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Beethoven's Piano Quartets WoO 36. Conservatism and Evolution[1]

The birth of the piano quartet as a chamber music formation is usually considered to be in 1785, when the Viennese publisher Hoffmeister commissioned Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to compose three quartets for piano, violin, viola and cello.[2] Although only one of the three works was completed and published, the commission bestowed upon history the masterpiece in g minor K. 478. Apart from a few contemporary quartets by Felice Giardini, Georg Simon Löhlein and Georg Joseph Vogler,[3] the year 1785 marks an important moment in the history of this chamber music formation for another reason: the young Beethoven wrote his Piano Quartets WoO 36. Even if quite distinct from K. 478, these quartets are profoundly indebted to other Mozartian models and, as has become apparent from newly uncovered sources, are in fact of key importance to Beethoven's work.

Musical life in Bonn and the legend of Mozart Beethoven, not yet fifteen, was in the midst of his musical development when he composed these quartets. He immediately made the decision not to publish them; in fact, they were released by Artaria only after Beethoven's death in November 1828.[4] For no apparent reason, the original sequence of the quartets in the manuscript (No. 1, C major; No. 2, E♭ major; and No. 3, D major) was changed by the publisher: first No. 2 in E♭ major, second No. 1 in C major and third, as in the original, No. 3 in D major. A plausible explanation behind this choice (which will be fully illustrated at the end of the following paragraph) could realistically concern the context of Beethoven's formative years and, above all, the legend of Mozart.

1 Translation of the original Italian version of this recently published paper: Leonardo Miucci: I Quartetti WoO 36 di L. van Beethoven – tra conservazione ed evoluzione, in: *Codice 602* 10 (2020), pp. 17–37.

2 The date on the autograph reads 16 October 1785; the Quartet was included in the second of three volumes dedicated to the *Klavier*; its publication was announced in the *Wiener Zeitung* No. 63 (6 August 1785), and it was published in December of the same year (see Alexander Weinmann: *Die Wiener Verlagswerke von Franz Anton Hoffmeister*, Vienna 1964, p. 27). The Quartet K. 478 was to be the first part of a commission of three works; however, this project was abandoned after the publication of K. 478, which was considered too complex by the contemporary Viennese public.

3 For a complete description of the historical context, see the critical introduction of Ludwig van Beethoven: *Drei Quartette für Klavier, Violine, Viola und Violoncello WoO 36*, ed. by Leonardo Miucci, Kassel 2020, p. III.

4 On Artaria, Beethoven's legacy and the related posthumous editions see Douglas Johnson: The Artaria Collection of Beethoven Manuscripts. A New Source, in: *Beethoven Studies* 1 (1973), pp. 174–236.

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Unfortunately, the exact circumstances of the composition of WoO 36 remain unclear. What is certain is that they belong to young Beethoven's formative years in Bonn, when he began lessons at the keyboard with Christian Gottlob Neefe and on the violin with Franz Anton Ries. That Beethoven chose to write a set of three compositions in a genre that was not yet common suggests that these quartets were not conceived simply as an exercise in composition or style, though one of his tutors likely provided some supervision. Their origins should rather be sought in the musical life in Bonn at that time and, in particular, the contribution of the family of the imperial official Gottfried Mastiaux.

Although Mastiaux remains relatively unknown to musicologists, he deserves particular attention given his intense relationship with Beethoven. An active contributor to the musical life of the city, Mastiaux organised one of the most prestigious academy seasons, which attracted the most accomplished musicians passing through Bonn and where Beethoven also often performed. Moreover, his daughter Amalie – like Beethoven, born in 1770 – took piano lessons from the young composer with a certain regularity.[5] The Mastiaux household offered Beethoven the ideal setting to demonstrate his precocious talent in composing for piano quartet: Amalie's three brothers played the violin, viola and cello.[6]

Both Mastiaux and the Archbishop-Elector Maximilian Franz (patron to Beethoven and successor to Maximilian, dedicatee of the *Kurfürstensonaten* WoO 47) were passionate supporters of the cult of Haydn and Mozart, and, in line with Neefe's and Ries's teaching approach, they played a key role in exposing Beethoven to the repertoire of these great composers. With this objective in mind, the Archbishop-Elector financed Beethoven's trip to Vienna in 1787 in the hope that he could study with Mozart – a hope that seems not to have been realised.[7] The atmosphere breathed in these circles, in which Beethoven took his first steps, is excellently summed up in the well-known article published in 1783 in *Magazin der Musik*, where Neefe predicts a rosy future for the young composer "who will surely become a second Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart if he continues to progress as he has done so far".[8] Almost ten years later, Beethoven's first formative period concluded

5 Paul Kaufmann: *Aus den Tagen des Kölner Kurstaats. Nachträge zur Kaufmann-von Pelzerschen Familiengeschichte*, Bonn 1904, p. 49. For musical life in Bonn and the role of the Mastiaux family, see *Beethoven. Die Bonner Jahre*, ed. by Norbert Schloßmacher, Köln 2020.

6 Paul Kaufmann: *Aus rheinischen Jugendtagen*, Berlin 1919, p. 23.

7 Dieter Haberl: Beethovens erste Reise nach Wien. Die Datierung seiner Schülerreise zu W. A. Mozart, in: *Neues Musikwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch* 14 (2006), pp. 215–255.

