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## The four-hand ensembles by Ludwig van Beethoven: search and gain

### Los conjuntos a cuatro manos de Ludwig van Beethoven: búsqueda y ganancia

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
#### Abstract


The original four-hand ensembles by L. Beethoven have not received the proper attention of scientists. The aim of the study is to evaluate the composer's gain from the standpoint of the searches for new sonority and timbre variety. This approach reveals the process of the mutual influence of the two-hand and four-hand compositions in his piano heritage. The main method was musical analysis, using which Beethoven's notes and scores were examined, and their structure was investigated on the basis of analysis and synthesis. The principles of abstraction, specification and generalization are also used. The result is the semantization of the developed techniques, the modelling of various figurative-playing situations in the march genre, the variety of characteristic means as the ways of varying song melodies, the combination in the variation cycle of the features of amateur music-making and concert style. In conclusions it is shown, that assimilation of the experience accumulated in the four-hand literature and new capabilities of the instrument laid the foundation for a new type of composer thinking. As the example


#### Resumen


Los conjuntos originales a cuatro manos de L. Beethoven no han recibido la debida atención por parte de los científicos. El objetivo del estudio es evaluar la ganancia del compositor desde el punto de vista de las búsquedas de nueva sonoridad y variedad tímbrica. Este enfoque revela el proceso de la influencia mutua de las composiciones a dos y cuatro manos en su patrimonio pianístico. El método principal fue el análisis musical, mediante el cual se examinaron las notas y partituras de Beethoven y se investigó su estructura sobre la base del análisis y la síntesis. También se utilizan los principios de abstracción, especificación y generalización. El resultado es la semantización de las técnicas desarrolladas, la modelización de diversas situaciones de ejecución figurativa en el género de la marcha, la variedad de medios característicos como las formas de variar las melodías de las canciones, la combinación en el ciclo de variación de las características de la creación musical amateur y el estilo de concierto. En las conclusiones se muestra que la asimilación

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Variations on the Theme of Beethoven for two pianos by C. Saint-Saens are considered.

**Keywords:** Ludwig van Beethoven, four-hand piano ensemble, march, variations.

## Introduction

### *Research Problem*

Many composers, regardless of the genre in which they work, find inspiration in his creativity and stylistic solutions. Elements of the great master's music can be heard in various genres, from classical and romantic music to rock, jazz and modern electronic music. Beethoven's music overcomes language and cultural barriers. It has a certain universal power of communication, which is able to connect people regardless of their political views, nationality, religion, social status, and ethical beliefs. Beethoven's works have stood the test of time and continue to amaze listeners around the world even centuries after they were written. Beethoven's music is imbued with expressiveness and saturated with powerful emotions (Rücker, 2002; Telesko et al., 2020). His works reflect a wide range of emotions, including joy, sadness, pity, ecstasy and heroism. They create a deep emotional impression that can move the listener and cause reflection. It is difficult to imagine the history of musical art without Beethoven's work.

At the same time, not all information about this famous composer has been fully investigated. Certain elements of his creative legacy also need to be rethought, as ideas about music are permanently transformed, so the knowledge about their compositions and works in general also changes. Beethoven's work is no exception to this process. If the world-famous works of the master are under the constant attention of researchers, then less well-known achievements require increased attention.

### *Research Focus*

Therefore, the main focus of the study is on the analysis of the key features of the ensemble of four hands created by L. van Beethoven. Ludwig van Beethoven worked on the border of two centuries (1770-1827), this influenced the fact that the features of two eras - classicism and romanticism - were embodied in his work (Burnham, 1995). It is believed that it was in his

de la experiencia acumulada en la literatura a cuatro manos y las nuevas capacidades del instrumento sentaron las bases para un nuevo tipo de pensamiento compositivo. Como ejemplo se consideran las Variaciones sobre el tema de Beethoven para dos pianos de C. Saint-Saens.

**Palabras clave:** Ludwig van Beethoven, conjunto de piano a cuatro manos, marcha, variaciones.

work that the classical sonata type fully realized its potential and influenced the emergence of a new romantic style. The works created by the composer, considered only in the aspect of the development of the technique of four-hand playing, do not allow an unambiguous answer to the question: was it a tribute to fashion or playing 4 hands on one instrument revealed to the composer the timbre-register secrets of the new, in comparison with the harpsichord, instrument?

