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A Historically Informed Perspective of Beethoven's Idiosyncratic Dynamics and Accents in His Piano Works

Introduction Beethoven was fortunate to witness the radical development of the piano throughout his creative life, acquainting himself with at least fourteen instruments available to him: eleven Viennese pianos, an Érard, a Broadwood and a Vogel.¹ For Beethoven, the immediate idea of sound is integral to his creative process, as he seems to have told Louis Schlösser in 1822 or 1823: “Stimulated by those moods that poets turn into words, I turn my ideas into tones, which resound, roar, and rage until at last they stand before me in the form of notes.”² The first-hand accounts of Beethoven’s piano playing among his contemporaries are mixed and sketchy. Particularly noteworthy are: (1) Carl Czerny, a pupil and friend of the composer, and (2) Anton Schindler, Beethoven’s admirer and amanuensis.

Czerny describes Beethoven’s playing as follows:

“In the meantime Beethoven appeared and elicited from the fortepiano – through entirely new and daring runs, through the use of the pedals, through an extraordinarily characteristic manner of playing that was distinguished particularly by the strict legato of its chords, and which therefore brought about a new kind of singing – many effects never before imagined.”³

Schindler describes Beethoven as a skilful orator whose playing “was the most distinct and intelligible declamation” owing to his use of the rhetorical pause (i. e., the lengthening of a written note in performance) and the caesura (i. e., a momentary break at the end of a phrase).⁴ These accounts of Beethoven’s playing could be associated

- 1 William S. Newman: *Beethoven on Beethoven. Playing His Piano Music His Way*, New York 2019, p. 53.
- 2 “[Meine Ideen] kommen ungerufen [...], angeregt durch Gemüthsstimmungen, die sich bei dem Dichter in Worte, bei mir in Töne umsetzen, klingen, brausen, stürmen, bis sie endlich beruhigt in Noten vor mir stehen.” Louis Schlösser: *Erinnerungen an Ludwig van Beethoven (Schluss)*, in: *Allgemeine deutsche Musikzeitung* 7 (1880), pp. 413–417, here p. 414. English: *Composers on Music. Eight Centuries of Writings*, ed. by Josiah Fisk, Boston 1997, p. 56.
- 3 “Inzwischen erschien (um 1790) Beethoven, und entlockte dem Fortepiano durch ganz neue kühne Passagen, durch den Gebrauch des Pedals, durch ein ausserordentlich charakteristisches Spiel, welches sich besonders im strengen Legato der Accorde auszeichnete, und daher eine neue Art von Gesang bildete, – viele bis dahin nicht geahneten Effekte.” Carl Czerny: *Vollständige theoretisch-practische Pianoforte-Schule* Op. 500, Wien 1839, Vol. 3, p. 72. English: James Parakilas: *Playing Beethoven His Way. Czerny and the Canonization of Performance Practice*, in: *Beyond the Art of Finger Dexterity. Reassessing Carl Czerny*, ed. by David Gramit, Rochester 2008, pp. 108–124, here p. 113.
- 4 “[...] die deutlichste, fasslichste Declamation”. Anton Schindler: *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven*, Münster 1840, p. 228. English: Anton Felix Schindler: *The Life of Beethoven*, trans. and ed. by Ignaz

with, among other aspects, his unprecedented use of dynamics and accents in his piano works.

Consider the example of the Piano Sonata in C major Op. 53 (Waldstein). Charles Rosen considers this “Grand Sonata” as a remarkable feat, writing: “Never again in his career did the composer try to find so many tone colours and technical inventions for the pianist in one work.”⁵ Some writers, namely Tilman Skowronek and Robert Taub, have also associated Beethoven’s expanded conception of sound range with the gift of a piano that he received from Parisian builder Sébastien Érard in 1803. This excerpt from the third movement, a transition before the arrival of the climactic Prestissimo (Figure 1), illustrates how Beethoven exploited the potential of the piano to its fullest, producing a striking blending of sound effects within just twenty-five measures: new sonorities produced by the indication of long pedal (bars 378–395), the extreme high and low registers (i. e., g_0 and a_{b5} in bar 386), and the vast dynamic range from a soaring *ff* to a whispering *ppp*.

The musical score for Figure 1 consists of three systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The first system (bars 375-379) shows a rhythmic pattern in the right hand and a similar pattern in the left hand, with a *cresc.* marking. The second system (bars 380-391) features a series of chords in the right hand, with a *sf* marking in bar 380, and a *decresc.* marking in bar 386. The third system (bars 392-402) shows a series of chords in the right hand, with a *ppp* marking in bar 392, and a *decresc.* marking in bar 398. The score ends with the instruction "attaca subito il Prestissimo".

FIGURE 1 Beethoven: Piano Sonata in C major Op. 53/III, bars 375–402 (All music examples © Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music ABRSM, ed. by Barry Cooper; except Figures 6, 10–12, 14–15, 16b, and 18b)

Moscheles, London 1841, Vol. 2, p. 129. See also Sandra P. Rosenblum: *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music*, Bloomington 1988, p. 387.

5 Charles Rosen: *Beethoven's Piano Sonatas. A Short Companion*, New Haven 2002, p. 188.

A question any pianist will ask is how to interpret such a considerable amount of notated dynamics and accents in the three-movement Waldstein Sonata: 3 *ppp*, 86 *pp*, 62 *p*, 39 *f*, 39 *ff*, 7 *fp*, 115 *sf*, 3 *ten.*, and 2 *rinforzando*. Of particular interest are Beethoven's paradoxical hairpins, which defy the conventional meaning of hairpins as indications of volume changes. The first example shows a *diminuendo* hairpin over a dotted quarter note, which is unattainable on the piano (Figure 2a). The second example shows the signs *sf* and hairpins notated in such close proximity that it is musically awkward to execute them as mere dynamic emphasis (Figure 2b).

