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by Derek Katz

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Sonata for Piano No. 29 in B-flat Major, Op. 106, "Hammerklavier" (1817-18)

When Artaria, Beethoven's publisher in Vienna, brought out the first edition of the "Hammerklavier" Sonata in 1819, they advertised it as a work that "excels above all other creations of this master not only through its most rich and grand fantasy but also in regard to artistic perfection and sustained style, and will mark a new period in Beethoven's pianoforte works." This may well prove that breathless commercial prose has changed little over the centuries, but, for once, the hyperbole seems to have been justified. Beethoven himself reportedly told his student Carl Czerny that this sonata would be his "greatest" (or perhaps "grandest"). The "Hammerklavier" Sonata, indeed, is a maximalist work that pushes the boundaries of scale, expression and pianistic technique. The longest of Beethoven's piano sonatas, it calls for extremes of tempo, dynamics and character, and has a reputation for near unplayability that persists to this day. The dimensions and expressive scope of the "Hammerklavier" suggest the monumentality of two Beethoven works with orchestra begun near the same time, the Ninth Symphony and the Missa Solemnis. The idea that the "Hammerklavier" Sonata aspires to the condition of a symphony has a long history, including a transcription of the Sonata for orchestra by the conductor Felix Weingartner, which he recorded in 1930.

The "Hammerklavier" Sonata comes from a time when Beethoven's deafness was worsening, and his attempts to continue with practical music-making were dwindling. 1818, the year in which Beethoven completed the Sonata, was also the year in which he began using conversation books, in which his associates could write questions that Beethoven would answer verbally (frustratingly for posterity, this means only the questions have been preserved, while we would much rather have Beethoven's responses). Beethoven still improvised at the piano and occasionally appeared to public to conduct one of his orchestral works, but public appearances as a pianist were now out of the question.

During the composition of the "Hammerklavier" Sonata, Beethoven received the gift of a new pianoforte from Broadwood & Sons in London. This instrument had a heavier touch and allowed for a wider range of dynamics and tone colors than the Viennese instruments of the time. While Beethoven had already composed the first three movements of the sonata by the time that the Broadwood arrived, he immediately made use of the extended lower range of the Broadwood in the final movement of the sonata (neither a Viennese nor an English fortepiano of the time has a wide enough range for the entire sonata). While the nickname "Hammerklavier" would seem to suggest a particular type of instrument (and the "hammer" part perhaps a particularly powerful one), it is merely the German translation of "fortepiano," and part of a larger move by Beethoven towards using German terms in place of Italian ones, reflecting his nationalist tendencies after Napoleon's defeat.

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Other sonatas could just as well have dubbed "Hammerklavier," but the name has only stuck for the most imposing of them.

The "Hammerklavier" Sonata is dedicated to the Archduke Rudolph, also the dedicatee of numerous other pieces by Beethoven, including the "Emperor" Piano Concerto and the "Archduke" Piano Trio, and shares the heroic, noble characters of the Concerto and Trio. Rudolph was a fine pianist and an accomplished musician who had studied both piano and composition with Beethoven, although by 1817, various ailments had limited his ability to play the piano, and there would have been no thought that he would have played the "Hammerklavier" himself. Rather, the work was intended as a tribute to Rudolph, who was both a close friend of Beethoven and his main source of financial support. Beethoven had initially planned to compose a choral work in honor of Rudolph, and a sketch survives of a vocal line setting the words "Vivat Rudolphus! Vivat Rudolphus! [Live, Rudolph!]" that shares some rhythmic and melodic characteristics with the opening of the piano sonata.

One sign of the seriousness of the "Hammerklavier" Sonata is its layout in four movements, something common for symphonies and string quartets, but unusual for sonatas, which generally lacked menuets or scherzos. It also shares characteristics with other works from Beethoven's last decade, including an emphasis on fugue and counterpoint, prominent trills, and large leaps in melodic lines. It is also one of the first works that Beethoven composed after acquiring a metronome, which was a new invention at the time. Beethoven was eager to indicate tempi with more precision than verbal descriptions allowed, but his chosen marks for the outer movements of the "Hammerklavier" at best teeter on the edge of playability.

