

Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas:

Performance Practices and Editions

Elements of the Classical performance

During the Enlightenment, Renaissance scholars developed a strong interest in antique Greek and Roman writers and the art of *rhetoric*. Baroque theorists continued this tradition, drawing parallels between rhetoric and music. The art of expressive declamation became an important element of the German musical tradition (Quantz, C.P.E. Bach).

The *Doctrine of Affections* was a musical style and aesthetic of the first half of 18th century. The affections, or various emotional states, provided the musical content of an entire musical piece or a section. The main promoter of this style was C.P.E. Bach.

Galant style

According to J. N. Forkel, it was a new instrumental style, in which the music expresses more subjective emotions of a composer. Comparing to the Doctrine of affections, where one main passion would determine the character of the whole movement, in Galant style, the emotions are subject to frequent changes. Forkel stated that “music expresses the ‘multiple modifications’ of feeling through multiple modifications of musical expression...” The *Style galante* was represented in early works of Haydn and Mozart and other early Classical composers. Characteristic elements are major keys, quick changes of contrasting elements and styles, homophonic texture.

Over the Classical period, the affections were gradually replaced by more subjective emotions, directed towards the early Romantic self expression.

Empfindsamkeit—(Germ. transl.: *sensibility*)

Heightened expression of the feelings, freedom in use of different, shifting elements, expressive leaps and harmonies, rhythmic and melodic unpredictability

Sturm und Drang—(Germ. transl.: storm and stress)

Initially was a literary movement of 1770s, driving rhythms, use of syncopations, chromaticism and minor keys, dramatic, theatrical layout, including recitative sections.

French Baroque dances—Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Gigue, Minuet, Gavotte, Passepied, Contredance—as well as French Overture or March rhythms and gestures were integrated in music, however not as whole movements but serving as a rhythmic basis for separate themes.

Metronome and the tempo choice

Beethoven grew up within the German rhetoric tradition. He was familiar with the works of the ancient Roman and Greek orators. He also knew the writings on rhetoric in music and had listened to performers who incorporated rhetorical style.

Authors of theoretical treatises--Turk, Mattheson and others-- saw parallels between the syntactic forms of language and musical grammar. Commas, colons, semicolons and periods influence the evolution of the discourse in real time and require fluctuation in the speed of delivery. Likewise in speech, the musical pulse cannot be exact as the beat of the metronome.

The debates about the interpretation of the Beethoven's music and the role of the metronome still continue. The main confusion draws from C. Czerny's writings and editions. Besides the misinterpretation of the articulation, he seems to have been as inconsistent in his metronome markings and tempo interpretation suggestions. His claims about *tempo giusto* and the strict, unvaried metric pulse are often taken literally, while Ries and Schindler advocated Beethoven's aesthetic approach to music as a free discourse, based on the rules of declamation and expression. Beethoven was not consistent in his opinion about the metronome. There is evidence of his excitement about the new device. However, in *Biographie*, Schindler described one of composer's anger moments, when he exclaimed:

"No more metronome! Anyone who can feel the music right does not need it, and for anyone who can't, nothing is of any use..."

Of all the pianoforte sonatas, only op.106 includes composer's metronome markings.

Fortepiano in Beethoven's time:

Viennese models

Simpler mechanism, small leather-covered hammers and leather dampers result in a light action, with a clear attack, great velocity and a variety of dynamic nuances and tone color. The decay is quick, the differences in touch and articulation are well enunciated.

English fortepianos

The more complicated mechanism provides bigger resonance. The key action is slower, the touch—heavier.

Sound changing mechanisms on earlier instruments were knee levers: damper, *una corda* and moderators. German manufactures adopted the damper pedal only in early 1800s

Beethoven's fortepianos:

Early period: Stein (after 1810 changed to Stein –Streicher), Walter. Both are Viennese instruments with knee levers.

1803—Erard with pedals

1818—Broadwood

1825—Viennese Graf

From the beginning of his career in Bonn Beethoven has played on fortepianos. Titles as “*pour le clavecin ou pianoforte*” were used for commercial reasons, while the main instrument he had in mind was fortepiano.

