

# MUSICMAP NOTES

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## **Beethoven's Cello Sonata No. 2 in G Minor, Op. 5, No. 2 – 1796**

The repertoire of great piano and cello sonatas really starts with Beethoven. Neither Mozart nor Haydn wrote any.

### **Movement I – Slow Introduction, Adagio sostenuto ed espressivo, 4/4, G minor**

Unusually expansive intro seems to take the place of absent slow movement. As expected, freely modulating, generating suspense, anticipation, and ever-greater tension, requiring resolution.

Part I: Powerful G-minor chord heralds intensely serious, portentous mood. Piano lead with expressive cello comment. Baroque-style dotted rhythms evoke French overture.

Part II: Lyrical, almost operatic episode, progressing from minor into major - strong contrast to prior mood. Singing cello leads now, above vocal-style broken chord piano accompaniment. Cello then switches to accompaniment material as R.H. sings response. Then baritone cello duets together with soprano R.H.

Part III: Stark return to Part I material, not much leavened by excursions into major mode.

Part IV: More of a continuation, but new rising motion and cello participation in dotted rhythmic lines.

Part V: New rhythmic vitality, with running R.H. triplets while dotted rhythm dialogue continues.

Part VI: Abbreviated return to duet mood, with baritone cello again leading the way...quickly arrives at expressive climax.

Part VII: Last section. Pregnant pause leads to final, gradual transition back to home key and start of exposition. Beethoven teases us by considerably extending passage with taunting pauses: "Are we there yet?"

### **Sonata Allegro design, Allegro molto piu tosto presto, 3/4**

Fast tempo and new triple meter come as welcome relief from accumulated tension. Certain dance-like rhythms crop up repeatedly, for example the pattern of two slurred notes followed by a staccato.

*Exposition:*

Main theme: 8(4+4)+4(2+2)+14(2+[2 ext. 8]+4 echo). Gentle, lilting theme is presented by cello and R.H. simultaneously, trading melody in call-and-response pattern. Subdued piano chords provide unobtrusive accompaniment. Cello proposes initial four bars (containing motive 'X')...R.H. response sequenced up a 5<sup>th</sup> in upper octave. A seemingly regular start, but phrasing will now become more and more quirky and playfully unpredictable. Cello proposes new shorter idea (motive 'Y'), which piano repeats up an octave. Cello sequences it back up a 4<sup>th</sup> (back to tonic), then piano repeats up an octave again, but extends by 6 bars, wresting initiative from cello. However, undeterred, cello insists on last word, echoing end of R.H. extension.

Bridge theme/Modulating bridge: Statement 9 bars, back to cello lead, built from short, vigorous melodic idea. Regular downward progression, welcome burst of characteristic Beethoven energy after understated main theme. Accompaniment of roiling R.H. triplets and emphatic L.H. octaves that mirror shape of theme.

Counter-statement – R.H. plays melody up an octave, while triplets switch to L.H. Cello harmonizes in contrary motion below. However, all of this is quickly cut short by start of modulatory bridge material.

Contentious rivalry between cello and piano seems to characterize Parts II & III of bridge, taking place of gentle main theme exchanges. Main theme motive 'X' asserted by cello as bridge wraps up, and mood lightens for gentle arrival in new key.

Subordinate theme: B-flat major (expected relative major). Statement presents first regular theme in movement, 8(4+4)+8(4+4). R.H. sings happy, carefree melody, while L.H. broken chord 8<sup>th</sup>-note accompaniment enhances vocal effect of theme. Mildly contrasting consequent – piano only. Accompaniment much less lively, with brief hint of minor.

Counter-statement – Cello lead down an octave, while R.H. has high, twinkling triplets – new accompaniment from above. L.H. harmonizes with cello melody. Cello retains lead for consequent. However, piano takes over for shift to minor, initiating long, free extension. Piano and cello dialogue short motive, in which 'X' appears, marked by *sf* dynamics. Music seems to drift astray and briefly stall, ending on fermata.

*Closing Material:*

Part I – Order restored as long, loose transition moves from rumbling depths upward.

Part II – More melodic and resembling an actual theme. Statement is 9-bar solo piano, both hands high on keyboard, with pregnant pause (fermata) near end. Short, repeated motive is answered by 'Y' after pause.

Counter-statement – Cello has melody, down an octave. Lively, contrapuntal new idea in R.H. ornaments above, while L.H. is back in normal territory. New take on pause launches free continuation/extension. Busy piano passagework (cadenza-like virtuosity) is followed by singing, descending cello line with touch of minor. Towards the end, chromatic L.H. figure adds drama.

