

## The Transcriber's Art – #55

Ludvig van Beethoven

by Richard Yates

*“Next is lot number 105, the autograph score of Herr Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. Will someone start the bidding at five florins?”*

The exact words are not recorded, and they would of course have been in German, but the auction was real. Nearly five months after the composer’s death in March of 1827, a small group of music dealers met to compete for the manuscripts and printed scores in Beethoven’s estate. The proceeds generally exceeded the appraised values and the Fifth Symphony manuscript went for six florins. Establishing a dollar equivalent over the span of a couple centuries is imprecise at best, but six florins then had roughly the same purchasing power as \$138 today. For slightly more you could have come away with 16 of his assorted socks and 8 pairs of trousers.

If that was a bit more than you wanted to spend, you could wait for lot 157, *“Two complete small pieces for pianoforte from his early period,”* which was taken for the appraised value of a single florin—about \$23. These two pieces most likely went to the music and art dealer Dominik Artaria but there is no record of his having published them. The first complete edition of Beethoven’s compositions from Breitkopf & Härtel, published 1862–65, includes two “light” sonatas that may be the ones from lot 157. The Kinsky-Halm catalog of 1955 includes them as two sonatinas in an appendix of pieces whose attribution had been questioned. While there has been no definitive resolution of this matter, the two sonatinas have enjoyed considerable success in collections of easy piano music. This longevity is due their attractive melodies and elegant construction. Dozens of editions are currently available, with nearly all listed as having been written by the master.

### **Sonatina, Anh. 5, No. 1**

Originally in the key of G major, the *Sonatina* is divided into two sections, the first labeled *Moderato* in 4/4 time, and the second is a *Romance* 6/8 time. Both movements follow the common architecture of sonatinas. They are shorter, lighter in character and technically easier than full sonata movements. And while their structure is a sonata form, the small scope leaves scant room for a true development section.

Keyboard sonatinas typically have a two-voice texture with a repeated arpeggio pattern in the bass that supports a more freely ranging melody. This is entirely idiomatic for the piano, but not for the guitar. The transverse shifts needed to reach the melody can wreak havoc with the fingering of the bass pattern and add awkwardness at best and unplayability at worst. But sometimes everything falls into place, as in this passage from a sonatina by Friedrich Kuhlau.

[Insert figure 1]

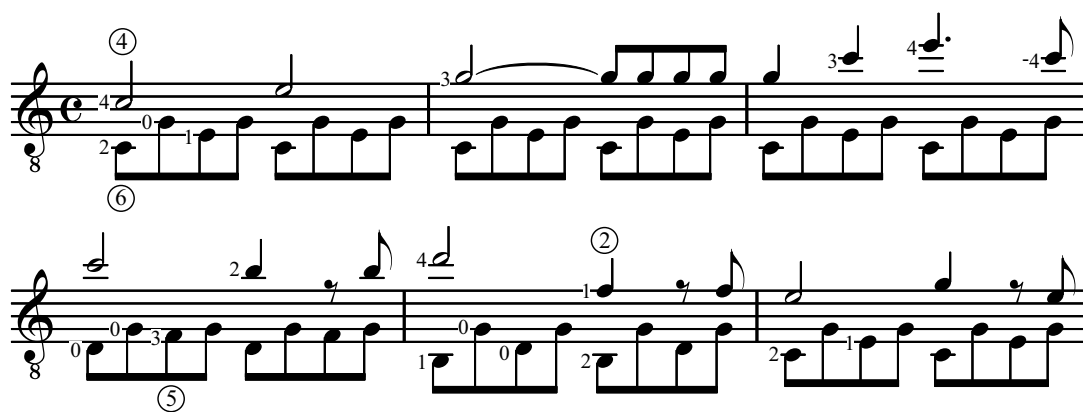


Figure 1

But this comfortable and typical beginning soon turns ungainly and nearly impossible. The sonatina may be the keyboard form that most often both tantalizes and frustrates a guitar transcriber. The trick in transcribing them is simply to look at many to find the ones that sit most naturally. The good news is that there are hundreds to sort through. CD Sheet Music has a disc of a thousand pages devoted entirely to “Sonatinas and Easy Classics,” and the online International Music Score Library Project returns hundreds of pages on a search of the keyword “sonatina.” Composers that stand out in this genre include Clementi, Kuhlau, Dussek, Diabelli, Gurlitt and Lichner.

