

An Appreciation of the First Movement of Mozart's Piano Sonata in D Major, KV.576

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Abstract. The most outstanding and influential composer of the Viennese classical school is Mozart, and the Piano Sonata in D Major (KV.576) is Mozart's last sonata, written in 1789. This paper will mainly focus on the first movement of KV.576, analysing it in detail from the compositional background, the period background, the performance technique, and the perception of the performance. KV.576 achieves balance and harmony by contrasting composition, theme, and texture. Instead of following the traditional style, Mozart's music reinterprets the new music with the vocabulary of the time to realize the aesthetic ideal of classical music.

1 Background of creation

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) was born on January 27, 1756, in Salzburg, Austria, the youngest of three children of Johann Georg Leopold Mozart (1719-1787) and Maria Anna Pert (1720-1778). Five of his seven brothers died prematurely of disease, leaving only the fourth, Maria Anna Mozart (1751-1829), and the youngest Mozart alive. The father, Leopold, came from an established family in Augsburg. An intellectual, he studied philosophy and law at university but abandoned his studies and pursued a career as a professional musician, serving as a court musician under the archbishop of the Salzburg Cathedral, responsible for teaching the members as a violinist in the court orchestra. After the birth of his son, Mozart, he published a book on how to play the violin, a musical background for Leopold's youngest son. Under his rigorous education, Mozart made an early name for himself in the musical world.

The Sonata in D Major (KV.576), Mozart's final sonata completed in 1789, presents an exceptionally demanding challenge for performers, necessitating a high level of technical proficiency. This work, written after Mozart's return to Vienna, stands as his last surviving sonata. Among his sonatas, KV.576 is notably distinguished by its remarkable cohesion and unified thematic motives [1]. It is also the only work commissioned by Prussia, and literature [2] speaks of combining the elegance of the Princess of Potsdam with the symphonic counterpoint characteristic of Mozart's late period, resulting in a top-notch sonata work like no other.

2. Background of the time of creation

KV.576 is Mozart's last piano sonata, which was composed in Vienna in July 1789. In 1789, when Mozart was on a recital trip to avoid an economic crisis, Prussia's queen-daughter Friederike commissioned "six simple piano sonatas." It is believed that KV.576, the commissioned work, was the only one of the six to be completed. It is speculated that Mozart was preoccupied with Bach's music at the time of the composition of KV.576. Mozart visited St. Thomas Church in Leipzig to compose KV.574, which utilizes the Baroque style. In addition, KV.576 was written after KV.574, and the work highlights the structure of counterpoint, which demonstrates Bach's profound influence on Mozart.

3 Techniques for performing the work

Analysis of the work KV.576 as a whole is composed of three movements arranged according to the fast-slow-fast order and the relationship of D major-A major-D major. KV.576 employs counterpoint techniques in the movements. The second movement and elements of a cyclical theme appear in the third movement. The first movement (Allegro) of KV.576 will be specifically analysed below.

3.1 Exposition (bars 1-58)

3.1.1 Primary theme group (bars 1-16)

The first movement is in sonata form, with bars 1-8 of the first theme being the theme that runs through the main line of the first movement of the sonata KV.576, featuring an octave upward arpeggio in 6/8 time [3] and

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the call to arms theme of the first two bars being represented by tremolo-marked harmonic phrases in bars 2-3. The use of arpeggios in bars 2-3 is combined with a stepwise ascending form, repeating the arpeggio as a structure in the upper voice's e minor harmony and proceeding in a two-bar variation, which has a thematic melody throughout the eight bars. Mozart repeats this idea and compositional technique in bars 9-16, shifting the original melody and shifting the thematic melodic center of gravity to the left hand. At the same time, a canonic counterpoint is introduced in the soprano section, creating sixteenth notes that culminate in a dominant ending in the key of D major, with Allegro 1-16 bars shown in Fig. 1.



Fig. 1. Mozart: Piano Sonata in D major, Allegro (bars 1-16)

3.1.2 Transition (bars 17-41)

This material connects the primary theme group with the Secondary theme group, and the section is a development of primary key D to dominant key A. It can also be divided into two parts.

(a) The first section (bars 17-27) uses sixteenth-note rhythms in the right hand and eighth-note rhythms in the left hand, utilizing a two-note to one-note approach and new melodic material. Bars 19-24 are a repetition and expansion of the material in bars 17-18. A series of short homophonic progressions appear in the left hand from bar 20 onwards, adding to the tension.