8 "Er würde gewiß ein zweyter Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart werden, wenn er so fortschritte, wie er angefangen." [Christian Gottlob Neefe]: Nachricht von der churfürstlich-cöllnischen Hofcapelle zu Bonn und andern Tonkünstlern daselbst, in: *Magazin der Musik* 1 (1783), pp. 377–396, here p. 395. All translations are mine, unless otherwise stated.

with his definitive departure for the Austrian capital in 1792. On this occasion, Beethoven's friend and patron Count Ferdinand von Waldstein – prominent and influential in the musical scenes both in Bonn and later in Vienna – expresses the same sentiment:

> "Dear Beethoven!
> You are now going to Vienna in fulfillment of your long-frustrated wishes. Mozart's genius still mourns and is weeping over the death of its pupil. In the inexhaustible Haydn, it has found refuge but no occupation; through him it wishes to form a union with another. Through uninterrupted diligence you shall receive *Mozart's spirit from Haydn's hands.*"[9]

Neefe's article clearly articulated important expectations for the young Beethoven, mapping out the beginning of a compositional development which would inevitably be influenced – at least as far as style is concerned – by the focal centre of the German keyboard tradition at that time: Mozart.

In fact, as amply noted in musicological studies,[10] in his first fifteen years Beethoven composed works – of what are very often authentic masterpieces – clearly based on the Mozartian example. These include, among others, the Piano Concerto WoO 4 (1784), the Piano Sonatas WoO 47 (1783), the Trio WoO 37 (1786); and among the works of the first Viennese period: the Variations WoO 40 (1793), WoO 28 (1795), WoO 46 (1801) and the Quintet for Piano and Winds Op. 16 (1796/97).

Apart from the structural, motivic and stylistic approach, which were clearly borrowed from Mozart's violin sonatas, what is striking about the WoO 36 piano quartets is the unusual instrumentation. As already mentioned, in 1785 Beethoven could not have been aware of Mozart's Quartet K. 478, nor was there an important earlier tradition for this chamber music formation. There are further details suggesting that the quartets were composed for the occasion of a private performance, perhaps with his peers from the Mastiaux family. Firstly, the autograph is unusually clear and intelligible. Rarely can such clear and well-defined handwriting be found in Beethoven's autograph scores, even those from his youth, but in this case, it is even possible to discern a graphic distinction between

9 "Lieber Beethoven! Sie reisen itzt nach Wien zur Erfüllung ihrer so lange bestrittenen Wünsche. Mozart's Genius trauert noch und beweinet den Tod seines Zöglinges. Bey dem unerschöpflichen Hayden fand er Zuflucht, aber keine Beschäftigung; durch ihn wünscht er noch einmal mit jemandem vereinigt zu werden. Durch ununterbrochenen Fleiß erhalten Sie: *Mozart's Geist aus Haydens Händen*". Album leaf by Count Ferdinand Ernst von Waldstein, 29 October 1792 (Beethoven-Haus Bonn, B 130/b). English: *Letters to Beethoven & Other Correspondence*, Vol. 1, ed. by Theodore Albrecht, Nebraska 1996, p. 22.

10 Among the numerous contributions on this subject, a recent bibliography is to be found cited in the paragraph "This passage has been stolen from Mozart" (2. Music for the Bonn Years), in Lewis Lockwood: *Beethoven. The Music and the Life*, New York 2003, pp. 55–61.

the staccato marks notated by dots or strokes, an almost unique example in the composer's hand.[11]

Secondly, the manuscript contains an unusually large number of pasted slips: in all, there are as many as fifty-four. These alterations to the manuscript can be divided into three categories: a) to correct evident mistakes or imperfections, b) to make the musical handwriting clearer, and lastly, c) to improve the composition itself. While the first two cases are fairly common in Beethoven's compositional process, the frequent occurrence of the third type is rare in his output and could plausibly be a reaction to the results of a performance or some other kind of feedback on the original version (most likely auditory).

This is clearly exemplified in Variation VI of the Quartet WoO 36 No. 2 (Figures 1 and 2). The original accompaniment in thirds in the violin and viola parts was radically different, written in a syncopated rhythm that failed to enhance the flow of the metrical accentuation as compared to the later version written on the pasted slip.

FIGURES 1&2 Beethoven: Piano Quartet WoO 36 No. 2, *Cantabile*, Var. VI, bars 1–4 and 9–13, violin and viola

There is additional evidence that this manuscript could have been thoroughly revised, perhaps following a rehearsal or concert or under the guidance of one of Beethoven's teachers. The *incipit* (first theme) in the opening Allegro of the third quartet is a representative example: in his creative process, Beethoven seems to have entirely re-elaborated

11 The autograph, held in the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, is available at the following URL: https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht/?PPN=PPN746161255 (last consulted 22 June 2021). For this specific reference, see the last paragraph of this contribution.

ideas that he had already previously clearly defined, even the most characteristic and structural of his motivic lines. The identity of the first theme is, in fact, different from the final version and passes through two principal stages (see Figure 3 for the first version of the opening).

Figure 3 Beethoven: Piano Quartet WoO 36 No. 3, fol. 61r(b) – *Allegro moderato*, bars 1–13

Despite the use of the same dotted figuration, from a rhetorical point of view, the thematic structure of the first version differs conspicuously from the final version. The latter is, in fact, well-balanced in the first four bars, following a typical scheme of the Classical period: an arrangement of musical material in the proportions 1 + 1 + 2, where the first element (bar 1) is repeated (bar 2) and subsequently developed towards an expanded concept with

a different musical pronunciation (bars 3/4). In the first version (Figure 3), this proportional rhetorical structure, both in the initial utterance of the piano (bars 1–4) and in the repetition by the strings (bars 6–9), is absent in favour of a two-part division of the musical phrase (bars 1/2, 3/4). Thus, the most expressive point occurs not between the third and fourth bars but is brought forward to the end of second measure (emphasised by the composer's slur), and so the flow of the musical discourse is less effective.

