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Beethoven Sonata for Piano and Cello, Op. 69 in A Major: A Linear Analysis

John A. Musick, Jr.

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements of the CSU Honors Program

for Honors in the degree of
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The Classical Sonata Form is not to be thought of in terms of the formal sections it can be broken into. Unlike other musical forms, the Sonata Form has less to do with its formal architecture and more to do with the linear progression and development of themes. Composers in this style did not approach the form in terms of the three sections it contains, though they did maintain these groups. There first needed to be an exposition where two contrasting themes, or keys, are presented. Next, there was a development where themes are broken down and several key areas are explored. The form concluded with a recapitulation, where the second theme is transposed to the first key area. While these sections are apparent, the Classical composers viewed the exposition, development, and recapitulation not in terms of their parts, but as a vehicle to propel their linear ideas¹.

This analytical approach helps explain how Haydn's monothematic Sonata style can be effective, a feat that eludes standard sectional analysis. The sectional approach generally focuses on reaching thematic concordance of key. Since Haydn's Sonatas generally do not have two themes, it is difficult to explain why he would use any formal structure at all to reach this concordance. The transposition of the first theme in the exposition to create the second theme does not create the drama associated with the sectional approach. This lack of conflict diminishes the importance of resolution that the sectional approach requires. Haydn's music is not based on the destination, and therefore is not explained by its progressing sections; instead, it can only be appreciated in terms of the journey, usually emphasizing motivic permutations and harmonic progressions.

Though the other Classical composers did use contrasting themes, it should still be stressed that a greater understanding of their music can be gained through an analysis of the entire linear journey as a whole, not as an episodic approach of conflict moving through extreme

¹ Rosen, Charles. *The Classical Style*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972.

harmonic tension to resolution. This linear approach requires more nuance than the standard sectional view, but in return it offers more insight. The pinnacle of composing in this style is reached in what is known as Beethoven's "Heroic Period," where the entire Sonata Form finds its origins in the opening phrase, and the resolution that is found has to deal with the opening phrase rather than the contrasting key areas. The *Sonata for Piano and Cello, Op. 69 in A Major*² is a perfect example of this style.

Beethoven's "Heroic Period" is rooted historically in his writing of the Heiligenstadt Testament in 1802, and his affection for Napoléon Bonaparte, which climaxed just before the publishing of his Third Symphony in 1804³. The Heiligenstadt Testament marked an important personal triumph over adversity with the decision to continue to create music despite his almost complete deafness. Napoléon, to Beethoven, was an ideal example of a self-made man, a Romantic hero, for Beethoven to revere and try to imitate in the musical world. Though Beethoven quickly became disenfranchised with Napoléon, the idea of such a man still resonated deeply with him. His music from this time reflects the idea of a heroic individual triumphing over adversity by using linear progression through the Sonata Form. The *A Major Sonata* (1808) is written in this vein.

The opening of this sonata is a presentation of the first theme in the solo cello line (Fig. 1). This melody is almost completely without discord. The only pitches that detract from a purely dominant and tonic relation are \flat 6 (Fs), that occurs on beat one of m. 2 and \sharp 4(Ds) that occurs on beat four of m. 5. These create the conflict, which must be resolved. This phrase is an announcement that the rest of the movement will be a journey through all of what \flat 6 and \sharp 4

² Beethoven, Ludwig van. *Sonata for Piano and Cello, Op. 69 in A Major*. München : G. Henle Verlag, 1984.

³ Solomon, Maynard. *Beethoven*. New York: Shirmer Trade Books, 1998.

imply, and that it will end when we understand their functions and how they will be changed to produce closure.

Fig. 1



To prepare for what will emerge from 6 and s4 on this journey, a brief digression on the typical contexts, functions, and relations of these scale degrees would be helpful. Figure 2 contains important theoretical ideas related to these scale degrees, which will be explored throughout the work.

Fig. 2

1 2 3 4 5 6 7	1 2 3 4 5 6 7	vi	V/V	V	I	vi	IV
A Major Scale	A Minor Scale	F-sharp minor	Tonicization of dominant		Progression of falling thirds		

One of the most frequent and effective developmental motions is the mode change from major to minor. The major and natural minor scales are presented with scale degrees labeled for both. The difference of 6 is an important one. In the major mode, 6 tends to move away from 5, like the opening of the sonata. In the minor, however, the 6 tends to lead down to 5. The

difference between the major and minor 6 will be an important point in the progression of the movement.

Directly following these scales is the chord based on 6 in A major. This chord is the tonic chord in the relative minor, fs minor. The relative relationship is a strong one that will later allow Beethoven to smoothly expand 6 into a key area.

The following two chords show s4, or Ds, in context. Typically s4 is used to tonicize the dominant chord, in this example B major leading to E major. This tonicizing function is what Beethoven will use throughout the movement to refer to and expand the idea of the s4.

The final three chords in Fig. 2 show how 4 and 6 are related. The two are most easily linked as the basis for a falling-third progression. This progression will be used later to fuse these two discordant degrees, and create stable harmonic motion.

