

# “O Hope...”

Archduke Rudolph as Composer of Variations on an Original Theme by Ludwig van Beethoven

Johann Sonnleitner (JS) and Anton Voigt (AV)  
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In this presentation Johann Sonnleitner and I want to introduce you to Variations on an Original Theme of Ludwig van Beethoven by Archduke Rudolph of Habsburg. Many aspects regarding this topic cannot be covered due to lack of time, such as Beethoven’s life circumstances between 1818 and 1821; the compositions which were in his mind at that time; and the relevance of the term “hope”, to name but a few.

Contents:

- Rudolph’s life (an overview);
- Beethoven and Rudolph: patron, pupil, friend;
- Samples from the Variations;
- Johann Sonnleitner on Metronome markings and open questions;
- More Variations and part of the finale fugue.
- References.

Archduke Rudolph (1788–1831)

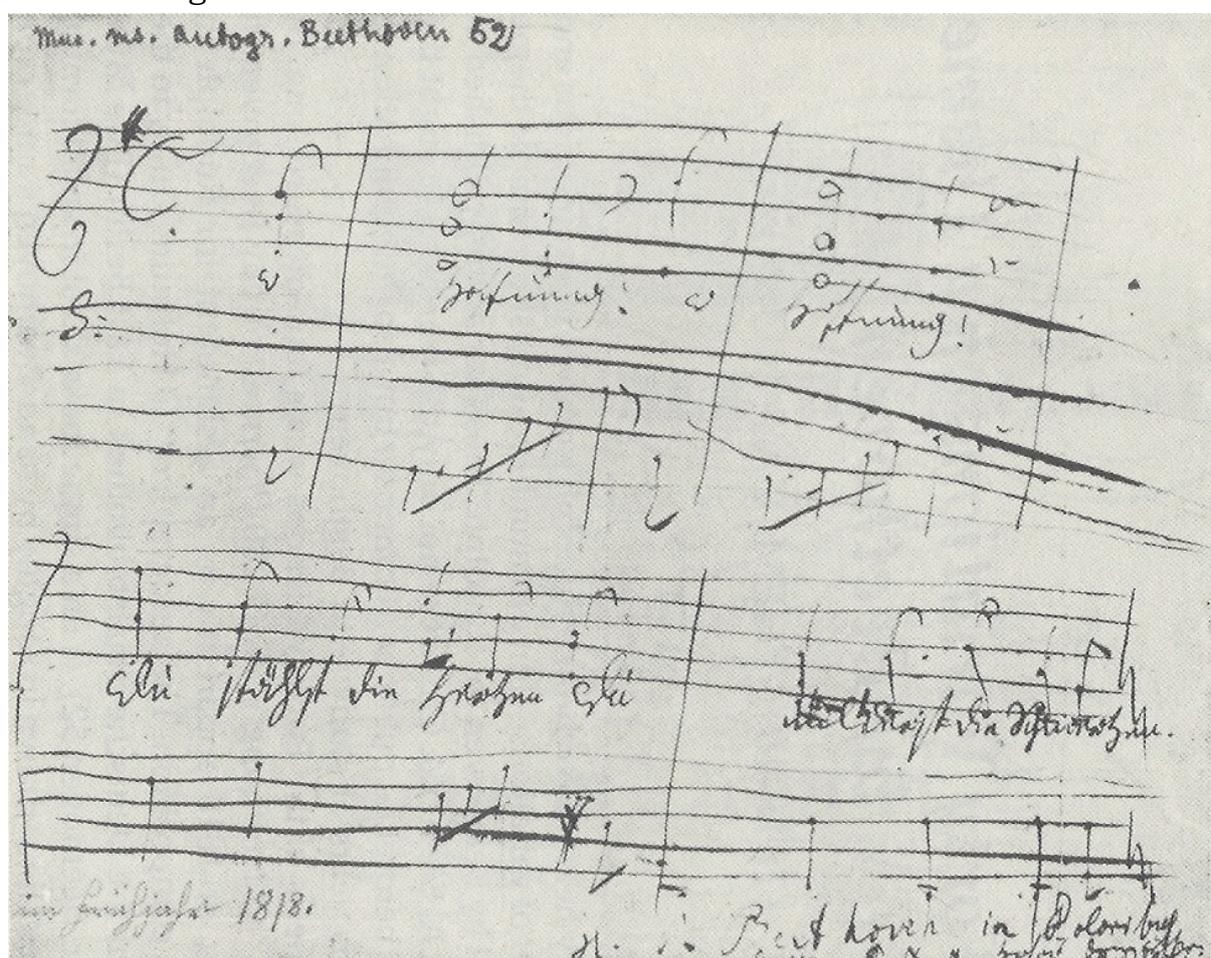
was the youngest child of Leopold II. and his wife, Maria Ludovica of Spain. At the sudden death of Emperor Josephs II. in 1790 Leopold entered the throne and the family moved to Vienna. When two years later both Leopold and his wife died, Franz Joseph Karl not only succeeded his father as Emperor, but had to care for his 15 orphan siblings. Franz was a music lover, enjoying himself as violin player in string quartets by Joseph Haydn. His second wife, Maria-Theresia of Naples-Sicily, was an excellent singer (e.g. in oratories by Joseph Haydn) and commissioned works of Michael Haydn (the so-called *Salzburg Haydn*). A musical environment for Rudolph! Because of ill health a training as military man was quit, and it was decided that Rudolph should become a clergy man.

