

# MUSICMAP NOTES

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## **Beethoven's Piano Trio in B-Flat Major, Op. 97 ('Archduke') – 1811**

Sketched in 1810 and composed over three weeks in March of the following year, but not published until 1816.

“One name that did not appear on the subscription list for Op. 1 [the first three piano trios] was that of Archduke Rudolph, half-brother to the Austrian Emperor. He was a boy of seven at the time but, already, he was revealing a strong musical talent. In 1803-4 he met Beethoven, who taught him the piano and composition. They became close personal friends: Rudolph was one of the composer's staunchest supporters and Beethoven dedicated no fewer than seven major works to him: the Fourth and Fifth Piano Concertos, the *Les Adieux*, *Hammerklavier* and Op. 111 piano sonatas, the *Missa solemnis* and the work subsequently known as the *Archduke* Trio.” (David Wyn Jones)

“When Beethoven composed the *Archduke* Trio in March 1811, Napoleon, the most heroic figure of the age, was rapidly approaching his downfall. At the same time the aristocrats of Vienna, who supported Beethoven and for whom he composed most of his music, were losing their wealth and power; the age of heroes and nobles was drawing to an end. They were being replaced by the middle class, the bourgeoisie, who were coming to the fore with their growing wealth and influence.

In view of these revolutionary social changes Beethoven found it difficult to continue his so-called heroic style of composition. Yet he objected to what he called ‘the frivolous and sensuous spirit of the times’ and strenuously sought to resist the mounting current of conservatism. In the *Archduke*, his single major contribution from this time, Beethoven found an approach that substituted a new *gemüchlichkeit*, a warm, emotional style with broadly sung, moderately paced melodies and appealing dance rhythms, for the grandiose gestures of the past.

Along with the diminishing affluence of the aristocrats came a corresponding drop in the amount of time they were able to devote to mastering difficult musical instruments and performing the compositions of Beethoven and other composers. Eventually professional musicians from the middle class replaced the aristocratic amateurs, and public concert halls instead of palace salons became the site of most chamber music-making. The *Archduke* was in the first wave of music composed expressly for professional players, to be presented in a public hall for a middle-class audience.” (Melvin Berger)

“In its aesthetic, architectural stance, it both represents the pinnacle of Apollonian grandeur and geometric unfolding characteristic of Beethoven's late middle period, and, at the same time,

prefigures some of the characteristics of his later style. As opposed to the *modus operandi* in his earlier works – i.e., Beethoven’s penchant for generating a large structure from the release of energy stored in highly condensed germinal motifs - here, we find him generating the structural monumentality from the development of broad, flowing melodies. This noble and lyrical rhetoric is found also in the composer’s 3rd Cello Sonata, Op. 69; his Violin Concerto; and his 4th and 5th Piano Concerti – other consummate middle-period works that point towards Beethoven’s later compositional style. In addition to expressing Beethoven’s growing interest in a rhetoric of lyricism, the *Archduke* prefigures such other late-period tendencies as: the blurring of boundaries between movements, as the slow movement leads seamlessly into the finale; an inverted order of middle movements; and making unusual and less polarizing harmonic choices for major structural arrivals. All of these elements heighten the sense of organic flow through the piece as a whole. The epic tone of the *Archduke*, particularly in the first movement, sets the stage for a work of grand proportions.” (Lois Shapiro)

“The B-flat-major Piano Trio surely marks the summit of Beethoven’s production for the medium, and it is among the towering masterpieces of his entire chamber-music output. It is a spacious work – Beethoven in his Apollonian mode – and its four movements (the last two being connected) typically run past forty minutes in performance.” (James M. Keller)

“Widely acclaimed in the composer’s lifetime for the grandeur of its conception and the quality of its ideas, it has held its place ever since as one of the finest achievements in the trio form and, indeed, in classical chamber music generally. The principal themes of the work attract immediate attention for their suppleness and cantabile character; it is noteworthy that each is stated initially at a soft dynamic level and in most cases with the term *dolce* appended. Also, many of the themes are linked together by a strong family likeness and thus engender a powerful sense of unity in the work as a whole.

The large and significant role allotted to the piano in Op. 97 is allied to string writing of a rather subdued character. No doubt the demanding, though not unduly showy, style of the piano writing reflects to some extent Beethoven’s wish to please the work’s dedicatee, the Archduke Rudolph, who is known to have been an accomplished amateur pianist. But it would be a mistake to suppose that the strings are restrained simply in order to allow greater scope for the pianist. Although the scoring appears to give the piano part undue prominence, in practice the string contributions are so telling, and so much concerned with important motifs and countermelodies, that the balance of interest within the ensemble is never seriously imperiled. What is unarguable, however, is the unusually low pitch of the string parts, and of the violin part in particular. The explanation for this probably lies in the expressive character of the music. In this work, more than any of his other trios, Beethoven sought to achieve a strongly unified sound complex, one in which, for example, antiphonal elements and others involving vivid contrast are curbed in favor of a consistency of texture and mellowness of sonority more akin to a string quartet or quintet. Thus, an important function of the strings is to supply inner parts which combine with and supplement the piano's overtones in order to create a special sense of fullness and warmth. One result of this is to impart emphasis to such occasional high-pitched string passages as do occur.” (Basil Smallman)

As we will see, a good example of the thematic integration that exists between the four movements is a rising scale motive, typically a scale fragment spanning the distance of a 6<sup>th</sup>, and cleverly disguised by a means of repeated notes, ornaments, rhythmic variation, and starting on different degrees of the scale.

