

SOME FORMAL AND RHYTHMIC FEATURES  
OF THE SLOW MOVEMENT  
OF BEETHOVEN'S PIANO SONATA OP. 31, NO. 2

by 6791

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to show in part the formal and rhythmic features of the slow movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata, Op. 31, No. 2. This study has been done to see if it could be discovered how Beethoven advances the slow movement in spite of the slow pulse. One who plays this movement is aware of the very slow quarter note pulse and the long time span of the movement, yet he is conscious of a constant rhythmic activity.

Sonata Op. 31, No. 2, was written in 1802, one of three piano sonatas in this opus number.<sup>1</sup> Milne quotes Beethoven as saying, after writing Op. 28, "From today I will strike out a new road." Milne believes that No. 2 is the most original of the three sonatas contained in Op. 31.<sup>2</sup>

Op. 31 begins what is referred to as Beethoven's "second period" or "second style." In this period Beethoven injects a more subjective feeling into the sonata form than had been heard previously. The subjective element is not easy to analyze, but the technical means by which it is achieved may be studied. Tovey gives an interesting account of this movement in his book, Beethoven, where he discusses its rhythm from an aesthetic standpoint.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William McNaught, "Beethoven," Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, p. 587.

<sup>2</sup>A. Forbes Milne, The Musical Pilgrim--Beethoven. I. The Piano-forte Sonatas, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup>Sir Donald Francis Tovey, Beethoven, pp. 57-59.

### Methods Used in Analysis

The first step in analyzing this movement was to mark each phrase and identify each cadence. Through harmonic analysis the key centers were located. Then, by noticing the material and themes, the general form was outlined. Analyzing the movement of the outer melodies and their rhythmic impulses was important in defining the motives and phrases in the first theme material.

In analyzing the rhythm, the number of rhythmic impulses per measure in the melody, the accompaniment, and the accumulative rhythm were recorded. The accumulative rhythm is shown on Chart I in the appendix. A comparison of the rhythm of the melody and the supporting parts is seen on Chart III. Graphs such as these are somewhat inadequate as the number of impulses per measure does not illustrate adequately if these impulses were of even or uneven rhythm, as shown in this comparison.

Ex. 1.

The image shows two measures of handwritten musical notation, labeled 'm. 31' and 'm. 32'. Each measure consists of two staves: a treble staff and a bass staff. The treble staff contains a melodic line with various note values and rests. The bass staff contains an accompaniment line with notes and rests. Below the bass staff, the text 'Accum. Rhythms: 8 impulses' is written, with a bracket indicating the duration of the impulses. The notation is in 3/4 time and includes a key signature of one flat.

### Definition of Terms

Switch--a term indicating change of direction in the tonality plan in the recapitulation. In the recapitulation of the sonata-allegro form, the first and second theme groups both appear in the tonic key, unlike their appearance in the exposition. The "switch" technique, sometimes sounding like

an apparent key change, helps prepare the listener for the second theme material by emphasizing the dominant chord sound.

Anchor--the technique of firmly establishing a new key center by alternating between the tonic and a first classification chord (usually the dominant) in the cadence area.

Phase--a section of music unique and identifiable because of like rhythmic and melodic activity throughout the section.

Accumulative rhythm--the total number of rhythmic impulses heard in the measure in all parts. In Ex. 2 the number of impulses in the accumulative rhythm of measure 23 is eleven.

Ex. 2.

The image shows a handwritten musical score for measure 23. It consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef staff with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. It contains a melody with notes and rests. The middle staff is a bass clef staff with a 3/4 time signature, containing a bass line with notes and rests. The bottom staff is labeled 'Accum. Rhythm' and shows a sequence of notes with a '3' written below it, indicating a triplet or a specific rhythmic pattern.

Rhythmic impulse--"rhythmic impulses per measure" means the number of times notes are struck in that measure. The term may be used when discussing specific areas, such as the melodic rhythm. For example, there are four rhythmic impulses in the melody in measure 23.

### Materials

The works referred to for supplemental help were Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, The Musical Pilgrim--Beethoven, by A. Forbes Milne, and

Beethoven and A Companion to Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas, by Sir Donald Francis Tovey.

A FORMAL AND RHYTHMIC ANALYSIS OF THE  
SECOND MOVEMENT (ADAGIO) OF BEETHOVEN'S SONATA  
OP. 31, NO. 2

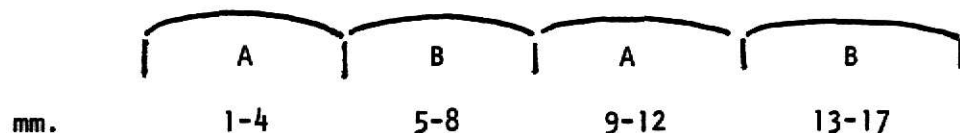
Tovey, in his Companion to Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas, describes the form of this movement as "sonata form without development."<sup>1</sup> In a single word, the form is that of a sonatina. A. Forbes Milne thinks that all three movements of this sonata are basically sonata forms, yet their dissimilarity shows the elasticity of that form in Beethoven's hands.<sup>2</sup>

The manner by which the rhythm affects this aspect of the music will be noted in this study, especially as to how it makes for continuity.

Exposition

The exposition is composed of a first theme, measures 1-17, a transition, measures 17-30, and a second theme, measures 30-38. There is no development section, but a transition section, similar to the one between the two themes, leads into the recapitulation.

First Theme. The form of the first theme (measures 1-17) is a double period.



At first sight, it seems as if the B $\flat$  major chord in measure 1 is introductory, while the thematic material proper starts in measure 2. But analysis

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<sup>1</sup>Sir Donald Francis Tovey, A Companion to Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas (Complete Analyses), p. 131.

<sup>2</sup>Milne, Musical Pilgrim, p. 32.