

THE EROICA “ETUDES”: MASTERING THE TECHNICAL CHALLENGES IN
BEETHOVEN’S “EROICA” VARIATIONS, OP. 35

by
NATTAPOL TANTIKARN

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Dr. Dean Kramer, Chair of the Examining Committee

June 2, 2016

Committee in Charge: Dr. Dean Kramer, Chair
 Dr. Claire Wachter
 Dr. Jack Boss

Accepted by:

Director of Graduate Studies, School of Music and Dance

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CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Nattapol Tantikarn

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

School of Music and Dance, University of Oregon
Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, National University of Singapore

DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Musical Arts, 2016, University of Oregon
Master of Music, 2011, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Music, 2009, National University of Singapore

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Piano Pedagogy

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow in Piano Pedagogy
School of Music and Dance, University of Oregon, 2012-2015

Graduate Teaching Fellow in Piano Collaborative
School of Music and Dance, University of Oregon, 2009-2012

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I. The *Eroica* Variations and Fugue, Op. 35

Introduction

The genius of Beethoven as a pianist, a composer and even as an improviser is reflected in his works for the piano. In addition to his musical innovations, Beethoven's writing for the piano was completely revolutionary. The technical challenges for the pianist were never the same after Beethoven.¹

However, in Beethoven's vast output, there is no composition that resembles an etude or an exercise; but there is one composition that incorporates many of Beethoven's technical innovations- the *Eroica* Variations, Op. 35.

Although this work is not performed as often as Beethoven's other works, the piece is unique and innovative in several ways. The theme and its presentation are unlike any other piano works in the standard repertoire. It is amazing to consider how much music Beethoven could generate from a simple idea.

The Eroica

Beethoven composed the *Eroica* Variations, Op. 35 in 1802. During the early 1800s, the variation form was not regarded highly by those who were seeking serious music. At that time, variations were often figurative elaborations of the theme. The theme often employed a simple "fixed" harmonic and melodic pattern that was not too complicated in order for the variations to be recognizable.² Variations were also perceived as more approachable music for amateurs. Beethoven's "*Eroica*" Variations was the first serious large-scale composition based on the

¹ The technical challenges include hand crossing, triplet arpeggios, broken octaves, pedaling, double notes, slurred chords, jumps, trill and extended left hand arpeggios, all will be discussed in more details in chapter 3.

² Carl Dahlhaus, *Ludwig van Beethoven, Approaches to his Music* (Clarendon Press, 1991), 156.

variation form. Beethoven composed the *Eroica* Variations, Op. 35 in “an entirely new manner,” as he said in his letter to the publishing firm *Breitkopf und Härtel*.³

The Theme

The theme of the variations was also used in the Finale of Beethoven’s ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*, Act II, No. 16 (1801), in the *Contradanse*, WoO 14 No. 7 for orchestra (1802) and in the Finale of the Third Symphony “*Eroica*”, Op. 55 (1804).

The *Eroica* Variations, Op. 35 is unique in terms of its treatment and its presentation of the theme. The theme begins with the “bass line,” the *Basso del Tema*, then progresses to two voices, three voices, four voices and eventually to the “real” theme, a new melody above the existing bass line. This process was adapted from his ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*, representing the gradual creation of life forms by Prometheus.⁴ The procedure was also used in the *Eroica* Symphony Finale as well.

The image displays four musical examples in 3/4 time, showing the progression of the theme from a single bass line to a full melody. Each example is labeled on the left: *A due*, *A tre*, *A quattro*, and *Tema*. The notation includes treble and bass staves with dynamic markings like *p* and *mf*. The *Tema* section is marked with a first ending bracket and a *dolce* marking.

Example 1, *A due*, *A tre*, *A quattro* and *Tema*, respectively, note that the bass line continually moves up in register as it progresses.⁵

³ Lewis Lockwood, *Beethoven, the Music and the Life* (W.W. Norton and Company, 2003), 140.

⁴ Lockwood, *Beethoven, the Music and the Life*, 150.