Extension range of Beethoven’s keyboard:

In music published before 1804, including the sonatas up to op.53, the generally used pianoforte range was FF to f³. Although Beethoven already knew larger keyboards, for commercial purposes he tried to restrict himself in five octaves. Exceptions are:

In op.14/1—wrote an f^{#3} (1798)

In Concerto op.15, f³ was interpreted as f[#] by analogy in recapitulation

1803--Concerto op.37—extended to g³ however cadenza written to c⁴—Beethoven expected to receive in a few months a new Erard with a bigger range

1808-1810 —including Trios op.70—FF-f⁴

1816—op.101—lower register reaches EE

1818—op.106—CC, the later Viennese range is CC-f⁴

Problems of notes restoration:

Completing top or bottom of the octaves is still debatable especially in cases when adding bass notes on a grand piano may destroy the transparency of the texture

Places where the composer had to reshape the passagework open new means of expression as well as new compositional devices, which seem inappropriate to be changed

Pedal

Beethoven often created unusual pedal effects with the damper pedal such as in op.31/2/i, op.109/iii, op. 110/ii

Una corda effects: op.106/iii, op.111/ii

Pedal indications in piano sonatas appear with op. 26. However, we know that Beethoven used much pedal in his playing. Thus, the subtle pedal is to be used carefully throughout, in order to emphasize dramatic points and important harmonies, support resolutions or help carrying out the long notes.

Dynamics

The scale of dynamics of the fortepiano is between *mf* and *mp* of a modern piano.

Expressing himself, Beethoven often explored extremes in dynamic, ranges, characters, which would often be presented in sudden contrasts. Although he could never obtain a loud enough sound of his fortepianos, he was a great master of the soft nuances. Most of his sonatas begin soft and maintain soft dynamics throughout most of the work.

Beethoven also liked to hear instrumental or vocal effects as the theme would be sung or played by a wind or strings instrument

Missing dynamics

The lack of dynamic indication at the beginning of the work, according to Turk, Rellstab, Koch and others means a loud start, as the *f* was a point of reference and any softer gradations were indicated. However, *f* was not a reference any more for Beethoven. Moreover, he preferred soft starts. Whenever not all the dynamics appear in the autograph and in the first editions, Beethoven has left clues. These are: touch or expression indications, as *legato* or *cantabile*, the next appearing dynamics, also the dynamics used when the theme returns.

According to S. Rosenblum, the following movements have a quiet start:

Op.2/2 Largo: although does not have a dynamic mark in the beginning, however, contains clues for a quiet start :*f* in m.17, next appearances of the theme in *p*.

Op.49/2—although the start is loud, the texture in the following passage cannot allow big dynamics otherwise will sound harsh

Tempo di Minuetto—proven to be in other Beethoven's minuets—is a soft start

Op.14/2—*ligato* and the return of the theme in *p* indicate a soft nuance at the beginning as well

Repeats:

Beethoven considered the repeats as a part of the performance. He was clear where he left the choice to the performer (Quartet op.135)

Accents

Koch distinguished two types of accents: grammatical or, metric, and rhetoric

Dynamic accents in editions

Beethoven was very particular about differences in types of accents. Unfortunately, Czerny, often relying on his memory, gave birth to many misinterpretations and confusions in his editions of the sonatas. Without reproducing exactly what the composer wrote, he repeatedly replaced one sign with another, mixing all up *sf*, *fp*, *rinf* and accents

The Urtext editions reproduced the original score

Performance problems

On the fortepiano, the accents and *rinforzando* have a quicker decay. This makes the *fp* in the opening of op.13/I logical. On the grand piano a performer needs to find the ways to adjust in order to produce similar musical effects.

The accents were referred to the background dynamic plan: *sf* within *p* is different from *sf* within *f*

Accents, as well as *f* and *ff* are not as loud on earlier instruments as on a modern piano

Articulation and touch

Around 1800, a new tendency towards legato playing has occurred—the London school composers—Clementi and Dussek, Field and Cramer, were known for their cantabile legato style. An explanation for this might be that London pianos had a longer sound. Also, Clementi's compositions consisted of constantly moving figures, requiring a different playing style from the Mozart sonatas.

