

International Journal of the Dutch-Flemish Society for Music Theory

Volume 8, # II – OCTOBER 2021



MUSIC THEORY & ANALYSIS



LEUVEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

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ISBN 978-94-6165-340-6



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Lauri SUURPÄÄ

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Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 106*

Abstract

Much ink has been spilled regarding whether mm. 224–26, which conclude the first-movement development section of Beethoven's Piano Sonata, Op. 106, the *Hammerklavier*, should contain A \flat or A \sharp . By contrast, what happens at the onset of the recapitulation, immediately after the A \flat /A \sharp controversy, has been taken for granted. Yet the beginning of the recapitulation features another, less obvious controversy: that of the structural role of the B \flat major chord in m. 227. This article discusses three different Schenkerian ways of interpreting the B \flat major chord that begins the recapitulation: structural, apparent, and parenthetical. It considers how these readings reflect the musical effect at the onset of the recapitulation, both locally and in the larger context. The essay favors the interpretation of a parenthetical tonic, arguing that it provides the best account of the multi-layered web of associations at the beginning of the recapitulation.

Keywords

Beethoven Piano Sonata Op. 106, Schenkerian analysis, structural tonic, apparent tonic, parenthetical tonic

MUSIC THEORY & ANALYSIS

International Journal of the Dutch-Flemish Society for Music Theory

VOLUME 8, # II, OCTOBER 2021, 340–348

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<https://doi.org/10.11116/MTA.8.2.7>

Structural, Apparent, or Parenthetical?
The Tonic Chord in the First-Movement Recapitulation of
Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 106

Lauri SUURPÄÄ

Much ink has been spilled over the controversy of pitches A \flat versus A \sharp in mm. 224–26 that conclude the first-movement development section of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 106, the so-called *Hammerklavier*.¹ By contrast, what happens at the onset of the recapitulation, immediately after the A \flat /A \sharp controversy, has been taken for granted. Yet, the beginning of the recapitulation features another, less obvious controversy, which forms the topic of this vignette: that of the structural role of the B \flat major chord in m. 227. As far as I know, this issue has not been discussed in the scholarly literature—there is a tonic chord in m. 227, period. Yet the musical context at the end of the development section and at the beginning of the recapitulation is so subtle and multi-layered that this question merits some pondering.

This vignette concentrates narrowly on the function of the recapitulation's opening sonority. Of the vast literature on the *Hammerklavier*, I will refer only to studies pertinent to my limited topic. In terms of methodology, I will be selective and analyze the music only from a Schenkerian perspective. Such a limited focus is appropriate in a short analytical study; a more comprehensive discussion of this complex movement would require a full-length article, if not a whole book.

STRUCTURAL TONIC

There are a sufficient number of Schenkerian commentaries on the first movement of the *Hammerklavier* to suggest a kind of consensus regarding the function of the B \flat major chord at the beginning of the recapitulation as a structural tonic (Example 1; in the analy-

¹ For a thorough overview of the controversy, see Paul Badura-Skoda, "Noch einmal zur Frage Ais oder A in der Hammerklaviersonate opus 106 von Beethoven," in *Musik—Edition—Interpretation: Gedenkschrift Günter Henle*, ed. Martin Bente (Munich: Henle, 1980), 53–61.

Example 1: Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 106/i, structural tonic at the beginning of the recapitulation

ses mentioned below, the top voice appears in slightly different ways, but the global tonal course remains invariant). The interpretation was first proposed by Schenker in an unpublished and undated sketch.² The reading was then suggested in 1960 by Ernst Oster, one of the first generation of Schenkerian theorists who was, incidentally, familiar with Schenker's unpublished graph.³ Without commenting on the development section, Roger Kamien in 1976 interprets a structural tonic at the onset of the recapitulation.⁴ Most recently, Eric Wen's analysis from 2015 presents a similar interpretation.⁵

In Example 1, the development section first prolongs a IV, transforming it into an augmented-sixth chord. The structural dominant then arrives in m. 226, when the bass reaches an A \flat (significantly, *not* the A \sharp printed in the first edition; throughout this vignette, I will interpret the structure with the pitch A \flat). As a result, the structural dominant appears on the musical surface only as a $\frac{6}{3}$ sonority, so the root in the bass is an implied pitch. The structural tonic is regained at the beginning of the recapitulation.

