

Violin Sonata op.96

It was not until ten years after the Kreutzer Sonata that Beethoven wrote his 10th, and last, violin-sonata. After it was sketched in 1812 Beethoven did not publish it. It took him until 1816 before the first edition was printed. The piece did get its first performance on the 29th of December 1812 by his pupil and good friend, the Archduke Rudolph, who took the piano part and the violinist Pierre Rode. The piece was also dedicated to the Archduke.

This piece was written around the turning point from his second to his third, and last period. In this period Beethoven went from the virtuosic style to a more philosophical and intimate style. When one looks at the pieces that he wrote in that same area, the seventh and the eighth symphonies, one can see that the pastoral moods are present in each of them. Not long after composing these pieces Beethoven went into emotional stress resulting in a creative stop.

In this piece, the violin and the piano are fully integrated as one instrument, more than in any other sonata of the set. The continued conversation between the instruments are more fragmentary and making it more important to communicate with each other. The piece itself can be seen as one of the most lyrical in the set and has extremely subtlety to it.

It is one of the three sonatas which has 4 movements. The other ones are the fifth and the seventh.

The first movement starts with a small motive, a trill, with the violin. This motive comes back throughout the whole piece. After the violin introduces it, the piano takes the theme and both instruments start to blend throughout the whole movement. This first movement has a very dreamy character and hints towards the 'Schubertian' way of composing. It is interesting to note that Beethoven changed the trill's in the coda in the manuscript in 1815 when he was making the piece ready for its publication. This movement is, compared to all the other pieces in the set, very different and not 'Beethovenian' at all.

The second movement is a slow adagio in E flat major. In this movement, Beethoven goes back to the composition flow of the other sonatas. Structure-wise this movement is more classical. The themes have a clear start and end, unlike the first movement. The end of the movement has an Attacca to the third movement.

The third movement is a Scherzo which has been described by Max Rostal as:

'This movement is usually regarded as being 'playful', a view I do not share at all, despite the marking 'Scherzo'. Its mode of expression - with the exception of the Trio - is rather uncanny, shadowy, tense, even alarming or, to quote Beethoven himself (although in another connection) Beklemmt.'

The trio is a big contrast, more melodic, than the Scherzo itself. The dramatic touch that the Scherzo was given by Beethoven is created by the *Sf*'s on the third beats and the rhythmic intensification in the piano part.

The fourth movement is a variation form that is more extensive and experimental than other variation-movements that Beethoven wrote in the set of violin sonatas. The first sketches of the theme were found among the sketches of his third cello-sonata dating back to 1807-08. The pastoral mood of the theme gets changed throughout the movement ending up in a slow adagio and a fugato part before the coda. In this coda, Beethoven writes for the violin the D in the 4th octave, which is the highest note that he used in the whole set. From this, Beethoven goes to a short adagio which is a short remembrance of the theme. Beethoven concludes the piece, after the adagio with a presto.

Note: About the interpretation of this sonata there are many discussions and ideas. We do not intend to give ideas about performance practice, merely descriptive and informative notes.