

Performance analysis and teaching analysis of the third movement of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata (Op. 27 No. 2)

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Abstract. Ludwig Van Beethoven was a famous German composer and pianist who was a major musical figure in the transition from the classical period to the Romantic period. His 32 piano sonatas, characterized by profound thought, significantly contributed to the sonata form's structural development. Among his masterpieces, the "Moonlight Sonata" stands out for its rich emotional depth, innovative musical arrangement, and powerful musical effect that captivates the listener. The Presto agitato of the third movement imparts a sense of tension and excitement, as if immersing oneself in a storm of emotions. This rapid pace evokes an ineffable passion and impulse, crafting a musical universe that is both dynamic and profoundly emotional. This paper analyzes the third movement of the "Moonlight Sonata " from the perspectives of its creative background, musical structure, and performance techniques.

keywords: Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata (Op. 27 No. 2), Piano performance, Music analysis.

1. The compositional background of the "Moonlight Sonata" (Op. 27 No. 2)

1.1. The life of Ludwig van Beethoven

Ludwig van Beethoven, a German composer, performer and musician, was a representative of the Vienna classical music school, born in Bonn, Germany, in 1770. Beethoven's life twists and turns. Although he suffered greatly from disorders of the ear, this affliction also served as a source of inspiration and motivation for his compositions, ultimately shaping his unique and distinctive musical style. Along with Mozart and Haydn, he was one of the leading figures of the classical music school. His creation is based on classical traditional music combined with his creativity and ideas. He was a master of integrating the music of the Classical period while also serving as an inspiration for the Romantic period. The 32 sonatas created by him are known as the "New Testament" in the music world, among which "Pathetique", "Moonlight", "Storm" are the most famous, reflecting his lofty spirit and far-reaching thoughts.

1.2. The creative background of "Moonlight Sonata" (Op. 27, No. 2)

Beethoven's creation can be divided into four periods [1]. During the Bonn Period (1770-1792), Beethoven was deeply influenced by Haydn and Mozart, and his musical style was similar to them. Haydn's music is light, witty and full of comedy. Mozart's music is simple, delicate, rigorously structured and philosophical. Beethoven incorporated the two styles into his works, forming a musical style that is sometimes extremely serious and sometimes humorous. He retains most of the optimistic humor characteristic of the classical period in the tone of the theme, the development of the motive, and the final movement. For example, Piano Concerto No.1 in C Major Op.15, written in sonata form, is entirely in the tradition of the Vienna Concerto exemplified by Mozart. The theme of the first movement is well structured, with alternating solos and full ensemble passages executed in a harmonious sequence. The frequent occurrence of scale phrases is the decoration of the subject material. The octave forte phrases in the piano solo section resemble a series of dazzling beams of light. The exposition of the piece ends with a magnificent march, which shows Mozart's influence on him. During the Viennese period (1793-1802), Beethoven's creative thinking changed, and he began to show drama, heroism, and strong emotions in his music. [2] "The drama of music is a kind of



emotional experience formed by the composer's special treatment of timbre, pitch, intensity, rhythm, musical thought, theme and structure, resulting in emotional transformation, change and strong contrast [3]". Beethoven embodied the dramatic quality of music through reforms to the sonata-symphony cycle, such as altering the order of movements, employing flexible and varied musical forms within compositions, and widely applying the sonata form [4]. For instance, the "Sonata in E-flat major (Op 27, No. 1)," he began with a slow movement, followed by a scherzo or a minuet with trio, and concluded with a fast finale. In the "Sonata in A major (Op2, No. 2)" Beethoven replaced the minuet with a scherzo, intensifying the emotional impact of the piece. Furthermore, Beethoven innovated the structure of the sonata form, including the introduction, exposition, development, recapitulation, and coda. In the "Piano Sonata No. 8 in C minor "Pathétique", Op. 13," he expanded the scale of the introduction, which spans ten bars and is set at a grave tempo. It begins dramatically with a transition from a tonic triad to a diminished seventh chord. The dynamics from forte to piano (in Example 1). The introduction material reappears in reduced form between the exposition and development, as well as between the recapitulation and coda, maintaining a state of unity and contrast that compacts the sonata form, enhances its rigor, and intensifies its musical appeal and dramatic quality.



Figure 1. Introduction to the Pathetique Sonata

In terms of heroism, Beethoven was deeply influenced by the French Revolution at the end of the 17th century. In the first and fourth movements of the "*Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Op.55*", he adopted themes from the ballet Prometheus, and the piece begins without an introduction, immediately entering the Prometheus theme after powerful E major chords played by the two orchestras, thereby establishing the image of a hero. A representative work from this period is the "*Moonlight Sonata*." During the mature period (1802-1814) [5], Beethoven utilized new creative themes. In his late years (1815-1827), Beethoven's compositions were characterized by their intricate and profound conceptions.

Influenced by the Enlightenment's ideals of freedom, equality, and fraternity, Beethoven composed the "*Moonlight Sonata*," a work that broke the traditional allegro-lento- allegro movement structure [6], embodying his optimistic spirit of advocating for freedom and opposing feudal oppression, as well as his intense revolutionary passion. This article analyzes the third movement of the "*Moonlight Sonata*" from the creative background, musical form structure, and performance techniques.