### *Aim and Research Questions*

Therefore, taking into account the importance of studying the creative heritage of Ludwig van Beethoven, the aim of the article is to analyze Beethoven's works intended for performance in four hands, to determine his creative searches and the results formed as a result of writing these compositions.

Accordingly, the main research questions are:

1. Characterization of the theoretical foundations of research, analysis of scientific literature.
2. Analysis of compositions in four hands by L. van Beethoven.
3. Description of his main innovations in musical art through a historical perspective.

## Theoretical Framework or Literature Review

The life and work of Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) as a special cultural phenomenon continues to stimulate research thought. Scientists investigate the composer's life path, the features of the author's style, which give a special energy charge to his musical ideas (Greenfield et al., 1965). In particular, Geck (2017) characterized the features of the composer's formation, the change in his stylistic characteristics, and the evolution of his creative heritage. about the creative and life path of the famous composer is presented in the work of Caeyers (2020). At the same time, Clarke et al. (2015) described the complex issues of musical

empathy against the background of cross-cultural contacts. Bank (2020) identified key aspects of the formation of European musical art. Garrison (2019) characterized key motifs in Western music. In a collective monograph, Raposo et al., (2020) explored major trends in music and art.

Against the background of the grandiose designs of large-scale sonatas and variation cycles for solo piano, the four-hand ensemble occupies a modest place. This gave Kesselschläger (1941) a reason to write about Beethoven's lack of interest in the genre, discoveries of new ways of development in the four-hand presentation and style. Stoelzel (1984) brief mention of Sonata in D major op. 6 by Beethoven in the context of a detailed presentation of the features of four-hand sonatas by Muzio Clementi (1752–1832) is indicative. The musicologist notes the similarity of episode C in the Andante of the 2nd movement of Sonata E flat major op. 3 by the Italian composer and the episode in d-moll in Rondo of Beethoven's Sonata. If Clementi appears in it as a piano virtuoso, ahead of his time, Beethoven, with such a texture, does not reach a large scale (Stoelzel, 1984). The temporal distance separating the two research works did not affect the perception of Beethoven's piano ensembles by researchers. At the same time, Stoelzel (1991) analyzed Mozart's last four-handed Sonata in C major KV 521, completed in Vienna.

On the other hand, the modern researcher Lockwood (2012) created a detailed picture of the life and work of the great composer, described Beethoven's musical development and paid considerable attention to the historical, political and cultural background. Each new chapter in his work begins with a concise analysis of the most important biographical events that influenced the composer's development. Some other biographical data is described in the study of Bernhardt (2021). The influence of romanticism on musical art was characterized by Rummenhöller (1995). At the same time, modern researcher Jan (2022) analyzed the evolution of individual musical styles. Suvorov et al. (2022) researched the main features of training future musicians. Some casual reminiscences of famous musicians were described by Goodhart (1936). Jones (2014) described the evolution of the Viennese school of composers.

In the study of De Luca et al. (2019), the relationship between traditional musical art and modern art is traced. Şahin (2013) researched the music Entertainment culture Scripp & Gilbert (2019) characterized the problem of human

becoming through music. Newmark (2009) and Sedivy (2021) investigated the health problems of L. van Beethoven, characterized how certain diseases affected his life and work. A similar problem is also described in works by Kauffman-Ortega & Valdovinos-Díaz (2020) and Camargo & Bronzini (2015).

Kemner (n.d.) studied the work "Drei Equale" of L. van Beethoven. Rehfeldt et al. (2021) believe that the development of Beethoven's music was characterized by a set of products that "arising from a series of interconnected circumstances that created a high demand for his music" (p. 69). The analysis of these researchers revealed two levels of relational processes in the selection of Beethoven's music:

1. the relational repertoire "which allowed Beethoven to compose masterpieces when he was completely deaf" (Rehfeldt et al., 2021, p. 69).
2. the symbolic role of his works in promoting freedom and democratic values in various societies (Rehfeldt et al., 2021).

## Methodology

The research was implemented in several stages. At the first, an analysis of the literature was carried out, the main achievements of modern scientists were characterized. At the second stage, a thorough analysis of Ludwig van Beethoven's compositions was carried out. At the last one, the summary was carried out.

An important role in the research methodology is played by a systematic review of the theoretical literature base related to the topic. The research uses musical analysis, based on which notes and scores of L. van Beethoven's musical works are considered. Their structure, features of the melody and other important musical elements were studied with the help of analysis and synthesis. On the basis of contextual analysis, the connection of L. van Beethoven's ensembles with his other works, musical traditions of that period is traced. Separately, the principles of abstraction, specification and generalization were used in the study.

