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**Exploring the Singing Style in Five Lyrical First Movements From
Beethoven's Piano Sonatas**

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Abstract

Exploring the Singing Style in Five Lyrical First Movements from Beethoven's Piano Sonatas

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Although Beethoven's so-called "heroic" style dominates perceptions about the composer, he also composed a number of pieces that have a less heroic, more intimate or "lyrical" style. Up to now, the most extended discussion of this lyrical strain has been written by Carl Dahlhaus (1980), who, however, treats the topic primarily from the perspective of thematic unification. Drawing on the discussion of the singing style in recent writings on topic theory, particularly on the semiotic approach of Sarah Day-O'Connell (2014), the present paper explores multiple musical and semiotic parameters of the singing style in the first movements of five of Beethoven's piano sonatas: Opp. 14/2, 28, 78, 101, and 110. As shown in my analysis, these five movements not only exhibit surface musical elements that signify of the singing style--conjunct melody with narrow range and long note values, continuous and flowing contours, less impetuous rhythms, soft dynamics, simple harmony, and homophonic (melody-and-accompaniment or chorale/hymn) textures--but also reveal how Beethoven solves the structural and

formal problems by mitigating contrasts between principal and subsidiary themes and lessening goal-directed processes in the development. In addition, the exploration of the signifieds of the singing style--nature, beauty, simplicity; the amateur and the feminine; and private domains as well as sociability--helps us understand how Beethoven's singing-style sonata-form first movements function in their socio-cultural and historical contexts, while also revealing a significant humanist value—loving communication and brotherhood—that is worthy of further research. The investigation of the singing style in Beethoven's music contributes to a better understanding of Beethoven as an artist, especially as a countermeasure to the dominance of the heroic in Beethoven reception.

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Introduction

The heroic or mythical interpretation of Beethoven and his music has influenced our recognition and perception of Western tonal music. Both Scott Burnham's book *Beethoven Hero* and K. M. Knittel's article "The Construction of Beethoven" offer historical, ethical, and political reasons for the dominance of the heroic image in Beethoven reception over two centuries.¹ While admitting the humanistic value and historical importance of the heroic or mythical strain in Beethoven reception, both authors reveal the cost paid for our insistence on this particular and simplistic image of Beethoven. Our understanding of Beethoven and his music has become a selective process, which yields a reductive binary opposition of the heroic and the non-heroic styles in Beethoven's music. In order to recuperate a "real" Beethoven from the mythical shrine and expand our appreciation of Beethoven's music, a need arises to transcend the hegemony of Beethoven's heroic style.² This paper aims to explore one character throughout Beethoven's three periods—the singing style—which has rarely been explored and valued, partly because of a quality that sets it in opposition to the heroic style—its lack of confrontation and struggle.

¹ Scott G. Burnham, *Beethoven Hero* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); K. M. Knittel, "The Construction of Beethoven," in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, edited by Jim Samson (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 118-150.

² Several scholars have made an effort to explore the "non-heroic" style in Beethoven's music. Matthew Head (2006) talks about a female hero in Beethoven's music for Goethe's *Egmont*, and argues that the "heroine" in *Egmont* is the symbol of freedom as well as transcendence in the aesthetic sphere. Daniel Chua's lengthy article (2009) attempts to find a set of values that challenge the ethical force of the hero reinforced by recent scholarship. Nicholas Cook (2003) discusses two works of Beethoven marginalized by the "Beethoven Hero" paradigm, arguing that reading both works from a different aesthetic basis gives access to aspects of Beethoven's music that the "Beethoven Hero" paradigm suppresses. Elaine Sisman (1998) talks about three piano sonatas written after the heroic style which reflect Beethoven's rhetorical integration of fantasia and the "characteristic," of image and invention, of tale, topic, and poetic idea.

One obvious way to start exploring the topic of the singing style is by looking through those movements with the tempo heading *cantabile*. A brief survey of Beethoven's works with opus numbers marked *cantabile* (or the German equivalents "singbar" or "singend") indicates but is not limited to the following five common characteristics: (1) the preference for slow movements (mostly in *Andante* or *Adagio* tempo); (2) the association with such self-sufficient and comparatively static forms as binary, ternary and theme-and-variations, as opposed to a more dialectical and goal-directed sonata form; (3) the dominance of narrow range, conjunct melody in periodic structure; (4) the prevalence of major mode, except for the C minor variation (no. 30) from the "Diabelli" Variations, Op. 120; and (5) the preponderance of homophonic textures, which imply vocal genres such as opera and chorale. These movements with a *cantabile* heading provide a preliminary understanding of some typical characteristics of the singing style. However, the investigation of the singing style does not simply cease at this surface layer. Our listening experience and analytical observations point to the existence of the singing style in many works without the explicit marking of *cantabile* or equivalent terms. Beethoven also infuses the singing style into the realm of sonata form, which, according to Carl Dahlhaus (1980), poses a structural challenge.

Although various Beethoven scholars, such as Maynard Solomon (1998), Lewis Lockwood (2005), William Kinderman (2009), Elaine Sisman (1998), and Stephen Rumph (2004), point out a general tendency to lyricism in Beethoven works after 1809, Dahlhaus specifically focuses on the topic of lyricism or singing style in his article "Cantabile und thematischer Prozeß: der Übergang zum Spätwerk in

Beethovens Klaviersonaten”.³ In this article, Dahlhaus indicates the emergence of a new tone—a lyrical character—in a number of works composed between 1809 and 1814. Dahlhaus regards this period as a “transitional” period that has usually been disguised, or at least obscured, by the middle-period “heroic” style and the late “esoteric” style. His discussion of lyricism primarily deals with the seemingly impossible compositional challenge of reconciling lyrical style and sonata form. For Dahlhaus, Beethoven’s sonata form, especially in his heroic style, achieves an urgent, processual, and goal-directed character by means of “thematic-motivic working,” a concept of continuous development borrowed from Hugo Riemann. In the lyrical sonata-form movements, however, the *cantabile* principal theme obstructs such a discourse due to its lack of the dynamism that is characteristic of the forward-driving motives in the heroic style. Dahlhaus surmises that Beethoven would not have permitted this lyricism to go its own sweet way: he interprets its paradoxical relationship to thematic process as a challenge that Beethoven must have set out to solve. Accordingly, Dahlhaus proposes that an abstract and latent “subthematic” structure was the way that Beethoven resolved this problem.

Dahlhaus defines the “subthematic,” on the one hand, as an abstract, interior, and latent structure as opposed to its conventional counterpart—the concrete, exterior, and manifest “thematic.” On the other hand, the “subthematic” can also be understood as a special form of the “thematic” from which the “subthematic” derives and detaches. The “subthematic” becomes the metaphor of form as a network through

³ Carl Dahlhaus, “Cantabile und thematischer Prozeß: Der Übergang zum Spätwerk in Beethovens Klaviersonaten.” *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 37. Jahrg., H. 2(1980): 81-98. Seven years later, Dahlhaus made a small revision of this article and included it in his book *Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to His Music*.

which the parts of the composition can be united. For example, in his discussion of Beethoven's String Quartet, Op. 132, Dahlhaus constructs a "subthematic" nexus, which is less a "theme" or a "motive" and more an intervallic structure, independent of rhythm and meter, such as "the configuration of two rising or falling semitone steps with a variable interval between them (G#-A-F-E)".⁴ After clarifying his idea of "subthematicism," Dahlhaus applies the concept to Beethoven's five piano sonatas composed after 1809, Opp. 78, 81a, 101, 109, and 110.

The legitimacy of Dahlhaus's "subthematicism" has been challenged by James Webster, who questions the necessity of evoking such an illusory "subthematicism." Webster argues that "by definition, any motives construed as being related but not identical will share certain features but not others; all such variants exist on a continuum of types and degrees of relatedness, which cannot be divided into separate domains."⁵ Moreover, Dahlhaus's fragmentary and univalent analyses of those lyrical piano sonatas mainly serve as an illustration for his concept of "subthematicism." As a result, there is a tendency to disregard the contributions of other musical parameters to the singing style, such as melodic phrasing, range, rhythm, tempo, dynamics, harmony, key, and register. Dahlhaus's analytical results thus are hardly sufficient to help us understand and appreciate the singing style permeating those piano sonatas.

Borrowing the concept of the singing style from topic theory, I shall first clarify the singing style as a musical topic and then move to a semiotic discussion of signifiers and signifieds, mostly drawing on Sarah Day-O'Connell's ideas. Partly as a response to Webster's appeal for a multivalent analysis in Beethoven's sonata-form

⁴ Carl Dahlhaus, *Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to His Music*, translated by Mary Whittall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 203.

⁵ James Webster, "Dahlhaus's Beethoven and the Ends of Analysis," *Beethoven Forum* 2 (1993): 215.

movements, this paper shall explore multiple musical and semiotic parameters of the singing style in the first movements of five of Beethoven's piano sonatas: Opp. 14/2, 28, 78, 101, and 110. Expanding the analysis to Beethoven's early works, this paper brings forward the argument that the singing style is not limited to the middle and late periods in Beethoven's music, as Dahlhaus and other scholars suggest; rather, it appears as early as 1798, as specifically demonstrated in the Piano Sonata, Op. 14/2. Ultimately, I hope this paper will shed light on the humanistic value manifested in the singing style that has usually been neglected and undervalued in Beethoven reception.

Chapter 1. Exploring the Singing Style Topic

1. The “Singing Style” as a Musical Topic

The concept of the “singing” style was first invoked by Leonard Ratner in his ground-breaking book *Classic Music* (1980). Ratner points out that in the early eighteenth century, music’s contacts with other social and cultural fields, such as worship, drama, entertainment, dance, the military, and the hunt, brought about the development of “a thesaurus of *characteristic figures*.”⁶ These musical figures, designated as musical topics, became a rich legacy for classic composers. According to Ratner, there are two types of topics: the first appear as complete pieces called *types*, such as the minuet and other dance genres; the other appear as figures and progressions within a piece, called *styles*. Ratner’s later explanation of the “singing” style is very limited and simply stops with descriptions of some musical characteristics, such as a lyric vein, a moderate tempo (or a quick one called the *singing allegro*), a melodic line characterized by slow note values and a narrow range, and certain dance rhythms.⁷

Following Ratner, several scholars have developed and extended topic theory in different ways. Some theorists have developed topic theory from the perspective of music theory. Drawing on Ratner’s topic category, V. Kofi Agawu’s book *Playing with Signs* (1991) offers an expanded list of twenty-seven topics and shows his interest in the contribution of topics to the structural dynamic in musical works.⁸

William Caplin’s 2005 article attempts to relate topics to formal function, although he

⁶ Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1980), 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸ V. Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1991).

admits a rather tenuous link between topics and form. Others, such as Raymond Monelle (2000 and 2006) and Robert Hatten (1994 and 2004), situate topic theory within the discourse of semiotic theory. These kinds of semiotic/cultural studies, as Caplin suggests, “represent a most promising path for further research on topical theory.”⁹

2. The Singing Style in Semiotic Terms

The realization that the associated meanings of music topics are historically contingent motivates Monelle to discuss topics in terms of the signifier and the signified, semiotic concepts coined by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). In the discourse of topic theory, the signifier of a music topic is manifested through musical signs, while the signified refers to its cultural and social meanings or significations. For instance, the topic *pianto* has as its signifier a falling minor second and as its signified the expression of someone weeping or even the general idea of grief in culture.¹⁰ Notably, for Monelle, different topics have various degrees of emphases on the sides of the signifiers and the signifieds. He describes the “singing” style as a topic of no more than stylistic traits, and thus it is a simple signifier with a less focused signified.¹¹ Drawing on Heinrich Christoph Koch’s description of the entry “*Singend*” in his *Musikalisches Lexikon* (1802), Monelle concludes that the singing style and the oppositional “flowing” or “brilliant” styles,

⁹ William Caplin, “On the Relation of Musical Topoi to Formal Function,” *Eighteenth-Century Music* 2/1 (2005): 124.

¹⁰ Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military and Pastoral* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 4-5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

serving as two fundamental building blocks of eighteenth-century music, alternate “to form the temporal amalgam of the classical movement.”¹²

Monelle’s devaluation of the singing style’s signifieds or cultural associations has been challenged by Sarah Day-O’Connell in her entry “The Singing Style” in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory* from 2014. To my knowledge, Day-O’Connell offers the most detailed and extensive theoretical discussion of the singing style in semiotic terms. Most importantly, she makes a substantial contribution to the understanding of the signified in the singing style. Day-O’Connell specifically emphasizes the necessity of investigating the signified—“the culture of singing” and “the network of associations around the act of singing”—for understanding the application of the singing-style topic in instrumental music.¹³

Before specifically addressing the signifier and the signified of the singing style, Day-O’Connell first provides a close and extended analysis of Koch’s description of the singing style, one that Monelle also draws on in his discussion. The following is the complete entry as translated by Day-O’Connell:

“Singing” is generally the quality of a melody that makes it able to be performed with ease by the human voice. In particular it is understood, however, to indicate a comprehensible and smooth melody, as opposed to the uneven, angular, or so-called Baroque. The singing style has much in common with the Flowing, because these qualities seem to differ only in that the Flowing, for the most part, is made up of small intervals that in performance are more smooth than detached. However the “singing style” must also apply to those melodies that contain a lot of leaping intervals and detached notes, as well as to melodies in which the notes flow continuously, because even in the expression of stormy passions or in a tumult of sounds, all harshnesses that are avoidable or unnecessary to the expression, and all unsingable sequences of tones, must still be avoided in the melody.

In this sense, the “singing style” is the basis whereby a melody becomes the language of emotion, which is comprehensible to every person. If a musical piece

¹² Ibid., 5.

¹³ Sarah Day-O’Connell, “The Singing Style,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, edited by Danuta Mirka (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 239

lacks this property, it becomes incomprehensible, and it lacks that which should capture one's attention.

In a limited sense one uses the word "singing" or *cantabile* (1) in order to distinguish the gentler portions of a piece from the very active, so one says, for example, the singer performed the passagework better than the *cantabile* or singing phrases; (2) one indicates with *cantabile* or "singing" a phrase of slower motion, the melody of which is to such a great extent singable, that no acquisition of training and the like is required. See *Cantabile*.¹⁴

Day-O'Connell's analysis shows that the definition of the singing style from Koch is far more than simply a "lyrical" temporality as opposed to "progressive" one as Monelle suggests. First, Koch defines *singend* as the act of singing that is "performed with ease by the human voice"; then he turns to another definition that moves away from the first one: "music that is *singend* is music that is comprehensible."¹⁵ For Day-O'Connell, Koch's two senses of *singend* unfold in a semiotic way: his first definition directly associates *singend* with the act of singing, but then moves into another understanding beyond the actual singing, which is rooted in comprehensibility. As Day-O'Connell farther explains, "the claim of comprehensibility would in fact have depended on a reliance on language and codes shared by the society in which the songs were sung"; the quality of comprehensibility nonetheless has a cultural signification that "could and would trump tempo, articulation, range, level of training, role of the accompaniment, and even the connection of 'singing' with the voice."¹⁶

Day-O'Connell examines the signifiers of the singing-style topic from two perspectives—vocal melodies and vocal performance. In the discussion of melodies, Day-O'Connell mainly bases her analysis on the relevant chapter in Johann

¹⁴ Ibid., 240.

¹⁵ Ibid., 241.

¹⁶ Ibid., 242.

Mattheson's *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (1739), in which Mattheson defines *singend* in both vocal music and instrumental music. Mattheson claims that the measure of success for composers is making their audiences completely grasp the "impetus, the meaning, the perspective, and the emphasis" in music.¹⁷ In this sense, composers of vocal music with words can easily achieve success because they know how to express a clear meaning in the music. As a result, vocal music composers have the advantage when they write instrumental music; they have a clear sense of what music should be like to be comprehensible and accessible to audiences, based on experience in writing vocal music with words. Day-O'Connell points out that a quarter-century earlier, Mattheson, in *Das Neu-Eröffnete Orchestre* (1713), makes a consistent argument that the principal rule of composition is to compose *cantabile*, whether it be vocal or instrumental. The "singable" not only suggests the qualities of vocal music such as "avoiding leaps, incorporating breaths, and adhering to the compass of the voice," but, more importantly, also the sense of comprehensibility.¹⁸ It is in the meaning of comprehensibility that the singing style topic matters for instrumental music.

In her discussion of vocal performance, Day-O'Connell explores some signifiers of the singing style that have rarely been mentioned by Ratner and other scholars. Drawing on Pier Francesco Tosi's *Opinioni de'cantori antichi e moderni* (1723) and Johann Friedrich Agricola's *Anleitung zur Singkunst* (1751), Day-O'Connell offers a list of signifiers in the discourse of vocal performance, including

¹⁷ Ibid., 244.

¹⁸ Ibid., 245.

vibrato, *messa di voce*, legato, *dragg* (a slow descending glissando), and rubato.¹⁹

This discourse of vocal performance is also articulated in terms of comprehensibility: the singers should articulate the words in an intelligible way for their audiences. This notion of comprehensibility is, to a certain extent, equivalent to that found in Mattheson's writings about vocal composition.

After the investigation of the signifiers, Day-O'Connell starts her examination of the signified with the discussion of the *lied*, which is metaphorically regarded as one of the rooms (genres) found in a home (the singing style). Through analyzing the original context of *lied* in Johann Christoph Gottsched's *Versuch einer kritischen Dichtkunst für die Deutschen* (1730), Day-O'Connell comes to the idea that "the home of the singing style is the realm of nature, simplicity, and beauty."²⁰ Then Day-O'Connell notes the wide range of possible song genres, including work songs, sacred songs, lullabies, ballads, airs, and pastorales. Day-O'Connell thus applies Monelle's notion of "cultural study" to refine our understanding of the singing style "by both delineating subsets and identifying characteristics in common."²¹ She demonstrates the importance of singing as a cultural theme through a short analysis of three literary works that depict singing—Mary Hays's *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799), George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1874), and Sir Walter Scott's review of *Evan's Old Ballads* (1810). In these singing invokes such cultural tropes as nature, beauty, and simplicity; the amateur, the feminine; private domains, and sociability. Day-O'Connell argues that all these cultural territories or tropes entail comprehensibility.²² Hays's and

¹⁹ Ibid., 248.

²⁰ Ibid., 250.

²¹ Ibid., 250.

²² Ibid., 254.

Eliot's notion of the comprehensible is the "real" and "solid" in its association with nature and the social affections of their female characters; Scott objects to "non-sense" and the incomprehensible quality of texts in songs.

On the basis of treatises and literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Day-O'Connell's exploration of the signifiers and the signifieds of the singing style points to the centrality of comprehensibility for defining the style. Building on the fundamental principle of comprehensibility, the singing style shows a wide range of signifiers and signifieds, which problematizes Monelle's argument that the singing style is no more than an array of musical traits with a less focused signified. On the one hand, the signifiers can encompass not only the smooth but also the leaping and the detached as Koch's entry shows. The signifieds, on the other hand, range through the domains of the feminine, the amateur, domestic space, nature, simplicity, and beauty. All of these signifieds, as Day-O'Connell suggests at the end of the chapter, "are available to migrate in some guise to instrumental music."²³ Day-O'Connell lays solid theoretical foundations for further semiotic research into the singing style. However, she does not provide any detailed case studies. Before starting my case studies of Beethoven's piano sonatas, I will clarify issues with respect to my analytical approach to the singing style topic.

3. The Singing Style as an Interpretive Frame in Beethoven's Piano Sonatas

Ratner (1980) points out that the mixtures and contrasts in styles in Classical music are what distinguish it from Baroque music, which usually develops one idea,

²³ Ibid., 254.

affection, or topic throughout a piece.²⁴ This claim forms the background for the traditional analytical approach to topic theory in the eighteenth-century music, which prefers to emphasize the contrast or juxtaposition of multiple styles or topics processing throughout a complete work, as exemplified by Wye J. Allanbrook's analysis of Mozart's piano sonata K. 332.²⁵ In Beethoven's sonata-form works, however, the nature and type of the main theme normally determine the character and type of the overall form, as A. B. Marx insists repeatedly in his treatise on form.²⁶ The following themes are conditioned and developed mostly in relationship to the character of the main theme. Consequently, when the main theme has a singing style, the whole piece would inevitably be colored with a lyrical quality.

The notion of the singing style as a premise for a whole work corresponds to Robert Hatten's theoretical discussion of the Pastoral topic as an expressive genre in his *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*. Hatten argues that "to reduce the pastoral to a thematic type or topic, or even to an elaborated group of such types, would be to miss an important aspect of its contribution to our sense of genre in those works where the topic becomes the central theme and premise."²⁷ Hatten proposes that the pastoral topic could serve as an "interpretive frame" for (a) complete movement(s), "prescribing an overall outcome (or perspective on that outcome) regardless of

²⁴ Ratner, *Classic Music*, 26.

²⁵ Wye J. Allanbrook, "Two Threads Through the Labyrinth: Topic and Process in the First Movements of K. 332 and K. 333," in *Convention in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Music: Essays in Honor of Leonard G. Ratner*, edited by Wye J. Allanbrook, Janet M. Levy, and William P. Mahrt (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1992): 125-171.

²⁶ Scott Burnham, "Form," in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. by Thomas Christensen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 889.

²⁷ Robert S. Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 83.

intervening events.”²⁸ Following Hatten’s argument, I shall demonstrate that the singing-style can also serve as the “central theme and premise” in Beethoven’s five lyrical first movements from his piano sonatas.

²⁸ Ibid., 83.

Chapter 2. The Signifiers

1. The Singing Style in the Main Themes

One character shared in the first movements of all five piano sonatas is the singing quality of the main themes, which differs from the “motivic” and “urgent” character of main themes found in the so-called “heroic” piano sonatas, such as the “Pathétique” Op. 13, the “Tempest” Op. 31/2, and the “Waldstein” Op. 53. This overall “lyrical vein” in the main themes is the determining characteristic of the singing style. In listening to the music, it is not difficult to perceive the singing style in the main themes, but how exactly does the musical construction of the melody contribute to the perception of the singing style that one hears? Consideration of the criteria of Mattheson, Koch, Ratner, and Day-O’Connell, along with my observations on *cantabile* movements in Beethoven’s *oeuvre*, reveals that the singing-style melody typically includes (but is not limited to) the following characteristics: narrow range, long note values, small intervals, economic use of disjunct notes and arpeggios, less impetuous rhythms, soft dynamics, homophonic or chorale textures, continuous and flowing phrasing (instead of broken or abrupt changes of musical ideas), slow tempo, and a couple of techniques from vocal performance, including *messa di voce* (a gradual crescendo and diminuendo while sustaining a single pitch), legato, *dragg* (a slow descending glissando) and rubato. All the aforementioned principles could serve as signifiers of the singing style in both vocal and instrumental music. I shall examine these signifiers in all five piano sonatas, showing how these different musical signs point to the singing style of the main themes. Notably, a theme does not have to include all the signifiers above to be understood as a singing-style melody. Similarly,

a theme possessing simply one of the signifiers might not necessarily suggest a lyrical or singing quality. The lesson here is to resist a dogmatic analytic approach; rather, according to Leonard Meyer (1973), the purpose of critical analysis is to seek out musical signifiers that corroborate the analyst's aural experience of the singing style in all five piano sonatas. Ultimately, what convinces is "aural cogency combined with logical coherence."²⁹

Generally speaking, the vocal range for a human is normally about one and a half to two octaves. A survey of ranges in the melody of all five works shows their consistency within this vocal range, instead of a wide range as an instrumental melody usually features: Op. 14/2 (mm. 1-8): C4-C6; Op. 28 (mm. 1-39): A3-A5; Op. 78 (mm. 5-16): B#3-F5; Op. 101 (mm. 1-6): G#4-A5; Op. 110 (mm. 1-12): Ab4-F6. Also, most of the main themes exhibit the preponderance of conjunct melody with long note values and motion, except for Op. 14/2 with its seeming preponderance of disjunct and leaping intervals and sixteenth notes. Then why, based on our listening experience, does this "deviant" piece still evoke a lyrical or singing style? In fact, if we look at a reduction of the melody in Op. 14/2, all those leaps and disjunct intervals are simply the ornaments of the "core melody" (see example 1 in black notes). The added ornaments by Beethoven, mostly through octave leaps and semitone neighbor notes, serve to energize and enliven the "core melody," and thereby conform to the *Allegro* character. The "core melody," mainly composed of broken triads and descending scales, possesses smooth and conjunct features, and therefore the singing

²⁹ Leonard B. Meyer, *Explaining Music: Essays and Explorations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 18.

quality here remains present even with added ornaments.³⁰ Besides, since Beethoven might also have noticed that the ornamented, disjunct melody in a quick tempo may, to some degree, lessen its lyrical character, he indicates “legato” at the very beginning of the theme, which is a typical signifier of the singing style.

Example 1: Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 14/2, I: The main theme, mm. 1-8.

The image shows a musical score for the first eight measures of the main theme from Beethoven's Piano Sonata, Op. 14/2, I. The score is written for piano and consists of two staves. The top staff is labeled 'Piano' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Pno.'. The music is in 2/4 time and D major. The right hand (treble clef) features a melody with slurs and ornaments, while the left hand (bass clef) provides a steady accompaniment. The score ends with a double bar line.

Another musical signifier that points to the singing style is the texture. As mentioned above, two types of textures can imply the vocal genres: melody-and-accompaniment and chorale textures. The former can be traced to Caccini’s monody in the late sixteenth century and the later emergence of opera arias; precedents for the latter can be traced even further back to the four-part *a cappella* in the Renaissance. All five piano sonatas make different uses of these two textures: Op. 14/2 and Op. 101, respectively, use the melody-and-accompaniment texture and chorale texture throughout the main themes; Op. 28 employs a three-voice *a cappella* texture supported by a steady tonic pedal; Op. 78 has the same texture as Op. 28 in the introduction, which is followed by a main theme in homophonic texture; the last one,

³⁰ The ornaments and leaps in the main theme also suggest the operatic aria-like topic, which is one of the subgenres of the singing-style topic.

Op. 110, integrates both textures in a two-part main theme—part A (mm. 1-4) with chorale texture and part B (mm. 5-12) with melody-and-accompaniment texture.

The ideal tempo for these singing melodies should be moderate. Of the five piano sonatas, Op. 110 is the most normative since Beethoven uses *moderato cantabile molto espressivo* in the tempo heading. *Allegro ma non troppo* in both Opp. 78 and 101 also suggests a moderate pace. Op. 14/2 and Op. 28, however, might initially seem problematic since only *Allegro* is marked in the heading. Could the singing style be appropriate in a fast tempo setting? In fact, Ratner explicitly mentions another type of singing style which he terms “singing allegro,” which designates a lyrical melody set in a quick tempo accompanied by either steadily repeated rapid notes or broken-chord figures.”³¹ He refers to the first four measures of Mozart’s “Jupiter” Symphony finale to illustrate this singing allegro.³² Coincidentally, Op. 14/2 and Op. 28, respectively, present the two different types of accompaniments that Ratner describes: Op. 14/2 uses the sixteenth-note broken chords, while Op. 28 sets a long and steady tonic pedal in quarter notes. Therefore, both a moderate tempo and a fast tempo with particular accompaniments can be appropriate for singing style expression. Given the flexibility in tempo provided by Ratner’s inclusion of singing allegro, all five piano sonatas may be understood as variants of the singing style.

2. Thematic Relationships in the Singing-Style Sonata Form

The foregoing discussion points out some important signifiers of the singing style in the main theme in terms of melodic range and types, texture, and tempo; now

³¹ Ratner, *Classic Music*, 19.

³² *Ibid.*, 19.

I shall address the complex relationship between the main theme and the second theme in the singing-style sonata form.

A “singing” second theme is long assumed to have been standard for sonatas in the decades around 1800. William Caplin’s *Analyzing Classical Form* (2013) explains this stereotypical assumption from the formal or structural point of view. Caplin points out that since sonata form is usually perceived as the most inherently dynamic of all conventional forms, the sentential structure becomes “especially well suited to initiate the formal type” due to its “forward-striving character.”³³ Besides, given that the second theme is destined to fulfill its fundamental formal function as a contrast to the main theme, it is therefore frequent to see a motivic and driving main theme contrasting with a later more lyrical and tuneful second theme.³⁴ From the perspective of practice, however, views that emphasize the contrasting formal function and the assumed character difference between the two themes can be problematic. Although Caplin does not devote much discussion to this issue, he does mention some “deviations” from both views: the monothematic exposition in Haydn’s sonata form (where the opening of the second theme is derived from the basic idea of the main theme) and the infrequent existence of non-lyrical second themes.³⁵ James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy’s *Elements of Sonata Theory* (2006) addresses the problem more systematically and in-depth. Hepokoski and Darcy offer a list of multiple themes types in the second theme (S), including the bustling and jauntily self-confident S, the lyrically “singing” or gracefully *cantabile* S, the P (primary

³³ Williams Caplin, *Analyzing Classical Form: An Approach for the Classroom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 287.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 353.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 358.

theme)-based S, S as “contrasting derivation” from P, the *forte* S, S as virtuosic figuration, the learned-style or fugal/imitative S, the multimodular S, and the list goes on.³⁶ Although Hepokoski and Darcy’s list has inconsistent criteria—it is based on either stylistic and topical categories or structural features—its comprehensiveness points to the range of possibilities for the second theme. I shall discuss the approach to the second theme described as “contrasting derivation” in more detail, since this concept is important for understanding the relationship between two themes in Beethoven’s sonata forms.

“Contrasting derivation” was initially proposed by the German musicologist Arnold Schmitz in the early twentieth century as a central principle of Beethoven’s music in general. In the 1970s and 1980s, Carl Dahlhaus revived this concept in his discussion of Beethoven’s music in both *Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to His Music* (1991) and *Nineteenth-Century Music* (1989). Dahlhaus offers a clear definition of “contrasting derivation:” “a first and a second subject have some characteristics—often semi-latent—in common; and at the same time, through other attributes, they express on the surface of the music the complementary opposition that is essential to the thematic structure of sonata form.”³⁷ The principle of “contrasting derivation”, for Dahlhaus, exemplifies the ultimate synthesis by means of dialectical process in Hegelian terms throughout the sonata form.³⁸ This principle helps us understand that while there exists a certain degree of necessary contrast between two

³⁶ James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 131-141.

³⁷ Dahlhaus, *Beethoven*, 51-52.

³⁸ Dahlhaus points out the uncertainty in the historical premises regarding whether the contrast or the derivation is the primary element—that is, if one must start from a “dualistic” or a “monothematic” conception of sonata form.

themes, the singing style emanating from the main theme imbues the second theme as well, thus ensuring an overall singing-style atmosphere throughout the exposition. I shall demonstrate this in the first movements of all five piano sonatas.

Of five piano sonatas, Op. 14/2 presents the most typical and clear-cut structure in sonata form. Both themes show similarities in terms of sentence structure and motivic-rhythmic content. The main theme is an eight-measure sentence in G major, and the second theme is also in sentence structure, though on a larger scale with an expansion to 28 measures. The rhythmic figure of four repeated eighth notes on A initiating the second theme is obviously borrowed from the beginning of the transition, where there are five repeated eighth notes on D with a crescendo mark, moving into E by a sforzando in measure 10 and then immediately back to D in a weaker dynamic.³⁹ However, the sixteenth-note repetition in the following measure 11 offers a clue that even this rhythmic figure is not new in the transition but could be originally derived from the beginning of the main theme: the five continuous sixteenth notes in upbeat. Through the transition, Beethoven points out the motivic-rhythmic connection between the very beginnings of the two themes (see example 2). However, the presentation phase of the second theme (mm. 25-32) shows some contrasts with the presentation phase of the main theme in terms of direction and motivic construction. Although the second limbs in the sentence structures of both themes are sequences of the respective opening units, the second theme shows an overall descending move from A to G while the main theme ascends from D to E. In addition, as mentioned before, the melody in the main theme suggests a singing style,

³⁹ This process of a gradual crescendo and diminuendo could be understood as an instrumental realization of the vocal technique *messa di voce*, which is one of the signifiers in the singing style as described above.

given its flowing melody and comparatively moderate length of each melodic unit, but the melody in the second theme is more fragmented and motivic, made up of motives in one-beat units at first and later in half-beat units (see example 3). This contrast of melodic-motivic construction between two themes does not last long. In the continuation part of the second theme (mm. 33-35), the lyrical or singing quality comes back. As shown in example 4, this singing motive (measure 33) is a retrograde inversion of the singing motive derived from the main theme, which is also confirmed in the closing section (mm. 49-63), where both the original melody from the main theme and its retrograde inversion come out.

Example 2: Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 14/2, I: Related rhythmic figures.

The image displays a musical score for Beethoven's Piano Sonata, Op. 14/2, I, in 3/4 time and G major. The score is presented in six systems, each with a piano (right) and bass (left) staff. Several rhythmic figures are highlighted with red boxes and labeled:

- MT (Mezzo-Tempo):** Located in the first system, it highlights a rhythmic figure in the piano staff consisting of a quarter note followed by an eighth note, then a quarter note, and another eighth note.
- Transition:** Located in the second system, it highlights a rhythmic figure in the piano staff consisting of a quarter note followed by an eighth note, then a quarter note, and another eighth note.
- ST (Sotto-Tempo):** Located in the sixth system, it highlights a rhythmic figure in the piano staff consisting of a quarter note followed by an eighth note, then a quarter note, and another eighth note.

A red arrow points from the 'MT' box to the 'Transition' box, and another red arrow points from the 'Transition' box to the 'ST' box, indicating a relationship between these figures. Dynamics include *p*, *legato.*, *cresc.*, and *p*.

Example 3: Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 14/2, I: The second theme.



Example 4: Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 14/2, I: Motivic connections.

