chapters on Beethoven's life and music written by the members of the staff of the Beethoven-Archiv, Bonn. The contributors examine his musical styles as well as his personal life. The chapter on his violin sonatas is especially significant to my project because it talks specifically about his Op. 23 violin sonata, with details regarding form and the work's relation to the subsequent Op. 24.

Sonata Form

Darcy, Warren, and James Hepokoski. *Elements of Sonata Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

This book discusses sonata form in great detail, examining the key centers that each section (exposition, development, recapitulation) is expected to have, as well as the hybrid forms of sonatas (i.e. sonata-rondo) of the late 18th century. This is specifically important to my research because they use Beethoven's Op. 23 in examples during their discussion while stating why certain tonal areas are used in the sonata, such as why Beethoven chose to use the unusual key of A minor for the sonata to heighten the use of a lesser-used key in the slow movement.

Newman, William S. *The Sonata in the Classical Era*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1983.

Newman discusses the historical background, conceptual nature, and the expansion of the sonata during the Classical period. Newman's discussion of the form and style of the Op. 23 violin sonata is especially important in relation to my analysis of the sonata as well as to my performance decisions.

Performance Practices

Kroll, Mark, and Lewis Lockwood, eds. *The Beethoven Violin Sonatas: History, Criticism, Performance*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

This anthology is a compilation of seven essays that were published after a festival-conference held at Boston University in October 2000 on the topic of Beethoven's violin sonatas. The essays discuss each sonata in great detail. The editors, professors at Boston University and Harvard University respectively, include an introduction paving the way for the discussion of the sonatas. This book is relevant to my research because it discusses Beethoven's sonata Op. 23 specifically and in comparison with Op. 24.

Levy, Janet M. "The Power of the Performer: Interpreting Beethoven." *The Journal of Musicology: A Quarterly Review of Music History, Criticism, Analysis, and Performance Practice* 18 (2001): 31-55.

Levy's article demonstrates how a performer has the ability to make choices within this repertoire to create certain moods and ideas that are specific to their own artistic voice. Levy also discusses tempo choices, articulation traditions and other aspects that should be adhered to when performing Beethoven. This article is important because it shows how a performer should be aware of every decision made when preparing and performing Beethoven's compositions. In my research I will be discussing how the performer chooses to interpret certain areas in the sonatas that are unexpected in traditional sonata form. This article shows what kinds of choices the performer can use in order to fulfill their own interpretations during those specified moments.

Stowell, Robin, ed. *Performing Beethoven*. Cambridge: University Press, 1994.

Performing Beethoven is a compilation of ten essays on the performance practices of Beethoven's music. The essay by Robert Philip (The Open University), "Traditional Habits of Performance in Early-Twentieth-Century Recordings of Beethoven," is relevant to my research because it will explain whether the recordings I have chosen to study are classical or romantic in style.

Szigeti, Joseph. *The Ten Violin Sonatas*. Urbana: American String Teachers Association, 1965.

Joseph Szigeti was an accomplished violinist who at age twenty-seven gave his first performance of the complete Beethoven Sonatas for violin. This book is relevant to my research because it provides ideas for how the violinist should play the sonatas in order to more fully realize their emotional reactions to the music. Szigeti provides examples showing how certain passages should be played in order to achieve different moods or characters. He offers alternate fingerings and bowings to greater enhance the idiosyncratic writing for the violin part, allowing the performer to create different tones and characters. This is relevant to my research because it gives practical choices that the performer can use to convey different interpretations when playing Beethoven.

Score

Beethoven, Ludwig van. *Sonatas for Piano and Violin, Volume 1*. Munich: G. Henle Verlag, 1974.

This Henle edition is an urtext score, which means that the editors tried to stay as true as they could to the composer's original manuscript. This is especially important in Beethoven's compositions because he was very specific with elements such as dynamics, tempo markings, and articulation. I used the score to learn the music and also to examine the form of each movement. Being able to look at both the piano and violin part allowed me to see what was occurring in the parts, such as who has the theme in a certain passage.

Sound Recordings

Grumiaux, Arthur. *Beethoven The Violin Sonatas* by Ludwig van Beethoven. Epic. LP. 1956-1957.

Arthur Grumiaux, violin, and Clara Haskil, piano made this LP recording with a traditional interpretation of Beethoven, meaning they did not take much rubato and stayed true to the score. This is an example of performing Beethoven in a 'classical' sense.

Mutter, Anne-Sophie. *Beethoven The Complete Violin Sonatas* by Ludwig van Beethoven. Schott. CD. 1998.

Anne-Sophie Mutter, violin, and Lambert Orkis, piano, compiled this CD after much research on playing Beethoven. They greatly 'romanticized' the sonata by taking rubato in tempo and rhythm and also utilizing different dynamics, such as extreme pianos and fortes to create different moods in the piece. This recording is important to my research because it shows a romantic interpretation of Beethoven's Op. 23.

Stern, Isaac. *Beethoven The Violin Sonatas* by Ludwig van Beethoven. Sony Classical. CD. 1996.

Isaac Stern, violin, and Eugene Istomin, piano, like Arthur Grumiaux and Clara Haskil, developed a classical interpretation of Beethoven's Op. 23. This recording is important to my research because it helps to further exemplify the classical interpretation of Beethoven's Op. 23.

Perlman, Itzhak. *Beethoven: The Violin Sonatas* by Ludwig van Beethoven. Decca. CD. 1988.

Itzhak Perlman, violin, and Vladimir Ashkenazy, piano recorded this sonata in a classical style while utilizing some romantic aspects, such as lots of vibrato and some rubato. This adds interest to my research because the recording serves as a cross between the classical and romantic interpretations of Beethoven's Op. 23.

Zukerman, Pinchas. *Beethoven Sonatas for Piano and Violin* by Ludwig van Beethoven. BMC Classics. CD. 1992.

Pinchas Zukerman, violin, and Marc Neikrug, piano provide another classical interpretation of Beethoven's Op. 23. This is key to my research because it shows how the

performers are able to be expressive and create an individual interpretation while still following performance practice for Beethoven's music.

