

Beethoven
— The Arbiter of Classical Style —

by
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Abstract

The Classical style of music met its absolute apex in the music of Ludwig van Beethoven. To illustrate this, I shall divide this paper into four parts. First, I shall explain the underlying structure and tonal qualities of Classical music, making many references to Charles Rosen's book on the subject, which is considered to be the best and most thorough study of classical music to date. In part two, I shall make an in-depth analysis of an early work by Beethoven, String Quartet #6, opus 18 in B-flat major. In part three, I shall examine a very late work, String Quartet #12, opus 127 in E-flat major, applying the same analytical principles as used in part two, and which will show considerable developments as compared to the earlier work. In part four, I shall examine Beethoven's personal development as a man, as seen through J.W.N. Sullivan's book. I should point out that Rosen's view of classical style is a very new book, published in 1997, and focuses on technical and analytical matters. Sullivan's book on the other hand, published in 1927, is not only an old classic, but provides philosophical insights by focusing on Beethoven the man himself.

Key Words: tonic (I), dominant (V), subdominant (IV), tonality, sonata form

Part 1: The Classical Style

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, a new style of music arose which we associate with "...the great triumvirate..." of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven: the classical style (Rosen 19).¹ The music of the High Baroque, which had reached its apex in the works of Bach and Handel, "...provided a coherent and systematic musical language..." upon which the great three classical composers developed this new style (Rosen 20). While it is needless to say that Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven had individual styles, we can nevertheless isolate elements common to the styles of all three, which we can then call elements of classical style.

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Important to classical style is classical tonality: the hierarchy of triads produced by the circle of fifths (Rosen 23). There is an essential imbalance in tonal music which causes the dominant (upward) direction of a key to outweigh the subdominant (downward) direction (Rosen 24). The leading tone in a dominant triad (the triad's third) produces tension by demanding an upward resolution to the root of the tonic triad, and this demand for resolution can be enhanced by the addition to the dominant triad of a flattened seventh, which will demand resolution downward to the third of the tonic triad. Equal temperament, which had been well established by the time classical music appeared, helped to strengthen the "...polarity between tonic and dominant...", which had not been so pronounced in earlier music (Rosen 26). Subdominant triads tend to weaken the tonic in that they can cause the tonic to be heard as a dominant (Rosen 24).² In classical music, cadences proceeded by the subdominant (the plagal cadence) disappear, and we begin to see only V-I cadences (Rosen 26). We also begin to see much more in the way of modulation by way of a secondary dominant, thereby creating a new key center with the former dominant as a new tonic, and thus increasing tension in the structure of the piece (Rosen 26). In classical music generally, the dominant side of the circle of fifths will be used to increase tension, whereas the subdominant side will be used to weaken the tonic and lower tension (Rosen 27).³

Typical of Baroque music is the notion of a figured bass, in which the structure of the music is dictated by a (vertical) chord progression, over which there are harmonically related yet independent (horizontal) voices (Rosen 29). In classical music we see a rejection of this style, a typical example being the Alberti bass, where the triad is outlined in one voice, rather than three independent voices being used to provide the harmony (Rosen 29). In classical music, rather than horizontally independent voices and vertically independent harmony, we see the emergence of periodic phrasing (Rosen 29). The use of periodic phrases has the effect of shifting importance away from the "...linear continuity of the individual elements..." of a piece, and causes us to hear "...the continuity of the whole work..." (Rosen 29).

In music of the High Baroque, rhythmic texture tended to be unified throughout a piece (*perpetuum mobile*), with contrasts occurring only "...by the superimposition of one rhythm over another..." or the by "...the placing of large blocks of one kind of rhythm next to another..." (Rosen 59–61). The balancing of one phrase against another had little importance in this style (Rosen 58). In classical music, the articulated periodic phrase had two important effects, one being a "...heightened...sensitivity to symmetry...", and the other being a great variety of rhythmic texture "...with the different rhythms not contrasted or superimposed, but passing logically and easily into each other..." (Rosen 58). The symmetry of periodic phrase structure produces a pulse in the music which is heard over and above the basic rhythmic flow (Rosen 58).⁴ For this reason, there is a great need for balance between the phrases of a classical piece, with one phrase leading logically to the next, incorporating elegant and natural transitions

of pulse (Rosen 58–60). These changes of pulse serve to “...break up the rhythmic texture...[and] add dramatic force....” (Rosen 61) The periodic phrases tend to be between three and six bars long, four bars having become standard by about 1820, as this length can be divided easily into symmetrical halves, thereby lending itself to “...the periodic breaking of continuity....” (Rosen 58) It is the balance, or symmetry, of periodic phrases with varying rhythmic textures that gives to classical music (to mind, at any rate) the feeling of a spoken dialogue, a conversation, as it were, as opposed to the feeling of a monologue one hears in a piece of the High Baroque.

In order for the contrasting elements in a periodic phrase to be heard clearly, a “...larger range of dynamic accent...” and “...greater rhythmic variety...” were required (Rosen 64). With elements of great contrast being heard in such a short period of time, transitional elements had to be developed in order to preserve a feeling of continuity (Rosen 64). Such elements included the orchestral crescendo and the introduction of faster rhythms in the accompanying voices prior to an increase of motion in the melody (Rosen 64). Rhythmic transition tends to come in well ordered fashion: “...twice as fast, or half as fast... so that the rates of speed tend to come from the series 2, 4, 8, 16, etc...” (Rosen 64). Transitions can be enhanced by subtle phrasing, the use of harmonic tension (especially in the introduction of a faster rhythm), an intensification of the material that leads to a cadence, and the tricky “...introduction of triplets into duple time...” (Rosen 65). Transitions may also be thematic. A crescendo in the first part of a phrase may be followed by a melodically descending line, for example (Rosen 65–66). Elements within phrases may be blended in such a way, for example, that a six bar phrase may be seen as two equal halves of three bars each, or as one opening bar, followed by four bars together, followed by one closing bar (Rosen 67). Unlike Baroque melodies, classical melodies cannot be extended for long periods, but tend rather to “...be rounded off, resolved as they end...” (Rosen 76). They progress clearly to a climax and then proceed logically to a resolution (Rosen 77). Dramatic interest in the melody comes from balance and symmetry, which are achieved within a clear, limited framework (Rosen 77). One result of the classical style of melody writing is that, unlike music of the Baroque, the performer’s freedom to ornament is very limited. Classical composers began to write directly into the music what ornamentation they wished to hear, the implication being that the performer should not take many (or any) liberties in adding extra ornamentation, the exception being in slow (*adagio*) movements (Rosen 100–103). Classical music was written out as the composer wished to hear it.

