

## Heiligenstadt and the Innovations in Beethoven's Op. 31 No. 2 "Tempest" Sonata

The Op. 31 No. 1 & No. 2 sonatas were most likely written in Heiligenstadt, as is suggested both by their presence in the Kessler sketchbook (dating them to 1801-1802) and Ferdinand Ries's accounts<sup>1</sup>. According to Czerny, after writing his Op. 28 sonatas, Beethoven said to his friend Krumpholtz: "I am not very well satisfied with the work I have thus far done. From this day on I shall take a new way", which Czerny later associated with the Op. 31 sonatas<sup>2</sup>. Beethoven's comment about the "new way" has created a lot of controversy, and different scholars have had different interpretation of what it meant. Nonetheless, the sonata Op. 31 No. 2 is unquestionably one of the greatest classical sonatas and occupies an important place within Beethoven's career.

Rosen<sup>3</sup> calls the opening of the Op. 31 No. 2 sonata "the most dramatic that Beethoven had yet conceived, with a contrast of tempos and motifs, and a radical opposition of mood." The Op. 13 sonata "Pathétique" also starts off with a similar juxtaposition of tempos and motifs, but in that case, the materials present in the starting Grave/Allegro molto con brio do not germinate the rest of the movement as will be shown to be the case in Op. 31, no. 2.

"The opening motif...is a motto and it will govern the entire work"<sup>4</sup>. This opening is constructed in a set of antecedent/consequent phrases. The first phrase, in Largo and *pianissimo*, is an upward arpeggiation of an A major chord in first inversion that starts out as a rolled chord. Nonetheless the top note of the rolled chord – A – continues

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<sup>1</sup> Thayer, p. 318; Kerman & Tyson p. 34

<sup>2</sup> Sonneck, p.31; Kerman & Tyson, p. 104

<sup>3</sup> Rosen, p.168

<sup>4</sup> Rosen, p.169

melodically into a rhythmicized horizontalization of the A chord. The consequent to this is a dynamic *Allegro* phrase characterized by falling two-note slurs in the right hand that are contrasted by a rising bass line.



This material repeats bar 7, now transposed into F major, but there is no clear cadence to be found until bar 21, where, in a seemingly new thematic material, the last four notes of the *Largo* antecedent phrase are now taken up in the bass register while the right hand accompanies with tempestive fast triplets in *forte*.

b. 21



An important aspect to keep in mind here is the registral space that is opened up between the iterations of the main thematic material in the bass and the melodic responses in the right hand line. At bar 41, the two-note slur motivic figure of the consequent phrase from bars 2-5 returns, but in a different melodic and harmonic guise.

b. 41



Thus the first two pages of the sonata generate from the first five bars, as the closing theme of the exposition (bars 75-87) derives its melodic content from the 5-4-3-2-1 descent of the initial Allegro motive, though now in the dominant key. As Jones notes<sup>5</sup>, even the chromatic turn around of bars 5-6 returns in a new guises but with the same melodic pitches in bars 22 and 55.



The development starts with a re-interpretation of the *Largo* rolled chords as arpeggios, which are longer (i.e. containing more notes) and thus allow for higher expressivity. After three permutations of the *Largo* motive, very unexpectedly the material of bars 21-40 (based on the Allegro part of the main theme) returns now in F# minor and *fortissimo*, thus completely skipping the actual Allegro theme, as it appears on bars 2-5. Even the earlier (and sometimes not most convincing) analyses of the piece have noted the unusual nature of this development section, which is not constructed, as

<sup>5</sup> Jones, p. 106; the above example is Jones'

most developments in classical sonatas were, upon sequences and breakdown of motives, but rather it moves to a whole new key area<sup>6</sup>. The idea of keeping the exposition materials practically intact (though transposed to a foreign key) is thus definitely a new element that Beethoven brings with this sonata.