“Throughout this trio the instrumental texture is meticulously balanced and full of variety – in the first movement’s seductive episode in pizzicato, for example, or in the way in which Beethoven avoids doubling instrumental lines, the better to clarify contrapuntal intent and to avoid pitfalls of unison intonation.” (Keller)

### **Movement I – Sonata form, Allegro moderato, Common-time, B-flat major**

“...a movement of great nobility of spirit and moving expressivity.” (Berger)

#### *Exposition:*

Main theme: “The opening theme is nothing if not aristocratic; whether its inherent nobility fostered the popularity of the work’s nickname I cannot say, but it is unquestionably music befitting an archduke. It sets the tone for the entire work, which ultimately comes off as beneficent and often tender.” (Keller) “There is a curious contradiction at the start: a theme of forte character is intended to be played softly and sweetly. According to musicologist Theodor Adorno, ‘it is as if someone were beginning to read Homer to himself in a low voice.’ There is a sense of time set free: already in measure 8 with the long cello note and improvisational phase, there is a moment of seeming self-reflection, as if the piece is musing over its own destiny.” (Shapiro) The theme is based on surprisingly regular 8-bar (4+4) mildly contrasting period. However, the subsequent interludes and codetta provide Beethoven’s typical organic freedom and unpredictability.

Statement – Piano solo until understated string entrance in the last 2 bars. Antecedent basically 2+2, made up of motives ‘X’ and ‘Y’. Both have the same rhythm of 4 legato quarter-notes followed by a long note, except ‘Y’ starts with a little dotted-rhythm upbeat that steals a bit of time from the 2 bars of ‘X’. ‘X’ has a gently rocking up-and-down shape beginning with a rising 3rd. ‘Y’, in contrast, is a stepwise ascent with a final drop to the long note. Consequent starts with a contrasting shorter figure, initiated by a rising 4<sup>th</sup>. This 1-bar idea is immediately repeated, yet ending on a new pitch. In each case, the final note is most effectively distinguished by a *sfp* dynamic. The concluding two bars wrap things up with a new motive ‘Z’, featuring characteristic trills and grace notes and a strong terminal cadence. (Note that both motives ‘Y’ and ‘Z’ represent our first two instances of the rising scale motive.) The lyrical melody is sung by the R.H. over a flowing 8<sup>th</sup>-note accompaniment from the L.H. that seems to impart a relaxed walking character. This theme makes a point of emphasizing the subdominant (E-flat), and the chord of E-flat will turn out to play an important role throughout the movement.

Interlude – A seamless 5-bar extension. Rather than going directly to the counter-statement, the music now seems to luxuriate in an almost cadenza-like pause. The walking pulse of the accompaniment is suspended, and the stings play improvisatory-sounding gestures emphasizing long-held notes. The dominant 7<sup>th</sup> harmony of rhythmically incisive piano chords enhances a sense of static expectancy. It is as though our good-natured heroic protagonist has stopped for a moment to stretch before continuing on his way.

Counter-statement – Still 8 bars. Now the strings are given their opportunity to sing the theme, the violin taking the melody down an octave from before, while the cello provides a beautifully independent harmony part that is almost a counter-melody. Now both hands of the piano are free to resume the forward motion-generating 8<sup>th</sup>-note accompaniment.

Second interlude – 8 bars. Again this starts seamlessly, but this time with the surprise of a diminished 7<sup>th</sup> harmony, followed by minor. In this case, the material grows directly from motive ‘Z’, which is repeated against hushed, mysterious chords. Unlike the previous interlude, here the 8<sup>th</sup>-note pulse continues unabated, but we have been suddenly dislocated by the daring harmonies. Towards the end, the clouds start to part, and we feel the pull of the home key returning.

Codetta – 4 bars. This brief passage brings our long main theme to a satisfying end, clearly reestablishing B-flat major as a “horn call” idea is presented by the R.H. and echoed by the two strings in succession.

Bridge: Part I – This follows without pause, but is vividly set off from the sprawling main theme by its *f* dynamics and a lively new triplet rhythm. We hear the 8<sup>th</sup>-note triplets, incorporating a trill at the beginning of each, played in descending sequence by the R.H. This is what captivates our ear, but if we are attuned to the cello in bass, we will also recognize motive ‘X’ from the main theme. After six bars of this pattern, it seems to begin over again, but this time the violin has ‘X’, sounding it low in its register. But the process is shortened here to only 4 bars before the intervention of...

Part II – It is at this point that the key signature changes from two flats to one sharp, signaling that we will soon be in G major, the major submediant of our tonic B-flat. This is the unorthodox key that Beethoven has chosen for his sub-theme group and the remainder of the exposition, instead of the expected classical practice of going to the dominant. (By this point in his career, Beethoven was fond of exploiting more striking key relationships based on the distance of a third in his sonata-form movements.) This last section of the bridge is all about anticipation; our sense of meter is disoriented as Beethoven obscures the location of the beat. The harmony is based on the dominant 7<sup>th</sup> of our upcoming G major. While the piano’s triplets continue, they are now shorn of their sparkling trill. Finally, when we know we must be about to arrive, Beethoven teasingly extends the moment with a high R.H. solo.

Subordinate theme group: Sub-theme I – Statement 4 bars (2+2), piano solo with both hands high on the keyboard. This short parallel period is strongly rhythmic in character, with a sprightly staccato presentation.

Counter-statement also 4 bars, but now it is the strings’ turn to dominate as the theme is complicated by immediate imitations. The R.H., which has been silent, re-enters just at the end to effect the segue to...

Sub-theme II, Statement – After the shortness and regularity of the first sub-theme, this one is considerably more sprawling and unpredictable. However, it starts out seeming to parallel the phrase structure we’ve just heard above. The cello launches a wonderfully lyrical, romantic-sounding idea, growing directly from its sustained note at the end of the previous theme. This is a 2-bar phrase that is immediately repeated, but with the violin doubling the cello in octave unison. The shape of this melody seems to be clearly related to motive ‘Y’, as it is also based on a stepwise rise concluded by the drop of a 3<sup>rd</sup>. Each measure of this has been decorated by a graceful stream of descending R.H. 16<sup>th</sup>-notes. The next four bars offer a varied repeat with the

lyrical idea now in the cello's bass register, while the piano's 16<sup>th</sup>s, in both hands this time, are elaborated with both rising and falling motion. At this point, the theme becomes more complicated, as it segues into fresh material: a free lyrical extension that seems at first to be maybe a third sub-theme. This is 5 bars, with R.H. lead throughout, and it is preceded by staccato piano triplets that seem to launch it on its way. Despite the piano's dominance, the cello's beautiful counter-melody here also deserves attention.

