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Beethoven's *Eroica* Sketchbooks: From Scribbles to Symphony

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The process by which composers create works of genius, such as *Eroica*, is often mystifying to musicians and audiences alike. Although no one will ever know exactly what ran through Beethoven's mind while composing *Eroica*, the sketches provide evidence of some of the steps Beethoven took to complete this epic work. By analyzing Beethoven's sketches for his *Eroica* symphony and comparing them to his final score, one can gain new perspective on his compositional process.

Sketching was a practice utilized by many famous composers, but it was Beethoven who became most strongly associated with it. Composers primarily used sketches to capture important material in the early stages of a work, and these preliminary sketches were to be discarded upon the completion of the work, so no one could discover the original, imperfect drafts. The details of a piece would likely be worked out by the composer on a keyboard, and written into the manuscript. Although the sketching process used by most composers was fairly casual, Beethoven spent much of his life developing an elaborate method of sketching music in great detail. Instead of relying heavily on playing a keyboard to compose, he preferred to complete his compositions by working out most of the details on paper in his sketches. At a time when it was common for composers to destroy their old sketches, Beethoven carefully preserved his own sketches in several bound volumes.¹

Beethoven used the sketchbooks as a means of recording and developing his musical ideas. He also carried around pocket-sized booklets in order to record his creative process at all times.² The earliest sketchbook that we are aware of – from 1789 – is called the Grasnick 1.³ The purpose of these sketchbooks was to lay the framework in which to compose his pieces and outlined elements such as form, key areas, time signatures, and main themes.⁴ These documents were clearly important to him; when he eventually moved to Vienna to continue his career as a musician, he brought some of his earlier sketches with him, careful not to damage or lose them, and even began to systematically catalog them in a portfolio. Later, he began keeping sketchbooks for each of his projects. Beethoven's dedication to categorizing his sketchbooks showcases his maturation as a composer; as he began to take his craft more seriously, he moved from disjointed loose-leaf sketches to dedicated journals.⁵ These sketchbooks also portray Beethoven's creative character; his ideas are not recorded in chronological order, but rather were written down

¹ Douglas Porter Johnson, Alan Tyson, and Robert Winter. *The Beethoven Sketchbooks: History, Reconstruction, Inventory*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 3.

² Lockwood, Lewis. *Beethoven: the music and the life*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2003, pp. 19-20.

³ Kerman, Joseph. *Beethoven's Early Sketches*. (Oxford University Press, 1970), 515-538.

⁴ Lockwood, Lewis. *Beethoven's Earliest Sketches for the "Eroica" Symphony*. (Oxford University Press, 1981), 457-478.

⁵ Kerman, Joseph. *Beethoven's Early Sketches*. (Oxford University Press, 1970), 515-538.

whenever inspiration struck. In other words, his compositional process was more organic than some other composers.

Beethoven's *Eroica* sketches can be found in three different sketchbooks; the Kessler, Wielhorsky, and Landsberg 6. The sketchbooks are currently in Krakow, Poland in the *Biblioteka Jagiellonska* library and have been there since 1977. *Eroica* was written during the years 1803 to 1804. These sketchbooks contained creative material for several other famous works, including the "Waldstein" Sonata, the first version of his opera, *Leonore*, and parts of works that were later more fully developed such as his Fourth Piano Concerto, Fifth Symphony, and Sixth Symphony.⁶ *Eroica* was originally titled, "Bonaparte," in an attempt to dedicate the piece to Napoleon, but was renamed "Sinfonia Eroica" when published in 1806.⁷

The earliest sketches that relate to Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony are found in his Wielhorsky sketchbook, which is dated from the years 1802 and 1803.⁸ In this sketchbook, Beethoven planned out several of the pieces that preceded his third symphony, which may be an indication of his inspiration. However, the majority of the planning for his third symphony can be found in what is known as the Landsberg 6 sketchbook, the most famous of Beethoven's sketchbooks. Today, Landsberg 6 can be found in the Berlin Royal Library in Germany.

