

Was Chopin's "Scherzo" modelled on Beethoven's ninth Symphony ?

No one can deny that Chopin grew up under the influences of the Polish folk dance music, Polonaise and Mazurka. When he grew old enough to learn the German traditional music by Bach, Mozart and so on, to which, his letter says, he preferred listening to Italian Operas that would endow him with the singing melody, and improvising then popular music on the piano.

The most brilliant works in the early days are his two piano concertos full of songful improvisational melodies, the dancing spirits, the lyricism characteristic of the youth and the love of his own land. His "Scherzo in B minor" composed few years after the concertos was so different in the style and form from them that I can not help but to think there ought to have been some mode which would give Chopin such innovative idea of music. I paid every effort to find some clues in the prevalent writings on Chopin only to have the feeling that most of the authors seemed to avoid mentioning this drastic change in Chopin's music.

Since it was *Beethoven who introduced 'scherzo' movement into symphonies, I assumed that there must be some clues among this great composer's works. And fortunately enough, I found them in the second movement of his ninth Symphony, which would have enough analogy to serve as a model for Chopin's "Scherzo".

**it was Ludwig van Beethoven and Franz Schubert who first used the form widely...from Wikipedia*

The followings are the points of comparison between the second movement of the ninth Symphony by Beethoven and Chopin's Scherzo in B minor:

Both of them are constructed by the typical three-part form. In the introduction of Beethoven's, D, A, F, D, the fundamental triads of the tonic, D minor, are played in descending octaves by the strings like this; D-d, a whole rest, A-a, a whole rest, F-f by the Timpani, D-d and two whole rests -- 8 bars in all (small letters mean octave lower). All tones are played fortissimo, and as the Timpani joins, the overall effect sounds percussive. Then the mobile first subject draws lines contrapunctly in turn from the violin, the viola and to the cello.

While in the introduction of Chopin's Scherzo, two independent chords are beaten and sustained each in 4 bars. The former, the subdominant, and the latter, the dominant-seventh of the B minor, which sounds almost two octaves lower. They are

also played fortissimo, giving the percussive effects like Beethoven's. Not until the Scherzo, Chopin used this manner of percussive effect which would be proved one of his most important musical languages to produce far deeper music together with the abrupt interruptions.

In the main subject, the melody ascends and ceases abruptly as if hesitating, which is repeated three times, and finally it goes high up to B. He never attained this compact mobility in the previous works.

In the trio of Beethoven's, the melody is modulated into D major. Its cheerful, pastoral subject presented by the wood winds sounds nostalgic and is followed by the strings with deep affection. The horns keep playing octave D as if the continuo almost all through the trio.

While in the case of Chopin's, the Polish Christmas Carol, "Sleep, Infant Jesus" in B major is recalled. The Carol sung in the tenor is sandwiched by the outer voices, the bass continuo B and the soprano' F sharp.

The percussive introduction, where the tones descend precipitately. The mobile main subject, where mobility itself dominates over the playfulness. The nostalgic trio, where the continuo is used.

Are they not enough to combine these two works ?

Chopin not only learned a structure of music from Beethoven but also felt his passion and tried to express his own in the form of "Scherzo". That would be the reason why his "Scherzos(Scherzi)" assume such passionate taste.

The reason why I persisted in the presence of the model on Chopin's "Scherzo in B minor" is that from this work Chopin had begun to produce the works of truly aesthetic value. Without the "Scherzo", we would surely be unable to enjoy such most superb works as four Scherzos, four Ballades, two Sonatas, Polonaise-Fantaisie, Fantasy, Barcarole and late Nocturnes.

Chopin acquired how to express his thoughts and emotions directly through music in composing the "Scherzo". The percussive effects, the passionate phrases, and the interruptions and the rests of melody which threatened his flowing music. He owed all of these elements to Beethoven, especially to his violent temper which might give barbaric tendency to Chopin that would surely betray what common people will expect in the music of Chopin.

It is said that Chopin did not like the piano works by Beethoven so much because they demand orchestral sounds beyond pianistic one, however, he preferred his orchestral works and the chamber music. As he is said to have often heard his family and their friends enjoy playing chamber music at his home, he might have heard Beethoven's last string quartet in F major, of which 'scherzo' resembles the second movement of his ninth Symphony.

In 1830, Chopin was staying in Vienna where he might not hear the symphony in the concert, but he could have obtained its score with ease. Because the symphony was premiered there in 1824, and the score was published in 1826, the year when young Felix Mendelssohn played it on the piano.

It is quite possible when Chopin saw the score of the second movement of the ninth symphony by Beethoven, the 'scherzo' gave him the idea of composing the new genre of piano music in quite a new style and form --Chopin's "Scherzo".

Hiroshi Kawanabe