Quasi-counter-statement – This is essentially a varied and rescored repeat of the theme, with the unusual aspect that the first 4 bars are omitted. Thus, it starts with the low bass statement of the short lyrical phrase, this time given to the L.H. rather than the cello, while the strings provide the rising and falling 16<sup>th</sup>s. The extension, including its launching triplets, is now given to the entire trio together, with all three instruments harmonizing on the melody, but the violin enjoys special prominence on top, in one of its rare opportunities to exploit its upper register. The original 5-bar phrase is now extended an extra 2 bars, made longer by an expectant *ritard*.

Closing material: This is relatively brief given the expansive scale of the rest of the exposition. Rather than introducing striking new thematic material, this has more the character of a cadence passage that subtly builds and evolves. A short idea, repetitively sung by the strings, starts hushed and then crescendos to a *f* climax, marked by the return of triplet rhythm, which is then traded antiphonally between the piano and the strings. The music continues to transform, adding brilliant R.H. trills to the sense of culmination, but we are still in G major, a huge harmonic distance from the B-flat tonic necessary to begin the repeat of the exposition. Thus, Beethoven now does some fancy harmonic footwork in a more quiet and poetic mode. Still, the final arrival home at B-flat is delayed to the point that it takes us a moment to get our bearings and realize that the opening theme is actually starting again. After our second pass through the exposition, a new ending launches us seamlessly into the...

#### *Development:*

This large development in five parts is on an ambitious scale that matches the proportions of the exposition and the movement as a whole. As French composer Vincent d'Indy points out in Cobbett's, this alternates between passages of repose and activity. Parts II & IV are by far the longest and most dynamic, while Parts I, III & V are more gentle transitions.

Part I is an unbroken continuation of the last part of the closing material. The triplet rhythm accelerates into flowing R.H. 16<sup>th</sup>s, while an ominous L.H. bass offers more of the strings' triplet material from earlier. Soon the feeling of increasing suspense is heightened by a cadenza-like R.H. solo that leads us to...

Part II: Against an accompaniment of renewed piano triplets, Beethoven starts a development of motive 'X' from the main theme. Poetic and lyrical, this freely canonic treatment is sung first up high in the cello, then by the violin in almost the same register one bar later, and lastly in the 3rd bar by the L.H. down in the bass. A 4<sup>th</sup> bar extends the process more freely, and then the entire passage is repeated with surprising faithfulness before a new, more fragmentary pattern is established. 'X' is now reduced to 3-note sighing figures, overlapping back and forth with almost swooning ardor between the R.H. and the strings, while the L.H. takes over the inexorable murmuring triplets. This simple, basic concept is effectively maintained while building

gradually to an impressive climax, as the music drifts from key to key and the dynamics yield from *sfp* to *sfz* to *ff*. After the peak is reached, a brief diminuendo leads us to...

Part III: After so much emphasis on motive 'X', we are gratified to hear another part of the main theme as the cello offers motive 'Y', including its continuation into the first part of the consequent. This is sung softly and sweetly, and then sequenced upward by the violin in another of its rare excursions into its higher register. Still, the pulse of triplets continues, now in both hands of the piano. This is a brief, glowing island of lyricism at the heart of the development. What follows in...

Part IV is in marked contrast: the famous pizzicato episode that sounds remarkably hip for its time, and delights us by continuing at such unexpected length. It is a "...thirty-three bar passage...where, at a consistent *pp* dynamic until the final crescendo, descending piano arpeggios are outlined with trills against rising string scales in thirds and tenths, played pizzicato with magical effect." (Smallman) Thematically, the pizzicato material is a deconstructive elaboration of motive 'Y'. Structurally, this part of the development is actually longer than Smallman's 33 bars, as it starts with 3 bars for piano alone, establishing the new mood and banishing the previous pattern of triplets. Then at the climactic conclusion, the piano continues for 4 more bars of *ff* solo. Still, the most salient feature of this section remains "...the extensive use of pizzicato. The device was employed by Beethoven as early as Op. I, No. 1 (at the end of the slow movement), and consistently in the other trios; but never previously with such freedom and richness of effect as in the *Archduke*." (Smallman)

Part V: Retransition. Initiated by a *ff* piano trill that links it to the end of Part IV, the dynamic level soon drops as the strings remind us of the 3-note 'X'-derived sighs from Part II. Here they no longer overlap, and the mood is not dreamy and romantic, but instead somewhat troubled and tentative. We seem to be groping our way uncertainly towards the home key of B-flat. Soon the music has softened further to *pp*, and the last 2 bars of the development give way to overlapping trills in all voices.

#### *Recapitulation:*

Main theme: Unlike many of Beethoven's recapitulations, which blare out *f* or *ff* a main theme that was originally presented softly, this one foregoes that dramatic effect and instead has the theme enter gently as a lamb, preserving the *pp* mood of the retransition. Thus, the theme is heard even more quietly than ever before, and seems to emerge almost imperceptibly.

Statement preserves the original phrase structure, but the R.H. lead is now dreamily embellished and the strings harmonize with the tune from the beginning. After the *pp* opening, the theme's original dynamic indications are soon mostly reverted to.

Interlude – The biggest change here is the more active and showy writing for the strings. The cello is given particular prominence by leading off, and then returning after the violin's turn.

This featuring of the cello is an effective set up for the...

Counter-statement, in which it is given the main theme lead for the first time. The lower-voiced instrument is embellished from above by the R.H. and violin in alternating 8<sup>th</sup>-note arpeggiated figures. Aside from the new scoring, this begins as a faithful rendition of the tune, but only a

little way into the consequent the melody and harmony start to veer into new territory, and before we realize it, we have morphed into a somewhat expanded version of...

Bridge, Part II: Thus, there is no reprise of the second interlude, codetta, or the first section of the bridge, and overall Beethoven has abbreviated the material by 20 bars. The new touch that is added to this metrically ambiguous passage is the violin's brief appropriation of the R.H.'s triplets.

Sub-theme group: All very regular, just transposed to the expected home key (which is not always a given for Beethoven by this date).

Closing material: Likewise very faithful, ending with a transposed version of the original first ending.