⁵ All the musical examples of the *Eroica* Variations in this lecture document were taken from *Ludwig van Beethovens Werke, Variationen für das Pianoforte* (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1862-90).

It is also interesting to note that the ending of the *Basso del Tema* generates the beginning of the “real” theme or vice versa (as shown below).⁶

The image contains two musical excerpts, A and B, in E-flat major. Excerpt A shows the end of the *Basso del Tema*, featuring a bass line with a four-note motif (E-flat, C, B-flat, A) and a treble line with a similar motif. Excerpt B shows the beginning of the “real” theme, starting with a piano introduction and a main theme marked *TEMA.* with a *dolce* marking. The two excerpts are connected by a double bar line, indicating their relationship.

Example 2, A) The end of the *Basso del Tema*, B) The beginning of the “real” theme.

The Variations

The *Eroica* Variations, Op. 35 consists of fifteen variations and a fugue. It is fascinating to consider how much music Beethoven could create from a bass theme comprising of four notes. Interestingly, the piece does not modulate extensively, staying mostly in its original key of E-Flat Major, its relative minor key of C Minor and its parallel minor key of E-Flat Minor.

Beethoven treated a number of variations conventionally, including the figurative variations (Variation 1, 2 and 4), the *minore* Variation 14 and the penultimate adagio Variation 15. However, some are treated unconventionally including the unstable Variation 6 (which begins with C Minor and ends in E-Flat Major) and the fugue.⁷

In these variations, the continuity and the organization are an integral part of the process of composition. The variations can be grouped on many levels, from a single variation to a larger unit consisting of two or more variations to the overall arch form of the composition.⁸

⁶ Christopher Reynolds, “Beethoven’s Sketches for the Variations in E-Flat Major Op. 35,” in *Beethoven Studies 3*, ed. Alan Tyson (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 52.

⁷ Thomas Sipe, *Beethoven: Eroica Symphony* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 18.

⁸ Christopher Reynolds, “Beethoven’s Sketches for the Variations in E-Flat Major, Op. 35,” in *Beethoven Studies 3*, ed. Alan Tyson (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 49-50.

During a performance of the *Eroica* Variations, Op. 35, the pianist must organize the variations into groups. Some groups are already “composed” and are fairly obvious, such as Variation 6 and 7 and Variation 14 and 15 (both pairs contain a lead-in into the next variation). The opening section from the *Basso del Tema* up to the *Tema* is also a compositional unit.

Several factors can help the pianist decide on how to organize the *Eroica* Variations, including changes in the tempo, changes in the configuration and changes of mode. The following is a chart with suggested performance grouping:

Group		Notes
Group 1	The theme, from the <i>Basso del Tema</i> up to the <i>Tema</i>	The pianist should note that the tempo marking <i>Allegretto vivace</i> is the only tempo marking that Beethoven indicated in the score.
Group 2	Variation 1 to Variation 4	Variations that are based on configurations (arpeggios, arpeggios in triplets, scales and hand crossing).
Group 3	Variation 5	A stand-alone variation. The tempo and the character of Variation 5 are entirely different from the preceding and the following variation. Beethoven adapted materials from this variation and transferred it to the penultimate slow variation of the <i>Eroica</i> Symphony Finale.
Group 4	Variation 6 to Variation 10	After the tender ending of Variation 5, Beethoven shocks us with the orchestral C Minor Variation 6. Variation 6 is unstable in its key scheme,

