

Trevor de Clercq
Music 452
Nov. 6, 1994

Beethoven Op. 53

Beethoven's Waldstein Sonata for Piano, Opus 53, exemplifies through-composed, organic writing in music. The opening thirteen bars expose all motives and techniques of prolongation used throughout the rest of the piece to move to and from each of the sonata's tonal goals. Bars 1-4 have a typical harmonic motion: I-V6. However, they start in a low register not typical of sonata opening. When the first melodic fragment appears in bar 3, it still dwells in this low register. Its consequent fragment in bar 4, though, has escaped into the treble clef, providing variety through a registral change. Why does Beethoven need this variety in a single phrase? Because the melodic motives in bars 3 and 4 are not so dissimilar. Bar 4's motive is a mere variation of the motive in bar 3. Notice the last three notes of the each motive (only four and five notes long respectively) are the same, even to the point of rhythmic position in the measure. Bars 5-8 are a simple sequential repetition of the first four bars, as far as melodic content goes. Not so simple is the whole step transposition down to a subdominant area. Also, to ease the mundaneness of pure sequential repetition, Beethoven adds minor mixture in bar 8. A dominant finally comes to control bars 9-13 to end the phrase. Beethoven keeps the minor mixture introduced in the previous bar through to bar 13, destabilizing the close on V. To emphasize the close on V, however, Beethoven increases tension by quickening the rhythmic motion of the bass (compression): Bar 8 speeds the note change in the bass from two measures to one measure; bar 9 shortens bass durations even further until bar 10 where the bass alternates every quarter note. The melodic content of these closing bars develops the opening motive even further: Bar 9's melody looks suspiciously like an extension of bar 4's, and bar 10 develops the last four notes of this motive through a change in direction (as well as compression similar to the bass).

The first tonal goal of the piece belongs to the second group which appears at bar 35 in E major. This choice of key area is unusual for a sonata (altered submediant of the dominant), but the method by which Beethoven approaches this remote key is rather simple. The opening theme is repeated in bars 14-17 with a register change adding enough variety for a pure repeat. Instead of moving down a whole step as in the opening, Beethoven now moves up a whole step for a sequential repeat in d minor. E major's dominant pedal appears in bar 23, so bar 22 must be the crucial move. This move is simple voice leading taking the shape of a short sequential repetition of the previous bar. Beethoven changes a minor 6-3 to an augmented sixth chord applied to E major through a simple a-sharp. The following dominant pedal extends from bars 23-34. The melodic material which begins this pedal is derived from the dominant material in bars 9-13.

Through bars 24-26, even more figuration extends this motive. The arpeggiations in the bass form a typical accompaniment to the motive, and by bar 27, they have even overtaken it. Also in bar 27, Beethoven heightens tension through compression (like bars 9-10) shortening the distance between the dominant 5-3 and 6-4. Finally, notice the registral changes and compression in bars 31-34 preceding the second group.

The next tonal goal (ignoring the repeat of the exposition) belongs to the development which begins in bar 90 or so. Until this development, E major holds authority over most of the music. The second theme is a simple eight bar phrase extending from measure 35 through to 42. Like the opening eight bars, the second half of the phrase is a kind of repeat of the first half, bringing the phrase to a full close. Again in bar 39, Beethoven uses registral change to add variety to his repetitions. Bars 43-50 are a recomposition of the second theme. The melodic figuration which varies this repetition, however is not new. Those triplets relate back to the dominant pedal figuration in bars 24-25, which of course related back to the opening. To prove this maybe tenuous relation, look ahead to 54-57. These arpeggiated triplets, alternating between I and V, seem similar to the bass alternations in bars 23-26. In fact, the triplets soon turn into sixteenth notes by bar 58, using compression, or rhythmic acceleration, to quicken the pace of the alternations just as compression was used in the dominant pedal in bars 27-28. The triplets in bar 54 grew out bars 50-53, which grew out of the figuration in the recomposition. Some relation therefore seems apparent. Bars 60-73 outline a stubborn attempt to cadence in E major. Bars 60-61 are I6 (with a D natural to apply it to IV); bars 62-65 are the subdominant (with passing bass chromaticism); bars 66-69 are V6-4; and finally to V5-3 in bars 70-73. The melodic material of this move is derivative as expected: notice the figure on the first beat of bars 64 and 65; compare it with the figure on the first beat of bar 43 and 47 or the figure on the third beat of bar 24 and 26. The bass arpeggio in bar 66 is not so unfamiliar either, of course. The passing mixture of c natural in bar 70 is hint of what is to come, for although Beethoven cadences on E major in bar 74, the cadence is denied with the introduction of minor mixture. Bars 74-81 are a sort of closing theme. The phrase structure, like the second theme, consists of two similar four bar phrases displaced by register moving from I to V. The melodic material again derives from the material in bars 9-13. Beethoven uses compression again in bars 82-83, this time compressing the harmonic movement from bars 74-77 in half. More simple sequencing brings Beethoven back to the opening in C major and ends the exposition.

