Phonon relaxation processes in crystals (NaNO₃) at high pressure and low temperature

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NaNO₃ is investigated in a diamond anvil cell in the pressure range of 0–9 GPa at 21 and 142 K by means of high-resolution Raman spectroscopy (HRRS). The pressure dependent linewidth of ν₁ (symmetric stretch) is determined and discussed in the framework of anharmonic lattice dynamics. The main relaxation pathways are depopulation processes, which are influenced by anharmonic terms in the expansion of the crystal potential and by multiphonon densities of states. The interpretation is supported by numerical calculation of multiphonon densities of states.

INTRODUCTION

Phonon relaxation processes are responsible for the finite lifetime and nonzero linewidths of phonon states; they can be described on the basis of the anharmonic expansion of the crystal potential. Studying these processes in the frequency domain, by means of high-resolution Raman spectroscopy (HRRS) and of Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy (FTIR), or in the time domain, by coherent anti-Stokes Raman spectroscopy (CARS) provides basic information on the phonon–phonon coupling mechanism, and is of growing importance for developing and testing model potentials for molecular or ionic crystals. During the past decades, in the great majority of the experiments on this subject special attention has been devoted to the temperature dependence of the linewidths, since different behaviors with temperature are characteristic of different relaxation processes. Much less attention has been paid to a second important parameter that can be varied, i.e., to the external pressure. Temperature and pressure can be considered as two somehow complementary parameters. In fact, in addition to the consequences of the thermal expansion, in most cases the main effect of rising the temperature is that of increasing the population of phonons and, as a consequence, of increasing the efficiency of the relaxation mechanisms and of making the high order processes more probable. On the other hand, the most relevant effect of applying high pressure on a crystal is that of drastically modifying its phonon density of states (DOS). Changing pressure modifies the intermolecular distances (of about 10% going from 0 to 10 GPa), what has considerable influence on the crystal potential and, consequently, on the frequency distribution of phonons and on the anharmonic coupling constants. Measuring linewidths at high pressure and low temperature is quite a new type of experiment, that up to now has been successfully performed on carbon disulfide, carbon dioxide, and naphthalene.

In Ref. 10 the authors reported quite an unusual behavior with temperature of the linewidth of the ν₁ symmetric stretching vibron observed in sodium nitrate crystal. Between 0 and 70 K and above 140 K, the linewidth of this mode increases normally with the temperature, whereas in the intermediate temperature range the linewidth decreases from 0.75 to 0.55 cm⁻¹. This strange behavior was explained as the result of the thermal expansion and of the peculiar density of vibrational states of this crystal. At low temperature in fact the frequency of the ν₁ mode is almost exactly coincident with the sum frequency of ν₂ (NO₃ bending) plus the Na⁺ translational phonons, whose frequencies are almost degenerate with a mean value of about 220 cm⁻¹. The resulting very high and narrow-peak two-phonon density of states provides a large number of decay channels to ν₁; when the temperature rises the thermal expansion of the crystal lowers the frequency of the translational peak, thus reducing the density of two-phonon states resonant with ν₁. Below 140 K this reduction overcompensates the increase of the phonon thermal population, and the net result is a decrease of the linewidth with increasing temperature. For T>140 K higher order processes, involving different phonon states, become dominant, and the “normal” behavior (i.e., increase of the linewidth with increasing temperature) is recovered.

This picture is confirmed by the IR spectra of the phonon sideband of the ν₁ mode, from which the number of final states available for the relaxation of ν₁ can be estimated by considering the absorbance at the frequency corresponding to the IR inactive ν₁ mode. Polarized IR spectra in this region at 80 K, 293 K, and higher temperatures have already been published; we have repeated unpolarized measurements at several temperatures below room temperature with a FTIR spectrometer. The spectra at five different temperatures are shown in Fig. 1.

