



Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts

**PREPARATION OF BEETHOVEN'S PIANO SONATA :
"SONATA QUASI UNA FANTASIA"**

Kho Ai Yong

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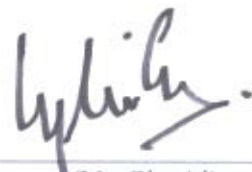
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Abstrak

Tesis ini bertujuan menyediakan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam mengenai latar belakang *Sonata quasi una fantasia* serta cara yang betul untuk memainkannya. Maklumat yang terkandung dalam thesis ini diperolehi daripada bahan pembacaan serta daripada pengalaman penyelidik dengan mengaplikasikan method ke dalam latihan. Penyelidik mengumpulkan data dengan menyusun semula data yang diperolehi dalam struktur yang teratur di samping menyediakan pemahaman yang menyesuaikan interpretasi dalam mempersembahkan sonata ini.

Abstract

This thesis provides deeper understanding on the background of *Sonata quasi una Fantasia* and the right methods to practice it. The data was collected from literature and also own experience of applying the methods into practice. My contribution for this thesis are in gathering all these ideas, organizing them into a structure, and providing some understandings of the appropriate interpretation towards performing this sonata.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This thesis presents a good practice routine to acquire a good interpretation towards playing *Sonata quasi una Fantasia*. Having experienced different kinds of teaching methods from different lecturers, it has been suggested that I write down my views regarding the most comfortable methods for me to achieve good playing. This thesis explains the manner in which I train myself in order to acquire the best playing. The practice routine that I have suggested has brought about a style of execution based on careful observation from practice and mental preparation. It enables me to use the greatest power of expression in my final recital.

Sonata quasi una Fantasia is also known as Sonata in C Sharp Minor Op.27 No.2, composed by Beethoven in 1801. The reason for choosing this sonata as my thesis writing is because of its famous haunting and mysterious melody in the first movement that captures my feelings. The original title of the sonata is *quasi una Fantasia* (It almost a fantasy). Rosen (2002) wrote that, "in 1832, several years after Beethoven's death, the German poet Ludwig Rellstab compared the music to moonlight shining on Lake Lucerne. Since then, it has been known as 'The Moonlight Sonata'." Hence, my curiosity of its sudden change of mood which is from the slow and mysterious mood in the first movement to a joke, cheerful and delighting mood in second movement then to the third movement, which is a gradually change of mood showing tragic and powerful mood in the sonata, leads me to this research such as finding out the purpose it was written and also to find out the appropriate way to perform it.

1.1 Statement of Problem

The process of preparing Beethoven's sonata has value for explaining and describing the difficulties encountered in this process of research. There are problems such as having difficulties in acquiring the techniques to play it, too much concentration on techniques and neglecting music during practice that will lead to non-musical playing habits and misinterpretation of this sonata. Apart from that, the ability of playing the last movement of this sonata needs a lot of effort, such as using the correct methods and interpretation since it is the weightiest of the three that demands flamboyant and skillful playing.

Pianists need to acquire the right techniques in order to play this sonata and to perform it with understanding. More importantly, the correct understanding leads to better practice methods.

To solve the problems encountered, I worked out a strategy for this research. I divided the strategy into two sections. The first section is to examine the sonata and analyze the important excerpts for interpretation purpose through literature reviews to identify the style and character of this sonata. The second section is by practicing the difficult sections using correct practice methods to solve the problem of playing. By concentrating on technique and neglecting music during practice, we can pick up non-musical playing habits. Therefore, in addition to playing with the right techniques, we have to perform the sonata with understanding to avoid misinterpretation.

1.2 Aim & Objective

The aim of writing this thesis is to attain a better performance together with this research that served as a guideline. In order to perform better, I break the aim into few objectives. Part of it is to present the most appropriate methods for practicing piano in order to attain an appropriate interpretation for this sonata. Apart from that, it is also intended to explain how Beethoven's behaviors affected his music writing at that period. This is important as by understanding the historical background of this sonata, it leads to a correct interpretation of playing this sonata. This thesis is, on the whole to examine the style and character of Beethoven's sonata and at the same time applying the analysis into performance playing.

1.3 Importance of Research

The importance of writing this thesis is that it served as a guideline that leads to a better performance. Hence, I will be using my own experience of examining the sonata and execute in the performance during my recital.

The examining on the style and character of this sonata leads us to a better understanding on learning and playing it. In spite of everything mentioned above, pianists still need a certain level of artistic maturity to play this sonata effectively otherwise it is easy to misinterpret the whole sonata. Therefore, this research is important because it serves as a guideline that leads to a better performance.

1.4 Scope of Study

The scope of study includes the composer himself, Beethoven, the style of the period he belongs to, the purpose of writing the sonata and the techniques used in playing

this sonata. This thesis will also tie to the period in which Beethoven wrote this sonata. Its objective is to attain a deeper understanding on the background of this sonata.

In the following chapters we shall discover the purpose of writing this sonata, the reason why Beethoven called it as *Sonata quasi una Fantasia*, various practice methods applied in this sonata and ways of attaining the right interpretation for this sonata.

1.5 Definitions

Accelerando: Gradually getting faster.

Adagio Sostenuto: Slow and sustained.

Allegretto: Moderately quick.

Baroque: Term applied to music composed during the 17th and 18th centuries. (1600-1750)

Classical: Term applied to music composed around 1750 – 1830 (post-Baroque and pre-Romantic)

Crescendo: Gradually becoming louder.

Damper / Sustaining Pedal: This pedal is used to enrich the tone as the mechanism lifts the dampers away from the strings allowing all of them to vibrate.

Diminuendo: Gradually becoming softer.

Dissonance: A chord which is restless, jarring to the ear, requiring being resolved in a particular way if its presence is to be justified by the ear. (Kennedy, 1996)

Dynamic: The gradations of volume in music, main aspects of expression.

Forte: Instruction to play loud. (*f*).

Fortissimo: Play very loudly. (*ff*, *fff*).

Mezzo forte: Moderately loud.

Motive: The shortest intelligible and self-existent melodic or rhythmic figure.

Ostinato: Obstinate, persistent. A persistent music phrase or rhythm.

Piano: Instruction to play soft. (*p*).

Pianissimo: Play very softly. (*pp*, *ppp*).

Presto Agitato: Play quickly in an agitated manner

Quasi una Fantasia: Almost a fantasy

Ritardando: Holding back, getting gradually slower.

Scale: A series of single notes progressing up or down stepwise.

Sempre: Always

Sempre pianissimo e senza sordino: The whole passage to be played very softly and without mute.

Sforzando: Reinforced. Direction that a note or chord be strongly accented or played in a 'forced' manner.

Sonata: A composition consists of several movements. Classical sonata has three movements, usually the first movement is the most important in style consisting of three sections: exposition, development, and recapitulation. The second movement usually is in a slow movement or an aria almost like a song-like style. The third movement often a rondo, is less serious and quite brilliant in style. And additional movement, namely a Minuet and Trio or a Scherzo, would also be included in some sonatas, either just before or after the slow movement. (Kennedy, 1996)

Theme: Successions of notes which play important part in construction of a composition.

Triplet: Group of three notes, or notes and rests, equal in time-value, written where a group of two notes is suggested by time signature. Usually indicated by adding numeral three above each group. (Kennedy, 1996)

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Before dealing with the finer point of this thesis, it is important to know the historical background of the composers, the style of the period and the sonata itself. Therefore, I have begun the research by searching for the historical background of all the elements which are needed in this thesis.

Kinderman (1989) have pointed out that, "In the piano sonata Beethoven first revealed the full expressive range and power of invention that he was to demonstrate only years later in some other musical forms." Beethoven does quite amazing things. He plays anything that comes into his head and there is nothing he does not dare. Besides that, Kinderman also noted that, "eventually, Beethoven's sonatas not only demonstrated his mastery of the Viennese classical style but also succeeded in considerable measure in defining the style itself." Beethoven was a changing man and so was his music. He went through different stages in his life, and always wrote great music. In fact, in music writing, he is unique in his own way.

It can be assumed that Beethoven was more concern with interpretation than with the matters of technique. Cooper (1991, p.136) noted that, "...Beethoven insisted on the correct interpretation, right down to the last detail."

Kerman and Tyson (2006) stated that, "...it was by the force of his character that he produced such a powerful effect on those around him" People liked Beethoven not for

his good looks or impressive education but because of his character. The character that Beethoven possessed was what helped him to be who he was.

“...Beethoven firmly took over the tradition instituted up to then, creatively and brilliantly developing them, expanding the outlines of classical forms by using new patterns, specific to his époque, thus bringing powerful dynamism to music...” noted Kinderman (1989). Beethoven used mostly classical forms and techniques in his music but gave them new power and intensity. In the third movement, he creates an infinite variety of stress and accent to show his forceful attitude. His music was a response of what was in his heart and the passion he felt.

“Beethoven was a musical architect who was unsurpassed in his ability to create large-scale structures in which every note seems inevitable,” according to Kamien (1988) in describing Beethoven’s music. The impression of this sonata is almost all of it stormy and powerful especially in the last movement. He was brave enough to go against the clarity and balance of classical music and put all his expressions such as *pianissimo*, *fortissimo* and *sforzando* in his music writing.

