

Mozart k331 analysis



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Analysis of W. A. Mozart's Piano Sonata in A Major, K. 331: First Movement

Classical composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born to Leopold and Anna Maria Mozart in 1756 in Salzburg, Austria (then the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation). Mozart showed promise in music from an early age, prompting his father to assume the role as his instructor. His father described his son as a gift from God, and Leopold nurtured Wolfgang's talents as such. Mozart would eventually travel throughout Europe with his musical family; however, it was in Salzburg that he would compose three piano sonatas in 1783.

These pieces were most likely composed for Mozart's pupils in Vienna, who were a significant source of income for him at the time. This paper concerns the second of the three: Sonata in A major, K. 331, specifically the first movement. The following explores the basic form of the piece, melodic and harmonic structure, as well as examination of methods used to vary the theme. The overall form of this movement is theme and variation. This form is characteristic of many solo sonatas; however, it is atypical for a first movement of a classical sonata. More frequently, the first movement would be in sonata form.

This movement presents the theme in the first 18 measures as seen in Fig. 1 (pg. 2). There are two 4-bar phrases, the first ending on a half cadence and the second on a perfect authentic cadence, that repeat. This forms what is called a "period," where we have two similar phrases connected by a half cadence. In the second period, Mozart introduces new material, developing the long-short motive for four measures and continuing to a half cadence.

After this he returns to the original melody for four bars, and ends the phrase on a root position imperfect authentic cadence.

Following is a 2-measure extension, ending with a cadential 6/4 to give a strong perfect authentic cadence. Each movement follows the same structure except variation VI, in which the final repeat cadences and then continues to an 8-measure coda. Other than that, each movement follows the same binary form. Fig. 1: First Movement, mm. 1-18. The tender melody Mozart presents in these first 18 bars is simple, with a lot of stepwise motion and small leaps. Adhering to classical style, he uses chords built on diatonic pitches and resolves dissonances quickly. Pairing a simple homophonic melody with simple accompaniment makes it easier to manipulate the theme in the coming variations. In Fig. 1, you'll notice that the middle voice barely moves at all. In fact, it isn't until measure 9 that we start seeing strong beats without an E in them. Also, the long-short (quarter-eighth/dotted eighth-sixteenth) motive remains constant until it too develops at measure 9. All of these techniques for a simple theme help Mozart develop his idea later. In the first variation, Mozart agitates the theme with the use of chromatic approaches and chromatic passing tones. Between the left and right hands, we hear an unrelenting series of sixteenth notes.

Mozart also incorporates more use of dynamics than he did in the theme, by composing contrasting piano and forte sections. This drastic dynamic change happens in the A section of the variation. In variation II, another insistent figure is introduced: this time, triplet sixteenth notes. The melody in the right hand starts out very ornamented. Mozart then puts each melody note at the start of a flowing downward triplet arpeggio. The left hand emphasizes the

strong beat throughout these triplets, and then the melody returns in the original ornamented character from the start of this variation's A section.

On the half cadences in this variation, we see a direct quote from the theme. Variation III brings the most drastic change yet. The key changes to the parallel minor (A minor). This movement features flowing sixteenth notes and phrase markings pning up to three measures. It features many chromatic neighbor and passing tones, as well as use of the melodic minor scale: sharpening scale degrees 6 when ascending, and keeping it within the key when descending. Scale degree 7 is rarely lowered, as it is usually bound by the major V chord quality.

Variation IV, back in A major, features a floating melody line above the staff that begins on beat 2, almost like an afterthought or reaction to the strong beat. It contains less dynamic contrast than the past variations, presenting the majority of the notes at piano. The light airy feeling given by the notes in the upper register provides a necessary contrast from the previous gloomy movement. In Variation V, the tempo is remarked: *adagio*. In the new slow tempo, 32nd notes in the left hand provide the accompaniment, while the right hand plays some intricate scalic and chromatic passages.

At this tempo, the right hand is playing such intricate passages, that the theme has been significantly blurred to the point where it is barely identifiable. The chromaticism is still present, but it is scaled back a bit in this movement. We see a new character of sound emerge in the right hand with a happy staccato repetition on the tonic pitch. There are also a lot of contrasting dynamics to the point where they change back and forth mid-

measure. In the final variation, the dynamic contrast resembles that of variation II; however the similarities, more or less, end there.

The tempo changes to allegro and opens with jubilant eighth notes with contrasting articulations. This variation features mostly fast scales and arpeggios that outline the theme. As the B section concludes, a major scale rockets upward and leads into the coda. The coda basically alternates tonic and predominant chords until finally ending with two strong V-I progressions for a perfect authentic cadence to close out the movement. One thing that I find interesting about Mozart's Sonata is that in every movement, there is a very steady pulse.

This means that the movements are not only tied together by the melody and chords, but by the presence of a constant rhythmic pulse first presented in the theme. I really like what Mozart did with these variations. He was able to create very individual variations without distancing the music from the theme or from classical style. I wouldn't go as far as calling the work genius, but I think the quality of the work, and the way that he connected the variations was nearly perfect. The dynamic contrast is exciting, and the final variation provides a good sense of finality.

Well done, Mozart. Bibliography Brown, Peter. "Amadeus and Mozart: Setting the Record Straight." *The American Scholar*. 61(1992): 49-52. TheHarvardBiological Dictionary of Music. "Mozart, (Johann Chrysostom) Wolfgang Amadeus (27 Jan. 1756, Salzburg - 5 Dec. 1791, Vienna)". Accessed November 16, 2012. http://www.credoreference.com/entry/harvbiodictmusic/mozart_johann_chrysostom_wolfgang_amadeus_27_jan_1756_salzburg_5_dec_1791_vienna. Hertz, Daniel. Mozart, Haydn, <https://assignbuster.com/mozart-k331-analysis/>

and Early Beethoven: 1781-1802. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009.

| | | | ----- [1]. Peter Brown, “ Amadeus and Mozart: Setting the Record Straight,” *The American Scholar*, 61(1992): 49-52. [2]. “ Mozart, (Johann Chrysostom) Wolfgang Amadeus (27 Jan. 1756, Salzburg - 5 Dec. 1791, Vienna)”, *The Harvard Biological Dictionary of Music*, Accessed November 16, 2012, http://www.credoreference.com/entry/harvbiodictmusic/mozart_johann_chrysostof_wolfgang_amadeus_27_jan_1756_salzburg_5_dec_1791_vienna. [3]. Daniel Hertz, *Mozart, Haydn, and Early Beethoven: 1781-1802*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), 52-4.