Coda: Given the scale of this movement so far, the coda is surprisingly short but loses nothing thereby in effectiveness. We can now appreciate more of Beethoven's strategy in starting the recapitulation *pp*, because here finally we hear the heroically inflected main theme bursting forth in exhilarating *ff*...a climactic and electrifying moment. Only the antecedent is actually *ff*, scored *tutti* for the whole trio, but that is enough to make the point. The consequent starts with a drop to *p* and soon spins out into a freely-evolving extension that completely omits motive 'Z'. From the start of the coda, the L.H. has been playing a regular accompaniment of 16<sup>th</sup>-note rising arpeggios, and this will continue as a unifying device for the remainder of the movement. With great skill, Beethoven leads us through incremental transformations. After a moment of peace and tranquility, the excitement starts to build again, and soon we have another rousing climax that evolves through incremental stages of intensity until the end is marked by an explosive burst of staccato triplets. On careful listening, we note that the essence of motive 'X' has been craftily exploited throughout this dynamic ending.

## **Movement II – Scherzo & Trio design (but with Trio repeated, thus ABABA-Coda), Allegro, 3/4, B-flat major**

“...full of freedom and joy...” (d'Indy)

“We...move from the elevated tone of the opening movement directly to the Scherzo, which comes across as jocular and even boisterous in comparison.” (Keller)

“Instead of a conventional slow second movement, the lively and disarmingly naive Scherzo comes next. Bearing an unmistakable resemblance to the Scherzo of Beethoven's String Quartet, Op. 59, No. 1, the movement starts with a rhythmic figure played by the cello alone that bounces along in its light humorous way until the cello introduces the sinuous mysterious chromatic line of the trio. Before too long, though, Beethoven brings in the second theme of the trio, a gay, dancing melody that falls somewhere between a sturdy peasant Ländler and a classical ballet melody.” (Berger)

“The scherzo begins humorously (note the exaggerated accent in bar 4 on the cello, and the fugal-type inversion of the theme when the violin comes in). The chromatically constructed

melody of the middle section may be similarly construed, though this kind of humour is less forthright, especially when worked out at length even into the coda. Yet there is no hint of savagery or gruffness, which, considering the nature of the slow movement, would hardly seem appropriate.” (Denis Arnold)

“Both the scherzo proper and the central trio section are built on themes that rise from a low B-flat, but apart from that their characters could hardly be more different; the scherzo proper is derived from a forthright ascending major scale [the rising scale motive expanded to a full octave] while the trio is a chromatic canon with creepy overtones.” (Keller)

*Scherzo (Principal song):*

“The main section of the Ländler-like Scherzo is cheerful and unrestrained...” (Hans Christoph Wobbs) This section is continually evolving and varied music, without the literal repeats of rounded binary form. It is freely constructed from two mildly-contrasting themes that alternate several times over its course.

Theme 1: Statement (strings) – Despite its contrapuntal and imitative style, this theme is presented as a surprisingly symmetrical 16-bar (8+8) balanced period (and each of the 8 bars even splits symmetrically into 4+4). After the solo cello leads off the beginning of the antecedent, the violin comes in with a loose inversion of the same idea. The consequent is nearly identical, but with the string parts reversed. The spare, almost skeletal texture of this opening leaves plenty of scope for progressive enrichment and complexity as the section progresses, while the feeling of a short-short-long rhythm will provide a unifying feature throughout. Counter-statement – Piano solo at first, but then for the consequent Beethoven incorporates an “...accompaniment pattern...where pizzicato strings add a wonderful delicacy and verve...” (Smallman)

Theme 2: This is more lyrical in character after the tiptoeing staccato quality of Theme 1. Now the piano is given the chance to introduce the melody of the new material, while continuity is provided by a continuation of the pizzicato accompaniment, along with a retention of the sense of short-short-long rhythm. The piano’s melody is 8 bars (4+4), then the strings start to repeat Theme 2, but this is where the regularity of phrasing that has been established begins to give way to greater freedom and asymmetry as, after only 4 bars, the tune slips into a free extension. The music becomes more busy, transitional, and less thematic, while the strings and piano share more equally in its presentation.

Theme 1 return: Abbreviated from its original 32 bars to just 16. Antecedent preserves opening string parts, but now with lively R.H. 8<sup>th</sup>-note ornamentation. Consequent switches to piano lead, and this in a compressed way suggests the piano’s counter-statement. The new 8<sup>th</sup>-note accompaniment is maintained, now switching to the strings. The last part of the consequent turns into free transitional material that leaves the theme behind, but without extending the number of bars.

Theme 2 return: This time the cello gets to start this theme and in a new key, but soon the R.H. reclaims and decorates the melody. As Theme 2 progresses, it transforms a good deal from the



original, with some particularly felicitous lyricism offered to the piano and especially the strings. At the end, the music reverts to the material that earlier summoned the return of Theme 1.

*Codetta:* Our ears are conditioned to expect Theme 1, but all we get is the distilled essence of it in a concise and witty close. The final crescendo and emphatic last notes provide telling contrast to what follows.

*Trio:*

“...a trio with two contrasting facets: one (in B flat minor) fugal and chromatic, the other (in D flat major) in the style of a dashing waltz à la Weber.” (Robin Golding)

“The Scherzo is audaciously original, particularly in the trio section. Beginning with a cello solo lacking clear pulse or key, the theme is then repeated as an eerie fugato which is interrupted three times by an incongruously exuberant ‘waltz.’ Beethoven's humor here takes on a particularly grotesque quality, found in many late works, such as the March movement in Piano Sonata, Op. 101.” (Shapiro)

With its alternation of two contrasting themes, the trio closely mirrors the construction of the principal song, but now instead of mild contrast, we seem to be shuttled back and forth without warning between some gloomy pit and one of the brilliant ballrooms of imperial Vienna. Each time, the accumulated tension generated by Theme 1 releases explosively into the joyful revelry of Theme 2. We hear this process three times, but Beethoven is careful to avoid monotony through changes of key and adjustments to the material. Theme 1 especially is significantly altered each time we hear it. The first time it comes back, it is much shorter and the fugal entries overlap much sooner in the manner of a *stretto*. The third occurrence of Theme 1 is the longest and most powerful. This time the violin makes the first entry, and again the other voices join in rapid succession. But now the music continues building to an extended climax characterized by an ominous new rumble of repeated 8<sup>th</sup>-notes, first in the strings and then moving to the piano.