2 Schenker's sketch has been transcribed in Nicholas Marston, *Heinrich Schenker and Beethoven's "Hammerklavier" Sonata* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315093055>), 141.

3 Oster's interpretation, which refers only to the structure of the development section and thus only implies the re-gaining of the tonic at the onset of the recapitulation, is presented in "Re: A New Concept of Tonality," *Journal of Music Theory* 4/1 (1969), 91, <https://doi.org/10.2307/843052>. His familiarity with Schenker's sketch is mentioned in the footnote he wrote in his translation of Schenker's *Free Composition*; see Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, ed. and trans. Ernst Oster (New York: Longman, 1979), 140.

4 Roger Kamien, "Aspects of the Recapitulation in Beethoven's Piano Sonatas," *Music Forum* 4 (1976), 196–205.

5 Eric Wen, "A Sharp Practice, A Natural Alternative: The Transition into the Recapitulation in the First Movement of Beethoven's 'Hammerklavier' Sonata," in *From Bach to Brahms: Essays on Musical Design and Structure*, ed. David Beach and Yosef Goldenberg (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2015), 143–56. Although he favors the pitch A \flat at the end of the development, Wen also has an alternative voice-leading sketch, which shows his reading of the voice leading if A \sharp were chosen.

Despite the unanimity presented in the above-mentioned studies, there are features in the music both preceding and following the onset of the recapitulation that have led me to question the interpretation shown in Example 1. At the end of the development section, there is practically no preparation for the tonic. Only the fleeting V^6 in m. 226 points toward it; indeed, Charles Rosen has noted that the “return to B flat major at the beginning of the recapitulation is so brutally abrupt as to resolve none of the tension at all.”⁶ Yet Example 1 shows the inverted dominant as a background element toward which the entire development section has been aiming. However, to my ears it hardly sounds like the center that pulls the material of the development section—including elements such as the emphatic tonicization of B major in m. 201—into its gravitational field.

The recapitulation does not retrospectively confirm the tonic function of the $B\flat$ major chord either. As in the exposition, the antecedent of the primary theme ends in a tonic-key half cadence (m. 234), but the extended consequent immediately veers into remote tonal paths and in the end firmly establishing $G\flat$ major as a local tonal center in m. 249. Thus, most of the primary theme lies outside the tonic key, showing an unstable, harmonically uncertain quality. As the $B\flat$ major chord at the beginning of the recapitulation is neither thoroughly prepared nor retrospectively confirmed, it does not seem to fulfill the requirement that Carl Schachter imposes on structural tonics: such sonorities must provide the music with “a significant beginning or goal of motion.”⁷

APPARENT TONIC

In Schenkerian theory, the term “apparent tonic” is used when referring to chords that contain the same pitches as the structural tonic but do not function as significant beginnings or goals of motion. Such chords have a contrapuntal origin; thus, they are subordinate to the surrounding harmonies. They have a tonic function only in the foreground, while in the middleground they prolong deeper-level *Stufen*. An interpretation of the $B\flat$ major chord that begins the recapitulation as an apparent tonic would account for the lack of preparation and retrospective confirmation; the sonority would be subordinate to preceding and following events.

Example 2 interprets the chord of m. 227 as an apparent tonic with a contrapuntal origin: the D in the treble is a passing tone within a third-progression moving from $E\flat$ to an inner-voice C, while the bass pitch $B\flat$ transforms the fundamentally dissonant passing

6 Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style* (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), 414.

7 Carl Schachter, *Unfoldings: Essays in Schenkerian Theory and Analysis*, ed. Joseph N. Straus (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 137.