Emotional complexity in classical music can be achieved by contrasting themes, but also by contrast inherent within a theme (Rosen 80). Dramatic effect can be produced “...without any contrast of character, either in various themes or in different sections of a movement....” (Rosen 81) Articulation can be achieved by differences in orchestration, or by rhythmic and dynamic means (Rosen 82). When contrasting themes do

appear, they may be reconciled by means of counterpoint, that is, two opposing themes played simultaneously (Rosen 82–83). The “...symmetrical resolution of opposing forces...” is at the core of classical music (Rosen 82–83).

On a larger scale, that of an entire classical movement, it is instructive to look at what happens in a first-movement sonata form.⁵ Typically, we will hear the tonic key established within the framework of a strict tempo at the outset (Rosen 99). There will then be a modulation to the dominant, where harmonic events will move along more swiftly than they did in the tonic, followed by a cadence on the dominant (Rosen 99). There will then be a second section which returns to the tonic key and ends on a tonic cadence (Rosen 99). The return to the tonic key may be extensively delayed “...by modulating to other keys or by sequential progressions at the dominant...”, and such a section is called the development section (Rosen 99). The point of greatest drama will occur (in most cases) just before the reintroduction of the tonic key, the recapitulation, which will occur “...no later than three-quarters of the way through the movement...” (Rosen 100)⁶ The modulation to the dominant can be a lengthy process, with the use of “bridge passages”, but there are other cases where movement to the dominant occurs almost immediately (Rosen 68). There is in classical music “[a] clear hierarchy of tonal strength...” and the establishment of a secondary key center creates “...a weaker pole of force reacting against the tonic...”, and this secondary key center serves as a way to expand the movement (Rosen 69). It is a fundamental aspect of classical style that the new tonality be dramatized by “...a pause, a strong cadence, an explosion, a new theme...” etc. (Rosen 71). Such moments of dramatic tension may be forcefully emphasized by passages known “filling”, that is, scales and arpeggios which will reinforce the key center (Rosen 71).⁷ These “filling” passages are not thematic in nature, but rather virtuosic flourishes which could be transposed to like sections in other sonatas (Rosen 72). What is important at these points of high drama is that the material be of appropriate length: proportion in terms of the movement as a whole is what is important here (Rosen 72). In order to contain the tension produced by the secondary key center in the middle sections, both the opening and closing of the sonata must be strong, and clearly establish the tonic key (Rosen 70). An inflexible rule of the classical sonata is that there be a recapitulation and a prolonged resolution of all harmonic tension at the end of the piece.

Part 2: The Classical Style in Early Beethoven

Beethoven’s String Quartet #6, opus 18 in B-flat major shows us elements which are common to the the classical style of composition. In a typical string quartet of the classical period, we expect to find a quick movement in sonata form, followed by a slow, “...more song-like movement...”, then a minuet or scherzo in triple time, and finally a fast-paced rondo or sonata form movement (Scholes 964). Quartet #6 follows this out-

line: a first-movement sonata form, a ternary song form for the second movement, a rapid scherzo for the third, and finally a rondo. Within the movements themselves, we find the general harmonic properties associated with classical music: "...the polarity of tonic and dominant...affirmed by modulation..." (Rosen 99–100). That is, a movement from I to V, with V serving as a secondary key center, and then back to I. Well known in classical music is the use of the subdominant to reduce tension. We see this at work not only within the individual movements, but also between the movements of Quartet #6 as a whole: the slow, song-like second movement has as its tonic E-flat major, the subdominant of B-flat major (the tonic key of the quartet as a whole). Looking more closely within the individual movements, we find more typically classical elements at work. The first movement provides us with examples of many such elements.

The harmonic properties of a classical first movement sonata form can be summarized as follows: a first section (exposition) with the first strain on the tonic and the second strain on the dominant, followed by a second section (the recapitulation) with the first strain on the tonic and the second strain on the tonic. We can also expect a prolonged delay before the recapitulation, and such a section will be called the development section. The recapitulation will occur "...no more than three-quarters of the way through..." the movement (Rosen 51). The first movement of Quartet #6 follows this pattern more or less exactly. The exposition (bars 1–91) has its principal section starting on I and moving through an intermediate passage which modulates to V (bars 1–44, first strain). This is followed by a subsidiary section of new (and contrasting) thematic material on V (second strain), with an added closing section which confirms V as the new key.⁸ There is then a repeat.⁹ At bar 92, we have a development section which lasts until bar 174. In the development section, we expect a fragmentation of melodic material, modulation to distant keys, sequences, and a breaking of periodic rhythm (Rosen 99). We see all these devices at work in this particular development section. For example, there is melodic fragmentation between bars 95 and 100. We see modulation to different keys, as at bar 102, where D-major (III) is established for a few bars. We see a magnificent sequence, fugal in nature, from the pick-up to bar 114 through bar 138. Periodic rhythm is broken at bar 112, where we have a one and one-half bar rest, just before the dramatic sequence mentioned above. The dominant is clearly established again by the cadence at bars 173–174, which has been set up by a slowing of rhythm, and another pause. It is essential to the classical style that a recapitulation and a prolonged resolution of all harmonic tension conclude the sonata, and Quartet #6 is no exception. The recapitulation starts at bar 175 in a well established tonic key. We hear alteration in the material between bars 190 and 217, which corresponds to bars 29 through 44 of the exposition. These alterations serve to prepare the repeat of the subsidiary thematic material (starting bar 218), but in the tonic this time (it was in the dominant in the exposition, bars 45–79). The tonic is thereby strongly reinforced for the ending of the movement. This follows the pattern mentioned above: that the recapit-