The basic idea of the experiment described here is to measure the linewidth of ν₁ as a function of pressure and temperature that can be varied separately. In such a way it is possible not only to modify to a large extent the DOS, but also to distinguish, among the different parameters which determine the phonon linewidths, temperature effects from volume effects. Our experimental work was paralleled by lattice dynamics calculations, whose contribution was important for a more convincing interpretation of the data. Finally, as a test of the overall picture, similar experiments were performed on KNO₃, a crystal with almost identical intramo-
molecular vibrational frequencies, whose DOS is quite different, due to the larger mass of the cations.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Line broadening mechanisms can be classified as homogeneous and inhomogeneous broadening. The former arises from anharmonicity and exhibits a pure Lorentzian line shape, whereas the latter one leading to Gaussian line profiles is due to crystal imperfections such as isotopic impurities or strain, as is the case in real crystals. Inhomogeneous broadening occurring even at low temperature is more difficult to describe mathematically than homogeneous broadening and will not be discussed here. The special case of isotopic impurities is investigated in Ref. 12.

Finite Raman and infrared linewidths originate from anharmonic terms in the expansion of the crystal potential. In the harmonic approximation, phonons are noninteracting quasiparticles having infinitely long lifetimes and therefore delta-shaped line profiles in the corresponding spectra. Anharmonic terms in the expansion of the crystal potential couple phonons to each other leading to finite lifetimes, or nonzero linewidths. The contribution of a four-phonon down process is

\[
\Gamma_i^{(4d)}(T) = \frac{192 \pi}{\hbar^2} \sum_{mnp} |B_{1mn}|^2 ((n_m+1)(n_n+1)(n_p+1)
- n_m n_n n_p) \delta(\omega_1 - \omega_m - \omega_n - \omega_p) \tag{2}
\]

Higher order processes have similar expressions.

In the vicinity of \( T=0 \), three-phonon down conversion dominates the relaxation of \( \nu_1 \) (Ref. 10), so the linewidth is essentially given by Eq. (1), which now reads

\[
\Gamma_i^{(3d)} = \rho_{\text{sum}}(\omega_1) \eta(T) \tag{3}
\]

where \( \rho_{\text{sum}}(\omega) \) is the two-phonon sum density of states and \( \eta(T) \) is an abbreviation for the sum term of the occupation numbers for the corresponding process. This equation is the basis for interpreting linewidth data at zero pressure/varying temperature as well as zero temperature/varying pressure. In the former case \( \Gamma(T) \propto n(T) \) because \( B \) and \( \rho \) can be treated as constant (if thermal expansion is neglected). In many cases this assumption is justified and the temperature dependence of the linewidth can be reproduced only by considering \( n(T) \) (e.g., the \( \nu_2 \) and \( \nu_3 \) mode in NaNO\(_3\), Ref. 10) but there are exceptions like \( \nu_1 \) in NaNO\(_3\), where at least \( \rho \) is strongly temperature dependent. In the second case, where \( T \) approaches zero, the phonon occupation numbers vanish and \( n(T) = 1 \). Therefore the linewidth contribution is simply the product of a mean coupling constant and the associated density of states. These quantities can be calculated for each crystal structure relative to each pressure of interest. If \( \omega_1 \) and \( \omega_m \) are internal modes with small dispersion (like \( \nu_1 \) and \( \nu_2 \)) \( \rho_{\text{sum}} \) is well approximated by the one-phonon DOS at the frequency \( \omega_1 - \omega_m \):

\[
\Gamma_i^{(3d)} \propto (B_{1mn})^2 \rho_{\text{sum}}(\omega_1)(\omega_1 \omega_m) \tag{4}
\]

This equation was used for the calculation of the linewidth at low temperature and for the interpretation of our experimental results.

EXPERIMENT AND RESULTS

In the past NaNO\(_3\) was mainly investigated because of the presence of an order–disorder phase transition beginning at 423 K and reaching the \( \lambda \) point at 549 K.\(^ {13,14} \) Below this temperature sodium nitrate consists of alternate layers of Na\(^+\) and planar NO\(_3\)\(^-\) ions perpendicular to the threefold c
axis where the orientation of the nitrate groups in a given layer differs by 60° from the groups in two adjacent nitrate layers. This is the ordered calcite structure $D_{3d}^5$ or $R3c$ with two formula units per primitive cell. Group theory predicts 27 optical modes which can be divided for $k=0$ into external (lattice modes below approximately 300 cm$^{-1}$) and internal modes originating from the vibrations of the nitrate ion above 725 cm$^{-1}$.