<p>Group 4 (continued from the previous page)</p>		<p>containing both C Minor (in the opening) and E-Flat Major (in the second half).</p> <p>Group 4 is very varied, this group contains the unstable Variation 6, the canon at an octave Variation 7, the spiritual <i>Waldstein</i>-like Variation 8, the festive Variation 9 (in which the <i>Basso del Tema</i> is embedded as grace notes) and Variation 10 (in which for the first and the only time, the B section does not follow the harmonic scheme). (refer to Example 3 on page 6)</p>
<p>Group 5</p>	<p>Variation 11 to Variation 13</p>	<p>A break from Variation 10 into Variation 11 could be justified due to the change of character into the charming scherzo opera-like Variation 11, departing from the harmonically-different B section of Variation 10.</p>
<p>Group 6</p>	<p>Variation 14 to Variation 15</p>	<p>The grouping of Variation 14 and 15 is a given due to the lead-in linking them together. Going into Variation 14 from Variation 13 requires a break due to the change of the mode, from the Tonic Major to the Tonic Minor, and because there is also a lot of energy in Variation 13.</p>
<p>Group 7</p>	<p><i>Fuga</i></p>	<p>The break before the <i>Fuga</i> is needed for several reasons. The coda of Variation 15 ends in G</p>

<p>Group 7 (continued from the previous page)</p>		<p>Major; in order to get into E-Flat Major, we need a brief pause (which is written in by Beethoven). The <i>Fuga</i> theme has to give the effect that it is being heard for the first time, which is much easier to achieve with a brief silence. A break will also help the pianist's mental and physical stamina; the <i>Fuga</i> will be long and the preceding variation is also the longest of the set.</p>
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A) 

B) 

C) 

Example 3, Group 4 (Variation 6-10), A) Variation 8: Beethoven marks the entire phrase with one pedal, disregarding the change of harmonies in order to create a mystical effect, B) Variation 9: with the *Basso del Tema* embedded as grace notes, C) Variation 10: the first and the only time that the first four measures of the B section do not end in V7 but rather in vii diminished instead.

II. The *Eroica* Variations and the *Eroica* Symphony Finale

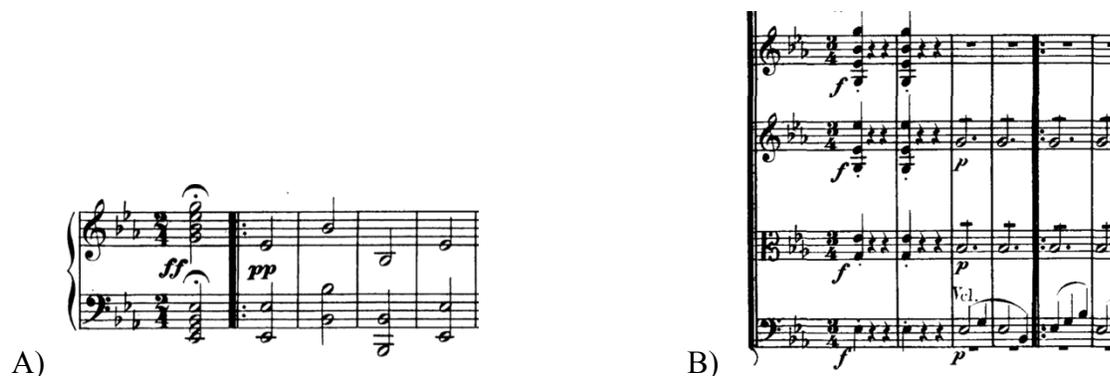
To fully understand the *Eroica* Variations, Op. 35, the *Eroica* Symphony Finale should also be examined. The *Eroica* Symphony, Op. 55 was completed in 1804, two years after the composition of the piano variations. The piano variations and the *Eroica* Symphony Finale both use variation form and are based on the same theme. Several connections are apparent; some are strikingly clear and some are subtler. In the following section, we will explore the two works' melodic relationships, compare the overall arch form and the key schemes and explore the instrumentation of the Symphony Finale. The Finale instrumentation can reveal the orchestral sounds Beethoven might have had in mind while composing the piano variations. This affects the pianist's decisions about technique and sound production.

The Form

The two works use the same theme; both themes are developed using the same approach, beginning with the *Basso del Tema* building up to the "real" theme with additional voices joining in as the theme progresses. However, compared to the Symphony Finale, the piano variations contain an additional stage having the *Basso del Tema*, *A due*, *A tre* and *A quattro*, versus the Symphony Finale which technically has only the *Basso del Tema*, *A tre* and *A quattro*. The Symphony Finale also contains an introduction leading into the *Basso del Tema*, whereas in the piano variations, the piece begins with the big tonic chord and no introduction.

Interestingly, the opening gesture in the First Movement of the *Eroica* Symphony uses a chord that is almost identical to the opening chord of the piano variations. Leonard Bernstein referred to the *Eroica* Symphony's opening as "whiplashes that shattered the elegant formality of the 18th Century." The beginning of both pieces embraced Bernstein's idea of "complexity within simplicity," both openings were based on a simple tonic chord which is arpeggiated to

become the theme for the Symphony 1st movement and the *Basso del Tema* for the piano variations.^{9 10}



Example 3, A) The opening of the *Eroica* Variations, Op. 35, B) The opening of the *Eroica* Symphony.¹¹

The Symphony Finale begins with the introduction in the “wrong” key of G Minor, followed by the *Basso del Tema*, ten variations and a coda. Compared to the piano variations, the Symphony Finale is more adventurous in its key scheme and is more complex in the transitions from one variation to the other.

The following chart describes the form of the *Eroica* Symphony Finale:

	Measure	Notes
Introduction	mm. 1-11	In the “wrong” key of G Minor.
<i>Basso del Tema</i>	mm. 12-44	
Variation 1	mm. 45-59	Compared to the piano variations, the <i>Basso del Tema</i> proceeds straight to <i>A tre</i> skipping <i>A due</i> .
Variation 2	mm. 60-75	<i>A quattro</i> .

⁹ Leonard Bernstein, *The Infinite Variety of Music* (Simon and Schuster, 1966), 196-198.

¹⁰ David Epstein, *Beyond Orpheus: Studies in Musical Structure* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1979), 111-112.

¹¹ All the musical examples of the Symphony Finale in this lecture document were taken from an edition by Braunschweig: Henry Litolff’s Verlag, n.d. (ca. 1880).

Variation 3	mm. 76-107	The “real” theme, <i>Tema</i> .
Transition	mm. 107-116	Modulates from E-Flat Major to C Minor.
Variation 4	mm. 117-174	Fugal treatment.
Variation 5	mm. 175-210	The “real” theme is presented in D Major.
Variation 6	mm. 211-256	In G Minor, the rhythmic march does not resemble any material from the piano variations. This variation could also be perceived as the center of the Finale movement.
Variation 7	mm. 256-277	The “real” theme is presented in C Major.
Variation 8	mm. 278-348	The inversion of the <i>Basso del Tema</i> . The presentation of the inversion in Variation 8 is similar to the inversion in the <i>Fuga</i> of the piano variations in terms of texture. In the <i>Fuga</i> of the piano variations, the inversion is presented towards the middle of the <i>Fuga</i> where the texture becomes significantly thinner (see Example 4 on page 10).
Variation 9	mm. 348-395	
Variation 10	mm. 396- 430	Mm. 396 is the starting point of Variation 10. Variation 10 could be perceived as something else entirely including the codetta of Variation 9, a transition or a developmental episode.

Coda	mm. 431- the end	The coda begins with the material from the introduction and uses diminution towards the end, a similar approach to the piano variations <i>Fuga</i> .
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A)

B)

Example 4, Variation 8 (mm. 278-348), A) The inversion in the Symphony Finale's Variation 8. Notice the sudden change in the dynamic and the texture right where the inversion occurs, B) The inversion in the *Fuga* of the piano variations.

The Instrumentation

By examining the instrumentation of the Symphony Finale, pianists can gain insight into the orchestral sounds Beethoven may have had in mind when composing the earlier piano variations. Pianists can imagine Beethoven's "mental orchestra" for the *Eroica* Variations.

The *Basso del Tema* is divided into two sections containing eight measures each. The first half ends on V and the second half, which contains the dramatic suspense and echoes ends on I. However, the notation of the *Basso del Tema* is different between the two works. In the

piano variations, the *Basso del Tema* is notated in half notes in contrast to pizzicato eighth notes in the strings in the Symphony Finale. Due to the nature of the piano, the initial attack could serve as the plucking gesture of the strings and could be the reason why Beethoven notated the *Basso del Tema* in half notes rather than eighth notes in the piano variations.