Example 2: Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 106/i, apparent tonic at the beginning of the recapitulation

100 131 213 226 227 277 332

I VI[♯] IV⁸ "I" V⁷ I

exp. dev. recap.

tone into a consonance. (The apparent function of the tonic is shown by the quotation marks around the roman numeral.) This interpretation significantly molds the global reading of the movement. Instead of a $\hat{3}-\hat{2}$ interrupted progression, the top voice consists of a neighboring motion prolonging the $\hat{3}$.⁸ The IV in m. 131 gives a consonant preparation for the seventh of the V^7 (m. 277). The structural tonic is regained only in m. 332, after complex events that lie outside the scope of this vignette. Also, the first-inversion dominant in m. 226 is taken as a local preparation for the apparent tonic, not as the gravitational center of the entire development section; it is subordinate to the emphatic IV reached in m. 131.

In my view, Example 2 accounts for the relative hierarchical significance of the harmonic elements at the end of the development section and at the beginning of the recapitulation better than Example 1 does; fleeting elements are not shown as significant pillars in the tonal structure. Yet I do not find Example 2 convincing. Referring to the $B\flat$ major chord of m. 227 as a contrapuntal element seems to contradict the impression that the sonority makes when it arrives. The thematic material associates it with the movement's opening tonic, the fanfare topic creates a celebratory expression, and the *fortissimo*

8 Because the interpretation with an apparent tonic lacks interruption, it differs from Schenker's definition of sonata form: "Only the prolongation of a division (interruption) gives rise to sonata form" (Schenker, *Free Composition*, 134). For studies that discuss uninterrupted deep-level structure in sonata form, see, e.g., Peter H. Smith, *Expressive Forms in Brahms's Instrumental Music: Structure and Meaning in His Werther Quartet* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 108–21; and Lauri Suurpää, "The Undivided *Ursatz* and the Omission of the Tonic *Stufe* at the Beginning of the Recapitulation," *Journal of Schenkerian Studies* 1 (2005), 66–91.

dynamic conveys the sense of significance. The chord sounds more emphatic than a mere contrapuntal element would—when it arrives, it suggests stability rather than elaboration. As a result, the interpretation of the B \flat major chord in m. 227 as an apparent tonic seems to miss something of its multi-layered quality.

PARENTHETICAL TONIC

My reason for questioning a structural tonic at the onset of the recapitulation was its meager preparation and lack of retrospective confirmation, while my reason for questioning an apparent tonic was that a contrapuntal interpretation undervalued the emphasis of the chord that opens the recapitulation. This would seem to include a contradiction: a structural tonic would indicate a sonority that is too stable, while an apparent tonic would not be stable enough.

The contradiction is only apparent, however, for my reservations on the two interpretations concern different temporal planes in the course of the music. I believe that there is a Schenkerian interpretation that mediates these two readings, accounting for the differences in temporal organization—an interpretation that enables us to have our cake and eat it too. Some analysts have applied the term “parenthetical tonic” when referring to tonic chords that have a kind of double identity.⁹ On the one hand, parenthetical tonics are subordinate to their surrounding harmonies, thus resembling apparent tonics—they are not centers in the larger context. On the other hand, they are not mere contrapuntal by-products of voice leading; they do represent the structural tonic, but in a temporally displaced guise. In other words, parenthetical tonics occur within continuous voice-leading procedures created by the preceding and ensuing musical elements, yet they represent the work’s main tonic, which has, however, been temporally dislocated. In spite of

9 In the published literature, parenthetical tonics have been interpreted in particular in movements in rondo form, where the return of the refrain may be seen to bring back the tonic in spite of a direct voice-leading connection between the harmonies preceding and following the tonic; as Carl Schachter has noted, “[I]n a rondo, motion from one episode directly to the next one might actually coexist with motion from the episode to the theme and then to the next episode” (*The Art of Tonal Analysis*, ed. Joseph N. Straus [Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190227395.001.0001>], 123). For instances of parenthetical tonics in rondo form, see, e.g., Joel Galand’s interpretation of mm. 167ff. in the last movement of Mozart’s Piano Concerto K. 466 in “Form, Genre, and Style in the Eighteenth-Century Rondo,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 17/1 (1995), 42–44, <https://doi.org/10.2307/745763>; Carl Schachter’s interpretation of mm. 68ff. of a Bach gavotte in “The Gavotte en Rondeaux from J. S. Bach’s Partita in E major for Unaccompanied Violin,” *Israel Studies in Musicology* 5 (1987), 21–22; and Schachter’s reading of mm. 40ff. in the slow movement of Mozart’s Piano Concerto K. 491 in *Unfoldings*, 128–30. I am not aware of published studies that would take the chord opening the recapitulation as a parenthetical tonic, a situation that would resemble the *Hammerklavier*. In his exhaustive discussion of voice-leading procedures in development sections, Edward Laufer discusses recapitulations beginning on apparent tonics but does not mention the option of a parenthetical tonic; see Laufer, “Voice-Leading Procedures in Development Sections,” *Studies in Music from the University of Western Ontario* 13 (1991), 69–120.

Example 3: Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 106/i, parenthetical tonic at the beginning of the recapitulation

= Cb: I V V I^b
 100 131 201 213 226 227 249 267 277 332

(= 5 — b6) (b 7 δ)
 I VI[#] IV⁸ bII (I) bII^b V⁷ I
 exp. dev. recap.

their tonic function, parenthetical tonics do not act as significant beginnings or goals of motion within their larger environment as proper structural tonics do. Carl Schachter has said that a parenthetical tonic may be “understood as a brief parenthetical statement that brings into momentary consciousness the tonal motion’s point of departure just before it continues on to its next important goal.”¹⁰

In the *Hammerklavier*, interpreting the sonority opening the recapitulation as a parenthetical tonic acknowledges both the chord’s local significance and its global subordination. Example 3 clarifies this reading. A key to the interpretation is a structural connection between the arguably main chromatic events in the development section and in the recapitulation, the tonicization of B major in m. 201 and B minor in m. 267 (both B’s have been spelled as C^b in Example 3; the subtle enharmonic network will be discussed presently). At the deepest levels, the bII in m. 201 extends the preceding IV through a 5–b6 progression; thus, bII retains the predominant function and in the global structure aims toward the dominant.

In m. 213 the music reaches a chord that first suggests the function of a V⁷ of C^b, but an enharmonic reinterpretation transforms this sonority into an augmented-sixth chord. It is noteworthy that the reading in Example 3 differs from Examples 1 and 2, which con-

¹⁰ Schachter, *Unfoldings*, 130.

Example 4: Beethoven, Piano Sonata Op. 106/i, motion from IV to V⁷

nect the augmented-sixth chord with the IV.¹¹ Example 3, by contrast, takes the augmented-sixth chord as occurring within parentheses; it is an enharmonic variant of the V⁷ of C \flat , preparing the V⁶ that leads to the parenthetical tonic with which the recapitulation begins. As a result, in the large-scale structure, the opening sonority of the recapitulation diverges, on a different temporal plane, from the global path prolonging the deep-level \flat II. At the same time, the chord expected at the beginning of the recapitulation is heard, albeit in a changed, parenthetical guise.

A return to the global path occurs at the end of the primary theme: the tonicized G \flat major chord (m. 249) functions as the dominant of C \flat , the bass pitch governing before and after the parenthesis. As the staff above the voice-leading graph of Example 3 shows, the parenthesis is entered via a C \flat –G \flat motion (I–V in C \flat) and left with a G \flat –C \flat motion (V–I in C \flat). The framing of the parenthesis by a quasi-palindrome enhances the sense of a connection between the C \flat chords in the development section and in the recapitulation.

Enharmonicism also creates a palindromic organization that stresses the parenthetical quality of the sonority opening the recapitulation (Example 4). When the \flat II first arrives in m. 201, it functions locally as a B major chord. From the E \flat in m. 131, the music moves via a fleeting C minor chord (m. 167) to a G major sonority that functions locally as a dominant of C minor, more globally as the upper third of E \flat . The next step is a D major triad (m. 197), a fifth-related sonority to the G chord. Now, a remote chromatic third-re-

11 It would be possible to read the B \flat major chord in m. 227 as an apparent tonic also in a large context that interprets a prolongation of the \flat II extending from the development section to the recapitulation; the top-voice D would then be a passing tone within a third-progression E \flat –D–C \flat . In this case the augmented-sixth chord would not be connected with the IV. However, this interpretation would not remove the reservations I have at the general level with an interpretation of an apparent tonic.

lated progression leads the music from the D major chord to the B major triad of m. 201. In other words, if we follow the path leading to m. 201, we end on a B♯, not a C♭. Retrospectively, the augmented-sixth chord, an enharmonic reinterpretation of a V⁷ of B♯/C♭, secures the primacy of C♭, showing the ♭II to be an outgrowth (5→6) of the preceding IV.