## Results and Discussion

### *Sonata D-dur op. 6* in the context of the established tradition

In the four-hand *Sonata D-dur op. 6* by Beethoven, many of the traditional methods of ensemble playing reveal their figurative and

drama function, causing a train of analogies both with the compositions of the composer himself and those of his predecessors. The two-movement cycle is built on the contrast of the actively-volitional *Allegro molto* (1st movement, miniature sonata form) and the lyrically-graceful *Moderato* (2nd movement, Rondo). The quasi-triplet rhythm formula of the theme of the main part is perceived by musicologists as a harbinger of the famous leading intonation of the *Fifth Symphony*. And at the same time none of the researchers notes the composer's reinterpretation of the initial unison. This kind of "inception" at the forte in a four-hand ensemble was characteristic of similar sonatas by Mozart, which distinguished them among the opuses of

contemporaries. If unison during the development of the technique of ensemble playing turned out to be an important way of "tuning" the ensemble members for joint music-making, in Beethoven's *Sonata* it became a means of expressing the general idea of *Allegro molto*. The first sentence of the main part contains an internal contrast, lining up on the principle of "question – answer". It is important to note the dialogical structure of the second half of the sentence. This kind of "personification" of thematism, on the one hand, explains the absence of contrasting lyrical imagery in the sphere of the side part, on the other hand, it stretches threads to the composer's two-hand works (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** L. Beethoven. Sonata D-dur op. 6. 1st movement (bars 1–12).  
Source: Beethoven (1952)

The opening octave unisons of the main part, which are expressing the energetically charged active imagery of the movement, will be further developed by Beethoven in the subsequent sonata opuses for solo piano (the main parts of the 1st movements of *sonatas D-dur op. 10 No. 3*, *C-dur op. 53*, *f-moll op. 57 "Appassionata"*). The composer uses full-sounding chords and

octave doublings in his solo sonatas not only embody powerful, authoritative or solemn images, but also lyrical ones. Consider, for instance, the type of texture in the main theme of the 2nd movement of *Sonata E-dur op. 14 No. 1*. It resembles four-hand literature projected onto two staves (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** L. Beethoven. Piano sonata op. 14 No. 1. 2nd movement (bars 1–8).  
Source: Beethoven (1952)

The roots of this phenomenon go back to the recent past, when, two-hand works could be performed in four hands, as well as those created for two claviers – on one instrument (this was

reflected in the subtitles of the works). However, among the fundamental elements of the work Stoele (1984) mentions doubling, leading the melody, and counterpoint which reflected the

typical properties of playing on one instrument. Beethoven avoids this kind of typed texture formulas in *Sonata op. 6*. He plays with the timbre roll-calls of two parts to create a surround sound. There is a parallel with *Sonata f-moll op. 2 No. 1* written between 1793 and 1795. In it the theme of the main part is presented in the timbre opposition of high and low registers, an active energetic ascending movement and softer, “feminine” motives, accompanied by a characteristic chord rhythm formula, which, owing to the lack of a strong beat of the measure, takes the form of an enlarged triplet. Beethoven’s approbation of the new imagery and means of expression in the solo sonata influenced the interpretation of the sonata form of the four-hand opus, making it possible to reduce what was found to structural and semantic formulas and shift the emphasis to the development to enhance the drama element. In turn, the practice of four-hand music-making opened the way to timbre diversity, sound density, brightness of register contrasts in the designs of sonatas for solo piano, with all the imperfection of instruments of that time.

Rondo of the 2nd movement reveals an influence of Mozart’s style. This is indicated by the dominance of melodic principle, which in the theme of the refrain resembles the stylistics of lyrical heroines of the operas of the Austrian Maestro, transparency of texture, predominance of soft quiet dynamics, only occasionally enhanced by the movement of more extended rhythmic groups, the presence of a quasi-improvisational ligament before the last performance of the refrain (Cooper, 2000). Some of the motive formations of the 1st episode (d-

