

BEETHOVEN'S "WALDSTEIN" SONATA*

เพลง “วอลด์สไตน์โซนาต้า” ของเบโธเฟ่น

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Abstract

Everyone knows who Ludwig van Beethoven was and agrees that he was a genius. In order to understand the composer's ingenuity, one has to study his works. The purpose of this article is to help audiences and pianists understand Beethoven's creativity in terms of his uses of registers, dynamic and rhythmic values, structures pedaling, hand-crossing techniques, trill techniques, and glissando techniques, through the study of one of his most well-known piano works, Piano Sonata Op. 53, also known as "Waldstein" Sonata. Not only that, the article also covers the tips on how to execute some of the technically difficult passages in the pieces, in which the author had acquired through intensive studying and performing, and being guided by several famous pianists, such as Dr. Dean Kramer, Dr. Claire Wachter, and Dr. Bennett Lerner, for pedagogical purpose and for anyone who would like to play this virtuosic piece.

Keywords: Beethoven, Waldstein, Sonata

Introduction

Dr. Maykin Lerttamrab has performed Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 53, also known as "Waldstein" Sonata numerous times. The piece is one of the most important works in the piano literature. Dr. Lerttamrab has written this article to help audiences and pianists to understand the importance of this sonata, how wonderful the piece is, how ahead of his time Beethoven was, and how to execute some of the technically difficult passages in the piece based on the author's experience and teaching from several famous pianists like Dr. Dean Kramer, Dr. Claire Wachter, and Dr. Bennett Lerner.

* This article is purely for pedagogical and performance purposes.

บทความวิจัยนี้เขียนเพื่อให้ความรู้ทางการสอนและแสดงเปียโน

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History

Beethoven's compositional output is usually divided into three periods: early, middle, and late. The first period is 1782-1802, the second period is 1803-1815, and the last period is 1815-1827. Beethoven composed a total of thirty-two piano sonatas. His earlier sonatas still keep the formal structure of the Classical sonata (Newman, 1972). The sonatas from the middle period, including the "Waldstein", are dramatic and virtuosic and frequently have no minuet or scherzo movement. The five sonatas from the late period are all very different from each other, and are generally considered the most transcendent and heavenly of Beethoven's piano works (Kirby).

The Piano Sonata, Op. 53, was dedicated to Count Ferdinand Gabriel von Waldstein, Beethoven's first great patron. The sonata is sometimes called the "Aurora" sonata because the sonority of its beginning has been likened by some to a depiction of the dawn.

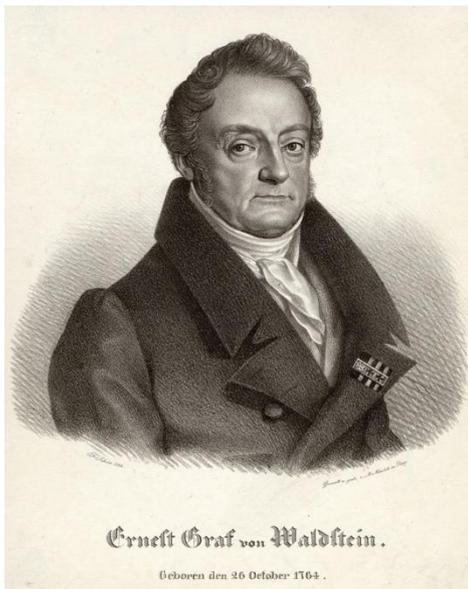


Image 1



Image 2

Image 1: Count Ferdinand Gabriel von Waldstein

Source: Alamy Limited. Image by unknown

Image 2: Maximilian Franz

Source: Wikimedias Common. Image by unknown

Waldstein was the youngest son of one of Vienna's most aristocratic families. He had been sent to Bonn because he knew the Elector (the Prince) of Bonn, Maximilian Franz. Since Waldstein was very interested in the arts, while he was in Bonn he got to know the young prodigy Beethoven, and took him under his wing.

In 1787, Beethoven was allowed by the Elector to travel to Vienna to study with Mozart. Unfortunately, the trip was shortened by the illness of Beethoven's mother. Through the intervention of Waldstein, Beethoven was allowed, in 1792, to travel to Vienna once more, this time to study with Haydn. Beethoven left Bonn never to return.

