

CHAPTER 7

MOZART AND BEETHOVEN COMPARED

“Above all else, I wish people would have the courage to say what they really think about music, and not be so eternally worried over what somebody else may think and say.” - - - Sigmund Spaeth (1933)

The partisan comparisons of the relative merits of Mozart and Beethoven have continued for over a Century. There are the fervent Mozartians, who become enraged at the suggestion that Beethoven’s music has more substance than Mozart’s, and insist that Mozart’s music has an altogether more lofty quality than Beethoven’s crudities. But there are just as fervent Beethovians, who dismiss the Mozart piano sonatas as mere finger exercises, suitable only for warming up before playing Beethoven. Indeed, there is a very different quality to their music, which cannot be explained merely by supposing that Beethoven used greater dynamic and rhythmic excursions; both used the full range of dynamics, tempo, and pitch that was possible on the pianos available to them. In this Chapter we shall try to describe and explain the difference in other terms, and make some comments on the performance of their piano music.

Current Gamesmanship

Today Mozart seems to be winning this, at least as judged by mass communications output; in the late 20th Century we have seen an explosive increase in *Mozartiana*, from Mozart festivals, to “mostly Mozart” concerts, to the TV documentary “*The Mozart Mystique*” narrated by Peter Ustinov, another by André Previn, the movie “*Amadeus*”, All of this is presumably intended to inform the general public about Mozart and his music, by almost hysterical effusions about the marvelous music he wrote. There is even a science fiction episode in which, many Centuries from now, the rediscovery of Mozart’s music changes the course of civilization. We do not seem to have any comparable attention to Beethoven.

But we feel that this Mozart *hype* has been overdone to the point where it has defeated its own purpose, and is actually discouraging public appreciation of Mozart. For most people, to hear the reputedly great experts constantly raving about the wondrous quality of his music – and not to be able to sense it for yourself – is to conclude that “Music is not for me!” and to perceive that gamesmanship is being played on us. In the Previn documentary we see an unidentified young man playing the last Mozart piano concerto, with such ridiculous facial expressions of agony and ecstasy, as if he were performing the most magnificent work of art of all time – in passages which are nothing but slow children’s pieces.

We hear his symphonies but they seem rather primitive, lacking the bigness, the cohesiveness, and the musical content of the Beethoven and Brahms symphonies – but we are afraid to say this out loud because one of those gamesmen would accuse us of having

insufficiently refined taste to perceive what *he* perceives. Everywhere, where Mozart is concerned, we are in a scenario much like the fable of the Emperor's New Clothes, in which everybody is playing the game of pretending to see, and marveling at, what nobody is actually able to see. Only the little boy has the naïveté to blurt out the truth: "But he has nothing on but his underwear!"

Recognition of this situation is hardly new. In the 1930's Sigmund Spaeth had a popular weekly radio show, "The Tune Detective" in which he analyzed the content of popular and classical music and found surprising relations between different works. He also wrote popular books explaining classical music to the general public, which are still interesting reading today. In our opening quotation, he deplored this same gamesmanship, which was then applied to all classical music. Today we seem to have moved beyond that universal gamesmanship, but it continues stronger than ever for Mozart and Debussy, of whom one still does not dare speak his true views in public.

We have both that difficulty and another one with Mozart's piano music. Czerny reports that legato touch was unknown before Beethoven. In his edition of the Mozart piano sonatas, Saint-Säens (1915) comments further: "One is accustomed in modern editions to be prodigal with ties, and to indicate constantly *legato*, *molto legato*, *sempre legato*. There is nothing of this in the autograph manuscripts and the old editions. Everything leads us to believe that this music should be performed lightly, that the figures should produce an effect analogous to that obtained on the violin by giving a stroke to each note without leaving the string. When Mozart wished the legato, he indicated it."

But, as we noted in Chapter 6, he does not indicate it, so in effect we are forbidden to play Mozart legato at all. While we understand and appreciate Saint-Säens' reasoning, we feel obliged to note also another side to this by raising the issue: *What is the purpose of playing Mozart today?* Is it to recreate the same physical acoustics that Mozart's listeners heard in the 1780's from a piano incapable of real expressiveness? Or is it to present his music in the best possible light that only the modern piano is capable of?

