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# The Origins of Beethoven's op.109

William Meredith

Among the commentators who have found something unusual in the first movement of Beethoven's Sonata in E op.109, few have put it so equivocally as A.B. Marx in the first review of the sonata of 4 February 1824 in the *Berliner Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*:

The present sonata in E major will not become familiar until one has repeated it often out of some inner impulse. It begins in the manner of a prelude, as if one were testing a harp to see if it were in tune. An Adagio, with a noble, sad, but consoling melody, interrupts the opening, makes strange (almost convulsive) enharmonic shifts, and returns playfully to the first prelude, somewhat as though this idea had pleased its inventor. He continues the figure in an interesting manner and then takes up the theme of the Adagio once more, which however again moves consolingly back into the Prelude-form and with this closes sentimentally. The reviewer must admit, however, that he has not found a principal idea [*leitende Idee*] in the entire first movement; it must consist then of the fact that the illustrious singer wished to divert himself by playing (there is very pleasant piano-writing in this movement), but that it does not entirely succeed for him. Actually, the entire movement is somewhat restrained and, in spite of the lovely places, somewhat unsatisfying.

Today the movement seems less strange and more satisfying, the principal idea seems less obscure, and the movement's abbreviated use of sonata form, though considered irregular and free, is usually recognized as sonata form nonetheless. But Marx's reference to 'Prelude-form' still sounds right, and the fantasy character of the movement places the sonata as a whole with the few others in which Beethoven experimented outside the traditional sequence of movements (op.27 nos.1 and 2, op.101).

It may come as no surprise, therefore, to discover that the Vivace of op.109 was probably conceived for a different purpose altogether, and only belatedly adopted as the basis of a sonata. The story is one that must be pieced together from a variety of sources, and some uncertainty remains even when all the available evidence is in. It begins with the correspondence.

On 25 March 1820 Beethoven wrote to the Berlin publisher Adolf Martin Schlesinger to offer two, as he called them, 'smaller compositions', the 25 Scottish Songs op.108, and the 10 Themes with Variations op.107.<sup>1</sup> Schlesinger noted on the outside of Beethoven's letter (as was his custom) the date of his answer to Beethoven: 'Beantw. d. 11/4.20'.<sup>2</sup> Although the publisher's reply is not extant, its

<sup>1</sup> This letter is now in the collection of the Beethovenhaus (Bodmer BBr 126). A transcription of the German is in Kastner-Kapp (no.963): *Ludwig van Beethovens sämtliche Briefe*, ed. E. Kastner (Leipzig, 1910, rev., enlarged 2/1923 by J. Kapp); the letter is no.1015 in Emily Anderson's translation: *The Letters of Beethoven* (London, 1961).

<sup>2</sup> H. Schmidt: 'Die Beethovenhandschriften des Beethovenhauses in Bonn', *Beethoven-Jahrbuch 1969-70*, 157

contents can be deduced from Beethoven's next letter of 30 April.<sup>3</sup> Schlesinger apparently requested additional information about the language of the Scottish Songs and about the international publication rights Beethoven had cursorily explained in the letter of 25 March.

Near the end of his letter of 30 April Beethoven wrote: 'I will also gladly let you have new sonatas'. Although not necessarily a response to a direct request, it may be that Schlesinger had inquired about the possibility of publishing some new sonatas in his letter of 11 April.<sup>4</sup> Alan Tyson came to this conclusion in the commentary to his transcription and translation of a letter from Beethoven to Schlesinger dated 28 June 1820: 'Schlesinger seems also to have asked Beethoven for piano sonatas'.<sup>5</sup> Beethoven's letter of 30 April, offering some new sonatas, has thus far been the only bit of evidence mentioned in the literature about the origin of the commission of op.109.

Schlesinger's letter of 11 April probably reached Vienna around 18 April.<sup>6</sup> Already on 12 or 13 April, however, Beethoven had noted the incipit of what became the first movement of op.109 on a leaf in a conversation book.<sup>7</sup> None of the entries surrounding the incipit in the conversation book seems to be even indirectly related to the entry for what became op.109.<sup>8</sup> But the incipit does closely match one of the sketches for the theme (ex.1) on folio 4r

Ex. 1



<sup>3</sup> The present location of the letter is unknown. The German appears as no.105 in Max Unger's *Beethoven und seine Verleger* (Berlin and Vienna, 1921); the letter is no.1021 in Anderson.

