

Music and Change: Some Considerations of the *Sonata quasi una Fantasia in C sharp minor Op.27 no.2* ('Moonlight')¹

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Art is the reflection of life on a higher plane in which the accidental and non-essential vanish giving place to an order which is hidden from our everyday eyes, and a beauty which is truth. Thus, art and life are not divided but are unity.

Wilhelm Furtwängler

In 1795 Haydn brought back with him from England the sturdy *Grand Piano Forte*. It became the favourite instrument in the last half of the 1790s of his twenty-five year old student, the brilliant young composer pianist, Beethoven, soon to be Vienna's legitimate successor to the late Mozart. Several of his most controversial *avant-garde, fin de siecle* compositions were conceived for it. Remarkably this full-length, extremely robust *Longman & Broderip*² and its twin have survived in near perfect condition to the present time. The former is at Professor H. C. Robbins Landon's chateau at Rabastens and the latter is in the Cobbe Collection, Surrey. I played on the immacutely maintained Rabasten instrument for Professor Robbins Landon's seventieth birthday celebrations to discover that nearly two centuries before, Beethoven himself had performed his *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* upon it.

During this memorable stay I could not resist playing through its pages and other works from that same period. To my astonishment its *sopra una corda* and famous ethereal timbre that I had read about in Professor Robbins Landon's celebrated *Haydn Chronicle*³ proved ideally suited to the *C sharp minor Adagio sostenuto*'s hushed sonorities. The *delicatissimamente* textures were crystal clear without the dampers when taken at a true *Adagio*—and neither *Largo* nor *Andante*—the end result being a completely natural *alla breve*. Perhaps the sustaining pedal damped a little less than on a modern grand piano (though not too sparingly) and yet it automatically filtered a coherent harmonic

process without muddying juxtapositions of remote tonal relationships, to hold the endless *pianissimo* in calm splendour throughout in an almost sensual *chiaroscuro*.

This experience led me to ponder the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* and its performance.

The primal force of its elemental sounds, transfigured, almost ecstatic, in their expressive profundity, seemed to me to fall out from some mysterious and intangible part of one's self at an undefined point, singing the endless narrative in life's conversation—any part of which can only be imagined and of which one is only ever part. I am reminded of Solzhenitsyn's words in *Cancer Ward*: 'Sometimes I feel quite distinctly that what is inside me is not all of me. There's something else, sublime, quite indestructible, some tiny fragment of the universal spirit.'

The 'mysterious energies within ourselves',⁴ which these powerful opening sounds release, form an almost prayer-like deeply solemn invocation to the deity in rich cantilena; they foreshadow Beethoven's new melodic style that emerged in 1809 and to which he constantly returned. Futuristic and prophetic sonorities are altogether typical of Beethoven's late sonatas and quartets which heralded nineteenth-century romanticism, twentieth-century neoclassicism and serialism, including the experiments of Stravinsky and Webern. The *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata*, with its unorthodox pedalling techniques, reshaping of traditional formal principles and continuous movements placed in an unusual order, in an overall span of protracted acceleration with *crescendo*, rising to its highest dramatic point and collapsing just moments before its end—all seems to have been part of Beethoven's personal preparation for musical rebirth. Clearly this began with his completion of the *B flat Sonata Op.22* the year before, at a crucial stage of his compositional development barely a year before his visit to Heiligenstadt. However it was the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* which was the precursor and which remains not so much a personal prophecy for the Heiligenstadt Testament, as the source for those larger forces which were shaping the major changes in his personal and creative life.

It is basically a two-movement construction in three dimensions—future, past, present—juxtaposed in an order to form a half from the first two, followed by a third movement—if its tiny *Allegretto* may be considered as an enharmonic coda for the opening *Adagio sostenuto*. Providing an anodyne to the visionary and anguished *Adagio sostenuto* first movement, ultra modern for the time, this miniature Minuet

and Trio movement recalls a tender memory of eighteenth-century Mannheim. But its brief measures are brutally swept aside by a torrential *Presto agitato* which provides the true direction in which Beethoven's compositional art was then heading. The work's overall tonal axis oscillates in or around C sharp minor with a radical modulatory scheme for the first movement, through one long *accelerando* with *crescendo* in an organic conception, which confronts us with the composer's idea of the incomplete. His whole idea of through-composing was a conception which remained with him all his working life and was a painstaking process, as remarkable as the end result itself, to show that composition, at least for Beethoven, was an unending process of invention which did not necessarily finish with a work's publication. Fragments, moments, germs of ideas and single intervals (from which he built entire sonatas as well as individual movements)⁵ became more evident in the achievement of his unconventional later works, for which the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* not only paved the way, but offered a crucial point of departure.

The sketchbooks reveal that his ideas were pieced together sometimes very slowly, often over many years through the stress of tremendous pressures, both artistic and personal, before they took on their final form. Even so, afterwards, he would constantly return to already completed works to make substantial alterations. By comparison with Bach and Mozart, who were blessed with the divine gift of being able to compose (certain) works in their finished form, Beethoven struggled all his life with fragments of inspirations, many of which were left incompletely worked—ideas which, to him, did not ever seem to be sufficiently complete. He struggled with a highly advanced artistic consciousness which, by his own admission, he never fully understood until much later in life. At the time of writing the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* he was deaf and had become totally dependent on his own finely-tuned inner ear and those internal compositional processes and private worlds which any true creative artist normally hears deeply within.

Beethoven's *experiment*, as he was fond of calling his *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata*, first presents itself as if in mid-sentence with a left-over scrap of simple triplet accompaniment figuration, which is the inner life of the piece, as if it were a new kind of melody in which the usual 'accompaniment' of the left hand is replaced by the right. It is the passing of this modest scrap of musical information from one hand to the other that achieves one of the most intense and miraculous

openings that Beethoven ever conceived.