Nonetheless, what does happen as expected in this development section is an increase in tension, which is in part achieved through a gradual and carefully paced ascent in the bass line, from F# to D. Rosen<sup>7</sup> notes that “the use of a rising bass at moments when the tension must be heightened is indispensable to Beethoven starting with op. 2, no. 2”. In the first movement of Op. 31, no. 2, the bass rises gradually over 20 bars (98-118) as the development section gets underway. An implied augmented sixth chord based on Bb propels the piece into a 12-bar prolongation of the A major dominant in *fortissimo* (bars 121- 132). Then a 5 – 4 – 3 – 2 – 1 melodic descent (for A major) in whole notes, with an A pedal in the bass, brings us to bar 137, where we get a hint of the recapitulation, through the C# and E grace notes that create an A chord.



The sforzando B flat in bar 139 then implies a dominant ninth chord, which is never played out vertically but is rather filled in horizontally as the 9<sup>th</sup> interval is outlined on the strong beats of bars 139 through 143 . It is interesting to note here that the dominant ninth plays an extremely important role in Beethoven’s compositions in

<sup>6</sup> Tovey (1944), p.99

<sup>7</sup> Rosen, p.169; p.125

preceding the recapitulation (as will also be shown even more prominently in the second and third movements) and it plays that same role here of creating a tension and an expectation of future release. Nonetheless, it should be remembered that the main “theme” in the exposition did not include a single root position tonic chord, and thus the recapitulation at bar 143 reinstates not the stability of the tonic but rather the instability of the dominant, as present in the exposition. Yet, we are now in a very different place than we were in the beginning, and the Largo is a much longer and more convoluted version of the first two bars. This is possibly the most extraordinary moment of the entire sonata, where the “expressive implications [of the mysterious arpeggios] are made explicit”<sup>8</sup>.

Within the recitative passage, the dominant ninth chord is again horizontally implied as the tension is not released but rather increased in a moment where, though in *pianissimo*, uncertainty of expectations is heightened to the edge. With the second iteration of the Largo motive (starting with the original first inversion C major chord) the piece comes to a halt at the tonally ambiguous Ab of bar 158. Beethoven swiftly enharmonizes the Ab to a G# that is part of a first inversion C# major chord leading to improvisatory arpeggios in F# minor<sup>9</sup>. What is lacking in this recapitulation section is the strong tonal arrival on D minor that came originally at bar 21. In fact the whole passage of bars 21-40 is not recapitulated<sup>10</sup>. The material that was originally in the dominant (starting at bar 41), as expected, is now recapitulated in the tonic, but it should not go

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<sup>8</sup> Kinderman, p. 76. In fact, the expressivity of the melodic line have prompted Kinderman to argue that this passage must have influenced Beethoven in he composition of the famous “O Freunde nicht die Tone!” recitative in the 9th symphony.

<sup>9</sup> The idea of key relationships, as well as returning to “foreign” keys within the piece will be discussed later in this paper.

<sup>10</sup> Note that the Allegro section of bars 3-6 was not repeated in the development, where it was replaced by the material of bar 41 transposed to F# minor

unnoticed that the only strong cadence and arrival in the tonic (after that of bar 21) comes at the end of the movement (bar 217). This concept is very important not only for the development of Beethoven's personal style and that of classical music but also in its role in the birth of romanticism. It is noteworthy that already in 1802, with Op. 31 No. 2 Beethoven creates a "sense of an unstoppable transformation process by constructing the music in unprecedentedly long spans, avoiding strong cadential closure"<sup>11</sup>.

This sense of unstoppable transformation in the first movement is also due the "processual" character of its structure. I have thus far described the different musical phrases as being in the exposition, development, or recapitulation, thus conforming to the generally accepted notion of sonata form. Nonetheless one of the things that make Op. 31 No. 2 special is its redefinition of sonata form in terms of a transformational process, rather than a neatly divisible form. I have already mentioned the motivic relations between the different materials in this movement but it is also important to note how these materials function structurally.