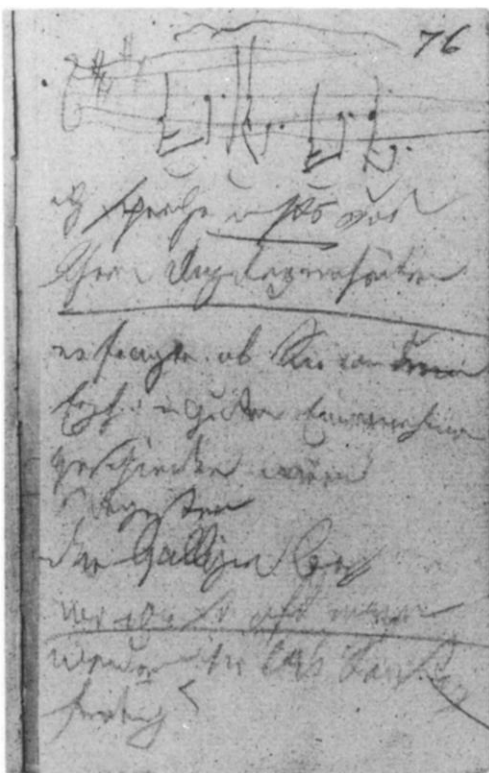
<sup>4</sup> There is also a remote possibility that Beethoven was already considering writing new sonatas at the beginning of March, for a humorous interchange in a conversation book between a publisher (probably from the Artaria firm) and another member of the discussion documents that the monetary value of sonatas had been jestingly discussed: [Publisher:] 'If this wine costs 3 f, what then should a sonata by Beethoven cost?' Answer: 'A million'. —. 'too much'. (*Ludwig van Beethovens Konversationshefte*, i, 312). These entries are followed by comments about the difficulties of a Beethoven sonata and discussion of a pianist who had performed a Mozart sonata and the 'Sonata pathétique'. Occurring as the set of entries does around several remarks about piano sonatas, it is perhaps too speculative to assume from this exchange that Beethoven was actually considering writing sonatas in March.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Tyson: 'New Beethoven Letters and Documents', *Beethoven Studies 2* (Oxford, 1977), 22-3

<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to estimate the exact amount of time necessary for mail to travel between Vienna and Berlin because Schlesinger only noted the date of his replies and the date Beethoven wrote the letter on the fronts of Beethoven's originals. Schlesinger's quickest answer to Beethoven occurred seven days after a letter was posted from Vienna. Beethoven wrote to Schlesinger on 28 June 1820 and Schlesinger answered on 4 July. The circumstances surrounding that reply suggest that Schlesinger wrote back immediately after receiving Beethoven's letter since he probably feared that he was in danger of losing the publishing rights to the three piano sonatas, opp.109-111.

<sup>7</sup> *Ludwig van Beethovens Konversationshefte*, ii, 56

<sup>8</sup> Since the incipit occurs at the top of a page and none of the surrounding entries directly relates, it is possible that Beethoven entered the incipit at some earlier time in the conversation book's use.



in the sketch miscellany *Grasnick 20b* (Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, East Berlin), a leaf that was originally part of the so-called Wittgenstein sketchbook (Beethovenhaus, Bonn, BSk 1/49; SBH 663).<sup>9</sup> Beethoven cannot have sketched the theme in response to an invitation from Schlesinger. Indeed, the piece at this point was probably not intended as the first movement of a piano sonata at all.

The evidence supporting this theory is a startling entry in the next conversation book, which covers the last half of April. Franz Oliva, one of Beethoven's close friends from 1818 to 1820, wrote: 'and use the new little piece for a sonata for Schlesinger'.<sup>10</sup> Written between 22 and 24 April, four to six days after Beethoven would have received Schlesinger's letter and a week before the decision to offer Schlesinger some sonatas, this entry suggests that the incipit already noted in the conversation book may have been for the 'new little piece'. Since the entry precedes Beethoven's reply of 30 April, it also corroborates the suggestion that Schlesinger had indeed requested some sonatas.

The probability that what became the first movement of op.109 was originally conceived apart from the sonata is supported by the sketches themselves. Those for the first movement are separated in the sources and in time from those for the second and third movements. Sketches for the first movement are found on folios 3r–5v of *Grasnick 20b*

<sup>9</sup> The sketch miscellany *Grasnick 20b* is now in the collection of the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, East Berlin. I am grateful to the library for permission to study the miscellany firsthand.