At temperatures below 384 K KNO$_3$ is found to be in phase II ($D_3^{12}$), the orthorhombic aragonite structure with four formula units in the Bravais unit cell.

The experiments were carried out on two single crystals of NaN$_3$ (in the figures referred to as No. 1 and No. 2) and one single crystal of KNO$_3$, all grown from aqueous solution and of unknown orientation. Their quality (strain, stress) was checked with crossed polarizers. Each crystal was placed in the gasket hole (diameter: 150 $\mu$m; height: 80 $\mu$m) of a diamond anvil cell (DAC); furthermore at least two ruby chips (diameter < 20 $\mu$m) were added serving as manometer. Helium, filled by application of the gas loading technique (initial pressure 0.27 GPa), was used as a pressure transmitting medium because it is the most hydrostatic material known even at low temperature. The DAC was mounted on the cold flange of a closed cycle cryostat which cooled the sample down to approximately 20 K during 6 h (cooling power at 20 K: 7.7 W). Temperature was monitored by two silicon diodes which were placed at the top and bottom of the cell. Their temperature difference was below 3 K giving rise to the assumption that no considerable temperature gradient over the cell is present. Pressure was measured by the well-known ruby fluorescence method with an uncertainty of 0.1 GPa. Pressure was increased exclusively at room temperature because there helium is in its fluid state up to 12 GPa. Therefore we expect no generation of stress during pressure increase.

Raman light was excited by an argon ion laser running in single mode on the 514.5 nm line at 200 mW output power. Due to transmission losses the power at the sample is about 100 mW. Collected Raman light is focused by a lens on a pin hole which serves as a point light source for the subsequent lens generating parallel light. In that region the pressure tuned Fabry–Perot interferometer (ITI) is placed which is the high-resolution element of our setup. Transmitted light is focused by a third lens on the entrance slit of the monochromator which serves as the preselector. Standard photon counting equipment in conjunction with a personal computer was used for recording spectra and interferograms. The FPI was equipped with spacers having 2 and 3 mm thickness corresponding to 2.5 and 1.7 cm$^{-1}$ free spectral range (FSR) and approximately 0.04 and 0.03 cm$^{-1}$ bandpass. This configuration enables us to measure linewidths as small as 0.02 cm$^{-1}$. A more detailed description can be found in Ref. 5.

Our interest is mainly focused on the pressure dependent linewidth evolution of the $v_1$ mode at 1071 cm$^{-1}$. Nevertheless it was necessary to take at least low-resolution spectra of the lattice region and of the $v_1$ mode to determine line positions. Figures 2 and 3 summarize the pressure dependent frequencies at $T=21$ K of the two Raman active external modes $E_g(T)$ and $E_g(R)$, where $T$ and $R$ are translation and rotation, respectively. Between 0 and 2 GPa the line position is given by $v(E_g(T);p) = 8.6p + 116$ and $v(E_g(R);p) = 9.4p + 205$, where the units are GPa and cm$^{-1}$. The pressure shift of these two modes serves as a check for the model potential discussed in the next section. Above 6 GPa the $E_g(R)$ mode splits due to a II/III phase transition which was already observed.

The pressure shift of the internal mode $v_1$ is shown in Fig. 4 (empirical fit: $v(p_1) = 1078.5 + 2.7p - 8.4 \times \exp(-p/0.79)$; units in GPa and cm$^{-1}$). Concerning the Raman forbidden $v_2$ mode we refer to Adams et al., who have measured the overtone of $v_2$ and found a shift of 1.2 cm$^{-1}$/GPa. If no unusual pressure dependence of $v_2$ and its
overtones occurs, the pressure shift of the fundamental is estimated to be 0.6 cm$^{-1}$/GPa which is in any case small compared to the other pressure shifts under discussion. Teo et al. (Ref. 21) observed a discontinuity of the line position of $v_1$ at approximately 1.6 GPa and the disappearance of the translational lattice mode at slightly lower pressure at room temperature. Neither Adams et al. (Ref. 20) nor our group observed a similar behavior; therefore we conclude that below 6 GPa no phase transition occurs at 20 and 140 K.