Starting in bar 24, the movement enters a phase of full development, with a succession of second descending chords appearing in the left hand in bars 25-26. The #G that appears in the bass in bar 25 is an introduction to A, along with a natural transition to A major.

(b) The second section (bars 28-41), which develops elements of the first theme in an imitative manner, establishes the key of A major. This section places a high level of skill on the player. Although the key of A major is established, the progression of scales and the frequent use of temporary notes cut the tonality of A

major. Bars 34-41, the transitional section of the second theme, utilize the material from bars 20-21 and establish a sense of A major through tonality and dominant-driven harmonies. The section concludes with a full coda at bars 40-41, featuring a continuous progression of A major dominant as the concluding note. As show in figure 2.



Fig. 2. Mozart: Piano Sonata in D major, Allegro (bars 16-41)

3.1.3 Subsidiary theme group (bars 42-52)

The second theme of the first movement exposition is more melodically fluid. It consists of a 4 bar + 8 bar phrase that can be heard in the development subsection of the first movement beginning at bar 41. This subsidiary theme group (bars 42-52) proceeds entirely into the dominant key (A major), allowing the piece to develop into an unstable state and setting the stage for the conclusive section and development. In this section, unlike the theme with the "dolce" [4], it is prepared by an Allegro, unaccompanied, in which the variations [#C-D-E-#F] occur in the same bar. In bars 41-42, the role of this non-adjacent connection in this sonata becomes clear if we examine Mozart's interpretation of the chromatic scale and the motivation of the passage in question. In bars 42-45, in contrast to the jumping two-handed unison of the first theme, the lyricism is further

enhanced by the use of 'dolce,' which indicates that the music should be played softly. A fast sixteenth note unfolds in bars 46-53 with a solid chromatic progression. The chromatic progression is first prominent in bar 48. Using relatively long quarter notes in bar 49 creates a dramatic effect through contrast, followed by a brief pause in the eighth notes, a downward monotone of sixteenth notes in the higher voices, and the lower voices responding with an ascending semitone of relatively long notes. Between the $\sharp F$ in bar 49 of $\sharp 50$, he inserts an $\sharp E$, supported by a diminution in the left hand and harmonically. The chromatic scale of $\sharp E$ - $\sharp F$ is echoed in the sixteenth note gesture that follows. The two voices end the Subsidiary theme group with a full coda at bar 52. Allegro 41-53 is shown in Fig. 3.



Fig. 3. Mozart: Piano Sonata Allegro in D major (bars 41-53)

3.1.4 Conclusive section (bars 53-58)

The conclusive section further solidifies the work by emphasizing the key of A major. The sixteenth notes, scales, and patterns in the higher voices, accompanied by eighth notes in the lower voices, evoke the section from bars 16-20. It also serves as a sort of bridge to the top and bottom. Additionally, bar 57 utilizes material from A major as well as bars 1-3, again recalling the theme and leading to development.

3.2 Development (bars 59-99)

Development is extremely unstable and tonally variable but mainly utilizes the keys of A and C, transforming, developing, and expanding on the thematic elements of the primary theme group. Through the use of harmonic progression and tonality, development can be divided into two parts (bars 59-81, 81-98), providing a sense of atmosphere to the recapitulation.

3.2.1 The first part of Development (bars 59-81)

Bars 59-62 are the Subsidiary theme group. The imitation of bar 57 demonstrates the organic combination of development and exposition. 59 and 61. Although largely the same, the E in bar 61 drops a semitone in bar 59. From bar 62 onwards, the rhythm of development becomes prominent and distinct. The

thematic material is carried out mainly through imitation. In bar 71, a three-beat motive appears, making the atmosphere tense. From bar 74, the music is made more dynamic and breathy by using sixteenth notes and dotted quarter notes that are switched between the left and right hands. In addition, the passage develops chromatic changes to the extreme, and the use of augmented 6th chords further pushes the piece's tension to a fixed point. It ends with an incomplete Allegro in bar 81.