Klassiks (1999) stated that, “When Beethoven wrote this Sonata he was deeply in love with the 17-year-old Countess Giulietta Guicciardi² and dedicated the piece to her.” Beethoven had a strong attitude, which gave him the courage to compose this sonata. *Sonata quasi una Fantasia* that started his second period of music was written for this Countess. This is the reason that *Sonata quasi una Fantasia* seems to depart from

² Countess Giulietta Guicciardi, the pupil of Beethoven, who was regarded in the nineteenth century as a likely intended recipient of Beethoven’s letter to the “Eternal Beloved.” In light of this, the opening slow movement of the sonata was sometimes misconstrued as a kind of love song without words. (Todd, R. Larry, 2004)

classical sonata, as the first movement is slow and whisper-like. This is as if Beethoven was trying to express his love to the Countess when he wrote this sonata.

Rosen (2002) stated, "This image of 'Moonlight' has no connection with Beethoven's intentions." Apart from that, Kinderman also stated that, "...the epithet 'Moonlight' is quite inappropriate for the work understood as a whole". Therefore, "Moonlight" can only be referred to the first movement of this *Sonata quasi una Fantasia*, as it seems to give a feeling that is dark and whisper-like. Somehow, the third movement might show different mood, which express heroism and struggle of his deafness rather than showing the atmosphere of "Moonlight".

Kinderman (1989) noted, "The opening of this sonata might have provided a brief respite from the whirlwinds, but after a dancing *Allegretto*, the *Presto agitato* from *Sonata quasi una fantasia* struck like a thunder emphasizing the dramatic harmonic progressions in the third movement." From the original context, *Sonata quasi una fantasia* is considered as one of Beethoven's few works in which the finale³ is of constantly tragic character.

According to Kamien (1988), "A hint of the virtuosity and improvisation that so astounded the Viennese can be gotten from Beethoven's thirty-two piano sonata, which are far more difficult than the sonatas of Haydn and Mozart." Thus, Beethoven actually created powerful and original piano style that foreshadowed nineteenth-century romanticism.

³ The last movement of this sonata gives the impressions of Beethoven struggling to overcome his deafness. He discovered his hearing difficulty in about 1797. (Cooper, 1991)

In addition, Kinderman noted that, "A central idea of this sonata concerns the transformation of the gently ascending arpeggios of the opening *Adagio sostenuto* in the *Presto agitato* finale, where the surging arpeggios lead to emphatic syncopated chords in the highest register, supported by a descending bass progression similar to that at the beginning of the first movement."

"Beethoven was known to break hammers and strings when he played, and it is easy to imagine this happening when he performed the last movement," noted Kinderman (1989). The last movement *Presto agitato*, in sonata form, is the weightiest of the three. "This movement is reflecting an experiment of Beethoven's writing of placing the most important movement of a sonata last." The writing has many fast arpeggios and strongly accented notes, and an effective performance which demands flamboyant and skillful playing.

According to Newman (1989), "Czerny⁴ said that Beethoven used much more pedal than it is indicated in his works." He reports that, "aside from requiring sturdier instruments with more volume to cope with his increasing deafness, Beethoven was especially responsive to the special effects of pedaling." As far as we can see, Beethoven's colouristic uses of the damper pedal are everywhere evident in the middle and late period works. The first movement of this sonata is marked *sempre pianissimo e senza sordino*, which uses pedal throughout. Likewise, it seems that the pedal helps fingers in a Beethoven's presentation.

⁴ Czerny, Carl (1791-1857) was a Viennese pianist and composer. He received piano lessons from Beethoven from 1801-1803, and he in turn taught Beethoven's nephew from 1816-1818. He was thoroughly acquainted with practically all Beethoven's piano works (which he knew from memory), as well as with the composer himself. (Kennedy, 1996)

Giesecking (1972) reported, “The presentation of most of Beethoven’s sonatas follows the principle ‘only the notes held by fingers on the keyboard sound’.” The *senza sordini*⁵ in the first movement of this sonata means with raised dampers, that is, with the right pedal, in the title of this sonata, the sound, softly enveloping the movement of triplets.

“One of the greatest pianists once remarked, the pedal is the soul of the piano... no instrument except for the harp possesses the ability to prolong the sound passively, on the vague border between the still sounding and already silent,” stated Unknown. Indeed, the pedal allows the piano to show its most characteristic and pleasant sides. In addition, it is quite natural that the sounds that use the pedal are the most pianistic. “A modern pianist uses the pedal effects performing Beethoven. His piano presentation may be relegated to an ensemble of other instruments without dramatic texture changes. It would be unthinkable if Beethoven assigned harmonic or melodic prolongation of individual sounds to the pedal.” However, the thread of Beethoven’s presentation may be imagined to sound without the pedal use.