And we can raise, antiphonally, the same questions as they appear from the side of the listener. To today's ears, accustomed to the smooth legato of properly played Beethoven or Chopin, to hear an entire work played in the same unvarying staccato touch, drives a perceptive person nearly mad. Couldn't we have occasionally just a bit of legato for ear relief?

The question does not involve only the piano. When we hear a Mozart piano concerto today, on what kind of instruments is it being played? Certainly not on any instruments available to Mozart except for the violin family, which had reached its present form before Mozart was born. There are a few French horns and trumpets, although valved brass instruments did not exist until Mozart had been dead for 25 to 40 years, a few clarinets and oboes with mechanisms that did not exist until Mozart had been dead for fifty years – and finally, a nine-foot concert grand piano, the like of which did not exist until Mozart had been dead for eighty years. There can be no pretense that the resulting sound is what Mozart heard.

We suggest that the purpose of playing Mozart today cannot be to recreate the same *acoustics* that his contemporary listeners heard; but to try to recreate as best we can the *music* as Mozart heard it in his own mind, making full use not only of the evidence of the score as he wrote it, but also every other bit of relevant evidence that we can find, of an

historical or technical nature. We agree with Saint-Säens that it is wrong to fill his scores with arbitrary *legato* markings that Mozart did not indicate. But we think also that the performer today should use legato whenever his own musical taste calls for it. Then it will become apparent rather quickly which performers have perceptive good taste and which do not.

In 1991 the writer heard a lecture by a pianist specializing in Mozart, in which he enthused over the variety of thematic material, claiming that with Mozart the listener always knows “where he is” in a movement because Mozart might use seven or eight different themes in it. He said that you get no such sense of position in Beethoven, because there would be only two or three themes in a movement.

We would put it in just the opposite way: with Mozart you do not know where you are in a movement because there is no coherent plan; only the calling forth of one short theme after another, at random. In Mozart there is almost no sense of ‘development’ of a theme; the closest he comes to it is to add a little ornamentation. Usually, when a theme remains for some time it is merely repeated unaltered – sometimes to the point of boredom. Indeed, he composed so rapidly that there was no time to work out a development even if he had thought in those terms. Beethoven used fewer and simpler themes because he gave them elaborate developments (that often required long series of revisions in his notebooks); and just for that reason, you know “where you are” in a Beethoven movement, from the stage of the development.

Although the lecturer gave examples of the variety of themes in a few Mozart movements from different works, he seemed unaware that the same themes had been used in several other compositions – so with Mozart we not only do not know where we are in a movement; we may not even know which composition is being heard. He played Mozart in a way painful to hear because every note was in the same sharp staccato, giving the effect of a poorly regulated harpsichord. With such a habit he probably could not have played Beethoven acceptably in any event.

Passing on to Mozart’s operas, they are always represented to us as perfect program music, each aria beautifully and uniquely adapted to its occasion. But not being able to perceive any difference in the nature of the music whatever the occasion – and again being afraid to say it out loud because of the reactions of those who are intent on putting us down with their gamesmanship – leaves one in a frustrated state hardly conducive to appreciation of Mozart.

Commentators marvel not only at the quality, but also at the quantity of music that Mozart composed in 35 years. Richard Strauss recalled his father telling him: “*Our best copyists could not copy it all in 35 years.*” Even more marvelous seems to be the fact that the autograph manuscripts show it all written down in final form without corrections, suggesting that every detail had been thought out in his head before putting pen to paper (or perhaps he was just not enough of a perfectionist to bother with corrections).

The Explanation

When one has heard too much Mozart in a short time, the realization comes suddenly: nearly all of his music sounds vaguely the same, whatever the instruments, whatever the musical form, and whatever the ostensible programmatic purpose. You could interchange

the musical material of almost any two Mozart works, and they would still have just the same effect.

This suggests a conjecture which would explain these mysteries very easily. If almost all of Mozart's music sounds the same, perhaps it really *is* the same. That is, perhaps his works are just different samples of abstract music, all constructed from the same basic material. Suppose that Mozart had built up in his head a collection of perhaps 100 nicely polished stock phrases, and simply used them over and over again, in different combinations. Then we could understand how he could compose faster than a copyist could copy, and without errors; he *was* a copyist, but with the great advantage that he was copying from his own head, and he had copied the same thing many times before.

One of these stock phrases, almost a Mozart signature, is the melodic line which descends and then ascends, changing to subdominant harmony at the bottom note. Listening to an unknown composition of that period, when we hear that we can be quite sure that it is Mozart.

This is not to say that no late work of his contained anything new; of course, he would invent for each some introductory sweet-sounding melody[†] and then call upon the library, adapting the chosen phrases if necessary so as to be compatible with it. This theory about how he composed – at least in his later works – is a little more than pure conjecture; we know from the independent evidence of notes in his handwriting that Mozart was very consciously aware of 'machine assisted' principles for composing music.

Aleatory, or Random, Music

'Random music' is sometimes thought to be fairly recent, made possible by the development of computers in the mid 20'th Century. Quite the contrary; there is nothing the least bit new in the idea.

Johann Philipp Kirnberger (1721 – 1783), a pupil of Johann Sebastian Bach, published a book (1757) which explained how to compose Polonaises and Minuets for two violins and harpsichord by throwing dice. In 1790 two similar but anonymous works appeared, one for the composition of minuets, entitled *Giuoco Filarmonico*, and another for composing waltzes. They were long attributed to Haydn and C.P.E. Bach respectively; but it was discovered recently (O'Beirne, 1971) that the former was plagiarized from a work by an Austrian composer, Maximilian Stadler, published in 1779.

Mozart too played this game: Alfred Einstein, in the 1937 revised Köchel catalog (Anhang 294) attributes to him a work which appeared in 1793, for the composition of various musical forms with two dice.[‡] This reappeared in England (Wheatstone, 1806)

[†] Such a melody is not difficult for anyone to produce. It seems that when Mozart or Verdi did this, they were always praised for it; but when Meyerbeer or Massenet did the same thing, they were laughed at for it. Beethoven usually avoided this, as did Chopin. As Liszt noted very perceptively in his obituary notice of Chopin, he used melodies which by themselves sound trivial or banal; but turned them into something wonderful by the way he harmonized them.

[‡] Mozart specialists sometimes deny this attribution in spite of the evidence of Mozart's handwritten notes; evidently they do not want it thought that Mozart composed music this way. We do not suggest that he did, only that he was aware of the idea, and found it interesting; indeed, this would have slowed him down intolerably. Our theory about how he composed is quite different.

under the name *Mozart's Musical Game*, described as “Showing by an easy system how to compose an unlimited number of Waltzes, Rondos, Hornpipes and Reels”.

These works are not easy to find today, but the Kirnberger work and a German edition of *Mozart's Musical Game* are in the British Museum. The system seems to be fairly simple; choose a harmonic/rhythmic sequence appropriate for the style intended, then for melody choose any notes belonging to the current chord by the toss of the dice. By tossing two dice one can generate any number from 2 to 12; almost enough to produce the full chromatic scale. Of course, this *may* produce a decent tune; more likely, it will not.

Put in computer terms, Mozart's Musical Game is a crude ‘machine language’ version (that is, one at the level of individual notes) of what we have conjectured to be his own method of composing. But he composed in a ‘higher level’ language (at the level of choosing whole phrases instead of individual notes). Today, a computer using the system of Mozart's Musical Game could compose in one second a work that would have required weeks by hand tossing of dice. The result might remind us of some works by modern composers – at least, of those who use the concepts of chords and tonality. The resemblance to the product of an intelligence could be increased very markedly with a smarter computer program that generates strong similarities (correlations) after 4, 8, or 16 bars. Occasional good luck might produce something that reminds us of early Haydn.

Also, we expect that a computer, given Mozart's library of source material in its memory, could compose ‘higher level random music’ that sounds very much like Mozart, and do it many thousands of times faster than he did. It would be interesting to check this conjecture by listening to many Mozart works and writing a library of the phrases he used most often.

But it would require an almost infinitely smarter computer program to produce anything that would remind us of middle or late Beethoven; here a directing intelligence perceives things on such a far higher level than mere correlations in notes or themes that we can scarcely comprehend it ourselves, much less teach a computer to imitate it.

The Unity of Beethoven's Music

As just noted, Mozart's music has a certain detached quality – even when the purpose is ostensibly programmatic, the music itself remains abstract, not really connected to any program. But can we call Beethoven's music ‘abstract?’

