

Beethoven: Piano and Violin Sonata in F op. 24 ("Spring")

Gilead Bar-Elli

Beethoven played the violin – and especially the viola – but his writing for the violin is often considered unfavorable to the instrument. In his sonatas for piano and violin (this is his order), besides their musical virtues, and though the piano continues to be the main instrument, the violin often takes a leading and independent role, which were rare (if existing at all) in previous works of the genre. With his sonatas for piano and cello, he actually invented the genre; this cannot be strictly said about his violin sonatas (Mozart wrote some masterworks in the genre before), but one could still say that he brought it to maturity in terms of the violin role, which, historically speaking, was to shape subsequent development. This achievement was obtained gradually, where the sonatas op. 24 (the spring), op. 30, and op. 47 hold a prominent place.

The sonata No.5 in F op. 24 was written in 1801 and dedicated, like its predecessor op. 23 in A minor, to count Moritz von Fries. Fries was one of Beethoven's patrons and supporters in Vienna, mainly in the beginning of the century (until he went bankrupt). He was also the dedicatee of the string quintet op. 29 of the same year, and of the much later seventh symphony op. 92. The sonata has four movements. The name "The Spring" was not given of course, by Beethoven. Its general calm and pastoral character stands in sharp contrast to the highly energetic and stormy mood of the preceding one in A minor (op. 23), which was originally intended to be published together with it (See M. Solomon: *Beethoven*, Granada, 1977, p. 149).

First Movement – Allegro

The movement is in sonata form, consisting of an exposition, with its first and second themes, development, recapitulation of the exposition and coda. Its general mood fluctuates between the calm and agreeable to the more energetic joyful, which is shadowed by threat and tension, where the germ of each phase is concealed in the preceding one.

The **first theme** is a calm, long and pastoral melody, which is yet marked by a rhythmic motive and typical tensed appoggiatura points (4, 6, 8), which emphasize the non-symmetric ending of the phrase. Both these elements are emphasized at the end of the presentation of the theme (from b. 20 at every bar), where the piano takes it over, turning it to the dominant, and they are to be exploited later in the movement.



The main theme here is dominated by a descending sixth, encapsulated at the first bar (from A to C) and even more clearly at bb.6-8 (high D to F). This descending sixth is an operative motive in all the movements of the sonata, which can be regarded as unfolding various masks of this descending sixth.

The sharp transition to the second theme begins with a shocking E-flat expansion of the rhythmic motive of the beginning, rolling to a sort of "German" cadence (with an augmented IV) to C minor, soon changed to the major – a duality which will dominate the second theme. The chromatic descent at the end of the transition will recur at the end of the exposition, and again at the end of the recapitulation, and again in the transition to the coda,

The **second theme**, in C major (the dominant), begins in a simple joyous syncopated call with major/minor exchanges.



The turn to the minor leads to a threatening shadow in a sequence of diminished chords, which leads to its closing section, which ends in a full chromatic descent deep in the bass. Note the reminders to the appoggiaturas of the beginning in this descent (e.g. in bars 80, 82).

The **Development** starts with a forte chord of the major III (A) and what seems to be a beginning of the rhythmic motive of the first theme. But this is soon left aside and the development in its entirety is devoted to the second theme – running it in a cycle of fifths of minor keys (Bb – F – C – G – D – A) – all, except the last, in minor, until it reaches back to the recapitulation in F major. The major III here has a somewhat similar effect to that of the shocking E-flat (which in the context of C is

again III) at the transition to the second theme, and this will recur at the beginning of the development and of the coda.

The **Recapitulation** (from b. 124) changes the order of the piano and violin taking over the theme. The transition to the second theme is again surprising, starting at a second below its start at the exposition, again leading by a passage dominated by the sort of a German cadence, with the chromatic descent, to the second theme in F, as expected.

The recapitulation surprisingly ends with a D major chord (210), as if beginning another development. But actually there starts a **coda**. It starts with a great expansion of the chromatic move of the transition section of the exposition, and the rest of it, instead of dealing with the second theme, is wholly devoted to the first theme, as if compensating for its lack in the development.

Second Movement – Adagio molto espressivo

The apparently simple movement in B-flat is in a complex form of a degenerated rondo: A – B – A' – C– D with a coda. It is degenerated because the episodes (B and C) are very short and D comes instead of the recurring A. The main theme consists of the basic motive of a descending sixth (bb.2-3), noticeable again at bb.20-23, we have encountered as a basic motive in the first movement.



The B-section is in the dominant F, and A' – back in B-flat – is a decorated form of A with a turn to the minor. The variety of short subsections towards the end is kept coherently in line due to the permanent texture of the accompaniment.

Third Movement – Scherzo – Allegro molto

The main theme of this very short and witty Scherzo in F, is a period of 4+4, repeated twice, the second stanza of which ends on the dominant. Its main motive is a rhythmic variant of our familiar descending sixth (from D to F).



The middle section plays on the typical rhythm of the main theme, in the major III (A). The Trio is also a symmetric period of 8 bars each stanza.

Fourth Movement – Rondo – Allegro ma non troppo

This is a very agreeable and flowing rondo. It can be compared to a somewhat similar rondo – the fourth movement of the piano sonata no. 11 in Bb op. 22, written about a year earlier. Their general atmosphere is similar, and they have many features in common like, for instance, their beginning with a relatively long upbeat starting with a pause, a typical use of appoggiaturas and more. Here bb.1-4 and 18:



The main theme in the piano solo is a balanced 8 bars, while its repeat in the violin extends it to a non-symmetric 10 bars phrase. Note the delicate way in which Beethoven postpones the resolution into F of the basic third A (b.1) – (b.3) – F(b.18). The general line of descent of a sixth – from D to F – sounds here as an elaboration of the compact parallel descent at the beginning of the Scherzo. It is of course our another face of our familiar sixth from previous movements.

A conspicuous feature of this rondo is the repeat and development (bb.160-187), after the third refrain, of the first episode, which makes it sound almost like a second subject of a sonata-form movement. Both episodes are mainly in the minor: the first (bb.38-55) – in C minor, and the second begins in E-flat minor. The movement ends with a long and highly syncopated coda. The coda consists of two sub-sections in both of which our descending sixth is an operative kernel: in the descent of A – G – F – Eb – D – C in the violin (bb.205-297) at the beginning of the first, and in the bass descent from F to A of bb.222-224 at the beginning of the second.

Gilead Bar-Elli, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem