
Beethoven and the Piano

It was noted in Volumes I¹⁶ and II¹⁷ of this edition that Carl Czerny (1791–1857) reported that when he auditioned for Beethoven as a boy of 10, the composer had in his home a piano made by the Viennese piano maker Anton Walter (1752–1826). By November 1802, Beethoven noted in a letter that, “when people began to think my relations with Walter were strained, a whole tribe of piano manufacturers have been swarming around me in their anxiety to serve me—and all for nothing. Each wants to make me a pianoforte exactly as I should like it.”¹⁸ Later in the letter he stated that he “shall then have the pleasure of seeing myself compelled to display my art on Jakesch’s piano.”¹⁹ One suspects sarcasm with regard to the pleasure of playing on the piano made by Viennese piano maker Matthias Jakesch (1783–ca. 1828). On November 23, 1803, in a letter to Breitkopf & Härtel, the composer apparently responded to an inquiry from the publisher by suggesting two other Viennese piano makers: “Since you wish to have instruments from other manufacturers as well, I am suggesting to you also Herr Poback, whose work is sound and whose prices and types of instruments are enclosed in this letter. I should also like to add Herr Moser, of whose prices and instruments will be sent to you shortly.”²⁰ These names are among the many piano makers in Vienna at the turn of the 19th century, and both are somewhat obscure. It is not known, for example, if either provided Beethoven with a piano or, indeed, if they were names of makers on whose pianos the composer had played at one time or another.

The most significant piano acquisition in this period of Beethoven’s life was the gift from the French piano maker Sébastien Érard (1752–1831). Sébastien and his brother Jean-Baptiste (d. 1826) manufactured five-octave small pianos up until the late 1790s, at which point they opened a London workshop and began copying the larger English-style pianos. (See “Beethoven and the Piano” in Volumes I or II of this edition for a discussion of differences between the Viennese and English pianos.) The 1803 piano sent to Beethoven had a mahogany case that sat on three legs and was braced on the inside by four small iron pieces. Its stringing was tri-chord and its action was the heavier English action. The white keys were covered with ivory and the black keys with ebony. The keyboard compass was five and one-half octaves (from \underline{F} to c ”).

Pedals on pianos of the period were far from standard, instruments often being customized with special effects that were manipulated by either knee or foot pedals. The Érard given to Beethoven had four wooden foot pedals. From left to right, they functioned as follows:

“**Lute**” Pedal: Activating this pedal caused leather thongs to be inserted between the hammers and the strings.

Damper Pedal: Its effect was the same as on today’s instruments.

“**Dampening**” Pedal: This pedal caused a cloth to be inserted between the hammers and strings.

“**Keyboard Glide**” Pedal: As on today’s pianos, this pedal caused the keyboard to shift so that only one or two strings sounded on pianos with three strings per key, and one on pianos with two strings per key.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Érard must have been considered state of the art, the composer was not fond of it. In a letter to the Viennese piano maker Andreas Streicher (1761–1833) in November of 1810, Beethoven made reference to what was undoubtedly the Érard, stating, “As for my French piano, which is certainly quite useless now, I still have misgivings about selling it, for it is really a souvenir such as no one here has so far honored me with...”²¹ In 1825 or 1826, Beethoven gave the Érard to his brother (Nikolaus) Johann van Beethoven (1776–1848), probably to make room for the new Graf piano the composer awaited. Johann, a pharmacist who had his own shop in Linz, later donated the piano to the Linz Museum. It is presently on loan to the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, where it is on display in the old musical instruments collection.

There is evidence, in fact, that Beethoven remained loyal to the Viennese instrument built by the Stein-Streicher family during the years in which the sonatas in this volume were written. (See Volume I of this edition for information on this family of piano builders.) A letter written to Andreas Streicher on May 6, 1810, implies that a Streicher piano had been in the composer’s home for some time, for he stated, “You have seen your instrument which I have here and you must admit that it is very worn out; and I frequently hear the same opinion expressed by other people...”²² In late July, Beethoven praises a Streicher piano he tried out, probably as a selection for Baron Georg Schall von Falenhorst (1761–1831), a major-general in the Imperial Army who gave musical parties in his home. The composer wrote to Streicher, “I can’t help it; the piano beside the door near your entrance is constantly ringing in my ears—I feel sure I shall be thanked for having chosen this one.”²³ Beethoven continued to

¹⁶ Beethoven, *Piano Sonatas*, Vol. I (no. 16743), ed. Gordon (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Co., 2002), pp. 6–7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. II (no. 22579, pub. 2005), pp. 6–7.

¹⁸ *Letters of Beethoven*, vol. I, p. 82.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 271.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

Sonata No. 17 in D Minor

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Op. 31, No. 2

Largo **Allegro**

Adagio **Largo** **Allegro**

pp *p* *cresc.* *sf* *p* *cresc.* *f* *(simile)* *sf*

Ped. *Ped.* *Ped.* *sf*

1 6 11 16

(a) Both Nägeli and Simrock show ♩ . Bülow and Köhler erroneously show ♩ . Pedal indications throughout the movement are in both first editions.

(b) Bülow, Casella, and Schnabel offer realizations for this turn:

Bülow and Casella:

Schnabel:

Dedicated to Count Ferdinand von Waldstein

Sonata No. 21 in C Major

(Grande Sonate)

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Op. 53

Allegro con brio

The score is divided into four systems:

- System 1 (Measures 1-4):** Starts with a piano introduction (*pp*) featuring a triplet of eighth notes in the bass. The treble clef contains a melodic line with a grace note (marked 'a') and a fermata. Dynamics include *pp* and *f*. Fingerings 4, 3, 1, and 5 are indicated.
- System 2 (Measures 5-8):** Continues the piano introduction with a triplet of eighth notes in the bass. Dynamics include *pp* and *f*. Fingerings 1, 3, 1, and 5 are indicated.
- System 3 (Measures 9-11):** The main melody begins in the treble clef with a grace note (marked 'a'). Dynamics include *cresc.*, *f*, and *sf*. Fingerings 4, 5, 3, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 4, 3, and 4 are indicated.
- System 4 (Measures 12-15):** Features a fermata (marked 'b') in the treble clef. Dynamics include *pp*. Fingerings 5, 2, 3, 4, 1, and 3, 1 are indicated.

(a) Both the autograph and the first edition show all grace notes in this movement as small sixteenth notes (♪). Of the referenced editors, Arrau, Hauschild, Krebs, Schenker, Taylor, and Wallner keep the original notation. D'Albert, Bülow, Casella, Köhler, Martienssen, Schnabel, and Tovey show ♪ instead. Taylor recommends playing the notes on the beat, rapidly, but not as crushed notes (*acciaccatura*).

(b) Bülow suggests the fermata should equal an extra whole note, counted in time. Casella objects to the "squareness" of this recommendation, suggesting instead an extra dotted half note (♪) or whole note tied to a quarter (♪).

Sonata No. 22 in F Major

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Op. 54

In Tempo d'un Menuetto

- (a) The first edition shows several small inconsistencies in the RH slurring of measures 12–16, 20–24, and 81–85. The LH slurring, on the contrary, is the same in all places. The RH slurring presented here is that adopted by most critical editors, all having deemed the shorter groupings that appear randomly as engraving errors.
- (b) The ornamentation in measures 16, 18, 20, 24, 85, and 113 is cause for disagreement among the referenced editors. The first question is whether the trill symbol in measures 16 and 85 results in different ornamentation from that indicated by the mordent-turn combination used in the other measures. Martienssen, Schnabel, Taylor, and Tovey suggest trills without after-notes (*nachschlag*) in measures 16 and 85. Martienssen and Tovey start on the main note, Taylor and this editor on the upper note, and Schnabel gives examples of both.

measure 16: or: or:

C.P.E. Bach designates the combination of a mordent and turn as a “trilled turn,” realized as follows:

measure 18, beat 3:

Only Casella, Schnabel, Taylor, and this editor suggest this realization; however, Schnabel also allows an easier version that resembles the models below. The other referenced editors who deal with these ornaments are d’Albert, Bülow, Köhler, and Schenker. They make no distinction between the symbols, with Köhler substituting the turn sign in all of these measures. Their solutions in all cases are one of the following two examples:

measure 18, beat 3: or: