

G. Becking: *Studien zu Beethovens Personalstil: das Scherzothema* (Leipzig, 1921), S. 77-8

As was shown in the brief overview of the first chapter, the year 1800 marks a decisive point in the story of Beethoven's scherzos. At a stroke, their most immediate competitor, the quick minuet, disappears from his sonatas. If Lenz believed that the first period ended around this time, we have every reason to agree with his division, without wishing to make any statement about the validity of his reasoning.

On the whole, Beethoven's output in his first period makes a much more colourful impression than in later ones. Although it is easier to determine the technical improvements of the young composer than the revisions of the mature and "late" Beethoven, one cannot in the first period find evidence of continuous development in the same sense as later on. Examining the scherzo themes confirms this impression. While the movements that appear after 1800 form a clearly observable sequence, the themes of the first period follow each other in a motley array, each bears little relation to its predecessor and, instead of consistently developing the demands of the scherzo, seeks to satisfy them in a different way. Certain individual characteristics at this time point towards later periods and are handled successfully only then. Many things yield no lasting benefit and are allowed to drop.

As has often been stated, especially by H. Riemann, Beethoven arrived on the spot in Vienna with his Op.1 as a finished master. Most of the pieces that followed, in spite of the composer's progress in individual cases, did not reach the level of the Piano Trios. Some movements, such as the Finale of Op. 1³, were never once surpassed during the whole of the first period. Analysis of the scherzi also endorses this view. Even here the Theme from Op.1¹ stands as an exemplar for the whole period all the way to the Menuett of the 1st Symphony; the terseness and simplicity of the scherzo elements are not achieved again. Thus it is impossible to speak of development towards a peak in the themes of the first period. The impression of a colourful succession is merely enhanced.