

Response to Nicholas Kitchen

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One of the many activities of musicological research has been to offer performers reliable editions of music that strip away layers of editorial redaction. The goal of this work is to bring performers as close as possible, and as best as can be determined, to the composer's original intentions. The end product of this line of work results in critical editions, the best of which include extensive critical reports that afford the performer opportunity to assess details that may be ambiguous or open to variant interpretations or readings. These publications are often identified as "Urtext" editions. The best of these critical editions are prepared by experienced scholars who are expert in reading and interpreting the orthographic or philological habits and idiosyncrasies of the composer. In the case of Beethoven's Opus 131, Dr. Emil Platen of the Beethovenhaus Archive in Bonn is that expert.<sup>1</sup> The results of his work, along with Commentaries were published in the Beethovenhaus NGA VI/5 (Streichquartette III), also issued by Henle in a Studien-Edition (2002),

While the principle of performers coming into direct contact with primary sources (Urtexten) is laudable, a few words of caution, especially regarding Beethoven, seem prudent. Many works have been transmitted to us not only by means of autograph manuscripts, but by other documents over which Beethoven had control. To arrive at an authoritative reading of this particular work, one must take into account not only the autograph score housed at the BJ in Krakow and available online—the source on which Nicholas Kitchen bases his interpretations of

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan del Mar, who has edited Urtext editions of Beethoven's Quartets, Op. 18, 59, 74, 95, and 127 for Bärenreiter has, to date, not issued an edition of Op. 131.

Beethoven's dynamics and expression markings—but other sources, all of which are accounted for in Platen's edition. Chief among these sources are the *Stichvorlage* (Platen's Source B, also available online) in the hand of Beethoven's copyist Wenzel Rampl, and the set of parts for the first movement of Op. 131 (Artaria 212) housed in the Berlin DSB. As I will demonstrate, some of the details, especially regarding dynamics and hairpins, where Kitchen sees consistency and intentionality, the evidence suggests otherwise.

### Special Dynamics:

Kitchen correctly informs us that Beethoven's method of writing his dynamic marks are varied, as illustrated by the chart shown us in his presentation. He further argues that interpretative signification lies within "special" dynamics, as indicated by specific abbreviations and/or single or double underscoring. Kitchen and his colleagues find that these variant spellings suggest differing levels of expressivity and interpretative meaning. The idea, on its surface, is intriguing and not without a modicum of credibility. In thinking about this aspect of his presentation, I offer a comparison of certain passages referred to in his paper by examining the autograph ms. and Rampl's *Stichvorlage*. I also examined passages from the autograph of Opp. 127 and 132 to see if there might be some consistency in Beethoven's notation of dynamics in these works.

The first slide shows a passage from the final movement of Op. 127 and excerpts from the first and second movements of Op. 132. As we can see, Beethoven is far from consistent in his orthography. In m. 23 of the finale of Op. 127, for example, we see the 1<sup>st</sup> violin marked "fo", while the other voices are simply "f."



I draw your attention next to mm. 74-77 of the first movement of Op. 132, where again Beethoven is inconsistent in his notation of piano and pianissimo.



Looking now at m. 245 from that same movement, we find a simultaneous marking of “piu f,” “piu fo” and “piu for.” It seems highly unlikely that Beethoven was striving for three separate modes of expression here!



Yet another example, this time regarding pianissimo, can be seen in m. 232.



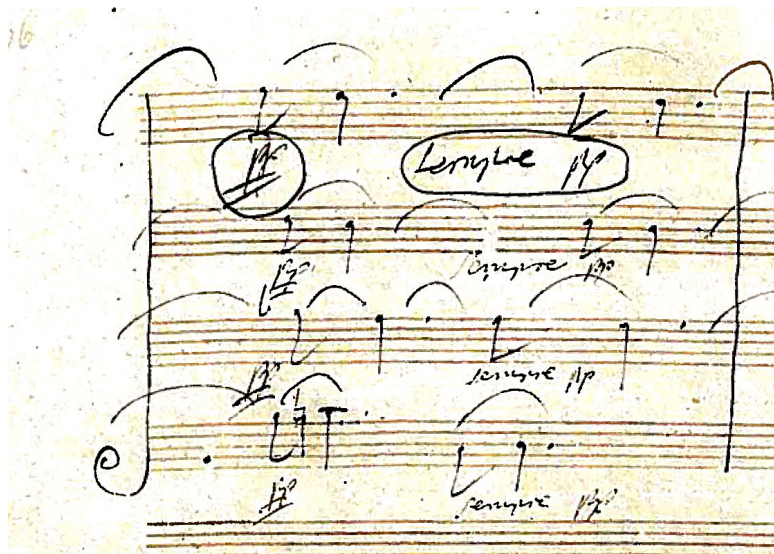
M. 39 of the second movement presents another case, in that the 1<sup>st</sup> violin we see “for,” whereas the lower instruments are marked simply “f.”