ulation will feature both first and second strains in the tonic key.¹⁰

Getting down to finer details, we note the periodic phrases typical of classical music. From the outset of movement one, we observe typical four bar periodic phrases (see bars 1–5, bars 5–10). Contrast is provided by octave displacement, the trading off of the melody between first violin and cello (bars 5–9). Visible in the second violin (bars 1–12), is the use of the Alberti pattern to outline the triad, a common device in classical music.

Some of the most striking examples of classical style can be seen in transition sections. In classical music, the periodic phrase structure imposes a pulse which is heard over and above the basic time signature. This pulse may be increased to give the feeling of greater motion in places of transition. In the initial material of the exposition (and therefore, of course, the recapitulation), we hear a motif of a grace note followed by an eighth and two sixteenths, which I shall call M1. We note, in this example, how the pulse is increased by the use of M1. At the beginning of the recapitulation, we hear M1 once every two bars (as in the exposition). Beginning in bar 187, we hear it once every bar, and by bar 191, we are hearing three repetitions of M1 for each bar and one half. Thus, the overlaying pulse is speeded up in a well ordered way, as we would expect.

Also typical of classical style is the use of dynamics, dynamic accent, rhythmic variety, and subtle phrasing as a way of driving transitions forward. Another example from Quartet #6 shows all of these features. Dynamically, we hear a rapid *crescendo* in bar 191, carrying the piece from *pianissimo* to *forte* in only one bar of this transition section. The transition section between bars 195 and 197 features *sforzandi* on the second and fourth beats (all voices). These dynamic accents increase tension by varying the pulse and throwing us off beat.¹¹ Further intensification and contrast is added in these three bars with rhythmic variety: quarters, eighths, and sixteenths sounding in the various voices with varying articulations: note the *legato* markings in the first and second violins and the juxtaposed *legato* and *staccato* markings in the viola. The phrasing here is subtle, and causes us to hear the music on many different levels.

All of this building up of tension is quite suddenly released with the gentle theme which starts at bar 198. We see the pulse become regular and clear (downbeat and third beat in the cello, off beats in the second violin and viola), the dynamic level reduce (terraced to *piano*), and we hear the introduction of a clear, slow moving, *legato* melody. Significantly, the new material at bar 198 is in the subdominant, which, as mentioned before, serves to reduce tension in classical music. Contrast within the theme itself is provided by various common devices. First, the melody itself emphasizes only the downbeats of the bar (notice the dotted half followed by two eighths pattern), while the accompaniment emphasizes both the downbeat and the third beat (bars 198–205). Further contrast is provided by the terraced dynamic at bar 202, along with a shift to a minor key (iv). Moreover, the melody is doubled at bar 202 an octave lower

in the second violin.

There are other features common to the classical style in this quartet. Some examples: There is use of “filling” before cadences in movement one. It is obvious that added ornamentation is unnecessary, as it is clearly written in the music when Beethoven intends it (movement two is a good example of this, where the melody is elaborately ornamented upon its return), or is simply not possible, given the nature of the movement (I refer here especially to the rapid scherzo). The work is not without a little classical humor: note, for example the amusing chromatics in the melody of the trio of movement three. But there are also some eccentricities in this quartet which may be less classical and more “Beethoven,” as it were. Take for example the scherzo. The syncopation is so strong that it is virtually impossible to tell what the time signature is until after the repeat at bar 15, when 6/8 time is finally established clearly. After the trio of the scherzo, a strange four bar section occurs in the tonic minor to announce the return (it sounds modal and primitive to me, almost like Bartok). The introduction to the final rondo movement is also harmonically strange in places. Note the dramatic chords and octave displacements (with terraced dynamics) which occur between bars 12 and 16 of the rondo, as well as the rising chromatic chords we hear between bars 30 and 32, and bars 37 and 41. It is also in this movement that we hear the many sudden mood changes which we associate with later music. While quartet #6, opus 18 in B-flat major is a work firmly rooted in the classical style as we now understand it, some of its elements point toward a later Beethoven, and his attempts to break through the limitations of the classical style.

Part 3: The Classical Style in Late Beethoven

In his latest works, Beethoven retained the basic principles and concepts of classical style and its forms, while at the same time “...expanding these forms and heightening their power without betraying their proportions...” (Rosen 381). One significant innovation we see in late Beethoven is the avoidance of the simple dominant/tonic relationship, with mediant and subdominant approached in imaginative ways, and functioning as dominants (Rosen 383). Beethoven sets up his secondary tonalities so that, while functioning as dominants, they are more closely related to the tonic than any true dominant can be. This causes modulations to have “...a dissonance of greater power and excitement than the more usual dominant...” (Rosen 383–384). Beethoven also likes to withhold resolutions for long periods, and will use such devices as enharmonics as a delaying tactic (Rosen 431). One of Beethoven’s greatest innovations was to use fragments of melody (motifs), to build large modulations from small details which allow us to hear the relatedness of the structure as a whole (Rosen 413). We may find some of Beethoven’s innovations by looking at String Quartet #12, opus 127, in E-flat major.