moll) are marked by ambivalent properties. The off-beat octave moves to the top-source, accentuated by *sf* and a longer duration, evokes memories of dramatic exclamations from the middle section of the 2nd movement of the four-hand *Sonata C-dur* (KV 521), the quivering lyrics of the main part of the soloist of the 1st movement of *Piano Concerto d-moll No. 20* (KV 466); the gracefulness of the subsequent dotted motives give this music a danceable character. If Beethoven’s beginning in the 1st movement of *Sonata op. 6* is easily recognizable owing to the “rhythm of fate”, then in Rondo the bearers of the author’s individuality are numerous sforzando, including weak beats of the bar in the bass line of the Secondo part (the 1st episode), solemn dotted figure of the “precursor” to the octave bass, which creates a figurative contrast to the roundedness of the similar figure in Primo part. Beethoven’s orchestral thinking proves itself in this, as the iambic motive in the bass is perceived in the phonics of the trumpet, the doubled melody in Primo is associated with the sound of flutes or violins, while the triplet figurations in the Secondo right-hand part can be colored with a string group or a harp. Beethoven makes extensive use of double octaves in the bass, thereby generating an additional contrast between the refrain and episodes. The four-hand presentation of Rondo eliminates such weaknesses of the still imperfect piano as insufficient keyboard volume. This kind of problem, as evidenced by the second episode of Rondo, is easily resolved in the context of ensemble music-making, as the expanded passage in the Primo’s right hand part grows out of an imitative dialogue of similar motives transmitted from part to part (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** L. Beethoven. *Sonata D-dur op. 6*. 3rd movement (bars 60–67).  
Source: Beethoven (1952)



At the compositional level, this cadence construction performs the function of a ligament-transition to the last refrain. Thus, the ability to fill the entire volume of the keyboard when playing four hands using the achievements of the pianistic technique of that time gave Beethoven an understanding of the piano universalism and the role of timbre-register and textured means in the drama process.

### Dialogue with the experience of musical culture in variation cycles

The creation of the *Sonata in Four Hands* was preceded by *Variations on the Theme of Count von Waldstein C-dur* (WoO 67; 1791/92), often called as *8 Variations on the Theme of Count von Waldstein*. Beethoven inherits the developed patterns, although he is not limited to the tight framework of the rules, supplementing the cycle with an expanded ending. Several tempo changes affect the musical imagery, which gives this section an independent meaning (here for the first time the composer changes the metro-rhythm from 4/4 to 6/8).

The cycle is based on the theme (Andante con moto), striking in its ingenuousness and intonations naivety. The simplicity of its tunes evokes associations with the thematism of some of Mozart's variation cycles. Suffice it to mention *9 Variations on the Theme of "Lison Dormait" by N. Desede C-dur* (KV 264), *12 Variations on the Theme of "Ah vous dirai-je, Maman" C-dur* (KV 265), *10 Variations on the*

*Theme of the Arietta "Unser dummer Pöbel meint" G-dur* (KV 455), *6 Variations on the Theme of "Stadler Quintett" A-dur* (KV 581). Considering the fact that the 2nd half of the 18th century retains a connection with musical rhetoric, the intonation fund of which was the vocabulary of the era, this kind of coincidence can hardly be attributed to stylization or imitation. The non-squareness of the original material (14 bars) forms a simple three-movement form with the middle contrasting in the mode scale, which anticipates the minor Adagio (var. VIII). The play of chiaroscuro (major-minor) gives the music a special plasticity, as if conveying the change of the participants of the dance performance. The said is confirmed by the brevity of motives in accordance with the repetition and change of choreographic "pas". This principle is maintained in the subsequent variations. In contrast to the theme where Primo part takes the leading position, they open up broad possibilities for four-hand presentation. In the playful 1st variation, the contrast is intensified owing to the timbre recolouring of the varied initial motive of the minor middle. Placed in the great octave, against the background of sustained chords, it introduces elements of alertness into this light music. Beethoven enhances the ludic element of this music by shifting the phrasing accents in both parts. In combination with the lace of triplet figurations in the upper register of Primo, they create an additional counterpoint line that destroys the mechanistic nature of the given movement (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** L. Beethoven. Variations on a Theme by Count von Waldstein. Var. 1 (bars 7–11). Source: Beethoven (1952)

The technique of variation under the conditions of four-hand presentation allows the author to differentiate the timbre space, the role function of the playing voices, to reveal the tendency to expand the register palette. If we recall that the sounds h–c formed a kind of “border” between the two parts, then Beethoven is guided by the

desire to fill the entire volume of the keyboard as much as possible: the Secondo left-hand part is mostly in the big octave. The change in sound resources, the activation of the passage movement is supported by the dynamics of fortissimo, sforzando, the polarization of dynamic comparisons. The promotion of