The initial version (Figure 3) is present both in the exposition at folio 61r(b) – under a page-long pasted slip – and in the recapitulation at folio 67r (Figure 4), which Beethoven also later changed to the new configuration of the first theme, again using a pasted slip. This seems to indicate that the WoO 36 manuscript was a fair copy of the three quartets

FIGURE 4 Beethoven: Piano Quartet WoO 36 No. 3, fol. 67v(b) – *Allegro moderato*, bars 94–109

that, nevertheless, was thoroughly revised by the young composer, perhaps at the last minute.

A possible revision following a performance or a second opinion – presumably from one of his tutors – is also suggested by the few markings on the manuscript that are not in Beethoven's hand but are, nevertheless, aimed at amending some of the most important features of the composition, such as the dynamic profile of the *incipit* of the first theme of the C major Quartet (WoO 36 No. 1). Beethoven frequently used this rhythmic/rhetorical configuration in those years: pedalling over a rigorously rhythmical cadencing of the left-hand chords and a right-hand line presenting an initial short, non-accented impulse followed by a longer note on the weak beat to be played with particular emphasis. Examples can be found both in WoO 36 No.1 (Figure 5) and in the Piano Sonata WoO 47 No. 1 of the same period, composed in 1783 (Figure 6).

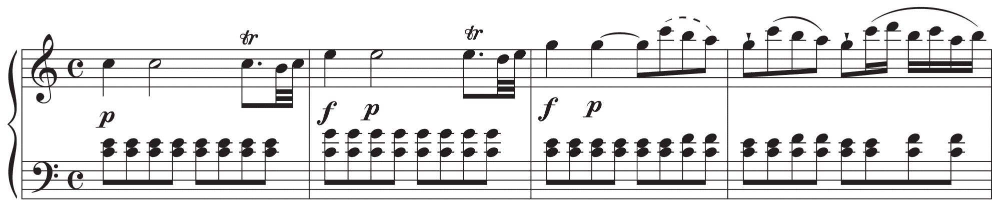


Figure 5 Beethoven: Piano Quartet WoO 36 No. 1, *Allegro vivace*, bars 1–4

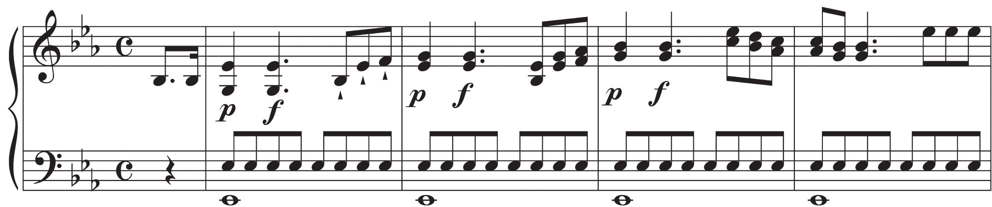


Figure 6 Beethoven: Piano Sonata WoO 47 No. 1, *Allegro cantabile*, bars 1–4

Figure 6 shows dynamic marks that underline the general sense of the metric scheme discussed above, that is, the accentuation of long notes on the weak beat. Conversely, Figure 5 shows a dynamic pattern that highlights the accentuation of the first beat of the bar, a sort of exception to the general rule in this type of configuration, which Beethoven will later reconsider. Traces of this re-elaboration are to be found in the manuscript.

Although the dynamic marks ***f*** and ***p*** in bars 2/3 in the piano part at folio 1v are not identifiable as being in the composer's hand (even if written in the same ink), the ***p*** placed on the first beat in the first measure does seem to correspond to Beethoven's own writing. It has not been possible to establish whether or not this particular stylistic choice was

Beethoven's own.[12] The identity of the author of these few marks that are not in Beethoven's hand has not yet been established, although it has been determined that this second script belongs neither to Neefe nor Ries. Hence, it cannot be established with certainty whether the reference to the Mozart violin sonatas was a didactic pretext of one of his tutors, an input received on a particular occasion from his musical life in Bonn or a deliberate initiative of the young composer himself.

The Sonatas for Violin and Piano K. 296, 379, 380 Taking into consideration this preliminary context, it comes as no surprise that the three quartets show a close affinity with the guiding pianistic style of the time: Mozart's style, and in particular that of the three Sonatas for Violin and Piano K. 296, 379 and 380 (1781). Although the similarities between the first quartet (in C major) and the Sonata K. 296, and between the third quartet (in D major) and the Sonata K. 380 are limited to some thematic ideas and specific keyboard figurations, the second quartet (in E♭ major) seems to be modelled in its entirety on the Sonata K. 379. In addition to evident thematic references and perfectly corresponding keyboard figurations, the Quartet WoO 36 No. 2 also shows important similarities on a structural level. Both works open with a slow Adagio introduction, followed by an Allegro in sonata form of agitated temperament in a minor key; in both works, the last movement comprises a theme and variations with the same structure coming to a close with a similar final coda (a theme in Allegretto). In addition to the macrostructure, the Quartet WoO 36 No. 2 and the Sonata K. 379 also share other significant similarities.

In the introductory Adagios, this becomes immediately apparent in the first few bars. Both these openings depict the same atmosphere and the same character through a similar series of chords and an identical melody, which unfolds in an expressive moment in the appoggiatura of bar 2, underlined with slurs by both composers (see Figures 7 and 8).