Count Waldstein believed in Beethoven's talent. When Beethoven left for Vienna, he wrote in Beethoven's autograph book: "May you receive the spirit of Mozart through the hands of Haydn."

Count Waldstein always believed that Austria should fight against Napoleon Bonaparte's Revolutionary Army. After Beethoven left Bonn, Waldstein tried to persuade the Emperor to declare war. Instead, he angered the emperor, was dismissed from Imperial service, and then banished from Vienna. Later, he even tried to raise his own army to fight the French, but went bankrupt. When Beethoven heard of Waldstein's misfortune, he dedicated his Piano Sonata, Op. 53, to him.

In 1803, Beethoven received an Erard fortepiano. The tone of French Erard fortepiano was crisper than Beethoven's old Viennese piano, made by Anton Walter. It also had a heavier action, four pedals, and a wider range. These improvements inspired Beethoven when composing the "Waldstein" Sonata. The work has become one of the best-loved of his sonatas.

Register

The range of pianos before Beethoven's period was about five octaves. Therefore, music up to that time usually was concentrated in the middle register. The increased range of the newer pianos allowed Beethoven to explore wider-ranging sonorities. In the "Waldstein" Sonata, for example, the beginnings of both the first and second movements are in the low register (Examples 1 and 2). On the other hand, the third movement begins in a very high register (Example 3).



Example 1

Example 1: The beginning of the first movement

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Example 2

Example 2: The beginning of the second movement

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Example 3

Example 3: The beginning of the third movement

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Different registers can express different moods and effects. For example, the beginning of the first movement's recapitulation (example 4) is exactly the same as the opening of the movement (example 1) but in a different register. This gives the passage a quality of brightness that the opening of the piece does not have. To achieve the best effect, both passages should be played with total relaxation in the hands and arms, controlled with the weight of the arm and the tips of the fingers, and not with a slapping motion of the wrists or movements of the upper arms.

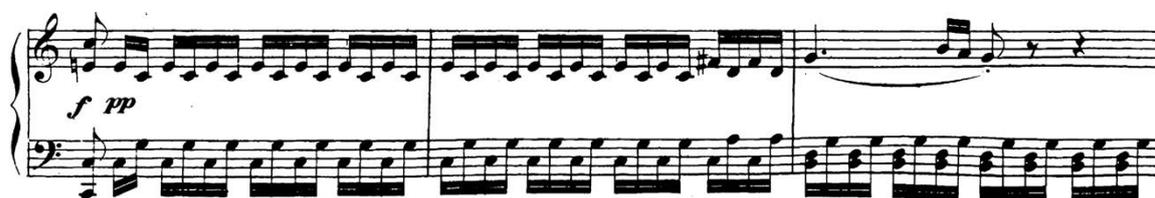


Example 4

Example 4: Different register

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Example 5 shows a variation of example 1 in a higher register. The use of this higher register and the faster note values produce a feeling of excitement. Though the notes and rhythms are simple, they are fast and the hands might feel physical stress. To execute this passage properly, the hands must be very light and the wrists loose. The wrists should rotate as if turning a doorknob (Kramer & Wachter, 2013). The pianist must also know which notes in each hand are lined up together in order to avoid the tendency to turn the passage into a free-style tremolo.



Example 5

Example 5: The variation of example 1

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Example 2, the beginning of the second movement, shows the use of low register in the piano to evoke a feeling of seriousness and depth of thought. This movement is, actually, an introduction to the third movement. Because of the contrast of registers from the second movement to the third, a mood of satisfaction, fulfillment, and happiness in the beginning of the third movement (example 3) is achieved.

Dynamics And Rhythmic Values

Beethoven uses dynamics and rhythmic values together to create an extreme range of emotional intensity. In example 6, the passage begins with quarter notes and half notes and the dynamic is *p* with the performing indication *dolce e molto legato* (softly, gently and very legato). (Legato means smooth and flowing, without breaks between the notes.) Eight bars later (example 7) the note value are now triplets, lasting for sixteen bars. After that (example 8), they change to groups of four sixteenth notes. Just two bars before the climax, Beethoven adds trills (example 9). As the speed of the notes increases proportionally, so do the dynamics grow from piano to fortissimo.