Example 5, A) The *Basso del Tema* in the Symphony Finale, B) The *Basso del Tema* in the *Eroica* Variations.

The piano variations also use repeat signs, inviting the pianist to invent musically interesting repeats. However, in the Symphony Finale, Beethoven composed echoes and syncopations into the repeats (in the higher voices, such as woodwinds), perhaps something pianists can keep in mind while performing the piano variations. Interestingly, in the piano variations, the dramatic rests were notated in the orchestral style; this could serve as a further evidence Beethoven conceived the *Basso del Tema* with an orchestral sound in mind.



The first variation of the Symphony Finale provides the same effect as the piano variations *A tre* (having jumps between registers), first violins and cellos take turn conversing

while the second violins play the *Basso del Tema*. This suggests that the pianist should recreate the ultra-legato string effect during the hand crossing in *A tre* variation.

The *A quattro* variation for piano and Variation 2 of the Symphony Finale also create the same effect; however, the second violins in the Symphony Finale play triplets in contrast to the double notes in the alto part of the piano variations *A quattro*. Both are preceded by similar lead-ins and contain canonic element in the latter half of the variation.

The alto voice of the *Tema* in the piano variations uses the same pitches as the first and the second violins of the Symphony Finale’s Variation 3. Also, a fragment from the right hand of Variation 1 can be found embedded in the first violin of the “real” theme in the Symphony Finale.

A) Variation 1 of the piano variations, showing a piano introduction with a treble clef and bass clef. B) Fragment from the *Tema* of the piano variations, showing a piano introduction with a treble clef and bass clef, marked *cresc.* C) The “real” theme (Variation 3) of the Symphony Finale, showing a piano introduction with a treble clef and bass clef, marked *p* and *Bassi.*, and a later section marked *cresc.* and *sf*.

Example 6, A) Variation 1 of the piano variations, B) Fragment from the *Tema* of the piano variations, C) The “real” theme (Variation 3) of the Symphony Finale, note that it contains the materials from A) and B) in Violin 1 and Violin 2.

The cello part of the second half from the Symphony Finale’s Variation 3 is similar to the left hand of Variation 4, suggesting the pianist can imitate the cello in the left hand while the right hand teases the left hand in a genial way.



Example 7, A) The second half of the Symphony Finale's Variation 3, B) Variation 4 of the piano variations.

The C Minor Variation 4 of the Symphony Finale follows the same key scheme as Variation 6 for the piano, however, Beethoven bases the Symphony Finale Variation 4 on the *Basso del Tema*, as opposed to the “real” theme the piano variations Variation 6 is based on.

Variation 8 of the Symphony Finale uses the inversion and the augmentation of the *Basso del Tema*. This idea was perhaps derived from the piano variations *Fuga*, suggesting that the pianist imitate the brass sonority where *Sf* is marked in the *Fuga*.



Example 8, A) The *ff* *Basso del Tema* in the *Fuga* of the piano variations, B) The *ff* *Basso del Tema* orchestrated for the brass instruments and woodwinds, Variation 8 of the Symphony Finale.

Variation 9 of the Symphony Finale was possibly suggested by Variation 5 for the piano. In terms of form, the variation acts as the slow section before the final part of the composition, the coda. Variation 9 could be compared to the slow variation Variation 15 of the piano variations, which precedes the *Fuga*. It is possible that Beethoven used Variation 5 of the piano variations as the material for the penultimate variation of the Symphony Finale. Beethoven shifts the piano variations Variation 5 which occurs towards the beginning of the composition to the end of the composition (the penultimate variation), yet the penultimate variation of the Symphony Finale seems to be where it properly belongs.

The instrumentation of the Symphony Finale's Variation 9 uses mostly woodwinds. The pianist can approach the piano variations Variation 5 with the sonority of woodwind instruments in mind, especially when the music shifts register.

A1) *Poco Andante.* - 106. Fl., Ob., Cl., Fag. *p con espressione*

B1) *pp*

A2) Fl., Ob., Cl.

B2)

Example 9, A1) The beginning of Variation 9, Symphony Finale, A2) The latter half of Variation 9, Symphony Finale, B1) The first half of Variation 5, the *Eroica* Variations, B2) The latter half of Variation 5, the *Eroica* Variations.

The endings of the piano variations and the Symphony Finale are similar, with the initial materials re-stated (the piano variations bring back the real theme half way through the *Fuga*,

while the Symphony Finale brings back the Introduction) and both use the diminution of the “real” theme towards the end.



Example 10, A) The diminution towards the end from the Symphony Finale, B) The diminution towards the end from the piano variations.

Beethoven stayed mostly within the tonic E-Flat Major in the overall key scheme of the piano variations, using only the relative key of C Minor in Variation 6 and E-Flat Minor in Variation 14. Instead of modulating, Beethoven focused on the use of piano figurations to characterize each variation. The Symphony Finale, on the other hand, modulates extensively and has more transitions (Variation 4 in C Minor, Variation 5 in D Major, Variation 6 in G Minor and Variation 7 in C Major). The two works share an overall arch form. The piano variations bring back the “real” theme in the *Fuga*, while the coda of the Symphony Finale brings back the Introduction. Both works also employ the use of a slow penultimate variation.

The following is a comparison between the piano variations and the Symphony Finale:

	Piano Variations, Op. 35	<i>Eroica</i> Symphony Finale
The Introduction	Does not have an introduction, started off with the grand E-Flat Major tonic chord.	Contains an introduction, the introduction is in the “wrong” key of G Minor and ends on the V of E-

		Flat Major, in contrast to the piano variations opening chord in I of E-Flat Major.
<i>Basso del Tema</i>	Notated in half notes.	Notated in eighth notes strings pizzicato with eighth note rests, the written out repeat is in a syncopated manner.
The “real” theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tema</i>, introduced after adding in voices: <i>Basso del Tema</i> → <i>A due</i> → <i>A tre</i> → <i>A quattro</i> → <i>Tema</i>. • The right hand from Variation 1. • The alto part from the right hand of the <i>Tema</i>. • The left hand from Variation 4. • The “real” theme is mostly presented in the tonic key, it is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variation 3 is the “real” theme. → Embedded in the Violin 1 of Variation 3. → Shows up in the Violin 1 and Violin 2 of Variation 3. → Becomes the Cello part of Variation 3. • The “real” theme is presented in several keys including E-Flat Major

<p>The “real” theme (continued from the previous page)</p>	<p>presented twice (in the <i>Tema</i> and in the middle of the <i>Fuga</i>).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • However, the “real” theme is presented in C Minor in Variation 6. 	<p>(Variation 3), D Major (Variation 5) and C Major (Variation 7).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variation 4 is in C Minor but the “real” theme was not presented, instead Variation 4 focused mainly on the fugal aspect of the <i>Basso del Tema</i>.
<p>Slow variation</p>	<p>The entirety of Variation 5.</p>	<p>→ Similar to the materials from Variation 9.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The penultimate variation • The ending 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The slow penultimate Variation 15 before the <i>Fuga</i>. • The <i>Fuga</i> brings back the “real” theme and uses diminution at the end. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The slow penultimate Variation 9 before the coda. • The coda starts off with the Introduction, it also uses the diminution of the “real” theme towards the end.

III. The *Eroica* Variations: Technical Considerations

For an advanced pianist, the *Eroica* Variations is an ideal piece to study many of the virtuosic techniques Beethoven employs in his works for the piano – “Etudes” for the study of Beethoven’s techniques. In these variations, the “technique” is of paramount importance and is an integral part of the music itself. The pianist has to master the technical challenges in order to create the nuances, articulations and sonorities of the piece. In the *Eroica* Variations, the physical aspect of the technique is a vital, central and crucial part of the interpretation.

