University of Cincinnati

Date: 4/5/2013

I, Mi Yeon Yun, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in Violoncello.

It is entitled:
A New Vision for the Genre: The Five Cello Sonatas of Ludwig van Beethoven and the Striving Towards Instrumental Equality

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A New Vision for the Genre: The Five Cello Sonatas of Ludwig van Beethoven and the Striving Towards Instrumental Equality

A document submitted to the

Graduate School
of the University of Cincinnati

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

in the Performance Studies Division
of the College-Conservatory of Music

April 2013

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Abstract

Mainstream scholarship teaches that Beethoven’s five cello sonatas follow his progression as a composer. The Op. 5 sonatas are considered to belong to the Classical tradition of keyboard domination and cello subordination, and the Op. 69 sonata is held as an important transitional work in which the cello and the piano are first treated as equals. The Op. 102 sonatas, appearing in Beethoven’s increasingly chromatic and contrapuntal late period, further integrate the cello into the music making, but many scholars see the cello here as more of an independent voice than a matching partner. A closer look at the sonatas reveals a composer who was more consistent in his thinking. This document will study the relationship between the cello and the piano in each of the five cello sonatas of Ludwig van Beethoven and demonstrate that the equal treatment of both instruments, so widely praised in the Op. 69 sonata, is present in all five works.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .............................................. 1  

CHAPTER .................................................. 2  
   1. Beethoven: Evolution of a Composer  
      The Early Period ................................ 2  
      The Heroic Period ................................ 3  
      The Late Period ................................... 3  
   2. The Cello Sonata: Evolution of a Genre ............... 5  
   3. Conventional Thinking ................................ 11  
   4. A Case for Equality .................................. 15  
      The Opus 5 Cello Sonatas ....................... 16  
      The Opus 69 Cello Sonata ...................... 32  
      The Opus 102 Cello Sonatas .................... 42  

CONCLUSION ............................................. 57  

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................... 58
Introduction

At the dawn of the Romantic period, Ludwig van Beethoven advanced the symphony, the string quartet, and the piano sonata, but he was also an innovator in other genres. In 1796 Beethoven became one of the few eighteenth-century composers to write a cello sonata, dedicating a set of two such works, bound in his Opus 5, for King Friedrich Wilhelm II of Prussia. In 1808, at the height of his “heroic” middle period, he wrote a third cello sonata, Op. 69, hailed by many scholars as a landmark in the genre. In 1815, with his hearing gone and his approach becoming increasingly chromatic and introspective, he finished the two cello sonatas of Op. 102, dedicated to Countess Maria von Erdödy.

Many scholars assert that Beethoven’s five cello sonatas are simply reflections of his journey as a composer, and from the standpoint of form, harmony, and thematic complexity, this is certainly true. The Op. 5 sonatas are considered to belong to the Classical tradition of keyboard domination and cello subordination, and the Op. 69 sonata is held up as an important transitional work in which the cello and the piano are first treated as equals. The Op. 102 sonatas, appearing in the midst of Beethoven’s increasingly chromatic and contrapuntal late period, further plunge the cello into the music making, but many scholars see the instrument here as more of an independent line than a matching partner.

A closer look at the Beethoven cello sonatas reveals a composer who was much more consistent in creating parity between the instruments than previously acknowledged. This document will study the intimate relationship between the cello and the piano in each of the five cello sonatas of Ludwig van Beethoven and demonstrate that the equal treatment of both instruments, so widely praised in the Op. 69 sonata, is manifest in all five works, from the restrained Classical vein of the Op. 5 sonatas to the highly involved Romantic utterances of the Op. 102 sonatas.
Chapter 1
Beethoven: Evolution of a Composer

1) The Early Period

Modern scholarship divides Beethoven’s early period into two parts: before 1792 and after 1792. The young Beethoven spent the first part of his education in his native Bonn, where he studied with the German composer Christian Gottlob Neefe, a strict teacher. In 1792, he moved to Vienna, one of the musical capitals of Europe, to seek professional growth and success. He took lessons with Franz Joseph Haydn and Antonio Salieri as well as the master counterpoint pedagogue Johann Georg Albrechtsberger. Beethoven’s music in this period was largely influenced by Classical structures and norms, especially its emphasis on melody, but some of his models were rather progressive. In her 1995 Masters Thesis for San Jose State University, Judith Lee Crawford writes that the composers that Beethoven revered had begun to grant the cello a larger role. “In Haydn’s six Russian Quartets, Op 33 (1781), the melodic exchange of the inner voices is significant and was a profound influence on Mozart’s treatment of the ‘cello’ in his Prussian Quartets.”  

Crawford later affirms German-American musicologist Alfred Einstein’s argument that “There is no longer any question of predominance or subordination of any voices in the ensemble.”

In his early period, Beethoven completed twenty piano sonatas, eight violin sonatas, six string quartets, two piano concertos, two symphonies, and the two cellos sonatas known collectively as his Opus 5. Even as he employed Classical principals his expressive voice and desire for innovation was growing. He extended traditional sonata forms and rondo forms and he wrote music that was increasingly personal in nature.

2Ibid., 18.
2) The Heroic Period

After 1802, as he began to lose his hearing, Beethoven increasingly pushed the limits of the Classical style. He infused his symphonic and chamber music with more sweeping themes, longer statements, more colorful scoring, bolder harmonies, and more direct and intimate utterances. In what some scholars call his “heroic” period, he finished seven piano sonatas, two violin sonatas, five string quartets, three piano concertos including the 45-minute “Emperor” Concerto” (No. 5), a violin concerto, six symphonies, an opera, a Mass, and an array of individually creative works such as the Triple Concerto, Op. 56 and the Choral Fantasy, Op. 80. In 1808 he wrote his Cello Sonata No. 3 in A major, Op. 69, a work that explored the full range of the cello, especially the high register. In doing so, Beethoven balanced the volume and forces between the cello and the piano. In her document Crawford notes the observation of former Eastern Michigan University cello professor Edward J. Szabo: “He exploited the instrument’s color and dynamic range in the various register and incorporated most of the possible technical devices which always challenge the violoncellist, notably in the quartet Op. 59, No.1, the late quartets and the piano trios Op. 70 and Op. 97.”

3) The Late Period

After 1815 Beethoven struggled with chronic illness and family problems. His hearing was gone, he unknowingly suffered from lead poisoning, and he became involved in a bitter custody dispute over his nephew. His music became ever more intricate, deliberate and introspective. His complex themes, daring harmonies, and formal decisions baffled critics and even divided a newer generation of composers.

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3Crawford. 22.
But as much as Beethoven was looking into the future, he was fascinated by the past. He studied Baroque and Renaissance music for both understanding and inspiration, and counterpoint and modal harmony become a part of his expressive palette. In his late period, Beethoven completed five piano sonatas, including the 40-minute “Hammerklavier,” Op. 106, five string quartets, the *Grosse Fuge* for string quartet, his *Missa Solemnis*, and his Symphony No. 9 “Choral.” The Op. 102 cello sonatas, in particular, are noted for their highly imitative texture. To this end, Crawford quotes American musicologist and record producer Maynard Solomon: “Beethoven experienced a veritable contrapuntal obsession during the last decade.”\(^4\)

\(^4\)Crawford. 25
Chapter 2  
The Cello Sonatas: Evolution of a Genre

In the closing days of the Renaissance a group of humanist thinkers in Florence known as the *Florentine Camerata* reacted against the counterpoint of the sixteenth century with a retreat to single melodic lines and accompaniment. Their ideas gave birth to monody and *basso continuo*, the latter of which functioned as an important structural element in the music. Instruments with a capable low register such as cello, bassoon, bass viol, lute, harpsichord and organ turned a skeleton notation known as figured bass into supporting harmonies. The combination of a bass note and specific numbers indicated the interval, inversion and voicing of the chord (Example 1).

**Example 1:** Figured Bass—Lower Line: Basso Continuo, Upper Line: Possible Realization

\[ \begin{array}{cccc}
\text{G} & \text{B} & \text{C} & \text{D} \\
\text{C} & \text{D} & \text{E} & \text{F} \\
8 & 6 & 6 & 5 \\
4 & 4 & 3 & \\
\end{array} \]

*Basso continuo* fulfilled crucial needs in harmony, texture, and color, and it required limited improvisation on the part of the performer--an almost *ad libitum* approach. Even so, the overriding principle was one of subordination and support.

In the middle of the eighteenth century composers began to write out their accompaniments, preferring to specify exact pitches and voice leading as opposed to leaving the responsibility to the performer. In doing so the accompanying instrument could share more of the spotlight.
In J.S. Bach’s Flute Sonata, BWV 1030, the obbligato harpsichord shares greater equality with the flute, exhibited through a pattern of eighth notes and sixteenth notes different from the traditional *basso continuo* lines (Example 2).

**Example 2:** J.S. Bach—Flute Sonata BWV 1030, No. 2 in B Minor, Mvt I, mm. 1-7

Crawford discusses this transformation in detail, writing that “with the advent of obbligato writing, the cello became increasingly more melodic by participating in the interplay of motives in the inner voices.”

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Crawford, 6.
The cello sonata grew out of the instrumental trio sonatas of the middle Baroque, a genre that benefited greatly from a meteoric rise in instrumental technology. In the trio sonata the cello often functioned as a *basso continuo* instrument, supporting the two featured treble instruments with the realization of a simple bass line. Nevertheless, a handful of composers dared to be different. The Italian virtuoso cellist Domenico Gabrielli (1651 or 1659 –1690) wrote the earliest extant works for solo cello: two sonatas for cello and *basso continuo*, a group of seven ricercari for unaccompanied cello and a canon for two cellos.\(^6\)

The concept of the cello as a *basso continuo* instrument persisted well into the eighteenth-century. Late Baroque violin sonatas like Corelli’s violin sonata Op. 5, as well as late Classical wind sonatas, often substituted the keyboard for a minimal bass line that could be played by the cello.\(^7\) In the early Classical period the cello continued its traditional responsibility as a *basso continuo* device, but some composers tried to diversify its roles. The virtuoso cellists Jean Pierre Duport (1741–1818), Luigi Rodolfo Boccherini (1743-1805), Jean-Baptiste Sebastien Bréval (1753–1823), and Bernhard Romberg (1767-1841) all wrote increasingly difficult works for the instrument.

These sonatas are collectively a curious mixture of the elaborate and the mundane. The melodic lines are much more complex, but the accompaniment remains rather simple, following either in unison or acting as a harmonic supplement. Some of the soloist’s lines are nothing more than harmonic and technical filler, resembling the burgeoning genre of the etude. In addition, the cello and the keyboard rarely share in moments of meaningful dialogue, largely due perhaps to the idea that contrapuntal textures were falling out of favor. The second movement of

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Boccherini’s Sonata No. 6 in A major is a rare gem that balances wonderfully expressive writing with passages that mirror the broken chord etudes of his contemporary, Jean Duport (Example 3).

Example 3: Left: Duport--Twenty-One Studies for Solo Cello, No. 17, mm. 132-135
Right: Boccherini--Sonata No. 6 in A major, Mvt. II, mm. 24-25

Beethoven’s interest in the cello began during his early years in Bonn. In 1790 the innovative German cellist Bernhard Romberg joined the orchestra of the Prince Archbishop of Cologne, and upon hearing Romberg Beethoven offered to write for him. Romberg stated that the young composer’s music was too intricate to play, but the young composer never forgot the instrument’s rich expressive timbre. In 1796, Beethoven visited Berlin to try to earn the patronage of King Friedrich Wilhelm II, who was himself an amateur cellist, and while at the Prussian court he wrote his Opus 5 sonatas for cello and piano: the Cello Sonata No. 1 in F major and the Cello Sonata No. 2 in G minor. Although he dedicated the sonatas to the king, the court’s principal cellist Jean-Pierre Duport likely premiered them.

In 1808, in the midst of writing his Symphony No. 5 and his opera Fidelio, Beethoven completed his Opus 69, the Cello Sonata No. 3 in A Major. Originally conceived as a “grand sonata” in G major for violin and piano, Beethoven recast the score for cello and piano at the

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suggestion of his friend Baron Ignaz von Gleichenstein, an amateur cellist. The Opus 102 sonatas, No. 4 in C major and No. 5 in D major, were written in 1815 for his close friend, the Countess Maria von Erdody, and they are concurrent with the beginning of the composer’s late period. Yet, as this document will demonstrate, all five cello sonatas share similar goals: to transcend the inherent balance problems of the genre and to realize its expressive possibilities.

As previously stated, most scholars believe that the relationship between the cello and the piano in Beethoven’s cello sonatas evolved with the composer’s three style periods. A similar issue exists with Beethoven’s ten violin sonatas, especially the first nine, which were written between the years 1797 and 1803. Although Mozart’s violin sonatas set the standard for a treble-dominated form reflective of the Classical period, the rapid development of the 18th century pianoforte led Beethoven to write more present keyboard parts. In fact, in his first set of violin sonatas (Op. 12), the title implies that the piano is the dominant instrument: Drei Sonaten für Klavier und Violine (Three Sonatas for Piano and Violin). Yet Beethoven’s Op. 12 hardly treats either instrument as superior to the other. In his 1992 Masters Thesis for California State University, Laurence Daniel Greenfield writes the following:

Note that unlike so many of the composers that came before him, Beethoven made a concerted effort to equalize the importance of the voices. Now, the piano was not an accompanying tool of the violin; nor was the violin an accompanying tool of the piano; both shared equal weight in the difficulty and importance of the parts.10

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9Elizabeth Cowling, The Cello (New York: Charles Scribner’s Son, 1975), 130.
Greenfield also points out that Beethoven’s philosophy of instrumental parity evolved markedly in six years and nine works in the genre. While discussing the Violin Sonata No. 9, Op. 47 “Kreutzer,” Greenfield states “It is clear how this sonata differs from those of Mozart or Haydn’s… quite different in its full use of the instrument’s potential.”\(^{11}\) Likewise, a thorough examination of the cello sonatas will show that Beethoven considered the cello and the piano as equals all the way through the five sonatas, from the Classical atmosphere of the Op. 5 to the seemingly free and chromatic counterpoint of the Op. 102.

\(^{11}\)Ibid., 43.
While music historians concur on the general course of the Beethoven cello sonatas, finer aspects of these works seem to encourage contradictory perspectives. Regarding the Op. 5 sonatas, University of Arkansas cello professor Stephen Geoffrey Gates believes that both sonatas have different goals. In his 1989 doctoral document, he writes that the Op. 5, No. 1 sonata continues the *basso continuo* tradition of the late Baroque and early Classical periods but the No. 2 sonata departs from this convention: “Whereas in the first sonata the cello often accompanies the piano and has many measures of rest, in the second sonata it is treated more soloistically.”\(^\text{12}\)

The Canadian cellist George Gabriel Kiraly acknowledges the *basso continuo* practice in the Op. 5, No.1, but he believes that the young Beethoven was already positioning the two instruments as equals. In his 1976 doctoral document, he argues that “In the two cello sonatas of Op. 5, the cello part is given a large degree of independence from the keyboard part and participates in the presentation of thematic materials.”\(^\text{13}\) He then claims that “it has been established that Beethoven was largely successful in elevating the cello to near-equal partnership with the piano in these two sonatas.”\(^\text{14}\)


\(^{13}\)George Gabriel Kiraly, “The Beethoven Cello Sonatas” (DMA diss., The University of Western Ontario, 1976), 24.

\(^{14}\)Ibid., 54.
Other knowledgeable musicians are not as convinced. In the March/April 2009 issue of *American Record Guide*, New York cellist and music critic David W. Moore writes in a review of the Beethoven cello sonatas that the challenges in the Op. 5 include the cello “getting drowned under the potential weight of the piano.”\(^\text{15}\) In her 2002 doctoral document on the Beethoven Op. 5 sonatas for Temple University, Philadelphia cellist Michal Schmidt discusses at length the “imbalance between the players’ roles when these sonatas are presented completely out of the context as cello pieces with the piano accompaniment.”\(^\text{16}\) In his 2000 doctoral document for the University of Maryland, U.S. Army Band cellist Samuel Robert Swift mentions the point at which Beethoven began when he wrote the Op. 5 sonatas, as “earlier works either gave the cello a subordinate or a continuo instrument.”\(^\text{17}\)