2. Music analysis

2.1. Musical structure

The third movement is an agitated presto in C-sharp minor with a 4/4 time signature and a sonata form structure. The expositions in the third movement are double expositions[7], consisting of the *first tonal area*, *second tonal area*, transition, and close. The first theme of the exposition (bars 1-14) is a contrasting theme that begins in C-sharp minor. The first theme (bars 1-9) encompasses a motive of ascending sixteenth-note broken chord, portraying a vibrant image with powerful staccato eighth-notes, driving the music forward with great momentum. In the transition (bars 15-20), bars 15-18 continue the first theme, while bars 19-20 shift to the dominant key of #C minor, which is #G minor. The rhythmic texture of the accompaniment in the secondary section emerges at this point, with the anticipatory sixteenth notes in the right hand. The secondary theme (bars 21-42) in the exposition is extremely full and emotive, filled with sorrow yet still brimming with passion. The closing section (bars 43-65) combines materials from the first and secondary themes, reinforcing the tonal characteristics of g-sharp minor in bars 43-56. The development section is divided into three parts: "introduction," "center," and "anticipation."

2.2. Modal harmony

The introduction (bars 66-71) begins in #C major. The central part (bars 72-87), which is the first part of the development, begins in #f minor and moves from bars 78 to G major. In the anticipation part (bars 88-102), the tonality of the recapitulation section is the bass pedal tone of the anticipatory section, which is the anticipation of the dominant note of the main key. The first part of the representation (sections 103-115) fully reproduces the exposition. The representation part omits the transition and goes directly to the secondary part of the representation part (bars 116-136), and the theme of the secondary part of the exposition part is reproduced in #c minor. End of Representation (bars 137-159) #c minor that reproduces the end of exposition. The coda is composed of materials from both the first theme and the secondary theme. It is divided into three parts: introduction, central section, and conclusion

2.3. Melody Characteristics

The third movement stands out as the most significant and explosive section of the entire piece. Beethoven crafted this movement with a unique approach, eschewing the classical rondo form, instead infusing it with an overwhelming sense of grandeur and drama that imparts a feeling of rebirth, akin to finding liberation after enduring hardships. Throughout the movement, Beethoven orchestrates diverse melodies that directly assault the listener's eardrums, generating a potent burst of energy and profound emotional resonance, genuinely reflecting his unwavering faith in destiny and music. To further emphasize the first theme, Beethoven judiciously trimmed and adjusted this chapter,

enhancing and expanding the secondary melody, and then abruptly stopped when the emotional development reached its climax. In the development section, he relentlessly builds up musical crescendos, causing the melody to surge and plummet like the tumultuous waves of the sea, creating a breathtaking tapestry of sound.

3. Analysis of performance skills

3.1. Overall performance characteristics

The third movement is the climax of "*Moonlight Sonata*". This movement is the most passionate and powerful one in terms of emotional expression among piano pieces, thus requiring great strength on fingertips when playing, giving a sense of "ready to be triggered at any moment". The third movement primarily utilizes two performance techniques. The first is large leaps, which belong to the category of jumping techniques and require a high level of hand-muscle strength. This technique is used to express the strong jumping nature and greater dynamics of the notes in the melody. The smooth performance of the jumping part requires the support of the palm, the curvature of the shape and the touch keys of the fingertips to be controlled properly, and the composer's irrepressible enthusiasm is played. The other is chord playing, where the sound of the chord must be "solid" and have strong penetration. This necessitates the use of muscle strength in both the upper and lower arms, as well as the propulsive force generated by the palm [8].

3.2. Difficulties in Performance

The movement begins with a series of rapidly ascending arpeggios in the exposition, which must be played clearly and without any blending. After playing the continuous sixteenth notes in one breath, the phrase is decisively cut off with two chords (Example 2), bringing the emotion to its peak. At this point, the eighth notes played by the left hand, acting as a supportive "metronome," must maintain a steady tempo, reflecting Beethoven's intended soaring yet controlled emotions. Due to variations in editions, the dynamic requirements on the score differ. Some versions require the series of sixteenth notes to build in intensity from soft to loud, while others instruct "no crescendo," maintaining a consistent volume until the final chord explodes with a sudden burst of strength, creating a contrast in dynamics.

Secondly, when playing staccato chords with eighth notes, it is important to convey a sense of firmness and decisiveness. Even at extremely fast speeds, each chord must be clean and distinct, with each note sounding clear and without error. Additionally, it is crucial to ensure that each fingertip applies even pressure, as any imbalance can lead to a cluttered and disorganized musical line.

Figure 2. The exposition

Finally, towards the coda, the alternating appearance of triplets, quintuplets, and sextuplets (Example.3) presents a challenging section where the fantastical arpeggios race across the keys, leading to a disruption of rhythm. The running notes here must possess a granular quality [9], with a sense of fluency and continuity. Here, repeated practice with a metronome, starting slow and gradually speeding up, is necessary. Otherwise, the overall rhythm may easily become sluggish or rushed. Throughout the movement, the techniques of legato, trills, grace notes, scales, arpeggios, and large leaps are vividly combined and employed [10], weaving together a picturesque scroll imbued with Beethoven's unique charm and color.



Figure 3. The coda

4. Conclusion

The "Moonlight Sonata" was composed in 1801, and it is highly distinctive in its musical structure, melody, and rhythm, rich and full of dramatic contrasts. The first movement employs a *lento*, the second an *allegro*, and the third an *allegro* with the pace of the piece gradually accelerating, fully revealing Beethoven's emotions. Pianists should combine the creative background of the work, and perform according to the melody, techniques, and emotional changes of the piece, to enhance the appeal of their piano playing.

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