At the turn of the century Beethoven's new melody-in-recitative was at first difficult to distinguish as a melodic *chose-en-soi* because of its innocent harmonic appearance in the 'accompaniment' context of an alberti bass. However in the *Allegro comodo* of the early *E major Sonata Op.14 no.1*, as the triplets dominate the central development (ie. about a quarter of the entire rondo sonata movement) it gradually becomes apparent that the opening left hand 'accompaniment' material loses itself somewhere on a more elevated point of spiritual inspiration, not as any kind of 'accompaniment' but essentially as a new kind of right-hand melody, in which the relation to the opening of the C sharp minor *Adagio sostenuto*, C major *Allegretto moderato Op.53* and *Allegretto non troppo* of the *A major Sonata Op.101* is unmistakable.

Within a year its recurrence in its successful new role, for the sensational debut of the C sharp minor *experiment*, where it made itself clear that it would not be content to wait two movements to explain its artistic *raison d'être*, is without equal. It was as if the worn-out particles which were so predictable in the various Cramer and Clementi type chord patterns and 'accompaniments' reminiscent of Cherubini and C. P. E. Bach, of Beethoven's earliest works, suddenly had new life breathed into them. To celebrate new freedom in longer, sustained, singing lines, accompanied by the strangest play of harmonic over-tones, in organically conceived juxtapositions of new harmonies and shapes, simultaneously held on one pedal, throughout an entire sonata movement, was the realization of a dream and an odyssey ahead.

Beethoven's intimate markings, with subtle use of a wide range of expressive and percussive accents, complete with their miniature dynamic shadings, are, throughout this whole period, heightened by the use of the (then) recent invention of the sustaining pedal mechanism. It is his revolutionary use of the soft and sustaining pedals throughout the opening *Adagio sostenuto* of his *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* which is of great musical interest in the evolution of a unique 'sustained' style in the development of Beethoven's compositional art.

In 1801 C sharp minor was still considered an unusual choice of tonality and, from the few references he ever made to it, the very choice of C sharp minor alone indicated that some kind of spiritual drama was intended. Beethoven was the only composer of his time who, because of his experimental attitude, not only dared but was sufficiently liberated and psychologically prepared, to write an entire

movement of a piano sonata with the sustaining pedal held down for its duration without break. It would appear that the only other complete work which Beethoven composed in that key resurrected the interlinking of movements again twenty-five years later. After 1801, he had largely discontinued this plan together with the replacement of a sonata-allegro plan for a first movement, until the writing of his *String Quartet Op.131*, in 1826—an experimental work which also features unheard of modernity with an historic use of *sul ponticello*. Both the string quartet and the piano sonata set a precedent in that they broke entirely new ground and are, therefore, considered to be of true musical and historical importance.

The tonality of the *Adagio sostenuto* in many ways recalls the solemnity of the A flat minor *Marcia Funèbre sulla morte d'un Eroe* from the preceding *Sonata Op.26*, where an extreme tonality was chosen to enhance the dramatic effect. In any case, keyboard instruments at that time sounded a semitone lower than they do today and therefore such a tonality would have sounded even darker and more intense—one is reminded of Goethe's 'colour is troubled light'. Could the C sharp minor *Adagio sostenuto* take its harmonic scheme from the *Marcia Funèbre Op. 26*? Certainly the dotted rhythm of the *Marcia Funèbre* and grave harmonic tread suggest a similarity of mood.

A comparison of harmonic shorthands for the two movements of *Opp.26* and *27 no.2*, composed in the same year, also suggests a certain aural relationship. The *personality-tonalities*⁶ of the two *Adagio sostenuto* movements in *Sonatas Opp. 27 no.2* and *106* enhance the gentle unfolding of a new kind of recitative in elevated musical narrative behind profound spiritual drama. C sharp and F sharp minor were extraordinary choices of key even for Beethoven, as was A flat minor for the *Marcia Funèbre*.

Edwin Fischer suggests that the origin of the first movement could be that Beethoven transposed into C sharp minor the passage from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* where the Commendatore is killed.⁷ The similarity with this passage and the first movement of Beethoven's *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* is, in his opinion, unmistakable. It is true that the postlude is note-for-note as in Mozart. The question therefore remains, was it so unlikely that Beethoven was reminded of the scene in *Don Giovanni*, and does this possibly account for the striking similarity between the passage from Mozart and Beethoven's opening *Adagio sostenuto* sonata movement?

At the age of twenty-two, Beethoven moved to Vienna and

commenced his studies with Haydn (who had already begun composing for the new pianoforte, as is evidenced by the alterations made to his keyboard dynamics from 1780 onwards). Beethoven had mastered the light, quarter-inch gauge of the *Stein and Walter* pianofortes with their matched treble and bass and spectacular addition of an escapement in the mechanism. Beethoven did not play the heavier *Broadwood* action until 1796; but he already knew the heavier English actions and subtle pedal effects because the year before he had fallen in love with Haydn's *Longman & Broderip*. He even notated use of its *sopra una corda* in his serene *Fourth Piano Concerto* (composed in 1806) which accounts for the literal instruction over bar 55 of the *Andante con moto*: *due e poi tre corde ...*; then at bar 56: *a tre corde ...*; and at bar 60: *due poi una corda*.