One of the many similarities is that both these introductory movements proceed directly into the ensuing Allegro without a resolution or break (the phrase suspended on a paused dominant). While the same spirit and metre are present in both second movements, a formal peculiarity suggests an unequivocal link between the two. Despite his youth, Beethoven had already proved his ability to shape the sonata form, showing glimpses of one of his stylistic hallmarks: the elaborate central development sections, as in the above-mentioned *Kurfürstensonaten* WoO 47 No. 1/I and No. 3/I. Conversely, the typology and dimensions of the development of WoO 36 is striking for its transitory character and its suspended effect achieved in only 25 bars out of a total of 196. In such case, it could be

12 The only repetition of this fragment in the entire movement (in bars 74–76) does not, unfortunately, throw light on any particular aesthetic ideal; it is simply marked ***f***.

Figure 7 Mozart: Sonata for Violin and Piano K. 379, *Adagio*, bars 1–3

Figure 8 Beethoven: Piano Quartet WoO 36 No. 2, *Adagio assai*, bars 1–3

affirmed that the development is almost completely absent, substituted by a short passage (transition) leading to the recapitulation. This procedure is also clearly borrowed from the Allegro of K. 379; notated with similar musical figuration and rhythmic patterns, it lasts a mere 12 bars (out of a total of 142).

Likewise, the last movement shows much affinity with K. 379, particularly regarding the structure itself and the pianistic and thematic figures used within this structure. This condition is not as evident in the theme (which, however, does present the same metre and a similar character) but – above all – in the variations. In the first variation, Beethoven borrows slavishly from Mozart's design; both unfold with figurations of broken chords, including chromatic appoggiaturas in the right hand (see Figures 9 and 10). In both cases, the violin part in the second variation adopts the same technique of diminution by exploiting the figuration in thirds. The Adagio variation – the third in Beethoven's composition and the fifth in Mozart's – is the only one to differ, not so much in its

figuration but in its character: in WoO 36, the dramatic tones are absent (even if in K. 379 they are only hinted at), and the dominant atmosphere is a serene, joyful cantabile. Beethoven's fourth variation returns to the original theme (with its original tempo, values and initial character) in order to further highlight the evident rhetorical contrast with the fifth variation – the only one in a minor key. This again is clearly modelled on the minor-key variation, the fourth, in K. 379. Beethoven, in this case, hardly attempts to hide the reference to Mozart's text: the piano texture, with its series of arpeggios, is identical – or, more precisely, even more virtuosic due to the augmented figuration (from triplets to sixty-fourth notes) – a melody built on broken chords in a dotted rhythm.

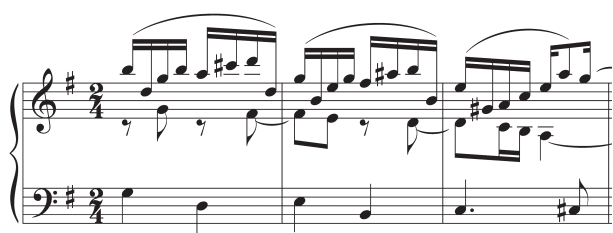


FIGURE 9 Mozart: Sonata for Violin and Piano K. 379, Var. 1, bars 1–3

FIGURE 10 Beethoven: Piano Quartet WoO 36 No. 2, Var. 1, bars 1–3

An identical context emerges in the following variation, which is brilliant in character and returns to the major key; once again, Beethoven uses a pianistic figuration that is practically identical to the third variation in K. 379. Lastly, the closing in Allegretto returns to the original theme, at a faster tempo, concluding with a brilliant virtuoso coda, exactly as in Mozart's composition.

It is not known if the parallels between these two chamber music works – so particularly clear and openly declared in some passages – were a deliberate choice, the result of a stylistic exercise on the part of the young composer, or whether it could have been triggered by Beethoven's burgeoning creative process, which, as documented in other similar cases, tended towards excessive reverence for his models.[13] Both of these hypo-

13 See, for example, the case cited in note 10, referring to Beethoven's sketch (dating back to October 1790, when the composer was still living in Bonn): probably a new melodic nucleus in c minor and

theses would be consonant with a further element that should be taken into consideration: the context of the academies organised by Mastiaux and the Archbishop-Elector of Bonn, who would certainly have appreciated a chamber music performance by young musicians resounding in the palace rooms in the style most celebrated and loved by members of their circles.

That K. 296, 379 and 380 had been a model for the WoO 36 was immediately evident at the time of the composition of the quartets, especially to the young composer himself, which is likely the main reason that Beethoven decided not to publish these works during his apprentice years nor during his time in Vienna. Due to some citations that might have sounded too obvious to the ears of the Viennese public, Beethoven never even considered publishing these quartets; he would have risked being accused of lacking originality precisely when this was the most sought-after characteristic of a composer in Vienna at that time. On the other hand, it is significant that Beethoven, despite his numerous changes of abode and his famous inability to keep things in order, never lost the manuscript of WoO 36, jealously conserving it until his death. Thus, it would seem that the composer held these compositions of his youth in high regard. This appears to

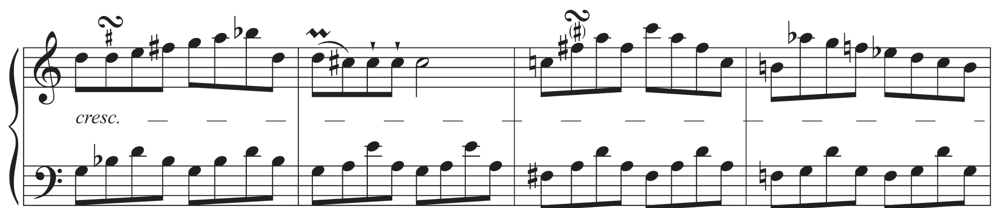


FIGURE 11 Beethoven: Piano Quartet WoO 36 No. 1, Allegro *vivace*, bars 37–40

FIGURE 12 Beethoven: Piano Sonata Op. 2 No. 1, Allegro con brio, bars 27–30

6/8, for a new symphonic incipit. In this same manuscript, Beethoven adds in his own hand, eliminating the fragment: "This entire fragment has been stolen from the Andante in 6/8 of the Symphony in c by Mozart" ("Diese ganze Stelle ist gestohlen aus der Mozartschen Sinfonie in c wo das Andante in 6 8tel aus den" [here the sentence breaks off]). See Joseph Kerman: *Ludwig van Beethoven Autograph Miscellany from circa 1786 to 1799. British Museum Additional Manuscript 29801, ff. 39–162 (The "Kafka" Sketchbook)*, London 1970, Vol. 1, fol. 88v.

be confirmed by the numerous instances of Beethoven's 'self-borrowing' from these quartets for piano and other works that he composed from the 1790s onwards.

In some cases the composer totally copies the text of WoO 36; for instance, the Adagio of Op. 2 No. 1 (which will be discussed further in the following paragraph) is nothing other than the re-proposal of the Adagio con espressione from WoO 36 No. 1. In other piano sonatas composed in his youth, such as Op. 2 No. 3 or Op. 13, thematic motives are lifted in their entirety from WoO 36 (see Figures 11 and 12). This became immediately clear to Artaria when he bought the manuscript of the Quartets WoO 36 at auction. It is likely that, due to such an overt similarity, he decided to change the original order of the quartets. Realising that there were particularly marked similarities between WoO 36 No. 2 and K. 379, the publisher had a transcription made of the Quartets WoO 36 for the original duo formation that had inspired the young composer.[14] This transcription for violin and piano had been arranged by a certain Hildebrand[15] and was probably intended to be published in November 1828 together with the first publication of the Quartets WoO 36, which, in fact, no longer opened with the C major but with the E♭ major quartet. Artaria, although probably fully aware of the profits to be gained from divulging and underlining the similarities between Beethoven's and Mozart's work, ultimately decided not to publish the transcription.

Notational Styles and Performance Practices What is striking is that Beethoven takes the Mozartian example in its entirety: not only just its structure, motives and style in general, but also more specifically its notation. For instance, concerning damper pedal practices, like Mozart, who provided no pedal indications in any of his keyboard pieces, the young Beethoven did not notate pedalling in these early works, although in performance he certainly availed himself of the pedal as an expressive device in certain circumstances.[16] This is particularly important considering that notation is the aspect that evolved the most in piano literature between the 1700s and the 1800s. Beethoven was

14 "Clavier quartett v. Be[e]thoven / arangirt für Clavier u. Violin / von Hildebrand". Berlin Staatsbibliothek, coll.: Mus.ms.autogr.Beethoven, L. v., Artaria 218 (https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN1029234280&PHYSID=PHYS_0005&DMDID=DMDLOG_0001).
This manuscript, consisting of 12 folios, is from the Artaria Archive.

15 Probably Johann Hildebrand, born in 1790 and director of the *Kärntnertortheater* in Vienna; the same Hildebrand is cited in the conversation books of 1823.

16 Concerning pedal practices, new sources have been just published in Leonardo Miucci: *Tra Apprendistato e Genialità. Le Sonate dalle WoO 47 all'op. 13*, Lucca 2022 (Le Sonate per pianoforte di Beethoven, Vol. 7.2), pp. 432–454. Here, the "double notational style" theory (Leonardo Miucci: Beethoven's Pianoforte Damper Pedalling. A Case of Double Notational Style, in: *Early Music* 47/3 [2019], pp. 371–392) has been further clarified, including a response to the problematic reading of it proposed by Barry Cooper in this book.

living in the midst of this change, which was determined more by external than internal factors: the revolutions that had shaken the social fabric in those two centuries had also had heavy repercussions on the sphere of music. The features of this profound evolution, in this case with respect to notation, is lucidly documented by Carl Czerny, one of Beethoven's most famous pupils, in 1839:

> "In modern Compositions, the marks of expression are in general so fully indicated by their Authors, that the Player can seldom be in doubt as to the intention of the Composer.
> But cases do occur, in which much remains at the pleasure of the player; and in the older Piano forte pieces, as for example those of Clementi, Mozart & c, the indications of expression are very sparingly inserted, and the style of playing is left to, and depends chiefly on the taste and experience of the Performer; hence the effective execution of these works becomes much more difficult."[17]

In other words, Czerny is suggesting that the pianistic notation of the mid to late 1700s should not be read through the same lens as that of the early 1800s. In this sense, Beethoven's notation and the aesthetic content in the quartets looks to the past, to the models of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach and, more particularly, of Mozart. To some extent, WoO36 represents a style that is destined not to return, characterised by graphic conventions and pianistic practices that are almost unique. These three are among the most significant: staccato, rubato and beaming with a metrical function.

