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A Comparison/Contrast of
Chopin Piano Sonata Op 58 with
Beethoven Piano Sonata Op 10 No 3

In order to discover certain relationships between Chopin's Piano Sonata Op 58 in B minor and Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op 10 No 3 in D Major, much information will have to be left out and/or taken for granted. Comparisons of form, phrase structure, and techniques of tonal prolongation between each movement in the Chopin and its Beethoven counterpart will hopefully reveal some insights as to the change of musical practices in the nineteenth century.

The forms of each movement in Chopin's piano sonata show strong similarities to the forms Beethoven uses. Beethoven uses classical sonata form to frame his first movement presto: the first group is stated in bars 1-8; in bar 22 he moves to submediant as the beginning of the transition section; this transition section is concluded by a dominant pedal in bar 46 to introduce the contrasting second group, in the dominant, at bar 54; finally, he uses motivic play to extend this second group to its coda in bar 97 over a characteristic pedal until a close in bar 124; the development and recapitulation seem typical.

Chopin begins his sonata with a similar skeleton: his first group appears immediately, too, in bars 1-8; the modulatory transition section follows from bar 17-32; a dominant pedal (bars 33-40) with unaccompanied pre-theme chromaticism prepares his lyrical second group in III (see bar 44 of Beethoven's largo for some more unaccompanied pre-theme chromaticism); motivic play (including a quasi-variation of the second group in bars 56-60) precedes a coda in from bars 76-90; most noticeably different in Chopin's recapitulation is the lack of the first group; bar 151 sees the recapitulation of the second theme in the tonic major, and Chopin is back on track.

Digging a little deeper, though, Chopin strays from Beethoven's style. For example, Beethoven's opening antecedent phrase conforms to classical guidelines: the first four bars begin on I and close with a half cadence on V; the second four bars balance this motion by returning to I at their close. Chopin, however, reverses this classical form: his theme, bars 1-8, closes on V, leaving the phrase open-ended to easily move elsewhere. And move he certainly does. Bars 9-16 are a transposition of the opening theme to the subdominant, quickly introducing non-ornamental chromaticism to the piece. Also notice Chopin's un-Beethovenian chromatic transposition in bars 13-14. Beethoven is more conservative with his consequent phrase: he begins with a strong dominant in bar 9 and, although moving beyond his destination through the use of naked octaves, reaches I in bar 21. From this tonic, Beethoven quickly jumps into a lyrical section in vi. Then he passes through applied

chords (bars 31 and 35) and a circle of fifths (bars 41-44) to ease the transition to a new tonal area. Chopin, too, jumps straight away in a new key, but one far more remote than Beethoven. Chopin uses Bb major in bar 17 and then Eb major in bars 29-30 to obscure tonality before the dominant pedal. Also notice the sudden, inorganic thematic contrast in bars 29-30. Chopin's use of rhythm is much more free than Beethoven's too: triplets, dotted eighths, and off-beat accents pepper this section as compared to Beethoven's continuous eighth note figuration.

Chopin's second theme also contrasts Beethoven's. Beethoven's theme in bars 53-60 seems more like the exposition of a motivic device or kernel, whereas Chopin's second theme is lyrical, showing a clear dichotomy between a singing melody and arpeggiated accompaniment. Beethoven does use this lyrical style sometimes, though, as in bars 23-30. But Chopin's melody is more long-ranging. Beethoven immediately departs from his theme in bar 31, while Chopin continues to sing through 15 bars. Also, Chopin's melody is more rhapsodic and improvisatory than Beethoven's tight, eighth-note driven tune. Chopin uses dotted quarters, triplets, dotted quarter triplets (bar 52), pentuplets (51), and arrhythmic sixteenth notes (bars 54-55). Similar differences are found in the coda. Beethoven stays to eighth notes, but Chopin uses triplets and other figuration more reminiscent of a slow movement to finish the exposition. Also a proliferation of passing tones enrich Chopin's harmonies in his coda. The first arpeggio in bar 76 includes a passing eleventh,

the second adds a ninth, etc. These tones can be explained as classical ornaments, but considering the allegro tempo and arpeggio nature of these rolled chords, these seemingly non-harmonic notes sound more like chord tones or frozen appoggiaturas (as Ed Murray likes to call them) more similar to the tonal language of Ravel and Debussy than Beethoven.

Chopin's second movement scherzo finds its counterpart in Beethoven's third movement menuetto and trio. Both pieces have simple ternary (A B A) forms, where the B section serves as a contrast to the A.

