

## A MANIFESTO ON SONATA FORM

By Nathan Smith

The Sonata-Allegro form was one of the great triumphs of Western Musical development. Here, finally, was a way to present ideas in instrumental music in a way that was easy to follow, yet enjoyable to listen to. However, almost immediately this great form became desecrated by composers who were 'bored' and considered themselves 'radicals'. They started bending the rules of sonata form and trampling it. One need only attempt to compare the sonatas of the Romantic composers to the actual Sonata-Allegro form to see how flagrantly these composers treated this most esteemed of forms.

This negligence has made it almost impossible to teach Sonata-Allegro form in any serious academic context, since the vast majority of the time is spent discussing the ways in which people have circumvented the expectations of the form. Why, then, do we bother teaching Sonata-Allegro form at all? If it's only purpose in the classroom is to be disregarded and mocked, wouldn't it be better to not teach it, and instead focus on the development of a melodic idea, and the effect of that development? Why praise composers for bending the rules of Sonata form, when we could be discussing how the music has served its role as an outlet for social emotion? This current way of teaching is an affront to the Sonata-Allegro form. Something must change.

I am here today to set straight years of disregard for the Sonata-Allegro form by publishing a formally perfect sonata. Some may say that it is the melodic content, the emotional experience of a sonata that really shapes the piece. They are wrong. Forms are eternal, and it is the elegance of the form of sonata that makes it emotionally meaningful. To demonstrate this, I have composed a formally perfect Sonata, who's greatness will be immediately apparent in spite of its unappealing melody.

The method of composition is thus: I randomly selected a number between 1 and 32 (32 because that is how many piano sonatas Beethoven wrote, and since Beethoven is the chief 'innovator' or should I say desecrater- of Sonata-Allegro form, it seemed fitting to use his corpus of works). This number told me which Beethoven sonata I would use for which measure. For example, I first selected no26, so the first measure of sonata 26 became the first measure of my Perfect Sonata. I then selected no31, and the second measure of that sonata became the 2nd measure of my Perfect Sonata (note that my sonata is in 4/4, so some adaptations had to be made to any of Beethoven's sonatas in other time signatures). I repeated this process until I had a 16 bar 'A' theme. For the 'B' theme, which should be a contrasting slower theme, I indicated a slower tempo, and started drawing instead from the slow movements of Beethoven's work. Thus I composed a 16 bar 'B' theme in the dominant key, and the first 32 measures of my Sonata were complete.

To achieve development, I again selected a random number between 1 and 32, this time relating to the measures of my Sonata. The ideas were represented in the order selected. For variation, I rolled a dice. 1-2 meant no variation, 3-4 meant inversion, and 5-6 meant retrograde. Then I copied the first 32 measures, transposed the 2nd theme into the original key, and added appropriate cadences, and thus completed the first ever sonata to adhere strictly and perfectly to Sonata-Allegro form.

Hopefully my example will encourage others to treat this revered form with more respect, and to stop praising those who, like Beethoven, have so recklessly trampled on it throughout the generations of music.