Giesecking (1972) wrote that, “a pianist must be trained to feel what is correct, in order to attain to a natural and perfect manner of execution, it is also essential to master thoroughly all technical features of a composition.” Therefore, playing for hours without concentrating thoughts and the ear on each note of the certain study in hand is wasted time. It is absolutely right, as only trained ears are capable of noticing the fine

⁵ On the feeble instruments of 1800 there was no reason for changing the pedal at all in this movement, for the sound without damped strings did not outlast its slow changes of harmony. This direction tells us that such a continuous triplet sequence could be treated by pianists of that time without pedal or with its minimal use. (Giesecking, 1972)

inexactitudes and unevenness tone. Through a continuous self-hearing, the sense for tone beauty and for finest tone shadings can be trained.

C. C. Chang (2006) stated that, we support the weight of our arm on each finger that plays. Because of the gravity, we shall never push down, however we must be relaxed. The first movement of this sonata is marked *sempre pianissimo e senza sordino*. To maintain the sound of *pianissimo* one must to play closer to the keys. However, this does not work in the long run. In Beethoven's first movement *Sonata quasi una Fantasia*, the *pianissimo* effect can only be achieved by consciously lifting fingers off the keys after pressing the key.

Newman (1989) observes that the few people who have had the opportunity to live with period pianos agree that, "differences between past and modern pianos can profoundly affect the music played on them." Unlike the piano from the classical or romantic period, the effect played on modern pianos is thick and muffled.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The data for thesis was collected based on qualitative method such as historiography, interviews, observations, experiments and secondary sources from literature, performance reviews and self-research on reading materials through internet. Some data were assembled through interviews from lecturers, my own experience of learning the sonata and score analysis using the secondary analysis. I reanalyzed the score that was originally analyzed by previous researchers. I shall state my opinion in Chapter 4 as a result of data collection organized into a structure, and provide some understandings of the appropriate interpretation towards playing this sonata.

3.1 Historiography

Historiography is a type of data collection that uses historical background through secondary sources from literature and internet. Instead of using the score analysis, the descriptions on *Sonata quasi una Fantasia* are based on analysis of its historical background through literature and research from internet. The complete score of this sonata is inserted in Appendix A.

3.2 Interviews

I have consulted with professors, lecturers and former piano teachers for their views on this particular piece. Consequently, I interviewed them in an informal way such as through discussions and emails to get more accurate information for thesis writing purpose.

3.3 Observations

Observations have been done through videotaping and recording own playing. One of the best ways to improve musical playing and to practice for recitals is to videotape or record it and then watch or listen to it. Videotaping is the best way to prepare for recitals and can sometimes eliminate nervousness almost completely. Apart from that, studying various recordings on different interpretations of different performers help to develop a fuller understanding of this sonata as well. Being familiarized in various interpretations of different pianists, it allowed room for improvement and at the same time provided a wider listening perspective of different musicality or techniques.

3.4 Experiment

The experiment involves the piano and researcher as the research instruments. A practice routine had been suggested and fixed through lessons from lecturers. This routine has been maintained throughout the whole practice session in order to improve the playing of this sonata. This was to examine the experiment and at the same time gain the knowledge from the experiment to achieve an effective way of attaining the right interpretation for this sonata.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Discussions

4.1 Historical Background

4.1.1 Style of Beethoven's Period

Cooper (1991) stated that Beethoven's biographer Wilhelm von Lenz is the one who first divided Beethoven's output into three periods. "A first formative period ending around 1800, a second period lasting until around 1812 and a third period from 1813 to 1827." This biographer has classified Beethoven's music into three periods in which he started his romantic music composing during the second period.

Meanwhile the other author, Kamien (1988) also divided Beethoven's output into three periods: early (1794-1800), middle (1801-1814), and late (1815-1827). Beethoven bridged the Classical and Romantic eras. His works of earlier period had some influences from Haydn and Mozart's music, but the later pieces clearly showed Beethoven's personal style, which was more aggressive in his music writing.

The Classical period in music history extended from around 1750 to 1820. The three great composers, Hadyn, Mozart, and Beethoven dominated the period. According to Martin (1993), "The term 'Classical' is mostly misunderstood to mean all music except 'Pop' music." More correctly, the word Classical describes beauty and proportion. A useful idea is to relate the word to architecture.

"The period saw a conscious reaction against the excesses, grandeur and complexity of Baroque style and a move towards a simpler and more directly appealing