Beethoven's sketchbooks have been a topic of great interest to scholars. Gustav Nottebohm, for example, has published extensive work on this subject and was the first to closely study Beethoven's sketches. Since Nottebohm's material is over a century old, it does not contain information on all of Beethoven's sketches, but rather on specific sketches and sections from each of his works. In 1962, Nathan Fishman more carefully investigated the Wielhorsky sketchbook and claimed that the earliest writings of *Eroica*, the finale, lay inside. The Wielhorsky sketchbook also includes works composed between Beethoven's second and third symphonies, which contributed to the inspiration of the *Eroica* sketches. The Wielhorsky sketchbook consists mostly of piano works, including Fifteen Variations and Fugue in E-flat Major, Op. 35, the "Prometheus" Variations (also known as the *Eroica* Variations.) There is strong reason to believe that *Eroica* is derived from Op. 35 because it immediately precedes *Eroica* and is also set in the same key. It is believed that this is where the composer's original planning for the *Eroica* finale began, since the sketchbook contains mainly sketches of the first three movements. Presented

⁶ Lewis Lockwood and Alan Gosman. *Beethoven's "Eroica" Sketchbook*. Vol. 2. (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Lockwood, Lewis. *Beethoven's Earliest Sketches for the "Eroica" Symphony*. (Oxford University Press, 1981), 457-478.

within the sketches, directly after Op. 35, are fragments of thematic notation from Op. 35 that found their way into the finale of *Eroica*. Musical thoughts can be seen to be borrowed from Op. 35's *Basso del Tema* and placed into the *Eroica* finale. Beethoven originally intended for these variations to stand alone but they were later reworked into *Eroica* as a more substantial work. A two-page sketch in the Wielhorsky sketchbook essentially provides the earliest sketches that have been identified as the *Eroica* symphony and sets out a plan for the symphony, specifically the finale.⁹ This suggests that the finale was just the starting block for the rest of the symphony. In fact, the beginning of the finale presents triadic movements similar to those found in Op. 35's *Basso del Tema* section, strengthening the creative connection.

Landsberg 6 is one of the largest of Beethoven's sketchbooks with 91 leaves (182 pages) and contains most of the sketches that were compiled to make up the *Eroica* Symphony. The sketches throughout each of Beethoven's sketchbooks were simply seeds being planted that evolved and turned into something much greater. Although the sketches are very difficult to read, it is clear that Beethoven had detailed thoughts even in his early stages of composing. Some of Beethoven's sketches are nearly impossible to read; his handwriting is messy, the pages have become old and weathered, and there are some spots where ink has been splattered. Despite this, it is clear that Beethoven had clear and detailed thoughts even in his early stages of composing. Because of this, scholars took a long time to unearth where exactly in Beethoven's sketches certain parts of *Eroica* come from. Rachel Wade was the first to publish an inventory of the entire sketchbook in 1977.¹⁰ The *Eroica* sketches are found throughout the Landsberg 6 sketchbook, with other sketches belonging to various pieces, or are unidentified. There are also pages that share parts of *Eroica* with fragments of other pieces and others that are simply blank. Whether Beethoven meant to keep these pages blank on purpose or was going to add ideas to them later is unknown, but the pages are numbered. The blank pages could also be seen as space set aside for other movements or sections in advance.¹¹ What makes the analysis of Beethoven's sketchbook even more difficult to comprehend is that the sketches comprising the *Eroica* symphony are not in any specific order. Some pages of the sketchbook may contain segments of other movements or fragments of a theme. For example, the first page that *Eroica* appears on is the fourth leaf in the Landsberg 6 sketchbook, which contains sections of the first and second movements. Here, Beethoven begins to

⁹ Lewis Lockwood. "Beethoven's Earliest Sketches for the "Eroica" Symphony." *The Musical Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (1981): 457-78.