By the time Mozart died in 1791 a considerable number of modifications had been made to early pianos. Like harpsichords, they sometimes had many pedals and, indeed, by the late eighteenth century some possessed up to seven, ranging from *piano, una corde, moderator, forte, harp, swell* to *bassoon and Janissary* or 'turkish music' effects. These effects were controlled by harpsichord-type stops, replaced in 1783 by handles and foot pedals. The broader sonorities presented by Stein's and Broadwood's instruments outstripped the rattling brilliance of the harpsichord and *non legato fingertanz* which Beethoven detested. A richer palette of greater delicacy and warmth could be achieved in textures performed on the *Stein, Streicher* and *Broadwood* instruments of the 1790s especially in finger *legato*, because of the increased flexibility afforded by the new pianoforte's weight principle. Together with the many pedals which existed on early pianofortes—Broadwood's invention in 1783, adopted by the French piano manufacturers, *Erard*, in the same year and then by *Stein* in 1789—the new instrument made it possible to sustain more complex sound structures with a *cantabile* and expressiveness which was intensely romantic.⁸

Although he owned a *Streicher* and a *Graf* and was presented at various stages with a *Stein, Erard, Walter* and *Broadwood*, Beethoven remained constantly dissatisfied with the limitations imposed by the instruments of his time, especially with their ability to dampen. Perhaps his instructions at the beginning of the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* are therefore less of an exaggeration for realisation on modern pianos than one would otherwise be led to believe. It is clear from the demands made in his *C sharp* and *D minor Sonatas* that the instruments of his time were not capable of producing sufficient

sound and if the *F minor Sonata Op.57* extended the pianoforte to its very limits, then the Himalayan peaks of the *B flat Sonata Op.106* took it completely beyond its limits.

Beethoven fought all his life for superior instruments. Is it unreasonable therefore, when it comes to the interpretation of his music, to take the particular instruments of his day, with their limitations, as the exclusive 'authentic' criterion for interpreting his markings, when preparing his work for performance on modern instruments? Furthermore, although one may question how much delicacy is lost on modern-day pianos, should they necessarily be rejected in order to put his experimental wishes into practice? Beethoven, like many other composers who followed him, performed, as an infant prodigy, Bach's complete *Das Wohltemperierte Klavier* on the modern keyboards of his time, despite the fact that he had wider access to authentic instruments than we do today (with the added bonus of appropriate acoustics). It is a matter of musical interest, therefore, that all the great masters who followed Mozart and Beethoven believed that it was musically acceptable to perform old music on new instruments. Perhaps their example is not one which should be dismissed.

Agogic accents and precision pedal markings aside, Beethoven's attempt to create an historic *lingua franca*, complete with its idiosyncratic 'moment style', was ideal for its realisation on modern instruments. The demands of even the earliest Beethoven scores on the instruments of his time show how limited they were. His markings bear this out time and again in the most intimate of all his diaries—the piano sonatas—as he searched for an increasingly sustained and poetic style of keyboard writing. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the high romanticism of the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata*. The composer's extraordinarily detailed instructions to the performer are written above and also below the opening sounds of the first movement: *Si deve suonare tutto questo pezzo delicatissimamente e senza sordini*—the whole movement is to be played with the utmost delicacy and without the dampers.

Charles Rosen comments on Beethoven's use of sustaining pedal in this first movement 'as a form of orchestration' and that

Playing the first movement ... as directed, very delicately ... with full pedal throughout ... 'senza sordini' ..., on an early nineteenth-century instrument with little sustaining power, produces a lovely sonority, difficult to produce with a modern keyboard. But none of these procedures—orchestration, dynamic emphasis or contrast, the

sustaining of important notes—is essentially at odds with late eighteenth-century style. They are merely expansions of standard procedures of the previous generations: they extend to the pedal what had previously been achieved by phrasing, dynamics and instrumentation.⁹

Among today's heavily annotated Beethoven editions, the finest is undoubtedly the facsimile reproductions of the composer's autographs published by Peters (Leipzig). Today's widely-used *urtext* editions such as *Universal* (Vienna) and *Henle* (Munich), impart clearer meaning when used together with such facsimile reproductions although the Beethovenhaus in Bonn and the British Museum possess fine collections of the composer's autographs.

The indication of *Adagio sostenuto* for the first movement of the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* is used only once again for the F sharp minor slow movement of the *Sonata Op.106*. Beethoven's original plan for this was to open with a profound *Adagio sostenuto*—a journey begun nearly two decades before. The recurrence of an extreme tonal climate within the same general indication of tempo and mood is perhaps no mere coincidence, although the F sharp minor movement stays basically in or around its own tonality as does the earlier *Adagio sostenuto Op. 27 no.2*.

An audacious harmonic scheme for the opening movement of the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* covers a wide spectrum rapidly with the neapolitan chord of the flattened supertonic appearing in the third bar. It modulates back to the tonic to prepare for the appearance of the first subject in bar 5, then proceeds to the flattened mediant at bar 10 in C major, before modulating to F sharp minor in bar 14. The second subject appears on the flattened leading note at bars 15 and 16 in dissonant minor ninths and diminished sevenths. The exposition passes through G major at bar 21 en route to F sharp minor to develop the first subject, which, on its return in the reprise, is considerably extended and altered before its return for the coda. Rhythmically and thematically this material is recalled for the *Allegretto* and *Presto agitato* in which there are scarce modulations to settle these dissonant minor ninths and major sevenths along with extreme modulations and intensity of mood. As the narrative of the *Adagio sostenuto* unfolds, it becomes obvious that Beethoven carefully notated the rise and fall of the triplet pitches in relation to filtering the overall sound, according to the proportions of the instrument's string lengths and their ability to sustain one more than another, throughout an overall accumulation of harmonies in optimum motion. This was not only an historic

precedent but the revolutionary achievement of a true genius.

The sonata form construction is characterised by concise themes which begin and end in different keys. The exposition closes with a third subject in the subdominant for a second theme of a second group. The second subject first theme remains on the dominant chord of the relative major without any cadence to the tonic. The appearances of this theme in the recapitulation, in the relative major, assume the same colouring of the dominant of the subdominant (a procedure reworked on the eve of his composition of the *Third Symphony*). It returns in the *Presto agitato*, bars 29/30 and 31/32 and again at 124/5 and 126/7.

Musical construction and compositional procedure are in fact closely related in both *Fantasy Sonatas Op.27* in which most of the material for the codas originates from their first subjects. In the C sharp minor, the cadence theme and final arpeggio are recalled from the very opening of the work to close it. This idea of beginning and ending with the same material is repeated in the *G major Sonata* a year later *Op.31 no.1* but was succinctly stated in the *C minor Sonata Op.13* in an organic construction two years earlier.