In the last few decades, one of the most discussed and controversial aspects of Beethoven's handwriting undoubtedly regards the staccato, notated either with a dot or vertical stroke.[18] These discussions have created a dichotomy between those who put forward the theory that, for non-legato notes, there is an effective distinction between the two markings, and those who, on the contrary, maintain that the vertical stroke is the sole indication of staccato. The only common ground is that the question is very complex and that it is difficult – if not virtually impossible – to determine with absolute certainty Beethoven's intention through his handwriting due to the speed and lack of care with which he wrote these articulation marks in his manuscripts. Apart from the hypothetical distinction of aesthetic character and/or execution, this question has often led, even in

17 "In den neueren Compositionen werden die Zeichen des Vortrags von den Autoren meistens so ausführlich angewendet, dass der Spieler im Allgemeinen selten über den Willen des Compositeurs in Zweifel sein kann. Aber selbst da gibt es Fälle, wo vieles der Willkühr des Spielers überlassen bleibt, und in älteren Clavier-Werken, (z. B.: von Mozart, Clementi, etc.) wo jene Zeichen äusserst sparsam sich angezeigt finden, hängt der Vortrag meistens von dem Geschmack und der Einsicht des Vortragenden ab. Daher ist der Vortrag dieser Werke in dieser Rücksicht weit schwerer." Carl Czerny: *Vollständige theoretisch-practische Pianoforte-Schule*. Op. 500, Wien 1839, Vol. 3, p. 4. English: Carl Czerny: *Complete Theoretical and Practical Piano Forte School* […] Op. 500, trans. by James Alexander Hamilton, London 1839, Vol. 3, p. 5.

18 For a general bibliography on the subject, see Clive Brown: Dots and Strokes in Late 18th- and 19th-Century Music, in: Early Music 21 (1993), pp. 593–610.

the choice of modern editors, to a tendency toward total uniformity. Consequently, the staccato indicated with a dot has been used only for the *portamento* effect (that is, applied to notes under a slur); in all other cases, the stroke has been adopted as the staccato marking. Without entering into a discussion on this choice, (which, however, is clearly limiting), the autograph copy of WoO 36 lies outside this debate; its unusual clarity, resulting from the extreme care with which the young composer wrote this manuscript, represents a *unicum*. This means that, unlike in other manuscripts, a clear distinction can be presumed both from the point of view of the handwriting and its meaning. Once again, the inspirational source of Beethoven's choices is Mozart. It is likely that the young composer had access to the 1781 Artaria edition of the Sonatas K. 296, 379 and 380 and that he actually possessed a copy himself. This printed source uses both dots and strokes for non-legato notes.

Although Beethoven's handwriting is meticulous, the manuscript source of WoO 36 still presents some spots where clarity lacks. While the staccato dots are almost unequivocal, the staccato strokes show some differences in handwriting that do not always allow definite confirmation of the same identical vertical stroke (see, for example, WoO36 No. 1/I, bar 22). Looking beyond these minor issues, however, a clear distinction between these marks emerges forcefully from this manuscript and enables the formulation of different meanings in terms of performance practice.

In considering the difference between dots and strokes, the acoustic properties of the pianos that Beethoven had access to in Bonn – the Stein and similar models – should be taken into consideration.[19] These were instruments with a highly sensitive Viennese action mechanism with only five octaves and an organological structure that resulted in an extremely rapid decay of sound. Consequently, a distinction between these two staccato marks based on their sound duration – as suggested in the methods of the late 1700s and early 1800s – can be misleading. Nevertheless, a plausible classification could consider the attack or accentuation: where the staccato is written with dots, it could be interpreted as referring to the concept of *leggero*, while the strokes could refer to a more accentuated attack. As can be seen in several teaching manuals, among other sources, the practice of distinguishing between dots and strokes was not unknown in the notational practices of the eighteenth century. For example, Quantz indicates that:

> "When a stroke is positioned above a note that is followed by other notes of less importance, then that note must not only last half its value but must also be emphasised through the pressure of the bow.

19 On this subject, see Tilman Skowroneck: The Keyboard Instruments of the Young Beethoven, in: *Beethoven and his World*, ed. by Scott Burnham and Michael P. Steinberg, Princeton/Oxford 2000, pp. 151–192.

> […] When dots are positioned above notes, these are to be played with a lighter bow stroke, but not staccato."[20]

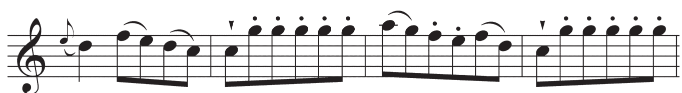
It is superfluous to underline that these indications are of a general nature and that, as all methods suggest, the correct execution of the staccato should be contextualised in the character of the music (brilliant, cantabile, et cetera) in accordance with the dynamic marks, the nature of the movement itself together with various other factors. The different meaning of the two marks can be seen, for instance, in Figure 13: in the groups of four semiquavers (bars 12/13), the staccato with dots comes immediately after the slurred pair of notes, so the first of these slurred notes will require more accentuation while the staccato notes will require a much lighter touch. Conversely, the staccato notes in bars 14/15 not only need to be short but also to be played with an accentuated attack.