Something about the structure of Beethoven's music – outwardly complex, yet with a kind of inner unity that is hard to put one's finger on – has been sensed by many, who have reacted to it in various ways. One persistent theory, not wholly unlike our above conjecture about Mozart, is that he had some kind of ‘secret formula’ that he chose never to reveal; and if we can only discover what it was, we shall have the key to understanding all his music.

For example, Robert Haven Schauffler, a cellist with many years of familiarity with his orchestral music, published a book (1929) in which he claimed to have discovered a certain melodic pattern which Beethoven “*used in his principal themes with astonishing frequency, investing it at each recurrence with a disguise sufficiently varied and effective to have preserved its incognito up to the present day.*”

But if this is true, then we think Beethoven's disguise was so effective that he has preserved the incognito from everybody except Schauffler, for sixty more years. We will not even disclose what that constant 'germ-motive' was, because Schauffler's claim seems to us ludicrous. He goes to absurd lengths to try to see every Beethoven theme as a disguised form of the secret one. And indeed, any melody can be transformed into any other melody – if you change enough notes.

Beethoven obviously had no need of any such device – in a serious composition, his active inventiveness needed more to be held in check than to be assisted with such crutches. This is well attested by those who heard him improvise on the spot, under circumstances where he could not have rehearsed it in advance. In any event, it appears to us that Beethoven's unity did not lie in melody at all; and there is no reason to suppose that the same unifying principle is used in all works. A Beethoven composition stands as an isolated whole, complete in itself and utterly unlike any other. The subtle unity of Beethoven's music is something that lies within each work separately; and he who seeks it in a similarity of different works is looking in the wrong place.[†]

This is not to deny that, occasionally, a theme would stay in Beethoven's mind for a time, appearing in two or even three works. The first movements of his Second Symphony and of the *Waldstein* sonata Op. 53, both probably written in 1803, have the same transitional passage introducing the main theme. The final movement of his Third Symphony is built upon the same theme that he had used earlier in *Prometheus* and the *Twelve Contradances*. There are moments in *Fidelio* when you think you are hearing the Ninth Symphony instead. But there is never any attempt to disguise these re-used themes; he comes right out and states them in the most forthright way, and they never become part of a Mozartian toolbox to be used over and over again in all his later works.

Also, we know that Beethoven studied the works of other composers in a way that Mozart seems not to have done, and this must have influenced his own work, both consciously and unconsciously. For example, the opening theme of his "Emperor" concerto Op. 73 of 1811 so strongly resembles that of the Mozart trio K 498 of 1786 that it strains our credulity a bit to think this is a mere coincidence. The keys are the same (E♭), the melodies are almost identical, the rhythms are only slightly different. In our view, Beethoven's version has that natural and inevitable quality that we expect from him; while Mozart's is a bit awkward (the turns delayed a little too much, and then accelerated too much). As another example, two of the themes in Beethoven's Rasoumovsky Quartet # 2 are almost identical with two in Haydn's C Major Cello Concerto.[‡]

[†] However, we agree with Schauffler that Beethoven sometimes achieved unity within a work by using disguised forms of the same phrase in all its movements. The *Pathétique* Sonata Op. 13 is an outstanding example of this, in which – if it has not been noticed already – the reader will find it interesting to discover that phrase independently. It is amusing that in an early review of this sonata, the critic remarked that the theme of the last movement sounded vaguely familiar to him, although he could not recall where he had heard it before. He had heard it in the first movement.

[‡] This is probably not deliberate copying; the writer has had the experience of being assigned, in a harmony course, the writing of a short composition; whereupon the instructor complained that I had plagiarized Chopin. On hearing the Chopin work it was clear that this was true, although it was certainly not done consciously. What happened is just that Chopin's style of harmonization had been absorbed so thoroughly that it became an automatic part of my own thinking, so any

The writer's theory is that almost all of Beethoven's music is really programmatic, but in a more rudimentary way than one usually understands by the term. Because of this, Beethoven is not really keeping secrets from us; he does not explain the programmatic basis because there is so little to explain. Even when it is ostensibly "pure" music, I am convinced that Beethoven had an organizing principle in mind; perhaps only a spoken phrase of two or three words, or two such phrases, which the music imitates repeatedly.