The *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata's* little Minuet and Trio offers its modest few bars as some kind of enharmonic coda in the reassurance of D flat for the bleakness of the movement which precedes it to provide a sense of relief from the accumulated dramatic tension. Liszt referred to it as '*une fleur entre deux abîmes*'¹⁰. The first full bar and its upbeat in reality form one large upbeat with the primary accent on the E flat. *Attaca subito il seguente* written at the end of the *Adagio sostenuto* gives the impression that Beethoven planned the *Allegretto* to follow without break on a soundboard full of mysterious and solemn sonorities, held deep in the bass by the sustaining pedal, then lifted, as the opening D flat chord of the *Allegretto* is softly placed onto the instrument's central register.

It is at this point that Beethoven notated the melody provided by the triplet 'accompaniment', to fall onto the lower string, just three bars before the end of the first movement. Here only six sounds remain to enrich (but not overwhelm) the ethereal nature of the final two *pianissimo* bass chords. Sparse writing for these two final bars at the end of the *Adagio sostenuto* is recalled for the close of the *Presto agitato*. As they appear in the dying *Adagio sostenuto*, all sounds contained within the two chords must be clearly articulated, even though the sustaining pedal has been held down throughout the previous

sixty nine bars without being lifted.

One of the most dramatic effects in Beethoven's music is the effect achieved by releasing the sustaining pedal after it has been held down for so long during this movement and in this way. The contrast is heightened not only by the *Attaca subito il seguente*, but also by the innocence of what follows, its simplicity and brevity, although the idea of continuing without break was already decided upon for the C sharp minor's twin *Fantasy Sonata in E flat*, in which all movements followed each other without break. This gives greater impact to the thematic flashback at the very end of the work. Apart from aesthetic and structural reasons and for the necessity to observe the composer's indications, can any interpretation of integrity be 'authentic' without observing Beethoven's fastidious pedalling procedure? Within a year he was experimenting further with such massed-sonority-pedalling-effects, in the first movement of his *D minor Sonata Op.31 no.2* where, in the eleventh bar of the reprise, the pedal at bar 153 is held for the whole of the six-bar *Largo* to give the impression of a juxtaposition of harmonies—a technique to which he returns in the *Allegretto moderato* of the *C major Sonata Op. 53* and again in the Scherzo of the *A major Sonata Op.101* (bars 30–34). His use of the sustaining pedal in the *D minor Sonata Op.31 no.2* recalls the same effect of lifting the pedal at the beginning of the *Allegretto Op.27 no.2*. In the *D minor Sonata*, 'sustained' sounds extend to the following *Allegro* at bar 159 where the pedal is lifted only on the first of three C sharp major *pianissimo* chords en route to F sharp minor—and the first of three historic steps which follow—*senza pedal*.

As for the last chord of the C sharp minor *Adagio sostenuto*, some editions—incorrectly—release the sustaining pedal before the first chord of the subsequent movement and in the case of the *D minor Sonata*—the subsequent section. If performed exactly as marked, the dramatic impact of this use of sustaining pedal in *Op.31 no.2* is as powerful as when it is released on the opening chord of the exquisite *Allegretto Op.27 no.2*. An equally dramatic instance of that same effect occurs on the F sharp minor high point of the *Presto agitato* bar 177, when it recalls the same tonality (F sharp minor) from the D minor movement. Exactly the same pedal marking connects the final piano low register chords of the opening movement of the *Sonata Op.109* to the opening *fortissimo* sounds in the middle register of its *Prestissimo*. Beethoven marks the pedal to be lifted on the first sound of the *Prestissimo ben marcato*. Similar pedal uses are notated to connect related sections and movements, in the *Sonatas Opp. 53, 57,*

101, 106 and 110. The original 'sustained' effect from the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* is then further extended to connect related sections of the late string quartets.

In the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* just a few, gruff, left-hand accents temporarily disturb the newly established sense of calm in the *Allegretto* (bars 37–44) and in the series of *forte-piano* markings in the consecutive tritones of the left hand (bars 45–48), before the *da capo*. When the unexpected violence of the *Presto agitato* is suddenly unleashed, visions of the *Adagio sostenuto* 'accompaniment' figure hurtle past as any lingering memories of the Minuet are swept away. Semiquavers, *Presto* with *agitato*, race upwards in diminution to punctuating chords, out of an eight-bar block of *piano*; a six-bar block of *forte* bars 9–14 and a third block of six bars marked *piano* but with *crescendo* at bar 19—for the first time—through to a sudden and rarely observed *piano* at bar 21, for the second subject in G sharp minor, where the *Adagio sostenuto* is recalled in diminution.

The *Presto agitato* is a sonata-rondo, the slow movement having been placed first, faster movement second and fastest last, in which dynamic accents and inflexions race past in a headlong extremity of sudden contrasts, thickly-textured chords and wild syncopations, until the dramatic tension finally breaks, the structure collapses and the opening movement is recalled (bars 185–190) with a staggered, improvisatory cadenza, just fourteen bars before the work's end.

In concert performance the two bare left-hand octaves of the *Adagio* which follow always feel like a concentrated summary of the entire opening movement (much as the closing chord of many of Chopin's *Nocturnes* calls out the imperative to bring all the work's strands together simultaneously, for their expression, in just the one final chord). Both codas of the outer movements of Beethoven's *Fantasy Sonata Op.27 no.2* commence by recalling the *Adagio sostenuto* first and second subjects of the *Presto agitato*. According to Fischer, Liszt (who studied with Beethoven's pupil, Carl Czerny) evidently played the whole of the *Presto agitato* in a relatively broad tempo, emphasizing the *forte* passages with tremendous energy and expression.¹¹

However that is not the only similarity between the outer movements in which broken chord patterns predominate. There is a similarity in the descent of the bass from the tonic to dominant in the opening of both movements and an obsessive presence of G sharp which gives the feeling that, in some way, the *Presto agitato* is a (second) attempted resolution of deeper matters held over from the *Adagio sostenuto*,

which the anodyne of the *Allegretto* could not achieve. There is an interwoven presence of closely related motivic material reminiscent of procedures later adopted for the experimental *Sonata Op.78*, in the outer movements: eg. the movement of the last crotchet bar 17 to the opening minim bar 19 of the first movement, the return in octaves in the last movement bars 29 and 30 (repeated at bars 31 and 32).

