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When referring to this work state full bibliographic details including the author of the chapter, title of the chapter, editor of the book , title of the book, publisher, place of publication, year of publication, page numbers of the chapter

Author of the chapter	William Drabkin
Title of the chapter	On Beethoven's cello and piano textures
Editor/s	Sieghard Brandenburg, Ingeborg Maass und Wolfgang Osthoff
Title of the book	Beethovens Werke für Klavier und Violoncello
ISBN	3-88188-016-x
Publisher	Beethoven-Haus
Place of publication	Bonn
Year of publication	2004
Chapter/Page numbers	125-144

William Drabkin, Southampton

ON BEETHOVEN'S CELLO AND PIANO TEXTURES

One of the most enduring images of Beethoven's later years is of a genius working in self-imposed isolation, composing difficult music for future generations and showing little regard for contemporaries who found his music either conceptually or technically too demanding. It is therefore reassuring to note that he entered the following in his diary (*Tagebuch*) some time in late 1814 or early 1815:¹

Jeden Tag Jemanden zum Essen, Wie Musici, wo man dann dieses und jenes abhandelt, von Instrumenten ect Violin, Violoncell ect.

Every day [invite] someone for a meal, such as musicians, so that one can then discuss this or that, e.g. instruments such as the violin or cello.

This entry has never been specifically associated with an event in Beethoven's life, or with any work for a violinist, cellist or some other *Musicus*. It is, nevertheless, tempting to associate it with a short note sent to the cellist Joseph Linke, which reads as follows:

Lieber Linke

erzeigen sie mir Die Gefälligkeit Morgen früh bey mir zu frühstücken, so früh, als sie wollen, Jedoch nicht später als halb 8 uhr - bringen sie einen Violonschell Bogen mit, da ich mit ihnen zu reden habe -

Dear Linke,

Please give me the pleasure of having breakfast at my place tomorrow morning.

1 Entry 36 in Solomon's edition of the *Tagebuch*; see Maynard Solomon, "Beethoven's *Tagebuch* of 1812-1818," *Beethoven Studies* 3, ed. Alan Tyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 228.

Come as early as you like, but no later than 7.30. Bring a cello bow with you, for I have something to talk to you about.

The letter is undated but, thanks to research into Beethoven's handwriting and information about Linke's movements, it must have been written between 1808 and 1815.² If it is sensible to associate it with the composition of the cello sonatas Op. 102, which were written for Linke and his patron, the Countess Marie von Erdödy, then we might usefully see it as the fulfillment of Beethoven's promise to discuss instrumental technique with a string player over a meal. Anderson's edition dates the letter at 1814; the suggested date in the new Beethoven-Haus edition (BGA), "possibly the early spring of 1815," is specifically linked to the composition date of Op. 102.

These two quotations show the practical side of Beethoven: he expresses his concerns about writing music for real musicians. A third, more theoretical statement of Beethoven's on the subject of chamber music – one that is specifically linked to a different project – survives as a record of the recollections of Karl Holz, the second violinist of the ensemble that gave the first performances of the string quartets Beethoven wrote for Prince Nikolai Galitzin.³

Als er das B Quartett beendet hatte, sagte ich, daß ich es doch für das größte von den dreien (op. 127, 130, 132) halte. Er antwortete: jedes in seiner Art! Die Kunst will es von uns, daß wir, so sprach er häufig scherzhaft im Kaiserstyl, nicht stehen bleiben. Sie werden eine neue Art der Stimmführung bemerken (hiemit ist die Instrumentirung, die Vertheilung der Rollen gemeint) und an Fantasie fehlt's, Gottlob, weniger als je zuvor.

2 BGA 3, No. 800.

3 Wilhelm von Lenz, *Beethoven: eine Kunst-Studie*, vol. 5 (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1860), p. 217. Writers since Thayer have quoted the anecdote only in part, and most have mined it either for its Beethoven-on-Beethoven pronouncement ("Each in its own way!") or for its cultural-political creed ("Art does not permit us to stand still"). The only modern writer to quote Beethoven/Holz (from Beethoven's reply onwards) in its entirety is Robert Winter, in *Compositional Origins of Beethoven's Op. 131* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), pp. 11-12; but Winter misses out the word *scherzhaft* ("jokingly"), a word which suggests that Beethoven could make light of his self-styled social elevation.

