

## Legendum II

JUNE 2018

**(Please excuse some redundancy!)**

With the analysis of Beethoven's piano sonata Opus 109 I have come to the end of a long journey that began in 1994 when the movie "Immortal Beloved" and George Marek's research led me to discover the elusive Immortal's portrait painted by the Master in the first of his five late piano sonatas. Opus 101 is based from beginning till end on the name "Dorothea" and its many possible permutations.

That happy discovery in 1998 was followed – after years of pondering – by a true *Aha Erlebnis* in January 2005, the discovery of the *soggetto cavato* in Opus 111 "Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott", then Opus 110's "Jesu meine Freude", Opus 106's "Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini."

After years of intimations and educated guesses of Opus 109's "motto" I was ready to give up, but here it is. The whole work is based, as in Opus 101, on the name of the dedicatee "Maximiliane" von Brentano.

I am strongly convinced that I have been led to this particular sequence of the works (resp. 101, 111, 110, 106, 135, 109) and that each one enabled me to tackle the next one.

What made Opus 109 such a challenge? This may be projection on my part but I have strongly felt the composer standing over me, arms crossed, perhaps begrudgingly congratulating me with discovering the secrets of the other sonatas, but daring me to crack this one.

Throughout the many years Opus 109 kept teasing me, my suspicion grew that Conan Doyle had found himself in a previous Sherlock Holmes incarnation as none other than ... Ludwig van Beethoven.

Let's take the opening of Opus 109 for starters. I don't believe there is a soul in the whole world – I myself was one of them – who does not play this as an eight measure phrase that consists of a standard two times four-measure group, preceded by a quarter note upbeat.

The problem I eventually came to sense, was that upbeat. It seemed easily belonging to the first full measure but, when it appears again at the end of the whole eight-measure phrase, it most definitely does not lead into the following measure. Here in measure nine the second theme (of the traditional sonata-form structure) starts rather abruptly in a different key, tempo and a three quarter note time signature instead of the two-quarters of the opening phrase.

So instead of our standard 2x4 measure group making up the first sentence (= the first theme), we have an upbeat followed by 3 + 3 + 2 measures; not that anybody – besides myself and one other person mentioned below – seems to be much bothered by the difference.

The development section of the first movement leads to more surprises. At long last Sherlock Holmes drops a hint in the form a slur spanning three measures (22, 23, 24). Zealous editors manipulate B.'s text and extend that slur to include the first beat of measure 25; what Henle does is so despicable that it does not even deserve mentioning. As my annotated text clarifies, starting from 22 till 33, these measures are grouped 3+3+2+2+ Maximiliane – Maximiliane – miliane – miliane – mili before, in measures 33 to 44, making up for these truncated two – and one measure groupings with four times

a full-bodied: Maximiliane Maximiliane Maximiliane Maximiliane.

N.B. one can and must feel the visceral building of suspense that finally is satisfied with these four “complete” Maximiliane’s, each exclaiming in gentle undulating rhythms all six syllables of the dedicatee’s name.

How can a performer share that information in audible form with the listener? When it comes to Beethoven, every composer before and a multitude after him, we must try and revive a species that has pretty much become extinct in contemporary performance: the understanding of “silences of articulation.” Beethoven’s student Carl Czerny was one of the first to set out to extinguish this essential element of music that earlier theorists and composers had taken such great pains to safeguard

I have dealt with all of this in some detail in my article “Extirpating the Romantic Virus.”

The subject of “silences of articulation” was a hot topic of discussion centuries ago but there is not much talk of it these days. That is more than unfortunate because without those “silences” separating notes and sentences from each other it is impossible to communicate meaning.

An obvious requisite for meaning, or intelligibility on the most elemental level, in language as well as music, is that letters (notes), words (motifs), and sentences (phrases or musical sentences) are grouped correctly. A word like “min ceme at” makes no sense, whereas mincemeat is clear. Well, it is my contention that for almost two centuries now we have made and continue to make mincemeat of Beethoven’s compositions, as well as the compositions of a host of other composers. If I were to write, “Thesa Turd aynig htsh, Owha! sbe enabi! gsu cc es, swi ththe Enti. recomm unity,” for good measure adding in some strategically misplaced capital letters, commas, exclamation marks and periods, not a soul would understand that I was commenting on the success of the Saturday night show. All the right letters are there, but where is the meaning?

The reader may again be wondering “Who cares”?

Well, there is one person who cared, cared passionately about how notes are correctly grouped into motifs, sentences, sections, movements: Ludwig van Beethoven.

In a letter to Carl Holz written in August of 1825, Beethoven complains bitterly:

“ .... The notes are all-right – but try to understand my meaning correctly....

The slurs must stand just as they are! It is not a matter of indifference whether you play three notes under one slur or two notes under one slur followed by the third note. (B. gives this example in music notation).

Mind, this comes from high quarters, so pay attention. I have spent the entire morning and the whole of yesterday correcting these two movements (*of the Quartet Opus 132*) and am quite hoarse with swearing and stamping.”

The example B. gives should make us all cry when we listen to Mozart’s 40<sup>th</sup> Symphony in G minor. I have yet to hear a performance, be it by an amateur orchestra, band-ensemble or the New York Philharmonic that does not play the first part of the opening motif with three notes grouped together rather than, as B. demands and Mozart clearly writes, the third note separated from the first two. Instead of a profoundly moving drama we are treated to a slick ditty, devoid of the work’s true, poignant and tragic meaning.

In written language meaning is communicated by creating a small space between one word and the next; if spoken, by a smaller or larger time-interval between words, sentences or parts of sentences, all that indicated by coma's, colons, semi-colons, hyphens, periods and the thousand and one variables that distinguish a good speaker from a bad one. As Bob Hope said "timing is everything."

And yes, it is that same way in music: timing is everything IF we are interested in meaning.

That "IF" brings me back to my own long personal experience. What we have become interested in, or accustomed to, is to hear all the notes the composer wrote played correctly, in the right tempo (often that tempo is faster or slower than the composer intended), with the right dynamics etc etc. We can appreciate an orchestra's glorious sound, a pianist's lovely touch, the richness, projecting power and depth of a singer's voice etc. etc. Indeed, let us not begrudge each other the delight and enjoyment, the sensuous beauty of which music is so marvelously capable. But let us not confuse that with the search for meaning. And, when it comes to Beethoven (and so many other great composers) we must become aware how seriously we have been infected by the "Romantic Virus" I wrote about.

All of Beethoven's compositions will suffer from wrong or non-existent punctuation marks (= silences of articulation) but in these late works the damage is catastrophic. Let us return to opus 109 dedicated to Maximiliane von Brentano. It starts with the announcement of the birth of the daughter of two of the composer's dearest friends, and throughout its three movements it is a celebration of the life of this young girl. (Incidentally, he assertion that the mother, Antonie, might have been the Immortal Beloved is as far-fetched and pure phantasy as the movie I alluded to above, which twists Johanna, the mother of Beethoven's nephew Karl, into that role). Beethoven wrote the dedication to Maximiliane in a charming and heartfelt letter from December 6<sup>th</sup> 1821 (the same year he finished, on Christmas Day – December 25<sup>th</sup> – 1821 his next sonata, opus 110, certainly intended as another birthday present, this time for a little boy lying in a crib in the manger "Jesu, meine Freude" (see my analysis on <Willem Ibes>). B. had known Maximiliane since the the age of about twelve; by the time the sonata was composed and dedicated to her she was about twenty years old.

Forgive me for sounding a bit pedantic and grant me your indulgence for a good cause. If, arbitrarily, we decide on one second (MM = 60) for maximum amount of "silence" we could assign 10 units (= one-tenth of a second) after the upbeat "Née:" – the colon in my annotated text is intended to indicate that time-interval; after the third full measure a comma is needed (NOT after the first beat of measure 4!), let's say 5 units; after measure eight perhaps a slightly longer comma (semi-colon?), perhaps 8 units. Returning to the Development section (mm 16 till upbeat measure 49). Again 10 units after the upbeat to measure 17, commas after m 19 (full name), perhaps only 8 units after the upbeat in m 21 (which here cleverly serves also as the final syllable of the birthday girl's name), comma after m 24. It is worth noting that the slur over mm 22 through 24 is authentic Beethoven and it should give us pause in case we were still tempted to drag it on till the first beat of m 25.

Commas again after m 29 (the full name), then commas two (not three measures) later as the truncated text “mi li a ne” makes clear, again a comma two measure after that and then a comma just one measure later when B. in measure 32 chops off two more syllables and ends up with just “mi li” which makes us cry out for the full name which B. magnanimously supplies four times in a row: Maximiliane – Maximiliane – Maximiliane – Maximiliane.

If you are just as tired of this tedious number game as I am, then the only recourse we all have left is to declaim out loud – as a well-trained actor or orator would – the text I have annotated to the score. There is no doubt whatsoever that the name of Maximiliane is exactly what the composer had in mind, but if you want to take exception, feel free to find another text, as B. advised “ ... rieth fertner an ... (see full quotation in *Extirpating the Romantic Virus*)” but make sure it has the same metrical and proportional qualities!

The Recapitulation starts with the upbeat on the second quarter note of measure 48 and its first theme ends in measure 57. Wait a moment, did I count that right? Let me try again. Yes, I counted it right, the 1<sup>st</sup> theme in the Recapitulation does indeed consist of 9, not, as in the Exposition, 8 measures and it does not take a genius to see and hear that they are grouped in three groups of three measures each. Had Ludwig (instead of surreptitiously slipping it in at the Recapitulation) been kind enough to start with a nine – instead of eight – measure sentence at the beginning of the sonata, we pianists might have scratched our heads well before I did.

## LEGENDUM I

Willem Ibes mid-April 2016

The 4th variation, in the final movement of Beethoven’s piano sonata opus 109, is a sophisticated polyphonic composition; setting it as a homophonic - harmonic- texture as existing editions do (with stems accommodated as much as possible within the staves), makes the intricate counterpoint unintelligible.

Examining Beethoven’s Autograph shows the pains the composer took in differentiating the four-part texture by stems-up for the soprano and tenor; stemming down for alto and bass. Indeed, only the rendering on four (not two) staves does justice to this jewel. In the present four-part analysis I have placed the direction of the stems exactly as Beethoven did in his Autograph and I have done the same with the slurs.

In the so-called third period works (starting from the piano sonata opus 101), Beethoven becomes ever more the “architect,” the “constructor” who measures, shortens, lengthens, truncates his motifs and sentences with the greatest ingenuity and in proportions of the utmost diversity. Even a cursory glance at the first page of this four-part analysis shows the length of the motif (“Maximiliane”) varying from three (dotted quarter note) beats in the bass, four beats in the alto, two beats in the tenor, three in the soprano followed immediately afterwards in the soprano by four beats and, for example, truncated to just “miliane” end measure 4, beginning of measure 5 in the alto.

The composer had used that latter device already in the very first sentence of the first movement: (Née:) “Maximiliane, Maximiliane” followed by just the last four syllables “mi li a ne.” Beethoven will “make amends” to his charming subject when the theme

returns in the Recapitulation with three complete statements of her name: “Maximiliane, Maximiliane, Maximiliane.”

I believe to have succeeded quite well – with the indispensable help and keen eyesight of my wife and collaborator Akiko Yoshikawa – in coming close to the composer’s intentions.

This four part analytical score-transcription is of course not intended to be a performance score; even though I have given great care to correctness there may remain some mistakes in opus 111, opus 109 and opus 135 which I had transcribed, Performers should consult and compare several printed editions and if possible the Autograph combined with my text-underlays to arrive at a correct interpretation.

However, just as essential for a correct understanding and interpretation is a metrical-proportional analysis that constitutes the fundamental matrix not only of this, but all of Beethoven’s writing, especially indispensable for the understanding of the late works.

The means Beethoven uses to communicate to the performer his meaning and understanding from the very beginning of his oeuvre, is the way he “slurs” the individual notes into larger groups. As language uses spaces and punctuation marks between words and sentences to communicate meaning, so Beethoven’s articulation slurs - in time-honored tradition - indicate notes that are separate from those that belong together.

Unfortunately for the past 150 years or so, the mainly German, commentators have tried to make us believe that the slurs – in fact “all” the slurs – in Beethoven indicate legato and nothing else. In years gone by I have wasted quite a bit of time and effort e.g. in the Fugue of opus 110, to consistently apply that “rule”. The result was utter nonsense.

The one and only function the slurs in Beethoven have is to indicate what belongs together and what is separate; in a word, without exception (however tempted we may be), they are all articulation slurs. If Beethoven wants legato he writes that in the score.

The only exceptions are the slurred two-note “sigh figures” that do ask for a legato connection; all others, as mentioned, indicate exclusively the groupings of individual notes into motifs and sentences or parts of sentences as antecedent and consequent.

Much more about this and the “Romantic Virus” in general can be found on <Willembes.com>

The composer certainly intended his copyist/editor to supply additional slurs for the rest of this variation but it is interesting to note (and try to find out the reason why) where he writes them himself.

## **Afterword July 2018**

I have waited too long to write about what the slurs in Beethoven (and many other composers) mean. Once more: in Beethoven not a single one means “legato” playing (see above). That calamitous misconception stands on a par with neglecting the silences of articulation and goes hand in hand with it.

Some odds and ends ...

Needless to say, B.’s slurs are often imprecisely notated and actually wrong.

To have B.’s Autograph is almost a necessity. I did not have one for opus 106

and since all printed editions try to prevent the stems as much as possible from sticking out, it becomes almost impossible to establish the contrapuntal voices which are the hallmark of late Beethoven writing.