The following are the technical challenges presented in the *Eroica* Variations, with other selected keyboard compositions by Beethoven that are related regarding the technical aspects they present:

- *A tre* • A study in hand crossing.



With the *Basso del Tema* played by the right hand, the left hand has to cross over in order to play both the soprano and the bass line. The cross over of the left hand poses difficulties for the pianist due to the awkward fingerings and the lack of time to get back into the position. Redistribution of the hands is highly recommended.

- *A quattro* • A study in alternating double notes and legato slurs.



The soprano line in the right hand uses the *Basso del Tema* as the melody with alternating double notes in the alto voice as the accompaniment. This technique can be played with a relaxed and a slight tilt of the wrist.

The latter half of *A quattro* has legato slurs both in the right and the left hand, presented in a canonic style. The legato slurs can be played with the parallel motion of the wrist. According to Czerny, Beethoven favored legato playing, playing with a close hand-position and also demanded fullness of tone.



• Tema



Example 11, A) The “real” theme, with the *Basso del Tema*, B) The latter half of the “real” theme.

In the latter half of the “real” theme, the left hand requires finger flexibility and independence (the *Basso del Tema* in the bass is accompanied by the moving tenor voice).

- *Var. 2* • A study in fast bravura triplet arpeggios.



It is highly recommended that the pianist play this passage as a big gesture (to be more accurate, one gesture per measure or one motion per direction without too much wrist movement).

- *Var. 3* • A study of hand crossing featuring chords.



Variation 3 is difficult because of the chords with hand crossing, giving the pianist very little time to get back into the position after the big leaps.

- *Var. 4* • The left hand has a semi-legato cello-like passage, while the right hand requires the pianist to quickly get into the position before playing the next chord.



- *Var. 6* • A study in broken octaves in the left hand.



Beethoven used broken octave technique in many of his compositions.

The pianist should use a lighter thumb and play the broken octaves in groups of two sixteenth notes.

- *Var. 7* • A study in pedaling and hand crossing.



This variation requires just the right amount of the pedal. Beethoven indicated a single pedal through an entire phrase, disregarding the change in harmonies. The blending of the pedal gives a mystical and spiritual effect to the music.

- *Var. 9* • A study in rising and falling double notes.



This variation requires the pianist to group the double notes into a larger technical gesture. Play with curved fingers, slightly pulling in the fingers and touching the keys before playing while moving the wrist sideways.

- *Var. 10* • A study in slurred, fast sixteenth notes.



The pianist has to be careful with the consistency of the tone and the balance between the two notes in the slur. This variation also poses a challenge in phrasing due to its highly disjointed nature.

- *Var. 12* • A study in slurred dichords.



To play this series of slurred chords, the pianist should be aware of the fingering (Beethoven favored consistent fingerings for repetitive or similar figurations¹² but the pianist should also take into the account the shape of the individual hand). The slurred chords should not be played with too much bouncing of the hand and the pianist should be very precise with the rhythm.

- *Var. 13* • A study of jumps.



Moving into the position as quickly as possible and touching the keys before playing is recommended.

- *Var. 15* • A study in Beethoven's *expressivo* playing. This variation is improvisatory in nature and has to be played freely. Perhaps a quote by Ernst Pauer on Beethoven's piano playing could sum up what this variation is about:

¹² William Newman, *Beethoven on Beethoven, Playing His Piano Music His Way* (W.W. Norton and Company, 1988), 288.

“They say that...in his playing, the passages, the execution, the technical appliances, disappeared before the transcendent effect and the meaning of the music...”¹³

• *Fuga* Study of various techniques:

• *Trill*



The right hand contains the trill in the lower voice with the melody on top. Measured trill practice is recommended for the pianist. Suggested fingerings for the trill are: 1 2 1 2, beginning with 1 on A going up to B-Flat and then to C.

• *Extended left hand arpeggios*



The arpeggios can be played with an open hand position, however, crossing the thumb over would be a more appropriate and plausible option for pianists with smaller hands.

