

Mozart sonata k. 281 analysis essay



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Sonata form is the musical form that has been most widely used then any other form. It really took shape as a main form during the Classical period.

It is usually used as a first movement in a multi-movement piece and is commonly referred to as Sonata-Allegro form. The concept behind it was to try and find a way to organize or categorize musical ideas into a movement based on a particular “key.” While this form has a formula or approach to it, it is rather rigid and leaves itself to be very open. It uses a 3 part binary form that has an Exposition, Development and Recapitulation. Many composers have developed and expanded this style of music composition.

Mozart being the subject of this paper is also one of the composers known for his strong and clear understanding of Sonata form in his music. This paper will examine one of his piano sonatas entitled, Piano Sonata K. 281 in Bb Major. As stated above, Sonata form has 3 parts. The first of these parts is the exposition.

This section has the primary material for the movement that is broken down into 4 sections of its own. The first subject, transition, second subject and codetta. The first section of the exposition in the Mozart (which for the remainder of the paper the piece will be referred to “the Mozart”) is in Bb major. The first subject is split into 8 bar phrases.

The first phrase acts more like an introduction to the second part of the first subject. The first two bars act like mini cadences. They go as follows: I – vii – I. This is followed by another two bars that also act like mini cadences, however, they don't set any sort of primary ideas. Their little motif ideas

merely allow the composer an easier transition into repeating the first two bars.

Naturally, Mozart does that by not only repeating the first two bars but also putting it down an octave. He finishes up this first phrase by bring in a new motivic idea and then setting up an rhythmic ostinato to help get into the second phrase of the first subject. Its also noted that he ends it with a perfect authentic cadence of V – I. The second phrase is a bit different.

Mozart keeps the same rhythm in the bass for the first 4 bars of the phrase, with appropriate chord changes. He also uses those first 4 bars to do a mini-development of the first two bars of the piece. It uses the same type f upwards motion and long ending note. This repetition stays until the end of the second phrase and helps push the piece forward into help the modulation into the dominant. As the piece is transiting into the next subject, the new key for the second subject is already put into place. The transition section is in F Major.

The transition section changes the mood in preparation for second subject section through mood metamorphosis. For the first 4 measures of the transition, the rhythm in the left hand follows an Alberti bass pattern while the rhythm in the right hand is more melodic and moving. The transition of the Mozart does a few things other things in the last 5 bars. It produces a deceptive modulation with lots of accidentals. It also anticipate of ideas of the second theme's rhythmic harmony.

Lastly, it introduces new material that is contrasting with both the primary and related key sections. When the transition finally builds up and ends, the

second subject is introduced in the key of the transition. The second subject starts and ends in F Major. The material in the second subject is different in rhythm and mood from that of the first subject. It is more lyrical and the motion is more constant. The cadences are less frequent in the second subject.

They happen but are seen as more than just chords. The second subject also keeps the Alberti bass going throughout for 6 out of 11 measures of the second subject. The second subject ends with an authentic cadence to set it up into the Codetta. The Codetta fulfilled its purpose to bring the exposition section to a close.

It ends the section in the same key as the second section. It uses the idea of sequencing themes which each arrive at the perfect cadence. The last measures of the exposition are slightly different to help point back to the tonic and also sets up prepare the developmental section to come. The Development of the Mozart is an open free-form section that bases its ideas on thematic materials from the Exposition.

It is very modulatory and derivative. Mozart pays special attention to shaping factors in the pace, texture, plan of key relationships and order of all the melodic material. He emphasizes the sub dominant throughout the entire development. It creates a sort of fantasy of the earlier material. The Alberti bass is very prominent through out the entire section. It acts as a strong accompaniment to the new themes that are introduced.

The development varies in length from the exposition and in other cases is quite long and detailed. However, it shows a greater degree of tonal,

harmonic and rhythmic instability than the other sections. The last part of the developmental section is the re-transition or bridge. It helps prepares the return of the first subject in the tonic.

It stresses and prolongs the dominant seventh of the tonic. At the height of the musical tension the tonic triumphs and it enters into the recapitulation. The recapitulation is an altered repeat of the exposition. It also consists of a first subject, a transition, and second subject and a codetta.

There is no coda in this piece of music. The recapitulation returns most of the material from the Exposition. However, the recapitulation does bring in different ideas. The first subject is in the same key and form as the exposition.

The beginning four bars brings in the exact same idea from the exposition. The entire first subject is the same as previously stated in the exposition, note for note, rhythm for rhythm. Onto the transition. The transition is now altered and doesn't change key and remains in Bb Major.

The transition keeps the same ideas from the beginning of the piece. The notes are varied in the second part of the transition. Before the transition in the exposition built up and ended with the second subject introduced in the key of the transition. The transition in the recapitulation doesn't build as much as it is not preparing for a development.

It does prepare a mini development just like the previous one did. The transition ends on the V chord of the key, regardless of how it sounds with the accidentals. The second subject in the recapitulation is in the exact same

form as the exposition. There is one difference that this second subject does and that is, its in the same key as the first subject.

In the exposition section in Sonata form, the second subject is supposed to be in the dominant. In the recapitulation, its supposed to remain the same. The second subject in the Mozart stays strict to that “ rule. ” The second subject in the recapitulation also ends with a V - I into the codetta of the recapitulation. The codetta of the recapitulation is exactly the same as the exposition’s codetta with the exception that it is in the key of Bb rather than F. The codetta doesn’t give anything new or bring something to the table that really makes it feel like the end.

Sonata form was created as a guide to composers to be a schematic for their works. It is for interpreters to understand the grammar and meaning of a work. It gives the listeners an understanding of significance of a piece and its musical ideas. The list of musical details in the Mozart did determine the harmonic meaning of a particular phrases.

His understanding of the sonata gave a good understanding of the shape and hierarchy of the movement. The classical era established this idea of structuring first movements and the standard layouts of multi-movement compositions. The practice of Mozart, as well as other notable composers, became the influence on the generation which sought to try and exploit the possibilities offered by the forms which he had established in his works. His works were studied, including the exceptions and boundaries of acceptable or usual practice set by his works.

Lastly, before it had been described as a form, it was used for music making.

Formal Analysis of Mozart K. 281 Sonata Exposition Primary

Subject Transition Second Subject Coda Repeat Sign M. 1-16 M. 17-26 M.

27-37 M. 38-40 Tonic —————> Dominant Tonic

———— Development Primary Subject Bridge M. 41-60 M. 61-69 Various ideas, sequential, sub-dominant emphasized Recapitulation Primary Subject Re- Transition Second Subject Coda M. 70-85 M.

86-95 M. 96-106 M. 107-109 Tonic Tonic Tonic Tonic