But the imitation is not in the melody. In a spoken language, we may repeat a phrase in many different inflections and sing it in many different pitches and different rising and falling melodic forms, but always with the same basic rhythm and dynamic emphasis; and that is what Beethoven does.

I feel, from many years of playing and studying his piano sonatas of the "middle period" (say, Op. 10 to 57) that I understand the source of their unity. In each work there is a very simple pattern, that might represent some short German phrase, that recurs in the most widely varying melodic forms but always with the same rhythmic and dynamic form. In a movement in sonata form ABA, it appears inverted in the B section. To Beethoven there is no secret; the presence of this recurrent pattern forming, so to speak, the framework on which the movement is built, would have seemed to him so obvious that he expected the performer to see it at once without being told. What particular German phrase it represented in his own mind at the time, is quite irrelevant and would only distract us. Perhaps it was a topical personal comment – his own little private joke – that he dared not divulge then and we would not understand now.

Here are two places where it is easy to spot these patterns. In the Op 31 #3 slow movement marked *menuetto*, the A theme is dominated by a two note descending pattern, with the emphasis on the first note. It appears first as ($E\flat - D$) in measure 2, then as ($A\flat - G$), ($B\flat - A\flat$), ($G - F$), in measures 4, 7, 8. After the repeat, it appears in measures 9, 11, 13, 14, 16 in more adventurous melodic forms, but with the same dynamic pattern. In the contrasting B section marked 'trio' it appears inverted in the first two notes, ($G - A\flat$) with the emphasis on the second note; this pattern is repeated in many different melodic guises.

Perhaps the reader's first reaction to this is that we are straining nearly as hard as Schauffler, trying to see things that are not there. But try it at the keyboard and see for yourself that these things *are* there in his middle period sonatas and, as that fact becomes more familiar, these recurrences increasingly dominate one's interpretation of them. The performer who has recognized this, and so gives all these recurrences same dynamical rendering, brings out the unity of a work in a way that others cannot approach.

A much more dramatic example is the final movement of Op 10 #3, marked *rondo*, where the recurrent pattern, stated immediately as $F\sharp G B$, is a rising three note one, with the emphasis on the middle note. This is repeated many times in the most obvious way, but even more times non-obviously (find it in measures 36, 38, 40). At measure 72, the left hand takes it up and plays it nineteen times consecutively.[†] The same rhythmic/dynamic

accidental similarity in melody became also a similarity in harmony.

[†] One will ask: "When nineteen consecutive triplets are played, must we suppose that they all represent the same phrase?" The answer is: "Probably yes, if the dynamics is also the same in all of them."

pattern is in the chord progressions of bars 101–105 without any melodic content. Then in the remaining eight bars of the movement, while the right hand is occupied with stylized scales and arpeggios, the recurrent pattern jumps back to the bass notes and fades out over twelve more repetitions.

This example is more dramatic, because recognizing these recurrences changes the whole mood of the movement. This sonata is the one containing the famous *Largo e mesto* slow movement, in which it is widely believed that Beethoven announces his reconciliation to becoming deaf. But then most performers seem to think that he recovers fully in the *menuetto*; accordingly they give a joyous, almost flippant, rendering to the final movement just discussed.

But when we play it just a bit more slowly, and give full recognition to all these recurrences, that final movement changes its character entirely; it becomes perhaps the saddest movement ever written, far more so than the *Largo e mesto*. Astonished at this discovery, made after I had been playing that movement in a flippant way for thirty years without suspecting any such thing, I could not help speculating on the meaning that pattern had to Beethoven; what words is he saying to us here? Rightly or wrongly, I fancy that I have succeeded in this quest, for the following reason.

Our theory that Beethoven's music is saying to him some simple German word or phrase was not just wild speculation, because we learned later that on several occasions Beethoven confirms this by revealing to us just what they were. The first movement of the Sonata Op. 81a, recording his sadness at the Archduke Rudolph leaving Vienna, starts with three descending notes (G – F – E \flat) of equal time and emphasis, over which Beethoven wrote *Le-be-wohl* (Literally, “live well”, which in German is a sentimental way of saying “farewell”). This same three note pattern recurs throughout the movement in the most varied melodic guise, and it is hard to see how anyone performing the work could fail to recognize that Beethoven is saying ‘lebewohl’ over and over again.

In two symphonies, although he did not put the words into the score, Beethoven disclosed to others what his meaning was. The opening four notes of the fifth symphony were described by him as: “Thus Fate knocks at the door.” The “Metronome” section of his eighth symphony starts with ten notes that Beethoven described as saying, “ta–ta–ta, ta–ta–ta, lieber Maelzel”.

Another confirmation of our conjecture appears in the string quartet Op. 132, where Beethoven twice writes three words over three notes, whose German pronunciation fits their rhythmic and dynamic emphasis and which pattern is then repeated many times. Those same phrases fit perfectly both the rhythmic pattern and the mood in the Op. 10 #3 final movement. The three note pattern starts as a rising one “*Muss es sein?*” (Must it be?, or with the middle note emphasis, a better English rendering is Must *that* be?) and gradually evolves into a falling one “*Es muss sein!*” (It *must* be!). In music, unlike a spoken language, a transition from one statement to another can be made gradually, through a sequence of almost imperceptible small changes. At bar 100 the transition is complete, and we enter those chord progressions that signal the end of the movement by repeating the phrase, neither rising nor falling, first more loudly, then more softly, and fading away into silence with the falling phrase.

This movement has some other minor recurrent patterns, and it would be pure speculation to guess what special meaning, if any, they may have had for him. But the unity

is further enhanced if one recognizes these and gives them the same dynamic rendering.

It is very easy to spot (and feel smugly superior to) a performer who does not perceive these rhythmic/dynamic recurrences in Beethoven, however far his technical powers surpass my own. But the unity of Beethoven's late string quartets and piano sonatas seems to have a different basis, that I do not claim to understand. How ludicrous it would be to try to analyze Mozart's music this deeply! We would find nothing there to analyze.

In the writer's view, Beethoven's music has an intellectual content that is completely missing in Mozart's, and therefore it requires an intellectual effort to appreciate it. Indeed, as just noted, one can study a Beethoven work for many years and still discover new things in it. But that is already enough to account for the greater popularity of Mozart in the mass media.

In summary, we suggest that Beethoven wrote program music of many different kinds, and usually presented it as abstract music; Mozart wrote abstract music of one standard kind, and tried to pass it off as program music of many different kinds. But neither strategy was generally noticed; as someone put it: "For the listener, all music is program music."

Personality Differences

Mozart and Beethoven differed greatly in personality and relations to other people. Mozart was accustomed to the company of royalty, and the fine dress and stiff formal politeness that went with it. If Beethoven was indifferent to such mundane matters as clothing and saw no reason to be obsequious to anybody, we have noted that he was not wrapped up completely in his own work. He took the trouble to study the works of other composers and voluntarily praised many, including Handel, Clementi, Field, Cherubini. He visited taverns where untrained peasant musicians held forth with local folk music, made friends with them, and absorbed their idiom.

In contrast, Mozart almost never had a good word to say for any other musician. For example, where Beethoven praised Clementi's playing, Mozart openly sneered at it. This unthinking juvenile behavior was undoubtedly the reason for his final troubles, due to his inability to find a secure position anywhere (in his last days, this man familiar with the insides of most of the palaces of Europe, could not buy firewood to heat his own rooms). Mozart turned down offers of positions that he considered beneath him, although they would have sustained him long enough to find a better position; and indeed would have been good stepping-stones to a better position. This behavior, too, would make him enemies in high places; having been snubbed once, who would make him a second offer? He was greatly respected as a musician and feared as a competitor; but except for Haydn he had no real friends, as Beethoven had, who were concerned with his welfare. A person whom he had ridiculed might have the good sense not to ridicule Mozart in kind; but he would hardly turn about and help Mozart find the position he needed.

Mozart was so often at his worst that we are glad to note the one incident we have been able to find, where he actually showed a trace of modesty about his own accomplishments. The pianist Richter once expressed a mixture of admiration and dismay at the effortless way he was able to achieve his results at the keyboard. Mozart replied, simply, "*I had to labor once in order not to show labor now.*"

Problems in Playing Beethoven

If our first playing of a passage sounds awkward, what do we do? With Beethoven or Chopin, we should keep on trying other phrasings, because we have confidence in them. They never wrote a passage that cannot be played so that it sounds “right” and all awkwardness disappears. But the printed score cannot convey every detail of dynamics and timing, the subtle emphasis on one particular note, the tiny micro-pauses at particular places; and so it is up to us to find this natural phrasing.