The first movement opens with a fanfare, perhaps a reworking or echo of the planned choral salute to Archduke Rudolph. This fanfare will serve as a kind of structural signpost in movement, marking important moments rather than functioning as a conventional theme (the opening jump for the left hand from a low note to the middle of the keyboard is also a tricky and high-stakes maneuver). Two statements of the fanfare give way to a softer and smoother theme, and, for all the emphasis on monumentality and velocity, most of this movement is on the gentle side. The fanfare returns to announce the second theme, spun from cascading passage work. The closing theme is also calm and leads to the first of many long trills that provide color and texture, rather than ornamenting a melody. The middle of the movement is a lengthy contrapuntal section, based on imitation of a theme based on the opening fanfare. This is both a moment when sentimental expression temporarily gives way to formal rigor, and a hint of the massive fugue that will conclude the entire sonata. There are even more extended trills (some in both hands at once) near the end of the movement, which ends with fragments of the fanfare.

In additional to vast late works like the Ninth Symphony and the Missa Solemnis, Beethoven also sometimes moved in the opposite direction, composing pieces made up of collections of miniatures (piano bagatelles) or that contain

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some very short movements (the string quartets Op. 130 and Op. 131). The second movement of the "Hammerklavier" is very short and would not be out of place in one of those late quartets. On the surface, it is a simple scherzo and trio. The scherzo has two halves, each of which is repeated (with some alterations), and the same is true of the trio. The extremity in this movement comes from its abruptness. The scherzo is graceful and dancelike (Beethoven apparently originally intended a more moderate menuet) but goes by in the blink of an eye. The trio sounds as if it will be expansive, with a broad melody (passing from hand to hand) accompanied by rumbling triplets, but it, too, is over before we have properly gotten introduced to it. This concentrated formal tidiness breaks down dramatically at the end of the trio, with the pianist apparently completely losing the plot. Before the expected return of the scherzo, we get an entire new idea, first in octaves, then in chords alternating between the hands, a rapid scale which runs from the very bottom to the very top of Viennese keyboards of the time, and finally a little tantrum on a broken chord. We do then get the delayed return of the tiny scherzo, with one more enigmatic and petulant outburst at the very end.

After this miniature follows the longest slow movement that Beethoven ever composed (many performances of this movement last longer than an entire early Beethoven sonata). The scale of the movement is due to the scope of the thematic material itself rather than to what Beethoven does with it. It is a movement that is about the presentation of deeply moving music, not about doing things with that music. There are three main ideas, each distinct in character. The first idea unfolds in solemn, stately block chords, marked by Beethoven to be played "passionately, with great feeling," and with a pedal that will prevent most of the strings struck by each key from vibrating. This idea (and the movement as a whole) is predominantly in the minor, but there is a moment in the middle of the theme (repeated near its end) where the mode shifts briefly to major, and there is a heart-breaking leap in the right hand as the melody suddenly floats in a higher and more ethereal register. The second idea remains in the same key but has a very different texture. The accompaniment is now in shorter notes, alternating between bass notes and chords, and the right hand spins out a singing melody that quickly breaks into decorative passage work and trills (here, conventionally ornamental). Beethoven now asks for "grand expression," and allows for all the piano strings to vibrate. The third idea is in major and consists of simple melodic ideas moving from the bottom of the keyboard to higher registers (both played by the right hand), crossing over a gently flowing accompaniment from the left. While there are transitions and some development of these ideas, the movement is mostly made up of repetitions of all three sections, with the return of the first disguised with elaborate passage work in the right hand.

The convention earlier in Beethoven's career was to end instrumental pieces with light, lively movements (the rondo that concludes the Mozart Serenade on this program would be a typical example). The "Hammerklavier," though, ends with

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another weighty movement, this time a massive fugue. Beethoven associated fugues primarily with Johann Sebastian Bach, for whose music he had a life-long reverence, extending back to his childhood study of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Beethoven's engagement with Bach's music had intensified in the years immediately before the "Hammerklavier," and the sketches for the sonata include passages copied from a fugue from the *Well-Tempered Clavier* and from *The Art of the Fugue*. Beethoven's goal was not to emulate or imitate Bach's contrapuntal style, but to combine the techniques mastered by Bach with a poetic element and a sense of fantasy that would accord with Beethoven's own expressive ideals.

The final movement begins with an introduction that seems to emulate a keyboard player "preluding," or improvising before presenting a formal composition. Meandering flourishes (notated without meter or bar lines) alternate with brief bursts of music that do sound like Bach. Perhaps this is Beethoven considering, but rejecting, these specific models? Beethoven indicates that the fugue that follows is "rather free," giving himself license for that element of fantasy, but it is also a compendium of contrapuntal devices. The fugue subject is remarkable. It begins with a large leap (leaps!), continues with a long trill (trills!) and then is extended with a very long series of scales. The wait for the second voice to enter is long and suspenseful.