When he had finished the Quartet in B flat, I said that I thought it was indeed the best of the three (Opp. 127, 130, 132). He replied: "Each in its own way! Art does not permit us to stand still" (he often used the royal "we" jokingly). "You will notice a new type of part-writing" (by this he meant the distribution of tasks among the instruments) "and there is no less imagination than ever before, thank God".

Although the story was not originally connected with the repertory of music for cello and piano, I believe that a survey of Beethoven's cello sonatas will show us that it is nevertheless applicable to it. I hope to demonstrate here that the three distinct periods during which Beethoven wrote for the combination – the mid 1790s, 1808, and 1815 – do show that "the distribution of tasks between the instruments" was a primary concern. They show him confronting the following theoretical problem: how does one put a cello and a piano together in music that has the tonal plans and phrase structures of the "sonata style" of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries?

It is useful to begin with some familiar examples of Classical chamber music for other combinations. In the standard piano quartet, the three string parts form a group of comparable strength to the keyboard. In the finale of Mozart's K. 478 in G minor, for instance, the piano initiates each of the first three pairs of phrases, the string trio entering for the response. This partnership is linked to an important organizing principle of Classical music, namely, the pairing of "antecedent" and "consequent" phrases, or of *statement* and *counterstatement*.⁴ There are

4 The former pair are the standard equivalents for the German *Vordersatz* and *Nachsatz*. The second pair of terms, which found favor with the British music theorist Donald Tovey, can usefully be distinguished from the first in that they do not suggest that the opening phrase is somehow incomplete, e.g. that it ends on a dominant harmony and thus needs a second phrase to round it off.

bars 1-8 end on V	bars 9-16 end on I
bars 17-26 end on I	bars 27-38 is an internally expanded restatement
bars 44-51 end on V	bars 52-59 end on the same chord, D major, but as I of new key.

three such pairings at the start of the Mozart quartet finale, each organized in a different way.

As a texture, the piano quartet comprises two “self-sufficient” groups, each capable of providing melody, bass and inner parts. Of course it is not necessary for the music to go in paired phrases, as it does here; but where composers wish to make use of a metric structure based on complementary phrases, they have a very neat way of distributing material between the two groups.

Not all chamber music ensembles can be so divided: sometimes the groups are not large enough to provide the required texture. The string quintet, for example, has more players than the piano quartet; but since string players are most comfortable when they play just one note at a time, the ensemble cannot be subdivided into groups that are capable on their own of achieving something like full harmony. In the opening period of Mozart’s Quintet in G minor, K. 516, the first viola appears throughout, first as the bass in the antecedent phrase and then as the melodic line at the start of the consequent.

Sonatas for piano and one string instrument can be understood in an analogous way. As with the piano quartet, there is an obvious contrast between the sounds of hammered and bowed strings; but like the string quintet there are not enough parts to go around. While the piano is always self-sufficient, the solo instrument normally needs the resources of the piano to complete the musical texture. If the materials of a theme are to be deployed, for instance, by a violin and piano duo, either the violin or the piano could carry the melodic line, or an inner part; but only the piano could provide the bass line. The rare examples of a full texture deployed by an unaccompanied string instrument points to an entirely different genre; the opening of Beethoven’s “Kreutzer” Sonata, for example, suggests a solo concerto.⁵ Assuming the violin is not resting, the distribution will take one of two forms:

5 Beethoven was himself aware of the distinction when he entitled the work “Sonata per il Pian[o]forte ed un Violino obbligato, scritta in uno stilo molto concertante, quasi come d’un concerto.” See KH, p. 111.

<i>melodic line</i>	violin		piano right hand
<i>inner part</i>	piano right hand	OR	violin
<i>bass line</i>	piano left hand		piano left hand

For Beethoven, the violin sonata was central the genre of the accompanied sonata not only because of its long tradition and because it figures prominently in the composer's output during the first decade in Vienna, but also because it is generally believed that Beethoven knew Mozart's violin sonatas well: well enough to use them as models for some of his earliest chamber works and not merely his early violin sonatas.⁶ Not surprisingly, he took full advantage of paired phrasing for the distribution of melodic interest between the piano and the violin. In the "Spring" Sonata (Op. 24, in F major), for instance, a series of thematic statements and counterstatements, in which the violin and the right hand of the piano are in dialogue, conforming to the pattern of, accounts for all but 20 of the 86 bars in the exposition of the first movement.