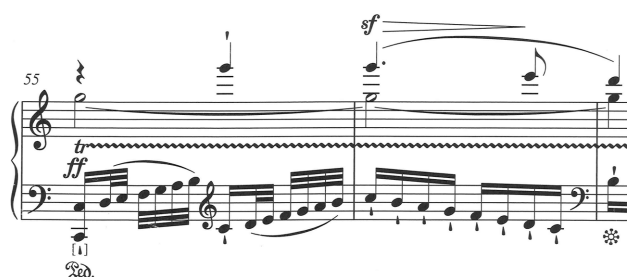


FIGURE 2A Beethoven: Piano Sonata in C major Op. 53/III, bars 55–57



FIGURE 2B Beethoven: Piano Sonata in C major Op. 53/II, bar 6f.

Scholarly research on historical performance practice and the recent publication of critical Urtext editions of Beethoven's piano sonatas reveal that his *crescendo/diminuendo* hairpins (< >) and *sforzando* (*sf*) are contextual expressive symbols which denote not only volume changes but also agogic inflections which call for flexibility of rhythm and tempo. This paper re-assesses a historically informed perspective of Beethoven's idiosyncratic dynamics and accents through the scrutiny of the commentaries on his performance style and musical intentions by his contemporaries such as Carl Czerny and Anton Schindler. Consideration of scholarly commentary by nineteenth- and twentieth-century musicologists and performers, including Louis Spohr, Hugo Riemann and Heinrich Schenker, may also help to illuminate the meaning of Beethoven's hairpins and accents. Thus, this paper explores interpretative possibilities of Beethoven's absolute dynamics, hairpins and *sforzando* by considering the musical context of selected piano works.

Absolute Dynamics Sandra Rosenblum's classification of absolute dynamic markings found in the scores of Beethoven's piano works include *ppp*, *pp*, *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f* and

ff.⁶ Most historical treatises provided scanty information about the execution of dynamic markings. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach's *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* – one of the most important treatises on keyboard playing that exerted great influence on Beethoven – comments that the dynamic markings are descriptive notations which are incomplete, imprecise and require an understanding of the *Affekt* of the composition:

“It is not possible to describe the contexts appropriate to the forte or piano because for every case covered by even the best rule there will be an exception. The particular effect of these shadings depends on the passage, its context, and the composer, who may introduce either a forte or a piano at a given place for equally convincing reasons.”⁷

In his *Klavierschule*, Daniel Gottlob Türk stresses that the performer must decide upon the degree of loudness or softness in order to match the subtle variance between characters:

“[C]ompositions of a spirited, happy, lively, sublime, magnificent, proud, daring, courageous, serious, fiery, wild, and furious character all require a certain degree of loudness. [...] Compositions of a gentle, innocent, naïve, pleading, tender, moving, sad, melancholy and the like, character all require a softer execution. [...] the livelier parts of a composition can be played louder and the tenderly singing, etc., parts can be played softer”.⁸

Türk's sentiment is also echoed in Czerny's *Pianoforte-Schule*. Czerny explains that each of Beethoven's compositions “expresses some particular and well supported idea or object, to which, even in the smallest embellishment, he always remains true.”⁹ In the

- 6 Rosenblum: *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music*, p. 58.
- 7 “Es ist nicht wohl möglich, die Fälle zu bestimmen, wo forte oder piano statt hat, weil auch die besten Regeln eben so viel Ausnahmen leiden als sie festsetzen; die besondere Würckung dieses Schatten und Lichts hängt von den Gedancken, von der Verbindung der Gedancken, und überhaupt von dem Componisten ab, welcher eben so wohl mit Ursache das Forte da anbringen kan, wo ein andermahl piano gewesen ist”. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: *Versuch über die wahre Art, das Clavier zu spielen. Erster Theil*, Leipzig 1753, pp. 129f. English: Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. by William J. Mitchell, New York 1949, p. 163.
- 8 “[...] daß die Tonstücke von einem muntern, freudigen, lebhaften, erhabenen, prächtigen, stolzen, kühnen, muthigen, ernsthaften, feurigen, wilden, wüthenden &c. Charakter alle einen gewissen Grad der Stärke erfordern. [...] Die Tonstücke von einem sanften, unschuldigen, naiven, bittenden, zärtlichen, rührenden, traurigen, wehmüthigen &c. Charakter erfordern insgesamt einen schwächern Vortrag. [...] daß die lebhaftern Stellen eines Tonstückes stark, die zärtlichen singbaren &c. aber schwächer gespielt werden”. Daniel Gottlob Türk: *Klavierschule, oder Anweisung zum Klavierspielen für Lehrer und Lernende*, Leipzig/Halle 1789, pp. 349f. English: Daniel Gottlob Türk: *School of Clavier Playing*, trans. by Raymond H. Hagg, Lincoln 1982, pp. 338–340.
- 9 “Jedes seiner Tonstücke drückt irgend eine besond're, konsequent festgehaltene Stimmung oder Ansicht aus, der es auch selbst in den kleinsten Ausmahlungen treu bleibt.” Carl Czerny: *Die Kunst des Vortrags der ältern und neuen Claviercompositionen. Supplement (oder 4ter Theil) zur großen Pianoforte-*

third volume of the *Pianoforte-Schule*, Czerny associates five dynamic levels – namely *pianissimo*, *piano*, *mezzo voce*, *forte*, *fortissimo* – with specific characters and moods.¹⁰ Czerny’s conception of dynamics as psychological connotation is not far removed from Schindler’s description of Beethoven’s playing style:

“He [Beethoven] set great store by the manner of striking the keys, and its double import: the physical or material, and the psychological, of which Clementi made him aware. By its psychological import, Clementi meant the fullness of tone already conceived in the player’s mind before the fingers strike the keys. One who is a stranger to this sense can never play an *Adagio* with feeling.”¹¹

Let’s examine Czerny’s comments about Beethoven’s Piano Sonata in *f* minor Op. 2 No. 1. All four movements begin with the same dynamic indication of *p* (Figures 3a–d): the first movement is described as “fervent and impassioned, energetic and varied”, the second movement as “soft and tranquil”, the third movement as “[h]umorous and lively”, and the last movement as “[i]mpetuously excited, almost dramatic, like the description of a serious event.”¹² There is no doubt that performers need to vary their touch in order to project subtle nuances within the scope of *p*, which Czerny defines as “the still soft and tender, though yet somewhat firm and expressive mode of touch with which the keys are to be struck.”¹³

By the same token, the recurring theme from the second movement of the Piano Sonata in *e* minor Op. 90 should be played with varying degrees of softness, as Czerny explains: “As the theme is frequently repeated, the player must each time endea-

Schule op. 500, Vienna [1846], p. 33. English: Carl Czerny: *The Art of Playing the Ancient and Modern Pianoforte Works. Being a Supplement to the Royal Pianoforte School Op. 500*, trans. by John Bishop, London [1846], p. 31.

- 10 Czerny: *Pianoforte-Schule*, Vol. 3, p. 4f. English: Carl Czerny: *Complete Theoretical and Practical Piano Forte School [...]* Op. 500, trans. by James Alexander Hamilton, London 1839, Vol. 3, p. 5.
- 11 “Großes hielt er auf den Anschlag und dessen Doppelbedeutung: der physische oder materielle und der psychische, darauf Clementi die Aufmerksamkeit gelenkt. Unter letzterem verstand dieser die im Gefühle berechnete Tonfülle, bevor noch der Finger die Taste berührt. Wem dieses fremd ist, wird niemals ein *Adagio* seelenvoll vortragen.” Anton Schindler: *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven*, dritte, neu bearbeitete und vermehrte Auflage, Münster 1860, Vol. 2, p. 237. English: Anton Felix Schindler: *Beethoven as I Knew Him*, ed. by Donald W. MacArdle, Chapel Hill 1966, Reprint New York 1996, p. 417.
- 12 “[...] ernst und leidenschaftlich aufgeregt, kräftig und entschieden”; “sanfte, gefühl- und melodie-volle [*Adagio*]”; “Humoristisch und lebhaft”; “Stürmisch aufgeregt, beinahe dramatisch, wie die Schilderung irgend eines ernstesten Ereignisses.” Czerny: *Die Kunst des Vortrags*, pp. 34–36. English: Czerny: *The Art of Playing*, pp. 32–34.
- 13 “[...] die zwar weiche und zarte, aber doch schon etwas bestim̄t’re und ausdrucksvollere Behandlungsart, mit welcher bei diesem Grade die Tasten anzuschlagen sind.” Czerny: *Pianoforte-Schule*, Vol. 3, p. 4. English: Czerny: *Piano Forte School*, Vol. 3, p. 5.



FIGURE 3A Beethoven: Piano Sonata in f minor Op.2 No.1/i, bars 1f.

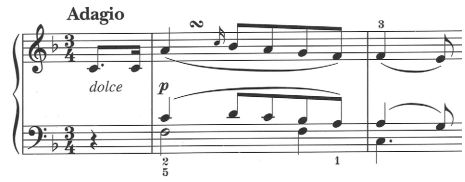


FIGURE 3B Beethoven: Piano Sonata in f minor Op.2 No.1/II, bars 1f.



FIGURE 3C Beethoven: Piano Sonata in f minor Op.2 No.1/III, bars 1f.



FIGURE 3D Beethoven: Piano Sonata in f minor Op.2 No.1/IV, bars 1f.



FIGURE 4A Beethoven: Piano Sonata in e minor Op.90/II, bars 1f.



FIGURE 4B Beethoven: Piano Sonata in e minor Op.90/II, bars 93-95

your to deliver it with a different gradation of tone, but always with delicacy.”¹⁴ (Figures 4a/b)

Hairpins Alfred Brendel, in his 1976 essay “Werktreue – An Afterthought”, claims that “Beethoven’s notation is more modern than that of his contemporaries” in that certain notational symbols taken from string techniques (bowings) and vocal effects (accents,

14 “Da das Thema oft wiederkehrt, muss der Spieler streben, es jedesmal durch einen anders nüancirten, aber immer delikaten Vortrag herauszuheben.” Czerny: Die Kunst des Vortrags, p. 64. English: Czerny: The Art of Plying, p. 62.

dynamics) require a translation into their pianistic equivalent.¹⁵ This is particularly true for Beethoven's hairpins. Extensive research by Clive Brown and Sandra Rosenblum tells us that the origins of hairpins can be traced back to: (1) the singing style of the early seventeenth century known as *messa di voce*, calling for swelling and diminishing in volume on a single note, and (2) the gradual increase or decrease in volume through varying bow strokes on the violin.¹⁶ This is particularly true in the early piano sonatas of Beethoven, in which the 'accent' hairpins (>) and 'diamond-shaped' hairpins are notated over a single note or a group of three or four notes, as illustrated in Figure 5:



FIGURE 5 Beethoven: Piano Sonata in f minor Op. 2 No. 1/1, bars 15–17

Another plausible viewpoint for Beethoven's unprecedented use of hairpins is associated with the freedom of his playing, especially his uncanny ability to execute dynamic nuances simultaneously with tempo flexibility. Schindler emphasised that Beethoven's playing "was free of all constraint in respect to the beat, for the spirit of his music required freedom."¹⁷ Beethoven's student Ferdinand Ries describes:

"In general, Beethoven played his compositions very whimsically, nevertheless, he usually kept a steady beat and only occasionally pushed the tempo, and even then, seldom. Among other things he held back the tempo in his *crescendo* with a *ritardando*, which made a very beautiful and highly striking effect."¹⁸

In Chapter III, "On occasional changes in the Time or degree of Movement", of Volume 3 of his *Pianoforte-Schule*, Czerny emphasises the importance of *rallentando* and *accelerando* – holding back and pushing forward in the degree of movement – as means of

- 15 Alfred Brendel: *Werktreue – An Afterthought*, in: id.: *On Music. Collected Essays*, Chicago 2001, pp. 30–41, here p. 34.
- 16 Clive Brown: *Classical & Romantic Performing Practice 1750–1900*, Oxford/New York 2002, pp. 106–117, 126 f.; Rosenblum: *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music*, pp. 58–60, 68–71.
- 17 "[...] es war frei alles Zwanges im Zeitmaße, wie es eben der Geist der Composition erfordert hatte." Schindler: *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven* (31860), Vol. 2, p. 230. English: Schindler: *Beethoven as I Knew Him*, p. 412.
- 18 "Im Allgemeinen spielte er selbst seine Compositionen sehr launig, blieb jedoch meistens fest im Tacte, und trieb nur zuweilen, jedoch selten, das Tempo etwas. Mitunter hielt er in seinem *crescendo* mit *ritardando* das Tempo zurück, welches einen sehr schönen und höchst auffallenden Effekt machte." Franz Gerhard Wegeler/Ferdinand Ries: *Biographische Notizen über Ludwig van Beethoven*, Koblenz 1838, p. 106; English: Kenneth Drake: *The Sonatas of Beethoven as He Played and Taught Them*, Cincinnati 1972, p. 54.

expressive playing. He enumerates a list of situations where *ritardando* can be applied. Particularly noteworthy is the use of *ritardando* with a gradual change of volume, which Czerny recommends: (1) “At the Diminuendo of a preceding very lively passage; as also in brilliant passages, when there suddenly occurs a trait of melody to be played piano and with much delicacy”, (2) “Occasionally also, in the chief crescendo of a strongly marked sentence, leading to an important passage or to the close”, and (3) “At the end of every long shake which forms a pause or Cadenza, and which is marked diminuendo.”¹⁹ However, Czerny does not provide any performance terms indicating tempo flexibility in the musical instances from the aforementioned chapter of his *Pianoforte-Schule*. A close examination of musical instances from Czerny’s *Pianoforte-Schule* reveals that the hairpins are always notated concurrently with Czerny’s recommendation for retardation and quickening in tempo, as illustrated in the following example, including Czerny’s remarks below (Figure 6). Of particular interest is that the *crescendo* hairpins in bars 2 and 4 call for two different interpretations – *ritardando* and *accelerando*, respectively, conveying the unwritten element of tempo flexibility.

“The three last quavers of the 2d bar must be *retarded* a very little; indeed almost imperceptibly so, as the next or 3d bar is a repetition of the [...] principal subject, though on other degrees of the scale. [...]

FIGURE 6 Czerny: Piano Forte School, Volume 3, p. 34

- 19 “Beim Diminuendo einer früher sehr lebhaften Stelle, so wie bei brillanten Passagen, wenn plötzlich ein piano und *delicat* vorzutragender Lauf eintritt. [...] Bisweilen auch in dem starken *crescendo* einer besonders markirten Stelle, die zu einem bedeutenden Satze oder zum Schluss führt. [...] Das Ende eines jeden langen Trillers, welcher eine Haltung und Cadenz bildet, und *diminuendo* ist, wie auch jede sanfte Cadenz überhaupt.” Czerny: *Pianoforte-Schule*, Vol. 3, p. 26. English: Czerny: *Piano Forte School*, Vol. 3, pp. 33f.

The three last quavers in the 4th bar must be executed with somewhat more fire, (and therefore almost *accelerando*), which is again relinquished in the last three quavers of the 5th bar.”²⁰

Czerny makes a similar observation about the first movement of Beethoven’s Sonata in f minor Op. 2 No. 1 (Figure 7): “From the 4th bar of this movement a slight *ritardando* and *crescendo* commences, which is increased to the pause.” However, there is no performance term in the score suggesting a *ritardando* except the *diminuendo* hairpin.

For the second movement of Beethoven’s Sonata in D major Op. 10 No. 3, Czerny seems to suggest *accelerando* for the passages marked with *ffp*, *sf*, *ff* and the *diminuendo* hairpin without further details (Figure 8a–8c), as he comments:



FIGURE 7 Beethoven: Piano Sonata in f minor Op. 2 No. 1/1, bars 5–8



FIGURES 8A–C Beethoven: Piano Sonata in D major Op. 10 No. 3/11, bar 23, 27, and 28

20 “Die letzten 3 Achteln des 2^{ten} Takts sind ein klein wenig, kaum merkbar, zu *ritardieren*, da der nachfolgende 3^{te} Takt wieder eine Wiederholung des ersten Takts, (also des Hauptgedankens) wiewohl auf einer andern Stufe, ist. [...] Die letzten 3 Achteln des 4^{ten} Takts werden mit etwas mehr Wärme, (folglich beinahe *accelerando*) vorgetragen, welche erst in den 3 letzten Achteln des 5^{ten} Takts wieder abnimmt.” Czerny: *Pianoforte-Schule*, Vol. 3, pp. 27. English: Czerny: *Piano Forte School*, Vol. 3, pp. 35.