However the main result is the pressure dependent linewidth of $v_1$ at 21 and 142 K which is shown in Figs. 5 and 6. Low and high temperature data are very different: at 20 K linewidth decreases from the zero pressure value of 0.7 cm$^{-1}$ (Ref. 10) to 0.3 cm$^{-1}$ at 2 GPa, whereas at 140 K the linewidth initially increases from 0.55 cm$^{-1}$ (Ref. 10) at zero pressure to 0.7 cm$^{-1}$ at 1 GPa and decreases to approximately 0.4 cm$^{-1}$ at 2 GPa. The increase of linewidth above 6 GPa is probably due to the II/III phase transition and will not be discussed here. For comparison interferograms of the $v_1$ mode of KNO$_3$ were recorded and linewidth data added to Fig. 6.

Furthermore FTIR spectra in the $v_2$ region (zero phonon line+sideband) of a NaNO$_3$ single crystal at zero pressure and above 30 K were taken to get information on the DOS in the lattice region (Fig. 1). This sideband reproduces at least qualitatively several features of the DOS and in particular the translational peak (see below) of the one-phonon density of states around 225 cm$^{-1}$. The corresponding zero-phonon line (ZPL) is $v_2$, which is the origin of the sideband. Thus the translational peak is mapped to 1068 cm$^{-1}$ (=842 cm$^{-1}$+226 cm$^{-1}$). The DOS is one factor controlling the linewidth [Eq. (3)] and it can be directly estimated from the IR spectra at the frequency of $v_1$. In Fig. 1 the length of the bars is an estimate for the DOS and the position corresponds to the infrared inactive $v_3$ mode. However, sidebands are not identical to the DOS but are weighted by a complicated response function.

**CRYSTAL MODEL AND CALCULATION**

The pressure dependence of the phonon density of states of NaNO$_3$ crystal was obtained at different temperatures by performing lattice dynamics calculations at the appropriate crystal densities. Since no high pressure/low temperature data about the crystal structure are available, the following extrapolation procedures were applied to calculate $a(p,T)$ and $c(p,T)$ from few experimental data: (1) lattice param-
TABLE I. Model potentials.

<p>| Potential parameters (units: kcal/mol and Å) | $V(r) = A_{ij} \exp(-B_{ij}r) - C_{ij}r^{-6}$ |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>i</th>
<th>j</th>
<th>$A_{ij}$</th>
<th>$B_{ij}$</th>
<th>$C_{ij}$</th>
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<td>Na</td>
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<td>9.601</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>24.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Na</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>20.096</td>
<td>3.46</td>
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<td>O</td>
<td>57.162</td>
<td>3.98</td>
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<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>76.054</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>197.8</td>
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Charges (units: proton charge)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>i</th>
<th>$q_i$</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>0.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>-0.366</td>
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TABLE III. Calculated and experimental lattice mode frequencies of NaN$_3$ at zero pressure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symmetry</th>
<th>Calcs, $T=0$</th>
<th>Expts. (Ref. 31) extrapolated to $p=0$</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$A_{1g}$</td>
<td>214.6</td>
<td>223.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>$A_{2g}$</td>
<td>239.2</td>
<td>239.1</td>
</tr>
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<td>$A_{2g}$</td>
<td>160.8</td>
<td>160.0</td>
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<td>$E_g$</td>
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<td>197.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$E_g$</td>
<td>114.1</td>
<td>114.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$A_{2u}$ (TO)</td>
<td>225.4</td>
<td>225.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$A_{2u}$ (TO)</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>56.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$A_{2u}$ (LO)</td>
<td>298.3</td>
<td>298.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$E_u$ (TO)</td>
<td>210.6</td>
<td>210.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$E_u$ (TO)</td>
<td>182.9</td>
<td>182.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$E_u$ (LO)</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>85.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$E_u$ (LO)</td>
<td>195.4</td>
<td>195.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$E_u$ (LO)</td>
<td>109.3</td>
<td>109.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A refinement of the potential parameters $A_{ij}$, $B_{ij}$, $C_{ij}$, and $q_i$, based on the extrapolated crystal structures and on the experimental data for the lattice energy and optical phonon frequencies at different pressures (when available), led to the set given in Table I. A good fit to the data is reached mainly through a hardening of the O–O interaction with respect to the starting potential. This partly compensates for the lack of polarizability contributions.