Secondo as the soloist is presented in a new way. The organic integration of his passages into the overall sound volume does not create register switches so characteristic of alternating playing

of the ensemble members. The swift music of this variation is perceived as a single stream, stylistically recalling the motor skills of the etude genre (See Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** L. Beethoven. Variations on a Theme by Count von Waldstein. Var. 2 (bars 1–4).  
Source: Beethoven (1952)

L. van Beethoven thinks like an experienced strategist, enhancing the contrast between variations at the expense of the ensemble's capabilities. In particular, in the 3rd variation, he brings Secondo part to the fore. It occupies the register space, traditional for two-hand literature, and sets out all the main thematism. Against this background, Primo part is entrusted with short motives in the high register, with the left hand being engaged only in the minor middle at the moment of pauses in Secondo part. This kind of ornamentation of a variable theme testifies to Beethoven's orchestral performances, to his mastery of all the piano timbre colours. In each subsequent variation the composer enhances the

contrast, using dynamics, registration, rhythm, reception of dialogical roll calls, alternating playing, etc. Owing to this, some variations acquire the features of a song without words (var. III), a grotesque march (var. IV), a sparkling etude (var. VI), and a love-flirtatious duet of the heroes of the buffa opera (var. VII). This music seems to appeal to the practice of dance and choreographic action, allowing going beyond the prevailing standards of the genre and enrich it with the elements of theatrical character. The inclusion into the 7th variation of Adagio (6/8), written out in brevier, which is perceived as a kind of vocal "cadence" in the opera scene, is indicative (See Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Beethoven. Variations on a Theme by Count von Waldstein. Var. 7 (bars 11–15)  
Source: Beethoven (1952)

The variety of genre analogies in *Variations on the Theme of Count von Waldstein* is complemented by an improvisational statement in Primo part at the end of the minor, 8th, variation. Anticipating the appearance of the final Allegro, it refers to the practice of fantasies

where such transitions-ligaments reinforced the contrast between the sections of the composition. At the same time, the free attitude to the integrity of the variation, the interruption of the musical process, based on dramaturgic goals, can be regarded as the first step towards the liberation of

the thinking of the composer, the creator of future *Sonatas d-moll op. 31 No. 2, As-dur op. 110*. The large-scale completion of the variation cycle summarizes the key thematic ideas and techniques of ensemble playing. This is evidenced by the further transformation of the theme in the dance rhythm of 6/8, the end of the sections at expressive fermatas, the invasion of two Adagio with the alternate promotion of each of the players to the fore, and, finally, the bright Presto, in which the juicy phonics of Secondo

part confirms the theme, while Primo part enriches the sound with ringing, trill-like figurations in the high register.

L. van Beethoven thinks *6 Variations D-dur* (WoO 74; 1779, 1803–1804) in a different way. They are distinguished by the presentation of the theme as a vocal model to the words of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe *Ich denke dein* (See Figure 7).

Andantino cantabile

Ich den - ke dein, wenn mir der Son - ne Schimmer von Mec - ren strahlt, ich den - ke dein, wenn sich des Mon - des Flim - mer in Quel - len malt.

Primo

Secondo

9

cresc.

legato

p

cresc.

p

**Figure 7.** L. Beethoven. 6 Variations on “Ich denke dein”. Theme.  
Source: Beethoven (1952)

The concept of the variations and their design are clearly focused on the performance in a close home circle. The vocal melody does not exceed the range of one and a half octaves, its 2 sentences include a series of short motives. Their descending intonations express the sincerity of the lyrical statement; brevity of the structure takes into account the possibilities of an unprofessional vocalist. The 6 variations with coda at small scales allow demonstrating the pianistic skills of the ensemble members. The cycle is built on the principle of contrast, contains 2 slow variations (the 3rd – D-dur, the 5th – d-moll), which fully correspond to the character of Andantino cantabile song. The other variations are distinguished by mobile tempo, active movement, and cheerful mood. Beethoven’s orientation toward didactic literature is evidenced by the inclusion of the most typified

techniques by which one can show the results achieved in learning to play the piano. It gives rise to equal rights for the ensemble members who take turns to demonstrate their skills (Rumph, 2004). At the same time the series of variations created by Beethoven goes far beyond the educational pieces. The composer skilfully uses features of different genres to personalize each of the variations. For example, Primo and Secondo compete in passages of “etudes” (variations I and II, respectively); in the last of them, in Primo part a new stylistic element appears, associated with scherzo imagery; the appearance of the 4th variation is distinguished by imitation technique, and the dialogical change of the thematic initiative in a miniature form gives this variation a special dynamism (See Figure 8).





