

MUSICMAP NOTES

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Beethoven's Violin Sonata No. 7 in C Minor, Op. 30, No. 2 – 1802

As often with Beethoven, when he composes a piece in C minor, it seems to stylistically anticipate his later evolution as a composer. Thus, this sonata gives us a foretaste of the coming middle period, or “heroic” style, of his next decade.

Movement I – Sonata form, Allegro con brio, Common-time, C minor

First movement finds Beethoven in his characteristic stormy C-minor mode.

Exposition:

Main theme: Statement 8 bars (2+2+4), piano solo – Hushed, unison presentation of dramatic theme built from pithy, pregnant motive ‘X.’ Key long notes of theme are dominant (G), tonic (C) & sub-dominant (F), and the implied chord sequence is I-IV-V⁷. Theme conveys a feeling of latent power held in reserve. Ends with chromatic descent leading to first vertical harmonies in quiet, solemn chords. Material has a stark, uncompromising character.

Counter-statement – Violin has melody up an octave over steady 16th-note accompaniment. Earlier pauses are filled now with menacing L.H. rumbles. After 4 bars, new consequent has crescendo and more climactic feeling, with rhythm of ‘X’ given new shape. Sense of climax continues into 7-bar free extension with further crescendo and *sfs* - powerful rising piano arpeggio and imitative treatment of new ‘X’ variant. Chromatic rise & descent at end provide a forceful culmination, derived from the chromatic descent that ended statement.

Bridge: Terse, violent bridge wastes little time in effecting modulation to relative major. Fortissimo alternating chords, full two-handed piano and violin triple-stops, lead to plaintive *p* contrast, but almost immediately more *ff* chords plunk us down in the relative major.

Subordinate theme: Statement 8 bars (4+4), mildly contrasting period. Violin leads with jaunty, marching tune, while R.H. 8th-note accompaniment almost sounds like actual counter-melody, and even rises above the violin towards the end. Absence of L.H. lends added brightness and sparseness to material.

Counter-statement – March tune now down two octaves in L.H., giving "counter-melody" (now in violin) added prominence. New rising shape and added grace notes further enhance violin's melodic profile and swaggering dash. After full original melody, counter-statement extended two bars in minor, with freer material that leads to...

Closing material: Part I is exciting, brief passage based on long, alternating 16th-note rising scales in both instruments.

Part II is a more extensive paragraph with the feel of statement/counter-statement. “Statement” 10 bars (6+4) of hectic, bustling material that leads to contrasting broad, fully-scored rhetorical gesture. “Counter-statement” re-scored for variety and fuller sonority, with contrasting final 4 bars recomposed to have more culminating effect.

Part III – Brief conclusion with *ff* alternating chords based on bridge material. Ends exposition in brusque, high style. Unusually, there is no double-bar calling for a repeat of the exposition. Instead, we are surprised to be plunged straight into the...

Development:

Part I: Quiet, lyrical passage has high violin singing new melody with expressive double-stops. R.H. provides rippling 16th-note accompaniment while motive 'X' grumbles softly, but ominously, in the L.H.

Part II: Brief transition crescendos using motive 'X' exclusively, but surprisingly leads to...

Part III: Sub-theme march tune. Beethoven develops theme with great energy and wide-ranging counterpoint, inspired by original character of melody with counter-melody. March motives more and more fragmented, as intensity builds to climax.

Part IV: Retransition. Dynamics drop down to *p* at start. Feeling of tense expectation.

Passage builds with crescendos and *sf*. Both hands of piano are low on keyboard, providing constant 16th-note “distant thunder.” Above, tense violin repeats brief, nervous figure, leading us inexorably back home to...

Recapitulation:

Main theme: Statement no longer hushed with latent potential. Now forcefully projected by both instruments in *ff* unison. Exciting new propulsive effect. However, quiets to *p* at end for hushed harmonies, which now lead to wonderful and unexpected 6 new bars, extending and deepening their mysterious message.

Counter-statement – After all the changes we've just encountered, counter-statement is reassuringly familiar, in fact a literal repeat of the original.

Bridge, too, starts as literal repeat, but change comes when concluding set of *ff* alternating chords are extended an extra 3 bars, allowing for the needed harmonic adjustment.

Sub-theme: Beethoven maintains the optimistic tone of sub-theme by having march now in C major (parallel major). Scoring and phrasing are very faithful to original. As before, the counter-statement's 2-bar extension switches to minor mode, but this time it's actually restoring the tonic, and minor will now prevail through the following...

Closing material: Much as before, but new interest provided by minor mode with its aura of greater severity.

Coda:

In typical Beethoven style, grand coda is like a second development section.

Part I: Based on Part I of development, with lyrical violin over rumbling 'X' in L.H.

Part II: Short return of main theme, treated imitatively for the first time. *ff* with soft echoes, but almost immediately gives way to...

Part III: Sub-theme march, also presented imitatively for first time. Final, brief island of optimistic major.

Part IV, back in minor, is a transition, moving rapidly from low rumbling to fiercely pounding piano chords and strident violin.

Part V: Final, climactic utterance of main theme by violin in counter-statement version, over dynamic new piano accompaniment. New free extension continues momentum in same style, building to energized, even frenzied plateau and brusque, emphatic close.

Movement II – Song & Trio design with Coda (Ternary form), Adagio cantabile (slow and singing), Common-time, A-flat major

Somewhat distant key is an interesting choice (sub-dominant of the relative major).

Principal song:

Gentle, lyrical melody that hints lightly at strong depths of feeling. Perhaps a bit hymn-like. Rounded binary form, with written-out, rescored repeats - very regular phrase structure.

Part I: 8 bars (4+4), parallel period – antecedent and consequent each break down further to 2+2. Regularity lends mood of soothing reassurance. Part I originally piano solo, with theme softly and simply stated, but crescendos and *sf* add dramatic interest. L.H. accompaniment understated, but still contains telling details.

Rescored repeat gives melody to violin, which sings it unchanged. Both hands of piano are now low on keyboard, providing both new richness of sonority and fuller harmonies. This offers an effective contrast to tone of violin above.

Part II: Also 8 bars (4+4 = contrasting *b* + *a'*). Piano has lead again first time through, preceded by brief lead-in scale. Contrasting *b* has yearning quality, and new harmonies and triplet motion of *a'* provide expressive climax to theme. Instead of piano solo, now violin gently lends its caressing sonority and warmth. At the end of *a'*, it assumes greater prominence by doubling end of melody in 3rds. L.H. accompaniment of *b*-phrase spare, broken chords, then during *a'* it harmonizes more in synch with melody.

Scoring of repeat follows established pattern with violin again singing the melody, and a fuller piano accompaniment low on keyboard. Nice contrary motion between hands of piano during *a'* offers slight intensification for close of theme.

Beethoven is generally showing restraint throughout, which will provide him abundant opportunity for elaboration when principal song returns.

Trio:

Strongly contrasting section in parallel minor mode (A-flat minor). After brief and slightly tentative-sounding transition, violin launches plaintive melody in long notes over ear-catching new piano accompaniment - soft staccato 16th-note rising figures (rockets), traded regularly back-and-forth between hands. Accompaniment provides note of hushed mystery and new animation. Theme is perhaps actually 9 bars (owing to slight intro & extension) but has a regular 4+4 feeling nonetheless. Pattern then seems to start over in new key, with piano now given theme in thickly-scored chords. Violin takes over R.H.'s rocket gestures. Soon however, material starts to freely evolve and intensify with stronger dynamics and the violin inverting its rocket motion. Feeling of climax, which then dies down to cadenza-like passage, providing transition back to tonic key and...

Principal song:

Entire binary-form theme is given, including repeats, but Beethoven adds new interest and much greater animation by providing new decorative material in the scoring.

Part I: Piano lead again, melody unchanged, though piano accompaniment somewhat rewritten. However, the big difference now is what the violin is doing with its lively, almost-dancy contributions. These start out with some restraint by only entering at the end of sub-phrases, but as the theme continues, the violin's capers become more and more pervasive. (At first, this material seems almost like an organic outgrowth of the 16th-note rockets from the Trio.) During the repeat, the melody switches to the violin as before, but what draws our attention is the virtuoso piano part, with both hands sweeping up and down the keyboard in waves of 32nd notes.

Part II has the expected piano lead again, and returns to the new scoring from Part I, with very animated violin embroidery. This time, there are also some changes that intensify the piano melody, such as extra trills and 16th notes replacing the triplet passage at the end. When the violin sings the repeat of Part II, it also has the added trills and concluding 16th notes, while the piano provides more wide-ranging 32nd-note accompaniment.

This strategy of elaborate and virtuosic ornamentation of a lyrical melody when it is presented for the second time in a slow movement has plenty of clear antecedents in similar movements by Haydn and Mozart.

Coda:

Part I: A gentle afterglow to the theme (based on the missing triplets?) launches coda with deceptive mildness. ("Hornlike calls, heard through crystalline atmosphere" -A. Loft) But this will be a large coda, with strong contrasts and very free reworking of the principal song material. Suddenly, brusque rising octave unisons on the keyboard bring us up short with a *ff* outburst. Then, just as suddenly, we have a soft return to the opening of the principal song, now freely treated in a developmental style.

This entire sequence of ideas then repeats with varied scoring and new elaborations.

Part II grows seamlessly from the end of this whole process. It is also made up of varied and contrasting ideas, but more gently and fluidly combined. Somehow, it seems to sum up what has come before in the movement, but in a free way that is hard to quantify. Beethoven's raw

materials for this musical alchemy are 32nd-note runs, violin pizzicatti, and eloquent lyrical phrases.

Movement III – Scherzo, Allegro, 3/4, C major (parallel major)

Usual scherzo & trio design (but unusual during this period for the dance movement not to be in tonic).

Scherzo:

Beethoven plays around a bit with expected rounded binary form, but it's still basically here.

Part I (*a*): 8-bar piano solo (2+2+4). Cheerfully prancing melody dances in R.H. Off-beat *sf* complicate meter in typical scherzo style. Instead of expected literal repeat, Beethoven continues with written-out rescored version - violin lead now, but surprise 2-bar extension provides codetta (which will also end Part II). R.H. ornaments melody with high, chirping figures.

Part II: Contrasting *b*, 16 bars - starts with 4-bar piano solo based on *a*. Violin then sequences this material up, but it is soon freely extended into noisy, exciting climax, which tapers back down into *a'*. Violin plays rapidly repeated E in a special way ('bariolage' – quick alternation on the same note between open and stopped strings). This high pedal continues briefly into *a'*. *a'* – 8 bars of *a* played an octave higher than before by R.H., while violin provides increasingly animated counter-melody. Violin then extends material an additional 4 bars, before the 2-bar codetta from Part I reappears. In this case, all of Part II is given the expected literal repeat.

Trio:

Rounded binary form, now with conventional literal repeats.

Part I (*c*): 10 bars. Violin sings stirring martial air, evoking the era of Napoleon in miniature. L.H. enhances the effect with canonic imitation of this popular-style melody. We're still in C major, but heroic mood is in strong contrast to playfulness of scherzo (though the melody is actually a clever variation of the scherzo's theme).

Part II: Contrasting *b* – short phrases are traded back and forth at first, with low L.H. given precedence briefly here. Then turns into surprisingly long (in context) teasing, modulating transition that finally leads us back for *c'*.
c' – Stirring, climactic presentation of tune with violin singing up an octave, and L.H. imitations in thundering octaves.

Da Capo:

Usual “da capo” repeat of scherzo with no added coda.

Movement IV – Finale: ABACABA Rondo design (but with particularly strong sonata-form feeling), Allegro, Cut-time, C minor

“...its nature throughout is one of drive, of tension constantly released and just as constantly regenerated, and of a certain degree of ominous foreboding.” -A. Loft

Rondo theme:

We are finally back in C minor, and with a vengeance! Opening theme is striking counterpart to main theme of Movement I - *aba* theme, with irregular phrase structure (7+7+8+7).

Phrase *a* is disconcertingly gruff, gestural music, with odd rumbling, thumping, pounding. 7-bar phrase breaks down to 3+4. First bit has rapid crescendo from *p* to *ff*...following 4 bars present soft, rhythmic chords in piano solo.

Repeat of *a* presents same with enriched scoring and added ornamentation.

Contrasting *b*-phrase – 8 bars (4+4). New lyrical melody has feel of balanced period - piano antecedent and violin consequent. Beautiful, soulful mood seems all too brief on its first appearance, but much will be made of this material later in movement.

Return of *a*-phrase enhanced by greater violin role from the very beginning. 4-bar rhythmic part introduces new harmonies, leading to bridge. As a rondo theme, this is quite a protean musical paragraph, which will morph to some degree at each reoccurrence.

Bridge (Start of *Episode I?*): From this point on, the movement proceeds very much like a regular sonata-form. Until the “tease” at the end of the “exposition,” one would be hard-pressed to identify it as a Rondo. Bridge is very brief and clearly transitional material. Legato 8th-note figures treated in contrary motion by the two soloists.

Sub-theme (B-theme), Version 1: E-flat major (expected relative major). Long, catchy theme with infectious verve. Disjunct melody features downward arpeggios that plunge in bold syncopation. Instead of 8 bars, its lively momentum carries it to 18 (4+4+2+2+6). Violin lead, strong staccato feeling in melody and in vigorous piano accompaniment.

Sub-theme (B-theme), Version 2 (Quasi-counter-statement): Starts with same melodic material, but arrestingly transformed in parallel minor. (This movement has a proto-Schubertian penchant for presenting the same material in contrasting modes.) First six bars much as before, but then theme goes in new directions that shorten it to 16 bars. Pivots back into major about halfway through. Novelty of presentation and new course of melody take this well beyond the usual counter-statement. Still violin lead, enhanced now by tandem movement from the L.H.

Closing material (Transition/tease): Brief and somewhat plaintive new lyrical idea seems to be typical closing material, but minor continuation is clearly transitional modulatory passage incorporating teasing references to start of...

Rondo return:

Start of theme (*a*-phrases 1 & 2) a literal repeat of opening. However...big surprise!...then starts new central episode with lyrical *b*-phrase, transformed in major.

Development (Central 'C' Episode):

Soulful melody now sweet and sunny. Antecedent now given to violin, and consequent to R.H. Lyrical material then expanded by new second 8-bar melodic line, with lead back to violin and attractive R.H. imitations. New idea then repeated with roles reversed. All this is the warm flowering of the lyrical promise of the Rondo's *b*-phrase.

After brief climactic extension, sharp change in mood as *b*-phrase, back in minor mode, now subjected to rigorous contrapuntal development, in fugal style with busy, scurrying 16th notes.

Severe and stormy passage has typical effect of shorter and shorter phrases piling up, then winds down to retransition/approach to tonic, with end marked by fermata.

Recapitulation (Rondo return):

First *a*-phrase in original form as always, but theme then transformed and telescoped as second *a*-phrase given surprise new treatment. Freedom with material continues into *b*-phrase, which is rewritten into B-flat minor and leads directly into bridge passage (thus final *a*-phrase completely omitted).

Bridge (Start of *Episode III*): Bridge material much as before, except for key.

Sub-theme (B-theme): All much as before in phrasing and scoring, but the big change is that now Version 1 is in minor mode (the expected tonic C minor).

Closing material (Transition/tease): Lyrical closing idea also in minor mode this time.

Transition and tease somewhat elongated to generate anticipation for...

Rondo return & ensuing Coda, Part I:

First *a*-phrase once more unchanged. Repeat of *a* has another jolting shift, this time a pivot to major which leads to a free, searching passage with expressive violin sighs. This could be considered the first part of the Coda.

Part II: Now Beethoven gives us a much more substantial final section in faster tempo (*Presto*), where the music is whipped into a fine frenzy with bold dynamic shifts, strong syncopations, and virtuoso 8th-note piano passagework. Partway through, the violin introduces a wild, gypsy-style dance tune in which Rondo phrase-*a* makes a climactic reappearance. The intensity and excitement are maintained up to the very end, where uncompromising C-minor cadence chords permit no last-minute reprieve to major.

“...the *Allegro* and *Presto* are at one with the first movement of the sonata, framing the work in that dark and tempestuous color that is so characteristic a side of Beethoven's personality.”
(Abram Loft)