¹³ Gerig, *Famous Pianists and their Techniques*, 98.

- *Broken octaves in triplets*



The broken octaves in triplets should be approached differently from the regular broken octaves. The triplets force the pianist to put the pressure on both the thumb and the fifth finger. This technique requires the rotation of the wrist (similar to turning a door knob).

The Eroica Variations in Relation to Beethoven's Other Works

The following is a table featuring selected variations in comparison to Beethoven's other works that require similar techniques:

	Technique	Works with similar technique¹⁴
<i>A quattro</i>	<p>The <i>Basso del Tema</i> is presented in the soprano line, while the alto line presents the alternating double notes.</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Op. 31 No. 3, II: <p>The scherzo movement is in sonata form rather than the usual ternary form. The left hand of the second theme presents a similar technique to <i>A quattro</i>. The technique requires a relaxed and slight tilt of the wrist (example on the next page).</p>

¹⁴ The musical examples from Op. 31 No. 1, Op. 31 No. 3, Op. 37, Op. 53, Op. 73 and Op. 106 were taken from *Ludwig van Beethovens Werke, Sonaten für das Pianoforte*, Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1862.

	(continued from the previous page)	
<p><i>Tema</i></p>	<p>The <i>Tema</i> presents the “real” theme in the soprano line with the accompanying double notes in the alto line.</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Op. 31 No. 1, I: <p>In the closing theme, the right hand has a similar rhythmic pattern and musical texture to the right hand of the <i>Tema</i>.</p> 
<p>Var. 6</p>	<p>Broken octaves:</p> <p>Fast broken octaves were one of the techniques that Beethoven employed in several of his compositions.</p>	<p>Among others:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Op. 2 No. 3, I: <p>Both hands have broken octaves at the end of the exposition and the recapitulation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Op. 19, III: <p>Broken octaves are in the B part of the ABACABA rondo form.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Op. 28, III: <p>Broken octaves are in the left hand of the Trio section.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Op. 37, III: <p>The Finale of the Concerto No. 3 has broken octaves at the end of the coda.</p>

	<p>Broken octaves (continued from the previous page)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Op. 106, I: Broken octaves are in the left hand at the end of the exposition and in both hands before the coda.
<p>Var. 8</p>	<p>Pedaling and hand crossing: Variation 8 has passages with hand crossing (with different articulation among the two hands). Beethoven marked the entire phrase with one pedal marking disregarding the change of harmonies.</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Op. 53, III: The first theme has pedal markings by Beethoven similar to the one in Variation 8, a single pedal marked through an entire phrase.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Op. 73, II: "Emperor" Concerto At the piano entrance, one pedal marking was marked through an entire phrase, even though the phrase contains one harmony, the melody in the right hand contains several non-chord tones. 

Fuga

Trill:

The pianist has to play the trill with a very relaxed wrist while staying in motion.



• Op. 53, III:

The right hand has two voices, the lower voice has the trill while the upper voice has the melody.



• Op. 106, I:

Right before the coda, both hands have moving lines in the outer voices (the soprano and the bass line) while the inner voices have trills.



• Op. 37, I: Third Piano Concerto cadenza:

The same technique is required to play the long trill in the cadenza leading into the coda.



Conclusion

It would take a significant portion of one's life and an absolute dedication to study all or most of Beethoven's keyboard works to master all of the piano techniques we find in Beethoven's compositions. The *Eroica* Variations, Op. 35 is a fascinating piece to learn and to perform, especially since it embodies several challenges from Beethoven's other piano works for us to study, both technically and musically.

The mastery of Beethoven's piano techniques is essential in order to play Beethoven's compositions. As Liszt supposedly said "you must have more technique than you actually need in order to play Beethoven". The *Eroica* Variations serve as a technical pathway, leading to the mastery of Beethoven's piano techniques.

I sincerely hope that this lecture document about the *Eroica* Variations will serve as a guide for pianists who are interested in learning the *Eroica* Variations, as well as a starting point towards mastering Beethoven's piano techniques.

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