

18. TECHNICAL AND INTERPRETIVE CONSIDERATIONS IN *THE THIRD SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO, OP. 45* BY EDVARD GRIEG

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Abstract: *Considered one of the founders of the Norwegian national music culture, Grieg sought to transpose into his music the grandeur of nature, the simplicity of people and their lives, the richness of fantasy and mythological stories. Edvard Grieg retains in his music essential elements of Norwegian folklore, which he uses in his own language. The third Sonata for violin and piano, op. 45 differs from the other two sonatas created previously, both by the dramatic character of the thematic material, as well as by the massive dimensions and the structure of the form that approaches the classical pattern. Starting with this Sonata, Grieg definitely crystallizes his style in the field of chamber music, revealing a mature language of dramatic essence, in which we find rich and inventive rhythmic and melodic structures, plastic harmonies and bold dissonances, picturesque timbre effects that capture the atmosphere and the specific Norwegian color.*

Key words: *violin, sonata, Grieg, technical evolution, interpretative artistry*

In the context of the numerous transformations that took place economically, politically and culturally in the late Romantic era, Edvard Grieg's creation is revealed under an original aura, full of freshness, impregnated by the Norwegian folklore. Considered one of the founders of the Norwegian national music culture, Grieg sought to translate into his music the grandeur of nature, the simplicity of people and their lives, the richness of fantasy and mythological stories. Edvard Grieg retains in his music essential elements of Norwegian folklore, which he uses in his own language. The melody is made up of simple and important tonal, modal or pentatonic motifs; the rhythm is closely linked to the rhythm of popular music, especially Norwegian dances. Grieg's harmony is placed in the sonorous world of tonal structure, from which the modal intonations and particular expressions of the folk song are not lacking.

The third sonata for violin and piano, op. 45 was composed between 1886-1887 and is dedicated to the painter Lenbach, who at that time worked on portraits of the composer and his wife. The work differs from the other two sonatas created previously, both by the dramatic character of the musical speech, as well as by the massive dimensions and the structure of the form that approaches the classical pattern. Starting with this *Sonata*, Grieg definitely crystallizes his style in the field of chamber music, revealing a mature language, of dramatic essence, in which we find rich and inventive rhythmic-melodic structures, plastic harmonies and bold dissonances, picturesque timbre effects that capture the atmosphere and the

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specific Norwegian color.

The Third *Sonata*, clearly outlined in a romantic style, is built in three movements: the first part (*Allegro molto ed appassionato*) in sonata form, the second movement (*Allegretto espressivo alla romanza*) in lied form and the final (*Allegro molto*) in sonata form without development. The first movement of the *Sonata* reveals a special atmosphere, in which the passion merges with the serenity and freshness of Norwegian folk art. The introduction of the sonata form begins with a vigorous phrase presented by the violin and supported by the massive chords of the piano in the *C minor* tone during the 22 measures.

The thematic material of the violin is based on the *motif α*, which is made up of several sequences of the *x cell*. Both the *α motif* and the *x cell* are processed during the whole movement under different rhythmic-melodic aspects, creating the thematic and structural unity of the musical speech:

Eg. 1, Grieg, Sonata for violin and piano, op. 45, first movement (m. 1-4):

The romantic pathos of this debut is gradually extinguished dynamically (from *f* to *p*) for the preparation of the main theme (m. 23-47), which is presented by the violin through repeated sequences of the *motif α* in different sound registers, by this time in the *G Major* tone; during this time, the piano dynamically and tensely supports the melody through an accompaniment in *tremolo* or in massive chords highlighted by pedals:

Eg. 2, Grieg, Sonata for violin and piano, op. 45, first movement (m. 23-27):

The continuous sequential of the main theme determines the widening of the musical range of the two instruments to the acute register of the *C minor* tone. From an interpretative point of view, we can say that the melodic-rhythmic unfolding of the main theme must be pursued under the aspect of continuity and sound fluidity in order to avoid the monotony of repetitive motivational structures, which are renewed in a continuous flow.

From measure 47, the piano assumes the leading role, playing alone the *α*

motif of the Introduction. This moment corresponds to the Bridge (m. 47-58) and anticipates through the dynamic decrease (from *ff* to *pp*) the harmony and the quiet character of the secondary theme, which we will note with B (m. 59-134):

Eg. 3, Grieg, Sonata for violin and piano, op. 45, first movement (m. 59-66):



The lyrical character of the secondary theme is supported harmonically by the use of modulations at distant tonalities, such as *E b major - G b major*. Within the second theme, we distinguish three subdivisions that have their own individuality: b1 = 20 measures (m. 59-72), b2 = 17 measures (m. 79-95) and b3 = 39 measures (m. 96-134).

Subdivision b1, organized in the form of a dialogue between the two instruments, is very expressive as it emphasizes the tonal and thematic contrast with the main theme. Subdivision b2 presents the melodic evolution of the previous section (b1) by diversifying the rhythmic drawing (diminution of the initial values and rhythmic changes in the structure of the accompaniment) and harmonic (the use of new harmonies and the introduction of chromatics). Subdivision b3 accentuates the permanent dialogue between the violin and the piano with the role of complement and mutual harmonic and melodic support. The thematic elements presented in the previous sections are repeated in different registers. From the agogic and dynamic point of view, section b3 brings a slight tension of the musical speech (*f, animato*), which calms quickly, restoring the expressive and quiet atmosphere, characteristic of the secondary theme.

