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Classic Improvisation

The *Eingang* in Early Beethoven

David Polan

Improvisation was an integral part of performance during the late-18th and early-19th centuries and took two principal forms: *ornamentation*, the adding of embellishing tones to an unadorned preexistent melodic line, and *extempore elaboration*, whereby a performer could make an impromptu addition to a work being performed, such as through a cadenza or, as in the issue at hand, an *Eingang*.¹

While the *Eingang* has been accepted as readily applicable in early Classic composers, such as Stamitz or C. P. E. Bach, or to later masters such as Haydn and Mozart, its suitability for Beethoven has until now not been generally acknowledged. Perhaps the most frequently given reason for this is the so-called "apology" letter which Beethoven wrote to Carl Czerny. The story is that at a performance of Beethoven's Quintet for Fortepiano² and Winds (op. 16), Czerny, who was performing the fortepiano part,

¹I am indebted to Malcolm Bilson, Howard Cinnamon, and William E. Hettrick for their support and suggestions concerning the work presented here.

²The term "fortepiano" is used herein to designate an instrument with Viennese action, "pianoforte" an instrument with English action. In speaking of Beethoven's works for *klavier*, the appellation of "fortepiano" seems the more appropriate since his preferred instruments are known to have been the Viennese.

improvised within the context of the work to the great displeasure of the composer, who then wrathfully reproached Czerny in front of the entire company. The next day Beethoven wrote Czerny the following letter:

Dear Czerny!

Today I cannot see you, but tomorrow I will call on you myself to have a talk with you.—I burst forth so yesterday that I was sorry after it had happened; but you must pardon that in a composer who would have preferred to hear his work exactly as he wrote it, no matter how beautifully you played in general.—I shall make amends publicly at the Violoncello Sonata. Be assured that as an artist I have the greatest wishes for your success and will always try to show myself—

Your true Friend Beethoven³

Of critical importance here is exactly what Czerny did that Beethoven objected to so strongly. We are fortunate to have Czerny's own account of the episode, in which he states,

... I took the liberty, in my youthful levity, to make many alterations,—such as introducing difficulties into the passages, making use of the upper octaves, &c., &c. Beethoven sternly and deservedly reproached me for this in the presence of Schuppanzigh, Linke, and the other performers.⁴

Czerny's account of "introducing difficulties into the passages, making use of the upper octaves, &c., &c." cannot be construed to represent that type of ornamentation known as extempore elaboration, since it reflects neither what is known from 18th-century theorists on the subject nor the written-out models of elaborations that have come down to us. Even more telling in this regard is Ferdinand Ries's account of this same quintet with Beethoven himself performing the fortepiano part. Here we read that in the last allegro "a pause occurs several times" before the recurrence of the main theme [i.e. the fermata at m. 76—see Example One].

"Beethoven suddenly started improvising, taking the Rondo as his theme, and entertained himself and his listeners for quite some time, although the other players were not so amused . . . It did indeed look rather comic to see these gentlemen, expecting to begin at any

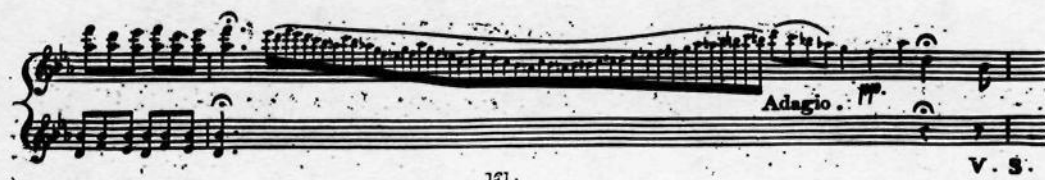
³Alexander Wheelock Thayer, *Thayer's Life of Beethoven*, rev. & ed. Elliot Forbes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 641.

⁴Thayer, *Life of Beethoven*, 640.

moment, constantly raising their instruments to their mouths, only to put them down quietly again. At last Beethoven was satisfied and returned to the Rondo.⁵

What made this occasion noteworthy is not that Beethoven should have improvised within a piece, but rather the evident length of time that the improvisation lasted. The score itself contains a written-out *Eingang*, which follows.

Example One, Op. 16, iii, m. 76-77. Simrock (Bonn, 1802).



It would seem apparent that Beethoven changed this written-out elaboration spontaneously, substituting a much more involved one. This is perhaps indicative of the manner in which written-out *Eingänge* were treated, i.e. simply as a guide or suggestion provided by the composer.

Theoretical Background

An early description of fermata elaboration appears in Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*.⁶ Here follow some essential points.

3. . . . There are three places at which the fermata appears: over the next to the last, the last, or the rest after the last bass note. To be used correctly the sign should be written out at the beginning and again at the end of an elaborated fermata.