Each of these elements (leap, trill, scales) is distinctive, making it easier to follow the transformations that the theme is subjected to. Beethoven continues on to present the subject twice as slowly as it first appeared (augmentation), backwards (retrograde) and upside-down (inversion), as well as in various combinations. Just when it seems as if Beethoven has exhausted the contrapuntal potential of the subject, he introduces a new fugue subject, softer, and in smooth and evenly moving notes. Inevitably, Beethoven then combines both the old and new subjects, leading to a climactic passage over rumbling trills in the bass. The leaps and trill get the final word.

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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)
Serenade in E-flat Major, K. 375 (1781, revised 1782)

Mozart's Serenade for winds in E-flat Major, K. 375 demonstrates both his sensitivity to the specific conditions of Viennese music-making and also that his musical genius was not matched by an equivalent knack for self-promotion. The Serenade exists in two versions, each of which reflects a different type of Viennese ensemble. It was common for 18th century Viennese aristocrats to employ a wind band (or *Harmonie*), often consisting of pairs of clarinets (or oboes), horns and bassoons, to play music at dinner, or for garden parties or other evening entertainments. The musicians in these ensembles were liveried servants, not professional musicians. The repertoire for these groups was dominated by transcriptions of music from popular operas. This type of wind ensemble was rising in social importance at the time that Mozart moved to Vienna in 1781. Prince Schwarzenberg established an octet (oboes, clarinets, horns, bassoons) in 1776, and he was emulated by other members of the Viennese aristocracy, culminating in the creation of an Imperial Harmonie by Joseph II in 1782. This was a fully professional ensemble, made up of the best wind players from the court opera orchestra. The scene in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in which Don Giovanni summons a wind band to play opera arias for him while he eats, although notionally set in 16th century Spain, faithfully reproduces the practices (and the operatic repertoire) of Mozart's Vienna.

The Serenade in E-flat Major was composed for the lowliest of Vienna wind ensemble, made up not even of servants, but of street musicians who more-or-less busked, moving from location to location and playing for money. The original version of the Serenade is for a sextet of clarinets, horns and bassoons, and was composed in the hope of ingratiating Mozart with the imperial court. The Serenade was a present for the sister-in-law of a court painter. Mozart knew that she was regularly visited by an imperial valet who also played chamber music with the emperor. Mozart hoped that the valet would hear his serenade and recommend him to the emperor. Perhaps needless to say, this scheme came to nothing, but we do know that Mozart heard this version played at least once. He wrote a letter to his father describing being surprised on the evening of his name day in 1781 to be serenaded by a group of street musicians ("poor devils") playing his composition. The final version of the Serenade, which adds a pair of oboes, was created in 1782, presumably in the hopes either of a performance by the Imperial Harmonie, or by an ensemble serving another prominent noble, but, again, there is no evidence that Mozart was any more successful with this scheme.

Beyond operatic transcriptions, there was also a large repertoire of original music for *Harmonie* ensemble, but this tended to be neither complex nor aesthetically ambitious. In the words of the German composer and theorist Daniel Gottlob Türk, serenades of the time had a "very simple, unaffected, pleasing character."

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This Mozart Serenade, however, clearly has ambitions above its station, and is more concerned with demonstrating Mozart's craft and imagination than with fulfilling generic expectations. It also requires absolutely first-class performers, of the sort found in the court opera orchestra. Mozart's "poor devils" must have been extraordinarily skilled, especially the horn and clarinet players (Mozart did specifically praise the first clarinetist and both horn players). Even in the final version, the clarinets take the lead role in the ensemble, with the oboes taking over some of the prominent lines, but otherwise largely relegated to filling out the textures.

The Serenade is in five movements, including two menuets, reflecting the usual emphasis in serenades and divertimentos on dance music. Each movement is superficially typical of its type while also including subtle and surprising touches that go well beyond "simple, unaffected and pleasing." The first movement opens unassumingly with block chords and walking arpeggios from the bassoons, but soon changes to a delicate texture with momentary dissonances and sighing figures. The contrasting second theme takes an unexpected turn the minor, with the opening arpeggios now darker and smoother (in the second bassoon) under plaintive figuration from the first clarinet. This unusual minor theme returns in the middle of the movement (making up almost the entirety of the development). Having presented the theme twice, Mozart feels free to replace it when the primary materials return in the recapitulation, substituting an entire new theme in a completely different character (and featuring the first horn playing the melody).

