

William Kinderman. *Beethoven*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, 374 pp.

The "central task" for William Kinderman in *Beethoven* "is to trace the formation and evolution" of the "process" of 'artistic unification' (*Kunstvereinigung*: Beethoven's term) "through analysis of works from all periods of Beethoven's life" (pp. 1–2). Formal analysis is not an end unto itself, but rather serves the higher goal of aesthetic criticism, "while maintaining the necessary balance between subjectivity and objectivity." The writings of philosophers contemporary with Beethoven, principally Friedrich Schiller, provide the conceptual basis for the emphasis on aesthetics. Kinderman sees a close link between Beethoven's aesthetics and Schiller's interest in the "synthesis of the sensuous and rational" (p. 5) in art, as well as the latter's "claims of 'freedom and progress', innovation and fantasy, [which] were ingrained so deeply into Beethoven's creative method." Unity is "a primary condition for the appearance of a true work," but unity is "understood not as an abstract, tautological concept, or even an organic whole, but rather that totality of concrete elements and relationships that demand realization in sound" (p. 12). Unity is "synthetic in nature, and entirely compatible with tension, contrast, diversity, and the individuality of a work" (p. 12). The evolution of Beethoven's art cuts a "path towards progressive integration, narrative design, and a deepened symbolic expression (p. 13)," and these structural and expressive elements are the primary constituents of "artistic unification."

These ideas are set forth in Kinderman's introductory "Overture." (Curiously, in view of their significance, he suggests that the non-philosophically inclined reader may skip this first chapter.) Yet the book has broader aims. It is perhaps better to regard Kinderman's "central task" as one of several threads (and not always the central one), which are skillfully interwoven around the discussion of the repertory. In the course of chronologically arranged chapters Kinderman provides a broadly conceived sketch of Beethoven's life and career (the latter including remarks on his attitudes towards art and an account of the context—for example, contract or concert—in which Beethoven decided to write a new piece or pieces), brief commentary on the compositional process for selected works on the basis of sketch and autograph evidence, and occasional discussion of the contemporary reception and scholarly literature.

This omnibus approach is a great virtue of Kinderman's book, for it is the first comprehensive study of Beethoven to appear since Maynard

Solomon's *Beethoven* in 1977, and, in addition to incorporating much of the Beethoven scholarship of the past two decades, Kinderman devotes considerably more space to analysis and criticism than Solomon had done. It shares these analytical and critical concerns with Carl Dahlhaus's *Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to his Music*, but Dahlhaus essentially excludes biography.¹ By its very nature it is a significant book and a very useful one—it can be read with pleasure and profit by the scholar and the music student, but also by the non-specialist who has some knowledge of music theory and history. Many of the lengthier discussions of works are distillations of previously published articles and books, in which Kinderman has made notable contributions to our understanding of works such as the Diabelli Variations, the *Missa Solemnis*, and the late quartets. Although they have been simplified—no doubt with the general reader in mind—they preserve the standard of excellence he has established, and this standard is maintained throughout the entire book.

Kinderman has complete control of his material. He persuasively generalizes about works, and often makes discerning comparisons between works within or across genres and style periods. As suggested in the formulation “path towards” (see above), Kinderman has a teleological view of Beethoven's artistic development and subscribes, with certain reservations, to the “convenient simplification” of the style periods. But he adds a “fragmentary” fourth one (1824–27) to the usual three, in which the late quartets, or at least opp. 132, 130 with the *Grosse Fuge* finale, and 131, “open up new artistic territory in ways comparable with the *Eroica* or the *Hammerklavier*” (p. 199).

The remarks about compositional process, which, no doubt for the sake of user-friendliness, include no reproductions of sketches and very little detail about them, are nonetheless skillfully presented within his analyses in order to illuminate aspects of Beethoven's “creative method” at the service of his aesthetic goals. For example, in his discussion of the Fifth Symphony, Kinderman explains that Beethoven “originally intended to repeat the entire scherzo and trio, but the published version, without the repetition, is most effective in the overall narrative design. The scherzo thereby yields up some of its formal autonomy in the interest of the unfolding progression between movements” (p. 126). Consistent with his view that criticism must depend on analysis, he usually reserves his consideration of aesthetic content for the conclusion of his discussion of a work. His remarks about the Fifth Symphony provide a good example of his

¹ Carl Dahlhaus, *Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to His Music*, trans. Mary Whittal (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).

critical approach and also demonstrate (in light of his remarks about the scherzo) how analysis supports criticism:

The Fifth Symphony . . . embodies a process of symbolic transformation, which is projected with remarkable coherence over the work as a whole. Unifying motifs are almost inevitable in any such intermovement narrative design, but no less essential is the directional tension culminating in the finale—a feature that resurfaces in later masterpieces such as the Ninth Symphony and the C# minor Quartet. A shifting of weight to the finale occurs in certain eighteenth-century pieces—notably in Mozart's 'Jupiter' Symphony—but in Beethoven this tendency assumes such prominence as to realign the aesthetic foundations of music. In the Fifth Symphony Beethoven departs from the more static, successive classical formal models by explicitly connecting the movements, undermining their individual autonomy. A mythical pattern seems to be imposed on the overall artistic sequence, guiding the processive chain of interconnected musical forms. In its embrace of the dichotomous and its evocation of the ineffable or even the demonic, the Fifth Symphony opens the door to Romanticism, yet the profound lucidity of its musical shape defies unequivocal programmatic interpretation. In this respect, as in many others, Beethoven's importance lies in his synthesis of the old and new, of the universality of the classical harmonic framework with the quest for particularity of expression characteristic of the nineteenth century. (p. 130)

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Unfortunately, the goal of comprehensiveness, along with the chronological rather than topical chapter organization, has prevented Kinderman from fulfilling his central (and secondary) tasks with complete success. This book has 336 pages of text and notes, yet it is too short. Only a handful of Beethoven's published works go unmentioned—surely a “pre-compositional” decision by Kinderman—and one senses the author's struggle to say something meaningful about many pieces in very few words. Moreover, one wonders sometimes about the criteria by which certain works were selected for longer discussion than others. The cello sonata in A Major, op. 69, for example, receives one short paragraph, which reads like a program note:

In the op. 69 Sonata the cello begins unaccompanied *dolce*, and legato, with motifs that permeate the entire first movement. After

the main theme has been heard in both instruments it is suddenly dramatically altered, and cast into A minor. The contrast between the quiet atmosphere of the lyrical opening, and a turbulent, rhythmically charged continuation is characteristic of the *Allegro, ma non tanto*. The second movement is a scherzo, whose main theme takes on a strong rhythmic tension through syncopation. Like the cello sonatas of op. 5, this work has no independent slow movement, but the finale is introduced by an expressive *Adagio cantabile* in E major, whose thematic material bears a subtle relationship to the finale. (p. 133)

Let us note the absence of true analysis as well as critical commentary for one of Beethoven's unquestioned masterpieces of chamber music, and a major work in the transition from the heroic style of the years surrounding the Third and Fifth Symphonies to the more lyrical and subtle character of compositions for piano (op. 78) and for chamber ensembles (String Quartet op. 74, Sonata for piano and violin op. 96, Piano Trio op. 97) surfacing around 1809.

On the other hand, the first movement of the first piano sonata, op. 2 no. 1 in F minor, receives detailed discussion. The reason is clear: it is a celebrated movement in a piece that despite its opus number has assumed the status of a portentous opus 1, and the author wanted to contribute to the substantial literature on it. But he neither critiques that literature nor attempts to move beyond the technical analysis into stylistic or aesthetic criticism. (I would welcome a quarter-century critical moratorium on this sonata!)

I am also surprised that *Fidelio* receives only five and one half pages, one of which is devoted to the overtures. In light of its significance both as a work and as an expression of Beethoven's political and moral perspectives, the reader could have expected a more substantial discussion. Kinderman offers thirteen pages on *Wellington's Victory* and *Der glorreiche Augenblick*, principally in order to offer an extended discourse on kitsch, and the "spectacle of a great composer lowering his art to gain economic reward and court political favour" (p. 169). This is fine and the Adornoesque conclusion rings true: "But intentionally or not, Beethoven held up a very unflattering mirror to this grand party of the restoration. In giving his audience what they wanted, his Congress of Vienna pieces exposed the superficial veneer that concealed the far less glorious realities of post-Napoleonic politics" (p. 180). Yet I still sense an imbalance.

Even in the longer commentaries, the author often limits his analysis to one aspect of the work, and his choices sometimes appear arbitrary. In the discussion of the "Hammerklavier" Sonata op. 106 (pp. 201–10), for ex-

ample, he traces the working out of relationships of the third (he acknowledges Rosen's discussion in *The Classical Style*) and the half-step over the course of the sonata, and makes Toveyesque descriptive generalizations about the movements—"The . . . scherzo is a humorous yet dark parody of the opening *Allegro* . . . [with] a sardonic dimension . . ."—which have little to do with his discussion of pitch relationships.² The closing fugue is described in more detail, but even here the weightiness of the critical remarks (they are similar in spirit to the conclusion of the section on the Fifth Symphony) and their degree of generalization here and elsewhere are not supported sufficiently by the analysis.