At the outset of the piece, the rolled/arpeggiated A major chord in the first two bars appears to be more like introductory material that precedes the main theme than the exposition of the main theme itself. It is only later in the piece, when this material returns, both reworked (as in bar 21) and verbatim (as in bar 143) that its significance is realized. In Dahlhaus' words: "bar 1 first presents itself as a prelude lacking in thematic significance, later (when viewed in retrospect from bar 21) as the anticipation of the theme and finally (after it has emerged that bars 21-40 are a modulating developmental passage) as the actual exposition". "Bars 1-2 'are' not either prelude, or anticipation or thematic exposition" but they set in motion a "dialectic process, where earlier meanings

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<sup>11</sup> Jones, p.106

continue to coexist on equal footing with later ones”<sup>12</sup>. The listener thus “follows the process of transformation” in which the motives/themes fulfill several functions at a time and the processual aspect of structure coexists with, if not supersedes the theoretical divisions of sonata form. In this case, in fact, the fact that bar 1 cannot easily be identified as either introduction or exposition is in no way a weakness. Rather, “ambiguity should be understood as an aesthetic quality”<sup>13</sup> as it is “the very contradictions of the form that constitute its artistic character”<sup>14</sup>.

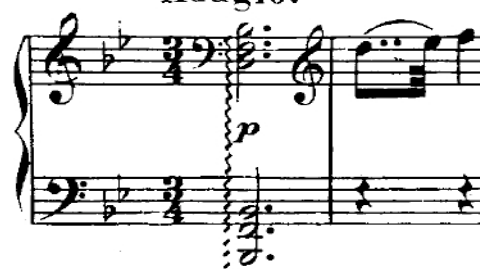
While the motivic relationships and their transformations are probably the clearest within the first movement, there are notable connections between the movements as well. The second movement “transforms elements from the first movement in a warmer context”<sup>15</sup>. The arpeggio from bar one of the first movement is now re-taken in the warmer and more stable Bb key (in root position), while the “double dotted rhythms are reminiscent of the recitative”.

b. 143 **Largo.**



The image shows a musical score for the first movement, marked 'Largo'. It features a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written in a simple, expressive style, with the instruction 'con espressione e semplice' written below the staff. The notes are: F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4. The bass line is mostly silent, with a few notes in the lower register.

**Adagio.**



The image shows a musical score for the second movement, marked 'Adagio'. It features a treble clef and a key signature of two flats (Bb). The melody is written in a simple, expressive style, with a piano dynamic marking 'p' written below the staff. The notes are: F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F4. The bass line is mostly silent, with a few notes in the lower register.

It is quite striking to note that the last two notes (F – D) outlined in the melody of the final chords of the first movement are also the same exact notes that are outlined in the first melodic passage of the second movement (bar 2), though now in the new

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<sup>12</sup> Dahlhaus, p.117  
<sup>13</sup> Dahlhaus, p. 169  
<sup>14</sup> Dahlhaus, p. 170  
<sup>15</sup> Kinderman, p.77

harmonic context. As Taub notes<sup>16</sup>, it is quite important as a pianist to voice the last two chords of the first movement to the top, in such a way that they will remain in the listener's auditory memory<sup>17</sup> until they are picked up again in the second movement.

In contrast to the first movement's design, the structure of the second movement is much simpler and more easily and unequivocally identifiable as a sonata form without development. On the other hand, there are several subtle compositional links with the first movement. One of the key characteristics of this movement is the registral space that is opened at the very beginning, which is reminiscent of the technique used in the first movement (bars 21-40 and 99-121). Similarly to the first movement, "the opening thematic statement is richer in what it implies than in what it actually contains"<sup>18</sup>. As the first theme material repeats at bar 9, what was essentially hollow space in the first eight bars starts to get filled in, as the rhythmic pace also picks up.

Adagio.



b. 9



<sup>16</sup> Taub, p. 197

<sup>17</sup> Though it is much harder to hear the connection here because of the distance in time, it is also quite interesting that the interval F-D is delineated in the main theme of the third movement, moving downward at the very local level (A-[F-E-D] in the first four notes) and upward in a more regional level (D-E-F is the motion in the downbeats of bars 1-9)

<sup>18</sup> Jones, p. 109



The transition passage, with its relentless and tension-building character provided by the drum-roll figure in the bass leads into the second theme (at bar 31, in the dominant, F major), which is by contrast the most serenely beautiful material of the entire sonata. Nonetheless, after only eight bars, the tension starts building, as Beethoven introduces again the dominant ninth chord that had such a prominent role in the opening movement to prepare for the return of the tonic in the recapitulation. The second time through the first theme (bars 51-59) Beethoven completely fills in the initial registral gap with cascading 32<sup>nd</sup> notes that embellish the main melodic line. After the recapitulation in the tonic of the second theme and a quick motion to the subdominant (bar 85), the main theme returns for a final time at the coda (bar 89), where the registral gap again widens and the texture gets thinner. The last bar is a very concise distillation of the motivic material that as made up most of the movement and in the same time it foreshadows the melodic motion (  $\overset{\wedge}{3} - \overset{\wedge}{2} - \overset{\wedge}{1}$  ) that the main theme of the third movement is made of.

