

Beethoven's Piano Trio No. 6 in E-flat major, Opus 70 No. 2: First Movement

- Ryan Patrick Maguire -

In the summer and fall of 1808, while away at his summer retreat in Heiligenstadt and, subsequently, staying with the Countess Marie Erdödy in Vienna, Beethoven composed his Opus 70: a set of two trios for the piano, violin, and cello.¹ These piano trios, numbers five and six, are both dedicated to Marie Erdödy, with whom he had become close friends.² They were written just before Beethoven was given a permanent stipend to stay in Austria and, therefore, at a time of relative financial vulnerability.³

Trio Number Five in D major, the first of the trios by date of completion and publication number, is nicknamed the “Ghost” Trio, after the eerie and atmospheric nature of the second of its three movements.⁴ The outer movements of the work, marked *Allegro vivace e con brio* and *Presto*, respectively, contrast this mood with a vigorous nature.⁵

Trio Number Six, in E-Flat major, has four movements. It is one of several works composed around 1809 by Beethoven in the key of E-Flat major.⁶ The opening movement enters *Poco Sostenuto* in E-Flat major and 4/4 before shifting to an *Allegro ma non troppo* 6/8 meter. It is a sonata form with a

¹ Raptus Association for Music Appreciation. The website cites: *Thayer's Life of Beethoven*, edited by Elliott Forbes (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 177-78. I could not obtain the original text.

Barry Cooper, *The Beethoven Compendium: A Guide to Beethoven's Life and Music* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1991), 19.

Emily Anderson, *The Letters of Beethoven* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 192.

² Raptus Association. The website cites: Cooper, Barry, *Beethoven*, Master Musician Series, edited by Stanley Sadie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 177-178. I could not obtain the original text.

Ludwig Van Beethoven, *Trios für Klavier, Violine, und Violoncello*, vol. 2, (München: G. Henle Verlag, 1967), pp. 5, 39.

³ Barry Cooper, *The Beethoven Compendium: A Guide to Beethoven's Life and Music* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1991), 19.

⁴ Timothy Noonan, “The Piano Trios of Beethoven,” Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee, 1984, 49.

Barry Cooper, *The Beethoven Compendium: A Guide to Beethoven's Life and Music* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1991), 19.

⁵ Ludwig Van Beethoven, *Trios für Klavier, Violine, und Violoncello*, vol. 2 (München: G. Henle Verlag, 1967), pp. 5-25.

⁶ Raptus. The website cites: William Kinderman, *Beethoven* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 133-5. I was unable to obtain a copy of the original text. See, however, Opus Numbers 73, 74, and 81a: all in E Flat Major and from within a year or two of 1809.

few minor idiosyncrasies.⁷ The sprightly second movement, marked Allegretto, is in C major/minor, 2/4 time, and is a double variation form.⁸ The gently lyrical third movement, marked Allegretto ma non troppo, is in A-Flat major, 3/4 time, and proceeds in an expanded minuet and trio form.⁹ The Finale, marked Allegro, brings the return to E-flat major and sonata form, executed in 2/4 time.¹⁰

The first movement of Beethoven's Piano Trio No. 6, Opus 70, No. 2 begins with a slow introduction which firmly establish the key of the movement as E-flat major.¹¹ The introduction begins with an inverted arching figure which is passed from cello, to violin, to the upper range of the piano, and finally to its bass, one measure after the next. This figure is fragmented in the next measure leading to a measure and a half long trill on g" underneath a series of chords- C minor, G minor, E-flat major 7, and finally A-flat major, with the trill, likewise, stepping up to a-flat" as its root. This beautiful progression leads into an extended stay on the dominant, with a B-Flat pedal in the bass of the piano under fragments of the opening figure in the strings alternating with flourishes in the right hand of the piano. An extended scalar run, through the upper register of the piano, works from the dominant to a cadence on the tonic, E-flat major. The first theme of theme group one is then foreshadowed, and the introduction closes quietly on the dominant, awaiting the next section with a fermata and a rest.

Beginning in m. 20 and marked Allegro ma non troppo the first theme of the first theme group is a 4 measure phrase in the tonic (mm. 20-23).¹² The phrase is characterized by intervallic leaps followed by a scalar arch.¹³ It is first developed by the strings and subsequently picked up in the upper range of the piano. Having been thus stated twice, various fragments of the theme are used to carry the

⁷ J. Peter Burkholder, Donald J. Grout, and Claude V. Palisca, *A History of Western Music*, 7th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 511.

Ludwig Van Beethoven, *Trios für Klavier, Violine, und Violoncello*, vol. 2 (München: G. Henle Verlag, 1967), 39-51.

⁸ Timothy Noonan, "The Piano Trios of Beethoven," Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee, 1984, 66.

⁹ Ibid., 68.

¹⁰ Ibid., 70.

¹¹ Ibid., 62.

¹² Ludwig Van Beethoven, *Trios für Klavier, Violine, und Violoncello*, vol. 2 (München: G. Henle Verlag, 1967), 40.