Part III – Brief scale-based cadence theme leads to emphatic closing gestures.

*Development:*

Part I: Closing gesture in new key launches development of bridge motive. Cello lead, followed by piano. Descending triplet idea continues, appropriate to bridge theme, but was ascending

originally in exposition. Brief free piano transition, before 12-bar unit seems to start over again at new pitch levels. This time, though, transition is changed and extended. Short fragment of bridge motive now traded by piano and cello - sense of acceleration of process. Storm then dies down, anticipating...

Part II: Marked contrast, almost Baroque-style contrapuntal episode. Apparently new material, softly presented. Tiptoeing staccato notes. Nice shift to major about midway through.

Part III: Retransition. Repeated rhythm turns into 'X' to effect journey back to tonic. Ends with high, tinkling piano, creating expectant, static mood.

*Recapitulation:*

Main theme: As before, but with richer, more complex piano accompaniment and cello's final comment rewritten in major.

Bridge: Theme and bridge itself radically shortened. After developing this material so recently, Beethoven opts out early here, with sketchy ideas from Part III.

Sub-theme: Preserves major mode with tonic major. Counter-statement cello version slightly altered by longer note values, changed rhythm. Switches to minor as before, but now instead of an excursion, it represents restoration of proper mode.

Closing material: Quite faithful to original, but effect appealingly new with tonic minor mode. Pregnant pause in Part II statement slightly elaborated. Virtuoso transitory passage more extensively recomposed and extended through repetition...adds more weight to end of recap. Part III extended an extra 6 bars for yet more emphatic close. Unusually for Beethoven, he employs the old-fashioned practice of directing that the second half of the sonata form (development and recap.) be repeated before proceeding to...

*Coda:*

Part I – Intro: Lively continuation mirrors start of development.

Part II: Surprising sudden drop to *pp*, plus motive 'Y' from main theme. Dialoguing of motive preserved from theme, but much extended.

Part III: Dramatic dialogue between low L.H. and high lyrical cello.

Part IV: Back to *pp* – all animation drained. Typical Beethoven setup for surprise lively end.

Part V: Final, rousing conclusion. Powerful, definitive return of main theme motive 'X.'

**Movement II – Rondo: A-B-A-C-A-B-A-Coda, Allegro, G major, 2/4**

As is common for classical era, Beethoven opts for tonic major for optimistic finale.

*Rondo theme (A): a-a-b-a*, 16 bars (4+4+4[2+2]+4), very regular. Piano solo until final *a*. Mini wind-up and pitch idea launches lively, bouncy phrase – contrasts staccato and legato, introduces galloping dotted rhythms towards end. R.H. melody over reactive L.H. accompaniment. Additional grace notes in wind-up of second *a* – otherwise literal repeat of phrase with slightly fuller scoring and altered ending that prepares...

Contrasting *b* (2+2) kicks off with rising staccato figure. Second two bars decorated repeat, sequenced down a step.

Climactic return of *a*-phrase reinforced by delayed entrance of cello.

#### *Episode I (B):*

Lively dialogue between cello and piano initiates free-form, modulating material (bridge). Quiet chirping of piano at close heralds arrival of theme – gentle analog to wind-up of rondo.

B-theme I (Sub-theme): Dominant D major. Statement has piano lead, 8 bars (4+4), contrasting period. Lyrical, legato theme with antecedent piano solo in "music box" scoring, highly ornamented. Consequent adds cello in harmony part.

Counter-statement – Staccato cello scale lead-in replaces piano's chirping. Cello then repeats theme down an octave, as hands of piano sandwich cello above and below. R.H. now has broken chord accompaniment. Changed consequent with reduced melodic profile leads into transition.

B-theme II (Sub-theme II): D minor, moving to parallel minor of B-theme I. Soulful, rhapsodic theme, freely structured, takes place of usual transition/tease. Cello & piano trade lyrical phrases as we modulate back to home key for...

#### *Rondo return:*

Slips in somewhat unexpectedly...cello now given the honor of lead at first. *a* repeat has piano take back lead and restore it to its original octave. Staccato cello part recalls climactic *a* scoring from before. In *b*-phrase, cello adds new contrapuntal imitation, and piano scoring fuller.

Actual cello counter-melody adds interest to *a* return.

Then extends into Part I of quasi-development/transition to central episode. Imitative and modulating development of *b*-phrase.