In Opus 106 III mm 14 and 15 I “saw”: this is the Sanctus of the Ordinary of the Mass but it took me a while to underlay the text. I attempted it first in German but, after realizing the augmentation in these two measures, the Latin text fit perfectly (as of course it does in the Missa Solemnis) here and in the rest of this third movement, How do I know that in measure 3 the text in the RH differs from the one in the left? The slur in the RH and the absence of that slur in the LH provides the answer.

But be aware, there are times where the composer intends a slur for both hands as in measure 9 of the same sonata and notates it for one hand only.

B. assumes the pianist is smart enough to figure out that e.g. the slurs in the Exposition of a movement must be “verbatim” applied to the Recapitulation (and in this particular case, the Recapitulation’s slurs must be retro-applied to the Exposition).

Opus 109 III is a textbook case of this principle in the Theme and Variations structure. First of all of course we must underlay the text correctly and then try to find an answer to the questions. For example what does it mean that in measure 5 and 6 of the theme there is, in all voices, one slur over two measures – as in measures 9 and 10? And how do we distinguish between the two opening measures with one slur in the bass-line and not on the top?

Yes, always compare Exposition and Recapitulation. Following this course of action makes it clear e.g. in opus 111 II that B.’s slur in measure 11 of the Arietta MUST be wrong.

A real puzzle for me was the countersubject in the Fugue of opus 110. Not one printed edition has that right. B.’s orthography is imprecise and only (after many years of searching) by applying the correct text “Jesu, meine Freude” could I be certain where that particular slur starts and especially where it ends.

I used to kind of “slug” through that last movement, without much regard to correct phrasing: now I know better.

How do we distinguish in this Fugue between the 2 and the 1½ measure groupings of the countersubject? Once more: we need the correct text-underlay and mighty assistance of the silences of articulation. Without those there is just a machine-like playing from start to finish without detectible meaning, like reading a text without spaces between the words nor commas, periods, colons, semi-colons, question marks (see opus 111 first movement measure 71). As B. wrote “All the notes are there, but where is my meaning?”

In opus 109 III fourth variation I have reconstructed the Autograph’s voicing: S and T stems up, A and B down. I did the same for opus 111’s second movement Arietta. The fifth’s variation in opus 109 also uses the above stemming in the Autograph but I have just done the best I could with the printed text (which does not follow the SATB stemming).

B. seems to be rather disdainful of us pianists (and performers in general); he does not realize that we are just too busy with getting the notes right and therefore don't have much time and energy left to think about the music. Why doesn't he make it more clear e.g. in the last movement of 109 that he wants the slurring in the Theme applied to the following two variations? We are left to figure that out by and for ourselves.

Would it have been so difficult to write us a few lines of explanation of why that is so and how to do it? Oh, how the grumpy Beethoven would have laughed! Or would he perhaps have said (as in a reply to a hapless copyist in 1825) "You stupid conceited ass of a fellow"? Probably better not to provoke the man and do a bit more due diligence ourselves. That may be what I have been led to do over a quarter of a century. There are a thousand and one marvelous little gems hidden in these scores and hopefully I have been to provide some additional "information"; – discovering what it all "means" and properly conveying that meaning is up to each one of us individually.

Hopefully the annotated scores (esp. of opus 106 and opus 135) will suffice to teach my colleagues and "all people of good will" to retrace the steps in my learning process. I again suggest making these steps in the following order: Opus 101, opus 111, opus 110, opus 106, opus 109 and finally Beethoven's last string quartet, opus 135 (movement I and III).

Bonne chance, les amis!

Willem Ibes

### **Footnote**

About twelve years ago, after several failed attempts, I approached again the Director of the American Beethoven Society in San Jose, CA, Dr. William Meredith. I am a regular contributor, but this time I sent a check of one thousand dollars for the Beethoven Society, in exchange for one morning and afternoon of his time so I could try and share what – over the course of many years – I had discovered in Beethoven's last sonatas. I never received a reply (and as to the check, rest assured, it was never cashed!).

Before that, around the year 2000, I had traveled to Germany to see the Director of the Beethoven Haus in Bonn. The latter received me courteously but showed not the slightest interest in my CD which purported to demonstrate in word and music that the identity of the Immortal Beloved was etched measure after measure in the score of Opus 101.

These discoveries have been available in my recordings (except for the first movement of opus 135) and there have been numerous downloads of the materials posted on my Website, but not a single follow-up inquiry was ever made. So, the answer to the question I raised above seems to be: No – nobody cares, no one is interested!