**Figure 8.** L. Beethoven. 6 Variations on “Ich denke dein”. Var. 4 (bars 1–8)  
Source: Beethoven (1976)

This technique intensifies the switch to a different emotional state: the minor, 5th, variation, sounding against the background of a pulsating chord accompaniment, brings a dramatic element into this cycle. A peculiar counterpair to it is the high lyrics of the 3rd variation, sustained in the spirit of the instrumental Adagio of the high baroque and early classicism era (Ott, 2019). The predominance of individualized thematism in each of the parts, the variability in the conduct of short but expressive phrases, and register matching strengthen the timbre associations. The composer’s maturity can be judged at the end of the variation cycle, in which all the most characteristic figurative-emotional complexes and playing techniques are summed up.

#### Play modus of the march genre in Beethoven’s four-hand ensembles

Beethoven’s legacy contains samples testifying to their orientation towards the amateur environment. *Three Marches op. 45 – C-dur, Es-dur, D-dur*, written in 1802–1803 are prime examples. The significance of the compositions of other genres written by this time confirms Beethoven’s mastery. Against this background, the four-hand marches show his connection with pedagogical practice; also, they show the creator of serious concepts “playing” with a widespread genre. Beethoven most accurately adheres to the genre characteristics in the *March C-dur*: the dominance of fanfare dotted turns, chanted repetition, and the power of chord sonority. Although in the middle of the 1st movement of a complex three-movement form, a melodic phrase of a lyrical nature, softened by minor colouring, homophonic-harmonic texture, and the piano dynamics, appears (See Figure 9).

**Figure 9.** L. Beethoven. March C-dur (bars 9–12).  
Source: Beethoven (1976)

The lyrical message is picked up in Trio, characterized by sparse texture, three-layer presentation (bass voice – triplet accompaniment

– expressive melody), and the transfer of the thematic initiative from Primo to Secondo (See Figure 10-11).

**Figure 10.** L. Beethoven. March C-dur. Trio (bars 1 4).  
Source: Beethoven (1976)

**Figure 11.** L. Beethoven. March C-dur. Trio (bars 9-12 ).  
Source: Beethoven (1976)

The four-hand ensemble allows Beethoven to fill the entire register space at the perfect alignment of the sonic balance. Despite the islets of lyrics,

*March C-dur* leaves an impression of bright, fanfare, victorious music.

The genre metamorphosis is palpable in the *March Es-dur*, maintaining the two-beat time, dotted figures, and dense chords. A large number of figurations, repetition, lengthy rehearsals,

brevity of motives with the avoidance of a strong beat, syncopé, and a stroke of staccato bring the features of a scherzo to this music (See Figure 12).



**Figure 12.** L. Beethoven. *March Es-dur* (bars 1–12).  
Source: Beethoven (1976)

These kinds of genre mixes were characteristic of the minuets in Mozart's late symphonies, which deviated from the dance prototype. It is also facilitated by the tempo shift – *Vivace*. The variety of timbre-stroke palette evokes parallels with the playing of a symphony orchestra. The intended trend towards the genre transformation is continued in the *March D-dur*. The composer sharpens the dotted rhythm formula, emphasizing the pivot beats of the sforzando measures and the unison tutti characteristic of the beginning. The similar thematism will be

presented alternately in the parts of ensemble members, which enhances the atmosphere of competition. The presence of a triplet movement, passages, turns with a trill, a lively tempo of *Vivace* smooth the march nature, while endowing this music with buffoon features (See Figure 13). Thus, the march is conceived by the composer both within the boundaries of typical formulas and as the expression of the characteristic sphere. This is especially evident in comparison with the funeral march in the *Piano Sonata As-dur op. 26* (3rd movement).