One cell parameter ($a$) is reproduced correctly, while the other ($c$) is larger than its extrapolated counterpart by about 15% (see Table II). As shown in Table III, the agreement for mode frequencies at $p=0$ is satisfactory. The pressure dependence of some lattice phonons is illustrated in Fig. 3: the frequency variation is nearly correct for the lower (translational) mode, while it is about two times the experimental value for the higher (rotational) mode. LO frequencies are also too high. As usual in similar calculations on ionic systems, the potential results too “stiff” if polarizability is not taken into account. However, including polarizability, e.g., through a shell model, implies the use of extra parameters that would make the refinement process much more complicated. In view of the approximations implicit in the model (e.g., the approximations on crystal structures at high pressure—see above) no effort was made to go beyond the rigid ion approximation.

As already pointed out, the phonon density of states is
the quantity of interest in the calculation of the relaxation probability of $v_1$. Densities of states were calculated at different pressures by sampling about 10,000 points uniformly distributed in the Brillouin zone of the appropriate crystals. The calculation was made for $T=0$ and 140 K using the corresponding crystal structures; some results are shown in Fig. 7. These curves can be compared to the phonon sideband observed in the $v_2$ region of the infrared spectrum, which shows a similar peak structure, although it should be kept in mind that the intensity of the IR profile is not simply proportional to the phonon DOS, but is weighted by a response factor depending on frequency. Figure 7 shows the dependence of the DOS on $p$ and $T$, which is in the expected direction, even though the temperature shift appears to be smaller than in the experiments. This shows that while the potential curve is somehow too steep on the side of the short distances (experienced by the crystal at high pressures), on the long distance side (corresponding to higher temperatures) it is probably too flat.

In Fig. 8, the phonon DOS around the resonance frequency ($v_1$ - $v_2$) is plotted vs pressure in the interval 0-2 GPa, which is the range of validity of crystal structure extrapolations and of the fitting of vibrational frequencies. The curves represent the average value of the DOS at 225±5 cm$^{-1}$. This interval (10 cm$^{-1}$) corresponds to the dispersion of the $v_2$ band, and also takes care of the uncertainty about the pressure dependence of this mode. An initial, steep decrease with pressure is calculated at $T=0$ K, while the curve at $T=140$ K shows a small plateau at low pressures. This behavior qualitatively reproduces the pressure dependence of $v_1$ linewidth (see Fig. 6).

DISCUSSION

As was anticipated in the Introduction, the unusual quality of sodium nitrate is a peak in the one-phonon density of states at approximately 225 cm$^{-1}$ (in the following called "translational peak") originating from the translational motion of the Na$^+$ ion against the NO$_3^-$ ion which nearly equals the difference in wave number of $v_1$ (1071 cm$^{-1}$) and $v_2$ (842 cm$^{-1}$). Therefore a three-phonon down process $v_1$ (1071 cm$^{-1}$) $\rightarrow$ $v_2$ (842 cm$^{-1}$) + $\omega_2$ (229 cm$^{-1}$) with many final states and consequently large linewidth is likely to exist. This can be seen in the FTIR spectrum of Fig. 1 where the $v_1$ position is marked by the line around 1070 cm$^{-1}$ and the estimated number of available final states is indicated by the length of that line (see above). As the temperature increases the translational peak shifts to lower frequencies [the temperature dependence can be expressed by the formula $v_1$ = 1067.9 - 16.2/ln[exp(160/T) - 1] [K, cm$^{-1}$], which is the common expression for temperature dependent line shift$^{28}$] whereas the frequencies of the internal modes remain almost constant ($\Delta v_1$ $\Delta T$ = -0.02 cm$^{-1}$/K and $\Delta v_2$ $\Delta T$ = -0.008 cm$^{-1}$/K). Therefore the number of final states and consequently the linewidth of $v_1$ decreases between 80 and 140 K. Below 80 K the linewidth evolution is in agreement with a three-phonon down process with constant linewidth below 40 K ($\Gamma$ = 0.7 cm$^{-1}$) and slightly increasing linewidth above 40 K ($\Gamma$ = 0.73 cm$^{-1}$ at 70 K). The nonlinear temperature dependence of the linewidth above 140 K can be ascribed to contributions from the four-phonon down process: $v_1$ (1070 cm$^{-1}$) $\rightarrow$ $v_2$ (842 cm$^{-1}$) + 2 $\times$ $\omega_2$ (114 cm$^{-1}$). This is the model used by Angeloni and Righini to explain the temperature dependent linewidth evolution of $v_1$ (Ref. 10).

The pressure dependent linewidth at low temperature is given by Eq. (4) and depends in this approximation on the averaged coupling coefficient $\langle B_{12L} \rangle$, which is a third derivative of the crystal potential with respect to $v_1$, $v_2$, and a lattice phonon, and the density of states of the lattice modes region.
Since high pressure IR spectroscopy experiments cannot be executed in our laboratory, we have no experimental access to such DOS data. Nevertheless, the calculated DOS at the difference frequency of $\nu_1$ and $\nu_2$ as a function of pressure (Fig. 8) qualitatively reproduces the main characteristics of the $\Gamma(p)$ curve in Fig. 8. This is because the DOS at 225 cm$^{-1}$ changes dramatically with pressure and in particular the translational peak loses intensity.

The second factor of Eq. (4), $(B_{122})$, is expected to be slowly increasing with pressure, as can be seen by the following consideration. Unfortunately, it is difficult to calculate this quantity “a priori,” due to the lack of information about high-order derivatives involving the internal potential of NO$_3^-$, which is part of the crystal potential. However, one can estimate the pressure variation of $(B_{122})$ from that of an average coupling coefficient $(B_L)$ involving only external modes: we find that $(B_L)$ varies almost linearly with pressure and increases by a factor of about 1.6 in the interval 0-2 GPa. Since the increase in $(B_{122})$ is probably much smaller than that of the internal potential is less dependent on pressure than the external potential, as shown also by the $\nu(p)$ curves, we can regard this value as an upper limit. If the balanced effect of the DOS decrease and of the $(B_{122})$ increase is considered, the overall self-energy change in the same interval results to be at least $-27\%$, a value which is in good agreement with the observed $\Gamma(p)$.

Thus, on the whole, our model indicates that at low $T$ the pressure induced change in the high-frequency region of the DOS is the driving force for the linewidth variation. However, as Fig. 7 shows, the effect of pressure is not merely a rigid shift of the translational peak [since the pressure shift is $<1$ cm$^{-1}$/GPa for $(\nu_1-\nu_2)$ and about 10 cm$^{-1}$ for lattice frequencies, this would cause an initial increase of $\Gamma$ with $p$, but rather a transformation in its shape.

The same discussion is applicable to the curve at $T=140$ K, in which case, however, the thermal factor $n_T(T=140)$ K$^{-1}$, and should also be taken into account [Eq. (3)]. The changes of the coefficients $(B_{122})$ with temperature are treated to be small compared to pressure induced effects. The main difference to the low-temperature case is the position of the translational peak of the sideband, which is 10 cm$^{-1}$ below $\nu_1$ (Fig. 1). This is the reason for the reduced linewidth (0.55 cm$^{-1}$, Ref. 10) at zero pressure as already discussed above. Increasing pressure again broadens the translational peak and generates new features in the high-frequency part of the one-phonon DOS (Fig. 7) leading there to increased DOS at 225 cm$^{-1}$ and consequently to the initial increase of linewidth (see Fig. 6). This behavior is reproduced theoretically by the pressure dependent DOS at 225 cm$^{-1}$ at 140 K (Fig. 8).