The B♯→C♭ reinterpretation is reversed in the recapitulation (Example 4). The shocking minor-mode ♭II of m. 267 is prepared as a C♭ by its G♭ major dominant. Before the global goal-dominant of m. 277 arrives, the chromatically altered ♭II is transformed into the diatonic ♯II (m. 273). These two sonorities are mediated by a V/♯II (m. 270), in which the C♭ of the ♭II is enharmonically reinterpreted as a B♯. Together, the two palindromes—the C♭∧G♭ / G♭∧C♭ shown in Example 3 and the B♯→C♭ / C♭→B♯ shown in Example 4—frame the parenthetical tonic that begins the recapitulation. In a metaphorical sense, the palindromes can be understood as representing musical frames, suggesting that the material they demarcate is, in some sense, detached—that is, set off parenthetically—from the ♭II that the palindromes emphasize.

CONCLUSIONS

The three interpretations discussed above are all syntactically correct Schenkerian analyses, so the choice between them depends on one's aesthetic preferences—which of the interpretations an individual analyst finds truest to the music. At this point, it probably comes as no surprise that I favor the reading of a parenthetical tonic. In my opinion, it best accounts for the apparently contradictory impression at the beginning of the recapitulation: the co-existence of local stability and global subordination and continuity. Also, the two palindromes seem to detach the onset of the recapitulation from the larger musical course, suggesting a connection between the two ♭II chords, the most salient chromatic elements of the development section and the recapitulation.

This interpretation suggests a dialogue between two non-synchronized temporal planes: on the one hand, the global syntagmatic layer in which the ♭II is being prolonged; on the other, a more associative layer in which the tonic chord, the structural matrix of the entire work, surfaces as a parenthetical sonority in an environment in which it is subordinate to elements that surround it. In all, an interpretation of a parenthetical tonic is the most unconventional and complex of the three readings. But unconventional and complex also characterizes the opening movement of the *Hammerklavier*; its web of associations, sense of uninterrupted drama, and unmediated juxtapositions of remote elements elude any simplifying explanations.

Abstract

Much ink has been spilled regarding whether mm. 224–26, which conclude the first-movement development section of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata, Op. 106, the *Hammerklavier*, should contain A \flat or A \sharp . By contrast, what happens at the onset of the recapitulation, immediately after the A \flat /A \sharp controversy, has been taken for granted. Yet the beginning of the recapitulation features another, less obvious controversy: that of the structural role of the B \flat major chord in m. 227. This article discusses three different Schenkerian ways of interpreting the B \flat major chord that begins the recapitulation: structural, apparent, and parenthetical. It considers how these readings reflect the musical effect at the onset of the recapitulation, both locally and in the larger context. The essay favors the interpretation of a parenthetical tonic, arguing that it provides the best account of the multi-layered web of associations at the beginning of the recapitulation.

About the Author

Lauri Suurpää is a professor of music theory at the Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki. His main research interest is the analysis of tonal music. His publications have typically combined technical music analysis with other approaches, such as programmatic aspects, narrativity, musico-poetic associations in vocal music, eighteenth-century rhetoric, and Romantic aesthetics. His publications include *Death in Winterreise: Musico-Poetic Associations in Schubert’s Song Cycle* (Bloomington, 2014), *Music and Drama in Six Beethoven Overtures: Interaction between Programmatic Tensions and Tonal Structure* (Helsinki, 1997), and numerous journal articles and book chapters. He is currently working on a monograph on Haydn’s London Symphonies and late string quartets.