**Figure 13.** L. Beethoven. *March D-dur* (bars 1–6).  
Source: Beethoven (1976)

## Beethoven's discoveries in a historical perspective

The composer's four-hand ensembles, seemingly not claiming to be discoveries in the field of ensemble playing, contain a scattering of finds that are recognized in the compositions of a later time. We should name the technique of genre variation, a variety of stylistic elements, all-encompassing of registers, semantization of timbres, brightness of contrasts within small scales, absolute equality of instrumental parts, their virtuosity, intricate skill in transforming tunes that are simple in melody and structure. One of the examples of the inheritance of this tradition can be *Variations on the Theme of Beethoven for two pianos Es-dur op. 35* (1874) by C. Saint-Saëns (Saint-Saëns, 2013). Two instruments fill the textured-register density characteristic of Beethoven's ensembles with a full sounding. For his composition the French

composer chooses the flirtatious and graceful theme of the Trio minuet from *Piano Sonata Es-dur op. 31 No. 3*. It is marked by the brevity of question-and-answer motives, built on the principle of opposing declamatory exclamations with long durations and light lyric-dance melodic turns. Neither Beethoven's scale nor the tone seriousness of the statement is guessed in the theme, on the contrary, the thematism is surprisingly simple and somewhat naive. The two-piano presentation does not violate Beethoven's original, since Saint-Saëns follows the path of distributing individual lines by parts. But the composer exposes a personalized "monogram" in the introductory section, where the energetic octave motives in Piano I part are answered twice by the ascending arpeggios with a stop at the upper sound in Piano II part, perceived as an allusion to the beginning of *Sonata d-moll op. 31 No. 2* (See Figure 14).



**Figure 14.** C. Saint-Saëns. *Variations on a Theme of Beethoven op. 35* (bars 1–8).  
Source: Beethoven (1976)

This kind of reminder will appear before the grandiose fugue of the 9th variation (Allegro). The inclusion of the introductory material into the process of transforming the original material becomes a watershed between a series of characteristic variations and a large-scale completion, in which the fugue is complemented by toccata Presto with a reminiscence of one of the motives of Beethoven's Trio and the modified arpeggio of the introduction.

Saint-Saëns (2013) is far from reconstructing Beethoven's achievements. He is the son of his time, so he uses the wealth accumulated by the European piano school. From this view, the *Variations* generate a wide field of associations. For example, the 4th variation (Molto allegro) with its chord presentation, repetitions, quasi-martellato is perceived as a tribute to the pianism of F. Liszt; the 6th variation (Presto leggierissimo), "cut" into short fragments,

reminds one of *Etude c-moll op. 25 No. 12* by F. Chopin; the 7th variation (Alla marcia funebre) appears as an ominously sarcastic modus of tragic music from Chopin's *Sonata b-moll* (in 1907 Saint-Saëns transcribed this sonata for two pianos); the 1st variation (Allegro) brings to mind the sparkling pianism of C. M. Weber, and the unfolded powerful fugue of the 9th variation serves as a sign of admiration for the genius of Beethoven, the philosophical concepts of his later sonatas (Eberler, 1923). As if in continuation of Beethoven's inventio in this genre, Saint-Saëns (2013) uses the polyphonic technique of inversion at a distance, thus creating a pairing within the cycle. For example, if we compare the presentation of the theme (Tempo di Menuetto) and the 3rd variation (Tempo del Tema), they are close in terms of texture, but also perceived as a mirror image of each other. This impression arises due to the change of the ascending movement of chord lines and

melodious turns in both parts for the descending one. The simplicity of the resources of variation used by Saint-Saens underlines the composer's wish to reveal the ludic nature of the piano ensemble, which creates additional connection with Beethoven's four-hand duets.

The score of *Variations on the Theme of Beethoven* by Saint-Saens (2013) from the standpoint of today is a kind of anthology of the 19th century piano styles. After the pearly 16th in the spirit of Weber (var. I) there is an excited, soulful lyrics of "Mendelssohn" song without words (var. II; Poco meno mosso). In it the material in both parts is almost completely identical, only being played with the help of the tessitura. To fill in all the registers, the French composer uses both the technique of an imaginary intersection of voices, by dividing the parts into a melody and accompaniment thickened by duplication, and the motivic roll-calls distant in the registers. The transparency of the ornamental style of the 5th variation (Moderato assai) unexpectedly plunges into the atmosphere of French harpsichordists' music, while recalling the exquisite, sophisticated design of instruments of the Rococo period, Antoine Watteau's "gallant festivities", and the dance divertissements at the court of French kings. The emerging echo of a distant era among allusions to pianism of generally recognized values in European art becomes a sign of worship for the achievements of national culture. The 8th variation stands apart in the cycle; it does not evoke any specific stylistic analogies. No coincidence that it is deprived of the author's tempo designations, clear intonation connections with the theme. Its textured relief is distinguished by an ostinato-sustained, monotonous figuration in hollow basses, creating a feeling of a hidden rumble, and interval-chord "spots" scattered throughout the keyboard. The contours of the borrowed original are guessed only in the picture of alternating sound points. The glamor variation is the smallest in the cycle; in comparison with the theme, it turns out to be its flip side: the gallantry of the dancing leaps and the softness of reciprocal bows seem to hypertrophy, while embodying the picture of the universal movement. It is seen as an indirect reflection of Schumann's ambivalence, carnival nature idea.