We cannot have this confidence in any other composer; we expect some inadvertent awkwardness in Schumann or Moussorgsky, and some quite deliberate awkwardness in Debussy and Ravel; but even Mozart, Schubert, and Brahms have passages for which, this writer is convinced, it is impossible to find any phrasing that does not sound awkward. The recorded performances of the greatest virtuosos and Mozart specialists confirm this; nobody can make them sound “right.” Perhaps they are copyist’s errors; but in the case of Mozart we know that some of his piano sonatas were written only as exercises for his pupils; they were never intended to be serious music for performance in concert halls. So he would not have been concerned with a momentary awkwardness; his pupils were already producing a great deal of that, and a bit more did not matter. Indeed, it is easy to imagine that Mozart inserted awkward spots quite deliberately, as traps for his pupils; to see which ones were able to get out of them gracefully.

But what if we encounter a passage where the problem is not phrasing but that it is too difficult technically to play as written – often impossibly fast? We can find out readily enough what the recording artists of the past have done. Rudolph Serkin slowed down just to the point where he could play every note; Artur Schnabel simply charged ahead at full speed, leaving behind a trail of wrong and missing notes. Both approaches sound awkward and wrong to this writer, but they might have at least the following rationales.

We know that Beethoven was a superbly powerful pianist, and he surely knew better than anybody what is and is not possible for human fingers to do. Then what are we to make of the fact that his piano sonatas have occasional passages which Beethoven himself could not possibly have performed as written in the modern score? Even if his fingers could do it, the pianos he had available, lacking the modern escapement action, were mechanically incapable of it. There is no way to be sure, but there are two possibilities:

(A) It is conceivable (although we think highly unlikely) that Beethoven neither expected nor wanted the sound to correspond to the score; he wanted the effect of a pianist *trying* to play what is written. This conjecture seems to us ruled out by what we know of the orderliness of Beethoven’s own playing. But if this *was* his intention, then we must say that he succeeded and Schnabel’s approach is correct.

(B) The following line of speculation seems to us much more plausible. Beethoven’s autograph scores are very carelessly – even sloppily – written and almost impossible to decipher. It seems inevitable that copyists and printers often misunderstood his intentions. The writer certainly could not reconstruct a Beethoven sonata, given only what Beethoven put on paper. Then what proofreading did they receive?

Beethoven would have given extremely careful proofreading, out of youthful pride, to his first published works (just as the present writer did with his first published scientific works). But soon, occupied with other things, we tend to give them more and more cursory

attention. The works published in the period, say, 1798–1805 (that is, roughly Op. 10–45) might have received very little proofreading. Then for some time starting in 1805 (that is, roughly from the *Kreutzer* Sonata Op. 47) Beethoven entrusted the proofreading of his works to Carl Czerny, who would surely have done a very conscientious job of it. But exactly how careful was he? Did he rely more on the autograph score or on his own musical taste? Did he trust his musical instincts enough to give him the courage to suggest to Beethoven that there might be an error on the autograph score – and seek his approval for a change?[‡] We just do not know.

A plausible theory is then that Beethoven wrote down all the notes, but in his haste failed to write down all the bars – just as we do today when we write music by hand. Indeed, this is most likely to happen in just those passages where a single chromatic run, black with notes, extends over several measures. If the result is taken literally, the effect of leaving out a bar is to double the speed momentarily, compressing the notes for two measures into one.

Then, in order to fit the notes Beethoven wrote into the bars he wrote, copyists would be obliged occasionally to put 64'th notes where Beethoven had intended 16'th or 32'nd notes. This is an error that Czerny could not have detected even by checking every measure of the proofsheets against every measure of the autograph score (and, of course, which we could not detect today even with the autograph score in hand). If this is what happened, then Serkin's approach is correct in spirit, although the slowing down should have been not just to the threshold of possibility; but by a factor of exactly two, three, or four.

So what is a pianist to do today when such a passage appears? We have experimented with several instances of impossible passages, trying the effects of slowing them down by a factor of exactly two or four; and in every case we think it sounds so "right" musically that it is almost surely what Beethoven really intended.