The second movement, both because it is cast in the most traditional form of the three movements, and because of its relatively symmetric form<sup>19</sup> serves as a central axis for the outer two movements, which share several characteristics, especially in terms of their harmonic language. While, in contrast to the first movement, the third movement starts with a clear tonic D in the bass, the pedal A in the tenor voice does introduce a tonal ambiguity that, as in the first movement is really only resolved at the end. While from the very beginning the 3/8 Allegretto sets up perpetuum mobile-type rhythmic activity, it is only at bar 30 that the true “Sturm und Drang” nature of the first theme

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<sup>19</sup> As noted above, the first theme appears at first in a concise/diminutive version (exposition), which is then enriched during its re-appearitions (in the development) and finally taken back to the most concise version at the last bar (and generally in the coda). Also, thought of crudely, the recapitulation of the first theme can be thought of as the center of the movement, where on each side there is one iteration of the second theme and one “concise” version of the first theme.

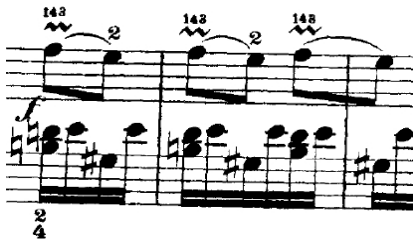
appears. Here, now in *forte* (while the first eight bars were in *piano*) the melodic content of the first theme is transferred to the low register of the bass while the right hand imitates the left hand rhythm but off by two eighth notes, thus creating an incredible pull and tension in the rhythmic structure.

**b. 29-33**



After this figure repeats transposed down to C major, through an augmented sixth chord on F we arrive at the second theme (bar 43), which is yet another reconfiguration, in a different metric and harmonic context, of the two note slur figure from the first movement theme<sup>20</sup>.

**b. 43**



**b. 41 (Allegro)**



We have now clearly modulated to the dominant A minor, but as in the first movement, Beethoven avoids a strong cadential closure (here in the dominant) through “elision” (bar 51) and “interruption” (bars 59 and 63)<sup>21</sup>. Even when A minor is reached through a perfect cadence (bars 67 and 73), the *subito piano* transforms the phrase endings into the start of a new forward-propelling phrases. Another dominant ninth chord at the last four bars of the exposition lead (after the repeat) to an unexpected F#

<sup>20</sup> Taub, p. 198

<sup>21</sup> Jones, p. 112

diminished chord that starts the development section<sup>22</sup>. As Jones notes, this development section is very characteristic in its persistence of the same rhythmic pattern<sup>23</sup>, derived from the first theme – in fact the second theme material appears nowhere in the development. The first theme material does appear almost verbatim and the choice of the key to which Beethoven transposes it here (bar 150) – B flat minor – is quite intriguing. After a long transitional section including, at its end (bars 189-214), a 26-bar long prolongation of the dominant ninth sonority (whose importance in preceding the recapitulation has been noted in the previous movements), the opening theme returns again in the tonic. As expected of a recapitulation the second theme is now restated in the tonic. Nonetheless, the original “Sturm und Drang” material from bar 29 is now transposed to the key of B-flat minor.

As noted earlier, in the first movement, Beethoven first uses F# minor in the beginning of the development section (bar 98) and then returns to this foreign key in the middle of the recapitulation (bar 161), where improvisatory material replaces the theme of bars 21-40, which is not recapitulated. Of course, the theme of bars 21-40 preceded the recapitulation, but it was there constructed in F# minor, the key that returns at bar 161. A similar maneuver happens in the third movement, where Beethoven uses in repetition the key of Bb minor. Starting in bars 130 of the development section, the key of Bb minor is emphasized until finally, at bar 150, the first theme suddenly reappears (bars 150 ½ - 157 ½ are a direct transposition to Bb minor of the first theme). As in the first movement, in the third-movement recapitulation section, Beethoven breaks out of the normal sequence

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<sup>22</sup> Tovey (1931), p. 134

<sup>23</sup> Jones, p. 112

of keys to go back to Bb minor (the “foreign” key, as F# minor was in the first movement).