The use of the rare tonality of F sharp minor at the opening of both development sections is followed by an extended G sharp pedal point which closes the same sections. Kenneth Drake believes that the outer movements 'constitute two variations of a large, never-stated Ur-pattern'.¹² The breaking point at bar 187 of the *Presto agitato* recalls the same pivotal collapse of the rondo structure in its twin (E flat) *Fantasy Sonata's Allegro Vivace* at a similar point, complete with improvisatory cadenza, which forms the little bridge for its Coda, marked *Presto*, just twenty one bars before its close. Even the final three sounds (bar 26) of the *E flat Fantasy Sonata's Adagio con espressione* are recalled at precisely the same place before the close of the C sharp minor *Presto agitato*. They emerge from collapsed structures at high dramatic points to link the rondos to their Codas. Codas for both *Fantasy Sonatas* are of similar construction and serve the same purpose of transporting high energy transients to close a musical conception which Beethoven extended three years later in his *C major Sonata Op.53*, with a highly organised series of experimental pedallings and 38-bar uninterrupted trill in the *Prestissimo* Coda, to break completely new ground again.

The semiquaver motion of the closing sonata rondo of the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* transforms itself into something which was destined to offer a great deal more than a closing *moto perpetuo*. Beethoven's technique of extracting deeper musical meaning out of this kind of predictable structure, continued throughout the constant repetitive motion for the closing movement of the preceding *Fantasy Sonata* and, in a slightly different context, in the last movement of the *Sonata Op.26*, where he kept the dynamic scaled-down to accommodate more delicate piano textures. The principle of extending continuous motion in a progressive dynamic structure, complete with ending *Presto* and rising and falling arpeggios with two explosive, punctuating chords at the very end, reached its peak in the conclusion to the *F minor Sonata Op.57* that was to follow four years later.

There, Beethoven preceded the idea of a tour-de-force *moto perpetuo* by division variations which extended the considerably longer time span into an overall motion which was far more ambitious

and relentless. In this scheme it was essential for Beethoven to build dramatic tension by repeating the finale's development and recapitulation. Unfortunately, Beethoven's repeat mark is often ignored, and so the dramatic impact of the overall motion and effect of the incorporated thematic flashback, which was so effective in the exposition repeat of the C sharp minor last movement, is therefore lost.

According to Czerny, Beethoven played the first movement throughout, with the soft pedal held down except for an unmarked *crescendo* from bar 32 which (supposedly) rose to (unmarked) *forte* on the first beat of bar 36, followed by (unmarked) *diminuendo* to the marked *pianissimo* bar 42, with (alleged) *accelerando poco a poco* throughout (though also unmarked by Beethoven). To achieve the *delicatissimamente* twice marked by Beethoven above and below the opening sounds of the *Adagio sostenuto*, it is necessary to make full use of the soft pedal on a modern piano. However the *una corda* of Beethoven's time is still confused with the *una corda* of nowadays. Beethoven would have used the soft pedal, and, according to Czerny, did so throughout the *Adagio sostenuto* of the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata*: 'except during the crescendo-forte-decrescendo in the middle section of the movement'.¹³

However it would appear that the only works which specifically request its use are the late *Sonatas Opp. 101, 106, 109 and 110*. In 1801, *una corda* meant that one string (as opposed to two or three which varied in length for the same pitch, depending on their place within the instrument's construction), was to sound for that same pitch, which, otherwise, would have been marked: *due* or *tre corde*. Piano mechanisms today are still tuned to two or three strings per pitch, as in Beethoven's day, although Robbins Landon believes that the expressive delicacy which affected timbre through the subtle pedal mechanism of Beethoven's time, has been lost in modern piano construction:

Unfortunately the modern grand piano cannot reproduce this (*sopra una corda*) effect, nor does it even approximate to the overtone-rich, delicate, metallic sound, of the late eighteenth century fortepiano, compared with which the Steinway and Bechstein are crude, clumsy pieces of Victorian pomposity.¹⁴

In the case of the first movement of the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata*, a few *urtext* editions still show the marking *senza sordino* (soft pedal) above the opening sounds, instead of *senza sordini*

(without dampers), the result of which was to sustain sound—namely, to use the right pedal, not the left. Clearly the difference between filtering pedalled sounds in the running triplets of the *Adagio sostenuto* *Op.27 no.2* and held chords of the opening three bars of the C minor Piano Concerto *Largo* (composed during the same period), was a matter not only of temporal pace but of inner pulse and a proper consideration of the delicate and expressive, musical possibilities that the sustaining pedal gives to such massed sonorities. Czerny reports: 'Beethoven used the pedal much more than is indicated in his scores ...'.¹⁵ But Drake notes that '... [Anton] Schindler, who left no directions regarding pedalling in his teacher's works, accused Czerny of an "indiscriminate use" of the pedal'. Drake continues: 'one who used the pedal indiscriminately would not likely be concerned (as Czerny was) about the symbols used to indicate the exact point at which the pedal is to be depressed and released'.¹⁶ Czerny, however, remarks:

It is known that many composers, instead of the word *Ped.*, for the sake of brevity, place the sign *P* where it is to be depressed and the sign * where it is to be released. This way is also better, because it is more precise. Far less precise than *Ped ... ** is '*senza sordini*' (without dampers)—the phrase which Beethoven uses in the three experimental *Sonatas* *Opp.26* and *27 nos 1 and 2*, to indicate the use of pedal'.¹⁷

