

Op 26 1st Movement Sonata in Ab (Beethoven)

Title: Sonata means 'to sound'. It is an instrumental chamber form that usually has three to four movements. The first and last movements are typically fast, while the middle movements (often a minuet or andante movement) are contrastingly slower.

Key:

This sonata is in Ab. The first movement is in theme and variation form.

Theme -

Section A Bars 1 to 8, ends with a half-cadence

Section A Bars 9 to 16, ends with authentic cadence

Section B Bars 17 to 25

Bars 17 to 20 Bb minor then sequence Ab major

Bars 21 to 22 F minor

Bars 23 to 25 Eb major

Section A Bars 26 (lead-in) to 34 ends in authentic cadence in Ab major.

Form is AABA - song form.

Variation 1 -

Varying range (lower), demi-semiquaver arpeggios, melodic LH. Chord progression identical to theme.

Variation 2 -

LH octaves with theme, alternating material between hands, perpetual motion/pulse throughout. Chord progression identical to theme.

Variation 3 -

Tonic minor (minore). Chord progression basically similar but major chords I, IV, now minor chords. Funeral march/processional (almost hinting at the 2nd movement). Melody in RH, syncopated suspensions for tension.

Variation 4 -

Gentle thirds with two note slurs (minuet-like), syncopated. Melody hinted at (basic outline in RH), more about chord progressions. Chord progression identical to theme.

Variation 5 -

Finale, chord progression same as theme but added coda at bar 204 (alternates between chords V and I, authentic cadence). Melody hidden amongst forward-moving faster rhythms, until appears in full at bar 179. Alberti bass here also.

Period: Classical

Style:

Pitch - short balanced phrases in 2 or 4 bar lengths, often featuring arpeggios or steps and two-note slurs. Emphasis on cadences to outline structure. Chord progressions based on diatonic chords, major/minor tonalities. Use of suspensions but in passing. Broken chords eg Alberti bass. Duration - use of simple and common time signatures, limited use of syncopation (often as a feature)

Expressive devices - wide range of dynamics, tapered phrasing (eg two-note slurs), range of touch (staccato, legato etc), ornaments which begin above main note

Texture - homophonic, emphasis on melody, accompaniment eg Alberti bass, chords

Tone colour - fortepiano more common than modern piano (extreme dynamics), some pedalling but not a lot and not always marked, clarity of touch (sparkle), light, elegant pieces

Structure - formal structures eg sonata form, theme and variation, rondo, emphasis is on repeating melodic material so that it's remembered. Balanced, symmetrical.

Composer dates and life:

Composer genres:

9 symphonies (eg Choral symphony 'Ode to Joy')
Piano sonatas (eg Sonata Pathetique, Moonlight Sonata)
Chamber music (eg quartets/trios/quintets/sonatas 'Grosse fugue', 'Ghost trio')
1 opera (Fidelio)
Concertos (eg piano)
Masses ('Missa solemnis')
Piano music (Bagatelles, 'Für Elise')
Overtures (symphonic)
Art songs

Notation:

Andante con Variazioni - walking pace with variations
3/8 - time signature - simple triple
p - piano - soft
slur - play legato
staccato - short and detached
cresc - crescendo - gradually getting louder
sf - sforzando - sudden loud note
diminuendo - gradually getting softer
appoggiatura - grace note
tr - trill - rapidly alternate between two notes
mezzo staccato - moderately detached
accent - stress the note
rinf. - rinforzando - reinforced
pp - pianissimo - very soft
sempre stacc. - always short and detached
dolce - sweetly
calando - dying away (softer and slower)
fermata - hold the note longer than written
ped. - pedal marking - damper pedal