Although Beethoven expanded his legato lines over several bars, the metric articulation was still used and was notated in the score.

Short slurs in accompaniment patterns (op.13/iii)—usually because of the fast tempo are played legato throughout. In the early classical period, the slur over a group of 3-4 notes means finger pedal for the bass note.

Slurs of 1-2 bars long that end in the middle of the motive or phrase are written by Beethoven. These are not to be interpreted as phrasing slurs but as a tool of carrying out and shaping the phrase: a discrete separation would help maintain the energy and would make the attack of the note after the slur more distinct. (op.13/ii, mm.1-8)

The first note of the slur receives a certain emphasis as we hear a new distinct attack, the last notes are lighter, as a release of the gesture

Staccato under slur means portato, but also, quoting Charles Rosen, was “*a standard way of indicating an expressive emphasis that was to be performed rubato*”

Beethoven was very specific about his notation and often was irritated when the editors or his students misinterpreted his precise articulation. Czerny and other editors of the 19th-beginning of the 20th century, change Beethoven’s slurs, making them longer to unify the musical sentences or phrases.

The question of how the phrasing slur must affect the articulation is still debated among the musicologists. (C. Krebs, D.F. Tovey, E. Badura-Skoda versus Schenker, Henle editions, G. Barth, S. Rosenblum)

The present day critical Urtext editions represent the scores as they appear in the first sources we have available-- manuscript or first editions

Note length

As we find from early treatises of C.P.E. Bach and G.Turk, separate notes are not held the full value: from $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of the written value. Separate notes lengths increase from early Classical towards the Romantic period.

Ornaments

There was no complete agreement on how to perform or notate the ornaments. Besides Clementi and Dussek’s description of the basic elements none of their contemporaries left exact instructions on the ornament realizations

Small and long appoggiaturas take their value from the main note

Long appoggiaturas require an expressive resolution

Grace notes and short ornaments—there was little consistency in performing these on the beat or before. Tutors indicate that most of Beethoven’s short ornaments were played before the beat.

Trills—in earlier works start on the upper note. In 1820s the trills were more often performed from the main note

The choice between long trill, short trill or turn (in cases as a short trill with ending) remains the performer’s choice since Beethoven was not consistent in using signs for trills

Comparing Editions

Editions in chronological order:

1842, 1850 Czerny

1834-1844--Mocheles

1890--Köhler/Ruthardt

1894--Bülow

1919--Casella

1898--Krebs

1902--D' Albert

1931--Craxton/Tovey

1934--Schenker

1935--Schnabel

1948--Martienssen

1953—Wallner

1973--Arrau

1999--Peter Haushild

2004,2006—Stewart Gordon

2007—Barry Cooper

Urtext editions of Schenker, Wallner, Haushild, Gordon, Konemann (Budapest), Cooper reproduce the score exactly as it appears in the earliest sources as autographs or the first editions.

Main problems. Articulation:

Staccato or wedge:

Since the first editors have not been consistent in differences between staccato and wedge, and Beethoven's autographs in many cases are almost illegible, most of the editions adopted the staccato dot for both types. The differentiation in editions of Tovey and Schenker does not originate from the first sources. In the performance practice, the length of the articulation is drawn from the context, texture and the musical expression. The only editors,

who are exact in reproducing staccatos and wedges as they appeared in the earliest sources, are P. Hauschild and B. Cooper.

Slurs:

19th –early 20th century editors, starting with Czerny, introduced phrasing slurs over the articulation slurs. Since Romantic music tended to have long legato phrases, the difference between the two types of slurs was not emphasized and gradually disappeared.

Thus, the editions as Köhler, Schnabel, Martienssen, Tovey would draw longer legato lines, which can be understood as phrasing slurs, but do not represent correctly composer's indications for the articulation.

Some editors also would add a staccato dot at the end of the slur (Köhler, op.2/1, II). This was not written by Beethoven, however, since in classic performance practice the last note under a slur is released and thus is shorter, Beethoven might not need to write it because he assumed that everyone knew it.

Accents:

Carl Czerny has contributed to the confusion among early editors about Beethoven's accents. Köhler's edition (1890) reproduces all the accents exactly. The same can be said about editions of Tovey, Schenker and the editions after 1935.