With the evolution of a more robust and highly developed, singing-legato instrument, Beethoven began notating his musical intentions far more precisely. His original language moved on from the unorthodox markings of the *C sharp minor Fantasy* and *D minor Sonatas* *Opp.27 no.2* (1801) and *31 no.2* (1802) and towering *C major Sonata* *Op. 53* (from 1803–4) where *tenuto* very often came to mean more than a prolonged agogic accent as, for example, occurs above the A in the first bar of the *Adagio molto*. Sometimes this prolonging of a sound continued as an expressive marking—for example the *sforzato* above the G in (the same movement) bar 6; as a tiny *crescendo* or *diminuendo* nuance between just two sounds (bar 6); or as a *rinforzando* between bars 9 and 10, then again between bars 11 and 12, of the same movement. Such a marking appeared six years earlier (after Beethoven had read Goethe's *Egmont*), in the D minor *Largo e mesto* *Op.10 no.3*, to sustain expressive sonorities, (evoking Klärchen's death?), commencing bars 9 and 11, on the right-hand A and at eight other such points of 'sustained' interest. In the same *Largo e mesto*, *sforzato* is sometimes replaced by *fp* or *ffp* as it was with the opening chord of the *C minor Sonata* *Op.13* (from 1798). In the *C major Sonata* *Op.53*

accents occur on the left-hand A flat and right-hand F in bars 23 and 24 of the *Adagio molto* and finally in bar 28, on the pivotal right-hand G which links it to the closing *Rondo*. These detailed expressive accents clearly seem designed for Beethoven's new *Erard* piano as part of the young composer's evolving 'sustained' style to offer a functional solution to the problem of the rapid sonority decay.

For the modern pianist many such markings ostensibly appear, and are consequently interpreted, as another form of *rubato*, just as the marking *ten.* is also very often interpreted, as a general means to preserve textural delicacy, a kind of Beethovenian shorthand for the more fully notated *rubato* marked at the end of the C major Sonata's *Allegro con brio* or suspensions from the language of his earlier sonatas. However, in the *Sonata in C major Op.53*, *ten.* is sometimes replaced by *sforzato* or *fermata*, as marked throughout bars 282–294, in addition to staggered values, highly contrasting dynamics and the *ritard.* which, for example, is indicated at bar 293. Such markings, especially in the late sonatas, particularly the late *B flat* and *A flat Sonatas*, are more precisely notated through the use of signs such as *bebung*. The 'sustained' language became a natural extension of Beethoven's private little batterie of percussive, expressive and other particular and personal accents, many of which are, sadly, no longer possible to achieve on modern instruments. However, surely it should be the composer's intentions which count. A full notation of *bebung* already occurred as early as the five downbeats between bars 141 and 142, 149/50, 153/4, 155/6 and 157/8, at the end of the exposition of the opening *D major Allegro Op.28*, written within months of the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata*.

The *ten.* sign recurs for the *Allegro* of the *E flat Sonata Op.81a*. After the *crescendo* at bar 21 where heavier, more intense accents appear in the right hand and *sfp* on the fourth beat of bar 22, the whole idea of *ten.* is carried over into *bebung* for the first beat between bars 22 and 23 and again at bars 26 and 27. The indication *ten.* is then repeated in bar 18 and in the recapitulation where the *sf* marking follows in the same manner. In both cases the musical is focussed on the problem implicit with rapid sound decay.

The indications *dolce* and *espressivo* are used in the *E flat Sonata Op.81a* in the same context as in the *Sonata Op.53*. Beethoven's efforts to delay and extend sonorities in an attempt to solve the problems (related to rapid sound decay) inherent with piano construction (despite all its modifications and improvements throughout the 1790s) intensified with his composition of the first movement of the

A major Sonata Op. 101, where *molto espress.* is marked after the *fermata* at bar 52.

In the Scherzo of the *A major Sonata Op. 101*, the sustaining pedal is extended over bars 30 to 34 as he juxtaposes E flat minor over the D flat major pedal, continuing with F minor against C minor. The resultant massed pedal effect is arresting, like the larger-scale similar version of the whole *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* opening movement and fastidiously superimposed sustained pedal effects of the last movement of the *C major Sonata Op. 53*, which are casually approached and often ignored, possibly because such intensively sustained harmonies (of an apparently 'unrelated' nature) can still be so aurally disturbing to so many of us, within the parameters of our listening habits and general orientation to music as an experimental force (as it was for Beethoven). But it is yet another example of how Beethoven's contemporary genius remains with us, like Shakespeare's, Goethe's or Michelangelo's, and manages to survive even the very harshest critics of style and time. Herbert Westerby's recommendation that: 'both pedals must be used, the sustaining pedal being released with each change of harmony',¹⁸ directly contradicts the composer's expressed intentions. Kullak¹⁹ and Schmitt²⁰ also advocated a pianistic style which certainly did not welcome the composer's experiment—on its own terms. Consequently a distorted interpretation of the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* emerged from the mid-nineteenth century, which went contrary to the precisely marked narrative of the work's original language and wounded its grand spirit. The deep conservatism which still surrounds the teaching of its interpretation, particularly in the academy, is, perhaps, the inevitable result of such disinformation which was so widely spread after Beethoven's death—opinions which, even today, are rigorously maintained.