“In this *Largo* the effect must be also increased by a well directed *ritardando* and *accelerando*. Thus, for example, the second half of the 23rd bar, should be played a little quicker, as well as the second half of the 27th, and the whole of the 28th bar.”²¹

Some of the most distinguished scholar-performers – Alfred Brendel, Clive Brown, Kenneth Drake, William Newman, and Sandra Rosenblum – share the view that Schindler’s commentaries on proper performance style for Beethoven’s piano works are, to a certain extent, convincing and relevant to Beethoven’s musical intentions, despite his reputation for his proven forgeries in Beethoven’s conversation books.²² For the case of the *Largo* movement from the Sonata Op. 10 No. 3, Schindler even acknowledged Czerny’s aforementioned comments as “particularly to be commended”, and he further elaborated:

“Beethoven himself said that the pace of this rich movement must be changed fully ten times, though only so as to be perceptible to the most sensitive ear. The principal theme is always to be repeated in the tempo of its first statement; all the rest is subject to variation in the tempo, each phrase according to its own meaning.”²³

Barry Cooper and Jonathan Del Mar, the editors of Beethoven piano sonatas for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music and Bärenreiter-Verlag, respectively, tell us that Beethoven’s hairpin notation is a constant problem in his thirty-two piano sonatas in that the exact peaks of the *crescendo* hairpins are often placed ambiguously and erratically, as illustrated in the two examples from the second movement of Op. 10 No. 3 (Figures 9a/b).²⁴ Del Mar’s commendable efforts to illuminate Beethoven’s idiosyncratic hairpins deserve mention here: his hairpins are not intended as “an obstructive bumping of any one note” but rather a “subtle and expressive swelling” which may affect the

- 21 “Vom 4^{ten} Takte dieses Satzes fangt ein kleines *Ritardando* und *crescendo* an, welches bis zur Haltung zunimmt.” – “In diesem *Largo* muss auch ein wohlberechnetes *ritardando* und *accelerando* die Wirkung vergrößern. So z. B. ist die zweite Hälfte des 23^{sten} Takts etwas schneller zu spielen. Eben so die zweite Hälfte des 27^{sten} und der ganze 28^{ste} Takt.” Czerny: *Die Kunst des Vortrags*, pp. 35 and 44. English: Czerny: *The Art of Playing*, pp. 33 and 42.
- 22 See Brendel: *Musical Characters in Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas*, in: id: *On Music*, pp. 66–78, here pp. 67 and 72; Brown: *Classical & Romantic Performing Practice*, pp. 386 f.; Drake: *The Sonatas of Beethoven*, pp. 22–24; Newman: *Beethoven on Beethoven*, pp. 22–24; and Rosenblum: *Performance Practices in Classic Piano Music*, pp. 98 f.
- 23 “[...] macht Czerny ganz besonders zu empfehlende Anmerkungen. [...] Nach Beethoven ist ein nahezu zehnmaliger Wechsel mit der Bewegung zur Darstellung dieses inhaltreichen Satzes erforderlich, meist nur dem feinen Ohr merkbar. Das Haupt-Motiv behält seine erste Bewegung bei der Wiederkehr, alle andern unterliegen der Veränderung und sind unter einander so vermittelt, wie es von deren Sinn geboten wird.” Schindler: *Biographie von Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)*, Vol. 2, p. 232. English: Schindler: *Beethoven as I Knew Him*, p. 421.
- 24 See *Beethoven. The 35 Piano Sonatas*, ed. by Barry Cooper, Norfolk 2007, Vol. 1, p. 45.



FIGURES 9A&B Beethoven: Piano Sonata in D major Op. 10 No. 3/II, bars 4–6, and 84–86

expression and even timing.²⁵ Del Mar’s observation about the hairpins is certainly corroborated by the remarks of Czerny and Schindler mentioned above.

The notion of hairpins as ‘notated’ rubato could possibly be applied to Beethoven’s idiosyncratic hairpins. In fact, such a notion is associated with the performance practice of the nineteenth century; possibly the earliest evidence of it is found in written instructions by Fanny Hensel Mendelssohn for her unpublished piano piece in f minor (1826): “This piece must be performed with many changes in tempo, but always gently, without jerking. The signs < > stand for *accelerando* and *ritardando*.”²⁶

In his influential *Violinschule* (1832), Louis Spohr introduced the term “rubato” and suggested lingering on a single note or a few notes as illustrated in Figure 10a/b.

“[T]he second half of the 28th and 30th bar [Figure 10a] is to be so played, that the first notes obtain a little longer duration than their value warrants, and the loss of time may be regained by a quicker playing of the following note. (This manner of delivery is termed *rubato*.) This increasing of time must be gradual, and harmonize with the decreasing of power.”

“On the F# [...] retard a little and regain [the loss of time] on the five following notes [through acceleration].”²⁷ (Figure 10b)

25 Beethoven. *Complete Sonatas for Pianoforte. Critical Commentary*, ed. by Jonathan Del Mar, Kassel 2019, pp. 47 and 74.

26 R. Larry Todd: *Fanny Hensel. The Other Mendelssohn*, New York 2010, p. 102.

27 “Die zweite Hälfte des 28^{sten} und 30^{sten} Taktes trage man so vor, dass den ersten Noten etwas längere Dauer, als ihr Werth verlangt, gegeben, und der Zeitverlust durch schnelleres Abspielen der folgenden wieder beygebracht wird. (Diese Vortragsweise nennt man *tempo rubato*.) Dieses Schnellerwerden muss aber allmählig geschehen und mit dem Abnehmen der Stärke harmoniren.” – “Bey dem fis [...] verweile

The image displays two musical staves. The upper staff features a complex, rapid rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The lower staff consists of a few notes with a hairpin marking. Below the upper staff, there are several hairpin markings: a crescendo hairpin followed by a diminuendo hairpin, and another crescendo hairpin. The lower staff also has a hairpin marking.

FIGURES 10A&B Pierre Rode: Violin Concerto No. 7
in a minor Op. 9/1, bars 28–30, and Op. 9/III, bar 41,
in: Spohr: *Grand Violin School*, p. 183 and 195

There are no expressive markings in the musical illustrations that accompany Spohr's written instructions about rubato except the hairpins, which implies a connection between the hairpins and expressive lingering.

Hugo Riemann, one of the most significant German musicologists of the nineteenth century, coined the term 'agogic' to refer to a slight modification in rhythm and tempo. Riemann codified hairpins as agogic inflections: "The < > is to be understood more as agogic: < increasing shortening of the values, > decreasing stress."²⁸ In other words, the crescendo hairpin implies an intensification through a motion of pressing forward and urging whereas the diminuendo hairpin implies a decline through a motion of holding back and lingering.

There is substantial evidence that hairpins should not be solely interpreted as dynamic changes but as indications of tempo flexibility as well. In correspondence with Clara Schumann in May 1893, Brahms discussed the Intermezzo in b minor Op. 119 No. 1 and suggested it "to be played very slowly' [...]. Every bar and every note must sound like a ritard., as though melancholy would be drawn in from each, with sensual pleasure from these dissonances!"²⁹ It is evident that these hairpins are not only intended as dynamic changes but also as agogic lingering (Figure 11).

man etwas und spiele dann die folgenden fünf Noten um so schneller." Louis Spohr: *Violinschule*, Vienna [1832], pp. 199 and 211. English: Louis Spohr: *Grand Violin School*, trans. by C. Rudolphus, London [1833], pp. 183 and 195.

- 28 "[D]as < > ist mehr agogisch als dynamisch zu verstehen: < zunehmende Verkürzung der Werthe, > abnehmende Dehnung". Hugo Riemann: *Zur Klärung der Phrasierungsfrage. Fortsetzung*, in: *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* 25 (1894), pp. 285f., here p. 286. English: Clive Brown/Neal Peres Da Costa/Kate Bennett Wadsworth: *Performing Practices in Johannes Brahms' Chamber Music*, Kassel 2015, p. 6. See also David Hyun-Su Kim: *The Brahmsian Hairpin*, in: *19th-Century Music* 36 (2012), pp. 46–57, here p. 46.
- 29 "[...] 'sehr langsam spielen' ist nicht genug gesagt. Jeder Takt und jede Note muß wie ritard. klingen,

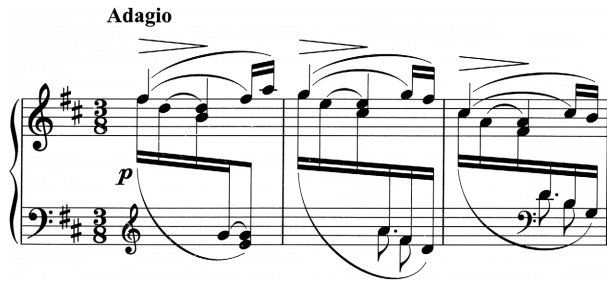


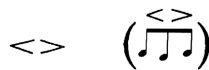
FIGURE 11 Brahms: Intermezzo in b minor Op. 119 No. 1, bars 1–3 (Bärenreiter)

Of particular interest are Heinrich Schenker's remarks on music performance in his 1911 unfinished draft of *Die Kunst des Vortrags* (*The Art of Performance*), drawing on a considerable number of examples from Beethoven's compositions and having much in common with Czerny's pedagogical guidance in his *Pianoforte-Schule*. It is worth mentioning that Schenker's groundbreaking edition of the complete Beethoven piano sonatas (Universal Edition, 1921–1923) is reputed to be the first publication faithful to the original sources: the autograph manuscripts and first editions. In the chapter "Dynamics", Schenker categorises the hairpins as rhetorical accents that signify "tension and relaxation" in volume, colour and timing, similar to manners of speech. Schenker defines the hairpins < > as a lingering and a subtle, expressive emphasis on such tones as the first note of a motive, neighbour tone, accented passing note and suspension,³⁰ as illustrated in Figure 12:

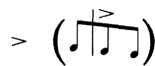
"It is noteworthy, however, that < > in Beethoven always means a momentary halting, not an actual < > in a dynamic sense.

Certain laws are generally valid. In principle the following are to be emphasized:"

1. the head-tone of a motive >
2. a neighboring note



3. an accented passing note



4. a suspension

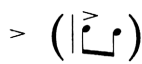


FIGURE 12 The definition and role of hairpins, in: Schenker: *The Art of Performance*, p. 47

als ob man Melancholie aus jeder einzelnen saugen wolle, mit Wollust und Behagen aus besagten Dissonanzen!" Clara Schumann/Johannes Brahms: *Briefe aus den Jahren 1853–1896*, ed. by Berthold Litzmann, Leipzig 1927, Vol. 2, p. 512 f. English: Imogen Fellinger: Preface, in: *Johannes Brahms. Klavierstücke Op. 119*, ed. by Imogen Fellinger, Wien 1974, p. III.