In the first movement of opus 127, we notice certain innovative aspects which expand on the classical style. For one thing, there are four key changes. The first occurs at the subsidiary section of the exposition (bar 41), which moves to two flats: G minor (iii). This key change has been so carefully set up (by way of the relative minor to E-flat major: C minor, with special emphasis on its dominant, G) that we do not hear it as a key change. And yet Beethoven has taken us far enough away from the E-flat tonic key that he finds it necessary to change key in order to avoid the use of too many accidentals, particularly the shift from a-flat to a-natural. It is significant that a-flat is the note which is dropped from the key signature, as it is the triad based on this note (IV of the E-flat tonic) which begins the first periodic phrase (bar 7) and serves as the anchor for much of the beginning of the exposition.¹² It is precisely this note, a-flat, which must be raised a half step in order to establish the dominant key, as a-natural is the leading tone to B-flat (dominant, or V of E-flat). Rather than taking us to the dominant, Beethoven gives us G-minor (iii), and through it, G-major (III) at the start of the development section (Bar 75). Thus, the major version of the mediant of E-flat serves as the dominant. Beethoven does not leave us here long, however. By emphasizing the flattened submediant of G-major (e-natural to e-flat), he then leads us to another key change at bar 119, where C-minor (the submediant of E-flat) can be emphasized. Another key change, to C-major this time, is prepared in the material leading up to bar 135. Again, Beethoven does not linger here long, and by the use of a repeated motif in the first violin (a grace note and two eighth notes, followed by a quarter note on beats two and three: bars 147 to 158) which is reharmonized by the lower three parts as it ascends in step-wise motion, we are led back to a three flat key signature at bar 159. (Three flats in the key signature would indicate either the key of E-flat major or C-minor). Beethoven continues to repeat the motif through to bar 166, again with reharmonizations which lead inevitably to the recapitulation (starting on the subdominant A-flat triad) at bar 167. This method of using a simple motif, repeated over several bars and reharmonized each time to bring about a remarkable modulation, is used often in Opus 127.¹³ What is remarkable through all this is the way in which Beethoven achieves great dramatic tension without touching on the traditional dominant in any significant way. We do not hear any traditional V-I (dominant-tonic) resolution until bar 234, but even this is immediately taken away from us as we enter the coda at bar 240. Throughout the closing bars of the movement, we hear V-I just barely touched on, never emphasized, and always quickly moved away from. Even in the final two bars of the movement, V-I seems only an after-thought.

In the first movement, Beethoven extends the classical harmonic language by departing from the tonic key and proceeding, not to the dominant key, but rather to keys which are related in varying degrees of closeness to either the tonic or the dominant. In each key change, at least one important note of either the tonic or the dominant can be emphasized. For example, G-minor (at bar 41) shares five notes with

E-flat major and six notes with B-flat major (assuming that we use the harmonic minor scale of G-minor). We may consider G-minor closer to the true dominant of the piece as it contains an a-natural, the leading tone to B-flat major. G-major (introduced at the beginning of the development section, bar 75) shares only three notes in common with E-flat (g, c, and d), but four notes in common with B-flat (c, d, g, and a), so that at this point, we are closer to a dominant than a tonic tonality. The C-major tonality at bar 135 brings even closer to dominant tonality (C-major is B-flat major's V/V, and so shares five notes in common with B-flat: c, d, f, g, and a), and farther away from the tonic E-flat tonality (four notes shared: f, g, c, and d). With the modulation to C-minor at bar 159, we move in the other direction, closer to the tonality of E-flat major, in preparation for the recapitulation. We do not see any trite V-I cadence leading to the recapitulation. The overall effect is that the piece proceeds gradually through keys that become more distant from the tonic (and at the same time closer to the dominant), and then back again. The I-V-I effect is achieved by degrees with the innovative use of diatonic harmonies, reharmonizations, carefully placed accidentals, and expertly crafted voice leading. It gives the work a seamless, rounded, polished quality.

In Beethoven's late work, we see a tendency to prologue the resolution to the cadence. Certainly this is true in the second movement of opus 127, and a remarkable example of Beethoven's mastery of prolonging the cadence occurs between bars 28 and 38. Between bars 28 and 29, a V-I cadence is avoided by voice leading: the cello goes from an a-flat pick-up to an a-natural downbeat. The A-flat tonic is barely touched on the third division of the second beat of bar 29, for only a sixteenth note, and then is immediately abandoned. Another V-I preparation in bar 29 (second division of the fourth beat) meets a similar fate. The avoidance of a clear tonic continues. In bar 30, we note the g-flat in the pick-up to the fourth beat, which makes the tonic A-flat triad seem like a dominant seventh chord. We see similar devices used throughout this ten bar section: the tonic is touched on briefly and then abandoned, a flattened seventh is added, or the tonic appears in 6/4 position, thereby destabilizing it. Beethoven brilliantly employs chromatic alteration and voice leading, with the treble and bass parts moving in contrary motion, in order to avoid a resolution. From bar 28 to 33, the treble falls while the bass rises, in bars 34 and 35, the contrary motion is reversed. The material between bars 28 and 33 gives the feeling that the music is gradually closing down, and the material in bars 34 and 35 gives the feeling that the piece will never stop expanding and opening up. The resolution to the tonic remains tantalizing and elusive, given only in 6/4 position at bar 36 (third beat), again to be abandoned, hinted at, and ultimately avoided throughout bars 37 and 38, before the next variation begins. The listener feels as though time itself were being suspended, and that the music could go on eternally.

Contrast is an important concept in classical style, and some examples of the extremes to which Beethoven carries it can be seen in the third movement (Scherzo)

of opus 127. To be sure, Beethoven uses the usual devices of contrast, such as differences in articulation, dynamic level, and rhythm. But he goes farther than these. For example, the pick-up into the development section (bars 36–37) introduces a melody (in unison/octaves) which, while maintaining the strong dotted rhythms of the earlier material, seems to pull us outside of the key, in such a way that it may end up in any key at all (bars 37–40). The device is modulated and used again (bars 66 to 69), and again (bars 307–311). Even though it seems so out of context, this strange melody, by virtue of its frequent reappearance, acts as a unifying factor. More extraordinary material appears (for the first time) between bars 60 and 65. Again, the dotted rhythm is present, but it establishes a I-IV-I-V pattern in G-flat major (bars 60–63), and then changes quite suddenly to D major (bars 64 and 65). This six bar section contrasts harmonically within itself and with the piece as a whole, and would seem unrelated to the rest of the piece were not for the fact that it then leads to a modulated version of the strange dotted melody (bars 66 to 69) which was first introduced at bar 37 (see above). Following this, from bars 70–74, is a highly contrasting and mysterious melody, including a time change to duple meter. The melody is in unison, and is harmonically ambiguous until we reach the diminished C chord at bar 75, with a return to tempo 1 and a time change back to triple meter. In the recapitulation of the Scherzo, we see the return of the strongly contrasting devices mentioned above, with the addition of one more striking contrast: a section from the fiery Presto section (from the Trio) at the start of the coda (bars 415–426). These contrasts have the effect of mood changes; strong and dramatic ones which we associate with Beethoven and his unique innovations.

While Beethoven was capable of writing long, lyrical melodies, he also possessed the genius of making a great deal out of small fragments of material (motifs), and building great modulations around them. We can see this process at work in the fourth movement of opus 127. In bars 5 and 6, we see a simple pattern of four eighth notes (which outline the tonic triad) followed by a half note a-flat (the fourth degree of the tonic scale, thus suggesting the flattened seventh of the dominant). In bar 7, the half note is raised one-half step to a-natural, and this becomes a major building block of the piece, occurring throughout the piece in various keys. The raised half note allows the harmony to be taken in new directions. For example, starting in bar 49, we see this motif used as it was starting in bar 5, but this time in the dominant key. The third repetition of the motif in bar 51 occurs, as expected, with the half note raised one half step. But in this part of the piece, Beethoven makes use of the chromatically altered half note, and continues to raise the first violin part by half notes through bar 53, which lays the ground work for an economical yet sophisticated modulation. The motif returns again and again throughout the piece, and is particularly important in the coda. Another effective motif, that of a quarter note followed by two eighths and a quarter note, is introduced in bar 176. It is used to great effect over the next few bars (176–186),

where it is reharmonized as it rises in step-wise motion. The result is another tidy, economical, and sophisticated modulation. Many such examples exist in opus 127. Beethoven squeezes all he can get from small fragments of music. So thoroughly does he do so that it is difficult to imagine what more they could possibly yield.

Opus 127 as a whole retains classical proportions. The sonata form of the first movement has its exposition, development, recapitulation, and coda occurring within the parameters that tradition demands. Similarly, the other movements are proportionally within the classical framework, and the key relationships between the movements are nothing new. We see the use of periodic phrases, dynamics, articulation, and rhythm which are in keeping with the classical style, expanded though they may be. On the other hand, we do not see anything so trite as “filling” in this piece (except for perhaps just a little at the end of the fourth movement). Beethoven also puts highly contrasting, seemingly unrelated material in strategic places to cause mood changes, which the listener may find jarring at times. But elsewhere, the divisions between sections within a movement are not so clear as they are in earlier classical works. There is a seamless quality to the music in opus 127, with one idea leading to another in a fluid, logical way, but seldom in a conventional or expected way. Beethoven, in his later years, achieved a new and original approach to classical music, and a level of craftsmanship which has never been surpassed. It is Beethoven’s absolute command and uncontested mastery of the classical style which makes him its arbiter.

Part 4: Beethoven the Transcendent Man

J.W.N. Sullivan, in his book *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development*, takes the view that Beethoven’s extraordinary achievements can best be understood by looking at the character of the man himself and the transformative experiences he had during his life. While there is little in the way of theoretical analysis in this book, the material focuses upon certain root experiences which Beethoven had, how these were altered by the events and misfortunes suffered by Beethoven during his life, and how Beethoven, by strength of character alone, learned the lesson of submission to his own fate. These factors culminated in Beethoven’s spiritual development, and this spiritual development is evident in his music. The book is divided into three sections: the Preface, Book One, and Book Two. Book One is a collection of three philosophical essays which discuss the nature of music, and serve as a preparation for Book Two, which discusses the life and character of Beethoven, the tragedies he faced and overcame, the practical and emotional difficulties he faced, and his eventual submission to his fate; all of which led to his spiritual development and transcendence, which can be heard in his music.

In his preface to *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development*, Sullivan claims that Beethoven the composer and Beethoven the man cannot be separated: that is, that Beethoven’s

music is a kind of record of his spiritual development (Sullivan vii). Even so, Beethoven's music is not like any diary. In his music, rather, we can follow the development of Beethoven's expressions of certain root experiences which influenced his attitude towards life (Sullivan viii). Sullivan quotes from Newman who said that the peculiarity of Beethoven's music "...lifts us to a height where we reevaluate not only all music, but all life...." (Sullivan ix).

In the first chapter of Book One, entitled "Art and Nature", Sullivan goes to great lengths to argue against the materialist notion that Art does not have anything of value to say about reality. It is clear that Beethoven himself regarded music as a means of "...communicating knowledge about reality...." This opinion would certainly have been at odds with contemporary mainstream thought in the 1920s, as Sullivan himself makes clear (3-5). The materialist would argue that Art can reveal nothing about reality, but rather is only a representation of the neural activity of the artist Sullivan (7-8). Art becomes "...a trivial mystery..." in this view, with the artist's perceptions giving us no insight into reality (Sullivan 8-12). The materialist view is that art appeals to an aesthetic emotion in us, and has no relation to reality outside this aesthetic. Our value judgements of a work of art are in fact of no value in reality. This view has been challenged by I.A. Richards' "revelation theory" of art: that art ranks with both science and philosophy in communicating knowledge about reality; and it is probable that Beethoven himself held this view (Sullivan 5-6). But materialism, as Sullivan rightly points out, stays strictly within its boundaries of a closed system of physics, and ignores the phenomena of life and mind: all phenomena which fall outside the realm of physics are at best irrelevant, or worse, are ignored (13-14). Sullivan asserts that human language is not an adequate medium within which to discuss art, and the fact that we cannot very accurately describe our experiences of great art does not in any way devalue the feeling that "...a large part of experience has been illuminated and harmonized for us...", (Sullivan 10). We see value in works of art; in great works we see through the artists eyes, "...experience of a higher degree of organization...." (Sullivan 10). We see more through a great work of art, and find value in it, and feel that it conveys reality in senses we have not hitherto imagined (Sullivan 11-12). For this reason, we must reject the materialist tenet that Art is trivial and shows nothing of reality (Sullivan 11-12). The materialist view is counter-intuitive. Great Art reveals to us a higher level of consciousness which cannot be ignored (Sullivan 26). While the great artist may not be able to show us reality directly, he can show us his attitude toward the reality he has seen. Beethoven, in his music, shows us his reactions to a place (a real place) which the ordinary man may not see unaided: Beethoven sees more of the universe than does the ordinary man, and attempts to make us aware of the unseen reality by showing us his reaction to it (Sullivan 16-17).

In the second chapter of Book One, Sullivan challenges the notion that musical ability (and appreciation) is a separate and trivial faculty which is unrelated to any other.

(18–25). He cites Gurney’s theory that music had no meaning and is appreciated only by the faculty of music (possessed, to a greater or lesser degree, by all human beings): that the musical faculty is, in fact, a closed system which does not relate to anything else in human experience, and is, as it were, *sui generis* (Sullivan 19–20). Sullivan finds the argument unconvincing for the reason that a vast number of people feel that this is intuitively not so (21). We therefore have two conflicting points of view: that music affects only musical emotions, or reactions, and the other view that music is expressive of meanings beyond this closed system.¹⁵ Sullivan points out that while it may be difficult or impossible to adequately describe in words our experience of music, this does not mean that these experiences are isolated (24). Music (as other art forms) communicates things which cannot be communicated in a different medium. We cannot conclude that no analog exists between a composer’s life and his music; the composer’s life certainly influences his music. To conclude otherwise would be grossly counter-intuitive.

The third chapter of Book One deals with “Music as Expression.” Sullivan cautions us that while music is very often independent, it is not isolated from human experience (26). He mentions three kinds of music: 1. that which is in isolation, 2. that which springs from a spiritual context, and 3. that which is programmatic (27). Of the three, music from a spiritual context is the one which Sullivan chooses to focus upon. While spiritual music may be judged as good or bad, pleasing or unpleasing, no theory yet exists to explain these notions (Sullivan 27–28)¹⁶ In spiritual music, certain criteria must be satisfied: it must be “pure” music, it must stir elements other than purely abstract musical ones, it must arouse emotions and expectations, and these emotions and expectations must continue in a pattern of organic growth (Sullivan 38–29). Human language will be unable to adequately describe these factors. Even were the composer to have a definite situation (program) in mind, a description of such would tell us nothing of the “...quality of response awakened by the music...” (Sullivan 29). Sullivan goes on to point out that programmatic music, where the scene evoked is very clear, tends to be “...very dreary...” in its attempts to sound like, for example, a storm or a babbling brook (29–30). He further states that it is unlikely that spiritual compositions are about anything at all (31). By their very nature, spiritual experiences are difficult to describe, and any programs associated with them may be considered irrelevant (Sullivan 32). But while it may be that we wish to deny programmatic elements in spiritual music, our own experience of such music may contradict this denial. We need only to listen to Beethoven’s sixth symphony (the Pastoral) to find the evidence. Even Beethoven himself mentioned that when he composed, he “...had a picture in my mind, and followed its lines...” (Sullivan 33). But this may have been a metaphor, for he also said that the painter or poet’s “...territory is not so restricted as mine...though mine...extends into other regions, and my domain is not easily reached...” (Sullivan 33). What a fraught and revealing statement: Beethoven claims that he can show us

regions of reality which are inexpressible in any other way save by way of his music. We know that Beethoven took to giving poetic titles to his works in order to assist his listeners in understanding the extra-musical content of his work: A clear indication that Beethoven believed that *some* of his ideas could be expressed in some artistic media other than music. But Sullivan contends that these titles are of no help: the content of the music is made from the composer's reaction to a situation, not the situation itself (34). He asserts that while it is possible that expressive music may evoke states of consciousness analogous to those that may be produced by extra-musical means, we cannot accurately describe these states as emotions and that neither can we use Gurney's term "fused emotion," nor the term "aesthetic emotion" with any success, as our experiences will be too various (34-35). Here, I must partially disagree: Certainly we can hear anger, happiness, heroism, and other aesthetic emotional states in Beethoven, though I admit that there is a limit to the number of such states. This having been said, I must say that I do agree with Sullivan where he gives several examples of the inadequacy of language when it comes to describing spiritual music (36). A great many spiritual states of great depth may be explored all at the same time in the music, which are representative of countless experiences coordinated by the composer's genius. This being the case, it may well be impossible to correlate these multifaceted and complex spiritual states with any definite or singular state of emotion or aesthetic experience we may feel while listening to music.

In Book Two of *Beethoven: His Spiritual Development*, Sullivan shows how we may use what we know of Beethoven's character and the major events in his life to understand the organic development of the spiritual content of his music. It was a life long process for Beethoven, and his works grew more and more profound as he aged, unlike the works of many other composers (Sullivan 41). Sullivan considers Beethoven's attitudes toward suffering and heroism as the most important characteristics which contributed to his outlook as mature composer (Sullivan 42). Beethoven's "...capacity for endurance,...enormous power of self-assurance...and indomitable strength..." is to be seen in Beethoven's greatest music (Sullivan 43). Sullivan goes on to describe the following personal characteristics of Beethoven: He was not malleable, "...immune from purely external influences...impervious to criticism", had atrocious manners, "...ignored conventions... [was] subject to no social passions, [including] sexual love...was ineducable...", did not accept "...the schemes and thought of his time...[and may not even have been] aware of their existence..." (Sullivan 44) What is true is that he was "...utterly faithful to his own experience...." (Sullivan 44) It was Beethoven's capacity for suffering and achievement, along with his inflexibility that caused "...the development of his attitude towards life...." (Sullivan 45) It is in works such as the C minor symphony that Beethoven finds meaning in achievement through suffering, with suffering as the enemy (Sullivan 45). Later in life, Beethoven manages to reconcile suffering as a valuable part of life, "...an illuminating power...",

such as is evidenced in the late quartets, in which Beethoven abandoned “none of the joy, the effort, or the pain....” of his experience (Sullivan 45). Sullivan contends that Beethoven’s genius, combined with all his sufferings, led him to growth and freedom from convention, and that Beethoven’s uncompromising honesty (faithfulness to his own experience) and sincerity gave him the advantage over all other composers (Sullivan 47).

What, then, were the events in Beethoven’s life which, in combination with his native genius and forceful character, led him to create his greatest works? Sullivan admits that little is known of Beethoven’s early life, save for the drunkenness and exploitiveness of his father, the closeness of his relationship with his mother, and his early assumption of his responsibilities as a man and head of a household (47–55). By becoming familiar with the von Breuning family, he was exposed to the Latin and Greek classics, and gained great musical experience as a viola player in both the Court Chapel and the Elector’s theatrical orchestra (Sullivan 56). But it is clear that Beethoven (being less than educable), took from these opportunities only what he found of use and discarded the rest (Sullivan 56). Again, we see here Beethoven’s strong independence. Even during his trip to Vienna in 1792, he did not allow his theoretical music exercises to stand in the way of what he composed himself, and was intolerant of any criticism of his own compositions (Sullivan 59–60). Outside of music, Beethoven appears to have been rather conservative in his views, but with regard to music, he never doubted that his own view was the correct one (Sullivan 60). If he had ever entertained any self doubt in Vienna, it was not for long, and he never accepted the role of servant, as his predecessors had (Sullivan 61). In public competitions he was confident to the point of arrogance, he made enemies, spent money freely, and did not suffer to humor his patrons (Sullivan 61). He had complete confidence that his formidable genius was quite enough to see him through anything that might arise (Sullivan 62).¹⁷ He could at times seem carelessly indifferent to others, was often rude and quixotic in his behavior, and seems to have been contemptuous of most of humanity. Beethoven believed completely in his own power. But destiny was to deliver him a blow that would take him to the next level of his spiritual development.

The first signs of Beethoven’s deafness appeared in 1798. He was to try all manner of treatment, and for a while kept up hope that he might regain, at least partly, his ability to hear. But as time went on, even as he abandoned hope, his reaction to his ailment was defiance, as when he said of it: “...I will take Fate by the throat...” (Sullivan 72). But as he came close to despair, and thought to give up his struggle, he found that his creative gift was still there, still as great or greater than ever (Sullivan 73). This made any notion of suicide or death impossible, and marks a turning point in Beethoven’s development. He no longer believed in the morality of power, as he had in those earlier years when he had come to Vienna as an arrogant young genius. It is at this time that a document appears, the Heiligenstadt Testament, which Beethoven wrote to his

brothers (Sullivan 73). It is in this document that we see the old defiance of Beethoven give way to submission to his fate. As Sullivan puts it: "...He had no need of defiance. He had no need of fear. He had become aware within himself of an indomitable creative energy that nothing could destroy...." (77) Beethoven had learned to accept his suffering and to submit to it, and this was the necessary step for his further spiritual development (Sullivan 78).

There is a curious lack of compositional activity in Beethoven's life in the decade following 1809. The "...courage and resolution, that had taken him so far, were not enough.... (Sullivan 113) What Beethoven now had to learn for the next stage of his spiritual development during these fallow years was "...submission and endurance..." (Sullivan 113). Though he wished to marry, and made a few failed proposals, Beethoven's own character, as well as the conditions of his life, would prevent him from doing so (Sullivan 144-122). It is clear that Beethoven had in mind an idealized version of the woman he wanted to marry, but of course, ideals do not exist in nature, and I have no doubt that Beethoven did not fool himself about this. It is possible that Beethoven came to realize he would never marry because he may have suffered from syphilis (Sullivan 122). But, as Sullivan contends and I believe, it is rather more likely that Beethoven felt that marriage would somehow interfere with his creative powers and ability to work effectively (123). While Beethoven craved the intimacy and companionship of a wife, on a deeper level he likely knew that his very solitariness was one of the necessary conditions for his creative genius. Beethoven did come to accept his loneliness, but this caused an inner conflict with his passions and desires which led to another spiritual lesson for Beethoven: sacrifice for achievement (Sullivan 124). Also during this period, we see Beethoven's hopes for financial security disappointed, and this was further exacerbated by family problems (many of which were no doubt caused by Beethoven himself, due to his inflexible nature).