Denis Matthews notes:

People will continue to argue over the degree of compromise required on a modern concert grand: some pianists ignore Beethoven's long pedal effects; a few, like Schnabel, have taken them literally, as indicating a veiled, cloudy texture. Surely Schnabel erred, if he did in fact err, on the right side, for why should Beethoven mark them if they were ineffective on his instruments? He seldom indicated 'normal' pedalling, and special instructions warrant special effects, as when the recitatives in the *D minor Sonata Op. 31 no. 2* rise 'like a voice from the tomb'. It is up to the individual to decide when half-pedalling is desirable, but any changes dictated by the slow-moving harmonies of the 'Moonlight' should be imperceptible: daylight, in fact, should not be let in.²¹

The *B flat Sonata Op.106* is full of similar 'sustained' markings, repeated in different ways, with *tenuto*, *bebung*, *cantabile*, *espressivo*, *dolce*, various types of *sforzato* and *fermata*, accompanied by suspensions enriched by unusual dissonances in the internal movement of the voices. The final trilogy of *Sonatas Opp.109, 110 and 111* is almost obsessively concerned with the sustaining of sonorities in such ways to prolong sound and to maintain the overall expressive flow of narrative in a unique vision of musical events flowing from one liquid sonority, sustained into the next. The duration of the *B flat Sonata's Adagio sostenuto* itself, is longer than that of the entire *F minor Sonata Op.57*. From its symmetrical arches and intricate shapes, which merge with awesome perfection one into another, a desperate search is revealed for a continuous line of unbroken melody throughout a series of oddly juxtaposed movements.

In the slow movement, conflict is followed by a profound expression of inner peace which occurs with the *C minor Sonata Op.111*. As Beethoven gradually took his departure from the personal pain of frustrated love and worldly anguish, there was an increase in his longing for a more intensively expressive and sustained style. In the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata*, the calm movement is in fact anguish followed by a brief *Allegretto* used as a coda to farewell the world, in preparation for the turbulence and storm which follows, a movement which Wilfred Mellers believes to be central to the aesthetic and structural resolution of the work as a whole.²²

The natural flow of expressive narrative in Beethoven's final essays in this genre (which are more like musical sonnets than piano sonatas), was still limited by the very nature of the instrument's construction. Perhaps it was inevitable, therefore, that he turned to the string quartet for his most profound expression of all. Whatever the reasons, Beethoven progressively abandoned the piano and reached towards the more expressive sustaining potential of the string quartet, although his final statements in piano writing—with the miraculous sets of *Bagatelles Opp.119 and 126* and above all with his *Diabelli Variations Op.120*, leave the problem of rapid sound decay unresolved. Even those masters who followed him—Chopin, Schumann, Debussy, Xenakis—found it difficult to create complete answers to the problems involved in sustaining sonorities adequately, despite the vast improvements made over nearly two centuries to the construction of the piano.

At the beginning of this most fascinating of all musical journeys, Beethoven, in the very same year he composed his *C sharp minor*

Fantasy Sonata, arranged his *E major Piano Sonata Op. 14 no. 1* (from 1799) for string quartet in F. The stage was already set to search for a sustained, lyric freedom of sonority, which satisfied particular musical demands that had been left unresolved in his piano works. Within five years he rearranged his extended love poem for violin and orchestra *Op. 61* (almost as a continuation of the liquid textures of the *Fourth Piano Concerto*) for piano and orchestra. Beethoven's linear writing for piano, derived from his string compositions, was by far the most highly expressive of his time. It contrasted severely with his more thickly textured piano orchestration and symphonic pianism of the late middle period but presents interpretive problems for the performer. Although there is total mastery and vision in these densely-knit later works of the middle period, characterised by terse motifs in succinct economy of organic expression and overall unity of concept, the isolated *crescendo* on a single note in *Sonatas Opp. 78, 81a and 90*, held over from the early *Sonata Op. 14 no. 1*, is, for example, an effect perhaps more ideally suited to strings than to the limited gauge of a keyboard mechanism. It remains as difficult to interpret successfully on modern grand pianos as on instruments from two centuries ago.

The *Allegretto moderato Op. 53* is in many respects a reworking of the *Adagio sostenuto* of the *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* and provides a halfway house to the *Adagio sostenuto Op. 106*. I can describe it only synaesthetically. It glistens with a pristine purity which is both highly visual and instinctive like the magic aura which surrounds the elevated C sharp minor movement. Its clouds of sound²³ steal out of the shadows in *pianissimo* like its other two movements and C sharp minor *Adagio sostenuto*, their opening sounds form the simplest possible harmonic statements. From the sketches for the *Allegretto moderato* of the *Sonata Op. 53*, only the first survived based on the idea of a massed-sustaining-pedal effect, prolonged by extended trills (which appear for the first time in a Beethoven Sonata bars 51-62, 162-175, 333-344) to provide a dynamic extension and high-energy-transient to its *Prestissimo* coda, with one uninterrupted 38-bar sustained trill! The same massed sonority effect with extended trills recurs in the *Sonata Op. 57* (for twelve and seventeen bars at a stretch), in the *Sonata Op. 106* and again in the codas of the *Sonatas Opp. 109 and 111*, where the physical no longer collapses (at the high point of the C sharp minor *Presto agitato*), or fragments into Beethovenien fallout (in the coda of the C major *Allegretto moderato*), but dissolves into the transcendental radiance, the ethereal and the sublime, at bars 118-129

of the C minor *Arietta Op. 111*, following the turbulence of its minor-key first movement.

Mastery of form and modulation throughout the *C major Sonata Op. 53* with an original use of the sustaining pedal, extended the achievements of Beethoven's *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata*, which exemplified the creator's indomitable spirit breaking out of the accepted status quo, combined with his quest to conquer the impossible. In the *C major Sonata Op. 53*, the *Allegretto moderato's* first subject establishes the same remote climate where physical and spiritual heights are one, as with the opening of the *Adagio sostenuto Op. 27 no. 2*.

The nature of both subjects encourages the sustaining of a delicate series of *sonority interconnections*²⁴ to form a new *legato cantabile*.²⁵ Beethoven's 'sustained' keyboard style creates hazardous demands in performance for the beleaguered pianist, abandoned to the imperative of such a noble but completely merciless *sostenuto*, which is often prolonged for extremely long periods at a time whilst maintaining that mysterious feeling of limitless space and shining calm so characteristic of his elegant, *pianissimo* expanses; sometimes veiled in mists and delicately balanced impressionistic pedal effects amongst heights of unhurried (opening) melody-in-recitative, with searing codas shimmering in extended vistas of singing trills.