Beethoven's B section is the trio itself and Chopin's is bars 61-156. Both pieces use simple harmonic structures, moving mainly between tonics and dominants, presumably to offset the harmonic complexity of the other movements. Phrase structures in both movements adhere to a regular 4+4=8 pattern. Also, each pieces' B section shows tonal loyalty to the subdominant (Chopin, though, extends the subdominant through a similar pre-cadential chord, flat-VI).

For more superficial features, however, Chopin contrasts Beethoven. For example, Chopin has a different approach to arpeggio figuration. In Beethoven's trio, the tenor arpeggios are simple, regular triads extended through time, similar to the Alberti bass of the eighteenth century. No melodic content exists in this figuration. Chopin, though, uses more virtuoso techniques. Many chromatic notes embellish these arpeggios, as well as many quick changes in direction, giving Chopin's figuration more contour than Beethoven's. Through this contour,

Chopin infuses his eighth notes with a semi-melodic quality. Also, Chopin uses an altered mediant chord (bars 8, 16, 32) to lead back to the tonic, as opposed to Beethoven's strict use of dominants before tonics. This use of III adds more ornamental chromaticism to a basic classical structure. More rhythmic complexity is used by Chopin, too. Notice bars 53-56. These off-beat accents add to the precadential tension. Beethoven uses off-beat accents, too, as in bars 50-52 to increase precadential tension, but not the extent of Chopin. Beethoven's A section actually matches Chopin's B section more closely for melodic content. Chopin's antecedent phrase roots itself on the tonic and his consequent phrase moves from the supertonic the tonic to close back on I in bar 76. Beethoven uses similar phrase structure: bars 1-8 extend the tonic (through bass passing tones in the first four bars and a dominant in the fifth and seventh), and bars 9-16 basically extend the progression from supertonic to dominant and back to tonic. Chopin uses pedals whereas Beethoven uses bass passing tones, but the essential progression is the same. Another classical technique used by both Beethoven and Chopin is motivic reference between sections. Beethoven's circle of fifths bass octave leap, first seen between bars 16 and 17, is continued in the B section's circle of fifths passage (63-69). Chopin uses the fortissimo octaves at the end of his A section in bar 101 and also uses them possibly as the basis for the sparse transitional octaves of bars 89-92 and 153-156. These sparse, transitional octaves

are not unlike the modulatory octaves Beethoven used in bar 21. The tonal ambiguity of one note lends itself to this modulation.

The largo movements of each sonata show less in common with each other. Chopin's largo has a simple ternary form (A B A), keeping with inherited classical traditions. The B section stems from bars 29-99 and provides thematic and tonal contrast to the A section with rolling alto arpeggios in the subdominant (a common key area for the B section as seen in the previous movement). The form of Beethoven's slow movement is less clear cut. In fact, the form for his movement more resembles sonata form than the ternary song structure that Chopin uses.

Beethoven introduces an eight bar phrase at the open of the piece, soon modulating to the dominant, a minor, bar 17, where a new, more lyrical theme is introduced. Bar 38 shows a dominant pedal and bar 44 shows the recapitulation of the first theme, back in the tonic. As in sonata form, the transition material is altered to bring the second group back in the tonic (bar 60). A few factors keep this movement from true sonata form: lack of a real development, return of main theme in bar 65, etc.

Nevertheless, its form differs from Chopin's form of choice for the slow movement. Chopin's framework, though, like Beethoven's, plays with the model upon which it is based.

Chopin creates transition material (bars 19-28 and bars 89-98) which he uses in both the A and B sections. Also, the B section has its own ternary form (actually closer to A A B A) nested within itself. Notice the recapitulation of the B theme in 79.

Similarities do exist between the two slow movements, though, particularly with phrase structure. Almost all of the phrases of Beethoven and Chopin can be divided into four bar sections, sometimes with two four bar phrases strung together into an eight bar sentence. Comparing the first two phrases of each movement (bars 5-8 Chopin and bars 1-8 Beethoven) shows many identical features: both phrases begin on the tonic and end on the dominant; both use neighbors to extend the progressions (A sharp and C sharp, bar 6, Chopin--C sharp and E natural, bar 3, Beethoven); both use thematic work to unify the phrase. However, many ornamental devices used by Chopin, similar to those discussed in previous movements, set him apart from Beethoven. The transition between movements in the first four bars of the Chopin is another technique absent in Beethoven. In Chopin's B section, an apparent frozen appoggiatura rears its head as a ninth chord in the first pattern of figuration. In fact, these extended harmonies appear often in this B section. Notice the soprano in bar 49 and 50 where the slow movement of the passing D sharp and C sharp seem more vertical sonorities than horizontal. Notice, too, the escape tone D flat in bar 72 or the passing tone G natural as notes of an arpeggiated chord. Chopin in bar 44 again uses a third relationship to move back to the tonic instead of the typical dominant in Beethoven. Beethoven often uses III as a way station from I to V, as seen in bar 30 of this movement, but Chopin dissolves the use of the dominant. More characteristic Chopin appears in bars 70 and 72 with an altered mediant chord.