Finally, the last aspect that clearly shows to what extent the young Beethoven was influenced by the Mozartian model with respect to these articulation marks, is the simultaneous use of both of these markings within the same bar (Figure 14) – an exceedingly

Figure 13 **Beethoven: Piano Quartet WoO 36 No. 1, Allegro *vivace*, bars 12–15**

Figure 14 **Beethoven: Piano Sonata Op. 2 No. 1, Allegro con brio, bar 22**

Figure 15 **Mozart: Piano Concerto K. 246, Tempo di Menuetto, bars 23–26**



20 "Steht aber nur über einer Note, auf welche etliche von geringerer Geltung folgen, ein Strichelchen: so bedeutet solches, nicht nur daß die Note halb so kurz seyn soll; sondern daß sie auch zugleich, mit dem Bogen, durch einen Druck markiret werden muß. […] Wenn über den Noten Puncte stehen; so müssen solche mit einem kurzen Bogen tockiret, oder gestoßen, aber nicht abgesetzet werden." Johann Joachim Quantz: *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen*, Berlin 1752, p. 201.

rare occurrence in the *usus scribendi* of the mature Beethoven. Again in this case, the notes marked with strokes seem to indicate an accentuated attack while the notes marked with a dot suggest a light touch. Through this notation, the composer creates an effective crescendo towards the second part of the bar concluding on the downbeat of the following measure. The same notation, borrowed once again from Mozart's pen, can be seen in Figure 15.

The second category of Beethoven's notation to be considered concerns one of the formulas used to mark the effect of rubato, the dislocation (anticipated or delayed) of the melodic line with respect to the accompaniment (which proceeds strictly in time). Among the various notational practices Beethoven used to indicate this type of effect is rubato expressed through inverted dynamic marks (***p f p f***). This type of marking is found in WoO 36 No. 2/I, bar 37, No. 1/II, bar 4 and partially in No. 1/II, bar 44.

This notation is interesting from many points of view. Firstly, as the heritage of a late galant style of writing,[21] it was destined to disappear from Beethoven's compositions in his Viennese period (his source of examples as a young composer had been Mozart, under the direct guidance of Neefe).[22] Secondly, he indicates dynamics that contrast the natural accentuation of the metre, a relationship between notation and performance practice found in the harpsichord and clavichord repertoires of this period; this is presumably why it was later abandoned in the pianistic traditions of the early 1800s. Nevertheless, that "the long notes in the bars, which should naturally be accented, become weak while the short notes become strong and fall with an accent"[23] was still understood. The question of the extent of this dislocation, both quantitively and qualitatively, is complex and evokes the words of Leopold Mozart, who, in his method on the subject of rubato, exhorted that it was "much easier to demonstrate than to describe",[24] confiding in the good taste of the performer. The task of the modern interpreter, however, is to identify at least the semantic extent of this dislocation: in other words, not to misinterpret the notation by reading it purely in dynamic terms but to place it within the correct aesthetic code (rhythmic freedom) of the keyboard practices of that time. Thus, Czerny's advice on how to read and identify the different traditions in style and notation becomes relevant.

21 The only other instance regards the Piano Concerto WoO 4/II, bar 19 (1784).

22 For some of the various references to Mozart, see the Piano Sonata K. 284/II, bar 29 and III, Var. 20, bars 7 and 24 (1775). Also see Neefe's *Klavier-Sonate* No. 7/II, bar 37 (1773).

23 "[...] die innerlich langen Noten des Taktes, die eigentlich den Accent bekommen, schwach, hingegen die innerlich kurzen Noten stark und mit Accente vorgetragen werden". From "Tempo Rubato" in Heinrich Christoph Koch: *Musikalisches Lexikon*, Frankfurt am Main 1802, cols. 1502 f.

24 "Was aber das gestohlene Tempo ist, kann mehr gezeiget als beschrieben werden." Leopold Mozart: *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule*, Augsburg 1756, p. 263, footnote.

Figure 16 **Beethoven: Piano Quartet WoO 36 No. 1, Adagio *con espressione*, bars 4/5**

Figure 17 **Beethoven: Piano Sonata Op. 2 No. 1, *Adagio*, bars 4/5**

The last aspect worthy of note regards Beethoven's re-proposal, as mentioned above, of the same fragment of WoO 36 No. 1/II, bar 4 (Figure 16) in the Sonata Op. 2 No. 1/II, bar 4 (Figure 17) in which the rubato marks disappear to be replaced by a legato marking encompassing the entire upbeat. Beethoven's choice, rather than presenting a different aesthetic vision, seems to pertain only to notation. This is an indication that the composer, aware that notation of this kind in the Vienna of 1796 would not have been understood by most but only by a scant minority of professionals, decided to leave the initiative to the pianist's 'good taste'.

Another aspect of performance practice concerns the correct metric accentuation, in particular when expressed through the grouping of notes. This notational tool, to be replaced by more descriptive and specific notation styles in the nineteenth century, played a vital role in the practices of the preceding century and enabled composers – above all in cases of exceptions to the general rules – to indicate particular metric structures.

The seventeenth-century German keyboard approach, strongly rooted in the aesthetic values of rhetoric and spoken language, was based on a complex, reciprocally interactive system of elements that determined the correct accentuation – like the pronunciation of words in a phrase –, enabling the interpreter to communicate to the listener the meaning of a page of music through the correct decryption of articulation and touch. It is, in fact, no coincidence that all keyboard methods (at least German methods) until the 1830s and '40s dedicated ample space to this subject, always referring to the metaphor of spoken language. The general rule assigned different meaning and importance to the beats of the bar, both in binary and ternary metre, an approach that has been rather neglected in our day. The conservative, and most prominent representative of the

Figures 18–20 Beethoven: Piano Quartet WoO 36 No. 2, *Allegro con spirito*, bars 1–5, 12–17, 116–120