The problem of analysis and criticism is an old one, and it is unfair to expect the author to solve it—particularly in a book of this kind. Yet Kinderman should (and doubtlessly could) have found a way to explore it in more systematic detail and to achieve fuller syntheses more often. Apart from his critique of formal analysis and definition of his own critical goals in the introduction, he devotes little attention to methodological concerns, pausing only, in the space of one and one half pages, to defend his interests in narrative process and unity against attacks by Carolyn Abbate and Jean-Jacques Nattiez. As can be expected in such a short commentary, his discussion is superficial. The great methodological "other" for Kinderman is Carl Dahlhaus, whose work on Beethoven consistently succeeds in grounding criticism in analysis. (Dahlhaus's book has the advantage of being organized topically, as a series of chronologically arranged essays on aesthetic-structural problems.) Dahlhaus looms large through his virtual absence in this book, but surely Kinderman has read and thought about his work. Because their analytical-critical goals are so similar, and because Dahlhaus has had such a decisive influence, Kinderman's failure to "take him on" is disappointing.

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Aside from the musicality of his thinking and the clearness of his writing, perhaps the most significant contribution of a more general nature is Kinderman's emphasis on Beethoven's humor and his critique of overly solemn interpretations of his music.³ This aspect of his music and per-

² Tovey, although infrequently cited, and Joseph Kerman, who is often mentioned, are major influences on Kinderman's approach to the technical and descriptive discussion of the music; on the other hand, Kinderman's philosophical perspective owes little to either.

³ He also emphasizes qualities such as paradox, ambiguity, openness, and doubt, all of which, like humor contrast with the notion of heroic authority that has been the predominant view of Beethoven and his music.

sonal outlook was not unknown (see p. 349 of the useful selected bibliography), but Kinderman skillfully reinforces it by devoting careful attention to the links between them on the basis of farcical canons and musical epigrams, and verbal puns. The most famous of these, of course, concerns the relationship between the "muß es sein" joke and the beginning of the last movement of the string quartet op. 135 in F. Here Kinderman is perhaps misled, in his zeal to assert the significance of humor in Beethoven's music, to find it where it is not. The finale is undeniably humorous; Kinderman is quite right to quote Joseph Kerman on its musical embodiment of the "essence of gaiety." The question is, where does the fun begin? I do not agree with Kinderman's critique of Paul Bekker, who "takes the mock pathos of the *Grave* sections too seriously, missing the parodistic dimension that surfaces at once in the opening *Grave* and even more clearly when Beethoven brings back the *Grave* at the end of the development" (p. 333). I, like Bekker, hear in the *Grave* true and deep pathos, which is overcome in the main body of the movement, to achieve a "humour won through reflection."⁴ Where does this reflection take place? The opening retains the expressive character of the preceding slow variation movement, whose own pathos apparently did not make an impression on Kinderman; he limits his discussion of it to an explanation of its structure, noting nothing about its character. But even as the introduction to the finale retains the character of the variations, it transforms it: the recitative-like motto implies the appearance of a human consciousness that reflects on the events of the variations, asks itself the famous question, answers it with a joke and leaves the pathos behind. The return later in the movement can be interpreted as a further reflective act (Kinderman sees it as confirmation of the parody), but one that recalls a process already completed.

Kinderman's reading introduces into our understanding of the piece the elements of narrative process and cross-movement unity, two of Kinderman's primary concerns, particularly in the late music. Hearing the *entire* last movement as parody deprives it of dynamic elements and emphasizes stasis. Moreover, this interpretation seems very suggestive of Beethoven's attitude towards his own life and his sublimation of his experience in his art. Despite his punning about his illness in 1825 and his deathbed citation "applaud, friends, the comedy is over" (see p. 336), there is ample evidence that Beethoven throughout his life took his adversity and suffering seriously and, instead of resorting principally to parody, adopted in the finales of numerous works various strategies to overcome

⁴ Paul Bekker, *Beethoven* (Berlin: n.p., 1912), 555.

hardships represented in earlier movements: heroic triumph (Symphony no. 5), serene contemplation (Piano Sonata no. 32 in C minor), and humor. In each of these cases the process of overcoming is a primary motivation to the formal design and expressive character of the finale. Without pathos in op. 135 there can be no such process. Humor seems to be a strategy of particular importance in the string quartets in F major and F minor. (Kinderman is as interested in continuities as in progress over the course of Beethoven's career.) In op. 59, no. 1, the element of process is very strong, but it begins within the third movement, when the first violin's soloistic flight escapes the prevailing melancholy and introduces the rough dance-like humor of the finale. In op. 95, the unexpected turn of events in the coda might be a thumbing of the nose at the entire previous quartet, but Beethoven is having serious fun that does not compromise the gravity of the first three movements.

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The book is well produced. I find only one major fault in the technical aspect of the publication: although measure numbers are given above musical examples, the scores themselves are not numbered, which unnecessarily complicates the reader's task.

Although I cannot conclude that Kinderman always accomplishes his ambitious objectives, the effort alone has produced a book of unusual worth. I have enjoyed reading his insightful discussions of Beethoven's music and, thanks to the portrait of Beethoven as artist that emerges over the course of the book, I am more conscious than ever of the creative intelligence that the composer possessed. These are reasons enough to heartily endorse this study, which is further enriched by its biographical and cultural-historical material. Kinderman's *Beethoven* will set the standard for many years to come.

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