¹⁰ Lewis Lockwood and Alan Gosman. *Beethoven's "Eroica" Sketchbook*. Vol. 2. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

¹¹ Lewis Lockwood and Alan Gosman. *Beethoven's "Eroica" Sketchbook*. Vol. 1. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press (2013).

sketch out his first movement, but what he sketched ended up being part of the development. Next, he sketches out part of the second movement, then shifts back to the first movement. Some parts of the sketchbook are believed to stem from a particular movement but are labeled as unidentified because it is not certain. For example, on the fifth page of the sketchbook, there is an unidentified sketch believed to be from the first movement. Sketches that belong to the Trio of Scherzo in the third movement do not appear until page 27 of the sketchbook. The fourth movement of *Eroica* begins on page 70. The last page that contains sketches from *Eroica* on page 92, which contains the end of the second movement. The page before that (91) contains the final chord of the fourth movement.¹² The chart below shows the location of the major ideas of each movement are embodied within the sketchbook. The impromptu nature and inspiration of Beethoven's writing is evidently shown throughout his sketchbooks.

Movement	Page Number in Sketchbook
I	Pages 4-5, 7, 10-18, 20-23, 26-27, 30-41
II	Pages 6, 9, 19, 42-43, 48-56, 61, 92
III	Pages 10, 36, 42, 60-61, 64-67
IV	Pages 70-85, 88-91

Beethoven's compositional process is shown throughout his sketchbooks. These sketchbooks are not simply random ideas jotted down on staves. They are concise, well thought-out thematic material, later to be developed. These ideas display Beethoven's steady drive towards further stabilizing his rhythmic and melodic content. Lockwood suggests for some of these unidentified sketches to be very early ideas of a theme or movement.¹³ It is likely that these fragmented sketches are still raw and will later be developed. Throughout the Landsberg 6 sketchbook, fragments are constantly being reinvented, whether it be through a change of key or an idea being further refined. An example of the rewritten material is found on page 10 in the Landsberg 6 sketchbook. The fragment composed on page 11 is the original idea while page 10 is the rewrite. These assorted sketches prove that

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Lewis, Lockwood. *Beethoven: the music and the life*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2003, pp. 204-205..

Beethoven did not necessarily write in his sketchbook from left to right like a book . He may have simply opened the sketchbook and instantly written down his impulsive ideas, and the movements stemmed from there. Beethoven often had continuity drafts, meaning that the draft is a continuation or variation of the corresponding draft.¹⁴ Beethoven demonstrated this multiple times, keeping the rhythm and intervals the same while changing the harmony or tonality throughout the many revisions. In addition to rewriting, Beethoven also kept alternate fragments available. He seemed to be playing with a couple of ideas, having as many options as possible. Within these preliminary sketches, Beethoven also included dynamics, instrumentation, and stylistic remarks. Although his sketches may seem unorderedly, this level of detail is proof that some form of organization, however small, is necessary for these preliminary sketches. However, it may be argued that even these details continue to be outcomes of spontaneity. Nevertheless, these sketches provide insight into the detail and complexity of Beethoven's compositional process. It is also interesting to note that no further progression of these sketchbooks are seen before the final score. These single staff thoughts are independently created, and eventually combined to create the final product without a bridge between these two steps.

It is clear that the free, unstructured nature of his sketchbooks were an integral part of Beethoven's compositional process. Unlike some other composers of his time, Beethoven valued the stage of raw musical thought that preceded the final product, and the results of that emotional intensity carry over to his completed works. While some questions surrounding this composer's sketches may never be answered, the markings left behind in his journals continue to delight and inspire musicians to this day.

¹⁴ Lewis, Lockwood. *Beethoven: studies in the creative process*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992, Pp. 118-166.

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Annotated Bibliography

Johnson, Douglas Porter., Alan Tyson, and Robert Winter. *The Beethoven sketchbooks: History, Reconstruction, Inventory*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

A compendium focusing on all of Beethoven's sketchbooks provides the level of detail needed for a paper such as this one. It includes information on the dates the sketchbooks were used, their physical characteristics, any and all editions of them, and where the original copies can be found today. This source also provides some background information on how each journal fit into its context during Beethoven's lifetime.

Kerman, Joseph. "Beethoven's Early Sketches." *The Musical Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (1970): 515-38.

