

An Analysis & Comparison of Three Beethoven Works

Piano Sonata in F minor Op. 2 No. 1, III (1795)

Symphony 9 in D minor, Op. 125, II (1824)

String Quartet in B flat major Op. 130, II (1825)

By: Jesse Nolan

An Analysis & Comparison of Three Beethoven Works

Piano Sonata in F minor Op. 2 No. 1, III (1795)

Symphony 9 in D minor, Op. 125, II (1824)

String Quartet in B flat major Op. 130, II (1825)

Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770 – 1827), one of the most dramatic and influential composers of his time, created dynamic contrast between his early and late works while retaining a basic overall formal shape and design. After analysis of Beethoven's works, it can be concluded that Beethoven utilizes various aspects of dramatic conflict to create tension in his pieces within his overall formal designs. Thus, his late works bear both striking similarities and differences to his earlier ones, specifically maintaining the overall formal shape and key scheme of his earlier works, but intensifying the dramatic aspects by changes in rhythm, meter, and tempo, and by the emphasis on the working out of short motives.

Perhaps some of the most striking comparisons can be made between three pieces that represent Beethoven's catalog in its variety. These pieces are Piano Sonata Op. 2, No. 1, III; Symphony No. 9, Op. 125, II; and String Quartet Op. 130, II. Op. 2, No. 1 was composed in 1795 for piano and dedicated to Haydn, who had been his mentor and teacher. The particular movement in question is a typical minuet and trio representing Beethoven's earlier works. Symphony No. 9, composed for a modified orchestra with a choir, was premiered in 1824 with text by Friedrich Schiller. Here, movement II takes on a more complicated and interesting form, something that Beethoven began experimenting with later in his career. Finally, Op. 130, written for string quartet, was composed in 1825. With its scherzo/trio form, it offers a prime example of Beethoven's

experimentation in his later works while always remaining close the roots he spread in his earlier compositions.

Beethoven, as dynamic and experimental as his compositions suggest he was, developed an overall style which remained fairly constant throughout his life. Thus, each piece, no matter what period during his career it comes from, bears similarity to his other works. The pieces in question offer no exception. The interesting element, however, is that although these pieces are similar in many ways, they also bear differences to one another that set them apart and individualize them. Similarities and differences between Op. 2 No. 1 and both Symphony 9 and Op. 130 include aspects of overall formal design, large key scheme, smaller level formal design/key scheme, meter/tempo/rhythm, and dynamics/motives/register.

The overall formal design of Op. 2, No. 1 and Op. 130 and Symphony 9 are similar. First, the forms of pieces must be established. Op. 2 No. 1 utilizes a simple minuet/trio form; Op. 130 uses a scherzo/trio form; and Symphony 9 uses a scherzo/trio form with sonata form inset in the scherzo. Op. 2, No. 1 and Op. 130 are divided into 2 sections, the second of which, in both cases, is a Trio. Symphony 9 also has a trio section. All three pieces bring back the opening theme at the end of the piece (or excerpt mm. 1-395 in the case of Sym. 9). Op. 2 No. 1 actually has the da capo marking in the score. Symphony 9's opening scherzo (mm. 1-395) is da capo as well. Op. 130 however, has a written out repeat that only slightly embellishes the original opening statement and adds a coda. Although the last section is written out, both Op. 130 and Op. 2 No. 1 seem to be compound ternary. Other differences between the pieces include the fact that Symphony 9 uses an extended sonata form (scherzo with a trio) versus Op. 2 No. 1's

minuet/trio form. Also, Op. 2 No. 1 is absent of a scherzo section which the other pieces possess. Another interesting note is that Op. 2 No. 1 has no transitions. Like a typical minuet and trio, the minuet goes straight into the trio without utilizing a transition to modulate (in this case to the parallel major). Op. 130 and Sym. 9, however, both use transitions; specifically mm. 48-63 in Op. 130 which serve as a transition between the trio and the return of the scherzo section, and mm. 69-76, 143-150, 151-176, and 396-413 which all serve respectively as transitions in the overall sonata form of the opening section. Finally, Op. 2 No. 1 is the only piece here that does not have a coda. Op. 130's coda lasts from mm. 96 – 105 and Sym. 9's coda lasts from mm. 531 – 559. Finally, the length of the pieces poses fairly obvious differences and similarities. Op. 2 No. 1 and Op. 130 have similar lengths (approx. 70 measures), assuming that the final written out scherzo of Op. 130 is actually a da capo. Symphony 9, on the other hand uses an extended sonata form within a scherzo/trio form and therefore is much longer than the other pieces (550+ measures). Taking these similarities and differences into account, it becomes evident that Beethoven maintains the basic formal shape of the pieces written later in his life while at the same time slightly augmenting the form to create dramatic conflict.

The overall key schemes of the pieces bear major similarities to one another. All three pieces begin in minor, Op. 2 No. 1 in f minor, Op. 130 in bb minor, and Sym. 9 in d minor. Similarly, the trio sections of all three pieces are in the key of the parallel major, F major, Bb major, and D major, respectively. An obvious similarity between Op. 130 and Op. 2 No. 1 lies in the fact that both pieces use closely related keys (I/i → iii/III) instead of the more distant keys of Sym. 9 (DM → CM → em → EbM). Finally, Op. 2

No. 1 is different from Sym. 9 in that Sym. 9 utilizes a pedal point (D pedal) between mm. 492 – 530. This pedal is an embellishment of the tonic and is a dramatic musical tool. Beethoven began to explore these tools not only in key structure but also in form as well. Thus, it can be concluded that although Beethoven utilizes unique dramatic elements in his later pieces, he does generally maintain the overall key scheme of his later works.