State densities were not calculated above 2 GPa (as already noted, the extrapolation of lattice parameters is limited to max. 2.5 GPa), but Fig. 8 indicates that no significant difference, between the low $T$ case and the 140 K case, is to be expected above this pressure. Since the thermal factor alone can account for only a fraction ($<0.1$ cm$^{-1}$) of the linewidth difference between the two temperatures in the range 2-6 GPa, higher order phonon relaxation processes must be responsible for the rest of this difference. We calculated that the contribution of four phonon down conversion approximately doubles in the interval 20-140 K, with $\Gamma(0)=0.2$ cm$^{-1}$ at the higher temperature. This value is in good agreement with our experiments.

Finally we recorded some interferograms of the $\nu_1$ mode of KNO$_3$ which served as a crosscheck. Linewidth increases from 0.4 cm$^{-1}$ at $p=0$ to 0.7 cm$^{-1}$ at 6 GPa as expected, which is completely different to the linewidth evolution of $\nu_1$ in NaNO$_3$ (Fig. 6). Since the frequencies of the internal modes, originating from the vibrations of the NO$_3^-$ ion, are almost identical to those of NaNO$_3$ (KNO$_3$ at 78 K: $\nu_1=1054$ cm$^{-1}$, $\nu_2=827$ cm$^{-1}$) we expect that differences mainly arise from intermolecular interaction and—of course—from the heavier K$^+$ ion. Considering only masses, the translational peak is expected at approximately 175 cm$^{-1}$, which is 50 cm$^{-1}$ lower than in NaNO$_3$. IR spectra of the phonon sideband of $\nu_2$ of KNO$_3$, which are unfortunately much less structured than in NaNO$_3$, exhibit slightly enhanced absorption around 990 cm$^{-1}$ corresponding to a more intense sideband and therefore to a larger DOS at 160 cm$^{-1}$ which in the expected direction Raman spectra in the $\nu_1$ region also exhibit phonon sidebands whose highest frequency is separated by $\approx 170$ cm$^{-1}$ from the fundamental. Moreover, the high-energy tail of the phonon sideband extends up to 1040 cm$^{-1}$ corresponding to a Debye frequency in the lattice region of approximately 210 cm$^{-1}$. All these findings support the assumption that at $p=0$ GPa no three-phonon down channel is available: $\nu_1(1054$ cm$^{-1})\rightarrow \nu_2(827$ cm$^{-1})+\omega (227$ cm$^{-1})$ because the difference frequency (227 cm$^{-1}$) is larger than the Debye frequency (210 cm$^{-1}$); however four-phonon down processes cannot be excluded. At elevated pressure the Debye frequency increases at a rate similar to that of high lying external modes ($A_9$ at 165 cm$^{-1}$: 8.2 cm$^{-1}$/GPa) and a three-phonon down channel may open. This should lead to increasing linewidth of $\nu_1$ in KNO$_3$ being in accordance with the experimental results.

**SUMMARY**

High-resolution Raman measurements were executed on NaNO$_3$ at pressures up to 9 GPa at 21 and 142 K. The abnormal decrease in linewidth is discussed in the framework of anharmonic lattice dynamics considering in particular pressure induced changes of anharmonicity constants and phonon densities of states. In particular the pressure induced change of the shape of the translational peak in the one-phonon density of states in the lattice mode region is responsible for the observed linewidths. Numerical calculations (DOS at several pressures) based on extrapolated lattice parameters reproduce the decrease of linewidth to a reasonable degree. The limiting factor for more precise calculations is again the lack of accurate structure data at low temperature and high pressure. Additionally, KNO$_3$ was measured because of the different crystal structure and different masses of the metal ion leading to modified DOS in the lattice region. The result—an almost linear increase of linewidth with...
pressure—can be explained by considering a three-phonon down process, whose efficiency increases with pressure due to increased number of final states.


