

MUSICMAP NOTES

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Beethoven's Sonata for Violin & Piano No. 9 in A (Major/Minor), Op. 47 ('Kreutzer') – 1802

In terms of fame, difficulty, length, and expressive impact, this is the big silverback gorilla of Beethoven's ten violin sonatas, the one you mess with at your peril.

“Rodolphe Kreutzer (1766-1831) was one of the best-known violinists and composers of his time. His home was in Paris, where (among other jobs) he served as a principal violinist for the pre-Revolutionary monarchy, later for Napoleon and finally for the restored monarchy. He was in Vienna for several months in 1798 as part of the entourage of Jean Baptiste Bernadotte (later King Charles XIV of Sweden), Napoleon's minister in the conquered city. During that stay, Kreutzer became a good friend of Ludwig van Beethoven.

“Although one of Beethoven's most highly respected sonatas has immortalized Kreutzer's name, he was not the one for whom, in 1803, Beethoven composed the great violin sonata... That honor belongs to George Augustus Bridgetower (c. 1778-1860), an extraordinary violinist of mixed African and European ancestry whose English name gave the Viennese considerable spelling difficulty. In one of his letters, Beethoven calls him ‘Herr Brishdower, a very capable virtuoso who has a complete command of his instrument.’

“By any name, he was a remarkable violinist who spent much of his career in England but also played extensively on the Continent. He was joined by Beethoven at the piano in a concert given in Vienna on May 24, 1803, at which the *Kreutzer Sonata* first saw the light of day.

“That date is also given by Beethoven's biographer A. W. Thayer as the sonata's date of completion, but the *Kreutzer* is actually one of those fairly numerous Beethoven works that were not finished (at least not completely written down) until after the first performance. Beethoven was late with the violin part, even though the concert had been postponed two days, and Bridgetower had to sight-read some of it while the composer, at the keyboard, probably improvised some segments of the piano part. The violin part of the *Kreutzer* is among the most challenging in the repertoire, and one must stand in awe of Bridgetower's accomplishment in playing with such minimal preparation.

“‘Bridgetower impressed him greatly,’ wrote Beethoven's friend, Ferdinand Ries, ‘because the date of his concert had been set and he wanted to study his part.’ But Beethoven barely made his deadline. ‘One morning,’ Ries continued (and Beethoven scholars generally interpret this to mean the morning of the concert), ‘Beethoven summoned me at 4:30 and said: “Copy the violin part of the first Allegro quickly”... The piano part was noted down only here and there in parts.

Bridgetower had to play the marvelously beautiful theme and variations in F from Beethoven's manuscript at the concert because there was no time to copy it.'

"In spite of this last-minute rush, part of the sonata had existed before Beethoven met Bridgetower. The final movement had been composed for the *Sonata in A*, Op. 30, No. 1, which dates from 1802, but Ries reported that Beethoven thought it 'too brilliant' for that rather gentle work. Nothing was 'too brilliant' for the *Kreutzer*; Beethoven originally used the word 'brilliante' in his title for the work but later scratched it out, leaving a title that still reflects his pride: '*Sonata scritta in uno stilo molto concertante quasi come d'un concerto*' ('Sonata written in a very concertante style, almost like a concerto').

"It is known as the 'Kreutzer' sonata, not the 'Brishtower,' not because of spelling problems but because, after becoming close friends, the composer and Bridgetower had a falling out – perhaps over a woman, if the violinist's recollection many years later is reliable. In October 1804, while writing to his publisher Simrock to complain about delays in printing the sonata, Beethoven explained the dedication, making an oblique reference to his ex-friend Bridgetower without mentioning his name: 'This *Kreutzer* is a dear, good fellow who during his stay here gave me much pleasure. I prefer his modesty and natural manner to all the *extérieur* without *intérieur* of most virtuosi.' As the sonata was written for a thoroughly capable violinist, the dedication to him is all the more appropriate.

"Appropriate or not, the dedication did not impress the recipient. He pronounced the sonata 'outrageously unintelligible,' according to Hector Berlioz, and never performed it or acknowledged the dedication." (Joseph McLellan)

"To make the irony even stronger, Kreutzer never actually played the work but for which he would be entirely forgotten, and Beethoven is said to have been so delighted with an improvement in the violin part made by 'Brishtower' (as he called him) that he jumped up from the piano stool, embraced him and cried 'Again, my dear chap!' Be that as it may, the *Kreutzer* is arguably the first great sonata for violin and piano. With this work Beethoven transferred the violin sonata from the private salon to the concert hall, at a time when public concerts were becoming established in Vienna." (Decca Recordings)

"The 'Kreutzer' is a perfect example of the 'occasional piece,' a work composed for a special concert or spectacular event." (William Drabkin)

"Few musical compositions figure as prominently in an important work of fiction as the Sonata...in A... In Leo Tolstoy's novella *The Kreutzer Sonata*, it is the music of this composition that finally drives the jealous husband to murder his wife.