The figurative and stylistic metamorphoses of Beethoven's Trio in the *Variations* of Saint-Saens (2013) determined the technical complexity of the composition. They are connected not only with the requirement of the perfect equipment of the playing apparatus of both pianists. It is about the highest degree of

ensemble interaction, which provides the illusion of two-hand playing when transferring short pulsating chord groups, passages, arpeggios at a fast tempo from part to part at the shortest time distances. The search for the sound balance is no less difficult in conditions of melodic-textured unity, when the duplicate parts of Piano I and Piano II are located in a dense register space. The opposite pole is made by the imitation technique of the fugue, which requires a clear vocalization of all conceptions of the theme as well as the achievement of a bright climax with the relief of each of the voices. In turn, the final 10th variation, serving as the finale, opposes the dominance of linearity to the toccata nature of interval-chord structures. Their assertiveness at Presto tempo, dialogical lines, and the placement of the parts to the extreme points of the keyboard are designed for the instrumentalists' fluency in chord technique.

### Conclusions

The depth of thought and strength of mind, strong-willed message and heartfelt lyrics, tragedy and light – these are the unity and struggle of opposites that determine the essence and nerve of Beethoven's music. It is his portrait in the light of his innovative transformations in almost all areas of musical art. The enthusiastic perception of the things created by Beethoven-innovator for a long time left the music written on orders for home as a sign of a friendly affection without due attention. Not distinguished by obvious prophecies, the works of this kind bear the imprint of a great talent hidden behind the modesty of their volumes and design.

The figurative content of *Sonata op. 6*, the brightness of contrasts, the presence of intonation details, a variety of ensemble playing techniques at small scales of form require the performers to have a subtle understanding of the nature of this music. *Variations on the Theme of Count von Waldstein C-dur* seem to inherit the aesthetics of "deception" of the Baroque era. The figurative and stylistic metamorphoses of Beethoven's Trio theme determined the technical complexity of the work. In addition to the development of the playing apparatus of both pianists, a high degree of ensemble interaction is required when switching to other genre conditions or distributing thematism along the parts at a fast tempo. Rapid change in stylistics stimulates the emergence of contrasting figurative and semantic complexes dynamizing the musical process. The accumulated energy finds a way out in the grandiose final Allegro, marked by bright concert



features. On closer inspection, the apparent simplicity of 6 *Variations D-dur* hides significant technical difficulties. The virtuosity of this cycle presupposes the developed fine technique of both partners, the consistency in the joint performance of trills, the search for the sound balance not only in the “relief – background” ratio, but also in the timbre-register colouring of individual motives. The composer sees the march as a field for the genre experiment and the realization of all the possibilities of a four-hand presentation with its motive comparisons, poly-stylistic complexes, timbre-register effects, and textured-dynamic contrasts within small limits. Despite musicologists’ lack of interest in Beethoven’s four-hand piano works, they have long gone beyond the classroom and entered the repertoire of the concert piano duets.

More than half a century separates the four-hand ensembles of Beethoven and the *Variations for two pianos* by Saint-Saens. Much of what Beethoven found was refracted in the brilliant concert style of the French composer. The ingenuity in the methods of variation, the variety of techniques of ensemble playing, the “interchange” of experience among the works for the solo piano and ensemble helped Beethoven to reveal the full potential of the instrument and lay the foundations for a new type of composing thinking.

The considered ensembles of the German master allow concluding that it was not so much the four-hand playing that was of little interest to the composer, as he turned out to be “cramped” in it. Having learned the timbre, register, and dynamic resources of the instrument in the conditions of the rapidly developing pianistic art, Beethoven transplanted many ideas into the field of solo piano music. The composers of subsequent generations took advantage of the improved mechanics capabilities, tuning in relation to each other, and overcame the constraint of movements of the ensemble members by playing two instruments, thus having “liberated” the multi-coloured timbre palette and register all-encompassing nature that Beethoven conquered from the sound space of his time.

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