The development connects the exposition to the recapitulation and spans from the second ending to bar 155. This development can be readily chopped into three sections: first group development in bars 90-111, second group development in bars 112-141, and the dominant pedal in bars 142-155. Extended sequencing from the second ending takes Beethoven to first group material in d minor at bar 90. More sequencing on the opening melodic motive helps a rising

bass unfold, ending in bar 96. Three key areas define the rest of the first group development: v in bars 96-99, i in bars 100-103, and iv in bars 104-111, outlining a long-term circle of fifths progression. The material in bars 100-103 identically transposes bars 96-99, which includes two two-bar phrases based on melodic compression of the opening motive. Notice the heightened compression of bar 99 (before the change of tonal area) where the first half of the motive is dropped. The subdominant key area (bars 104-111) compresses the circle of fifths progression to a short-term effect in bars 106-109. The melodic material is an obvious derivation of the opening melody, while the bass arpeggios are seeming derivatives of the dominant pedal bass arpeggios starting in bar 23. A chromatic descending bass brings Beethoven to his second theme development where another long-scale circle of fifths begins. Bars 112-115 extend C major, followed by four bars of F major, four bars of Bb major, and finally to Eb major in bar 124. From where in the piece do these circle of fifths progressions arise? Are they merely a developmental cliché? Possibly their existence derives from the opening eight bars, where Beethoven transposed material in C major to F major, the beginning of a circle of fifths. The Bb major chord in bar 5 is very foreign to C major, a foreignness that is usually only encountered in sequential patterns. Nevertheless, once the Eb major chord is reached in bar 124, Beethoven starts using old tricks to bring him to his dominant pedal. The four bar phrases are now compressed to two bars, and voice leading techniques move many of the chords forward (as in the resolutions of bar 126 and 130). Bar 134 sees compression to one-bar units until V6 is reached in bar 136. This dominant however is in the wrong register to herald the recapitulation. So Beethoven repeats the two bars of 136-137 with a registral change in bars 138-139. The rhythmic pacing of the melodic line (f-e flat-d) in these bars is compressed in bars 140-141 to a change every quarter note, bringing Beethoven down to his dominant pedal in bar 142. For bars 142-145, Beethoven extends his pedal with changes in register each bar. For the rest of the pedal, Beethoven takes advantage of his opening motive. The three-note motive in the middle of bar 146 is simply an inversion of those essential last three notes of the opening melody in bars 3 and 4. Beethoven compresses the occurrence of the motive in 147 and again in 149 while rising in register and tension. Finally in bar 153, Beethoven compresses the motive's occurrence even further to precede the characteristic dominant motive in bar 154. The falling melody closes the development just as it did in bar 11.

The recapitulation begins exactly as the exposition, the new tonal goal this time being A major in bar 195. No changes to the exposition occur until bar 168, which begins an odd tangent lasting until bar 173. The reason for this tangent is tenuous: maybe Beethoven felt a need to develop the inorganic material of bars 12-13 in the exposition. Strict recapitulation begins anew in bar 174. Beethoven delays his augmented-sixth chord until bar 184, facilitating a move to A major instead of E major (notice the balance in choice of key: C major lies between A and E,

separated from each by the distance of a third). The piece is back on track until bar 200. Here, Beethoven uses the minor mixture he has been setting up all along to change the A major second theme to a minor, easily leading to C major in bar 203. Now he can directly transpose the second group material into C major, and he does until bar 239, where the closing theme is changed back into major (more mixture). What follows from bar 249 to the close of the piece is a coda which further develops the opening motive. In the rising bass to the dominant in bars 251-259, compression of the occurrence of the motives sustains the melody, including bar 257-258 where the motive is compressed to only its second half. Bars 261-268 exhibit another registral change by placing the opening melody in the bass. This bass melody is compressed through bar 271, then compressed even further in through to bar 274. Finally under the rising pressure of compression and ascending tenths, the bass gives way in bar 276 on the subdominant, leaving room for the right hand to develop the dominant pedal material up to the dominant in bar 282. The second group is recapped in bars 284-290, this time with reversed registers. More registral changes follow through to bar 294, ending with an ever-increasing compression of the opening motive in bars 295-300. So as seen through this whole first movement, Beethoven has limited himself to one small melodic kernel from which most melodic fragments arise. The techniques driving and prolonging these melodies include mixture, compression, register changes, sequencing, and circles of fifths--techniques all exposed in the opening few bars of the piece with the main motive.