Mozartian school, Johann Nepomuk Hummel, emphasised in his *Anweisung* as late as 1828 how, for example, in four/four time, there are two strong beats (1/3) and two weak beats (2/4) while, in three/four time, the first beat was accented and the other two were played more lightly (in particular the last beat).[25] It is essential to take these norms aimed at correct accentuation into consideration, in order to determine, among other things, the correct tempo and its fluctuations. Since the multitude of marks that were to be added in the following century (accents and specific kinds of articulation) were not yet available to keyboard composers of the second half of the 1700s, often these customary practices are communicated in a way that is not immediately apparent. The use of what the English call 'beaming' falls into this category. This is exemplified, for instance, in the obsessive precision with which the young Beethoven indicates changes of accentuation in metre through this notational tool in the Allegro con spirito WoO 36 No. 2. Figure 18 shows the *incipit* of the movement: the rhythmic motor is in the cello part and the left hand of the piano, where the precise metric layout indicates that the last beat – in theory the weakest in the bar – should here receive some accent.

It follows that the metric unit is no longer a single strong beat (the first beat) in the bar but a strong and a weak beat, forming a sort of trochaic foot (– ⌣); this rhythmic structure restricts the choice of tempo while limiting the risk of excessive acceleration.

Figure 19, on the other hand, shows a different rhetorical function, that is to say the leading of the musical phrase towards a *fortissimo* in bar 17. Through a different type of beaming, suggesting a single accent per bar (anticipated by the slur at the end of the bar in a sort of rubato), the composer seems to clearly communicate this intention. For further confirmation of this notational expedient, it is possible to compare the same fragment with the thematic *incipit* in Figure 18 as it appears in the recapitulation (see Figure 20).

Beethoven evidently intends the recapitulation to have a more flowing nature than in its first appearance. In bar 118, the climax of the first half-period is now marked *forte* rather than *fortissimo*, thus diminishing the drama and intensity of the dynamics, yet the single initial accent, both in the piano and cello parts, sounds more marked while at the same time enhances the directional flow towards the following bar.

In conclusion, the Quartets WoO 36 offer a valuable and detailed picture of a precise moment in Beethoven's development. The influence and links with the models and general poetics of Mozart's keyboard practices, together with those of C. P. E. Bach, are evident. The young composer's borrowings from Mozart (or at least the most important

25 Johann Nepomuk Hummel: *Ausführliche theoretisch-practische Anweisung zum Piano-Forte-Spiel*, Vienna 1828, Vol. 1, pp. 60–63.

examples) involve all aspects of musical discourse: structure, treatment of themes, style, and aesthetics, together with performance practice and notation, to cite just a few. However, what was for Mozart a point of arrival was for Beethoven a point of departure. Although some of the notation solutions and musical choices had already been surpassed by Beethoven in the first Viennese period, indicating that by that time, a precise artistic direction had been embarked upon, signs of the precocious manifestation of such genius are already evident in WoO 36. Despite being just 14 years old, Beethoven already showed an extremely deep musicality with a concept of sound that prefigured future aesthetics, coupled with virtuoso tendencies that precociously heralded the nature of his mature pianism. A few years later, that very pianism would evolve into the antithesis – or at least what would be perceived as such – of Mozart's pianism. As Theodor W. Adorno said: "The human is indissolubly linked with imitation: a human being only becomes human at all by imitating other human beings."[26]

26 "Das Humane haftet an der Nachahmung: ein Mensch wird zum Menschen überhaupt erst, indem er andere imitiert." Theodor W. Adorno: *Minima moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*, Frankfurt 1980, p. 174. English: id.: *Mimima Moralia. Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott, New York 2005, p. 154.

Content

Forewords 7

Preface 10

NOTATION AND PERFORMANCE

Clive Brown Czerny the Progressive 15

Barry Cooper Beethoven's Pedal Marks Revisited 40

Neal Peres Da Costa The Case for Un-Notated Arpeggiation in Beethoven's Compositions for or Involving the Piano 59

Siân Derry Beethoven's Tied-Note Notation. An Ongoing Debate 100

Marten Noorduin Beethoven's Indicators of Expression in His Piano Works 118

Yew Choong Cheong A Historically Informed Perspective of Beethoven's Idiosyncratic Dynamics and Accents in His Piano Works 137

Leonardo Miucci Beethoven's Piano Quartets WoO 36. Conservatism and Evolution 156

FROM SKETCH TO PRINT

Sandra P. Rosenblum Publishers' Practices and Other Happenings in the Life of Beethoven's Quintet for Piano and Woodwinds Op. 16 177

Susanne Cox Beethoven's 'Concept'. Working Manuscripts Between Sketch and Fair Copy 188

Mario Aschauer Text, Context, and Creative Process in Diabelli's *Vaterländischer Künstlerverein* 210

Roberto Scoccimarro Beethoven's Sketches for the Last Movement of the Sonata Op. 106. Thoughts on the Creative Process 228

Claudio Bacciagaluppi Hans Georg Nägeli as Publisher and Bookseller of Piano Music 295

INSTRUMENTS AND KEYBOARD PRACTICES

Michael Ladenburger Beethoven's Early Approach to Different Types of Keyboard Instruments in Bonn and Its Lifelong Aftermath 323

Tilman Skowroneck Beethoven and the Split Damper Pedal 345

Robert Adelson Beethoven's Érard Piano: A Gift After All 358

Martin Skamletz A Gesture of Expansion. The Limited Enlargement of the Tessitura in Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 53 as a Further Development of Procedures Essayed in His Early Chamber Music 374

Index 400

Authors 412

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