After the opening phrase there is a fragmentation and continuation in the piano entrance and a repeat of this theme with a thicker texture. Following this is the first episode of the journey concerning 6, the Fs from the opening phrase.

Typically, the modal difference between major and minor is thought of in terms of 3. In the bridge to the second theme, however, Beethoven uses the more dramatic motion of the minor 6 to 5(Fn to E) to change modes (Fig. 3). Already, in the very first passage after the opening theme, Beethoven starts to develop the first discordant tone from the first theme, 6.

Fig. 3



Beethoven continues the minor mode by modulating from A minor to E minor. Craftily, before he cadences and moves into the second theme, he makes a quick reference to the s4 by using tonicizing leading tones, which perform the essential function of s4 (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4



This bridge is coming to an obvious close with a half-cadence in E minor. This almost sets up the second theme, but the mode is wrong, because, according to the form, the second key area needs to be in major. Beethoven makes the modulation back to the major mode through the use of 6 and s4. After the cadence of this bridge, Beethoven corrects the key by adding a short tag. In this tag, Beethoven reduces the melodic material to three notes: 5 of E minor (B), 6 of E minor (Cn), and s4 in E minor (As) and uses them to alter the mode back to major. By changing 6 from minor to major (Cn to Cs) Beethoven sets up the second theme in the proper mode (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5

In the second theme, Beethoven again makes small suggestions through the tension and resolution of 6 to 5 and the tonicization of secondary dominant chords. However, these are insignificant in comparison to what directly follows this theme. In the bridge to the closing theme (Fig. 6), Beethoven introduces a falling-third progression. This is a link between 6 and 4⁴ because they are related by a falling third, a strong progressive motion. These measures foreshadow the resolution that will come from these two notes.

⁴ Scale degree four in this context is natural, not sharp. Though it is not the same tone from the opening phrase, the reference is clearly to s4 from the opening phrase. This quality change is similar to the major/minor quality change of 6 in Fig. 3.

Fig. 6

The image shows a musical score for Cello and Piano. The Cello part is written on a single staff in treble clef. The Piano part is written on two staves (treble and bass clefs) grouped together. The music is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The Cello part begins with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note Bb4. The Piano part begins with a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note Bb4. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

This leads into the closing theme in the dominant key. The heroic closing theme propels the ideas of 6 and s4 by climaxing on a tonicized vi chord, now Cs minor (Fig. 7). This closing theme integrates a foreshadowing triumph over the tension created in the opening, while at the same emphasizing the tension that is yet to be resolved.

Fig. 7

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system is for Cello and Piano. The Cello part is in the bass clef, and the Piano part consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs). The second system is for Violin and Piano. The Violin part is in the bass clef, and the Piano part consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs). Both systems feature dynamic markings such as *f* and *ff*, and include various musical notations like slurs, trills, and articulation marks. The Piano part in both systems features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with many sixteenth notes.

The ending transition in the exposition is preceded by a tonicized 6 (Cs), which is emphasized with a trill and a *sforzando*. This is a single-measure synopsis of the exposition. Directly following is a less abrasive summary using a modified version of the first theme. Here, the opening interval of this phrase is a sixth instead of a fifth, referring to 6 from the opening phrase. Also, the strong beats in the second and fourth bars are used to tonicize the chord, referring to the s4. As an antithesis to the s4, Beethoven closes the exposition by moving toward the flat side of the circle of fifths through lowering 4s. In the descending passage that

leads to the repeat of the exposition, Beethoven first lowers As to An to modulate from B major to E major. He then lowers Ds to Dn to modulate from E major to A major. Instead of acting as a leading tone to a key a fifth higher, the n4 works as a tendency tone that resolves down. Now 4 functions to modulate down by a fifth in the same way the seventh of a dominant seventh chord typically leads to the third of the resulting tonic chord (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8

The musical score for Fig. 8 consists of two staves: Cello and Piano. The Cello staff is in bass clef and shows a sequence of notes starting with a whole note chord, followed by a series of eighth notes with slurs, and ending with a whole note chord. The Piano staff is in treble and bass clefs and shows a sequence of notes starting with a half note chord, followed by a series of eighth notes with slurs, and ending with a whole note chord. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *sf* (sforzando).

What Beethoven does here is of utmost interest in regards to 6 and s4. As previously mentioned, in order to return to the exposition he lowers 4s. However, to go on to the development he pivots keys on the second 4 (Dn in A major) and transforms that D into the minor 6 of Fs minor. This sets up his already established relationship of minor 6 leading to 5, now D to Cs. This motion leads to a long dominant pedal on Cs, which establishes the relative minor as a key area. It is important to note that Beethoven pivots on a note that functions as both 4 and 6, the two discordant tones from the opening (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9

The musical score for Fig. 9 consists of two systems. The first system is for the Cello, with a single staff in bass clef. It begins with a long, sustained pedal point on C5, indicated by a large slur. The second system is for the Piano, with two staves. The right hand (treble clef) plays a melodic line that includes a bridge-like structure. The left hand (bass clef) plays a rhythmic accompaniment with rapid subdivisions. The score is in 2/4 time and F major.