As Rosen remarks (p. 172), Beethoven again uses this idea of returning, in the recapitulation, to the most unusual key of the development section in his “Hammerklavier” Sonata, but Op. 31 No. 2 is his first attempt at such a technique and thus represents a very important innovation. It is important to note here Beethoven’s merits with regards to establishing key-relationships as an important compositional element. Tovey observes that “the darker colors, such as Ab to C (Vi to I) are often evident in Mozart” while “the brighter key relations, such as C to E (I to III) are apparent in Haydn’s late works”.<sup>24</sup> But “neither Haydn nor Mozart took the risk of giving a remote key an essential function in a continuous and highly organized movement”. It is only after Beethoven, especially with Schubert that we see the major third key relation becoming typical. For example, in the exposition of the String Quartet in G Schubert goes through a tonal sequence D-F#-Bb-D<sup>25</sup>. Curiously, these are the same keys that Beethoven goes through in his Op. 31 No. 2 sonata, but in the sonata they are all in their minor mode.

Nonetheless, it must be noted that Beethoven was experimenting with key areas for some time and the innovations did not start with Op. 31 No.2, rather they continued in the path of Beethoven’s search for an individual style. In the sonata Op. 26 (written 1800-1801) Beethoven tries the idea of remaining in the same key of Ab throughout the four movements (the third movement being in the minor mode)<sup>26</sup>. Op. 27 No. 1 (written 1800-

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<sup>24</sup> Tovey (1944), p.29

<sup>25</sup> Webster, p. 20

<sup>26</sup> Ab (movement 1 – Andante con variazioni); Ab (movement 2 – Scherzo); Ab minor (movement 3 – Marcia funebre sulla morte d’un Eroe) and Ab (movement 4 – Allegro)

1801), on the other hand goes from Eb (movement 1 – Andante) to C minor (movement 2 – Allegro molto e vivace) to Ab (movement 3 – Adagio con espressione) and back to Eb (movement 4 – Allegro vivace)<sup>27</sup>. The sonata Op. 27, no. 1 is one of the set of two sonatas subtitled by Beethoven “Quasi una fantasia”, the second of which is the slightly more celebrated “Moonlight” sonata. In both these sonatas Beethoven tries out new models for the different component movements defying the general expectations of what a piano sonata was supposed to be. While the “Moonlight” with its contemplative first movement possibly gave way to more speculation, Op. 27 No. 1 is definitely worthy of attention. Two elements particularly in this sonata are an important precursor to Op. 31 No. 2. Firstly, the key relations (especially in major thirds) are present not only *between* the movements but also *within* the movements. Jones<sup>28</sup> shows very clearly the big-scale tonal scheme of the sonata:

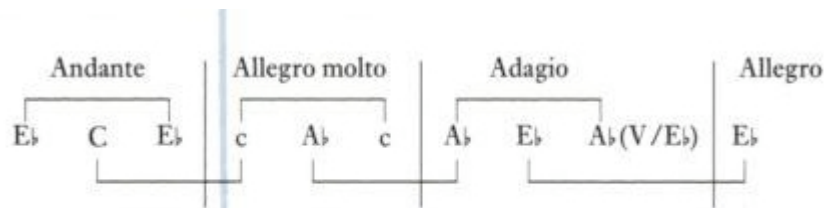


Figure 5.1 Tonal integration in Op. 27 no. 1

Secondly, in an unprocessed way, we find here an attempt to integrate the movements within a unified work by means of using the same motive in two different movements. The first 6 bars of the third movement are largely cut and pasted before the coda in the fourth movement, transposed by a fifth up. Obviously this relationship is not extremely subtle, but it can be seen how Beethoven then reuses this idea of motivic unity in Op. 31 No. 2 in a less apparent but exceptionally consistent manner.