Though the violin sonata is probably the best model for the texture comprising piano and cello, we must recognize a fundamental, if obvious, difference between the two solo instruments. Whereas the violin had been used as a high-register solo instrument since the early seventeenth century, the natural range of the cello is much lower, and it became the preferred bass instrument in chamber music towards the end of the eighteenth century.⁷ A cello sonata is thus a work for an accompanied bass instrument, that is, for a bass *instrument* accompanied by a bass *part* that supports a set of inner parts. If the cello is set in a high register, or is accompanied by a low instrument (such as a double bass) there will be space for the inner parts. But the comparable ranges of the cello and piano in late eighteenth-century Vienna makes a partnership between them precarious. In contrast

6 According to Douglas Johnson, "all three of the Piano Quartets WoO 36 were modeled on violin sonatas by Mozart." See "1794–1795: Decisive Years in Beethoven's Early Development," *Beethoven Studies* 3, p. 14, note 5.

7 For a fuller account of this matter, see James Webster, "Violoncello and Double Bass in the Chamber Music of Haydn and his Viennese Contemporaries," *JAMS*, 29 (1976), pp. 413–438.

to the violin, the lowest note on the cello, its open C, lies only a fifth higher than the lowest note on the piano.

At the other end of its compass there is, admittedly, about an octave between the highest notes of the cello and piano, but this difference is compensated by the intensity of the cello A-string, which makes for an upward shift when we work out the relationship between the cello and the piano. In *cantabile* passages for the cello in the sonatas of Op. 5, we can often conceptualize the relationship of the cello to the piano by imagining the cello written an octave higher. In the first movement of the F major sonata, the cello has the melodic lead in the second subject and the sixths between it and the piano right hand ought to be understood as thirds.

Example 1: Op. 5, No. 1, first movement, bars 254-61:

The perception of the cello as a tenor voice is entirely consistent with the notational practice of the period. Mozart wrote the high-register cello melodies of his three “Prussian” quartets (1789-90) in the treble clef, an octave higher than they sound. Beethoven adopted Mozart’s notation for his solo cello works; the surviving authentic sources notate high cello parts in the treble clef an octave above pitch, not in the tenor clef.⁸ If we accept this psychoacoustic extension of the cello’s upper range, then we can say that the piano and cello had about the same

⁸ The NGA volume of the music for cello and piano, follows modern practice by transcribing the high cello parts into tenor clef and untransposed treble clef; the music examples for this paper are based on this volume.

compass at the time of Beethoven's visit to the Prussian court in 1796. The following illustration may help us to visualize their near-congruence.⁹

(a) piano
(ca. 1790)



(b) cello, as notated in
chamber music by
Mozart and Beethoven
(ca. 1786-95)



How does this comparability affect the way in which a composer could write for cello and piano? If the Classical principle of antecedent and consequent still holds, then we have an additional possibility for distributing thematic material between the two instruments:

<i>melodic line</i>	cello		piano right hand		piano right hand
<i>inner part</i>	piano	OR	cello	OR	piano left hand
			right hand		
<i>bass line</i>	piano left hand		piano left hand		cello

The question now arises: do the greater resources of the piano and cello duo translate into more interesting textures? The answer to this question, it turns out, depends mainly upon the date of the piece, and to a lesser extent upon the character of the thematic material. For much of the time, the cello parts of Beethoven's early cello sonatas are like the violin parts of his violin sonatas: they exchange melodies and inner parts with the piano right hand. When he does assign the bass to the cello, it is almost always as a reinforcement of the piano left hand. Consider, for example, the following passage from the first movement of Op. 5, No. 2: The piano starts with the melodic line; the cello has an inner part before dropping out midway through the antecedent phrase. The cello then takes the melo-

9 The range of the piano is that used by Mozart, and by Beethoven until 1803. The range of the cello is based on the cello parts in Mozart's late chamber music for strings; the bracketed $f\sharp^3$ was used in an early, discarded version of the Trio section of his Quintet in D, K. 593. In Beethoven's Op. 5, the cello reaches e^3 (sounding e^2) only in the Rondo of the G major sonata (bars 109, 111).

The musical score consists of four systems, each with a cello staff and a piano staff.
 System 1 (measures 144-149): The cello staff begins with a *p* dynamic and a *cresc.* marking. The piano staff has a *p* dynamic and a *cresc.* marking. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand.
 System 2 (measures 150-155): The cello staff has a *sf* dynamic. The piano staff has a *sf* dynamic. The piano accompaniment continues with eighth-note patterns, and the cello part becomes more melodic.
 System 3 (measures 156-161): The cello staff has a *sf* dynamic. The piano staff has a *ff* dynamic. The piano accompaniment features a strong, rhythmic bass line.
 System 4 (measures 162): The cello staff has a *ff* dynamic. The piano staff has a *ff* dynamic. The piano accompaniment features a strong, rhythmic bass line.
 The score includes various musical notations such as *pizzicato*, *tr*, and *acc.* (accents).

dy in the consequent, but the continuation sees the cello and the piano right hand in dialogue. Then at bar 144, in preparation for a big cadence in B flat major, the cello finally has the bass line, but it does not have sole responsibility for it: it doubles the piano at the higher octave, or at pitch, for the next twelve bars.

The two exceptions in Op. 5 can be explained as special cases, and they occur at comparable places in the respective rondo movements. In the Allegro vivace of No. 1, the cello is the lowest part when it accompanies the piano, *pizzicato*, in the manner of a double bass in a serenade:

extract is only one of many in which the pianist, practising alone, will sense that something is missing from below:

Example 5: Op. 69, finale, bars 120–23:

Musical score for Example 5: Op. 69, finale, bars 120–23. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It consists of three systems. The first system shows the bass line with a long note and the treble line with a melodic line. The second system shows the bass line with a rhythmic pattern and the treble line with a melodic line. The third system shows the bass line with a rhythmic pattern and the treble line with a melodic line. The word "dolce" is written in the first system.

Secondly, Beethoven relaxes the requirements of the bass line, so to speak, partly freeing it of its role as harmonic anchor. This often happens at a restatement of a theme, where the conventional bass line has already been heard and the harmonic structure of the theme is therefore understood. Compare the last two statements of the principal theme of the finale:

Example 6a: Op. 69, finale, bars 173–80:

Musical score for Example 6a: Op. 69, finale, bars 173–80. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It consists of two systems. The first system shows the bass line with a melodic line and the treble line with a rhythmic pattern. The second system shows the bass line with a melodic line and the treble line with a rhythmic pattern. The word "dolce" is written in the first system, and "f" is written in the second system.

Example 6b: Op. 69, finale, bars 187-95:

The slow-moving cello part in the first presentation articulates the tonic and dominant clearly. In the restatement, the chords are inverted, and the bass line is ornamented with appoggiaturas and neighbor notes.

Perhaps the most important innovation in Op. 69, hinted at in the previous example, is a partnership between cello and piano in which the roles of melody and bass are woven together in such a way that they are impossible to separate. In the first movement, the harmonic simplicity of the second subject belies its sophisticated textures. The cello and piano exchange roles of bass and melody, respectively, in the space of four bars, without the listener being quite able to pinpoint the exact moment at which the switch takes place. (Note especially how the piano's broken chords, $B-G\sharp-E$, are transferred to the melodic portion of the cello line.)

Example 7: Op. 69, first movement, bars 37-41:

It is instructive to observe Beethoven's earlier intentions here. The autograph of the first movement does not give the final version of the passage, but bears two layers of notation for the piano part. It shows the composer wavering between a floating downward line, similar to the final reading, and a version in which the keyboard instrument provides a stronger harmonic anchor.¹⁰ The copy of the sonata that served as the *Stichvorlage* for the first edition also shows two versions of the passage: here the cancelled version shows the harmony anchored by the piano.¹¹

Example 8: *Stichvorlage* of Op. 69, first movement, bars 37–41, original version:

In other words, the kind of accompaniment that Beethoven wanted for the cello theme – which is little more than an E major scale – emerged after a process that involved much writing down. It may be dangerous to say that a lot of written evidence is a sure sign of a big compositional problem, but it is at least clear from the *Stichvorlage* that the relationship of the cello to the piano in bars 37–45 (and the parallel place in the recapitulation) is one of the very last things that Beethoven worked out while composing this sonata.

10 For transcriptions of these, see Lewis Lockwood, “The Autograph of the First Movement of the Sonata for Violoncello and Pianoforte,” *The Music Forum*, II (1970), p. 48, Examples 3a and 3b. (As I interpret the manuscript, these examples should be reversed, i.e. 3b precedes 3a chronologically.)

11 For further particulars, see Sieghard Brandenburg, “Das Autograph des ersten Satzes von Beethovens Cellosonate op. 69,” in: *Ludwig van Beethoven: Sonate für Violoncello und Klavier op. 69* (Berlin: KulturStiftung der Länder, 1992), pp. 38–39.

An equally subtle example of the cello-piano partnership is found at the start of the recapitulation, where the antecedent and consequent of the original main theme have been welded into a single phrase:

Example 9: Op. 69, first movement, bars 152-64:

The musical score for Example 9, Op. 69, first movement, bars 152-64, is presented in four systems. Each system consists of a piano part (treble and bass clefs) and a cello part (bass clef). The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 3/4. The piano part begins with a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand, and the cello part begins with a triplet of eighth notes in the bass line. The piano part is marked *dolce* and *fp* in the first system, *p* in the second and third systems, and *cresc.* and *f* in the fourth system. The cello part is marked *ad libitum* and *sf* in the fourth system. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

The cello starts with the theme as bass line to the piano's new counter-melody in triplets, and one can hear it clinging to the bass - just! - as it starts its ascent at the upbeat to bar 158; but it emerges two bars later in full possession of the melodic line. The earliest layer of the autograph score shows a much cruder juxta-

position of bass and melodic roles for the cello: the left-hand hammering on low *E* covers the delicate interplay between cello melody and right-hand triplets.

Example 10: Autograph score of Op. 69, first movement, original version of bars 156–59:

The foregoing examples are indicative of Beethoven's having worked out the implications for a Classical partnership between cello and piano in Op. 69, yet another example of his coming of age in the middle period. It is exciting to see that this maturity is the result of grappling with the specific thematic materials of this sonata. What happens in his last two sonatas represents yet a further development in the art of writing for the combination. Typically for the late period, the Op. 102 sonatas of 1815 turn a middle-period solution back into a problem: the problem of how to accommodate two potential bass parts in a single texture.

We may note, for a start, that in the later sonatas the cello switches its role in the texture more frequently. The opening of the D major sonata, for instance, has the piano starting alone, the cello joining in with an arpeggio of the tonic chord, i.e. an elaboration of the bass. This arpeggio leads directly to a lyrical melodic line, but when the piano right hand takes over that line the cello slips into an inner part. In the second-group themes, an antecedent-consequent structure is more evident, yet the exchange between cello and piano still occurs at close range – every two bars – making a much more nervous musical surface than we find in any of the earlier sonatas. Perhaps the most telling detail in the exposition of this movement is the connecting bar 17, with its single-note crescendo returning to the main theme. The use here of a string instrument joining the quiet end of one phrase to the loud beginning of another is, to my knowledge, unique in Beethoven's accompanied sonatas:

Example 11: Op. 102, No. 2, bars 12–18:

The musical score for Example 11, Op. 102, No. 2, bars 12–18, is presented in two systems. The first system covers bars 12 to 14, and the second system covers bars 15 to 18. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The piano part features a consistent eighth-note accompaniment in the left hand. The right hand plays chords in the first system and a melodic line in the second system. Dynamics include *cresc.*, *f*, *sf*, *p*, and *f*.

The earlier part of Example 14 also shows the instruments in competition over the harmony: the piano has a pedal on *A* in bars 13–16, against which the cello struggles to project a IV–V–I cadence in *A* major. It is a battle that the piano, having the deeper tone and noisier articulation, will probably win. There are, however, other passages in the Op. 102 sonatas where the bass seems to be located simultaneously in both parts.

In the first movement of No. 1, the harmony in the development section aims at *D* minor, but is deflected up to *B \flat* major at bar 89, in the manner of an interrupted cadence. From this point, the piano moves in one direction, towards *E \flat* major, while the cello sits on a pedal *B \flat* that wants to pull the harmony back *D* minor. What is, of course, crucial is the relative position of the cello part and the piano left hand. In bars 89–90 the piano is the lower instrument, so that when its line starts to ascend we hear a change of chord, from I to II⁶ to IV⁶. We perhaps continue to hear the piano chords as defining the harmony between bars 90 and 92; eventually the piano gives in to the cello's pedal note, and the harmony resolves to *D* minor.

What I am suggesting, though, is that the harmony is best understood as underpinned by two bass progressions, one determined by the piano left hand, one by

the cello, which I conceptualize by a two-dimensional graph. The $B\flat$ pedal in the cello part sustains chord VI in D minor across bars 89–92, which then proceeds

Example 12: Op. 102, No. 1, first movement, bars 88–95, with graph of harmony:

The image displays a musical score for the first movement of Op. 102, No. 1, bars 88–95. The score includes piano and cello parts with various dynamics such as *sf*, *fp*, *dimin.*, *pp*, *cresc.*, and *f*. Below the score is a harmonic graph with two horizontal axes: 'cello D minor' and 'piano B \flat major'. The vertical axis represents time in bars, from 88 to 94. The graph shows the progression of chords for both parts. The cello part starts with V in bar 88, moves to VI in bar 89, and remains VI through bars 90 and 91. In bar 92, it moves to an augmented sixth chord (aug. 6th), which then resolves to V⁷ in bar 93. The piano part starts with #IV in bar 88, moves to V in bar 89, and remains V through bars 90 and 91. In bar 92, it moves to IV⁶, which then resolves to V⁷ in bar 93. The graph also shows a dashed line for the piano part moving from IV⁶ to IV in bar 94, and a solid line for the cello part moving from V⁷ to I in bar 94.

directly to the augmented sixth and the chords that resolve it. The piano part, on the other hand, explores $B\flat$ major as a key in its own right.

While I would not wish to argue that ambiguity of harmony – of bass line – is a novelty here, I believe that the conflict between the two interpretations is justified by the scoring. Moreover, it offers insight into the harmonic incongruity at

12 That is, when the piano keeps its lowest note, *a*, instead of resolving down to *d* in bar 94, the cello a^1 (which is the start of the main theme) is too high to be construed as a root. Beethoven seems to be favoring a stepwise bass line leading towards the recapitulation, i.e. $B\flat$ - A - $C\sharp$ - A , with the cello lending additional support for the diminished seventh on $C\sharp$ (bar 97); we find this alternative to the standard root-position dominant preparation in other sonata-form movements of the period, e.g. the first movement of the Quartet in F minor, Op. 95.

the expected point of resolution in bar 94: the cello's d^1 is too high for the piano left hand, but the integrity of the progression from $B\flat$ to A to D in one part (the cello), spanning all six bars, compensates for the mismatch of register.¹²

The competition between the cello and the piano for the bass part also allows Beethoven to produce some daring harmonizations whose "Classical" origins, so to speak, peek out from behind the musical surface. In the second group from the same sonata movement, heard only moments earlier, the expected harmonization of the last two bars would probably be with the progression $G-A-B$ in the bass (see Example 13a), and not, as Beethoven wants it, with an internal cadence in G major in which the bass fails to resolve down a fifth. Since an augmented sixth-

Example 13: Op. 102, No. 1, first movement, bars 53–54

(a) cello part with conventional bass line

(b) actual scoring:

chord has been activated some time before, the early arrival on the dominant, B , rules out this progression. The most that Beethoven can do is to "shadow" the standard progression in an inner part, the top voice of the piano, $g^1-g^{\sharp 1}-a^1$: Of course, this inner part could never be mistaken for a bass. But when the entire progression is repeated, with variations, Beethoven is able to reassign the chromatic progression to the cello. It is still too high to be understood as the governing bass line; but because it is played on the cello, it will be conveyed with an intensity that one identifies with a more important element than a mere inner part. In other words the cello is bidding, however disadvantageously, against the piano for linear prominence, by providing the conventionally correct bass line in the wrong register. Using a two-dimensional graphing method, we could represent the harmony as follows:

Example 14: Op. 102, No. 1, first movement, bars 63–66, with graph of harmony:

bar 63 64 65 66

cello

E minor: I^6

piano

augmented 6th-chord

V^6/IV IV I^6

$V^{2/IV}$ IV V/III III^6 $\#VII^1$ IV I

* * *

If Beethoven's cello sonatas and variation sets are not normally reckoned to be among his very highest achievements in chamber music, this says more about the genre, and the size of the repertory, than about the merits of the pieces themselves. The prior and subsequent production of string quartets, piano solo sonatas, and even violin sonatas makes an inquiry into Beethoven's contribution to these genres seem more relevant to needs of the historian, and the theorist. And though the chronology of his music for cello and piano conforms better than any other group of works to an early-middle-late classification – if that is what we want – the repertory is not large: the five sonatas of Opp. 5, 69 and 102 can do hardly more than give a snapshot of Beethoven's handling of the medium at three points in his career. To conclude, from the examples given above, that Beethoven's approach to this duo followed a straight path – from convention to innovation, from coherence to dissolution and ambiguity – risks oversimplification. Nonetheless, the categories of early, middle, and late, which usually encourage such views, at

least have the advantage of making us look carefully at the partnership between the cello and the piano and one major composer's changing conception of it. A small ensemble with two potential bass parts is problematic in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. That Beethoven confronted this matter head-on should cause us no surprise; but the range of solutions he came up with sheds light on a genre that is still not fully understood.