

MELODIC RECALL AND MANIPULATION IN BEETHOVEN'S
SYMPHONY NO. 4 IN B-FLAT MAJOR, OP. 60, NO. 1
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Beethoven establishes unity and familiarity throughout the first movement of his Opus 60 by basing the melodic themes and connecting material on basic ideas and motives established in the beginning of the piece. Though the harmonic motion provides sufficient interest for discussion, it is how these original ideas are reiterated and manipulated which feed a cohesive story across the sonata. Meyer-esque excitement is maintained through the various means by which Beethoven breaks from expected patterns not only in harmonic resolution but in melodic direction as well. In short, it is to the relationship and continued presentation of thematic ideas that the conductor will need to emphasize and present in preparation and performance of this work. In this paper, I will demonstrate and discuss how various motives are related and function to highlight their relatively simplistic-yet-ingenious origin, and how their reconfigurations move musically forward. Unlike a standard sonata, however, where we can simply begin with the first theme of the exposition, close attention needs to first be paid to the introduction where the expectations and realizations of the exposition and development are established.

The symphony begins with a slower, adagio introduction akin to an opera prelude. Unlike some opera preludes, though this opening material appears to be disconnected from the rest of the movement, Beethoven uses the “desultory” introduction to present key material referenced throughout the remainder of the movement (Evans 229). Though I share the view that this opening appears to wander, or better that it conveys a directionless character, I do find that Beethoven artistically builds a familiarity through this early material, a familiarity which will simultaneously bring greater excitement to the contrasts in mood and texture. Understanding—

or at least experiencing—the first thirty-five measures serve as a key to unlock the full enjoyment the rest of the movement.

First off, even though the title indicates the key as B-flat major, the introduction really does not clearly establish it as such, much less sound like it. The initial pizzicato of the strings and the held B-flat in the winds introduce the key more as a distant thought or want rather than something we get to experience at that moment. Against the winds' B-flat, the first subject of the introduction is introduced in mm. 2-5. The octave G-flats, E-flats, and D-flats in this section led me to hear it more in B-flat minor, giving the F pitch-class in measure six a lingering implication of that key. However, this is quickly followed by the line of separated eighth-notes in mm. 6-10 which further make me feel like Beethoven is flirting with the chromatic mediant and subtonic tonal areas, only acting as though he were outlining stable chords. The strings in measure ten slip into an uneasy-yet-clear F major chord, with the following G-flats still leaning toward the F in an uncharacteristic way of implying it as the dominant to B-flat minor. This implication is strengthened by the G \flat -E \natural -F material found in the bassoon in m. 7 and the cello/bass in m. 9.

We finally get V⁷ – I motion in mm. 12-13, but it rings hollow in truly establishing the key. This is in part that the F dominant-seventh occurs as an eighth-note, only plucked by the strings, while what should be the tonic B-flat and ensuing material look more like a copy-and-paste of mm. 1-5, the forte being instantly reduced to piano and then pianissimo in line with the lingering B-flat minor tonality. This time, however, the octave G-flat pitch-class in the strings in m. 17 do not resolve down to an F but rather tie over the bar line. Beethoven then appears to treat this pitch-class enharmonically as an F-sharp to move further away from the implied, intended key. The next seven measures, mm. 18-24, seem to imply a dominant-ninth, with the

bassoon and cello bringing back the G \flat -E \natural -F material, this time modulated half a step higher to outline the arrival to F-sharp. The tonal center then wanders a half-step higher, leading to a G dominant-seventh in mm. 25-26, C major in m. 27, followed by the semitonal voice leading to D minor in mm. 28-29.

With the D serving as a common tone, Beethoven then abruptly interjects B-flat major on beat four of measure twenty-nine, with its teasing through the next bar highlighting how out of place it sounds with the surrounding material. The D then leads to E-natural, moving us from B-flat to A, with measure thirty-one outlining the E dominant-seventh. The next four measures then act as though the A will return to its respective tonic of D. In m. 35, however, the violins repeat A⁴ and A⁵, allowing it to serve as a common tone heard as part of the fortissimo F dominant-seventh chord in m. 36. Instantly, Beethoven kicks off the motion toward the exposition in the allegro vivace with the first, strong implication of the title key. It is rather interesting to note, however, that the piece does not cadence on B-flat major until m. 43, five measures into the new section with the introduction of the first theme.

Through the introduction, Beethoven gave insight into how the main movement would follow, and by what means he would tinker with the harmony and melodic material. As was previously mentioned, experiencing the introduction set expectations which would be realized by reworking and presenting familiar material in contrasting settings and textures. Thus, the first movement forms a cohesive whole which needs the experience of the introduction to be fully realized. In his own analysis of the piece, Edwin Evans observed, “The peculiar unity of the work, in the sense that its movements seem like chapters of one story, also brings home to us that its romance is something definite; while the absence of all dark shadow in the expression equally assures us that the world in which it moves is one of happiness—the happiness of contentment

and affection without boisterous glee, and without anything to cloud it more than those moments of comparative gloom which exhibit its radiance all the more” (Evans 228). The main portion of the movement comes across as overwhelmingly happy in its tone and affect in large part due to its absence in the introduction. The first thirty-five measures teased my ear, denying me the opportunity to settle. Thus, the affect of joy and happiness was strengthened by postponing the first settled arrival to tonic until the presentation of the first/main theme, allowing the *Allegro vivace* to act as a realization of the introduction, itself.

The first theme continues to set the gleeful mood through its continuation of employing shortened pitches (eighth-note, eighth-rest). This technique is demonstrated through a comparison of the excerpts in Examples 1.

17 18 19 20 21 22

pp **Fag.** **Basses**

(B \flat): (V 9) ----- (aug. 7) ----- (aug. 7)

43 44 45 46

fp **f**

(B \flat): I ----- IV ----- V 7 ----- **f**

Example 1: Violin I part, mm. 17-22 (Grove 104) and 43-46 (Hopkins 104). Comparison to show similar articulation and motion between themes in the introduction and allegro vivace.

I have always heard short, dancing rhythms as a cliché means of conveying gaiety and happiness. In the introduction, these short arpeggiations contrast the forlorn motive of descending thirds found in mm. 2-4 and 14-16. Even in the minor key, they feel as though they sprit about and build anticipation. Incorporating this general rhythm mm. 43-47 then allows the theme to act as

a realization of the earlier eighth-note motive. No longer searching, it is clearly rooted in B-flat major, absent any ninths and meandering toward augmented sevenths. With this juxtaposition, the shortened notes and eighth-rests fully convey boundless joy as the notes dance about their arpeggiations while also providing a familiarity with the expectation and yearning I had while first listening to the introduction.

I should note, however, that the change in mood is effectively wrought in part through changing the direction of the melodic line between the two excerpts. In the introduction, the eighth-note motive consists of an ascent followed by a descent in pitch. In the allegro vivace, the line leaps higher from the down beat to then generally descend, accentuating the bounding motion commonly associating with joyful dancing. In fact, the concept of falling thirds is employed throughout the piece and as part of various motives, further tying the whole work together as a cohesive whole. This principal theme appears for a second time in mm. 53-57 and then again in the cello/bass line of mm. 81-84, all before any tonal shift occurs in preparation for the traditional secondary area of sonata form.

The next realization of the introductory themes comes in mm. 107-112, and is highlighted in Example 2.

Example 2: Violin part, mm. 2-3; woodwind parts mm. 107-111 (Hopkins 105). Highlights origin of “new” thematic material.

As we get to m. 107, we are met with what appears to be new thematic material in the bassoon line, imitated in the oboe and the flute before continuing with its developing idea. No other motion is present in the orchestra, with the strings holding octave Fs. However, this is nothing more than a return of the first melodic material from the introduction. Right after the introductory B-flat, we are presented with descending half-note minor-thirds. If you were to take these thirds, spell the notes enharmonically, and then lower the third note by a half-step, you would hear the first four notes presented in the bassoon, oboe and flute in mm. 107, 109, and 111 (Hopkins 105).

However, Beethoven was not finished playing with this idea just with this entrance following the first theme. The violins then pick up on playing with this material a bit in mm. 117-120 before playing in unison (though notes are displaced by octaves) a half-note material that looks similar in style to mm. 2-3. The emphasis here has to be on the melodic material due to the fact that the harmonic motion is relatively stagnant mm. 107-120.¹ Not only does it appear similar in style, but mm. 121-124 are reworkings of the violins' own material between the woodwind imitation and the strings' unison. On closer inspection, I found that mm. 121-122 were the inverse of m. 120 with the rhythm augmented. Similarly, mm. 123-124 are the inverse retrograde of m. 119, with new-but-similar motion by the thirds and seconds then dictating the strings' motion through m. 130. To be honest, I do not hear the inversion and retrograde. However, what I perceive as new material is, at the same time, familiar and does not strike my ear as being out of place. Being a reworking of previously-presented melodies, it does not fall

¹ After starting in F (mm. 107-110), the dominant area of the movement, we experience some motion between A major and D minor (D minor mm. 111-112, A major m. 113, D minor m. 114, A dominant-seventh m. 115, D minor m. 116) before centering on A the four measures before the string unison (mm. 117-120).

out of place. It fits well within the context of the work and efficiently connects ideas throughout the movement.

Continued manipulation of these melodic ideas allows Beethoven to seamlessly incorporate new material while not endangering the mood and desired affect. His means of providing variation and new ideas is shown in Example 3.

Woodwind theme: (bassoon) 107 108 109 (oboe trans.) 109

New theme (bassoon) 142 143 144 145

Woodwind theme: 110 111 (flute trans.) 112 113

New theme (bassoon) 146 147 148 149

Example 3: Woodwind parts, mm. 107-113; bassoon part mm. 142-149 (Hopkins 108). Highlights the growth of new themes as variants of previous material.

Measure 141 introduces a new theme in canon between the clarinet and the bassoon. Again, the texture and harmonic motion are such that the attention lies with this melodic material. After completion of the canon by the clarinet and bassoon, it is then passed along to the strings with the upper strings starting the new canon followed by the cellos/basses, rounding out mm. 148-157. As demonstrated by the example, however, this new idea is not necessarily new, but can be seen as a variation of the material of the woodwind imitation found in mm. 107-113, which was taken from the first melodic material of the movement in mm. 2-3.

The recurring use of thematic ideas is what aids the unity of the piece through the chaotic development. Hopkins observed that, in addition to three other of Beethoven's symphonies, that the main theme implies a harmony, depicted in Example 4 (Hopkins 109).

43 44 45 46

Bb: I ----- IV⁷ ---- V⁷ ----

Flute, Oboe, Bassoon:	225	226	227	228
Violin I:	221	222	223	224

Example 4: Harmonic reduction of main theme, mm. 43-44; woodwind part mm. 225-228, violin I and II mm. 237-240 (Hopkins 109). Additional melodic material comes from reordering note from original theme in new rhythm.

The first part of the example highlights this implied harmony by superimposing the notes of the main theme, as found in mm. 43-46, into the chords they form if sounded simultaneously within the measure. New material, such as the theme from the development in mm. 221-224, 225-228 and 237-240, is created by choosing notes from each measure of the original theme/subject to create a new melody which sounds familiar and rooted within the overall tone of the piece. In the case with the woodwinds and the violins, it provides new interest following the reintroduction and development of the original theme, which returned in the dominant key in m. 187.²

² As customary for sonata form, the first theme returns with the beginning of the development in the dominant key. In m. 191, we see the theme in C (dominant of F), in F (tonic) in m. 195, and then shifting to through ii⁶ mm. 197-198, a cadential ⁶₄ mm. 199-200, V (C major) mm. 201-202, and then shifting with C going up half a step to an A major chord in mm. 203-210 (the dominant of D major). The seventh is added in m. 211 with the cadence on D major in m. 217, before the introduction of this new theme based of the original one.

This final theme, again rooted from original material encountered earlier in the movement, marks the point where the development begins to truly delve into chaos. This chaos is signified by the breaking down of the melodic structure which, as discussed up to this point, had been so clearly established and preserved through reiterations and inspiration for new material. The third appearance of the new theme (discussed in the previous paragraph and shown in Example 4) ends unexpectedly with a shift toward E-flat major in m. 241, followed by a move to G in m. 249. Where the melodic phrase had earlier served as the main attraction, the breakdown into melodic fragments moves my attention toward the harmonic exploration and wandering typical of this stage of the sonata. This becomes most true in mm. 257-277 where the orchestra is, more or less, hashing out an E diminished-seventh chord before leaving only the solo violin alone in continuing the thirds it had been playing, now enharmonically spelled as C-sharp and A-sharp instead of D-flat and B-flat. This leads to an F-sharp major chord on m. 281, implying B major—not the intended key for return. Scalar passages move first from the violin and then through the rest of the strings, making several unsuccessful attempts to find a way to return to the movement's harmonic home.

This area of the development marks the furthest we could possibly move tonally from our home key of B-flat major,³ marking the spot of the development where the greatest amount of chaos has been achieved along with a seeming inability to return to the original key. In discussing this point of the sonata, Hopkins observed,

Employing the principle that if you have lost your way you should try to get back to the place where you went wrong, the players return to that same diminished seventh which

³ No notes are shared between B major and B-flat major signifying the least degree of compatibility between the two keys.

had been sustained for some twenty-four bars. As though throwing a beam of light from a torch, a solo flute leads them out of the maze by showing them a different way of resolving the chord. It is a moment of sheer magic. (Hopkins 112)

The orchestra, after returning to the diminished chord where we were harmonically thrown off the path, now the orchestra begins to lay out B-flat major instead of moving toward the F-sharp as found in m. 281; the basses lay down a soft F² in m. 305 while the timpani calls the instruments home with the rolled B-flat. The timpani roll continues through the crescendo wherein the orchestra becomes more unified, literally moving in unison across short runs outlining B-flat and its dominant, F, and through the final cadence marking the return to B-flat major in mm. 333-335. It is only at this point, m. 337, that the original theme returns and we enjoy melodic rather than strictly scalar material.

In the end, and following the textbook protocol, the melodic material and themes of the sonata serve as the means of motion through the movement. The harmony progresses in a fashion not uncommon for a Beethoven sonata, and does not therefore take a secondary role in telling the story of the movement. The interest is built and maintained by Beethoven's masterful presentation and reuse/manipulation of the themes upon which the movement is built. The relationships of the themes and additional melodic material, reworked in contrasting sections, pervade the movement, allowing it to feel unified and cohesive from mm. 1-498. Further study of the symphony as a whole would reveal whether or not this technique continues to act as a unifying element in each unit and whether there is melodic or other motivic material which links across all movements.

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