What is of further interest, however, is that Beethoven double underscores the pianissimos in m. 41. To me this suggests that perhaps the composer is taking special note of the suddenness and extremity of the change of dynamics. I offer this as a hypothesis regarding *why* Beethoven may have differentiated his dynamic markings through the use of underscoring—perhaps as a

warning. Only further study can determine whether or not he does so with any modicum of consistency.

Turning our attention now to examples from Op. 131, I start with an excerpt from the end of No. 2, where we find three voices with double underscored pianissimos, with the second violin being the outlier with only a single underscore. Surely his *d* is not intended to be more prominent than the other pitches.



Earlier in the same movement, namely m. 125, Beethoven could not have meant for the viola to bear a different expression from the other voices.

Regarding the end of No. 1, referred to specifically in Kitchen's presentation, we find an instance of tied notes that Platen labels as a "differenzierte Lautstärken-Rhythmisierung," a term that is difficult to translate, but equating roughly to a "rhythmicization of differentiated intensity." I also discuss an analogous passage in Op. 130 in my article on the *Grosse Fuge*.<sup>2</sup> Platen further maintains—without citing the authority of evidence from any source—that these precise differentiations of intensity are "not to be achieved by accents or separations, but rather simply by alteration of dynamic quality" ("nicht durch Akzenturieren oder Absetzen, sondern

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<sup>2</sup> David B. Levy, "Ma pero beschleunigend," *Beethoven Journal* 14/2 (2007). See also Platen, "Ein Notierungsproblem in Beethovens späten Streichquartetten," *Beethoven Jahrbuch* 8 (1971/72), 147–56.

lediglich durch den Wechsel der dynamischen Qualitäten zum Ausdruck kommen”).<sup>3</sup> Kitchen draws our attention to the last pianissimo note, which, as we can see, is not consistently marked with a double underscore in all voices. The same holds true for the commencement of No. 2, where no underscore is to be found in the second violin voice. If we examine what the Stichvorlage shows in the same measures, we find further inconsistency, as marked on the slide.

In a recent study, Jens Dufner has alerted us to the fact that Beethoven’s copyists sometimes saved Beethoven from his own errors and lack of prowess as a proofreader. A good example of this may be found in mm. 8 and 9 in No. 3, where no slur is given over the 32<sup>nd</sup> notes, whereas they may be found in the Rampl’s Stichvorlage.

### Hairpins

In his presentation, Kitchen has suggested that there is a difference between crescendo-diminuendo markings that are open, as opposed to those that are closed. My examination of the autograph of Op. 131 and other late quartets, however, leads me to conclude that Beethoven almost always uses conjoined hairpins *within* a measure, and leaves them open when *crossing* over bar lines.



<sup>3</sup> I argue that a separation between the notes is implied by these tied notes.



While there are exceptions, as can be seen even in some of the examples I have shown, I think that Kitchen overstates his case regarding expressive intensity. I am unconvinced, that the crescendo and diminuendos *not* conjoined represent “two events.” I would suggest that swells within a single measure would, by dint of the compacted timeframe in which the expressive event occurs, is, by its very nature, liable to be at a higher level of expressive intensity, as Kitchen states, than a swell that spans a longer timeframe.

### Further Hypotheses

As I stated earlier, Nicholas Kitchen has opened up a number of intriguing possibilities of interpretation of expressivity within Beethoven’s notational practice regarding expressive markings. You may notice that I do not challenge his assertions regarding vertical strokes and staccato markings (dots), although in tomorrow’s panel we may wish to delve into this question.

My hope is that scholars and performers alike will continue to investigate the issues raised by Kitchen in a systematic fashion. As for the editing of critical editions, I concede that the texts we present to performers could do a better job of calling attention to the kind of possibilities that careful study of primary sources may reveal. Until such time, however, that we can conclude that Beethoven was consistent in his application of his expressive markings, as

suggested by Kitchen, knowledgeable and skilled editors such as Platen, Dufner, and many others will have to continue doing what they have always done, i.e., to offer as accurate a text as possible, using critical apparatus commentary that speak to variant, and even contradictory readings that may have equal validity. Conscientious performers such as Kitchen and his colleagues in the Borromeo Quartet, on the other hand, should continue doing what diligent performers have also always done, i.e., to perpetually probe the infinite interpretive possibilities of music such as Op. 131 whose depths can never be fully plumbed or realized by any single performance.