"...the virtuosic piece has incredibly difficult parts for both players, making it in effect a double concerto for violin and piano *without* orchestra. The 'Kreutzer' has the distinction of being the longest of the ten violin sonatas and the only one with a slow introduction." (Melvin Berger)

"As to the...[opening] presto it is, perhaps, well to guard oneself against a misconception that has misled not only a certain great novelist but also many less nervous music-lovers into

underrating the rest of the work. The mood of the first movement is very fiery and passionate, but it is the passion of Homeric fighting, not that of Aeschylean tragedy; and the rich set of ornate variations follows with exactly the right contrast of tone; while the happy and witty finale (though originally intended for a smaller and earlier work, which it would most certainly have overbalanced) is the one possible outcome of the other two movements that is neither trivial nor sententious.” (Donald Francis Tovey)

Movement I

“It was, and still is, a very unusual thing that a work introduced so broadly in a major key should proceed to a stormy and passionate first movement in the minor. I am aware of only two instances before the ‘Kreutzer’ Sonata...” (Tovey)

Slow Introduction, Adagio sostenuto, 3/4, A Major

“It is again, perhaps interesting from a dramatic point of view to note that in the introduction to the ‘Kreutzer’ Sonata it is only the first four bars (for the unsupported violin) that are really in A major, though their breadth is such that the seal of A major seems at once set upon the work. But the entry of the pianoforte casts a most dramatic cloud over the opening and sets the tone for the wonderfully wistful, yet terse anticipatory expression that makes this introduction one of the landmarks in musical history.” (Tovey)

Part I: Starts with a declamatory violin solo of spare nobility, featuring multiple stops providing a striking sonority, almost evocative of some of Bach’s music for unaccompanied violin. What an incredible opening that sets the string instrument apart with a mood of Olympian detachment. The solo piano responds - also 4 bars and parallel material but marvelously complicating the harmonic picture. This leads then to a freer 5 bars with the instruments trading ideas more conversationally and with increasing overlaps.

Part II: 6 bars. This is now the “teasing” setup that builds anticipation and introduces an all important rising half-step motive in short-long rhythm. The suspense is increased at the end by the addition of a fermata. “[This] held-note gambit is used throughout the movement: at the end of the slow introduction; in the Presto, the end of the exposition, the end of the development, end of recapitulation, beginning of coda. Clearly, the fermata is the boundary marker between the several sections of the movement, as well as a signal element of the opening of the exposition and recapitulation.” (Abram Loft)

Sonata form, Presto, Cut-time (written like 4/4 but counted in 2), A Minor

“The first movement, which hurtles along at a breakneck pace after the introduction, dazzles with its technically demanding parts, including many three- and four-note chords for the violin, cadenza-like interludes, and a number of breaks in rhythm and changes in tempo.” (Berger)

Exposition:

“The half-step motions, so prominent in the maneuverings of the slow introduction, remain important to the fabric of the Presto. If we tabulate the various melodic materials of the Presto, we note not only that they are distinguished from each other broadly along lines of note value, but also that they are bound to each other by the half-step motif emphasis. To a great degree,

these are all manifestations of the one premise highlighted by the slow introduction. The whole movement is coordinated, integrated by this adherence to a central melodic idea.” (Loft)

Main theme I: Statement – 9 bars. A spare, gestural, assertive, uncompromising theme launches *fp* with the half step motive. Violin lead over piano accompaniment. The key is now A Minor, though the theme does not actually start in the tonic. After the long build up, this beginning has an exciting, explosive quality with single-minded intensity conveyed by its burst of staccato quarter-notes and brusque two-handed block chords. But then the sense of propulsion is dissipated by a deceleration ending with a fermata on an inconclusive sounding C Major chord. We feel this pause especially keenly so soon after the slow introduction. (“But we just got going!”)

Counter-statement – Also 9 bars and the same basic idea but now it starts as a piano solo with the violin entering in harmony toward the end. This time, the concluding fermata is enhanced by a *ff* piano cadenza sweeping the entire expanse of the keyboard.

Main theme II: Introduction – Rather than launching straight into the statement, there are 8 bars of introductory wind-up to whip the music into a frenzy. Against a chromatically rising violin line, elaborating on the half-step motive, the R.H. introduces for the first time the steadily flowing 8th-note rhythm that will dominate so much of the rest of the movement. Crescendo to *f*.

Statement – 8 bars. Finally, an uninterrupted *presto* tempo and undiluted assertion of the home key, A minor. This is so satisfying to us precisely because of the whole process of getting to this point. This busy music now finds steady 8th-notes in all parts (except the violin toward the end). A back-and-forth dialogue of two-bar exchanges between the violin and R.H. introduces an important oscillating 8th-note idea that will recur elsewhere and which typically takes the form of a fixed pitch against a melodically moving line.

Counter-statement – Again 8 bars, but enhanced scoring now has the oscillating 8th-note dialogue doubled in various voices and exploits greater extremes of range.

Bridge: The start of this passage is emblematic of an electric atmosphere typical of this movement that seems continually to threaten sudden boisterous, almost belligerent eruptions from both instruments. The bridge has the effect of an unbroken sweep because of the piano’s non-stop, roiling 8th-note arpeggios (in two-handed unison octaves until close to the end). Thus, the 8th-note motion from the previous theme persists uninterrupted. Meanwhile, the violin starts with strident multiple-stop chords, then switches to long notes and trilling figures, and finally offers 8th-notes of its own in jagged, chromatic figuration. The bridge calms at the end to a sustained, dominant preparation.

Subordinate theme group:

Sub-theme I: “Notice, here again, the extremes favored by Beethoven. From rushing streams of small notes to the striking contrast of series of whole and half notes.” (Loft)

Statement – E major (we get the expected switch to the major mode here, however not the conventional relative major, C, but rather the dominant). A strikingly new mood is encountered with a gentle hymn-like melody in long notes, sung sweetly by the violin, supported in sync by block piano chords. This scoring clearly evokes the effect of part-writing for a choir. Even this mild utterance pays oblique tribute to the half-step motive with the violin’s opening rise from G

sharp to A, though shorn of the characteristic short-long rhythm and sinking back to G sharp with the third note. A regular, mildly contrasting period of 16 bars (8+8). A peculiarity of the consequent's melody is its way of ending by blithely repeating the same note five times in a row. Partial counter-statement – Switch to E minor (a change in mode which will prevail through the rest of the exposition...thus our respite in major was brief indeed). Now the R.H. plays the melody, doubling it in the upper octave, while the violin contributes a simple new, sighing descant. We hear the complete antecedent, but soon after the music stalls as the tempo switches briefly to *adagio*, and the effect is further enhanced by an expectant fermata at the end.

Interlude/Setup: This has a similar function to the main theme II intro, but at greater length. It very effectively builds intense excitement, tension, and anticipation, especially after the stasis of the *adagio* lull. The passage starts by contrasting *p* and *f* dynamics, while resuming the now familiar, turbulent 8th-note motion continuously in the piano and sometimes in the violin as well. (The oscillating version of the 8th-notes from main theme II returns prominently here, especially in the L.H.) The most striking part features syncopated, repeated high Es from the violin, almost immediately duplicated by the R.H. in octaves.

Sub-theme II: The exhilarating climax of the exposition, a theme of overwhelming, swaggering machismo. This is the apotheosis of the half-step motive, but unlike main theme I, with its fermata-enhanced pauses, this is simply unstoppable, a juggernaut sweeping everything before it. Statement – 12 bars, with irregular phrase structure of 5+7(4+3). Piano lead with melody in ringing R.H. octaves over L.H. steady quarter-note “oom-cha-oom-cha” accompaniment. Although this belongs to the piano, the violin's series of imperious pizzicato chords adds immeasurably to the stirring effect. The first 5 bars are all about the half-step motive, first thundered out three times in exaggerated rhythm and then sequenced successively upwards, outlining the E-minor triad. The contrasting 4 bars that follow are more subtly suggestive of half-step motion, and this new idea is then sequenced down a third and shortened to 3 bars. In fact, it is prevented from quite making a proper ending by the impetuosity of the... Counter-statement – The melody is unchanged, but enhanced scoring creates an even more powerful impact. This time the violin sings the lead while the L.H. contributes booming new imitations that soon switch to doubling the tune far below. Also, our steady 8th-note pulse is back in continuous R.H. arpeggios. Extension –The sense of accumulated momentum is given its due by an additional 8 bars that seamlessly prolong the consequent and before long climax with furious *tutti ff* 8th-notes.

Closing material: This is relatively brief and sounds similar to the bridge. Antiphonal exchanges between instruments contrast 8th-note figuration and *ff* vertical chords. The storm then suddenly quiets to two long chords each prolonged by a fermata. By the end, the key has modulated back to the tonic A minor, anticipating the exposition repeat.

Development:

Befitting the monumental scale of the first movement, this is a long and complex development in many parts. Still, great unity is imparted by the derivation of nearly all of its material from sub-theme II, a compelling confirmation of the signal importance of this imposing melody.

Part I: A gentle start that offers the theme nearly complete but wandering harmonically and introducing more of the major mode. The R.H.'s lyrical "statement" is followed by a violin "counter-statement" that begins sequenced up a step.

Part II: This is much more violent and turbulent, as the L.H. pounds out and then extends the theme and R.H. octaves follow in close imitation. Also, the familiar 8th-note arpeggios are now transferred to the violin. Still, for all the tumult, the major mode seems to predominate.

Part III: "The storm center of the movement, comparable in its fury of spirit and sound to the notorious passages of the Great Fugue..." (Loft) Now the theme is shortened to just the upward sequencing half-note motive mostly presented by the violin, though momentarily shifted to the piano. As it progresses, the material becomes more free and varied. Throughout, jagged 8th-notes keep up their steady excitement.

Part IV: A gentle interlude reminiscent of Part I. The violin sings a sweet, yet incomplete version of the theme, the end of which is imitated by the R.H. and then L.H. octaves. This brief introduction of counter-point sets up the following...

Part V: An effective new atmosphere is created here by a bustling fugato based on a harmonic distillation of Sub Theme II's second phrase and also incorporating the oscillating 8th-note pattern from Main Theme II. This builds eventually to a *ff* climax of *tutti*, mostly-unison 8th-notes.

Part VI: Retransition begins. This is a strong contrast with a sudden drop to *p* and a long, plaintive descending violin line. There is a brief crescendo to *ff*, but then the dynamics drop right back down to *p*. Throughout, the R.H. has preserved some continuity with Part V by maintaining a steady 8th-note motion. This passage terminates with a *ritard* that gives those piano 8th-notes the effect of a cadenza, leading to a fermata.

Part VII: Retransition continued. We might expect to be finished now, but instead we get a related passage with the effect of a violin solo. This consists of steady 8th-notes that again lead to a cadenza-like *ritard* and fermata.

Recapitulation:

Main theme I: False Start – Thematically this is the beginning of the recapitulation, but not harmonically, as Beethoven gives the theme in D minor, the subdominant. The scoring here is based on the original counter-statement, with piano lead. The disorienting effect of the "wrong" key is enhanced by a new *p* beginning and finish. Furthermore, all of this has been preceded by a teasing version of the half-step motive prolonged by a fermata.

Statement (harmonically the true return) – Before this properly gets underway, we have 8 bars of transition that harken back to the teasing end of the slow introduction and effect the necessary modulation to prepare the tonic, A minor. After this, the presentation of the theme itself is identical to the opening of the exposition. Because we have in effect now heard main theme I twice, a counter-statement here would feel redundant, and so we proceed directly to...

Main theme II: Intro – This is now 4 bars longer and sounds very different until close to the end. In this case the first 8 bars are made up of a bold series of very fully scored vertical chords with a strongly rhythmic character. Only afterward does the original bustling motion briefly assert itself.

Statement & counter-statement – Now a literal repeat of this material, welcome after so many changes.

Bridge: This also starts out as a literal repeat and, aside from some harmonic adjustments, is the same length and substance throughout.

Subordinate theme group:

Sub-theme I: Very similar to the original and the effect of changing mode is now achieved by A major (the parallel major). Then, as expected, the counter-statement reverts to A minor. The melody is transposed to the higher octave for a brighter effect, while, interestingly, the violin's descant is transposed to sound lower than before.

Interlude/setup: Transposed without notable change.

Sub-theme II: The material is much as before, but Beethoven uses the transposition as an opportunity for enhanced contrast of range. For example, the R.H.'s statement drops to the lower octave while the pizzicato chords are up higher than originally. Soon after, the violin's counter-statement sounds especially brilliant in the upper octave.

Closing material: Again, very faithful to the original, but continues a little longer, replacing the long-note lull that ended the exposition with additional pounding chords and a new modulation.

Coda: This is one of Beethoven's grand codas in multiple parts as is only proper to complete such an imposing movement.

Part I: This has more the character of a transition than a defined thematic statement. It begins in a suggestively remote key and features continuous 8th-note arpeggios played in octaves low on the keyboard while above a slowly-moving high violin line drifts up and down.

Part II: An upward-rushing scale leads to a climactic statement of main theme I, back in its original key and *tutti* in unison octaves with no accompaniment. This time, the theme's obsessive momentum is finally given its head with no *ritards* or fermatas, but instead a powerful chromatic extension that sounds practically manic charges on an extra 7 bars.

Part III: 12 bars (6+6), with a feeling of statement and counter-statement. After this tremendous wind-up, we are at a plateau of high intensity, and this new and strongly contrasting material offers a feeling of release and culmination. A fresh long-short-short rhythm with stepwise motion is treated in descending sequence, first led by the violin and then the piano alone.

Part IV: Another transitional passage, this has the job of winding things down dynamically and expressively, and features a thinner texture and decrescendo down to *pp*. A return to

continuous 8th-note motion is juxtaposed against lengthening rhythms that generate a slowing effect as a setup for...

Part V: *Adagio*, 8 bars (4+4), still very quiet. This return to *adagio* tempo just before the end of the movement is an effective nod to the measured pace of the opening slow introduction. It consists of an extremely slowed-down development of the half-step motive, presented by violin and then piano in whole-note chords, further lengthened by fermatas. During this, we touch on the same remote key that started the coda.

Part VI: Back to *presto* and A minor for the final, loud and furious conclusion. We get two-fisted piano chords as the violin and piano exchange tempestuous 8th-note runs and clear cadencial harmonies affirm the tonic key.

Movement II – Theme and Four Variations with Coda, Andante, 2/4, F Major

“After the feverish opening movement, the emotional temperature drops considerably for the *Andante*... The first two variations focus on the jocular, playful nature of the theme itself. The third variation, written in the minor, conveys a rather more somber and contemplative character. Variation 4 is a paradigm of melodic decorations and ornaments, filled with sparking trills and turns. The quiet and introspective coda that follows gives little hint of the gaiety in the early variations.” (Berger)

This movement is very long and casts a powerful spell, but for the most part it is not particularly complicated or especially challenging to follow. Its calm and straightforward expansiveness provides an effective foil to the intense and quirky outer movements. Here Beethoven avoids the strong contrasts and sudden violent storms that sometimes characterize his variation sets, preferring to decorate his beautiful theme with graceful and understated craftsmanship. Often he works like a master jeweler doing the most delicate and intricate filigree. For long stretches, repeated patterns seem to lull us with a satisfying regularity, but the sense of something mechanical is always avoided through slight alterations and subtle new developments.

Theme:

This itself “...begins with a richness in pianistic color such as another composer might have chosen to reserve for a much later point in the proceedings.” (Loft) A long melody in rounded binary form with a subtle and somewhat elusive quality; while generally quiet and peaceful, frequent *sf*s and several crescendos suggest stronger emotional undercurrents. Beethoven observes the expected repeats of binary form, but here he uses them as an opportunity to swap the lead between the piano and the violin instead of giving us literal repeats.

Part I (phrase *a*): The first time through this is a piano solo. A general feeling of an 8-bar (4+4), mildly contrasting period. But where the usual caesura would fall, Beethoven has deliberately blurred and fused the juncture. The antecedent consists of block chords projecting a melody in stepwise motion ending with a crescendo that serves to reinforce an expressive chromatic rise. The consequent has a less conjunct line with increased rhythmic variety. There is also a more complicated texture with greater independence of movement for the lower voices.

A trill near the end serves as a harbinger of many to come. Part I is then repeated with the violin singing the melody an octave higher over an enriched piano part.

Part II: Phrase *b* – This is long (11 bars) with a strikingly irregular and organically evolving structure. It opens with contrasting material that appears relatively straightforward, but rather than settling into a predictable pattern, it progresses into an intensifying phrase featuring more and more fragmentary repetitions. The climax of this process is accentuated by a profusion of trills following which the music calms to a smooth descent (albeit to a crescendo) to welcome the return of *a*. Though phrase *b* stubbornly resists the usual parsing, its unique behavior makes it especially easy to recognize and follow over the course of the variations.

Phrase *a'* is effectively set off by a drop to *p* after the lead-in's crescendo. The violin is so excited by the return of the familiar *a* melody that it can't resist entering now rather than patiently waiting for the repeat of Part II. It starts on a discreet monotone but within moments is happily singing along with the tune doubling the R.H. in the upper octave. This is a nice example of Beethoven refusing confinement by a traditional pattern. The repeat of Part II features the expected violin lead throughout with phrase *b* in the original octave and a jump back to the upper octave during the lead-in to *a'*. This time *a'* is subtly enhanced by some new violin grace notes and a brief but telling L.H. trill.

Over the course of what follows, the contrast of the *b*-phrase will not be exaggerated by a marked change in scoring as is often done when a rounded binary form theme is varied. Because of this, the considerable duration of each variation has a consistency of sound and effect that contributes much to the unruffled expansiveness of the entire movement.

Variation 1:

The first two variations are decorative rather than disguised. Through all the ornamentation and rhythmic elaboration, it is still not hard to follow the essentials of the original melody. Also here, as well as with the following two variations, the treatment of the theme switches to literal repeats of Parts I and II.

“One of the most striking features of this variation is the great difference between the two parts—the luxuriant piano writing, on the one hand, and the monotone chirpings of the violin, on the other...the violin line takes on a cantabile role in its own right, and one that - because of the crystalline simplicity of the writing - assumes a unique beauty.” (Loft)

This is the piano's turn to lead throughout, though as Loft indicates, the violin's contributions are not insignificant. We encounter a mood of happy excitement tinged with a certain nervous intensity. Rhythmically a great deal of this is based on 16th-note triplets.

Part I: The R.H. playfully decorates the familiar tune with trills, octave doublings and oscillating 16th notes while the consequent proves particularly frisky with a flexible rhythmic pattern featuring repeated turns.

Part II adheres to the general premise of Part I while freely enhancing and intensifying the material.

Variation 2:

Switches to violin lead as the melody is broken up into 32nd-notes, primarily in legato/staccato four-note groupings. Here is the chance for the string instrument to show off its delicacy, agility and extreme upper range (as well as stamina!). Meanwhile the piano is kept plenty busy with a steady pattern that rapidly alternates the hands, the L.H. always on the beat, the R.H. just after. As with the previous variation, both Parts I and II hew closely to the same basic manner.

Variation 3:

A switch to F minor (the parallel minor). This is the first variation to disguise the theme. Less animated than the preceding treatments, here we encounter a solemn mood tinged with mystery. Though solo piano briefly starts each of the two parts, the instruments really share the lead now as they recast the melody in sinuous legato 16th-notes. The consequent of *a*, marked *espressivo*, combines long violin sighs with spine-tingling contrary motion effects from the keyboard. In Part II, phrase *b* rises to a pitch of considerable intensity with stronger dynamics, dense piano writing and a high-lying violin part. Following this, *a'* also features fuller piano scoring.

Variation 4:

Back to major and it is once again relatively easy to discern the contours of the original theme. This final variation dispenses with literal repeats allowing for a sharing of the lead role similar to the presentation of the theme itself. This also gives Beethoven greater scope for progressive alteration and enhancement of the material, providing a sense of culmination and new freedom that will effectively prepare the ensuing coda. With emphasis on the treble range, a light and gracious atmosphere prevails as the R.H. and violin take turns singing the melody or engaging in conversational dialogue. Especially noteworthy are the long strings of trills and 32nd-note triplets suggestive of extravagant bird song.

Part I: The first time through, this is essentially a piano solo with “music box” scoring as the R.H. ornaments the theme over rippling L.H. 32nd-notes that will provide an undercurrent over the course of much of the variation. During the consequent, the violin makes its own subtle contribution with bright pizzicato accents leading eventually to pizzicato chords that are a gentle reminder of Movement I’s sub-theme II. The repeat of Part I finds the violin in the lead, at first sticking closely to the R.H.’s treatment of the theme but eventually exercising greater autonomy. Here is another variation where Beethoven indulges in some stratospheric violin writing. Focusing on the piano, with the R.H. free it is able to move the L.H. down and shift to the style of rapidly alternating L.H./R.H. accompaniment familiar from variation 2, but now proceeding at double the pace.

As for Part II, the opening of phrase *b* is turned into a series of brief R.H. and violin exchanges, before settling in to piano lead embellished by additional glittering pizzicati. Phrase *a'* starts with a somewhat more elaborate version of the solo piano opening, but the violin will not hang back for long and within a couple of bars is providing a graceful new descant. The consequent reverts to the original R.H. and pizzicato combination. As we would expect, the repeat of Part II recasts all of this with violin lead, so no more pizzicatos, but listen for some ethereal double stops and how the instrument is drawn, Icarus-like, to fly higher and higher into the ether.

Coda:

“...the coda looks back to Beethoven’s early variation sets in its reliance on trills and sentimental treatment of the concluding motif of the theme.” (Drabkin)

Part I: Introduction. This starts with a slow and soulful piano solo, *dolce ed espressivo*, further prolonged by fermatas and a bar of *molto adagio*. The declamatory, cadenza-like style clearly signals that the formal process of variation is at an end. The piano’s portentous utterance is then given a balancing response with the violin singing above full piano chords, no *molto adagio* this time but still plenty of fermatas.

Part II: We are now embarked on a nearly three-minute long free fantasy that does not easily lend itself to further division. Rounded binary form and faithful adherence to phrase structure are left behind as the music shifts and evolves from moment to moment. Throughout, the instruments create the impression of two fond lovers relaxing together, savoring and discussing fragments of the well known theme.

Movement III – Sonata form, Presto, 6/8, A Major

The choice of such a fast tempo as *presto* for both outer movements contributes strongly to this sonata’s effect of a particular brilliance. Haydn and Mozart often wrote practically monothematic *molto perpetuo* finales with a pronounced dance character and Beethoven’s ending is very much an outgrowth of that well-established classical tradition.

As was mentioned above, Beethoven had already composed this music with another purpose in mind and “...The only revision was the addition of an initial *fortissimo* chord, which is needed to ‘cancel’ the F major tonality of the middle movement.” (Drabkin) Given some striking parallels between the music that follows and the Kreutzer’s first movement, it seems very likely that Beethoven composed that remarkable A-minor drama with the inspiration of this existing finale clearly in mind. As we’ll see, the half-step motive that so forcefully dominates movement I is a major presence here as well.

“...a madly whirling dance based on the repeated long-short rhythmic patterns of the tarantella, an old Italian dance whose frenzied steps were once believed to be the result of the poisonous venom injected by the bite of the tarantula spider. The movement dashes to a tempestuous conclusion with scant time to catch a breath.” (Berger)

“The finale, Presto, seems to begin with a reminiscence of the slow introduction, from the very opening of the sonata, but reduced, here, to one sustained *fortissimo* chord (in A, of course) in the piano. Then both instruments are off and running, literally. The movement is a marathon, rolling along for the most part in...snapped rhythm...or in full triplet sequences, or in both simultaneously.” (Loft)

Loft is referring to “Scotch snap” rhythm which denotes a lilting pattern of repeated short-long-short-long, in this case 8th-note - quarter-note - 8th-note - quarter-note, etc. With the movement’s 6/8 meter this occurs very naturally with the measures always starting with a quarter-note. Here this regular pulse will periodically include still longer notes for variety and emphasis. The

alternative rhythm that Loft refers to is the flowing triplet effect of steady 8th-notes in 6/8 meter. The contrasting and combining of these two insistent patterns adds great unity and overwhelming vivacity to what follows.

Exposition:

Main theme, Part I: Statement – 8 bars with a mild 4+4 feeling but a pretty continuous flow. The material is presented as a loose two-part canon with violin lead and the piano imitating a 3rd lower. The start of the theme is pure rhythm, with a monotone rendering of the simple iambic pattern that only gradually develops a melodic profile. After the antecedent's "snapped" rhythm, the consequent switches to triplet feel. Note that this spare texture is placed entirely in the treble range. Of particular interest here is that at the end of the antecedent seems to present the first instance of the half-step motive, heard three times and emphasized by the addition of longer notes and the fact that the 8th-note launching it is chromatic. The manner in which this then gives rise to the steady 8th-notes of the consequent seems related to the way that main theme I from the first movement proclaims the half-step motive and then continues with a stream of unbroken quarter-notes.

Counter-statement – Moves to D major (the subdominant), and the instruments exchange parts. This time the 8 bars are followed by a free extension of over 10 bars that develops the familiar material while finally introducing a bass part compliments of the L.H., which incrementally works its way down the keyboard. The passage rises to a crescendo in preparation for...

Main theme, Part II: After the previous contrapuntal texture, this contrasts a bluff hardy homophonic treatment of the same basic rhythms.

Statement – 8 bars featuring 2-bar long contrasting antiphonal exchanges between the piano (snapped rhythm) and the violin (triplets). The piano's parts have a ringing staccato quality, with both hands playing the same material in different octaves.

Counter-statement – By dropping back down to *p*, an echoing effect is achieved. The violin and piano exchange their previous parts, though this time the piano also plays a supporting role under the string instrument. Before the theme can quite finish it is interrupted a bar early by the start of the...

Bridge: Part I – The R.H. seamlessly continues the triplet figuration over *sf* L.H. chords, while the violin executes a series of octave leaps in a syncopated short-long rhythm.

Part II – This is about the same length as Part I, but sounds very different with teasing repetitions of the half-step motive in the characteristic snapped rhythm, building great anticipation for the ensuing...

Subordinate theme I: E major (the expected dominant), but a modulatory melody so overflowing with high spirits that it soon happily wanders from key to key. This has very regular phrase structure, but at 16 bars (8+8) for just the statement, it is twice as long as the previous themes.

The antecedent and consequent also neatly break down to 4+4, contributing a very regular dance music feeling. The rhythm here provides strong continuity with the main theme and almost makes this feel like a fuller flowering of its ideas. Also, this theme consistently juxtaposes the snapped rhythm in the melody, given additional sparkle by occasional grace notes, with the triplet rhythm in the accompaniment. Here again the half-step motive is present, this time serving as the destination of most of the 4-bar sub-phrases and emphasized by a longer final

note. The statement has violin lead, and then the counter-statement switches to the R.H. in the same octave while the violin takes over the triplet pattern and ends up reshaping it to move a bit higher. The counter-statement is followed by an additional 6 bars of extension that further explore the basic rhythm, but now with the parts mostly harmonizing in rhythmic sync.

Sub-theme II, Setup: This long passage emerges very smoothly from the previous extension, but gradually introduces the basic material that will characterize the approaching theme. It features stronger dynamic contrasts that eventually lead to *ff*. While 8th-notes flow almost continuously, the R.H. and then the violin play an idea in high long notes, often repeating the same pitch, that will soon become the theme.

Sub-theme II: Following the turbulent climax, this seems like a quiet island of calm, serenely removed from the whirling dance. Much of the effect comes from a change in meter to 2/4 time, a well-judged break from the prevailing pulse that helps to avoid any danger of monotony. Also, after the harmonic excursions of sub-theme I, the present material now compensates with a very stable affirmation of E major.

Statement – 8 bars (a mildly-contrasting 4+4 period), including an initial bar of *f* 6/8 before the gentle mood really takes hold. We hear chorale-style scoring with the violin on top, moving in sync with sonorous piano chords. The start of the consequent draws particular attention with four staccato quarter-notes calmly reiterating the same pitch.

Counter-statement – Now the violin drops out and the same material is rendered as a piano solo. Particularly noteworthy here is the *f* “hiccup” effect created by the single 6/8 bar that is again used to start the melody. Then the violin returns for 6 bars of gentle extension, based on the consequent and more freely savoring the peaceful mood. In performance, all of this stands as a subtle reminder of the hushed serenity of sub-theme I from the tumultuous first movement, especially as that earlier hymn-like theme also placed significant reliance on repeated notes in even rhythm.

Closing material: Back to 6/8 meter as a series of trills signals the end of the quiet reverie and the return of the hectic dance. This is freely-evolving music that summarizes much of what has come before and seems to reference the teasing material from Part II of the bridge. Also noteworthy are the piano’s contrary-motion 8th-note runs that bring this passage to a close and initiate the exposition repeat.

Development:

The continued reliance on the two contrasting rhythmic patterns lends this development the same strong feeling of cohesion that prevailed during most of the exposition.

Part I: A brief, gruff-sounding introduction, treating the snapped rhythm in minor with all voices in unison octaves.

Part II: A light-hearted development of the antecedent of sub-theme I, heard twice in the violin followed by momentary, off-kilter interjections, and then started again by the R.H. before continuing smoothly into...

Part III: A short, sad, wistful dialogue of a small fragment between the R.H. and violin.

Part IV: Emerges back in boisterous major. Things have changed to a bold, confident mood as an 8-bar pattern with a rising and then falling motion is heard and immediately given a varied repeat.

Part V: Has a contrapuntal feeling, like a brief fugal exposition in three voices...first violin, then the R.H., and finally the L.H. Soon after all the parts have entered, the texture switches to a more homophonic feeling with a brusque, insistent manner before reverting to a more contrapuntal style by way of transition to...

Part VI: This has a more sustained quality, as the violin plays a series of double-stop 2nds that resolve into 3rds against upward-rippling three-note figures, traded fluidly from hand to hand.

Part VII: Apparent retransition. This has the feeling of a gradual winding down as the previous piano triplets now change into a repeated triplet-followed-by-quarter-note pattern in consistent contrary motion. Towards the end, there is a *ritard* and diminuendo as well as a long-sustained violin note that elicits suspense leading to the...

Recapitulation:

Main theme, Part I (false start): Here we encounter another parallel with Movement I as Beethoven creates deliberate uncertainty about where the recapitulation really begins. We hear the full statement and counter-statement, but reharmonized so that we are not actually home in A major yet. The lead voice's melody notes are the same, but instead of the original canonic imitation, a new accompaniment casts them now in the context of the relative minor. After the counter-statement, its extension is only half as long and otherwise quite changed.

Main theme, Part II (true return): From a strictly harmonic perspective, this would be considered the actual start of the recapitulation as we finally land securely in the tonic. The statement is a literal repeat, but then after the first antiphonal exchange, the counter-statement veers off into attractive new material, featuring sustained violin double-stops, that effects a major abbreviation by smoothly segueing into...

Bridge, Part II: Aside from being transposed, this is very much as before. In fact, from here to the end of the recapitulation the music is so faithful to what we heard in the exposition, aside from being shifted to A major, that there is no need to go through it in further detail.

Coda:

Part I: Aside from occurring in a different key, this is virtually identical to the brusque unison octave, minor-mode presentation of the snapped-rhythm motive that started the development. However, this time it extends an extra 4 bars with a feeling of heightened insistence.

Part II: A succession of troubled-sounding transitional ideas, anchored through the first half by a low L.H. dominant pedal. First comes a plaintive, downward-sequencing dialogue of a brief snapped-rhythm motive between the R.H. and violin. Soon this gives way to flowing triplets, also in the R.H. and violin but, instead of dialoguing, they both play continuously, harmonizing in contrary motion while still sequencing downwards. Then as the pedal stops, the L.H.

forcefully asserts a new rising version of the snapped-rhythm idea and repeats it three times. The motive next jumps up to the violin for more reiteration and extension. All of this has been complemented by sustained violin double-stops and triplets treated in various ways. Now Part II ends with a long dominant 7th chord, further prolonged by a fermata. The resulting slowing and feeling of suspense effects the transition to...

Part III: *Adagio*. We are just about at the end of the movement as well as the entire Kreutzer Sonata, and this final encounter with the stilled pace of *adagio* triggers memories from Movement I. It recalls as well, in intensified form, the momentary serenity of Sub-theme II. Nonetheless, what we actually hear is a transfigured version of main theme Part I. For 4 bars the theme's antecedent returns, but with its nervous snapped rhythm rendered in slow motion and its insistent repeated C-sharps nostalgically harmonized in minor. This starts as piano solo, with the violin entering most affectingly towards the end. Logically enough, the antecedent leads directly into the theme's triplet-based consequent, still with piano lead, but surprisingly the tempo has suddenly reverted to *presto*. Here the length is the normal 4 bars as well, but a new arrangement includes staccato quarter-notes marking the beats. The entire process then begins again with a violin-dominated counter-statement that reverts to *adagio* for the antecedent. Enhanced scoring that expands the range both below and above gives a moving sense of culmination before the consequent takes us back once more to busy *presto*. This time, instead of stopping at 4 bars, the music is considerably extended in the same style, though eventually the staccato quarter-notes drop out and all voices take on the triplet motion with mounting excitement and a crescendo up to *f*.

Part IV: A short, triumphant climax with roiling L.H. triplets low on the keyboard and high, long syncopated notes in the violin and R.H. leading to an extended trill that pivots us into...

Part V: As the snapped rhythm returns to bring the movement to a joyous close, the violin excitedly reiterates an abbreviated version of the start of sub-theme I while the piano works furiously with both hands, combining ongoing triplets with occasional reinforcing of the violin's part.