The most rewarding approach to transcription is to entirely preserve the contour of the melody and make judicious octave transpositions of the bass as needed. As Spencer Doidge noted years ago in this series, a note in any octave can function effectively as the bass as long as it is below the melody. Attention must be paid however to retaining the particular inversion of the harmony. It is usually not convincing to transpose upwards only the lowest note of a bass pattern. More often, moving middle notes upward preserves the harmonic inversion, allows easier fingering and also avoids the muddy, bass-heavy accompaniment that can be a pitfall on the relatively low-pitched guitar. An example of this technique occurs in the final section of the first movement of the Beethoven *Sonatina*.

[Insert figure 2]



Figure 2

Another technique that can often yield a playable guitar transcription is to thin out chords in the accompaniment into single notes. This may have no essential effect on the harmonic support but greatly ease technical difficulty and lighten the texture. The

original score and the transcription of the opening of the second movement of the Beethoven *Sonatina* show this method deployed to good effect. Note that in the original, the accompaniment becomes single notes throughout most of the piece, so this modification in the transcription blends invisibly with the later texture.

[Insert figure 3]

The image displays a musical score for the opening of the second movement of Beethoven's *Sonatina*. It is divided into two parts: 'Guitar transcription' and 'Piano original'. The 'Guitar transcription' is written on a single staff in treble clef, featuring a melody with eighth-note patterns and rests. The 'Piano original' is written on two staves, treble and bass clef. The piano part consists of a melody in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef, which includes chords and single notes. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 6/8.

Figure 3

I have posted mp3 recordings of both movements of the *Sonatina* on my web site. Go to: <http://www.yatesguitar.com/Soundboard/sonatina.html>

Please send comments, suggestions or your transcriptions to:

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# Sonatina in G

Anh. 5, No. 1

Transcribed for guitar  
by Richard Yates

Ludvig van Beethoven  
(1770–1827)

**Moderato**

⑥=D

*p*

4

7

10

13

16

19

*dolce*

22

Musical staff for measures 22-24. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 8/8. The melody consists of eighth notes and quarter notes. The bass line features a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

25

②

25

Musical staff for measures 25-27. Includes fingering numbers (2, 1, 4, 4, 3, 3, 2, 2, 1) and a circled '2' above the first measure. The melody continues with eighth notes. The bass line includes some chords and eighth notes.

*mf*

28

Musical staff for measures 28-30. Includes fingering numbers (-4, -2, -1, 4, 3, 2, 1, 4, 3, 2). The melody continues with eighth notes. The bass line includes some chords and eighth notes.

31

①

31

Musical staff for measures 31-33. Includes fingering numbers (3, 1, 3, 4, 2) and circled '1' and '2' above the first and second measures. The melody continues with eighth notes. The bass line includes some chords and eighth notes.

Romance - Allegretto

Musical staff for measures 34-38. Includes fingering numbers (2, 0, -1, 2, 4, -4, 3, 0) and a circled 'II' above the second measure. The melody continues with eighth notes. The bass line includes some chords and eighth notes.

39

Musical staff for measures 39-42. Includes fingering numbers (2, 4, 7, 1, 2, -1, 2, 4) and circled '2' and '1' above the second and third measures. The melody continues with eighth notes. The bass line includes some chords and eighth notes.

43

IV IX VII

43

Musical staff for measures 43-46. Includes fingering numbers (-2, 2, 4, 4, 3, 4, -4, 1) and circled Roman numerals IV, IX, and VII above the second, third, and fourth measures. The melody continues with eighth notes. The bass line includes some chords and eighth notes.

47 <sup>③</sup> <sup>①</sup>

51 <sup>③</sup> <sup>②</sup> <sup>②</sup>

55 <sup>③</sup> <sup>④</sup> <sup>①</sup>

58 II

61

65 *p*

69 <sup>③</sup> <sup>③</sup> <sup>②</sup> <sup>①</sup>

73 <sup>②</sup> VII<sub>3</sub>