But of course, only your own musical taste can answer this question for you. Here are some suggestions of places where you can try this out easily and decide the matter for yourself. At the beginning of the "Pathétique" sonata Op 13, the bad measures 4, 9, 10 – and the horrendous measure 11 – can be played naturally, and sound much better, if the heavily barred notes are played at 1/4 the indicated speed. The rhythm now fits together smoothly where before those sudden bursts of speed would not sound right – but rather awkward and out of place – even if one could play them as written.

The slow movement of Op. 10 #1, marked *Adagio molto*, is one of those places where, in the middle of complacency, suddenly you are kicked in the face by measures 28 – 30, where Beethoven appears to demand that you quadruple the speed instantaneously. Then, escaping somehow from the wreckage of the attempt, you again lapse into complacency until he does it to you again in measures 75 – 77. But for these six disaster-creating

[‡] Czerny may have been less inclined to consult Beethoven than he should have been. Schindler (1860) reports (p. 377) that Beethoven "was thrown into a rage when a copyist or some other person asked him about specific points in a composition without having the score in hand." Donald Francis Tovey accuses Czerny of inserting arbitrary *sempre p* and *rinforzando* markings, that destroy the musical sense and that Beethoven could not possibly have wanted. But, of course, Czerny had unparalleled opportunity to hear Beethoven's own performance of these works; from this he would have learned many things that are not in the autograph score and were not available to Tovey. So we are inclined to trust Czerny's judgment.

measures, this would be one of the most serene and beautiful sonata movements ever written. Even if they could be played as written, they would have a disruptive, jarring effect that ruins the musical sense of it.

But just try playing them at half the indicated speed; the trouble disappears. There is still acceleration, but it is acceleration under control and without awkwardness. The rhythm fits together just right, and you have a smoothly coherent musical statement, in impeccably good taste. We feel sure that this must be what Beethoven really intended; he may do things vigorously, but never awkwardly. In any event, whatever the modern scores seem to say, sudden and grossly exaggerated changes of either tempo or dynamics are simply in bad taste, and the performer who commits them – or tries to commit them – should not put the blame on any composer; he is revealing something about his own musical perceptiveness.

Loesser (1954, p. 147) tells us about Beethoven that “Even before his deafness became severe, we can be sure that he craved an extreme intensity of tone (*i.e.* loudness) to express the extreme intensity of his feelings.” Our reply is that extreme intensity of feelings is *not* conveyed by extreme loudness; quite the opposite, as Beethoven demonstrates repeatedly, better than any other composer. Extreme loudness conveys only a situation out of control.

We suggest that nothing in Beethoven’s piano sonatas requires extreme loudness; indeed, the attempt to do this invariably results in a harsh tone, just the opposite of what Beethoven wanted. A player with good musical sense will prepare for a crescendo by starting softly; then the full dramatic effect is achieved without exceeding the range of good piano tone.

It might be thought that these problems surely have come up so many times that the solutions must be long since known; did not both Artur Schnabel and Donald Francis Tovey write detailed instructions for performance of the Beethoven sonatas? Unfortunately, neither seems even aware of this problem; Schnabel is more concerned with ‘correcting’ Beethoven’s tie marks,[†] while Tovey points out only the obvious things that everybody can see for himself on a second reading.[‡] Both miss the subtle things that need to be explained, which one perceives only after long acquaintance with the work.

In this Chapter we have departed from our presentation of established scientific facts, and indulged in tentative personal conjectures that seem plausible from our experience, in the hope of stimulating further thought on these issues. Perhaps readers with different knowledge and experience may be in a position to confirm – or refute – our conjectures.

[†] After some study we found that we disagree with Schnabel’s phrasing instructions about as often as we agree with them, so it is easiest simply to ignore his instructions altogether – particularly since in his recorded performances he too ignores them. The difference amounts to this: from Czerny’s comments we suggest that for Beethoven a slur indicates something entirely different than for Mozart. In Beethoven, absence of a slur does not indicate non-legato; rather, the breaks between slurs indicate the momentary suspension of legato – one of those little micro-pauses. Saint-Saens told us that, when Mozart wished the legato, he indicated it. But when Beethoven wishes the non-legato, he indicates it.

[‡] While we rarely disagree with Tovey, we even more rarely learn anything from him, so again it is easiest simply to ignore his instructions and trust to our own judgment.