Ludwig van Beethoven – Piano Sonata in G major, Op. 79
Third Movement: Vivace

What does the title mean?

- Vivace is an Italian tempo and character marking meaning lively, brisk or spirited.
- This is the third and final movement of Beethoven's Piano Sonata in G major, Op. 79, composed in 1809.
- Beethoven described the complete work to his publisher as a sonata facile or sonatine: an intentionally compact sonata rather than one of his large-scale dramatic works.
- Sonata means 'to sound'

Keys / Modulations

- Home key: G major.
- bb. 1–8: G major moves to D major, the dominant.
- bb. 9–17: begins in D major and returns to G major; C major is briefly tonicised.
- bb. 17–25: E minor, the relative minor.
- bb. 25–35: begins in E minor and works back toward G major, ending on dominant harmony that prepares the return.
- bb. 36–51: G major and D major alternate as the A material returns.
- bb. 51–67: C major, the subdominant; F major is briefly tonicised within the episode.
- bb. 68–72: transition away from C major, touching A minor and redirecting the harmony toward G major.
- bb. 73–96: return of the A material in G major, with excursions to D major.
- bb. 97–104: coda begins with movement between D major and G major.
- bb. 105–118: G major predominates to the end, with brief colour from C-major tonicisation before the final tonic confirmation.

Period and 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.

Ludwig van Beethoven – Biography

- born in Bonn 16 December, 1770 (baptised on 17 December 1770).
- Father was a singer in the court and tried to push Ludwig as a child prodigy
- Early teachers were Christian Gottlob Neefe (keyboard, composition), helped him to publish his first compositions;
- Teenager, worked as an assistant court organist, played viola in the Bonn court orchestra
- Moved to Vienna in 1792, studying composition with Haydn, lessons also with Albrecthsberger and Salieri;
- Established a reputation as a pianist and improvisor, gaining supportive patrons.
- Late 1790s, Beethoven had hearing problems.

- Wrote the ‘Heiligenstadt Testament’ in 1802, describing his despair over his worsening deafness and his determination to continue composing.
- During the following decade he produced many of the large-scale works associated with his so-called middle or ‘heroic’ period, including the Eroica and Fifth Symphonies, the Violin Concerto, several piano concertos and major piano sonatas. Op. 79 was composed in 1809 during this period but is deliberately smaller and lighter in scale.
- Beethoven’s hearing continued to deteriorate until ordinary conversation became extremely difficult;
- from 1818 visitors increasingly communicated with him through written conversation books.
- His later music became more concentrated and experimental, producing works such as the Missa solemnis, Symphony No. 9, the final piano sonatas, Diabelli Variations and late string quartets.
- Beethoven never married.
- His later personal life included a prolonged legal dispute over guardianship of his nephew Karl.
- Beethoven died in Vienna on 26 March 1827, aged 56. His funeral was attended by the public (procession through the streets).

Composer Genres

- **Symphonies –** 9 symphonies; Symphony No. 9 includes the famous choral finale setting Schiller’s Ode to Joy.
- **Piano sonatas –** 32 piano sonatas, including the Pathétique, Moonlight, Waldstein and Appassionata sonatas.
- **Chamber music –** string quartets, piano trios, quintets and instrumental sonatas; examples include the Grosse Fuge and the Ghost Trio.
- **Opera –** one completed opera, Fidelio.
- **Concertos –** five piano concertos, the Violin Concerto and the Triple Concerto for piano, violin and cello.
- **Masses –** the Mass in C major and Missa solemnis.
- **Other piano music –** bagatelles, variations, dances and shorter pieces, including Für Elise and the Diabelli Variations.
- **Overtures –** concert and dramatic overtures including Egmont, Coriolan and the Leonore overtures.
- **Art songs / Lieder –** numerous songs, including the song cycle An die ferne Geliebte.

Structure / Form

- Rondo form with coda: A^1 – B – A^2 – C – A^3 – Coda.

A^1 – bb. 1–17

- bb. 1–8: first theme. Two related four-bar phrases develop the opening motive sequentially; the first confirms G major and the second moves to D major.
- bb. 9–17: second theme. Two related four-bar phrases move between dominant and tonic areas; the later phrase briefly colours the harmony with C major before returning firmly to G.

B – bb. 17–35

- bb. 17–25: contrasting episode in E minor. The first phrase grows from the opening motive; a tonic pedal supports part of the passage before an imperfect cadence.
- bb. 25–35: the opening motive passes between the hands in a thinner texture. The harmony gradually points back toward the dominant of G major, preparing the rondo return.

A^2 – bb. 36–51

- bb. 36–43: first A theme returns, now with triplet accompaniment beneath the duple melody.
- bb. 44–51: second A theme returns; the triplet accompaniment reappears during the latter part of the passage.

C – bb. 51–72

- bb. 51–67: new episode in C major. Its theme is organised as paired four-bar phrases; F major is briefly brought into focus before C major is restored. The material is then repeated with rhythmic alteration.

- bb. 68–72: transition derived from the first A theme. The harmony moves away from C major through A-minor/G-minor colouring and prepares the return of G major.

A^3 – bb. 73–96

- bb. 73–88: the first A theme is stated twice. Beethoven changes the accompaniment: first to flowing semiquaver broken chords and then to broken octaves in triplets, producing 3-against-2 rhythmic interplay.
- bb. 89–96: second A theme returns, again combining familiar melodic material with the more active accompaniment.

Coda – bb. 97–118

- bb. 97–104: begins like another return of the second A theme, but its short units are fragmented and answered in a higher register.
- bb. 105–114: motives and textures from earlier in the movement are combined as the tension accumulates; C major is briefly suggested within the tonic-centred passage.
- bb. 114–118: extended G-major tonic confirmation. The opening motive remains audible before emphatic block chords bring the sonata to a close.

Notation and Terms

- **Vivace –** Lively, brisk and spirited.
- **p dolce –** Softly and sweetly.
- **p –** Piano – soft.
- **f –** Forte – loud.
- **sf –** Sforzando – a sudden strong accent on the marked note or chord.
- **dim. –** Diminuendo – gradually become softer.
- **cresc. –** Crescendo – gradually become louder.
- **slur –** Play the grouped notes smoothly and shape them as a single gesture or phrase.
- **two-note slur –** A short Classical articulation normally shaped with greater weight on the first note and a lighter release on the second.
- **staccato dot –** Play the note short and detached.
- **accent –** Give the marked note additional emphasis.
- **turn –** An ornament circling around the written note using neighbouring notes; in Classical practice the precise execution depends on context.
- **triplet (3) –** Three equal notes performed in the time normally occupied by two of the same written value.
- **repeat signs and first/second endings –** Repeat the enclosed passage, taking the first ending on the first performance and the second ending on the repeat.
- **treble-clef change in the left hand –** The left hand temporarily moves into a higher register; the clef change avoids excessive ledger lines.