Pedal:

In 20th century editions, except Bartok, Schnabel and Tovey, additional pedal do not appear.

Arthur Schnabel's edition A. Schnabel was one of the 20th century specialists in Classical music. He also was among the first pianists who became interested in early instruments. In his edition, he has offered his own interpretation of Beethoven's sonatas. It helps understanding better his recordings and is a good reference for the teachers and students, however not everything should not be taken literally. Still, he offers a great variety of articulation for different types of non legato, portato, staccato, accents, according to the character of the music.

Schnabel filled-in some missing dynamics (op.2/2/II). It is worth noting that his dynamics do not contradict the latest scholarly research on Beethoven's sonatas.

His micro-dynamic plans within the phrases are very helpful for young musicians. Schnabel's score is rich in character and touch indications.

Phrase slurs create a great confusion and misinterpretation. Editors like Schnabel, Martienssen, Tovey rewrote Beethoven's articulation without indicating the original articulation.

Voicing within multiple-voice texture and chords and the ornament realization are self-explanatory to the students and help understanding the style and the performance practice.

The edition provides exact fingering for all of the passages, chords, ornaments.

Metronome markings and tempo gradations indicate precisely the tempo changes within a movement. However, should they be taken exactly? Tempo changes within the movement, as well as slight fluctuations were a part of performance practice at Beethoven's time. Schnabel gives a wonderful representation of these fluctuations. Still, literal execution, without an image and an idea behind it, can make the performance meaningless and unnatural.

The same is true of pedaling. There cannot be a recipe of exact places for pedal and release. One should assume that pedal is a very delicate component of the performance. Schnabel and the performers of his time mostly used delayed, or syncopated pedal. The releases depend on the instrument and the length of the sound it produces. After all, it would be impossible to write all the gradations from quarter to full pedal. Perhaps, for these reasons, other editors chose not to include any supplementary pedal.

Köhler/Ruthardt edition

Overall, this edition follows the originals or the first editions except for articulation and extra marks of dynamic gradations. Accents and pedaling are exact. Some of the realizations of embellishments are offered. There are no metronome markings. Missing notes in octaves are added (op.10/3,I). Sometimes, Köhler proposed an alternative split between the hands for a smaller hand.

Craxton/Tovey

The edition follows the original texts with exception of the articulation. Tovey has an individual approach to the interpretation of the phrasing and articulation. Editorial suggestions such as supplementary dynamic within the phrase, added notes in octaves where the 5-octaves range was exceeded, are in brackets. Pedaling indications are fewer than in Schnabel's edition. Some ornaments or appoggiatura realizations are written-out. Every sonata has an introductory essay discussing the tempo, phrasing, character, tone color, poetic images. Also, Tovey draws attention to the moments when Beethoven, restricted by 5-octaves range, had to change the phrase shape. (op.10/3/i)

Stewart Gordon's edition is based on the original sources. The main difference from Urtext editions like Schenker's or Wallner's is a broader perspective of the latest research in performance practices and the availability for comparison of the most important earlier editions. Thus, in the footnotes, there are demonstrated several possibilities for ornament realization, facilitations, articulation discrepancies between the sources. Each opus has an introductory essay discussing and the formal analysis. The editor's notes in the beginning talk about the historical context of Beethoven's sonatas and the performance issues. Possibly, because of printing, some dynamic gradations or articulation marks are not as exact as in other editions (op.2/1/i). This edition can be recommended as a good teaching edition and source for young musicians.

Peter Hauschild's edition, as well as Gordon's edition, is one of the most recently researched. This edition is distinctive for its exact reproduction of the original and early sources. Critical notes are available in a separate volume. This edition is appropriate for professional musicians, who know how to interpret the score.

Barry Cooper's critical edition of Beethoven's 35 sonatas, including WoO numbers, is the most recent edition available. Each sonata is anticipated by an introductory essay. The edition highlights Beethoven's original fingering and composer's use of staccato and wedge. It also offers the realization of the ornaments. The essays discuss historical and performance problems, Czerny's metronome marks are given in the commentary.