*Literal repeat of Scherzo & Trio*

*Final repeat of Scherzo:*

Again, all as before. We can see the wisdom of not having internal repeats in this section, as we hear it all three times anyway without any change. During these later years of his middle period, Beethoven was particularly fond of these scherzos that cycle back and forth between the principal song and trio, for example the scherzos of the Trio in E-Flat, Op. 70, No. 2 and the 7<sup>th</sup> Symphony.

*Coda:*

Part I: This hints at another return of the Trio, but it is only a free meditation on its dreary, chromatic material. This shortened version uses all the instruments together sooner and features stronger dynamic contrasts. Also, the original steadily rising line is now replaced by a more undulating motion.

Part II: Now Beethoven offers welcome and good-humored relief with a brief and clever variant of the Scherzo's Theme 1. Thus, this final bit is closely akin to the Scherzo's codetta, but still manages to sound fresh and playfully effective.

**Movement III – Theme and 5 variations with coda, Andante cantabile ma però con moto (walking tempo, singingly but with motion), 3/4, D major (major mediant)**

“...the choice of D major for the slow movement, after two extended movements in B flat, provides a wholly Haydnesque type of contrast as a means of establishing a mood of warmth and serenity for the radiant set of variations.” (Smallman)

“...the spiritual center of the work and foreshadows the final movements of the piano sonatas Op. 109 and 111. In this *Andante*, as in those later works, variations are no longer taken to be merely a number of separate vignettes, presenting a somewhat spare theme in increasingly more elaborate and sumptuously decorative ‘garb.’ Rather, in Op. 97, the variations take us on a spiritualized, transformational journey deep into the inner core of the noble chorale theme – into the heart of lightness and luminosity. By means of a gradual increase in rhythmic motion throughout the continuously flowing narrative, the materiality of the music is transformed into pure energy, and Beethoven brings the listener to a place where time seems to stand still, for an ever-deeper communion.” (Shapiro)

“The variations follow the eighteenth-century model, essentially transforming the original melody by elaborating on the rhythmic patterns while maintaining the fundamental melodic and harmonic features, to create a movement of ineffable beauty.” (Berger)

“...a set of variations over a hymn-like melody, simple and clear in harmony and marked *andante cantabile ma però con moto* to avoid the temptation of too much solemnity. Its main quality is its serenity, a hint of that to come in later quartets and piano sonatas. The stiffness of his previous variation sets for the medium is quite gone. Here all is fluid and forward-moving. The first variation may be based on triplets in the piano part, the second on a semiquaver dialogue between violin and cello and so on. That is not what it sounds like, rather does it appear to be seamless, each instrument intervening as necessary, while the recurrence of the theme in its simple, original form does not round the movement off (as in Bach's *Goldberg Variations*) but is given new possibilities until it leads gently into the finale.” (Arnold)

“...variations that unroll leisurely in an atmosphere of pervasive calm, reminding us that the monumental slow movement of the *Hammerklavier* Sonata lies not far ahead in Beethoven's production.” (Keller)

*Theme:*

“...a captivating melody, a model of the two-section theme...” (d'Indy) As so often with variation movements, this theme is in binary form, but with a free treatment of the usual template. Beethoven directs that it be played *semplICE*.

Part I: 8 bars (2+2+4...sort of “ready, set, go”), marked ***p*** throughout. The first time through, this is a piano solo with the theme presented in richly scored, two-handed block chords,

everything moving in rhythmic sync. Thus, a very simple homophonic texture that leaves ample scope for future variation. The triple-meter and repetition of a simple rhythmic motive create a gentle, rocking effect. After the repeated motive of the first 4 bars, the more continuous consequent is based on a stepwise ascent (our rising scale motive again) and then descent. The second half of the last bar acts as a lull and subtle upbeat to the ensuing repetition of Part I. As was his usual practice at this point, Beethoven offers an enriched scoring rather than a literal repeat. This time the strings sing the melody, harmonizing it mostly in 10<sup>th</sup>s. Their leading role is effectively anticipated by their entrance during the upbeat breather. Rather than switching to a broken chord accompaniment, the piano maintains its simple vertical chords.

Part II: 8 bars (2+2+4). This returns to solo piano in the same homophonic texture. The first 4 bars are based on the opening of Part I, but reshaped and reharmonized. The consequent is also similar to its Part I equivalent, but now the entire passage is basically a stepwise descent. Once again, there is a half-beat lull during which the strings enter, but this time only the consequent of Part II is repeated, with the strings harmonizing the lead. This provides an effective surprise, while neatly abbreviating the typical procedure. Part II has also introduced some mild dynamic contrasts with crescendos and a *fp* midway through the consequent. The *tutti* repetition enhances this *fp* with a violin quadruple-stop, providing a point of climax for the entire theme. With the exception of the final variation leading into the coda, all of the forthcoming variations will faithfully adhere to the theme's phrase structure.

#### *Variation 1:*

The piano has prominence throughout, with the R.H. recasting the melody in 8<sup>th</sup>-note triplets while the L.H. mirrors it in contrary motion. All of Part I is *pp*, and its texture is enhanced by simple *sotto voce* string phrases. The first time through, these are sung by cello alone, low in its register. For the repeat, the cello then moves up an octave and is doubled by the violin an octave higher still, while the piano part is enriched by fuller scoring. Worth noting is a brief crescendo in the last bar both times through. This may seem like a minor detail, but it acts as a precedent that will be maintained and elaborated in the subsequent variations.

The material of Part II closely follows the instrumental pattern established in Part I, but a notable feature is the increase to *ffp* at the climactic point of the partial repeat.

*Variation 2* features more variety of scoring from section to section. The strings take over the leading role here, and the theme is predominantly translated into staccato 16<sup>th</sup>-notes, lending a mild scherzando effect. Part I the first time through has regular alternation of cello with violin, accompanied by a rhythmic chordal pattern from the piano. The repeat is a marked contrast with the staccato 16<sup>th</sup>s reshaped into rising and falling arpeggios. These still alternate, but now between the cello and L.H., together in octaves, and the violin and R.H.

Part II begins with an even stronger contrast for the first 4 bars, as now the string phrases are legato. But this change is only temporary, with the consequent returning to the original staccato material from the start of the variation. Thus we have more of a feeling of rounded binary form here than was present in the original theme. Also the expected stronger dynamics of the consequent now include a second *fp*, with the climactic effect in the repeat generated by triple-stops from both strings.

*Variation 3* is based on a sustained 16<sup>th</sup>-note triplet rhythm, and returns the focus to the piano. After the internal scoring contrasts of the last variation, this one sounds much more “all of a piece.” The R.H. is very busy with throbbing, off-beat triplet chords, periodically punctuated by L.H. contributions. The strings’ role is considerably cut back, but they provide a telling dramatic effect when they respond to the piano with triplet chords of their own. By now the dynamic swell at the end of Part I has become especially prominent, and though Part II has always been marked by greater dynamic range, here this is exploited strikingly with strong and varied contrasts.

*Variation 4:*

After the persistent, headlong pace of Variation 3, this provides a sense of relaxation, increased by an actual tempo change to *Poco più adagio*.

Part I: The R.H. syncopates the melody, mostly in 8<sup>th</sup>-notes, while the L.H. accompaniment is a continuous stream of broken-chord 32<sup>nd</sup> notes. All the while, the strings are a constant presence in slow harmony lines featuring long-sustained notes and violin double-stops. Despite the soft dynamics, the effect is of a wonderfully rich sonority.

Part I repeat: Now the syncopated version of the melody is presented by the strings, harmonizing in rhythmic sync, having in fact asserted their lead with a crescendo during the lead-in upbeat. The fullness of sound is enhanced here by the freed R.H. doubling the L.H.’s 32<sup>nd</sup> notes in octave unison. The consequent features a further expansion of texture with more double-stops from the violin.

Part II: There is not much more to say here, as the scoring faithfully adheres to the pattern established in Part I with piano lead for the initial 8 bars, followed by the same switch to the strings for the consequent repeat. The expected greater variety of dynamics provide the main sense of something new and a culmination.

*Variation 5/Coda/Transition:*

“...seems about to end with a simple restatement of the theme, as is done by the composer in so many cases (adagio of Op. 109, arietta of Op. 111, etc.). But this time things turn out quite differently. The theme, after its second bar, seems as though distraught; with mournful change of key it hesitates, falters, and stops, as if tired out, on a cadence in E minor, a key absolutely foreign to the original one. But the concluding figure (‘cellule’ [short motive]) is there; it is watching over the healthful progression of the phrase entrusted to it, and in this way begins an admirable ‘terminal development’ [coda], which, bringing back the desired tonality, gives rise to a melodic amplification of the melody – a marvelous conclusion to the movement.” (d’Indy)

Number 4 was the last true variation in the strict sense of following the full theme’s phrase structure. But this long and constantly-evolving final section, nearly a quarter of the length of the entire movement, starts with what appears to be a reprise of the opening theme, yet is in fact an unconstrained and emotionally charged fantasy on it. Part I is presented with the most faithfulness, still 8 bars, and the melody clearly recognizable for all its harmonic distress. We continue straight on to Part II without any repeat, but after only the first 4 bars, new invention and expansion takes over. There is marked contrast between quiet, tentative phrases ending in

pauses and powerful swells of ringing sonority. Emphasis is placed on the dotted rhythm motive from Part II's consequent that d'Indy refers to as the "cellule." Now this motive, over a new pulse of repeated triplets, launches us into d'Indy's "terminal development," a combination of coda and transition that sustains and amplifies the magical mood of the preceding variations while progressing in a smooth flow of free invention. The latter portions of this flower into gorgeous moments of transcendent lyricism. At the end, the quiet music diminuendos to an even-softer *pp*; however, the sense of a peaceful close is disturbed by a final shift to dominant 7<sup>th</sup> harmony. This is the unstable chord that requires resolution at the beginning of the finale. (Note that this is actually a B-flat 7 chord, and not the expected F7 chord that would take us to the home key of B-flat. Why is a riddle that is explained in the Smallman quote below...)

#### **Movement IV – Rondo (ABACABA/Coda), Allegro moderato, 2/4, B-flat major**

"In a moment of musical magic, Beethoven 'allows' the *Finale* to generate its own creative spark, seemingly finding its impulse from the wisps of cosmic material in the *coda* of the lovely preceding movement. These melodic fragments coalesce into a high-spirited paean of joy, as Beethoven asserts the existential possibility of our experiencing heaven on earth. Here we have an exuberant, rollicking dance with Hungarian flavorings and earthy humor – a life-loving and boundless energy to serve as the fitting culmination of such a monumental work!" (Shapiro)

"The last movement, following the lofty *Andante cantabile* without pause, provides the same rude shock that observers frequently reported after hearing Beethoven improvise at the keyboard. Apparently it was Beethoven's habit, after catching everyone up in the magic of his music, to slam his fist down on the keys and burst into raucous laughter, as though embarrassed by the spiritual experience they had just shared. Likewise, the energetic, dancelike last movement impudently intrudes on the serene, otherworldly atmosphere Beethoven had created in the previous movement. But, once having broken the spell, the movement fairly bubbles along with great wit and humor, to reach a brilliant conclusion." (Berger)

"This begins with a jaunty tune with a suspicion of a Hungarian gait (Haydn comes to mind). The form is rondo, and if that might suggest a lightness compared with the by now usual heavyweight finales, the delicacy of the episodes, the skillful way in which the main theme is brought back and even the surprises of the ultimate dash for home in 6/8 time, tell us otherwise. It is nonetheless a happy piece, as is the whole trio." (Arnold)

The "Hungarian" flavor referenced in two of the above quotes links this finale with the finale of Beethoven's immediately previous piano trio, Op. 70, No. 2 in E-flat.