Acquaintance with Beethoven dates from appr. 1803 and lasted all the years till Beethoven’s death in 1827, though Rudolph in 1819 became a Cardinal and Arch-Bishop of Olmuetz. According to Ferdinand Ries, Beethoven claimed that besides him (Ries) “no-one could really claim to be called a student of Beethoven”.

Noteworthy are the many compositions which Beethoven dedicated to Rudolph: Piano Concertos No. 4 and 5; Piano Sonatas op. 81a, op. 106, and

op. 111; the so-called *Archduke Trio* op. 98; *Missa solemnis* op. 123. These dedications not only prove Beethoven's gratitude towards his sponsor, but also are signs of the high esteem for his friend and pupil. Rudolph according to contemporary reports was a very able pianist, especially regarding expression. E.g. a performance of the Sonata for Piano and Violin G major op. 96 together with the French violinist Pierre Rode, in which Rudolph's playing is described as "getting the right feeling for the spirit of the composition, and soul." (*Musikalische[n] Zeitung für die oesterreichischen Staaten*, January 1813.) This was, indeed, what Beethoven required of a performer, and he would get into rage if these qualities were missing. (Ries)

In the spring 1818 Beethoven assigned Rudolph to compose variations on the following theme.



A literal translation of the text reads as follows:

“O Hope! O Hope!  
You steel the heart, you soften all pain.”

To add words to music is in accord with Beethoven's advice. He himself used texts on several occasions to make clear his intention regarding interpretation, e.g. „Le-be-wohl“ (*Fare-well*, op. 81a), „Vi-vat, vi-vat Rudolfus“ (op. 106), „Muss es sein? – Es muss sein, es muss sein!“ (*Does it have to be?*

– *It must be, it must be!*, Streichquartett op. 135); possibly even „Jo-se-phi-ne, Jo-se-phi-ne“ (Andante favori WoO 57 for Josephine Brunsvik). And now

„O Hoffnung, o Hoffnung,  
Du stählst die Herzen, vertreibest die Schmerzen.“

Beethoven seems to have been satisfied with this proof of his student's abilities, for not only did he propose the composition for publication to Sigmund Anton Steiner & Co. in Vienna), but most likely on his advice they appeared in abridged version in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Part of Friedrich Starke's *Wiener Piano-Forte-Schule*, 1821. In this presentation I shall play parts from the latter version. Both versions were acclaimed enthusiastically, perhaps partly because of both Beethoven's and Rudolph's names. This Beethoven had foreseen, when he proposed publication, for in his letter to Steiner he wrote, that "no loss should be expected with such a *principe Professore ...*"

Friedrich Starke (1774 bis 1835) was a French horn player and member of the orchestra of the Viennese court opera. From 1815 on he taught Beethoven's nephew Carl on the piano. Many meetings with Beethoven are reported in the *Konversationshefte* around 1820.

Beethoven's share in the publication of the *Piano-Forte School* of Starke can be seen in several respects: (1) He allowed the use of his name; (2) Most likely he helped select pieces for inclusion; (3) He contributed some of his own compositions (e.g. some of the *Bagatelles* op. 119); (4) He marked some passages of his own composition and of Rudolph's Variations with fingerings. Johann Sonnleitner will speak on the Metronome markings included in the *School*. But first you will hear the Theme and some Variations between 1 to 20 by Rudolph. (AV)

## Archduke Rudolph's Original Metronome Markings for his 40 Variations on a Theme by Beethoven (JS)

Archduke Rudolph indicated a total of 44 detailed metronome markings for his series of 40 variations (plus Introduction and Fugue). These markings cause serious questions about the intended tempo both from a musical and a technical point of view. The composer's markings suggest incredibly fast tempi – like countless other metronome markings from the early years of the metronome.

