

Violin sonata op.12 no.1

The first, of the three sonatas for violin and piano op.12, was written in 1797 for Anton Salieri of whom he had gotten informal lessons. The question what influence Salieri had on Beethoven is debatable. When Salieri had certain criticism on Beethoven's only Opera, Fidelio, Beethoven got very insulted and stayed angry with Salieri for many months.

The Sonata has three movements. One can see that this sonata starts almost in the same way as the E-flat sonata Kv.302 of Mozart. One can debate if this sonata by Mozart was of interest (it is even debatable if he knew this sonata) to Beethoven but it is definite that in the Classical-style the composers would sometimes write a couple of bars of introduction before the first melody. The thing that Beethoven did differently from Mozart was that the violin plays the same as the piano and in the Mozart sonata, the violin is quasi-accompanying the piano part. After the opening passage of the first sonata of both instruments, Beethoven gave the main melody to the violin which later switches around. In the violin sonata of Mozart, kv.302, one sees that the piano gets the main melody and later the violin takes the same melody, which the piano repeats.

First movement: written in 'Allegro con Brio', A-B-A/sonata form and has the tonality of D-major. As said above, the violin sonata almost starts with a four-bar introduction for the main melody, with a countermelody in the piano part. This opening has the effect of a shock and gives a contrast between that opening and the first main melody. This main melody ends up in a very virtuosic second theme. Within this virtuosity, a musical dialogue between the violin and the piano is made. After the second theme, Beethoven combines both the musical grammar of the first and the second theme. In the middle section of the A part, Beethoven changes the figure in the piano and creates a slower 'flow' of music by breaking the chords in arpeggio's and gives the violin all the space to its melodic line. Opposed to the virtuosity of the second theme, the melodic line gives the direction and remembrance the first theme. The end of the first section, before the development, shows a spectacular ending full of virtuosity between the instruments and combining them both together to finish that part. The middle section starts with repeating a phrase close to the end of the A-section. The theme that was originally intended as a statement becomes a comical theme through the soft dynamic that Beethoven writes. The first theme comes back and continues developing/modulating. Which results in a rhythmical figure, for the piano, that is exactly the same as the introduction which results back to the second A-part of the first movement. The reprise-section is musically identical to the first opening-section of this movement.

Second movement: The second movement is a 'Tema con variazioni' in A-major starts with the piano and the violin repeating the melody after the finish of the introduction. The same happens for the second, counter-theme in which the accompaniment is different, by doubling the melody in both instruments. The first melody shows an incredible lyricism and has a more static second theme that compliments the first theme well.

The first variation gives the impression of a cantabile movement. Here the piano has the freedom to show itself due to the way the violin part is written; as a supporting line giving the piano part some more spice with the sudden small accents.

In the second variation, the violin has the chance to flourish. The piano accompanies this line and has the main aim to give a nice harmonic basis for the violin.

The third variation is the only variation, in this movement, that is written in minor. It is a very dramatic piece with a lot of tension that is continuously being build up by both instruments having completely equal parts here. It is also the longest variation of the movement.

After this variation, we are presented with the last variation. A very calm piece that compliments as a wonderful contrast from what happened before in the third variation. Both instruments have, again, the same importance and end in a coda where the violin and piano, also both hand of the piano, have a wonderful dialogue.

Third movement: The last movement of this sonata is a Rondo, Written in a tempo that gives the feeling of a quick dance. We are back in the original key of the Sonata, D-major and the tempos can be interpreted almost in the same cadence. Both instruments have a very virtuosic line. The fun comes in with the accents that are not 'on' the beat but 'off' the beat. The two places that have a fermata, a long note, which can be kept at one's own wish, gives a bit of time to relax and catch the breath for the listener (as well for the performer). The middle part of this movement is a cantabile part that gives hints from what happened before and gives a strong contrast. Beethoven writes a quick scale for the piano, in the end, to return back to the main, Rondo, theme, repeating what came before in the first part. The coda is a conversation that giving the feeling of musical uncertainty and finishes abruptly with a strong statement.