By the time Beethoven reached the composition of his *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* he had already arrived at The Isle and his composition of the *D minor Sonata Op. 31 no. 2* a year later merely confirms this. Even by the mid-1790s he was beseeching the elements, shadows and Gods, to bring justice and death to one who betrayed love and trust in 'Ah, *Perfido!*' His pre-Heiligenstadt journey to The Isle was simply the result of increased disillusionment with the world and his enforced isolation from it as deafness obsessed, then overwhelmed him.

Perhaps he saw Caliban as a slave of fate and the Isle as an enduring achievement of man's spirit. His devotion to the works of Homer, Shakespeare, Schiller, Kant and Goethe, shows that although he suffered with his deafness, perhaps this terrible reality even added in a strange way to his wish for greater intimacy and depth of expressive musical intention. As he became increasingly isolated from the world, so his passion to experiment with his art increased. If his C sharp minor *experiment* was the turning point in the evolution of a 'sustained' language at that moment in his life and one of the major turning points in the Sonatas, so too was his *Third*

Symphony, which followed and which proved to be the most crucial turning point of all.

I am reminded of Mondrian's comments in 1917: 'If art is to be a living reality for modern man it has to be a pure expression of the consciousness of the age'.²⁶ Beethoven's composition of his *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* in 1801 unlocked the gates into the gardens of nineteenth century romanticism from which there was no return. In many ways it remains misunderstood, critically under-rated and often unappreciated, as 'the' *fin-de-siècle* avant-garde masterpiece which broke new ground, despite the fact that it advanced the whole idea of keyboard music for its time with an original 'sustained' style. The *C sharp minor Fantasy Sonata* heralded a meaningful personal direction for the critical reassessment of Beethoven's musical language during the aftermath of the French Revolution. It stands as a magnificent achievement in his overall compositional development, a rare fusion of man with the eternal law of nature, and straddles two epochs in its gigantic struggle to ignite the Enlightenment with Romanticism.²⁷

Notes

- 1 According to Beethoven's Russian biographer, Wilhelm von Lenz, the German critic and poet Ludwig Rellstab was the first to refer to the Beethoven *Fantasy Sonata Op. 27 no.2* in terms of moonlight: 'a boat visiting, by moonlight, the primitive landscape of Vierwaldstätensee in Switzerland': *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, London, 1980, pp.732-33. Beethoven's attitude is best summed up by the explanation he gave for the titles he placed over the movements of his *Sixth Symphony*: 'Not painting but the expression of feeling' (Edwin Fischer, *Beethoven's Piano Sonatas*, trans. Stanley Gorman and Paul Hamburger, London, 1959, p.60).
- 2 H. C. Robbins Landon, *Haydn in England 1791-1795*, Vol 3 in *Haydn: Chronicle and Works*, London, 1976, p.415.
- 3 Robbins Landon, p.416.
- 4 Dolores Menstell Hsu, 'Ernst Kurth and his Concept of Music as Motion', *Journal of Music Theory* 10 (Spring 1966): 2.
- 5 *The B flat Sonata Op.106*—from a major 3rd; the two-movement *C minor Sonata Op.111*, with the interaction of a diminished 7th (conflict) and perfect 4th and 5th (its inversion) from the *Arietta* (resignation to peace in progressively ecstatic, ethereal splendour) throughout its two-movement construction. Generally speaking the early sonatas are dominated by lengths of melody; succinct motifs; and greater economy of expression in close-knit organic design in the middle period, giving way to single intervals for the late works.

- 6 A term used by Edwin Fischer to various colleagues, including the Polish pianist, teacher and writer, Zbigniew Drzewiecki.
- 7 Fischer, p.63.
- 8 Kenneth Drake, *The Sonatas of Beethoven*, Bloomington, 1981, p.159.
- 9 Charles Rosen, *The Romantic Generation*, London, 1996, p.20.
- 10 Cited in Donald Francis Tovey, *Beethoven*, Oxford, 1944, p.80.
- 11 Fischer, p.64.
- 12 Drake, p.80.
- 13 Carl Czerny, *Vollständige theoretisch-practische Pianoforte-Schule, Op.500*, Vienna: Universal Edition [1839] Vol.IV, p.51.
- 14 Robbins Landon, p.416.
- 15 Cited in A. W. Thayer's *Life of Beethoven*, rev. and ed. by Elliot Forbes. Princeton, 1973, p.368.
- 16 Drake, p.50.
- 17 Czerny, p.50.
- 18 Herbert Westerby, *Beethoven and his Piano Works: (Sonatas, Concertos, Variations, etc.): descriptive and analytic aid to their understanding*, London: Reeves Edition, [1931], p.43.
- 19 Westerby, p.46, with reference to Kullak's *Aesthetics of Piano Playing*.
- 20 Westerby, p.47, with reference to Hans Schmitt's *The Pedals of the Pianoforte*.
- 21 Denis Matthews, *Beethoven Piano Sonatas*, London: The British Broadcasting Corporation, 1967, p. 26.
- 22 Cited in Iannis Xenakis, *Formalized Music*, Bloomington, 1971.
- 23 Wilfred Mellers, *Beethoven and the Voice of God*, London, 1983, p.77.
- 24 Iannis Xenakis, *Synaphai for piano and orchestra*, Paris, 1969, Preface.
- 25 Xenakis, *Synaphai*. Referred to by Xenakis as 'liquid legatissimo'.
- 26 Piet Mondrian, 'The New Plastic in Painting (1917)', pp.27-74 in *The New Art, The New Life. The Collected Writings of Mondrian*, ed. and trans. by Harry Holtzman and Martin S. James, London, 1987, p.43.
- 27 Conversation with Dr Carmel Gammal.