Part II is free transition that effects final modulation to sub-dominant. R.H. virtuosic passage of 32<sup>nd</sup> notes creates sense of acceleration.

#### *Central Episode (C):* C major (sub-dominant)

C-theme, Part I: Lyrical, expansive and at times bouncy. Statement is 8 bars (4+4), contrasting period, piano lead. Rising antecedent, descending consequent. Cello maintains momentum by taking over 32<sup>nd</sup>-note motion.

Counter-statement – Cello sings in high register (but still down an octave). Quadruple-stop at start. Both piano hands in low register – R.H. takes over 32<sup>nd</sup> notes. Modified, more lyrical finish.

C-theme, Part II: Irregular contrasting period, 4(2+2)+6(2+2+2). Antecedent piano lead – rising arpeggio idea (2 bars). Then sequenced down a step and ornamented into virtuoso 32<sup>nd</sup>-note run. 32<sup>nd</sup>-note broken chords continued by cello. Consequent brusque and highly contrasting. Three forceful, triple-stop chords assert cello lead, yet 32<sup>nd</sup> notes still there, back in piano R.H. Gentle L.H. echo of chords follows, then back to cello for decorated final version.

C-theme, Part I return: Statement only now, piano lead as before. More animated L.H. accompaniment. Lyrical counter-statement ending used.

C-theme, Part II return: Antecedent gives piano lead, preserving alternation of soloists. Opening modified by substituting sustained note for rising arpeggio, highlighting more vocal abilities of cello. Decorated sequence also modified. 32<sup>nd</sup> notes now in L.H. – R.H. has new contrapuntal line based on Part I material. Brusque consequent as before.

C-theme, Part I final return: Alternation of soloists preserved in compressed form by switching from piano to cello for consequent. Clever and satisfying rounding-off of this sprawling 2-part theme.

Transition: Abrupt shift in mood, as Beethoven teases us with motive derived from start of Rondo theme, including a nice shift to minor. This tease eventually conjures actual theme, but not yet in correct key. Soon we hear harmonic gear-shifting as Beethoven works to set things right.

*Rondo return (Recap.):*

True return in home key is cleverly disguised at first by new singing cello line. This cello melody continues through repeat of *a*. Contrasting *b*-phrase given to cello for first time, with new *sf* piano contributions. Return of *a*-phrase more powerful than before, with *f* dynamic and up an octave. Cello back to subsidiary role.

*Episode III (B return):*

Bridge starts the same, but then shortened and re-written to arrive back at tonic key for recap of... B-theme I (Sub-theme): G major. Statement presented in upper octave, enhances tinkling "music box" effect.

Counter-statement somewhat surprisingly reverts to prior presentation in dominant (D major). Transition used to restore tonic key.

B-theme II (Sub-theme II) - Much as before, but now in G minor. Approach to Rondo theme shortened by one bar and modified.

*Rondo return:*

In upper octave from beginning for first time – shortened presentation quickly shifts into coda. First *a*-phrase mostly piano solo, while cello takes lead for second *a*. Only fair, as this is it for now.

*Coda:*

Part I: Transition. Busy, repetitive idea takes the place of *b*-phrase – not quite an actual theme. Both instruments very active, but piano has lead.

Quasi-counter-statement starts with lead switching to cello, but quickly becomes long, modulating extension/transition. Exciting, freely evolving music...upward momentum and lack of resolution generate tension. Where are we going?

Part II: Practically before we realize it's started – entire presentation of Rondo theme in significantly varied and climactic guise, still in tonic key and preserving original phrase structure. *a*-phrase gives piano lead, virtuoso 32<sup>nd</sup> notes throughout. Contrasting *a* has lyrical cello lead. *b*-phrase back to piano lead with both hands high on keyboard – cello imitations.

Final *a*-phrase has piano lead with cello counterpoint...grand apotheosis of theme.

New codetta, 8 bars (4+4), adds extra moment to final complete presentation of theme. Second 4 bars are decorated repeat.

Part III: Strongly contrasting episode/transition effectively sets up Part IV. Momentum slows as eloquent new theme (seemingly derived from low chord pattern in coda Part I) is commenced by cello. Striking new texture of widely-spaced vertical chords. Piano then takes lead...stately and impressive mood. Without break, continues into richly modulating piano solo – growing anticipation. Finally winds down to *pp*, back home to G for...

Part IV: Loud, exciting conclusion! Cello given last word with gruff, commanding presentation of coda's variation of Rondo theme – just *a*-phrase with new extension. Definitive final cadence includes quadruple-stop chord.