<sup>27</sup> Lockwood (1996), p.16

<sup>28</sup> Jones, p. 66, above figure taken from Jones

In the sonatas Op. 27, no. 2 and Op. 28 Beethoven goes back to the idea of one-key for the entire work, with C# minor (Adagio sostenuto) – Db (Allegretto) – C# minor (Presto agitato) in Op. 27 No. 2 and D (Allegro) – D minor (Andante) – D (Scherzo) – D (Rondo) in Op. 28. Then he returns, with Op. 31, no. 1, to the 3-movement sonata with G-C-G the keys of the respective movements, but he uses the “foreign”, major third-related key of B major for the second subject at the first movement’s exposition (bar 66), after the first subject’s G major.

“The Op.20’s sonatas confirm that for Beethoven the piano sonatas were a field of experimentation”<sup>29</sup>. Especially with the “quasi una fantasia” sonatas<sup>30</sup> Beethoven attempts to unite the different movements as one continuous composition and, after having toyed with the number, quality and inter-relation of the movements, Beethoven concentrates his experimentation in Op. 31, no. 2 on the inner workings of each movement. In a way, within the general goal of creating a unified sonata, his focus shifts from the outer appearance of the movements (in the Op. 20’s) to the inner workings of each movement (Op. 31).

A final note about Beethoven’s experimentations in the Op. 31 sonata has to do not with structure, but with sound. It is fascinating that the three movements of the Sonata Op. 31, no. 2, as well as Op. 31, no. 1, end quietly, without the classical formal ending with big chords<sup>31</sup>. Considering the fact that both these sonatas were written during Beethoven’s permanence in Heiligenstadt, it would not be a very far-fetched theory to

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<sup>29</sup> Lockwood (1996), p.15

<sup>30</sup> A fantasia (as described in Lockwood, 1996) is a “work with an unpredictable number of sections, all played without pause, literally or figuratively making use of the idea of an ‘attacca’ at the end of each section”. The idea of “attacca”, especially within a fantasy-like movement, is important as it creates continuity between the movements.

<sup>31</sup> Rosen p. 173; Lockwood (1944), p.139

say that this experimentation with sound might have been at least in part due to Beethoven's increasing awareness of his hearing loss<sup>32</sup>. Nonetheless, the soft ending of each movement also serves to "prolong the atmosphere beyond the final chords"<sup>33</sup>. This not only imbues a greater meaning to the short moments of silence between the movements but it also aids in creating the feeling of the sonata as a continuous work, to which end also serve, the motivic relationships within and between movements as well as the avoidance of cadences. Thus, whether autobiographically induced or not, the experimentation with sound eventually has an effect in the structural unity of the piece.

Many scholars have considered Beethoven's realization of his future permanent hearing loss in Heiligenstadt during 1802 as a crucial point that defined his compositional style. Solomon claims that Beethoven's this served as a "fresh start", a turning point in his style.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, such absolutist claims should be read with caution. Kinderman points to letters of Beethoven to Wegeler and Amenda in 1801 where it is clear that already for at least a couple of years before that he has been seriously preoccupied with his hearing loss.<sup>35</sup> Thus it is very hard to identify within a moment or even a few weeks/months Beethoven's personal crisis associated with his hearing loss. In Jones' words<sup>36</sup>, "rather than representing a turning point [the Heiligenstadt testament] may be seen as continuing a crystallization of thoughts that Beethoven had been exploring for some time". On the musical side, it has also been shown here that, while the Op. 31, no. 2 sonata presents multiple innovative compositional techniques, many of such

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<sup>32</sup> This experimentation with the sound is also very obvious in the "recitative" section at the recapitulation of the first movement of Op. 31 No. 2, where the pedal is held down through different harmonies, creating an outer-worldly effect.

<sup>33</sup> Rosen, p.173

<sup>34</sup> Solomon, p.121, p.124

<sup>35</sup> Kinderman, p.61

<sup>36</sup> Jones, p. 14

techniques were already used or toyed with in previous works. Further, to say that Beethoven's "new way" started suddenly in this one piece would be a very simplistic and even offensive way to regard music of such stature. Perhaps closer to the truth is the notion that in his long artistic life of improvement and innovation, Op. 31, no.2 is but one of many noteworthy examples.

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