

Rhythm, significant
basic elements of
music that can



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Rhythm, melody, and texture are some of the significant basic elements of music that can be found in literally any musical piece.

Yet, those elements differ dramatically from piece to piece, thus creating the individual image of each composition and making it unique. The present paper focuses on analyzing the rhythm, melody, and texture in a selection of two musical compositions and discovering both the similarities and differences in the way those musical elements appear in the compositions. The works under discussion come from different styles of piano music.

The first piece, Allegretto Gracioso from Piano Sonata K333, was written by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in the golden age of Classical tradition in 1780s. The second piece, Fantaisie-Impromptu op. 66, was created by the Romantic genius of Frederic Chopin in the first half of the nineteenth century. The rhythmic peculiarities of Mozart's Allegretto Gracioso reflect the graceful nature of the piece, announced in its name. Streaming through the simple quadruple time signature alla breve, the movement proceeds in the steady rhythm of quarter-notes and eighth-notes, with a significant rhythmic accent placed on the first beat of the bar by placing a dotted crochet rest there (Mozart 00: 00, 00: 08).

The stability of rhythmical scheme is somehow enlivened by a triplet of sixteenth-notes appearing in the variation of the initial motif (Mozart 00: 08). A more obvious shift from duple to triple rhythm is observed in the fourth realization of the main theme, with its final bar breaking out in a series of four eighth-note triplets (Mozart 00: 22-00: 24). Mozart uses the method of rhythmical variation quite widely, with the second theme diversified by a

small syncopé during its repetition (Mozart 00: 38–00: 40). In addition to these small rhythmical variations, the overall diversity in rhythm is achieved through altering more stable rhythmic schemes of quarter-notes and eighth-notes with more agitated patterns of sixteenth-notes (Mozart 00: 41–00: 51).

As it is typical of music written by composers of Viennese Classic period, the melody of Allegretto Gracioso is based on the sounds of chords. For example, the first bar of the piece features a melody highlighting the tones of a triad, and in the second bar it outlines the tones of a seventh-chord. Due to this peculiarity, the first motive is characterized as disjunct melody (Mozart 00: 00–00: 04). In contrast to this part, the final motive of the phrase moves in intervals of seconds, and therefore features a conjunct type of melody (Mozart 00: 05–00: 07). The significance of the initial phrase is emphasized by the fact that it is repeated four times at the beginning of the piece (00: 00–00: 24), then in the middle of the piece (01: 00–01: 21), and then developed in a different mode (02: 15–02: 25), returning in the original variant two more times (02: 44–03: 05 and 05: 15–05: 25).

In the traditions of the Classical period, the texture of Allegretto Gracioso is homophonic. The main melody is placed in the top layer of the texture, the highest pitches. Although the rest of the layers sometimes demonstrate interesting melodic lines, they do not represent an independent melody. Therefore, those subvoices cannot be viewed as equally significant melodic materials and should rather be classified as accompaniment.

Inside this homophonic texture, however, there are fragments of polyphonic dialogue between the voices, imitating each other's motifs (Mozart 01: 30–

01: 33 and 04: 21–04: 24). Chopin's Fantaisie-Impromptu for piano represents a curious piece of music from the point of view of its rhythmical scheme. The basic time signature of the composition is simple quadruple, but it is almost leveled by the intricate polyrhythmic pattern: the right hand of the pianists plays passages in four sixteenth-notes per beat, and the left hand of the pianist performs triads of eighth-notes per beat at the same time. This creates an original effect of continuous and quite irregular movement. Rhythmic organization also helps to divide the form of the piece: the polyrhythmic pattern of four sixteenth-notes against eighth-note triads gives place to another polyrhythmic pattern of two eighth-notes against eight-note triads in the middle section of Fantaisie-Impromptu (Chopin 01: 03–02: 55). It is hard to talk about the melody in the two parts of Fantaisie-Impromptu located around the middle. In fact, the real melody appears only in the middle part, featuring a melodic line of a wide range and both conjunct and disjunct movement (Chopin 01: 03–02: 55).

The large leaps in melody increase the expressiveness of the piece by enlarging the melodic range to almost two octaves (Chopin 2: 25–2: 27). Emphasizing the romantic nature of the piece, the melody of the middle part is rich with various embellishments like trills and ornamentation (Chopin 01: 10, 01: 20, 01: 30). Contrasted to this obvious melody in the middle section of Fantaisie-Impromptu, the outer sections represent a constant movement of sounds without a definite melodic line. However, even in this sound entity, there emerge certain melodic impulses, allowing to link sounds together in an audible melodic line (Chopin 00: 20–00: 38 and 03: 07–03: 24). The texture of Chopin's Fantaisie-Impromptu is obviously homophonic in the

middle part where a definite melodic line is accompanied by figurations in the bass (Chopin 01: 03-02: 55).

On the contrary, the texture in the outer parts does not possess an outstanding melodic line. The texture there is quite thick due to the figuration in the parties of both the right and the left hand of the pianist. However, since the material played by the right hand prevails in the hearing perception of the listener, it can be assumed that in the outer parts the texture is homophonic as well. Despite the difference in style between Mozart's Allegretto Gracioso and Chopin's Fantaisie-Impromptu, there is certain similarity in the way the two compositions are organized rhythmically. On the one hand, both pieces maintain one and the same type of time signature, the simple quadruple one.

On the other hand, when comparing the ways the composers handle repetitions of the main melodic line, it becomes apparent that with each repetition the theme is varied rhythmically. By theme here is meant the initial phrase in Mozart's Allegretto Gracioso and the melodic phrase that opens the middle part of Chopin's Fantaisie-Impromptu (Chopin 01: 03-02: 55). Rhythmic variation as a means of development is thus common to both pieces.

In terms of melody, the pieces are similar in that they both possess distinctive melodies that combine both conjunct and disjunct movement. Again, in case with Chopin's Fantaisie-Impromptu melody is discussed in terms of the middle section (Chopin 01: 03-02: 55). Both of the compositions feature repetitions of melodic phrases in order to emphasize the significance

of the given melody as the main theme of the piece. Moreover, Mozart, like Chopin, employs the techniques of ornamental embellishment as variation in consequent repetitions of the melodic phrase (Mozart 00: 15). Remaining within the conventional tradition of Classical and Romantic music, both Mozart and Chopin write their pieces in homophonic texture. The melody clearly dominates over the accompaniment, however interesting subvoices the latter may feature.

The accompaniment of both pieces is mainly based on supporting the melody by harmonic structures that actually represent harmonic chords expanded in separate sounds. Therefore, the subvoices merely fill in the harmony and cannot be viewed as independent melodic structures. Along with the similarities, the music pieces under discussion demonstrate significant differences in terms of rhythm, melody, and texture.

The differences in rhythmic organization of the two compositions are apparent in the fact that Chopin's *Fantaisie-Impromptu* demonstrates a bright example of polyrhythmic music, with its outer parts featuring a collision between triple and quadruple rhythmic structures. Such conflict of simultaneously sounding rhythms creates a conflict and dramatic character of music itself. On the contrary, Mozart keeps his piece in relatively steady rhythms, occasionally introducing a series of triplets or syncopes to diversify the rhythmic scheme. This placidity in rhythm contributes to the graceful nature of music announced in the title of *Allegretto Gracioso*. The melodic organization of Mozart's and Chopin's pieces demonstrates a difference in terms of the expressive effects of the melody. While Mozart keeps the main melody of his composition emotionally neutral by sticking to the standard

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pattern of following the sounds of triad, Chopin appears more creative in his approach to melody.

In the two outer sections of his *Fantaisie-Improptu*, the composer conceals the melody in the streaming passages of sixteenth-notes and only rarely lets the audience trace intonations that resemble a melodic line (Chopin 00: 20–00: 38 and 03: 07–03: 24). Such veiling of the melody in the outer parts makes its appearance in the middle section ever significant. This melody of the middle part differs from Mozart's melodic structures by a much wider range and length of phrase. The difference in the texture between the two pieces reveals itself mainly in the level of texture denseness. In Mozart's *Allegretto Gracioso*, the texture is mainly light and almost transparent, since it is only limited to the melodic line and a simple accompaniment with either chords played together or figurations on the sounds of chords. In Chopin's *Fantaisie-Improptu*, the texture is seemingly based on the same principle of melody with accompaniment. However, it seems much denser to the listener due to the accumulation of multiple sounds sustained on one pedal.

In addition, the lack of melodic clarity in the outer parts of *Fantaisie-Improptu* contributes to the loadening of texture, as the listener intuitively connects the many tones into one reverberating whole. Upon comparison of the two pieces, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Allegretto Gracioso* from Piano Sonata K333 and Frederic Chopin's *Fantaisie-Improptu* op. 66, it becomes obvious that certain conclusions should be drawn from the analysis. On the one hand, the similarities in rhythm, melody, and texture prompt that there exist certain artistic standards common for every style in music. Rhythmic variety as a principle of development, repetition of melodic fragments in <https://assignbuster.com/rhythm-significant-basic-elements-of-music-that-can/>

order to emphasize the significance of a certain melodic theme, homophonic texture as dominant in both pieces, – all those features appear universal principles in classic music. On the other hand, composers individualize their works by employing various patterns of rhythmic organization, a narrower or wider range of melodic lines, and a more or less transparent texture.

Singling out the common and the different in music compositions helps to realize the universal and the individual in art.

Works Cited

Chopin, Frederic. *Fantaisie-Impromptu* op. 66. Perf. Vladimir Horowitz.

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