The image shows a musical score for the Piano part of Beethoven's Piano Sonata, Op. 14/2, I. The score is in 2/4 time and features a treble and bass clef. Red boxes highlight specific motifs: 'MT: measure 1' in the first measure, 'ST: measure 33' in the second measure, 'CS: mm. 49-50' in the third measure, and 'CS: measure 52' in the fourth measure.

The formal structure in Op. 28 is much more complex compared to Op. 14/2. The main theme is composed of two related yet contrasting phrases, and each phrase is immediately followed by its slightly modified repetition an octave higher (A-A'-B-B'). The arch-shaped phrase A (mm. 1-10) can be further subdivided into two units: a descending scale within an octave and an ascending gesture (a fourth followed by a short scale), both of which have their significance in the later stages—the descending one in the exposition, as will be discussed shortly, and the ascending gesture in the development section (which will be addressed in the next section). The descending scale can be essentially understood as two tetrachords (A-G-F#-E and D-C#-B-A);

this highlighting of tetrachords is not arbitrary since tetrachords are important in both the transition (the descending tetrachord bass in mm. 40-43 and its sequence in mm. 44-47) and the second theme (both the soprano and bass in mm. 90-93 and its sequence in mm. 94-97). Through this descending tetrachord, the main theme, the transition, and the second theme are connected, just as the themes in Op.14/2 are through rhythmic figuration. While the scalar movement in phrase B (mm. 21-28) goes in the opposite direction—starting with an ascending line followed by a descending one--the tonic pedal constantly appearing throughout the main theme unifies the two phrases (see example 5).⁴⁰ The second theme maintains the same singing effect as the main theme because of its slowly ascending scale. However, the jumping bass here, composed of a quarter rest plus two repeated quarter-note dyads played *staccato*, yields aesthetic effects that distinguish it from the main theme: the intervention of the rest among notes and the use of *staccato*, to some degree, mitigate the continuous and flowing singing style in the upper voices and add some dynamism and energy to the second theme (see example 6). Thus, both themes also manifest the “contrasting derivation” principle. After the PAC in the dominant key at measure 70, the second theme repeats itself with variants. Instead of moving into an expected PAC, the second theme modulates to F# major temporarily and reaches another stage of singing style in a more continuous texture (see example 7). The slowly moving and stretched-out notes regularly interrupted by semitones in outer voices, interacting with the bustling oscillation in eighth notes in inner voices, seem to prepare for the flowing melody in the measure 91, where the singing melody, composed of two clearly

⁴⁰ The tonic pedal shifts its position from the bass in phrase A to the tenor in phrase B so that the theme can ultimately have a determinate PAC on the tonic.

phrased tetrachords, flows simultaneously in both outer voices. After a couple of alternations between the passage work and the singing melody, the second theme closes with a PAC in the dominant key. As with Op. 14/2, the ensuing closing section draws the material from the second theme (the drum figure in the bass with metric displacement—the quarter-rest is moved to the last beat--and the transition (the melody in mm. 138-139 is from mm. 42-43).

Example 5: Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 28, I: The main theme (tonic pedal).

The image displays a musical score for the main theme of Beethoven's Piano Sonata, Op. 28, I. It consists of four systems of piano and bass staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes various dynamics such as *p* (piano), *cresc.* (crescendo), *f* (forte), and *sfz* (sforzando). There are also articulations like accents and slurs. The bass line features a prominent tonic pedal point in the left hand, while the right hand plays a melodic line with some triplet figures. The notation includes notes, rests, and chord symbols.

Example 6: Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 28, I: The second theme (first stage).



Example 7: Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 28, I: The second theme (second stage).

The image shows the second stage of the second theme in Beethoven's Piano Sonata, Op. 28, I. It consists of four systems of two staves each. The music is marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a crescendo (*cresc.*) marking. The right hand features a melodic line with a long slur, while the left hand provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines. A red arrow points to a specific chord in the right hand, labeled "Tetrachord". Red boxes highlight specific musical phrases in the right hand across the systems.

The relationships between the two themes in Op. 78 are subtler than in the previous two sonatas. At the first glance, the two themes are seemingly very different: the main theme (mm. 5-16) has a homophonic texture with a clear singing melody mostly in quarter notes, while the second theme (mm. 28-36) has a two-voice texture that is dominated by eighth-note triplets in both voices without prominent singing melody. The two themes nonetheless show many similarities in terms of character, harmonic progression, and motivic connection. The second theme starts with a typical *piano* dynamic and is marked *dolce*, both of which indicate a singing or lyrical character similar to that of the main theme. In addition, the harmonic motion in both themes features tonic and dominant, although they are in different keys. Furthermore, there exists a latent motivic connection between two themes that Dahlhaus has pointed out: the prolonged descending tetrachord in the second theme (mm. 28-30: A#-G#-F#-E#) reminds of the manifest descending tetrachord in the main theme (mm. 7-8: F#-E#-D#-C#).⁴¹ Last but not least, as Dahlhaus has also noted, the triplet texture dominated in the second theme is actually from the second half of the main theme (mm. 10-11); one can also easily find the correlation of pitch degrees in the bass of both themes (mm. 10-11: F#-G#-A#-B; mm. 28: C#-D#-E#-F#).⁴² The “contrasting derivation” principle again features in the relationship between two themes in Op. 78.

Op. 101 has the shortest and the most seamless exposition among all five piano sonatas. The boundaries between all subsections are considerably ambiguous, and it seems that all subsections are closely connected and welded into a unity (see example 8). As Donald Tovey says, this piece “might be merely a single stream of

⁴¹ Dahlhaus, *Beethoven*, 207.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 207.

lyric melody.”⁴³ The main theme (mm. 1-6) has an incomplete period: the basic idea in the consequent simply ends up with a deceptive cadence to vi of A major, and then it directly modulates to the dominant key E major through an ascending scale. As a result, the consequent is melded together with the transition. Then the stepwise melody continuously flows without any cadential marking until measure 16, where another deceptive cadence occurs with a diminuendo articulation. One could identify the beginning of the second theme through this uncommon cadential marking and the *piano* dynamic in measure 16. The continuity is unbroken until a definite PAC in the dominant key in measure 25. It is not difficult to perceive the similarities between two themes, since they are replete with stepwise motion set as either three eighth notes or the combination of a quarter and eighth notes. For instance, the rising diatonic steps in eighth notes at the beginning of the second theme are obviously associated with the diatonic progression in the melody of the main theme. The chromatic descent in the tenor of the main theme (measure 1) is also appropriated by the bass of the second theme (measure 17). Furthermore, the harmonic simplicity (emphasis on the dominant chord) in both themes shows another sign of the singing style.

⁴³ Donald Francis Tovey, *A Companion to Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas: Complete Analyses* (New York: AMS Press, 1976), 216.

Example 8: Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 101, I: Two themes with transition.

*Etwas lebhaft, und mit der innigsten Empfindung.
Allegretto, ma non troppo.*

MT Rising seconds
Chromatic descent

poco ritardando Tempo I. Transition
crescendo mezzo *f*

ST
Rising seconds
E: DC

Chromatic descent
Chromatic descent
Rising seconds

cresc. *f* *p* *espressivo e semplice*
E: PAC R. 151.

The piano sonata Op. 110 was described by the British musicologist Eric Blom as one of the gentlest things Beethoven ever wrote.⁴⁴ Indeed, this is the only first movement among all of Beethoven's piano sonatas to have been given a *cantabile* tempo heading.⁴⁵ The main theme has two texturally and structurally contrasted (yet motivically connected) parts. The first phrase in a chorale texture is only an antecedent stopping on a dominant seventh chord with a fermata and trill, ambiguously suggesting an introductory function, while the second part in a homophonic (melody-and-accompaniment) texture is periodic, with a clear antecedent and consequent. The bass line in the first phrase (mm. 1-2: Ab-Bb-Db-C) is repeated and stretched out in the second period (mm. 5-8: Ab-Bb-Db-C), which closely connects the two parts. The exact same melodic and rhythmic unit in measure 3 and measure 10 also confirms the correlation between both periods as well. In contrast to the main theme, the second theme is seemingly dominated by a fragmentary texture with dotted rhythms. Nonetheless, the theme maintains a lyrical and singing character consistent with the main theme (see example 9): the fact that the sixteenth note in the dotted rhythm is simply an octave duplication of the dotted eighth note actually lessens the fragmentary nature of the dotted rhythm and highlights the flowing, stepwise melodic lines in the soprano. Furthermore, the beginning in *piano* dynamic and the *legato* marking also confirm the singing character of the second theme.

⁴⁴ Eric Blom, *Beethoven's Pianoforte Sonatas Discussed* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), 230.

⁴⁵ Although there is a *cantabile* heading in the thematic introduction in op. 78, the real theme is still under *Allegro* tempo heading.

Example 9: Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 110, I: The second theme.



3. *Cantabile* and Thematic Process

As discussed in the introduction, Dahlhaus evokes “subthematicism” for reconciling the contradiction between lyricism and the principle of sonata development. As Dahlhaus further explains, “the motives are lyrical and contemplative, and they lack the dynamism which made thematic-motivic working seem an urgent, goal-directed activity in Beethoven’s middle period—with the reconstruction of the theme as the telos and end-result.”⁴⁶ Therefore, for Dahlhaus, it is subthematicism, a latent and abstract motivic structure derived from the previous themes, that lets the music progress, instead of “tarrying” to create a “fair moment.”⁴⁷

Dahlhaus’s concern makes sense not only because of the dialectical and goal-directed nature of sonata form but also because of the formal function of the development section *per se*—where the most dramatic and tension-building activities occur by means of reworking the previous materials (especially the main theme) in

⁴⁶ Dahlhaus, *Beethoven*, 212.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 212.

different tonal areas and through various developmental techniques such as model-sequence, fragmentation, harmonic acceleration, and increase in surface rhythmic activity. A singing-style main theme, thanks to its lack of dynamic and forward-driving character, would be hard-pressed to unleash the formal and aesthetic expectations of a development section. As my analysis will show, however, the traditional tension-building techniques in the development section of the singing-style sonatas are still present, but the way in which they are used and the way the development section prepares for the recapitulation of a singing theme do create a different character, a less goal-directed process consistent with the singing-style rhetoric.

The development in the first movement of Op. 14/2 has the typical four areas theorized by Caplin: pre-core, core, retransition (with false recapitulation), and standing on the dominant. It is very easy to recognize that the development follows the “developmental rotation” principle proposed by Hepokoski and Darcy, reworking the main theme and second theme in the order presented in the exposition.⁴⁸ In the pre-core area (mm. 64-80), the main theme appears in G minor followed by the first part of the second theme in its relative Bb major. Although there is a crescendo in the middle of the pre-core, the overall dynamic is in a *piano* setting, which represents the lull before the storm. All of a sudden, a strong strike on an octave Ab in the bass—which deceptively disrupts an implied modulation to C minor prepared by its six-four chord in the previous measure, along with the broken triplet chords in the soprano, marks the beginning of a stormy scene. The rhythmic conflict between the continuous sixteenth-note triplets in the soprano and the duple meter in the bass achieves a

⁴⁸ Hepokoski, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, 205-207.

restless and tempestuous feeling. The melodic motive drawn from the beginning of the main theme now is moved into the “darker” bass, which is developed in a forward-driving way, first through a five-measure model-sequence by the descending step (Ab-g) and then by breaking into smaller units. The fragmentation does not stop until the repetitions of dominant chords in Eb major culminating in a V7 chord with a fermata in measure 98. However, the harmonic goal is not yet achieved, since a dominant chord in a sub-median key does not prepare for the subsequent tonic return in the recapitulation. Then why does Beethoven stop at this “wrong” standing on the dominant? One possible reason might be that Beethoven realizes there would be a drastic conflict and inconsistency between this jarring and stormy scene and a recapitulation of the singing main theme. One way to balance and reconcile this aesthetic discrepancy is to reestablish the lyrical character, in this case, by introducing a surprising false recapitulation. After this false recapitulation, there is another standing on the dominant in the tonic starting at measure 105. However, the implication of G minor and the passagework in thirty-second notes at a *forte* dynamic level create another patch of turbulence, which requires once again reestablishment of the singing mood. As shown in measures 115-121, this happens in four ways: (1) by slowing the pace from thirty-second notes to sixteenth notes; (2) by decreasing the dynamic from *forte* to *piano*; (3) by recalling the short motives from the main theme, and (4) by relaxing from G minor to G major (see example 10).

Example 10: Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 14/2, I: Development section.

The image displays a musical score for the development section of Beethoven's Piano Sonata, Op. 14/2, I. The score is presented in five systems. The first system includes the annotation "Standing on the dominant" in red. The second system continues the texture. The third system features "decresc." in a red box and "ppp dynamic decrease" with an arrow pointing to a red box around a specific note. The fourth system has "rhythmic reduction" in red. The fifth system shows the continuation of the piece.

The development section in Op. 28 possesses no less dynamic and dramatic force than that of Op. 14/2. In the first three measures of the development (mm. 164-166), the drastic dynamic change from *sforzando* to piano with the pedal point on F#

functions as a harbinger for the following turbulence. Afterwards, the development “officially” starts. The phrase A from the main theme is presented in G major, and its repetition an octave higher follows in the minor mode, with the addition of a chain of restless eighth notes from the transition, foreshadowing the following outburst. The ascending gesture from phrase A is extracted and developed in sequences accompanied by flowing and agitated eighth-note scales, restlessly crossing from the soprano to alto, tenor, and bass. Afterwards, it is fragmented into two-measure units and later into one-measure units with *sforzando* in every measure. This forward-driving one-measure unit ascends until reaching to the highest notes D with *fortissimo* in measure 216. However, this restless one-measure unit does stop but continues by displacing the metric accent from the first to the second beat of each measure until measure 240, where the one-measure motive is replaced by F# major triads over an F# pedal. The music gradually calms down and stops at a fermata marked *pianissimo* at measure 256. Here Beethoven encounters the same problem as Op. 14/2: he could not directly introduce the recapitulation since the harmony is not standing on the dominant of the tonic. Therefore, Beethoven reintroduces a lyrical phrase from the transition (mm. 42-43) in B major and then repeats it in B minor. After a rest on another fermata in measure 266, the same phrase appears again and is harmonized on the dominant seventh of D major, followed by the recapitulation (see example 11).

Example 11: Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 28, I: Development section.

The image shows a musical score for the development section of Beethoven's Piano Sonata, Op. 28, I. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a dialogue between the treble and bass staves. The bass staff has a dotted rhythm figure that moves between registers. The treble staff has a short lyrical phrase. Red boxes highlight specific phrases in both staves. A red arrow points to a phrase in the bass staff labeled "from transition". The score includes dynamic markings like "p", "decrease.", and "pp", and tempo markings like "Adagio." and "Tempo I.". A red label "D: V7" is placed below the bass staff.

Compared to the previous two sonatas, the development section in Op. 78 is much gentler and shorter. In the first six measures of the development, Beethoven works with the short lyrical phrase from the beginning of the main theme, and then he draws out the dotted-rhythm figure as the dynamic element to develop sequentially in contrasting registers. Although the fast motion of sixteenth notes adds a layer of urgency and restlessness, the dialogue-like dotted rhythm shuttling between treble and bass clef lessens the urgency and momentum in the development to some degree. Also, we should be aware that after this comparatively short development, a repeat sign appears at the end of the recapitulation. If the performer plays the whole movement with all indicated repetitions, the resultant A-A-B-A'-B-A' pattern might remind us of rondo form, which actually weakens the teleological trajectory and intense dynamic characteristic of the typical heroic sonata form. Because of the repeat sign at the very end of the movement, there piece also lacks a definite coda that would serve as the final goal of a “goal-directed” sonata form.

Op. 101 has a comparatively short development section but with drastic dynamic changes. The singing melody drawn from the first half of the main theme comes to the fore, supported by static harmony in syncopation. Then, the singing melody is fragmented into a four-note motive and later, pairs of semitones with *sforzando* accents until measure 50, when rising *staccato* octaves in the bass break the continuity and add some vitality by contrasting with the descending melodic lines in the soprano. At measure 52, both parts reach the dominant chord of C# minor under a fermata in *piano* dynamic, preceded by what Hatten calls the undercut “tragic climax” (mm. 50-51).⁴⁹ Again, the same strategy is present as before: the development stops at a “wrong” key so that the recapitulation has to be delayed. Beethoven resolves the problem in the same way as before: he brings back the lyrical character through a false recapitulation of the main theme in measure 55. The ascending first measure of the opening theme is presented three times at different pitch levels over dominant harmony of A minor, following which the main theme is recapitulated in A major in an abbreviated form that leads directly to the transition (see example 12).

⁴⁹ Hatten, *Musical Meaning*, 96.

Example 12: Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 101, I: Development section.

The image displays a musical score for the development section of Beethoven's Piano Sonata, Op. 101, I. The score is divided into three systems. The first system shows a 'False Recapitulation' and an 'Undercut tragic climax' marked with a red box and arrow. The second system shows a 'Recapitulation' and a 'Transition' section. The third system shows a 'Recapitulation' and a 'Transition' section. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'p', 'molto', 'espressivo', 'cresc.', 'mf', and 'dimin.'.

The development section in Op. 110 has the least obviously developmental nature. The music seems aimless, resigned to repetitious descent until the long trill in measure 55, which leads into the recapitulation as a surprising turning point. In the first four measures of the development, Beethoven simply juxtaposes the singing melody and the chordal accompaniment from the first and second periods of the main theme. Although it seems that the whole development section is simply a downward, sequential repetition of a two-measure phrase, there are in fact a couple of subtle ways that it increases tension as the development section progresses (see example 13). After the first four measures, Beethoven substitutes a contrapuntal texture with flowing and

forward-driving arch-shape scales in the bass for the static chordal accompaniment. In addition, the overall descending orientation by step from Eb (two measures before the development in measure 38) to Db (measure 52) to its final goal on C in the recapitulation (measure 56), even though in a slow motion, features a processive and goal-directed motion typical of Classical developments.

Example 13: Beethoven, Piano Sonata, Op. 110, I: Development section.

Development

Texture change

dim. cresc.

Recapitulation

B.154.

Chapter 3. The Signifieds

1. Privacy and Domesticity

The sonata as an instrumental music genre in the eighteenth century could be found in a variety of locations and occasions, including church, court, salon, academy, and occasionally public concert hall. It expresses a wide range of personal and intimate sentiments compared to structurally larger but less expressively flexible genres such as symphonies and concertos. Johann Georg Sulzer clarifies this genre distinction clearly in his article:

There is no form of instrumental music that is more capable of depicting wordless sentiments than the sonata. The symphony and overture have a somewhat more fixed character, while the form of a concerto seems suited more for providing a skilled performer the opportunity to be heard accompanied by many instruments than for the depiction of passions. Other than these (and dances which also have their own character), no form other than the sonata may assume any character and every expression. In a sonata, the composer might want to express through the music a monologue marked by sadness, misery, pain, or of tenderness, pleasure and joy; using a more animated kind of music, he might want to depict a passionate conversation between similar or complementary characters; or he might wish to depict emotions that are impassioned, stormy, or contrasting, or ones that are light, delicate, flowing, and delightful.⁵⁰

The piano sonata, along with the chamber music, was primarily performed in “private” and “domestic” venues as the salon culture began to flourish and culminate in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For both aesthetic and commercial considerations, the public concerts, however, gave preference to genres for larger ensembles or genres for solo or small ensemble characteristic of virtuosic display, such as the capriccio, the fantasia, and other improvised pieces. Those less virtuosic

⁵⁰ Thomas Christensen and Nancy Kovaleff Baker, ed. and trans., *Aesthetics and the Art of Musical Composition in the German Enlightenment: Selected Writings of Johann Georg Sulzer and Heinrich Christoph Koch* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 103-104.

sonatas, as Thomas Schmidt-Beste points out, “retreated from the concert stage into the private or semi-private ‘salon’ sphere.”⁵¹

With the popularity of the public recitals after the second half of the nineteenth century, Beethoven’s piano sonatas have been performed frequently in public stages. However, this was not the case during Beethoven’s lifetime; in fact, only one of his piano sonatas, Op. 90, was played in his lifetime at a public concert, by an amateur pianist named Stainer von Felsburg in February 1816.⁵² Beethoven’s sonatas were mostly performed in private recitals by his amateur and professional students. Admittedly, some of his more dramatic and large sonatas such as the “Pathétique,” “Tempest,” “Appassionata,” “Waldstein,” and “Hammerklavier” sonatas possess certain symphonic qualities in their structure, style, and aesthetic dimensions that seem more appropriate for performance in those places where symphonies were heard rather than in private and intimate spaces. His singing-style or lyrical sonatas, as analyzed in the last chapter, however, still retain a private and domestic quality through their intimacy, directness, and comprehensibility. This privacy and domesticity served as the signifieds of the singing style, and they also have a connection with femininity as discussed below.

2. Femininity and the Dedicattee

Sonatas were usually written on commission, for church services, for public academies, for the private entertainment, and so on.⁵³ But mostly sonatas in the

⁵¹ Thomas Schmidt-Beste, *The Sonata* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 176.

⁵² Glenn Stanley, “Genre Aesthetics and Function: Beethoven’s Piano Sonatas in Their Cultural Context,” *Beethoven Forum* 6 (1998), 2.

⁵³ William Newman contributes detailed discussions of these different social functions of sonatas in the Classical Era. See William Newman, *The Sonata in the Classic Era*, 3rd edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983), 43-57.

Classical style functioned as a diversion or a training resource for amateurs.⁵⁴ In the Classical era the piano sonata belonged to the amateur, particularly the female amateur, since the keyboard was perceived as the most natural and acceptable outlet for women's musical talents and ambitions.⁵⁵ Both playing a keyboard instrument and singing at home were particularly fashionable among ladies. Therefore, those piano sonatas with an overall singing-style quality appropriately correlate with female gender as another signified of the singing style.

Another connection between femininity and the singing-style sonatas is the dedicatee of such works. For composers during the Classical era, one way to secure or improve their livelihood was to dedicate their sonatas to an affluent or influential individual, often an aristocrat. Needless to say, they often had to make concessions in terms of style, instrumentation, technique, and texture to conform to the preferences of the dedicatee.

Of the five Beethoven piano sonatas examined here, three (Opp. 14/2, 78, and 101) were dedicated to females who were capable pianists, some even with superb technique and outstanding expressivity.⁵⁶ In 1799, Beethoven dedicated Op. 14/2 to Baroness von Braun (c. 1765-1838), who was married to Baron Peter von Braun, the

⁵⁴ Wei-Chun, Bernadette Lo, "The Piano Sonata in the Musical Life of the Early 19th Century," DMA dissertation (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2000), 34.

⁵⁵ As Newman mentions, some composers specifically wrote keyboard sonatas for women. "[Johann Baptist] Vanhal's keyboard sonatas were said...to have the graceful and charming melodies that would attract amateurs, 'especially ladies.'" C. P. E. Bach also composed a set of sonatas for women. See Newman, *The Sonata in the Classic Era*, 45 and 416.

⁵⁶ The only one of the five sonatas that does not have a connection with female dedicatee is Op. 28, which was dedicated to Joseph von Sonnenfels (?1733-1817). He was created a baron in 1797 and in 1806 he was granted honorary citizenship of the city of Vienna. Beethoven's dedication of Op. 28 to him has rather puzzled scholars, since there is no known evidence of any contact between them. Thayer surmises that it must have been simply an expression of the composer's profound regard for a man of high principles, with whose general philosophy he found himself in sympathy. See H. P. Clive, *Beethoven and His World: A Biographical Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 341.

theatre manager of the Theater an der Wien where Beethoven conducted the first public performance of the ‘Eroica’ Symphony on 7 April 1805. As H. P. Clive indicates, Baroness von Braun appears to have been an excellent pianist, like her husband.⁵⁷ Countess Therese von Brunsvik (1775-1861), a Hungarian aristocrat, was the dedicatee of Op. 78 in 1810, and that same year Therese sent Beethoven a painting. In May 1799, Therese’s mother Countess Anna brought her and her sister Josephine to Vienna to stay with her sisters-in-law for fourteen days, during which time Beethoven gave them piano lessons every day.⁵⁸ Op. 101 was dedicated to Baroness Dorothea von Ertmann (1781-1849), the wife of an Austrian army officer. The Baroness was a distinguished amateur keyboard performer during her time, and she had a wide-ranging acquaintance with contemporary works. Beethoven probably once taught her, helping her understand and perform his piano works, and as a result she was frequently reported as one of his pupils.⁵⁹

Although Op. 110 was published without a dedication, Alexander Thayer suggests that Beethoven originally intended to dedicate it to Antonie Brentano (1780-1869). Thayer relies on a note of Beethoven to Schindler that was found among the latter’s papers.⁶⁰ Antonie was the daughter of a senior Austrian civil servant and noted art collector, and she has also been identified by Maynard Solomon as the “Immortal Beloved” of Beethoven.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Clive, *Beethoven*, 43.

⁵⁸ Clive, *Beethoven*, 63.

⁵⁹ Clive, *Beethoven*, 103.

⁶⁰ Alexander Thayer, *Thayer’s Life of Beethoven*, *Thayer’s Life of Beethoven*, rev. and ed. by Elliot Forbes (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), 781.

⁶¹ Maynard Solomon, “Antonie Brentano and Beethoven,” *Music and Letters* 58, no. 2 (April 1977): 153-169.

3. Nature and Simplicity

"Nature" is a recurring concept associated with the singing style. One thing that connects "nature" and the affiliated concept of "simplicity" to the singing style is the pastoral topic. In topic theory, the pastoral is identified as a distinctive topic from the singing style. According to Ratner, the Pastorale and Musette are "rustic music played on the bagpipe, cornemuse, or musette" which usually has a "sustained bass" and a melody that is either a "naïve, pastoral tune or . . . a melodic flourish."⁶² Later discussions of the pastoral topic have become much more complex. Many contemporary music scholars discuss in detail not only the pastoral in music but also in related literary genres, which reveals some of the complexities of the topic. It is not my purpose here to fully present the discussion of the pastoral topic; instead, I aim to show that there is a strong association with the pastoral topic in the singing-style sonatas, especially in Op. 28, Op. 78, and Op. 101, which confirms the cultural significance of nature and simplicity as signifieds of the singing style.

The publisher Crazz of Hamburg gave Op. 28 the not inappropriate title *Pastorale*, since its music exhibits numerous points of contact with the traditions of the pastoral, such as sustained tonic pedals, relatively simple melodic progressions, terraced harmony, and major mode.⁶³ Most of these features are also shared with the main theme of Op. 101, as Robert Hatten demonstrates in *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*.⁶⁴ Hatten also offers a poetic reading of Op. 78 in terms of the pastoral: the

⁶² Ratner, *Classic Music*, 21. That Ratner unconditionally equates Pastoral with Musette is problematic as seen in many sources. Both Sulzer and Koch note that the Musette usually has a faster tempo than the Pastorale. See Andrew Haringer, "Hunt, Military, and Pastoral Topics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, ed. by Danuta Mirka (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 204.

⁶³ Lockwood, "Reshaping the Genre: Beethoven's Piano Sonatas from Op. 22 to Op. 28 (1799-1801)," *Israel Studies in Musicology* 6 (1996): 13.

⁶⁴ Robert Hatten, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven*, 97-98.

first movement “might be interpreted as opening with a sunrise (the gradual ascent over a tonic pedal that acts as a horizon) and continuing with a ‘workaday’ set of themes in the following Allegro.”⁶⁵ The representation of scenes from nature and the overall simplicity of the music also conform to a larger conception of the literary pastoral mode, as “peaceful, simple, happy, picturesque, and unsullied.”⁶⁶

Although the subtle and complex relationships between the pastoral and the singing style are far from clear and need to be further explored, the association of the pastoral—as one type of song mentioned by Day-O’Connell—in three sonatas nonetheless clearly points to the cultural significance of nature and simplicity for the singing style.⁶⁷

4. Beauty

If one compares both Op. 14/2 and Op. 78 with the piano sonatas that preceded them, one finds drastic stylistic contrasts between the “turbulence” of the earlier works and the “beauty” of these works. The aggressive “Pathétique,” Op. 13, was followed by the gentler sonatas of Op. 14/2; and the tempestuous “Appassionata,” Op. 57, precedes Op. 78. The question raised here is whether such a stylistic and aesthetic contrast was intentional by Beethoven. What are some possible reasons that could explain this phenomenon? Lewis Lockwood in his article “On the Beautiful in Music,” examines this issue through his study of Beethoven’s “Spring” Violin Sonata, Op. 24. Lockwood’s exploration of “beauty,” a trait earlier in this paper identified as a signified of the singing style, mainly draws its meaning from Eduard Hanslick’s

⁶⁵ Ibid., 83.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 82, summarizing the definition in *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (1960). [include full reference in your bibliography.]

⁶⁷ Day-O’Connell, 250.

famous essay on music's aesthetic value. He argues that the special character of beauty in Op. 24 can be interpreted as Beethoven's "early response to questions and feelings about the nature of 'the beautiful'."⁶⁸

Since 1798 Beethoven's name had appeared repeatedly in the pages of *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, where one could also find occasional negative reviews of Beethoven's "experimental" works. One review of Beethoven's "Appassionata" in 1807 echoes the startled reactions typical of many contemporary listeners:

Everyone knows Beethoven's method of composing a major sonata; and in all of them, in his most multitudinous ways of presenting bizarre material, Beethoven generally adheres to the same method. In the first movement of this sonata he has once again released many evil spirits similar to those already familiar through their appearance in other major sonatas. But truly, this time it is worth the trouble of fighting to overcome not only the extreme difficulties of the piece but also the repugnance that one frequently feels over forced waywardness and eccentricity!⁶⁹

As Lockwood points out, Beethoven was aware of some of these negative critiques, as demonstrated by a letter he wrote to the publishers Breitkopf und Härtel in April 1801:

Advise your critics to exercise more care and good sense with regard to the productions of young composers, for many a one who perhaps might go far, may take fright. As for me, far be it from me to think that I have achieved such perfection as to be beyond criticism. But your critic's outcry against me was at first very humiliating. When I began to compare myself to others, I could hardly pay any attention to it, and I remained calm and thought, 'they do not know anything about music.' And what made it easier to remain calm was that I saw how certain people were being praised to the skies who have very little standing in Vienna.⁷⁰

Obviously, Beethoven's most powerful response to those negative critiques is not to be found in his letter to the journal but in his compositions. His musical response is

⁶⁸ Lewis Lockwood, "'On the Beautiful in Music': Beethoven's 'Spring' Sonata for Violin and Piano, Opus 24," in *The Beethoven Violin Sonatas: History, Criticism, Performance*, edited by Lewis Lockwood and Mark Kroll (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 24.

⁶⁹ Stanley, *Genre Aesthetics*, 15.

⁷⁰ Lockwood, "On the Beautiful in Music", 41.

manifested in works with a conspicuous singing and lyrical style in which Beethoven attempted to “minimize those elements within his style that listeners could readily construe as ‘bizarre’, ‘ungracious,’ ‘dismal,’ and ‘opaque’.”⁷¹ As Lockwood deftly summarizes, Beethoven’s special interest of exploring the singing style, or “melodically beautiful,” “not only formed an artistic balance to the elements of power but was a vital element in Beethoven’s quest for the widest possible range of expression in every genre.”⁷² Besides, the creation of beauty through comprehensible means leads us to understand Beethoven’s singing-style music as an artistic manifestation of a key point in the ideology of the Enlightenment movement: the achievement of loving communication and brotherhood.

⁷¹ Ibid., 41.

⁷² Ibid., 44.

Conclusion

As a practical response to Day-O'Connell's theoretical discussion of the singing style in the discourse of music semiotics, and as a theoretical supplement to Dahlhaus's univalent "subthematic" analysis of the structural tensions between the singing style and sonata form, my analysis aims to provide a more integrated and comprehensive understanding of five of Beethoven's lyrical first movements from his piano sonatas in terms of musical text, and cultural and historical significance.

As shown in my analysis, these five piano sonatas not only indicate surface musical elements as signifiers of the singing style, such as conjunct melody with narrow range and long note values, continuous and flowing contours, less impetuous rhythms, soft dynamics, simple harmony, and homophonic (melody-and-accompaniment or chorale/hymn) textures, but also reveal how Beethoven solves the structural and formal problems that the singing-style theme encounters in sonata form. By evoking Schmitz's "contrasting derivation," one can better understand how the contrast between the singing main theme and the second theme is mitigated, thus creating a unified singing style throughout the exposition. In the development section, potentially the most recalcitrant location for a sonata form with a lyrical main theme, I demonstrate, on the one hand, how Beethoven employs such traditional techniques as model-sequence, liquidation and fragmentation, harmonic acceleration, and increase in surface rhythmic activity to build tension and drama, and on the other hand, how he lessens the turbulence at the end of development section in order to prepare a return to the lyrical singing style. As a result, the development section often leads to less goal-directed and urgent processes, as consistent with the singing-style rhetoric.

Rather than simply stopping at an understanding of the musical structure of Beethoven's singing-style sonatas, the exploration of the signifieds of the singing style, including nature, beauty, simplicity; the amateur and the feminine; and private domains as well as sociability, helps us understand how Beethoven's singing-style sonata-form first movements function in their socio-cultural and historical contexts, while also revealing a significant humanist value—loving communication and brotherhood—that is worthy of further research.

In sum, the investigation of the singing style in Beethoven's music contributes to a better understanding of Beethoven as an artist, especially as a countermeasure to the dominance of the heroic in Beethoven reception. This is not to devalue Beethoven's heroic style, which would be impossible in any event, given its centrality to Beethoven's reputation and its humanistic value for society. My purpose here instead is to call more attention to Beethoven's other sides and to break the stereotypically dualist division of Beethoven's music into heroic and non-heroic styles. Only if we pay attention to various styles and characters as manifested in all of Beethoven's music, can Beethoven be understood and better appreciated as a real historical figure, instead of a constructed myth.

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