Beethoven's loneliness (perhaps self-alienation is a better word) caused within him a slow, gradual spiritual development: he was becoming conscious that "...what is called 'human' life, the life that includes love, marriage, children, family, friends...", were to be denied him (Sullivan 137). In the Hammerklavier Sonata (generally acknowledged to be among the most technically difficult piano pieces ever written), we hear Beethoven's realization of his complete isolation. Sullivan refers to this work as the ending of Beethoven's second period, a period in Beethoven's life when all his outer resources (love, friendship, money) had either failed him or deserted him (Sullivan 140). And yet from so impoverished an outside world, Beethoven in his greatness had "...expressed so much...." (Sullivan 140). I have little doubt that Beethoven's self-alienation from the outside world caused the greater development of his inner world, and that we may view this as the ultimate expression of personal autonomy.

Beethoven's religious beliefs are not well known, but it appears there may have been an element of Eastern transcendentalism involved: "...I am that which is. I am all that

was, that is, and that shall be...” Beethoven had written and kept on his desk (Sullivan 142). It seems that in his late period, Beethoven had made the spiritual leap from utter personal despair to the greatest love of humanity, as is evidenced in the ninth symphony. Beethoven was alone, within his own thoughts, and discovered things there that he could report back to us (Sullivan 145). Sullivan goes so far as to say that Beethoven may have been “...moving about in worlds not realized...” (145) Sullivan further claims that, in his latest works, Beethoven’s “...deafness and solitariness are almost symbolic of his complete retreat into his inner self. No ‘external storms’ could influence his work now...,” the profoundest of these late works being the last string quartets (Sullivan 147). Sullivan is no doubt absolutely correct here, and this is why I chose to analyze the opus 127.

Beethoven’s use of language was clumsy, as can be seen in the existing examples of his writing, and it has been said that human language is not adequate when trying to describe music. The language of Beethoven was music, and it was in this language that he described his reactions to what he saw and felt, things which are perhaps not expressible in human language at all (Sullivan 84–86). Perhaps Beethoven, in his efforts to expand (to the very ultimate limits) the classical style in his later works, was using music not so much as a descriptive language, but rather as a telescope to aid us in increasing our vision. Beethoven hoped to show us newly discovered regions, hitherto unknown to the rest of us. Perhaps he was using his music as a kind of amplifier, so that we would be able to hear voices and languages we had never suspected were there. Perhaps he was using his music as an extension of some part of the brain, by which we could experience new and undreamed of emotions. Perhaps Beethoven’s spiritual development allowed him to see the face of God, and perhaps he hoped that through his music, he might help to show us what only he could see.

End Notes

1. Glück, because of the “...seriousness and the integrity...” of his operatic compositions is considered to be an important, albeit lesser, contributor to the classical style (Rosen 19).
2. This is due to the fact that the fifth of the subdominant triad is the same note as the root of the tonic triad. Classical composers, most notably Mozart, would introduce the subdominant as a way of relaxing tension, very often as a part of the recapitulation after the reintroduction of the tonic key.
3. To clarify, the dominant will increase tension in that it demands resolution to the tonic.
4. Relevant to this point is that unlike the rather equal weight given to the beats of a bar in baroque music, each beat in a classical bar “...has a distinctive weight of its own...” Thus, in a bar of 4/4, the downbeat is stronger than in Baroque music, and the upbeat heavier than the second beat. This lends greater significance to syncopations, makes possible the isolation of individual beats, and lends rhythmic weight to silences (Rosen 90–91).
5. In the interests of brevity, I shall not examine here the slow-movement sonata form, the minuet sonata form, the finale sonata form, or the sonata-rondo.
6. It bears repeating here that the composer did not wish there to be much (or any) added

ornamentation, even in the recapitulation. Whereas in the High Baroque, ornamentation was necessary to achieve continuity, in classical music, ornamentation is used to articulate structure. In classical music, added ornamentation is not only unnecessary, but may be destructive in that it can obfuscate structure and symmetry.

7. It is in such sections that instrumental performers are given the opportunity to show off their technical prowess.
8. I am perhaps oversimplifying here. Beethoven spends a quite a lot of time confirming V by means of emphasizing the movement from V to V/V to V, with sequences which never get too far away from the new key center in F-major (see bars 64–88).
9. The repeat is necessary here, as it helps to preserve the desired proportions of the form. If the repeat is omitted in this particular movement of Quartet #6, the recapitulation will occur too soon, in my opinion.
10. In the Smetana recording of Quartet #6, the group does not repeat the recapitulation, and wisely so in my opinion. Such a repetition would make the development section seem too distant, and thereby harm the overall proportions of the movement.
11. In classical music, the down beat and third beat of a 4/4 bar is stronger than it is in earlier music. This makes the accentuation of the weaker beats all the more striking.
12. We are reminded here that the subdominant is used to relieve tension in classical forms.
13. Rosen remarks on Beethoven's use of repetition of small elements and the large modulations built on them (413).
14. One can certainly see where Brahms got a few of his cadential ideas, particularly in the chromatics and voice leading between bars 35 and 37.
15. I do not want to appear irreverent of so serious a debate, but is it possible that anyone could think music has no relation to anything outside itself? Was Gurney, perhaps, musically challenged by some handicap? Sullivan is too kind to say so, but I feel that this must be the case. Either that, or Gurney never really let himself be taken up, never really gave himself, to the experience of listening to music.
16. Sullivan holds out hope that at some distant future time, a neurological explanation may be found for the way in which we make these judgement. On this point, I feel that Sullivan is on a rather slippery slope. What if there were something beyond the cold, Darwinian universe, which could not be measured by science?
17. Beethoven was no doubt right to think so.

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