<sup>10</sup> *Ludwig van Beethovens Konversationshefte*, ii, 87

(all originally part of the Wittgenstein sketchbook) and pp. 39–41 and 43 of the pocket sketchbook BH 107 (Beethovenhaus, Bonn, SBH 665). Previously we have known of two sources that help us date the work on the pages in *Grasnick 20b*/Wittgenstein. The first, mentioned above, is the incipit Beethoven inscribed in a conversation book around 12 or 13 April, which matches a sketch on *Grasnick 20b*, folio 4r. Second, the folio that precedes work on the first movement of op.109 (in the set of leaves in *Grasnick 20b* that originally belonged to Wittgenstein) contains sketches for *Abendlied unterm gestirnten Himmel*, WoO150. The autograph of this song is dated 'am 4ten März 1820',<sup>11</sup> suggesting late February or early March for the song's composition. Normally, then, we should conclude that the op.109 sketches on the next page followed in March.

A marginal comment at the bottom right-hand corner of the first page of sketches for op.109 in *Grasnick 20b* (folio 3r), however, may suggest an earlier date, if it was written on the page at the same time as the sketches. Beethoven wrote: 'in that case I don't want [nor] do I ever intend to lower myself [*erniedrigen*] by gossiping [*gewäsche*] about this person [*dieser person*]'. Hans Werner-Küthen has established that this entry was written between the middle of February and 5 April 1820.<sup>12</sup> On 5 February Beethoven had received notice from the judges of the magistracy that his nephew's guardianship by law belonged to the boy's mother. In response Beethoven drafted a long memorial, the *Entwurf einer Denkschrift*, that passionately and irrationally details his arguments for his own exclusive guardianship. This document, dated 18 February, contains the same complex of words ('Person' for Johanna van Beethoven, 'gewäsch' and 'erniedrigen') and opens:<sup>13</sup>

It is painful for one of my sort to be obliged even in the least to sully himself with a person like Frau B., but as this is the last attempt to save my nephew, I for his sake accept this humiliation.

The document was apparently entered with the magistrates about 18 February and a final decision in Beethoven's favour was received on 5 April. After this date Beethoven would have had little cause to enter the phrase on *Grasnick 20b/3r*. Our three sources for dating the pages in *Grasnick 20b* limit their use from the middle of February to 12 April at the latest.

Only one source enables us to date the sketches for op.109 at the end of BH 107. On the last of four pages of sketches for the first movement, Beethoven wrote 'geh' Baurer' and 'Geh' Bauer', a pun on the name of Franz Xaver Gebauer, a musician who had jointly founded the Viennese *Concerts spirituels* with Ferdinand Pringer.<sup>14</sup> There are several conversation book entries from the first half of April about

<sup>11</sup> G. Kinsky and H. Halm: *Das Werk Beethovens* (Munich, 1955), 621

<sup>12</sup> I am very grateful to Hans-Werner Küthen of the Beethovenhaus for his deciphering of this difficult passage and his communication about the dating of this passage.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of the document see E. and R. Sterba: *Beethoven and his Nephew* (New York, 1954), 175–94, 321

<sup>14</sup> *Ludwig van Beethovens Konversationshefte*, ii, 392

Gebauer and the *Concerts spirituels*, including the notation 'Geh' Bauer' on 10 April; this suggests a likely date for the sketches for op.109 at the end of BH 107.

These four sources for dating Grasnack 20b/Wittgenstein and BH 107 are slightly at odds chronologically, and a look at the types and contents of sketching in both sets clarifies the matter. The sketches in Grasnack 20b/Wittgenstein are without doubt the earlier of the two sets: the first and second themes go through several metric and harmonic transformations, the movement as a whole takes shape, and a large continuity draft of the entire movement ends the sketching with the development and coda still far from their final form. The sketches for the first movement in BH 107 are of an entirely different nature: there are no sketches for either theme and the work is concentrated on planning the linear progress of the development and the individual phrases of the coda. None of these sketches exceeds or crosses over to another section of the movement, and the kind of work complements the kind in Grasnack 10b/Wittgenstein. Since the Grasnack 20b/Wittgenstein sketches were written before the sketches in BH 107 (which can be dated from the first half of April), March or February seems a reasonable estimate for the time of their composition. And this two-month time-frame fits in well with our date for the marginal comment on Grasnack 20b/3r and the sketches for *Abendlied unterm gestirnten Himmel*, WoO150, on leaf 2 of Grasnack 20b. Beethoven began sketching the movement in Grasnack 20b in February or March, finished the movement in BH 107 around 10 April, and wrote down its incipit in the conversation book a few pages later.

The extant sketches for the last two movements of op.109 occur in two desk sketchbooks, Artaria 195 and Artaria 197 (both in the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, West Berlin), with the majority of sketches on pp.35–79 of Artaria 195. On the basis of some parallel sketching in the pocket sketchbook BH 108 and Artaria 195 (discussed by Robert Winter in the forthcoming *The Beethoven Sketchbooks*),<sup>15</sup> the first 35 pages of Artaria 195 may be assigned to the period from the middle of May to the middle of June 1820. Since the sketches for op.109 begin immediately thereafter, it appears that Beethoven resumed work on the sonata in the middle of June. At the end of the month he wrote to Schlesinger:<sup>16</sup>

If you agree with my suggestion, as from your proposals I have no reason to doubt, I shall send you the songs straightway together with the one sonata which is also ready; the other two sonatas will follow, as I told you, by the end of the month.

Although it is doubtful that the sonata was actually finished by the date of this letter (28 June 1820), Beethoven's letter

can be taken as supporting evidence that the last two movements were being composed in June. Thus approximately two months separate the sketches in Grasnack 20b/Wittgenstein and BH 107 for what became the first movement and those for the second and third movements in Artaria 195 and 197.

If the first movement of op.109 was not originally conceived as part of a piano sonata, why might Beethoven have interrupted composition of the massive *Missa solemnis* to write a 'new little piece'? The answer may concern one of Beethoven's more colourful acquaintances, Friedrich Starke, who published a pianoforte method in three parts, the *Wiener Piano-Forte-Schule*, that contained some of Beethoven's works. Starke (1774–1835) was Kapellmeister of the famous Kolter Circus in his youth, later taught the piano in Salzburg, became Kapellmeister of an Austrian regiment that fought in the Napoleonic wars, and finally settled in Vienna to become a prolific composer and, at Beethoven's recommendation, the first horn player of the Vienna Opera. The second part (1820) of Starke's pianoforte method contained the Andante and Rondo of the Piano Sonata in D op.28, with Beethoven's fingerings and remarks. The third part (1821) included the Bagatelles op.119 nos. 7–11, passages from the second movement (Adagio) of the Piano Sonata in D minor op.31 no.2, and a 'Concert Finale von Ludwig van Beethoven', an arrangement of the last movement of the Piano Concerto in C minor op.37.<sup>17</sup>

At the beginning of February 1820 Starke's name appears in a conversation book that was in use from around 22 January to 23 February. Josef Karl Bernard, a writer and journalist who was another of Beethoven's close acquaintances at this time,<sup>18</sup> wrote:<sup>19</sup>

Starke would like to have a little piece of music for the second part of his Klavierschule; he already has contributions from the first composers alongside short biographical notices.

This entry was written between 2 and 8 February, precisely the time that Beethoven began drafting his *Entwurf einer Denkschrift*. Sketches for what became op.109 and the marginal comment about Johanna van Beethoven occur on the same page in the sketches in Grasnack 20b, suggesting that Beethoven began to work on the little piece we know he promised Starke in February.

Starke reappeared at the end of the month with his biographical sketch, as reported by Bernard again in a conversation book entry from 27–9 February: 'Mr. Starke, the author of many works, was with me today with a short biographical sketch of you'.<sup>20</sup> A few days later, between 2 and 6 March, Starke's name reappears with a request for information about Beethoven for his biographical sketch.<sup>21</sup> Apparently nothing was forthcoming; around 29 March Ber-

<sup>15</sup> Douglas Johnson, Alan Tyson and Robert Winter, eds: *The Beethoven Sketchbooks* (Berkeley, 1985). I am grateful to Robert Winter for showing this section of the book to me before its publication.

<sup>16</sup> This letter is now in the collection of Sir David Ogilvy, Scotland. The original German was first published in a transcription with English translation by Alan Tyson in 'New Beethoven Letters and Documents', *Beethoven Studies* 2, 22–3. The translation here is from my own *The Sources for Beethoven's Piano Sonata in E Major, Opus 109* (diss., U. of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1985).

<sup>17</sup> Von Frimmel: *Beethoven-Handbuch*, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1926), ii, 249

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, i, 36–8

<sup>19</sup> *Ludwig van Beethovens Konversationshefte*, i, 245

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 289

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 301–2

nard weakly punned, 'Starke was there again, and made a strong [=stark] request'.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile Beethoven had written Schlesinger his first letter on 25 March. The incipit of what became the first movement of op.109 (already completed in BH 107 by 10 April) was notated in a conversation book around 12 or 13 April. About the same time that Beethoven received Schlesinger's reply, Franz Oliva asked the following question in a conversation book entry dated 19–20 April: 'Are you sending that to Starke as a single piece?'<sup>23</sup> Since Beethoven had evidently completed a single piece for Starke by 19 or 20 April and what was to become the first movement of op.109 was near completion or completed by 10 April, it seems probable that they are the same piece. Oliva's question certainly makes sense in this light: how does the first movement of op.109 stand as an independent piece? Also, Starke's request at the beginning of February for a 'little piece of music' fits in neatly with our dates of February and March for the sketches in *Grasnick 20b/Wittgenstein*.