Example 6

Example 6: Rhythmic Value: quarter notes

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Example 7

Example 7: Rhythmic Value: triplets

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Example 8

Example 8: Rhythmic Value: sixteenth notes

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Example 9

Example 9: Rhythmic Value: trills

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Structure

The “Waldstein” Sonata is a typical three-movement sonata (fast-slow-fast). The second movement is entitled “Introduzione” (“Introduction”; example 2). This is intriguing because, normally, if a section of a piece is called “Introduction”, it is placed before, and connects to, a usually larger section of a single movement. In this case, the “Introduction” functions both as a separate movement and as the introduction to the third movement of the sonata (Kramer & Wachter, 2013).

Another piece, the “Andante favori” (WoO 57), was originally intended to be the second movement of the “Waldstein” Sonata. One of Beethoven’s friends suggested that with the “Andante favori” as its slow movement, the sonata would be too long. In response to this criticism, Beethoven decided to set aside the “Andante favori” as a separate piece, and compose a new second movement, merely twenty-eight bars in length, as the second movement/”Introduction” to the third movement.

The result is that, even though the sonata consists of three movements the third movement, unlike those in previous sonatas, is not clearly separated from the second movement. Example 10 shows the ending of the second movement, which is marked *attaca subito il Rondo*. This means that the music must connect directly to the third movement, a Rondo, without any pause. At that time, this sort of continuity between the movements was considered a daring innovation.

The image displays a musical score for a piano piece. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system shows the piano and bass clef staves with dynamic markings *pp* and *pp*, and the instruction *attaca subito il Rondo.* Below the first system, the tempo is marked **RONDO.** and *Allegretto moderato.* The second system features the instruction *sempre pianissimo.* and a *♩.* marking. The third system includes asterisk markings *** and *pp* at the beginning and end of the system, indicating the use of an open pedal.

Example 10

Example 10: *attaca subito il Rondo*

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Open Pedaling

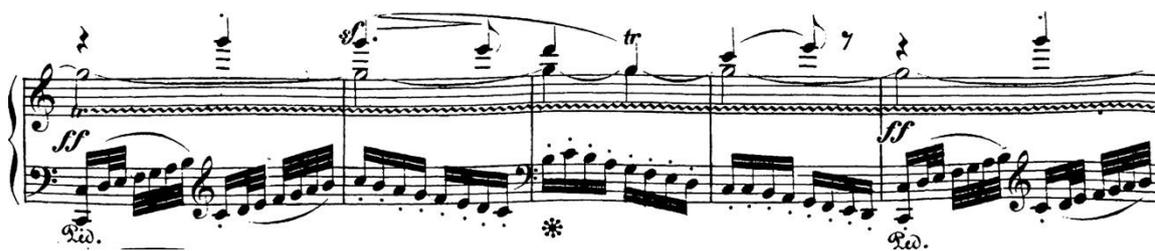
Scholars believe that during the early 1800s Beethoven owned an Erard piano. The Erard piano at that time had four pedals: a lute pedal, which creates a ‘pizzicato-type’ sound; a sustaining pedal, or, as some call it, a damper pedal, which sustains all the notes of the piano simultaneously; a sostenuto pedal, which, unlike the damper pedal, can sustain notes selectively; and a soft pedal, or *una corda* pedal, which softens the sound. Unlike earlier pianos, which used knee levers to operate the pedals – they sometimes could control the bass and treble dampers separately – the Erard had foot pedals. In example 10, Beethoven puts an open pedal mark (“Ped” followed by an asterisk), which indicates that he wants performers to depress the sustaining pedal for the very long total of eight bars. This sustains the bass notes, improves the legato, blurs the harmony, and thus creates a unique sonority. In modern pianos, the pedal sustains the sound much longer, so some pianists feel the need to control the sonority through the use of a half- or partially- depressed sustaining pedal, or by “fluttering” the pedal (Kramer & Wachter, 2013).