The development is put into motion with this long pedal Cs. On top of the pedal are quotations from the first theme and the bridge to the second theme. This dominant pedal eventually finds its resolution in Fs minor, and this becomes the main key of the development. Fs minor has a special significance in terms of 6 from the opening. This is the key based on the Fs in m. 2. Beethoven has expanded 6 from a note in the first phrase to a key area in the development. Within this key area he creates a sequenced *Sturm und Drang* passage based on the consequent of the first phrase. On top of this melody, he employs rapid subdivision that outline and intensify the harmony.

The texture becomes sparser and the dust settles as the development leads into a false recapitulation. Rather than making use of a strong retransition into the recapitulation, Beethoven returns to the opening melodic material but retains the key of the development.

The solo cello line starts the first theme pianissimo and in F \flat s minor. As the theme descends, Beethoven makes an important link between the two tension-causing scale degrees from the opening, 6 and 4. After a modified version of the theme is played in F \flat s minor, Beethoven modulates the theme to D major. He is employing a falling-third progression to relate the two ideas just before he reestablishes A major as the tonic (Fig. 10).

Fig. 10



This is the most important moment in the movement. It serves as a chordal link between 6 and 4 just before the recapitulation resolves them. What is more interesting though, is that even while Beethoven is relating these in a significant way, the linear progression of ideas does not halt. Instead, even within this context he makes an important foreshadowing alteration in the theme. The sixth degree undergoes a rhythmic change that will prove to be very significant later on. In the first presentation of this theme, the 6 is given emphasis largely by being longer than any other note in the melody. Here, Beethoven balances the rhythm to half notes, de-emphasizing the step away from dominant.

After the false recapitulation, Beethoven returns to A major through a quick progression and begins the recapitulation. He makes sparingly few changes from the exposition beside the obligatory key change, making the second theme appear in the tonic key. The next point of interest, therefore, is how he ends the movement.

The recapitulation follows the same theme groups as the exposition, including the bridge that led to the repeat of the exposition. Now this bridge, because of its new key in the recapitulation, has been transposed from B major (V of the dominant) to E major (V of the tonic). Therefore, as he lowers a series of 4s, first Ds to Dn then Gs to Gn, he modulates to a key one fifth lower than tonic, D major (Fig. 11). In going to D major, or the IV chord here, Beethoven is preparing for the final resolution. This is an important motion that must be made before the movement can be completed, because it establishes the resolved 4 as a key based on D similar to how he established the discordant 6 as a key based on Fs in the development.

Fig. 11

The musical score for Fig. 11 is divided into two main sections: Cello and Piano. The Cello part is written on a single staff in bass clef, featuring a melodic line with several slurs and accents. The Piano part consists of three staves (treble, middle, and bass clefs) grouped together. The top piano staff has a melodic line with slurs and accents, marked with dynamics *p* and *pp*. The middle piano staff contains chords, with some marked with *p* and *pp*. The bottom piano staff has a bass line with slurs and accents, also marked with *p* and *pp*. The overall texture is characterized by the interplay of the Cello's melodic line and the Piano's harmonic support.

Beethoven has at this point altered these notes in every conceivable way and has expanded them into entire key areas. Now, these two ideas must be modified in the context of the first theme in a way that they do not create discord. Beethoven achieves this through harkening back to important parts of the journey for these two notes.

After modulating from D major back to A major, Beethoven writes one final iteration of the first theme, scoring it to be the most climactic point in the movement. With extensive doubling and a *sempre fortissimo* dynamic marking, he reminds the listener of the tension that will be resolved.

Directly following this, the s4 is resolved by transposition. By transposing the last measure of the theme up by a fourth, Beethoven makes these notes lead to the tonic rather than the dominant (Fig. 12). Though he is using a different tendency tone, a parallel can be made to the bridge from the end of the exposition to the repeat. There, Beethoven used the n4 to 3 motion to modulate. Here, he retains the s4, and transposes it to become 7 in the tonic key. Both effectively use one tone to create a circle of fifths modulation.

Fig. 12



Thus, the issue of the s4 has been resolved through transposition. Still, however, there exists a problem from 6 (Fs) in the second measure of the theme. Beethoven resolves this in the coda. He does this discreetly by harkening back to the development where he changed 6 to a neighbor-tone. By making use of that rhythmic setting of a half note rather than the dotted-half note from the beginning, he removes jolting emphasis of that note and creates a more flowing line. It is also important to note that 4 in this phrase is natural instead of sharp (Fig. 13).

Fig. 13



Clearly, Beethoven conceptualizes the Sonata Form in a linear way, emphasizing the journey of the first phrase from its opening discord to its final resolution. His ideas flow through a three-part form, but the sections of the Sonata Form and the necessary harmonic motions within have little to do with Beethoven rhetoric. His ideas are not formed from sectional parts, and therefore a sectional analysis of them detracts from a true appreciation of his work.

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