The core question is therefore: what is the matter with these metronome markings? And the following question for historical metronome markings in general is:

## **Did composers refer to a single beat (tick) or a double beat (tick-tack) when they indicated their metronome markings?**

Maelzel, the inventor of the metronome, featured single-beat counting: the same method we use still today. However, it is possible that composers counted after the double-beat method, nevertheless. A full beat therefore means a double movement, a movement back *and* forth, according to the hand beating the time: a movement down *and* up. This is how, for instance, everyone counts their pushups at the gym still today. This corresponds to a **full** beat or a **tick-tack** of the metronome.

(The question whether or not both methods can be applied within the work of a composer shall remain open for now)

There is a criterium that perhaps has not been considered enough within the tempo discussion: The mechanical limits of Viennese pianos in terms of repetition during Beethoven's lifetime. That limit lies at around 480 notes per minute. This corresponds to semiquavers at a tempo of quarter=120. Above that number reliable repetitions of notes become critical, because – even with greatest skills of the performer – the mechanics of the instrument are unable to execute the repetitions. This is an important criterium that supports the option of double-beat counting.

Now: Among the 44 original metronome markings of the Archduke's variations there are no less than 8 indications that would exceed the mechanically given limit of repetition.

There is a short version of the work published in Friedrich Starke's piano school. Regarding the metronome markings there is only one difference in the variation No. 20 of the original edition which is variation No. 15 in Starke's edition.

This variation is in 6/8 time. The original metronome marking says: dotted crotchet = 96. Starke's edition shows the same number, but with a regular crotchet. This is not necessarily a misprint as such unusual indications can be found quite regularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The indication crotchet=96 (i.e. quaver=192), taken literally, is still within the mechanical possibilities of the instrument, with 384 notes per minute. This "sober" aspect of mechanics however is only *one* part of the problem. It is the more "outer", technical part. The "inner" aspect, **the musical expression** however is crucial.

Starke describes the character of the preceding variation (No. 14) with its semiquavers, jumps and chords as "**teasing like a young lover**". The following variation (No. 15) with its many diatonic and chromatic elements is

described as “**coaxing like her**”, that is the young lover. This very much supports a double-beat interpretation of the metronome markings also for that variation.

While **the option for double-beat** is suggested for Archduke Rudolph’s variations both from a musical and a technical point of view, the general application of double-beat for **all** metronome markings remains questionable (some people claim that to be the case in current debates about the topic). On the contrary there is evidence that supports a **context-related variable application of the metronome**. Instead of a “either or” principle there is a “as well as” principle. There is more information to be found about this on the internet within the “A Tempo Project” by Bernhard Ruchti.

To sum things up: if we read Archduke Rudolph’s metronome markings according to a re-discovered (or to be discovered) double-beat option, the resulting tempi are slowed down and breathe. As a result there is a real chance to actually execute the tempi on period instruments. Whether or not the resulting way of playing matches with the hearing and playing conventions of our time however is another question. It is an artistic decision that needs to be made by musicians individually. Prior to such a decision, **the basic understanding of metronome markings as they were intended by composers needs to be examined.**

(JS)

Now you will hear some more variations. The review in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* N<sup>o</sup>. 47, 10. Juny 1820 reads: „Beethoven’s excellent melody [...] is the basis, from which the whole composition develops, by permanent changes touching all strings of the heart, and enthralling reason by supreme craft.”

Archduke Rudolph starts off his cycle with a long introduction and concludes with a fugue at the end of the finale. Beethoven’s *Eroica Variations* op. 35, and especially *Diabelli Variations* op. 120 come to mind. Indeed, Beethoven worked on the latter composition from 1819 on, and it would be interesting to compare the structure of both cycles, thus getting a glimpse of Beethoven’s “composition workshop”. This will have to be done at another occasion.

Beethoven in his tuition put much emphasis on counterpoint. He used scripts from his time under the guidance of Georg Albrechtsberger, published after his death by Ignaz Ritter von Seyfried. The fugue at the end of Rudolph’s variations follows all rules for a well-crafted fugue. After the pedal point on the dominant and a sudden turn to *super-dominant* follows a *stretta*, after which the composition ends in *piano* – coinciding with the

character of theme and text. The *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* concluded its description with highest praises for composer and composition, emphasizing the “noble and veritable education” of Rudolph. (AV)

#### Scores

*Aufgabe von Ludwig van Beethoven gedichtet, Vierzig Mahl verändert und ihrem Verfasser gewidmet von seinem Schüler. R:E:H: Wien, bei S. A. Steiner und Comp. Archive of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien. Private reprint by Johann Sonnleitner, Zürich.*

*Wiener Piano-Forte-Schule von Fr: Starke Capellmeister III<sup>te</sup> Abtheilung. S. 87–95. Online at*  
[http://ks4.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/d/d4/IMSLP495094-PMLP628369-starke\\_vol3\\_light.pdf](http://ks4.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/d/d4/IMSLP495094-PMLP628369-starke_vol3_light.pdf)

#### Selected Literature

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