Hand-Crossing Technique

Hand-crossing technique (example 3) was not a new idea, but Beethoven used this technique to create an unusually fluid and harmonious sonority. However, asking the performer to hold the hands-crossed position for a very long time was rare and, furthermore, is uncomfortable, with tension in the left wrist caused by the awkward position. To play this passage with ease, when the left-hand crosses over to the right part of the keyboard the pianist must bend his torso sideways, thus relieving some of the discomfort.

Trill Technique

Example 11 shows the technique in which a performer has to play a trill and a melody simultaneously in one hand. Here, it is impossible to play the melody legato using only finger legato. The use of pedal is one means to help execute legato, but the performer's hearing must be very sensitive in order to make necessary adjustments, as too much pedal would blur the melody and the texture and too little would break up the melodic line. Further, one must study carefully the alignment of trill notes with the melodic line.



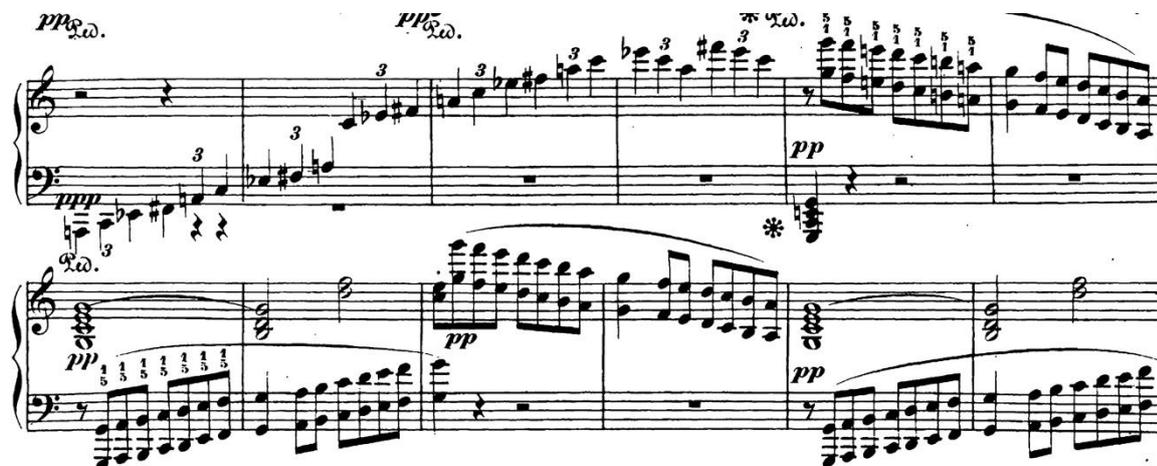
Example 11

Example 11: Trill passage

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Glissando

Example 12 shows the famous octave-glissando passage. This is another of Beethoven's innovative ideas in piano technique. The left and right hands play alternating octave-glissando scales. One way to execute this is to lead with the nail of the thumb (the thumb must be bent) while the fifth finger follows. Another way, for a pianist who has a large hand is to use the first joint of the thumb at the palm side of the hand while the fifth finger leads. If one cannot do either of these, or if one's hand is simply too small and cannot reach the stretch required, or if the action of a piano is too heavy to allow a painless glissando, one can play two-handed scales; but one must try to imitate the effect of a glissando (Lerner, 2017).



Example 12

Example 12: Octave glissandos

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Conclusion

Compared to Beethoven's previous piano sonatas the "Waldstein" Piano Sonata was the most challenging piano music he had yet composed. In this piece, Beethoven used many innovative ideas in register, dynamics, piano techniques, pedaling techniques, and structure. Beethoven was not merely showing off how creative he was; he was being purposeful. His use of different registers, wide ranging dynamics, varying note values, unique pedaling effects and other piano techniques produced distinct emotional expression. Furthermore, they were tools to create a quasi-orchestral dynamic range, sonority, and texture, never before heard in piano music.

Although the work's structure exploits extreme contrasts, the continuity and the relationship between the movements is deeply unified. Because of its musical, technical, and structural innovations, but also because of the work's deep emotions, the "Waldstein" Sonata, Op. 53, created a new standard and was an inspiration for future composers and performers.

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