"...another pastoral symphony; not in a landscape this time, but a joyous meeting of the rude peasantry, the themes of which should be interpreted almost brutally. As regards construction, it is a rondo in which the refrain appears five times, but on the last two occasions in a modified rhythm (6/8), bringing with it a curious simplification of the theme, and ends the work in most joyously brilliant fashion." (d'Indy)

(Some greater detail for the more harmonically adventurous...)

“The unusually long rondo finale contains several structural features of particular interest. The principal theme, though fundamentally in B flat major, starts repeatedly on a dominant 7<sup>th</sup> in E flat and maintains that key, the subdominant, for four bars before turning to its real tonic. It is thus a particular type of modulating theme, similar to those found in the rondo finales of the second *Rasumovsky* quartet and the fourth piano concerto, both of which start in C major before moving to their main keys of E minor and G major, respectively. In the case of the trio a special problem arises because the rondo theme, starting as it does on the dominant of the subdominant (over a dominant seventh), cannot be approached for the purpose of reprise by means of a normal preparatory dominant. Beethoven's ingenious solution to the problem is to establish well in advance, and in numerous imaginative ways, the actual dominant harmony (complete with dominant seventh) over which the theme is to enter; and to rely on its strong melody profile, rather than any shift in harmony, to characterize the point of its return. There is, however, one exception, and a particularly fascinating one. At the end of the recapitulation, the return of the rondo theme is approached by the same method as before, but at the last moment shifting harmonies and a sudden enharmonic side-step bring the music to rest on a dominant seventh in A major. Logically, if the former harmonic pattern were to be preserved, the return should proceed at this point in E major; but Beethoven, for the first time, suddenly treats his dominant seventh as a ‘real’ preparatory chord, shifts into A major, and provides in that key a new version of the rondo theme, now presto and in 6/8 time, with G natural subtly removed from its melody and harmony so that no trace remains of the original subdominant harmonic characteristics. The use of the ‘foreign’ key area of A major is remarkable mainly because it is maintained at such length; no less than thirty-one bars elapse before a further return of the rondo theme at last restores the original tonic. Elsewhere in Beethoven, such ‘wrong-key’ returns tend to be more short-lived. A lovely early example occurs in the finale of the E flat piano sonata, Op. 7, of 1796, where a magical reprise of the rondo theme in the key of E major is preserved for only five bars before slipping back into the original tonic key. In Op. 97, so disruptive is the effect of the long A major passage that it requires a coda of exceptional spaciousness, much of it over a tonic pedal, to provide an effective counterbalance.” (Smallman)

*Rondo theme:*

Piano lead throughout. A 2-bar introduction sets up the theme itself by anticipating its rhythmically-incisive basic motive ***f*** and starting with a brusque *tutti* chord including violin double-stops. The theme proper follows immediately, but now ***p dolce/expressivo***. The theme is in binary form, with each part given a decorated repeat.

Part I: 8 bars (2+2+4...“ready, set, go” pattern). The R.H. offers an infectious dance tune over a bouncy L.H. “oom-pah” accompaniment. The strings are limited to strategic off-beat chords that add considerably to the festive mood. For the repeat, the R.H. ornaments the melody by means of 16<sup>th</sup>-note quintuplets, and then a switch to triplet rhythm. Meanwhile, the strings contribute a felicitous new effect by playing bursts of chattering, repeated-note 16<sup>th</sup>s in alternation. (Note that the 4 bars of antecedent here constitute another permutation of the rising scale motive.)

Part II: 8 bars (1+1+1+5). This starts with a short new rhythmic motive that contrasts with the previous one and is characterized by a ***sfp*** accent on the up-beat. After this is repeated three times, the 5-bar consequent continues in a more graceful mode with a descending run of flowing 16<sup>th</sup>s, much enhanced by a lyrical cello counter-melody. While Part II is effectively

differentiated from Part I, but still linked to it by an overall shape characterized by a rising repeated figure, it is followed by a more gradual fall. The manner of decorating the repeat is similar to the earlier procedure, but now the piano uses 16<sup>th</sup>-note triplets throughout. Also, the violin, which was silent during the first presentation of Part II, now harmonizes with the cello during the consequent, and this rich *tutti* scoring provides an effective climax to the theme. Whereas the theme came to rest in the 8<sup>th</sup> bar of Part II the first time, now it extends through the measure, leading into...

#### *Episode I (B):*

Part I: Still in home key. Playful 8-bar rhythmic idea, more gestural than actual theme. The strings, in octave unison, launch a dialogue with the piano. Their contribution is a staccato 1-bar motive that is answered by a bouncy keyboard variant. After a few of these exchanges, the piano extends its material to the end of the part and is joined by the strings.

Part II (modulating bridge): 8 bars (4+4). This is almost a piano solo, and features a staccato 16<sup>th</sup>-note scale rising up the keyboard in octave unison, with a diminuendo from *f* to *p*. At the top, the momentum is slowed by triplet rhythm, and the strings add a brief contribution. The second 4 bars are a literal repeat.

Part III (B-theme): Version 1 – F major (the expected dominant), 8 bars (4+4). This gentle, *dolce* theme has a less-distinctive melodic profile than we might typically expect at this point. The piano has the lead, in “music box” scoring, with a syncopated, dotted-rhythm R.H. line over a L.H. accompaniment that echoes the same pattern. Meanwhile, the strings play rising, long-held notes. The second 4 bars contain the same material with slightly expanded scoring. Version 2 – 8 bars (4+4), with seamless extension. The mild mood of Version 1 is now turned into something more wild, hectic, and excitingly gestural... far from any suggestion of vocal-style melody. Once again we have the syncopated dotted rhythm, but now recast as antiphonal exchanges between *pp* strings and *f* piano. In this case, the second 4 bars are essentially a literal repeat. (The scoring of this second version points up a strong affinity to Part I of the episode as well.)

Extension/Transition – 6 bars. After the very regular phrase structure of the episode, this is a free modulatory passage that sets up the Rondo theme, though with the unusual necessity of preparing for its start in the subdominant.

#### *Rondo return:*

This is a literal repeat of the entire theme, though the last bar of the decorated repeat of Part II is expanded into a new 6-bar extension that lushly amplifies the effect of the original ending. All of this provides a seamless setup for the ensuing...

#### *Episode II (Central ‘C’ episode):*

Part I: This presents new, strongly memorable thematic material, while at the same time modulating from key to key in the manner of a development section. Powerful dance rhythms provide a fresh dose of Hungarian atmosphere. The basic theme is 10 bars long, with an asymmetrical 6(2+4)+4(2+2) phrase structure, contrasting lyrical and dramatic elements. The 6-bar opening starts with bold impetuosity and a rising motion, then transitions to a longer, gently-lyrical descent. The following 4 bars intervene with a brusque rhythmic figure that is sounded

twice. The entire trio is heard throughout, but the lead seems to shift from piano in the 6 bars to strings for the 4 bars. The whole 10-bar process is then faithfully repeated, but transposed into a new key. A shift to yet another key starts a third pass through the theme, though this time after the 6-bar phrase we arrive at...

Part II: Transition/tease. This starts with a sudden shift of atmosphere, a mood of hushed mystery featuring sustained strings and L.H. triplets as the R.H., near the top of the keyboard, anticipates the Rondo theme with two ghostly utterances of its opening motive. This evolves into a crescendoing modulatory passage based on a steady stream of undulating 16<sup>th</sup>-notes from the piano. After this climaxes in a *f* chord featuring multiple stops from the strings, the solo piano completes the transition with a 4-bar cadenza-like tease.

*Rondo return (Recapitulation):*

Because the first return of the theme was a literal repeat, this is Beethoven's first go at a significantly new treatment. This time the strings dominate, the cello high in its range throughout, while the piano provides a shimmering new accompaniment that seems to evoke the Eastern European folk instrument the cimbalom.

Part I: After a brief violin lead, the tune is taken over by the cello up in the same octave. The repeat of Part I does not alter the melody with the earlier decorative style, but instead relies on new scoring that finds the violin briefly harmonizing beneath the cello before it then takes over the lead. Throughout, the virtuoso piano part gives both hands a constant pulse of 16<sup>th</sup>-note triplets.

Part II: This follows very regularly the new scoring pattern of Part I.

*Episode III (B'):*

Part I: The first 8 bars are a literal repeat of the original, but then the material receives a new 6-bar extension that starts to shift harmonically. Thus the following...

Part II (Bridge) is heard transposed down a major 2<sup>nd</sup>, though otherwise unchanged.

Part III: Versions 1 & 2 are presented very regularly, except that the key is now E-flat (the subdominant), rather than the more typical use of the tonic at this point. However, Beethoven is only delaying that, because he then repeats the entire sequence again, otherwise unchanged, but now finally in the tonic.

Extension/transition – The familiar treatment now continues an extra 2 bars, leading to a new 8-bar tease based on the Rondo theme and derived from the similar passage at the end of Episode II. This effectively builds an expectant atmosphere, enhanced by a diminuendo and a *ritard* leading to a fermata. For more on the strange harmonies used to set up the coda, refer back to the Smallman quotation above.

*Coda:*

The entire coda features an exciting change to Presto and 6/8 meter.

Coda, Part I: A major (the major leading tone, a very remote key relationship). This takes the place of the final climactic return of the Rondo theme. We still have the regular phrase structure



with Parts I & II each repeated, and hushed dynamics create a sense of excited anticipation. The strings present the melody in octave unison, while the R.H. decorates with persistent trills on the tonic and dominant. The beginning of Part I gives a fairly recognizable presentation of the start of the theme, but from then on the melody gives way to an unbroken stream of triplets. The repeat of Part II is essentially literal, without rescoring or decoration. A jaunty L.H. “oom-pah” pattern adds an effective new touch throughout Part II.

Coda, Part II: 8 bars. A sudden *ff* and a harmonic shock start this modulatory passage that will bring us back to B-flat after our remote excursion. Thematically, this is all based on repetitions of the Rondo theme’s opening motive.

Coda, Part III: Once again we hear the entire theme in its new 6/8 garb, but now determinately reasserting the tonic key and reinforcing this with a continuous tonic pedal. The theme is given slightly enhanced dynamics with brief crescendos and the restoration of Part II’s characteristic *sf*s. Now the melody is triplets throughout, even at the very opening. New scoring gives the tune to the piano while the strings together count out a steady pulse of 2 beats to the bar, initiating a pattern that will continue through most of the rest of the coda. The repeat of Part II is cut just a little bit short by the impetuous intervention of...

Coda, Part IV: This features a surprising return of the B-theme, given its own opportunity to cavort in 6/8 at the new breakneck tempo. However, unlike the treatment of the Rondo theme, this is not faithful to the earlier phrase structure, and instead we get a very free and lengthy expansion of the material. The inspiration seems to come especially from Version 2 of the theme, with its assertive trading back and forth of the syncopated motive between piano and strings. That same principle of exchange is clearly evoked here, but the effect now is more gentle and playful. We also hear more of the strings’ regular dotted quarter-note rhythm, but now legato and describing ascending or descending chromatic lines.

Coda, Part V gives us one final evocation of the Rondo theme. Part I starts with a brief *f*, and the R.H. recasts the melody into a lilting long-short-long-short rhythm. The repeat of I reverts to the by-now typical steady triplet rhythm, and instead of a clear continuation with Part II, the triplets just keep freely flowing in an unbroken extension (but for 16 bars, the normal length of Part II). Once again the key of B-flat is reinforced by a sustained tonic pedal. The piano dominates throughout, while the strings are relegated to their characteristic dotted quarter-note pulse. Towards the end, a *ritard* and then a fermata create a pregnant pause that provides an effective setup for the brilliant finish of...

Coda, Part VI: Still faster, this starts *ff* with a bold recasting of the Rondo’s basic motive. Then another fermata-enhanced pause leads to the grand finale of this movement and the entire epic ‘Archduke’ Trio: a bouncy, virtuoso piano pattern combined with the strings’ familiar rhythmic beat, capped at the end by a ringing closing cadence. The powerful dynamics of this final passage are especially effective after a coda that has predominantly been very quiet.