Kerman discusses Beethoven's earliest sketches and reviews the studies of Gustav Nottebohm. These studies are not praised by many due to the fact that Nottebohm only used specific pieces of information from Beethoven's sketches to prove his own points. However, Hans Schmidt issued a list, the *Verzeichnis der Skizzen Beethovens*, that encompasses the available Beethoven sketches and includes the composer's *Eroica* sketches. Some entries are less complete or less accurate than others. *Eroica* is also part of the Bonn sheets, which suggest continuity.

Lockwood, Lewis. *Beethoven: the music and the life*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2003, pp. 19-20.

Beethoven: the music and the life discusses Beethoven's life in four sections: the early years, the first maturity, the second maturity, and the final maturity. Within each section is information regarding important works and major events in Beethoven's lifetime. This source covers the span of Beethoven's life, along with visual aids (diagrams, pictures, and sketches), in great detail. A bibliography and chronology are also included for ease of reference and possible future reference. A classified index of Beethoven's works, index of Beethoven's works by opus number, and a general index allow for a more specific word reference.

Lockwood, Lewis. "Beethoven's Earliest Sketches for the "Eroica" Symphony." *The Musical Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (1981): 457-78.

Gustav Nottebohm's essay, "Eroica", was originally believed to contain all the information of the *Eroica* Symphony about Beethoven's sketchbooks. However, the discovery of Beethoven's *Wielhorsky Sketchbook* provided new theories. This source provides information about the earliest thought process of Beethoven's sketchbooks for *Eroica*, including a diagram of the original sketchbook with Beethoven's earliest sketches of *Eroica*. Lockwood also individually analyzes each staff in detail, including thematic origin, theory content, and to which movement it pertains. The author believes that *Eroica* was completed beginning at the finale and moving forward. This source only discusses the earliest sketches of *Eroica* contained in the *Wielhorsky Sketchbook*. Therefore, it does not contain all the sketches involved in the creation of *Eroica*.

Lockwood, Lewis. *Beethoven: studies in the creative process*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992, Pp. 118-166.

Lewis Lockwood focuses on the compositional processes of a few of Beethoven's works including *Eroica*. This source specifically analyzes the steps Beethoven took to produce his sketchbooks. Included are detailed excerpts of fragments and form diagrams depicting the analysis. Scans of the original sketchbooks are also included. Each step of Beethoven's compositional process of *Eroica* is outlined and explained in detail, along with charts containing the sketchbook page number and the measure number for ease of reference. *Beethoven: studies in the creative process* is an all-encompassing source about the genesis and development of the *Eroica* Symphony.

Lockwood, Lewis, and Alan Gosman. *Beethoven's "Eroica" Sketchbook*. Vol. 1 . Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press (2013).

There is a large amount of information on Beethoven's sketchbooks, particularly in the form of background information on *Eroica* and on the process that Beethoven went through in several sketchbooks. There are many questions about why Beethoven put some parts on one sketchbook and some in another. There are also questions about why Beethoven used more than one sketchbook while sketching out *Eroica*. This source also provides many other sources that can potentially be used for further research.

Lockwood, Lewis, and Alan Gosman. *Beethoven's "Eroica" Sketchbook*. Vol. 2. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

The facsimile of Beethoven's *Eroica* sketches provide a direct link to Beethoven's writing process. As the main focus of our research, having the sketches themselves to refer to will be an excellent resource. We will be able to use this source in combination with all of our other sources, to verify or challenge the information we read based on what we see in the sketches.

Sheer, Miriam. "Patterns of Dynamic Organization in Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony." *The Journal of Musicology*, vol. 10, no. 4, 1992, pp. 483–504. www.jstor.org/stable/763646.

Dynamics are often overlooked as secondary to creating a musical product; this author argues that in the *Eroica* symphony, Beethoven uses dynamics very intentionally within each movement and across the entire work. While this source does not directly connect to the sketchbooks, it provides valuable insight into Beethoven's writing and how he expressed his musical ideas so effectively. One can draw connections between his use of dynamics and the influence of the sketchbooks.