If this chain of events is true, Beethoven changed his mind about the home of the 'new little piece' some time after receiving Schlesinger's letter around 18 or 19 April. Franz Oliva's entry from 22–4 April ('and use the new little piece for a sonata for *Schlesinger*') may have been the impetus for the transfer. After the decision had been made, Starke reappeared at the end of April. Beethoven wrote in a conversation book entry from 25–7 April that 'Starke was with me today and reminded me of my promise. I have to write him something for his *Clavier Schule*'. Someone else added: 'You should write a *sonata* for 4 hands; all keyboard players are eager for them'.<sup>24</sup> This proposal that Beethoven write a four-hand sonata for Starke suggests – tenuously – that the story of the piece Beethoven had ready for Starke by 19–20 April also concerns a piano sonata. Perhaps the author of this entry knew that the little piece planned for

Starke had become part of a piano sonata for Schlesinger. And in the end Starke did receive two piano sonata movements for the second instalment of his pianoforte method.

The evidence in favour of Starke's *Piano-Forte-Schule* as the original home for what became the first movement of op.109 is not indisputable. We do know from the conversation books, however, that the first movement of op.109 was probably not written as part of a piano sonata, and we would like an explanation for Beethoven's composition of an independent single piece in February or March of 1820. The evidence surrounding Beethoven's promise of a 'little piece of music' for Starke's pianoforte method in February 1820 and his composition of 'the new little piece' by 12–13 April is too coincidental to be easily dismissed.

The first movement of op.109, this 'new little piece', has always puzzled Beethoven's more interesting commentators, from A.B. Marx (who in the end found the prelude-like movement 'somewhat unsatisfying') to Tovey (who could find no precedents for it). The puzzle may be attributed in part to its extra-sonata origin as a piece for Starke's pianoforte method. When Czerny observed in his own pianoforte method that 'this interesting movement is more of a *fantasia* than a *sonata*', he was close to the mark.<sup>25</sup> In fact Beethoven himself had already used the word; after the first sketch of the opening theme he wrote: 'descends to c-sharp minor and in a *Fantasia* closes in that key'.<sup>26</sup> C sharp minor was later abandoned, but the character of the material suggests what Beethoven had in mind. And so the movement stands with one foot in both worlds – a sonata with the themes of a fantasy or a fantasy with the tonal plan of a sonata. We have seen how such a mixture might have evolved. The puzzle is a permanent part of its charm, of course, and few still find it unsatisfying.

<sup>25</sup> C. Czerny: *Ueber den richtigen Vortrag der sämtlichen Beethoven'schen Klavierwerke*, ed. P. Badura-Skoda (Vienna, 1963), 59

<sup>26</sup> The sketch is on folio 3r of *Grasnick 20b*; in the original the sentence reads 'fällt[?] in cis moll u. [inserted with a loop] in einer[r] *Fantasia* [continuation of original] schliesst darin'. I am grateful to Hans-Werner Kütten for his help with my transcription of this sentence.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, 389

<sup>23</sup> *Ludwig van Beethovens Konversationshefte*, ii, 72

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, 92

## Towards a New Image of Henrich Schütz – 2

Joshua Rifkin

The practical revival of Schütz's music in this century gave special emphasis to three groups of works: the *Kleine geistliche Concerte* of 1636 and 1639; the *Geistliche Chor-Music* of 1648; and the three Passions from the mid-1660s. We may see the pre-eminence of these compositions as a direct consequence of their propagation by the German Singbewegung of the 1920s, which – together with the closely affiliated reform movement among Lutheran church musicians commonly known as the Orgelbewegung – served as

the moving force of the Schütz renaissance. Insofar as both movements shared the ideals of communal musical experience, reawakening of national traditions and revitalization of worship, the Passions, the *Chor-Music* and the *Kleine geistliche Concerte* seemed predestined to their cause. Except for a few of the *Concerte*, all had German texts, and all but this last collection adopted a retrospective *a cappella* style that allied them with both the choral orientation of the Singbewegung and its attendant interest in older poly-