The Op. 69 sonata is considered more than just one of Beethoven’s middle-period achievements. To many cellists the sonata is a revolutionary and transitional work. Indeed, many of the aspects of the sonata are engaging to the soloist. Beethoven maintains a constant balance of forces between the cello and the piano throughout the entire work, enriching both parts with melodic lines, rich counterpoint, and vital harmonic and rhythmic figures. As Gates notes, most scholars and performers relish the equality between both instruments, writing that the work is “the first sonata for cello and piano in which a major composer achieves a balance of function...matching of important of the two instruments in the entire texture.”\(^\text{18}\)


\(^{16}\) Michal Schmidt, “Two Sonatas, Two Instruments---One Performer: Analysis and Interpretation of Beethoven's Sonatas for Piano and Cello, Opus 5, No. 1 and Opus 102, No. 2” (DMA diss., Temple University, 2002), 61.


\(^{18}\) Gates, 69.
As mentioned previously, the Op. 5 sonatas do have many instances of “equality,” namely in unisons and alternating passages. A passage that places the melody in the cello and the accompaniment in the piano will subsequently be followed by a passage that places the melody in the piano and the accompaniment in the cello. In Beethoven’s Op. 69 sonata, however, the composer maintains a constant balance of forces between the cello and the piano throughout the entire work, enriching both parts with melodic lines, rich counterpoint, and vital harmonic and rhythmic figures. The artistic process unfolds between the cello and the piano in an equal partnership in which all the thematic material takes place in a large-scale imitative sequence.

Given the nature of the relationship between the cello and the piano in the Op. 69 sonata, one logically expects in the Op. 102 a further development of progressive ideas and the same equal collaboration. Gates writes that in many passages in the Op. 102 sonatas, “The piano plays two phrases, now joined as completed melodies in one register, while the cello has a new line, independent of the piano.”\(^\text{19}\) In her 2009 document for the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Grace Shih-Huei Lin Anderson acknowledges Gates and his observation, and she adds a remark about the challenges of the Op. 102 in a performance setting: “The ever-changing texture and rapid exchange of melodies between the cello and piano is the reason that the blending of sound is difficult for the two instruments.”\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{19}\) Gates., 120-121.

In addition Anderson mentions the eminent American musicologist Lewis Lockwood and his viewpoint regarding the Op. 102 sonatas, especially the Sonata No. 2:

In his article he states that the “bizarre quality” of the fugal movement magnifies the “inherent compositional problem of any serious cello sonata” that is, “to reconcile the material of the piece with the unequal relationship between the two instruments in scope, sonority, and volume.”

Lin also comments that “Gates and Lockwood similarly point out a major challenge in this sonata—that performers must negotiate their discrepant timbre amid the thrashing seas of the barbed texture.”

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21 Anderson., 7.
22 Ibid., 7.
This chapter will compare the prominence and employment of thematic material between the cello and the piano in all five sonatas; draw attention to the expansion of the cello’s range in all five sonatas; and analyze important contrapuntal passages in all five sonatas in order to show that parity between the two instruments was crucial to Beethoven in all of the sonatas, whether he was writing in the twilight of the Classical period or in the dawn of the Romantic period.

First, all five sonatas have several question-and-answer dialogues between the cello and the piano. In many passages, the cello presents the principal melody or theme first, followed by the piano, or the cello and the piano play the principal melody or theme in unison. This new relationship between the instruments not only governed the composition of all five sonatas, but influenced important cello sonatas of the Romantic period, particularly the sonatas of Chopin, Mendelssohn, and Brahms. Second, instead of persisting with the *basso continuo* tradition through the Op. 5 sonatas, Beethoven sought to free the cello through an expansion of register, particularly the high range, where the cello reaches a D5. The Op. 69 sonata builds on the Op. 5 sonatas with a regular use of the cello’s high register, especially in the third movement. Curiously, the range of the cello in the Op. 102 sonatas is the same as that in the Op. 69 sonata, but the music aims for a more personal and deeply felt expression than in previous works, and as such, the high range of the cello predominates.

Finally, counterpoint plays a vital role in all five Beethoven cello sonatas, even if many scholars appreciate it more in his Op. 102 sonatas. The Op. 5 sonatas have several instances of imitative rhythms and textures between the cello and the piano, hardly the protocol for a composer trying to extend the *basso continuo* tradition, and the Op. 69 sonata foreshadows Beethoven’s obsession with contrapuntal devices in his late period.
1) The Opus 5 Cello Sonatas

Published in Paris as Deux Grand Sonatas pour Le Clavecin ou Piano-Forte avec un Violoncello oblige (Two Grand Sonatas for the Harpsichord or Piano with Obbligato Cello), the Op. 5 sonatas run counter to the treble-dominated model of the late Classical era. In these works Beethoven leaves the basso continuo tradition nearly behind and treats the instruments as vital components in the music making. The cello engages in the main themes just as much as the piano, and in many passages the cello muscles its way into the texture much more than the obbligato function would allow.

Important themes either occur in unison or move from one instrument to the other. In the first five measures of the first movement of the Sonata No. 1 (Adagio sostenuto), for instance, the principal melody begins in both instruments, migrates to the cello, and then shifts to the piano (Example 4).

Example 4: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in F major, Op. 5, No. 1, Mvt 1, mm.1-10
In the *Allegro* of the same movement, the piano states the melody accompanied by the cello in eighth notes, and upon the melody’s reappearance at measure 49 the roles are reversed (Example 5).

**Example 5:** Beethoven--Cello Sonata in F major, Op. 5, No. 1, Mvt I, mm. 35-59
Likewise, after several measures serving as the accompaniment, the cello at measure 72 takes the spotlight with the principal melodies (Example 6).

**Example 6: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in F major, Op. 5, No. 1, Mvt I, mm. 72-92**

In the *Allegro* of the opening movement of the Sonata No. 2, the cello states the principal melody first, and then the piano takes up the theme. (Example 7)
Example 7:  Beethoven--Cello Sonata in G minor, Op. 5, No. 2, Mvt I, mm. 1-16

In the following movement, the cello plays the main theme first and the piano repeats the theme. At measure 66 the cello takes on the principal melody while the piano settles into a busy accompaniment role with quarter notes and sixteenth notes. At measure 69 the roles change: the piano assumes the principal melody while the cello moves to the background and then the role is changed and the piano plays the principal melody at mm. 69-72 (Example 8).

Example 8:  Beethoven--Cello Sonata in G minor, Op. 5, No. 2, Mvt II, mm. 66-72
These passages foreshadow Beethoven’s writing in the opening of the first movement of the famous Sonata No. 3 in A major, Op. 69, where the cello plays the principal theme first and the piano plays the principal theme second (Example 9).

**Example 9:** Beethoven--Cello Sonata in A major, Op. 69, Mvt I, mm. 1-24

Thus, while the Opus 69 Sonata is often cited as the first cello sonata in which both instruments are treated equally, Beethoven actually began experimenting with such parity much earlier.
Beethoven takes a similar approach in his early violin sonatas as well. In his Violin Sonata in D major, Op. 12, No. 1, dedicated to Antonio Salieri, the opening principal theme occurs in unison between the violin and the piano, and as the first movement progresses, subsequent themes are shared between the instruments (Example 10).

**Example 10:** Beethoven--Violin Sonata in D major, Op. 12, No.1 Mvt I, mm. 1-16
In the second movement, which is a set of variations, the piano enunciates the principal theme first followed by the violin (Example 11), and the concluding Rondo movement proceeds in much the same manner (Example 12). As such, Beethoven’s approach to the relationship between the cello and the piano in his Op. 5 sonatas is a concept that the young composer had been formulating as he attempted to write expressive music in a Classical vein.

**Example 11**: Beethoven--Violin Sonata in D major, Op. 12, No. 1 Mvt II, mm. 1-13

![Example 11](image1)

**Example 12**: Beethoven--Violin Sonata in D major, Op. 12, No. 1 Mvt III, mm. 1-15

![Example 12](image2)
Beethoven’s use of the cello’s high range goes beyond established accompanimental conventions, especially his foray into the high register. This exploration is not entirely new, as 18th century cello virtuosos such as Luigi Boccherini demonstrated the ability of the cello to play in the treble clef range, and composers such as C.P. E. Bach and Joseph Haydn requested the high register of the instrument in their cello concertos.\textsuperscript{23} Beethoven’s appropriation of the cello’s high register, though, is new for the cello sonata, and it signifies the transformation of the instrument in chamber music. No longer is the instrument strictly for accompaniment: now it can be a soloist. In the first movement of the Op. 5, No. 1 sonata, the cello ventures into the high register at two important moments: mm. 254–74 and mm. 299–301 (Example 13 and 14).

\textbf{Example 13:} Beethoven--Cello Sonata in F major, Op. 5, No. 1, Mvt I, mm. 254–74

\textsuperscript{23}Crawford, 6.
**Example 14:** Beethoven--Cello Sonata in F major, Op. 5, No. 1, Mvt I, mm. 299–301

In the second movement of the Op. 5, No. 1 sonata, the cello’s high register makes further appearances, particularly in mm. 89–92, mm. 97–100, mm.109–114, and mm. 229–239 (Examples 15-16). The cello’s statement of the principal theme between mm. 233-38 is particularly effective, as the instrument reaches a D5 while the piano trills peacefully in the upper register of the right hand (Example 16).

**Example 15:** Beethoven--Cello Sonata in F major, Op. 5, No. 1, Mvt II, mm.89–92 and mm. 97–100
Example 16: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in F major, Op. 5, No. 1, Mvt II, mm. 109–114 and mm. 229–238
In the Op. 5, No. 2 sonata, the cello plays in the high register much less than in the Op. 5, No. 1 sonata, but Beethoven reserves this cello color for special moments in the music. In the climax of the Op. 5, No. 2 second movement, the cello has an eight-measure declamatory passage all in the upper tessitura, and during this phrase, it enunciates an E5, one whole step higher than the D5 in the Op. 5, No. 1 sonata (Example 17)

Example 17: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in G minor, Op. 5, No. 2, Mvt II, mm. 98–113
Counterpoint is also an intrinsic part of the Op. 5 sonatas. As previously stated, many scholars consider Beethoven’s late period as the most intricate, a reflection of the aging composer’s return to the scores of J. S. Bach and his exploration of Renaissance music. Yet in 1794, two years after his arrival in Vienna, Beethoven began counterpoint lessons with the eminent Austrian pedagogue-composer Johann Georg Albrechtsberger, whom he later praised as a lasting influence. Completed only two years later, the Op. 5 sonatas are already using techniques taught by Albrechtsberger as part of a new expressive language. In the second movement of the Op. 5, No. 1 sonata, for example, the cello and the piano engage in several imitative textures, especially in the opening measures and in measures 141–167 (Examples 18).

**Example 18:** Beethoven--Cello Sonata in F major, Op. 5, No. 1, Mvt II, mm. 141–187
In the Op. 5, No 2 sonata, the first movement closes with opposing scales in the cello and the piano, and the medium speed of the harmonic rhythm (quarter notes and eighth notes) allows the listener to grasp the delightful interplay (Example 19).

Example 19: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in G minor, Op. 5, No. 2, Mvt I, mm. 422-29
Earlier in the same movement, the cello and piano engage in friendly competition as they trade descending motives in an ascending sequence. Beginning at measure 343, the piano plays D-C-B followed by the cello one pitch higher at E-D-C. The piano responds with F-E-D, the cello plays G-F-E, and the piano has the final word with B-A-G in the same rhythmic pattern. The melodic line, once again whole, begins its complete descent (Example 20).

Example 20: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in G minor, Op. 5, No. 2, Mvt I, mm. 330-50

Imitation plays important roles elsewhere in the Op. 5, No. 2 first movement. At measure 209, the cello proposes the idea C#-A in quarter notes, but when the piano left hand answers with D-A, the cello also obliges with D-A. This witty dialogue continues two more times, and then at measure 220, the cello and the piano plunge into more intricate counterpoint (Example 21).
Example 21: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in G minor, Op. 5, No. 2, Mvt I, mm. 209-227

At the end of the Op. 5, No. 2 second movement, the cello and the piano share in a rather moving passage of non-imitative polyphony. While the cello enunciates the modified principal melody in sixteenth notes, the piano pairs shimmering thirty-second note scales in the right hand with pedal notes in the left hand (Example 22)

Example 22: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in G minor, Op. 5, No. 2, Mvt I, mm. 293-304
Beethoven’s violin sonatas also have several contrapuntal passages, even as early as the Op. 12, No. 1, where the violin and the piano engage in imitative playfulness in the first part of the Rondo movement, notably mm. 25–39 (Example 23).

**Example 23:** Beethoven--Violin Sonata in D major, Op. 12, No. 1 Mvt I, mm. 25-39
The Beethoven Opus 5 Cello Sonatas are more than the musings of a young composer trying to push established boundaries. Rather, they point to a new way of thinking. Having established the cello and the piano as equals in his Op. 5, Beethoven was prepared to write his acclaimed Op. 69 as well as the complex and profound sonatas of the Op. 102.

2) The Opus 69 Cello Sonata

In the first decade of the 19th century, even in the midst of losing his hearing, Beethoven was highly swayed by the democratic ideals of the French Revolution, and his music began to break long held rules to make more profound utterances. His melodies became longer and more chromatic, his harmonic plans became more daring and sophisticated, and his expressive statements became more agitated and profound. His symphonies introduced cyclic tendencies, new instruments, formal innovations, and programmatic elements, and his instrumental sonatas firmly planted the featured solo instrument in the spotlight.

In 1808, Beethoven completed his Sonata for Cello and Piano No. 3 in A Major, Op. 69. From the very opening measures the work establishes a meaningful line of communication between the cello and the piano and explores a level of personal expression that foreshadows the Romantic period.

In contrast to the first two cello sonatas the Op. 69 sonata asks the solo instrument to present the principal theme first (mm. 1–9). Only then does the piano take up the theme while the cello plays a pedal E (Example 24). The second movement begins much the same way, except that the piano has the theme first (Example 25).
Example 24: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in A major, Op. 69, Mvt I, mm. 1–24
Example 25: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in A major, Op. 69, Mvt II, mm. 1–24

The Op. 69 sonata also has numerous voice exchanges and interchange of melodic material, many more than the other cello sonatas. One of the more ornate passages occurs in the middle of the first movement. The cello begins a solo passage in a four-measure phrase while the piano plays a passage connected to the central melodic line. The cello and the piano subsequently alternate the melody with scalar passages that paint a virtuosic backdrop to the principal tune (Example 26).
Written four years later, but in the same “heroic” vein as his other middle-period works, Beethoven’s last violin sonata, the Sonata No. 10 in G major, Op. 96 has a great deal in common with the Op. 69 sonata. The Op. 96 sonata also features the same kind of voice exchange and melodic interplay. Even the opening is similar to that of the opening of the Op. 69--the violin begins alone, and the piano repeats the violin’s thematic statement (Example 27).
Example 27: Beethoven--Violin Sonata No. 10 in G major, Op. 96, Mvt I, mm. 1–2

The violin and the piano have further conversations throughout the movement, notably with triplets at mm. 34–38; mm. 80–85; and the contrary motion between mm. 111–114 (Examples 28-30).

Example 28: Beethoven--Violin Sonata No. 10 in G major, Op. 96, Mvt I, mm.34-38
Example 29: Beethoven--Violin Sonata No. 10 in G major, Op. 96, Mvt I, mm. 80–85

Example 30: Beethoven--Violin Sonata No. 10 in G major, Op. 96, Mvt I, mm. 111–114
Counterpoint also plays an important role in this sonata. In the first movement of Op. 69 the contrasting secondary theme (mm. 38–65) makes use of imitative textures (Example 31), and in the Adagio-Cantabile of the third movement the cello accompanies the theme in the piano with an effective countermelody (Example 32).

Example 31: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in A major, Op. 69, Mvt I, mm. 38-79
Example 32: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in A major, Op. 69, Mvt III, mm. 1–18

The Violin Sonata No. 10 also has many fine moments of contrapuntal writing, such as the beginning of the first movement (mm. 10-22), where each voice fills the texture with eighth notes (Example 33), and the opening of the Scherzo where the principal theme begins in both instruments before splitting into separate lines (Example 34). Taken together, the Op. 69 sonata and the Op. 96 reveal a composer who was interested in chamber music that was more involved and profound than was expected during the Enlightenment.
Example 33: Beethoven--Violin Sonata No. 10 in G major, Op. 96, Mvt I, mm. 10-22

Example 34: Beethoven--Violin Sonata No. 10 in G major, Op. 96, Mvt III, mm. 1-7
3) *The Opus 102 Cello Sonatas*

After the landmark Op. 69 sonata, Beethoven waited seven years to return to the genre, and in that time span his life and artistic outlook changed. In the final period of his life and career (1815-1827), Beethoven went through many personal hardships, losing his hearing completely and fighting the Vienna courts for custody of his nephew.

He looked inward for answers to his pain, and his melodic, harmonic, formal, and expressive experimentation laid the groundwork for the next generation of Romantic composers. In 1815 he finished his Sonatas for Cello and Piano No. 4 and No. 5, collectively bound into his Opus 102. In these pieces Beethoven launches one of the defining characteristics of his late music: the commitment to complex Baroque-like fugal writing in a Romantic context. As such, the finale of the Opus 102, No. 2 is the first of nine large-scale fugues that dominate Beethoven’s late masterpieces.24

To some scholars, like the aforementioned Lewis Lockwood who calls them “bizarre,” Beethoven’s compositional decisions compel him to treat the cello and the piano in wildly uneven ways, with regard to register selection, thematic scope, sonority, and volume. The finale of the Op. 102, No. 2 sonata contains the first of nine large-scale fugues that dominate Beethoven’s late masterpieces, and it carries a reputation in the cello world as notoriously difficult to perform from many standpoints: technical, practical, and expressive.25

Yet many passages in the Op. 102 sonatas indicate that while the fully mature Beethoven had ambitious plans, he refused to sacrifice one instrument for the other. Much like the opening of the Op. 69 sonata, the opening of the Op. 102, No. 1 sonata places the principal theme first in the cello (Example 35).

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24Crawford, 123.
25Ibid., 123.
**Example 35:** Beethoven--Cello Sonata in C major, Op. 102, No. 1, Mvt. 1, mm. 1–15

In the ensuing *Allegro* both the cello and the piano play the theme in unison, an event similar to the one that occurs in the *Adagio* of the first movement of the Op. 5, No. 1 sonata *(Example 36)*. Furthermore, Beethoven explores the outer reaches of the cello’s tessitura even more than in the Op. 5 and Op. 69 sonatas. In the *Allegro* of the second movement of the Op. 102, No. 1 sonata, the cello sounds a G5, compared to the D5 played in the first movement of the Op. 5, No. 1 sonata *(Example 37)*. In fact, much of the cello part in the Op. 102, No. 1 second movement *Allegro* requires the player to stay in the thumb position that allows for the enunciation of the upper register of the instrument.
Example 36: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in F major, Op. 5, No. 1, Mvt I, mm.1–10

![Example 36 Sheet Music](image1.png)

Example 37: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in C major, Op. 102, No. 1, Mvt. II, mm. 229

![Example 37 Sheet Music](image2.png)

As expected in a late Beethoven work counterpoint is integral to the Op. 102 sonatas, and the Sonata No. 5 (Op. 102, No. 2), in particular, is full of non-imitative polyphony. At the beginning of the first movement the piano solo leaps an octave with an eighth note and a dotted half note (m. 1) and then in the same texture climbs to the interval of a tenth (m. 2). The cello responds with an arpeggio and then takes the music in a different direction with a new mood and new thematic material. In other words, even though the sonata begins with a dramatic cry in the piano, Beethoven quickly moves the spotlight to the cello (Example 38).
Example 38: Beethoven-- Cello Sonata in D major, Op. 102, No. 2, Mvt I, mm. 1–8

In his document Gates mentions “non-polyphony occurs at mm. 64–75 in the first movement of the second Op. 102 sonata.”\(^{26}\) Moreover, the cello’s counterpoint to the piano’s opening solo is not intrusive (Example 39). Writing about this passage in his thesis, Gates observes that the cello and its “quiet accompaniment does not compete.” He then concludes that the “two instruments are perfectly balanced in terms of prominence.”\(^{27}\)

\(^{26}\) Gates, 121.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 124.
Example 39: Beethoven Cello Sonata in D major, Op. 102, No. 2, Mvt I, mm. 64-75

At the same time Beethoven displays great concern for instrumental equality in many imitative passages. In the opening Andante of the first movement of the Sonata No. 4 (Op. 102 No. 1) the principal theme in the piano part (mm.6–9) is repeated in whole by the cello (mm. 11–15), and later in the movement, the cello and the piano play this theme in unison (mm. 28–32) (Examples 40-41).
Example 40: Beethoven-- Cello Sonata in C major, Op. 102, No. 1, Mvt I, mm. 6–9

Example 41: Beethoven-- Cello Sonata in C major, Op. 102, No. 1, Mvt I, mm. 28–32
In the *Allegro* of the second movement of the Op. 102, No. 2 sonata the cello begins the principal tune at measure 19 and quickly passes it to the piano. The cello takes the tune back at measure 25, and at measure 33 the right hand of the piano echoes the theme just finished by the cello. This frequent voice trading in a melodic line is not only evidence that Beethoven continued to insist on equal treatment of both instruments, but that each instrument depends on the other for satisfying music making (*Example 42*).

**Example 42:** Beethoven-- Cello Sonata in C major, Op. 102, No. 1, Mvt II, mm. 19–38
At the end of the second movement in the Op. 102, No. 1 sonata, the cello and the piano create a five-voice contrapuntal layer. In particular, at measure 225 the cello and the piano right hand participate in the same moving triplet and sixteenth-note passage. Important thematic material returns, but for emphasis Beethoven casts it in unison between the instruments (Example 43).

Example 43: Beethoven-- Cello Sonata in C major, Op. 102, No. 1, Mvt II, mm. 225–242
In the first movement of the Op. 102, No. 2 sonata, the cello and the piano often present the thematic material in an imitative dialogue. At measures 84 and 85, for instance, the piano plays the principal motive in unison in both hands and the cello repeats it. Moreover, at measure 88 the cello hands off the motivic sequence to the piano (Example 44).

**Example 44:** Beethoven-- Cello Sonata in D major, Op. 102, No. 2, Mvt I, mm. 81–89

The second movement of the Op. 102, No. 2 sonata has some especially intimate conversation between the instruments. In the opening eight measures the cello enunciates the *Adagio* theme in moving yet unhurried eighth notes, and the piano accompanies this utterance with a progression of chords that forms a breathtaking contrapuntal line (Example 45).
Example 45: Beethoven—Cello Sonata in D major, Op. 102, No. 2, Mvt II, mm. 1–8

This closely connected imitative texture occurs in the sequencing and transitional material immediately afterward (mm. 9–24) and at several other times in the movement, notably at mm. 28–32 and at mm. 37–46 (Example 46-48).
Example 46: Beethoven-- Cello Sonata in D major, Op. 102, No. 2, Mvt II, mm. 9-24

Example 47: Beethoven-- Cello Sonata in D major, Op. 102, No. 2, Mvt II, mm. 28–32
Example 48: Beethoven-- Cello Sonata in D major, Op. 102, No. 2, Mvt II, mm. 37–46

In the recapitulation of the first movement in the Op. 102, No. 1 sonata, the cello and the piano move back and forth between unison and contrapuntal textures. At measure 97 the cello and the piano share the same motive and rhythmic line, even if for two measures the piano right hand harmonizes with a pedal E-natural in octaves. Once the dotted rhythm subsides, however, the two instruments quickly go their own way, and with each keyboard hand doing something different the result is three-voice polyphony. Later, at measures 103-104, the cello and the piano right hand participate in imitative dialogue (Example 49).
Example 49: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in C major, Op. 102, No. 1, Mvt I, mm. 97–106

The opening of the third movement in the Op. 102, No. 2 is an engaging question-and-answer conversation between the two instruments. The cello plays a segment of the principal theme first and the piano repeats it. At measure 4, the cello presents the principal theme in full, and the piano left hand follows at measure 10. Once the theme has been stated twice, the cello, piano right hand, and piano left hand begin a three-voice fugue (m. 16) (Example 50).

Example 50: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in D major, Op. 102, No. 2, Mvt III, mm.1-21
As Lockwood notes, the fugue that begins at measure 59 certainly has a “bizarre quality.” The cello and the right hand piano are first in the same rhythmic pattern, but the piano left hand introduces a small descending stepwise motive from the main theme and builds a sequence out of it that the cello picks up and plays alongside the piano left hand (Example 51).

Example 51: Beethoven--Cello Sonata in D major, Op. 102, No. 2, Mvt III, mm. 58-72
Even Gates believes that while Beethoven’s concept of instrumental accompaniment in the Op. 102 sonatas looks backward more than in his famous Op. 69 sonata, counterpoint is more intrinsic to the texture and the composer’s artistic intentions. The *Allegro fugato* of the finale of the Sonata Op. 102, No. 2, for instance, is much more than just a dense interweaving of lines to form an orthodox musical structure. Through the entire fugue the cello and the piano engage in a heated question-and-answer dialogue that pushes Romantic harmony to the limit and forces each player to contend for space (Example 52). As such, any notion of a “bizarre quality” about the Op. 102 sonatas must be within the context of not just what Beethoven is trying to say, but how he is trying to say it.

Example 52: Beethoven-- Cello Sonata in D major, Op. 102, No. 2, Mvt III, mm. 125-131

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28 Gates, 125.
The Romantic era built upon Beethoven’s musical development, and the cello sonatas of Chopin, Brahms, Saint-Saens, and Rachmaninoff, to name a few, all owe something to Beethoven in their expressive counterpoint and seamless marriage of both instruments. In effect, much as Haydn and C.P.E. Bach established the cello as a solo instrument in orchestral music, the Beethoven cello sonatas raised the status of the cello in chamber music. To this end, these sonatas are much more than a reflection of his evolution as a composer. Rather, they are emblematic of a musician who held core beliefs that governed his thinking both inside and outside his art.

All five sonatas break new ground in the cello sonata literature. Even as the Op. 5 sonatas deal with the Classical rules and proportions of their time, Beethoven insists on giving the cello an equal role, and while the Op. 102 sonatas fuse late Baroque imitative complexity and Romantic harmony in a quest for a more profound statement, the composer never loses sight of how the instruments should unfold his ideas and how they should relate to each other. Meanwhile, the Op. 69 sonata remains as the standard model for the new cello sonata, even if the techniques within it had Classical precedence as well as a clear direction for the future. Although only time will determine if the Op. 5 sonatas and the Op. 102 sonatas reach the same level of esteem as the Op. 69, scholarship should consider a reappraisal of these works as a whole. They are not three separate opus numbers; they are together a pronounced declaration of what the cello sonata genre should be.
Bibliography