On a smaller level, these pieces bear even more similarities and differences in formal design and key scheme. Both Op. 2 No. 1 and Op. 130 have similar A (first) sections. The A section of Op. 2, No. 1 includes measures 1-40 and is being compared to the A section of Op. 130 which consists of measures 1-16. These two excerpts are clearly divided by repeat signs into 2 sections each, setting up antecedent/consequent and a two reprise relationship between them. This same section, however, emphasizes a difference between the two pieces in the following: Both Op. 130 and Op. 2 No. 1 utilize the key of III/iii. Op. 130 uses the key of d minor in both the opening scherzo (mm. 9-12) and the closing scherzo (mm. 80-83, 88-91). Op. 2 No. 1, also utilizes III/iii in the minuet section in mm. 5-14, where Ab major is tonicized. The placement of this chromatic mediant however, creates a difference in these pieces. Op. 2 No. 1 has the chromatic mediant in the antecedent phrase (before the repeat sign), thus bearing repercussions on the form of this section by making it continuous because the phrase ends in III instead of i in m. 14. Conversely, in Op. 130, Beethoven uses the chromatic mediant of d minor directly after the antecedent phrase in mm. 9-12 and then moves back to bb minor to end the phrase in mm. 16. This, therefore allows this entire section to be sectional. The smaller differences in key scheme and form of these pieces are the details that begin to set them

apart from one another, thus indicating the dramatic aspects Beethoven employs in his later works that are absent from his earlier ones.

Meter, tempo, and rhythm also pose interesting discussions when comparing these three pieces. It can be observed that all three pieces are at some point in triple meter ($3/4$ or $6/4$). Op. 2 No. 1 is in $3/4$ for the whole movement. Op. 130 however, begins in cut time $4/4$ and moves to cut time $6/4$ in its trio section. Sym. 9 also begins in $3/4$, but moves to cut time $4/4$ for its trio section. Tempo also poses major differences between the pieces. Op. 2 No. 1 uses an “Allegretto” tempo which is considerably slower than that of both Sym.9’s “Molto Vivace” and Op. 130’s “Presto”. Perhaps the most interesting tempo/meter issue, however, occurs in Symphony 9 at m. 177 where Beethoven marks “Ritmo di tre battute,” which means “rhythm of three beats.” This performance marking is indicating that each measure is part of a larger grouping of 3 measures. Therefore, instead of a measure being one unit, 3 measures becomes one unit. This type of metric acceleration is called hypermeter. Beethoven also begins using rhythmic patterns, displacement, and short motives to build intensity and drama in his later pieces. For example, the trio of Op. 130 begins stressing beat two of every measure, creating a possible scenario of metric displacement. Sym. 9 poses a prime example of the short rhythmic motives Beethoven uses to create drama in his pieces. The opening dotted rhythm of the second movement (“yum-padum”) returns over and over again, and becomes stressed at many places in the movement, for example at mm. 268 – 281. This repetition combined with the dynamic level of *ff* builds intensity, drama, and suspense that is resolved later in the movement.

Finally, Beethoven employs the use of dynamics, texture, register, and melody to create contrasts between his pieces. One important element of both Op. 2 No. 1 and of Op. 130 are the simple phrases of melodies that appear throughout the movement. Op. 130 is a prime example of this. The scherzo section has four 4 bar phrases, and the melody is structured around these phrases. Op. 2 No. 1 is a little looser in the fact that each phrase is not of the exact same length, but the melodies still seem highly influenced by the length and form of the piece. The melodies of Op. 2 No. 1 and Op. 130 are also simple when compared to the complex working-out of the melodies in Symphony 9. This is partially due to the dramatic difference in orchestration of the two pieces. Much more contrast can be written when the composer is working with an entire orchestra versus one or four instruments. In Sym. 9, Beethoven employs many melodic elements that allow the melody to dictate the length of both the sections and of the piece as a whole. For example, Beethoven uses many imitative entries and “fugato-like” passages to extend his dramatic conflict as long as possible. One example of this can be seen at the beginning of the exposition of the scherzo section (mm. 9-28), where each instrument begins four bars after the previous one, with the same rhythmic motive. This “fugato-like” passage comes back during the hypermeter passage at mm. 177-185. This use of motive-based imitative entries allows Beethoven to create tension that must later be resolved and worked out. Another difference between the pieces includes the change in dynamic usage between Beethoven’s earlier work Op. 2 No. 1 and his later works of Op. 130 and Sym. 9. Whereas Op. 130 and Sym. 9 are full of dynamic shifts and accents, Op. 2 No. 1 seems dynamically flat in comparison. The entire piece is written at either piano or pianissimo, with the exception of two forte passages at mm. 26-34 and mm. 59-62. The piece does

not use the entire dynamic range of the piano, something that Beethoven does brilliantly in Sym. 9 with an orchestra. Written range also becomes of concern when comparing the pieces. Op. 2 No. 1 uses a fairly limited middle range of the piano, whereas Op. 130 and Sym. 9 use the entire range of the instruments they are scored for. These intricate details indicate Beethoven's growth and stylistic enhancement between his earlier and later works.

In summary, Beethoven's style and growth as a composer can be traced by comparing his range of musical expression between his early works where he begins to define his style and later works in which he not only builds on his own musical language but does so by brilliantly remaining close to his original style. By intensifying the dramatic aspects of his pieces while maintaining his basic formal shape and key scheme, Beethoven creates music that challenges the listener but at the same time allows them to recognize the unparalleled style of the true master that Ludwig Van Beethoven was.