³⁰ Heinrich Schenker: *The Art of Performance*, ed. by Heribert Esser and trans. by Irene Schreier Scott, New York 2000, p. 47.

Consider the following musical example from the first movement of Beethoven's Sonata in E \flat major Op. 81a, *Les Adieux*: Czerny's recommendation of *ritardando* for the last three measures of the Adagio introduction is unnotated in the score.³¹ However, based on Schenker's explanation, the hairpins can be interpreted as slight hesitation and delay of the downbeat, conforming to Czerny's recommendation (Figure 13). Schenker's suggestion that non-chord tones can be expressively emphasised through lingering without exaggerating dynamic changes is illustrated in Beethoven's Bagatelle in G major Op. 126 No. 1 (Figure 14).

FIGURE 13 Beethoven:
Piano Sonata *Les Adieux* in
E \flat major Op. 81a/1, bars 14–16

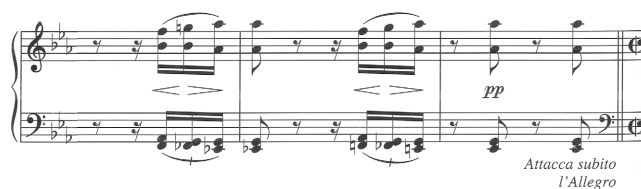


FIGURE 14 Beethoven:
Bagatelle in G major Op. 126
No. 1, bars 21–25 (Wiener
Urtext, ed. Alfred Brendel)



In view of the evidence of historical precedents espousing the connotation of hairpins as 'notated' rubato, some scholar-performers such as Eric Heidsieck, Seymour Bernstein, Roberto Poli, David Kim and the author have provided interpretative possibilities for hairpins mostly for the nineteenth-century piano works by Chopin and Brahms.³² For the case of Beethoven's hairpins, a brief discussion of interpretative possibilities is illustrated in the selected examples from Beethoven's piano works below.

1) *Crescendo* hairpin Beethoven most commonly uses the term *cresc.* for purely dynamic intentions. However, there are some instances where Beethoven notates *cresc.* and a *crescendo* hairpin together in close proximity: a 'redundant' notation which could signify beyond a mere gradual increase in volume. Thus, the 'redundant' notation of *cresc.* and a

31 Czerny: *Die Kunst des Vortrags*, p. 63; Czerny: *The Art of Playing*, p. 61.

32 See Eric Heidsieck: *Dynamics or Motion? An Interpretation of Some Musical Signs in Romantic Piano Music*, in: *Piano Quarterly* 35/140 (1987), pp. 56–58; Seymour Bernstein: *Chopin. Interpreting His Notational Symbols*, Milwaukee 2005; Roberto Poli: *The Secret Life of Musical Notation. Defying Interpretive Traditions*, Milwaukee 2010; Kim: *The Brahmsian Hairpin, and Yew Choong Cheong: Decoding Idiosyncratic Hairpins. Dynamic Changes or "Notated" Rubato?*, in: *Mahidol Music Journal* 2 (2019), pp. 4–20, <https://soo4.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/mmj/article/view/189241/132573> (last consulted 15 September 2022).

crescendo hairpin could suggest a slight acceleration, generating a forward motion (Figure 15).



FIGURE 15 Beethoven: Diabelli Variations Op. 120, Theme, bars 20–24 (Wiener Urtext, ed. Erwin Ratz)

2) Diminuendo hairpin There are a few interpretative possibilities for the diminuendo hairpin: a slight delay of the note, a lingering on the note, or a retardation, usually in slow and lyrical passages, as illustrated in Figures 16a–c:



FIGURE 16A Beethoven: Piano Sonata in E \flat major Les Adieux Op. 81a/11, bar 5



FIGURE 16B Beethoven: Fantasia in g minor Op. 77, bars 158–160 (Wiener Urtext, ed. Alfred Brendel)

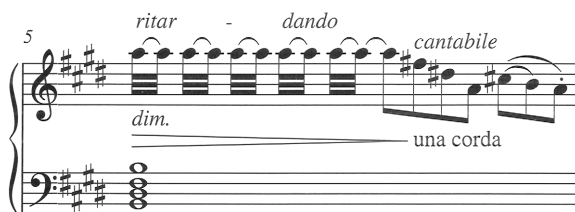


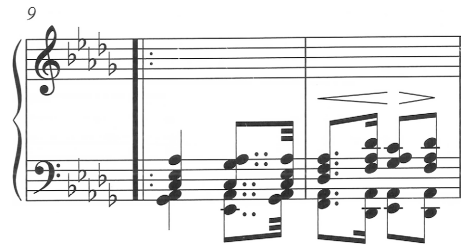
FIGURE 16C Beethoven: Piano Sonata in A \flat major Op. 110/111, bar 5

3) $\leftarrow \rightarrow$ hairpin A pair of crescendo and diminuendo hairpins (or 'diamond-shaped' hairpin) generally suggests rubato playing with varying degrees of *accelerando* and *ritardando* depending on the musical context of the passage. In Figure 17a the hairpins



FIGURE 17A Beethoven: Piano Sonata
in f minor Op. 2 No. 1/1, bars 27–30

FIGURE 17B Beethoven: Piano Sonata
in f minor Op. 57/11, bars 9–10



may suggest a slight acceleration without excessive accents that may disrupt the melodic flow. In Figure 17b, on the other hand, the hairpin seems to imply a slight stretching of time over the chords.