⁵Franz Wegeler and Ferdinand Ries, *Biographische Notizen über Ludwig van Beethoven* (Koblenz, 1838), trans. Frederick Noonan (Arlington, Va.: Great Ocean Publishers, 1986), 69-70.

⁶See the translation of William J. Mitchell (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1949), 143-44.

4. Fermate over rests occur most frequently in allegro movements and are not embellished. The other two kinds are usually found in slow, *affetuoso* movements and must be embellished, if only to avoid artlessness. In any event, elaborate decoration is more necessary here than in other parts of movements.

5. . . . [These elaborations] require a slow or at most a moderate tempo. Since such elaborations must be related to the affect of a movement, they can be successfully employed only when close attention is paid to a composer's expressive aim.

Though fermata elaboration continued to be used by composers and to be recognized by theorists in the late 18th century, some of its conventions, as prescribed by Bach, came to be discarded. Daniel Gottlob Türk, for example, treated the subject in his *Klavierschule* of 1789 in the chapter on "Extemporaneous Ornamentation."⁷ Here I extract some particulars of special interest for performance.

3. Fermatas are either to be played without extempore elaborations (simple fermatas) or they are embellished . . .
4. Every embellishment must suit the character of the composition . . .
3. The embellishment should not be too long; nevertheless, one is not bound as far as the meter is concerned.
5. The duration of tones . . . [is not] exactly specified; therefore it is possible now and then to linger somewhat longer, and in other places, on the contrary, to play a little faster, according to the demands of the affect.

. . . the *appoggiaturas* before the actual fermatas, and in addition, even the main notes can also be embellished.

8. The transition must be short . . .
2. By means of the transition one should lead skillfully into the principal subject, and especially into the given interval of the upper voice [the melody].

⁷See the translation of Raymond H. Haggh (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 290-94.

Bach's prescription of using the elaboration only in slow movements and never over rests seems no longer to be applicable by the time Türk wrote his treatise, since such restrictions are omitted by Türk. Similarly, in his theoretical examples, Türk expands the role of fermata elaboration to incorporate the properties of a "lead-in" (called *Eingang* by Mozart). As a consequence, the device could then be recognized by certain notational conventions: the presence of a fermata before recurrent principal thematic material over a functioning dominant chord or a rest. In this way the *Eingang* both served to elaborate the given harmony and to facilitate a smooth thematic transition. The properly constructed *Eingang* was not to be too long, was not necessarily to be played in strict meter, and above all had to conform to the principle of unity of affect.

Beethoven's Treatment of *Eingänge*

Concerning the introduction of *Eingänge* within Beethoven's early forte-piano sonatas, there is a degree of subjectivity in determining the appropriateness of their use. To be sure, an objective criterion is present—a fermata over a seventh-chord or rest—which allows, at least in theory, for the insertion of an *Eingang*. However, in all such instances the question must be put forth: should an *Eingang* indeed be utilized? The determining factor of this "should" is dictated by two elements: the psychological expectancy of an *Eingang*'s use—Do we want to hear something more? Is this an area that needs to be "filled in"?—and the suitability of its use under the affect governing the movement out of which the *Eingang* must come. Interestingly, the number of instances in which an *Eingang* seems to be implied in Beethoven decreases in proportion to the number of his own written-out *Eingänge*. Evidently he took a greater responsibility to write out *Eingänge* as his style developed.

Some instances in which *Eingänge* are implied follow.

Example Two, Op. 2, no. 2, i, m. 157-61.



Example Three, Op. 10, no. 3, i, m. 180-3.



Two examples of written-out *Eingänge* are now cited.

Example Four, Op. 27, no. 1, iii, m. 25-26.



Example Five, Op. 31, no. 11, ii, m. 25-26.



In these as well as in other written-out examples Beethoven makes use of single-line melodic texture, in either descending or ascending scalewise figuration. Individual note values can range from quarter to 32nd notes. The essential idea is one of virtuosic passage-work that fills in an arpeggio with stepwise figuration or with rapidly executed scales.

These observations of Beethoven's handiwork, as derived from a theoretical approach provided by C. P. E. Bach and Türk, may serve as a prescription for the filling in of areas left by Beethoven to be executed at the performer's discretion. It must be emphasized that the impression to be created should always be one of spontaneity and of appropriateness to the movement or section at hand.

In conclusion, I offer two elaborations of my own invention, these each illustrating possibilities allowed for by the above given examples of implied *Eingänge*. Ideally, of course, one would spontaneously improvise such elaborations within a performance.

Example Six, Op. 2, no. 2, i, m. 161.



Example Seven, Op. 10, no. 3, i, m. 183.