Similarly, the first menuet features a festive fanfare figure for the full ensemble in octaves, but also contains an unexpected turn to softer music (briefly in a different key), and a moody minor trio in which repeated notes from the horns elicit stabbing responses from the clarinets. The slow movement presents one of Mozart's most serene melodies, first shared by clarinet and oboe in turn and then repeated by a lyrical horn. When the melody returns, it is accompanied by arpeggios passed between the second clarinet, second horn and first bassoon, in a particularly delicate texture. The second menuet is livelier than the first, has more dynamic contrast, and is marked by melodic leaps, first ascending, then dropping back down. The finale is a perky rondo, but even here there is a briefly scholarly contrapuntal passage in the middle.

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Frédéric Chopin (1810-1849)
Nocturne in G Minor, Op. 37, No. 1 (1838)

Mozart heard his Serenade as an informal evening performance, and the piano nocturne has distant roots in vocal serenades, especially from French songs. This is already something of a stretch, and it would be an even greater effort to find a connection between the epic "Hammerklavier" Sonata and this rather modest Chopin Nocturne. It might be more meaningful to point out that while both Beethoven and Chopin were great pianists and great composers, the relationship between composition and performance was quite different for the two musicians. Beethoven must have been a phenomenal keyboard player, and he ingratiated himself with Vienna's aristocracy by improvising in their salons, but public performance in the modern sense was never an important part of his musical life. Chopin, however, was part of a culture of virtuoso pianist-composers whose careers were centered on public performance, and whose works were dominated by piano pieces composed for their own use. These pianist-composers included older musicians like John Field, Ignaz Moscheles and Frédéric Kalkbrenner as well as Chopin's contemporaries Sigismond Thalberg and Franz Liszt. Kalkbrenner, Liszt and Chopin all gravitated towards Paris, which was the commercial center of piano culture, encompassing instruction, instrument building, music publishing and public performance.

Until the end of his teens, Chopin was on the path towards the life of a traveling virtuoso, but after moving to Paris in 1831 public performance played an ever-smaller role in his life, and he turned away from large-scale works with orchestra towards small character pieces more suited to salons or other private events. The Nocturne in G Minor, Op. 37, No. 1 is from 1838, when Chopin had been refusing invitations to play in public for a few years, and was attempting to solidify his reputation as a serious composer. It was also composed near the beginning of his nine-year relationship with George Sand, a time when he was in poor health but still in the early stages of a loving (if highly unconventional) liaison.

Chopin's use of small character pieces, like nocturnes, mazurkas and waltzes, as a vehicle for significant musical statements was a radical and implausible move, as these genres had been associated with amateur players and lacked the technical demands, compositional complexity or extended scope generally taken as signs of significance (as exemplified by the discussion of the "Hammerklavier" above). In a sense, although the musical products are about as different as can be, we do have a similarity with Beethoven's sonata, as the keyboard sonata also began as a relatively low-status form of music for amateur players of limited attainments.

In this context, it is not surprising that the G Minor Nocturne shares some surface similarities with earlier nocturnes but also seems to have very different expressive goals. The Nocturne is in the expected three parts, with a main section that is heard twice and a contrasting section in the middle.

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The texture of the outer sections has a singing melody in the right hand, embellished with decorative flourishes, and an accompaniment that takes advantage of the sustaining pedal to combine low bass notes with middle register chords, again, all typical of earlier nocturnes. Beyond this, though, we have moved a long way from the bel canto flourishes that earlier Chopin nocturnes share with Bellini opera arias and the flowing arpeggiated accompaniments that pervade earlier Chopin, as well as nocturnes by Field and other composers of the time. Instead, the melody is presented in tightly structured and symmetrical eight-bar phrases, the ornamental embroidery is restrained, and the accompaniment is in measured chords. Between these characteristics and the minor mode, the affect is sober and well, serious. The middle section is entirely in block chords, suggesting a hymn rather than a vocal romance (no tempo change is indicated for the middle section, but it is frequently played somewhat faster than the outer sections). This interlude of possible religious feeling only enhances the contrast between the unassuming structure and scale of the pieces, and its poetic impact.