Some final strokes of genius appear in the codas of both movements as referential chromaticism: Chopin's penultimate chord's G natural refers back to the augmented sixth chord in bar 112 and Beethoven's E flat in bar 80 hints at the melody in bar 35.

Finally, the finale/rondo movement of each sonata needs examining. Both pieces have a rondo form, but Chopin's is A B A B A as compared to Beethoven's form of A B A C A. The themes used for each A section, however, are strikingly different. Beethoven, as in the first movement, seems to prefer a thematic cluster with quickly changing chords to a singing theme. Chopin, on the other hand, prefers a long-range, singable melody over relatively static chord movement. In his exposition of the A section, the first theme spans bars 9-27, and the chords change about once every four bars (with some alternating between each chord and its subdominant). Chopin also relies more heavily on chromaticism for his theme than does Beethoven. Notice the middle voice chromaticism in bars 16-20 in the Chopin, starting on A sharp and descending to E natural. Bars 24-26 exhibit circle of fifths type harmonies underneath even more apparent chromatics. Again, Chopin's melodies have a more improvisatory and rhapsodic nature than Beethoven's due to Chopin's use of dotted eighths and a triplet meter. Beethoven's rhythms all appear rather square. Also square is Beethoven's arpeggiated figuration. Compare bars 9-13 in Beethoven to the figuration under the theme in Chopin's exposition. In fact, Chopin hides this theme within these rolling arpeggios. Do not

overlook the chromatic shift in bar 187, similar to the chromatic shift in the first movement's exposition.

Some techniques of composition are common to both composers in this last movement. Chopin uses a first inversion tonic chord to delay a final cadence and add a forward dynamic to the piece. See bars 39, 44, 48. Beethoven uses the same trick in bar 11 and 13. To heighten tension, both composers use chromatic runs over a static harmony: Beethoven's bars 18 and 23; Chopin's bars 87-89. Also, both composers feel the necessity to add some recomposition to their opening themes when the theme returns in the rondo. Chopin merely changes the figuration underneath the melody. Of course, some of his changes, such as the three against four starting in bar 100, are uncharacteristic of Beethoven. Beethoven, conversely, does not have much of a melody, so he cannot simply alter the accompaniment. He has to be more subtle. He adds some thematic work to his recomposed theme, the hocketing in bar 60 and 88 being of particular interest. Finally in the codas of both movements, both composers desire a grand finale to their sonata. Thus over a pedal in bar 106, Beethoven adds chromatic runs traversing three octaves up and down the keyboard. Similarly, Chopin, over dominant-tonic bass pounding in bars 274-281, adds an embellished chromatic descent from an extremely high register down to fortissimo chords of more tonics and dominants. How exciting.

As seen from an analysis of each piano sonata, Chopin and Beethoven share many classical qualities of composition.

Pedals, ornamental chromaticism, dominant pedals, unaccompanied pre-theme chromaticism, neighbor progressions, circle of fifths, arpeggio figuration, thematic work, square phrase structure, closing codas with simple harmonies, B sections in the subdominant, recomposition of themes, use of mediant as passing between tonic and dominant tonal areas, referential chromaticism, use of first inversions to undermine cadences, ternary form, sonata form, and use of naked octaves for modulation all form the basis of both composers' tonal techniques. However, frozen appoggiaturas, chromatic transposition, excessive ornamental chromaticism, inorganic thematic contrast, extended middle voice chromaticism, chromatic alteration of the mediant, long-range melodies, improvisatory figuration, rhapsodic triplets, remote keys of development, substitution of III for V, extensive pedal use, and transitions between movements separate Chopin's tonal language from Beethoven's. The essential tools, therefore, with which each composer works are basically the same. Chopin has merely added chromaticism and lyricism to the classical forms that he inherited.