3.2.2 The second section of development (bars 82-98)

The second section of development is a recapitulation and parody of the primary theme group theme, repeating elements of the first theme. Bars 81-92 are characterized by counterpoint through vocal shifts and frequent transpositions. Beginning in bar 82, tonal shifts are frequent, culminating in bar 92 with the dominant of the work's dominant key (A major). Bar 93-98 connects development and recapitulation, emphasizing the work's dominant key (A major) and suggesting the return of the work's homophony (D major). In bars 93-96, the harmony is unstable in these four bars, with the second voice as a chromatic upward scale that rises, one by one, into an appoggiatura quarter note. In bar 96, the return to the work homophony (D major). Immediately afterward, in the higher voices of bars 97-98, a downward scale of sixteenth notes unfolds around the chord V7. Reaching a peak in D major in bar 99, there is a reprise that successfully develops the return of the work homophony (D major). As shown in figure 4.



Fig. 4. Mozart: Piano Sonata Allegro in D major (bars 82-98)

3.3 Recapitulation (bars 99-160)

The recapitulation begins in the original key of D major. The overall structure is the same as the exposition, but the ending is extended and developed.

3.3.1 Primary theme group (bars 99-106)

The primary theme group of the recapitulation is reduced from 16 bars in the exposition to 8 bars, followed by the transition.

3.3.2 Transition (bars 107-121)

Starting at bar 107, the primary theme group material is performed through mimicry and counterpoint techniques in transition. Bar 118 repeats bars 24-27 of transition in exposition, with a brief tonal shift through chromaticism but then a return to homophony (D major).

3.3.3 Subsidiary theme group (bars 122-129)

The subsidiary theme group is presented in homophony (D major) over the original. The section is simplified to 4 bars + 4 bars based on the 4 bars + 8 bars of the exposition subsidiary theme group theme.

3.3.4 Conclusive Section (bars 130-160)

The Conclusive section starts at bar 130. From bar 137 onwards, a counterpoint composition in A major and C major is introduced, which has already appeared in the exposition, but in the recapitulation in D major instead of A major in the exposition. This is to avoid repetition with the statement of the theme in exposition.

4 Sense of the work

Mozart, an Austrian composer, raised 18th-century classical music to the zenith of Western music [5]. Although he only lived a short life of 35 years, he left behind more than 600 musical compositions in the genres of opera, symphony, concerto, chamber music, solo, and religious music. Just as Mozart showed musical talent from a young age when he was young, he traveled around Europe under the leadership of his father and experienced colorful musical experiences. It was these experiences that laid the critical foundation for his creative compositions.

He composed numerous solo piano pieces, among which the 18 piano sonatas stand out as particularly representative. These works not only made a significant contribution to the classical form of the sonata but also hold a significant place in the cultural heritage of piano music history, remaining widely circulated and appreciated to this day. Mozart's 18 piano sonatas present a variety of stylistic variations depending on the time and place of composition and the temperament of the work, making them rich and varied.

The final piece in Mozart's collection of 18 piano sonatas, KV.576, holds a significant position within his sonata repertoire, skillfully intertwining intricate counterpoint techniques with the mature musical expression of his later years. This composition unfolds with clarity and conciseness, emphasizing thematic repetition. Furthermore, KV.576 presents a reimagined approach to counterpoint within the classical music

framework. It can be seen as a work that simultaneously suggests new directions and ideas for the next generation of music through a new understanding of traditional values.

5 Conclusion

Mozart's piano sonata is a typical classical sonata work. In the representative work KV.576 the whole piece follows the fast-slow-fast three-movement rhythm, and the relationship between the movements is generally the main key-relationship (association minor)-primary key. Showing the contrast of tonality, the first movement mainly follows the form of Sonata Allegro, and the performance part has a contrasting theme with universality as well as easy-to-understand musical characteristics.

The first movement is divided into three parts in sonata-allegro form: presentation-development-expression, with contrasting first and second motifs, an active first theme, a two-handed leaping melody, and an active second theme. Overall, it builds on the tone of the first theme, which appears continuously throughout the first movement to express the theme, emphasizing and giving unity to the work. Harmonic accompaniment also appears, giving a sense of structural balance.

KV.576 achieves balance and harmony through compositional, thematic, and textural contrasts. Despite the development of counterpoint, it does not deviate from universal music based on harmonic music that anyone can understand. Thus, Mozart's music, rather than following traditional styles, can be said to reinterpret new music in the vocabulary of the time, realizing the aesthetic ideals of classical music and opening up the possibilities of new music.

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