¹³ Timothy Noonan, "The Piano Trios of Beethoven," Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee, 1984, 63.

piece through measure 39, presenting material in at least three distinct manners along the way (mm. 29, 31, and 35).¹⁴

In measure 40, a second tonic theme, an ascending fourth followed by a series characterized by descending thirds lasting 4 measures, is in the cello. The piano and violin then echo this, playing an octave apart. A flourish of sixteenth-notes seemingly spun from this second theme begins in measure 47. It is passed from the strings to the piano and back, over alternating harmonies of E-flat major and F minor chords, finally working through a C minor and an F⁷ chord on the way to a cadence on the dominant, B-flat major.

Rather than proceeding directly to the second theme group in the dominant as in a traditional sonata form, the material from the slow introduction is reintroduced in tempo, using longer note values, in measures 54 and 55. Transposed in E-flat minor, it visits E-flat minor, F diminished, G-flat major, B-flat minor, and F major harmonies, finally shifting from the F major to a B-flat major chord (mm. 60-63) in preparation for the second theme group in the dominant.¹⁵

Beginning at measure 64, the first theme of the second theme group is played in the upper range of the piano, preserving the shape of the first theme (mm. 20-23) though highly decorated with runs of sixteenth notes.¹⁶ Following this four measure phrase, a play on m. 64 (compare m. 68 and m. 64) is passed from the cello, to the violin, and to the piano, over the changing chords B-flat major, E-flat major, and a B-Flat major 9 (m. 70). A four measure variation leads to a sudden imitative run of 16th notes from violin to the cello played forte and lasting two measures. Then back to a re-working of the preceding variation, now lasting five measures, where-after the imitative runs of 16th notes, sequencing from the piano to the strings and there and back again, finally cadence on an F major 7th chord, the V⁷ of V (m. 90). Arpeggios on the piano complete the exposition, which is then repeated.¹⁷

¹⁴ Ludwig Van Beethoven, *Trios für Klavier, Violine, und Violoncello*, vol. 2 (Münich: G. Henle Verlag, 1967), 40.

¹⁵ Ludwig Van Beethoven, *Trios für Klavier, Violine, und Violoncello*, vol. 2 (Münich: G. Henle Verlag, 1967), 41.

¹⁶ Timothy Noonan, "The Piano Trios of Beethoven," Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee, 1984, 64.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

After the repeat, the development begins by continuing the arpeggiated piano figures while modulating through a variety of new sonorities. Above this, the violin and cello pass a fragment back and forth based on the beginning of the first theme from the first theme group.¹⁸ These figures work through a variety of harmonies including E and A diminished 7ths, D-flat major, G-flat major, C major, and F minor en route to a modulation into the key of A-flat Major at measures 105-6. This modulation marks the reintroduction of the first theme from theme group two, originally in the dominant, B-flat, but here down a step. The theme is treated at length from measure 106 through measure 119, being worked in turn by each of the three instruments in the trio. This developmental section modulates through several keys including A-flat minor, C-flat major, and E major. Then a fragment of this theme is developed from measures 120 to 127, moving from E major to E-flat minor and ending on an A-flat major seventh sonority which leads surprisingly into the recapitulation.

The recapitulation begins with the cello stating the theme in D-flat major before the piano enters promptly a measure later at m. 128/9 with the theme in the original tonic, E-flat Major. This recap of theme one is slightly varied from its first appearance in the exposition. The initial statement is rounded out by octaves in the piano, and the theme's second statement, in the strings, is melodically varied from the exposition and accompanied by piano arpeggios.¹⁹ The strings then play a measure canonically in sequence, from whence the remainder of the recapitulation proceeds as a standard sonata recapitulation.²⁰

The coda begins as an extension of the recapitulation at measure 207.²¹ Building tension through sequencing the theme over shifting harmonies, it culminates in a long scalar piano cadence over a D-minor diminished chord, the vii of E-flat Major. This decrescendos into a restatement of the introduction with only inconsequential deviations from the original scoring, such as a few elaborated

¹⁸ E.T.A. Hoffmann, *E.T.A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings: Kreisleriana, The Poet and the Composer, Music Criticism*, ed. David Charlton, trans. Martyn Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 315.

¹⁹ Timothy Noonan, "The Piano Trios of Beethoven," Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee, 1984, 65.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 65-6.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

harmonies in the piano figuration. After a fermata on the dominant, an allegro piano figure passes from an F minor to an F-sharp minor, leading up to the B-flat in the upper voice of an E-flat Major chord. Here an echo of the opening notes of the first theme from the first theme group is repeated and passed between voices, diminishing slowly from forte to piano and then to pianissimo. Then a pair of piano arpeggios subtly arch, crescendo, and decrescendo, outlining an E-flat Major chord. Ascending, at the last, towards a high E-flat in the soprano voice of the piano, Beethoven instead steps back down to a G on the final note of the movement, reminding us that this is, in fact, only the first of four movements (mm. 239-241).

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