

Beethoven: Sonata no. 7 for Piano and Violin, op. 30/2 in C minor¹

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This sonata, the second in the three sonatas op. 30, was composed in 1802, and, like its sisters to the opus number, dedicated in 1803 to the "Caesar" (Tzar) Alexander I. Alexander had just been crowned as Emperor (1801) and great hopes of liberalism were connected with him. The sonata is in four movements (besides it, only no. 5 op. 24 in F, and the much later no 10 op. 96 in G have four movements).

C minor – the key of the 5th symphony, the Pathétique sonata for piano op. 13 and the last piano sonata op. 111 – is considered, particularly with reference to the first movements, as having a special character in Beethoven: both tragic and heroic. But it sometimes has a softer and more introvert shade, like in the 3rd Piano Concerto op. 37 (completed in 1800). It is the latter to which this sonata belongs.

First Movement – Allegro con Brio

First theme – The skeletal character of the first 8 bars phrase is typical: In its naked character, in unison, with no harmony or decoration, and hardly any melody, it has a special tension, almost frightening, much like the opening of the 3rd Piano concerto.



It consists of two motives – a descending triad with a "decorative" rhythmic filling (A) and then a descending fourth followed by a chromatic ending (B) – all in unison and in piano. Motive (A) is repeated on the IV degree, melodically forming an interval of a fourth from G up to C. This fourth will prove important in the sequel, particularly in the second part of the second theme. On its entrance, the violin repeats (A), where the accompaniment of the piano enhances the tensed and threatening character, and in m. 13 makes a little variation on B, taken up by the piano in m. 17.

The second theme consists of two sub-themes (or one can rather talk of two themes in the secondary "group"). The first (mm. 28-51) is in sharp contrast to the first theme. It is, as usual, in the relative major – E flat – and has a jolly, rhythmic character. In the second sub-theme tension and dramatic drive intensify, playing on

¹ See the opening passage and note to the lecture on Sonata 5 op 24.

the rising fourth motive, which, as noted, was presented nakedly right at the beginning. Here 52-4, which recurs throughout the section:



This rising fourth is on a I-IV harmony in the first theme, and here, in the second, it is on V-I one, and yet, melodically the identity of the interval impresses on our ear. The I-IV progression (on Eb) itself is emphatically stated at two peak points in this passage (mm. 58-59) and (68-69). The rising fourth is also much expanded in a transition passage between the two sub-themes of the second group: C (m.47) – D (m.48) – Eb (m.49) – F (m.50).

The **Development** also consists of two main parts, the first dealing with the first motive of the main theme (A), modulating it from E in various keys, with some sharp transitions (e.g. Eb minor (m.80) to B major (m.81)) until it gets to Ab (m.95) – which is, again, the IV of Eb – in which the second part begins, developing the second theme. This section again is highly modulatory, in which the main points are Ab (m.95) – F minor (m.101) – Db (m.103) – Gb minor (m.106) – F minor (m.109) – C minor (m.111) – G (m.113) – C minor (m.125).

The **Recapitulation** begins (m. 125), after a great preparing crescendo at the end of the development, in fortissimo. This is in sharp contrast to the quiet and tensed beginning of the exposition – as if the great tension of the beginning is at last here erupted and resolved, and the resolution is with the same skeletal theme in unison. The second theme enters here not in C minor, as expected, but in C major (m.161). It gets back to the minor only in the second sub-part (m. 185)

The movement ends with a long **Coda**, which is almost another development, beginning in C major. Its last part (from m. 230) – a bravura passage typical of the heroic style – begins with a chromatic element reminiscent of the main theme (B).

Second Movement – Adagio Cantabile

This adagio in Ab major is in grand A – B – A' form, with a long Coda, where B (m.33) is in Ab minor, and the A' (m.52) is highly decorated repeat of A. The **coda** (86), which at first might be heard as introducing a completely new material, is built in fact on the motivic germ of the main motive of A – the third descent C – Bb – Ab

The stormy and nervous character of the beginning, deep in the bass, is expressed right at the start by an emphatic use of the somewhat irregular "German" chord (IV5/6 with an augmented sixth), which serves as a secondary dominant leading to the dominant (G), in an intense and short crescendo to a fortissimo (mm.1-3).



The great effect of it is enhanced by the answer, which is a balanced simple progression to the dominant through its regular VII.

All this sounds as an introduction to what seems to be the main theme proper (m. 15), and we shall call it the introductory theme, but as we move along, this apparent main theme immediately collapses back to this deep turmoil of the introductory bars, which prove to be essential to the whole movement.

The **second theme** (m. 39) is, as usual in the relative major (Eb). It is jerky and witty with its staccato motive, but shares with the first theme its nervousness and rapid harmonic moves. The exposition ends in a sort of a third theme, more melodious in character (m. 73), but this is immediately cut and falls back onto the nervous minor seconds of the beginning.

The **development** (m. 94) starts by repeating the beginning of the exposition, but the main theme is taken here in the major and expanded. When it comes back to the minor (m. 134) it proves to be the backbone of the whole development, which is contrapuntal in its texture where all motives are combined: the main theme, the introductory theme with its minor seconds, and the melodious third theme (in a sort of inversion). Here from the middle of this section (m. 142)



The **recapitulation** (m. 165) modulates the main theme to Bb minor (m. 179), and then, as expected, to the second theme in the tonic (m. 201). From there it is quite ordinary, where its ending returns to the introductory theme, modulating to the

virtuosic **coda** (Presto). This presto, besides its virtuosic brilliance, ingeniously combines the main motives of the introductory theme: the minor seconds motive and the fourth descent from F to C (mm. 11-14), thus closing the movement in a sort of an embracing circularity and coherence. But this circularity is a Beethovenian one – it is more a spiral than a circle: it has a definite direction towards a culminating peak, which has a heroic and victorious character, expressed here (as often) in the trombone-like calls of V-I in the bass at the last 17 bars.

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