Sforzando Scholarly literature on the subject of accentuation is extensive; especially the studies by Brown and Rosenblum provide detailed codification of accents based on their roles in the context of the music. Based on Rosenblum’s detailed classification, the accent marks commonly found in Beethoven’s piano works – *fp*, *sf*, *sfp* and *rinf.* (or *rinforzando*) – are considered as ‘qualitative’ accents which call for varying degrees of emphasis in volume (i. e., dynamics) and varying degrees of note values (i. e., rhythms) according to the context of the music. The concept of ‘qualitative’ accents is possibly related to declamatory style in which each syllable or word is given a different emphasis. C. P. E. Bach stated in his *Essay* that it would be a mistake for an orator “to place an impressive accent on every word, [as] everything would be alike and consequently unclear”. Furthermore, Bach suggested lengthening certain notes and rests as a means of evoking declamatory style.³³

Since the *sf* is the most common accent mark in Beethoven’s piano music, various musical significations of *sf* are illustrated below.

33 “Widrigenfals würde ich denselben Fehler begehen, in den ein Redner fällt, welcher auf jedes Wort einen nachdrücklichen Accent legen wollte; alles würde einerley und folglich undeutlich werden.” Bach: *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen. Erster Theil*, pp. 59, 129. English: Bach: *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, pp. 81, 160–162.

1) Metrical accents and contrametrical accents The fundamental role of *sf* is twofold: used as a metrical accent, it emphasises the strong beats according to the organisation of pulse in a measure; used as a contrametrical accent, it emphasises syncopations and hemiola effects that contradict the metrical organisation. In Figure 18a, the *sf* first creates metrical accents on all four beats in the quadruple metre, followed by syncopated accents on the weak beats, serving in climactic projection and rhythmic drive. In Figure 18b, the *sf* accents create a hemiola effect against the triple metre.

FIGURE 18A Beethoven:
Piano Sonata in c minor
Op. 111/1, bars 145–147

FIGURE 18B Beethoven: Diabelli Variations,
Variation v, bars 29–31 (Wiener Urtext,
ed. Erwin Ratz)

2) Agogic accents The agogic, or expressive, accent involves lingering on a note for a variable length of time (Figures 19a/b).

FIGURE 19A Beethoven: Piano Sonata
in E major Op. 109/111, bar 14

FIGURE 19B Beethoven: Piano
Sonata in E major Les Adieux
Op. 81a/11, bars 11f.

3) ‘Foreshortening’ accents The term ‘foreshortening’ is borrowed from Alfred Brendel, who defines it as a compositional process that divides melodic and harmonic phrases into progressively smaller units, creating a gradual increase in tension.³⁴ ‘Foreshortening’ accents are usually formed when two or more *sf* are notated one after another. ‘Foreshortening’ accents almost always involve acceleration, especially in lively movements. There is concrete evidence of ‘foreshortening’ accents in the last movement of Beethoven’s Sonata in C major Op. 2 No. 3, where Czerny instructs: “the notes marked *sf* must follow each other quickly and forcibly.”³⁵ (Figures 20a–c)



FIGURE 20A Beethoven: Piano Sonata
in C major Op. 2 No. 3/IV, bars 119–122

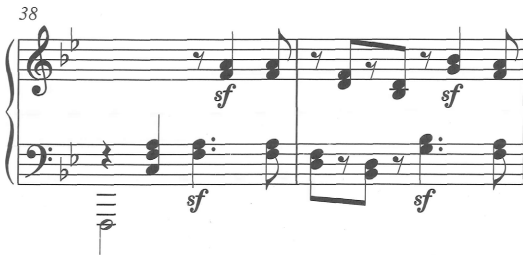


FIGURE 20B Beethoven: Piano Sonata
in B \flat major Op. 22/1, bars 38 f.



FIGURE 20C Beethoven: Piano Sonata
in D major Op. 28/1, bars 219 f.

34 Brendel: *Form and Psychology in Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas*, in: id.: *On Music*, pp. 42–54, here pp. 46 f.

35 “[...] müssen die *sf* rasch und kräftig nach einander folgen.” Czerny: *Die Kunst des Vortrags*, p. 39. English: Czerny: *The Art of Playing*, p. 37.

Conclusion Based on the collective evidence of the historical sources and selected musical examples discussed above, it is evident that Beethoven's idiosyncratic dynamics and accents are descriptive notation that can never be realised precisely but rather encompasses a wider range of expressive possibilities. Czerny claimed,

“his [Beethoven's] performance depended on his constantly varying frame of mind, and even if it were possible exactly to describe his style of playing, it would not always serve us as a model, (in regard to the present otherwise cultivated purity and clearness in difficulties); and even the mental conception acquires a different value through the altered taste of the time, and must occasionally be expressed by other means, than were then demanded.”³⁶

Indeed, a historically informed interpretation of Beethoven's notational idiosyncrasies – through tireless questioning and exploration of the historical sources and keyboard instruments of Beethoven's lifetime – constitutes a voyage of discovery which reveals a constant re-invention of sound and timbral effects.

36 “Indessen hing er dabei von seinen stets wechselnden Launen ab, und wenn es auch möglich wäre, seine Spielweise ganz genau wiederzugeben, so könnte sie, (in Bezug auf die jetzt ganz anders ausgebildete Reinheit und Deutlichkeit bei Schwierigkeiten) uns nicht immer als Muster dienen; und selbst die geistige Auffassung erhält durch den veränderten Zeitgeschmack eine and're Geltung, und muss bisweilen durch and're Mittel ausgedrückt werden, als damals erforderlich waren.” Czerny: *Die Kunst des Vortrags*, p. 34. English: Czerny: *The Art of Playing*, p. 32.

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