The following 10 measures (m. 135-144) have the role of preparing through different chromatic sequences (present in both instrumental scores) the new tonality, *B b major* and implicit, the new sonata form section, the developing section; it is structured in three stages: the first stage = 37 measures (m. 145-181), the second stage = 44 measures (m. 182-225) and the third stage = 36 measures (m. 226-261). The phases have an open character, both in terms of construction and tone (avoiding perfect cadences). Within the Development (m. 145-261), the two themes of the Exhibition create waves of emotional tension through the process of thematic elaboration and processing.

The first phase begins with the presentation of the thematic material from the exhibition section varied from a rhythmic point of view (through rhythmic evolutions of the *α motif*), harmonic (through the appearance of new tones: *B b major, A major*) and of character (the *α motif* loses its initial dramatic character). The second phase consists of different chromatic sequences of the motivational elements characteristic for the Exhibition's themes. This process of thematic elaboration is underlined by the repetitive dialogue of the two instruments.

The last phase of the Development returns the introductory motive under the initial appearance, but in a very small nuance (*pp*) and varied rhythmically by repeated evolutions of the initial values. This restless hypostasis of the *motif α* is sustained harmonically (by the recurrence of the basic tonality of the **C minor**) and dynamically (by the progressive tension of the musical speech), moment that will announce of the Reprise (m. 262). The Reprise (m. 262-430) is built almost after the pattern of the Exhibition, but in another tonal correlation. The secondary thematic group is brought this time in the **C major** tone (the major homonym of the initial tonality). The end of the sonata form is marked by the Code (m. 431-465), which will bring to the listeners' attention the *motif α* of the Introduction (in the minor tone) repeated by the violin in different octaves of the register. The conclusive elaboration presents the main motive in both characteristic hypotheses, which ultimately overlap to determine the symbolic and structural unity of the first movement of the *Sonata*.

The second movement (*Allegretto espressivo alla romanza*) approaches expressively the genre of romance due to the musicality of the musical speech. The shape of the median part is built on the structure of a tripartite *lied* ABAV. The first section, A (m. 1-88), consists of two periods: a (m. 1-44) and av (m. 45-88). The almost vocal melody of the romance is presented first by the piano (period a) and then by the violin (period av) in the **E major** tone. The two different instruments from acoustic and timbre point of view must be merged into a whole unit, in order to achieve the expressive fluency of the melody:

Eg. 4, Grieg, *Sonata for violin and piano, op. 45*, second movement (m. 1-16):

In the second section, B (m. 89-188), a new theme appears, contrasting in terms of character, dancing and cheerful, repeated tirelessly and sequenced on different stairs of the new tonality, **B minor**. The theme is presented first by the violin and then by the piano. The secondary theme is supported in turn by the two main instruments through specific procedures for each: in the case of the piano - chords in *arpeggio* and in the case of the violin - the process of pinching the strings, called *pizzicato*. These modalities of harmonic support suggest certain popular instrumental sonorities, which have the role of coloring and diversifying the melody:

Eg. 5, Grieg, *Sonata for violin and piano, op. 45*, second movement (m. 89-95):

In measure 209, the initial theme is presented again by the violin through a surprising tonal and harmonic artifact (the *E b Major* tonality), followed by the measure 217, in the starting tone, *E Major*. The main theme is slightly varied in terms of musical range, this time being presented in the acute register. It reveals to us full of emotion, vibrant, supported by the amplified sonority of the piano chords. Gradually, the music diminishes into the colorful transparency of the violin's timbre and faded piano chords.

The final movement (*Allegro animato*) is built in a sonata form without development. The musical speech of this part is strongly imprinted by elements specific to the national dance, which reveals energy and vitality. The main theme of the Exhibition begins with the rudimentary tonic-dominant accompaniment of the piano (in the *C minor* tonality), played by figurative fifths, which creates a sonority suitable for the dance. On this figurative accompaniment, exposed in low sonority (*pp*), the violin embroiders the main theme (m. 1-21), based on the *motif* α :

Eg. 6, Grieg, *Sonata for violin and piano, op. 45*, third movement (m. 1-7):



From measure 22, the main theme is taken over by the piano and the violin will pass in the background, supporting the melody through syncopated octaves. The main theme (m. 1-112) is extensively processed both within the Exhibition (m. 1-193) and in the Reprise (m. 199-366) through sequencing and thematic evolution, section that will keep the place for the usual Development, peculiar to the sonata form. The repeated sequencing of first theme causes an interesting harmonic evolution (*C minor – E b Major - G minor - E minor - C minor*). In one of its sequences, the main theme is brought to Dorian mode, on the sound *E flat*. In this way, Grieg undertakes a bold incursion into the field of modal, which has often been used in the creation of 20th-century composers.

The secondary theme (m. 113-193), presented by the violin in the *A b major* tonality, is sequenced three times in different registers and has a meditative and lyrical character:

Eg. 7, Grieg, *Sonata for violin and piano, op. 45*, third movement (m. 113-125):



During the whole performance of the secondary theme, the piano plays an

accompanying role, supporting the main voice through *arpeggiato* rhythmic formulas. With each sequence, the musical speech is dynamically driven to a new intensity (from *p* to *f*). The musicality of the second theme determines a new character, which requires a slight calming of the initial *tempo*. Measures 194-198 prepare both dynamically (*diminuendo molto*) and *agogically* (*ritardando*) the reappearance of the main theme, which coincides with the moment of the Reprise. The reprise (m. 199-366) is built according to the Exhibition pattern, except doing only the tonal evolution of the thematic material, which presents the first theme in the *C minor* tonality and the second theme in the tone of the homonym, that is *C Major*.

In the final section of the Sonata (m. 367-401) is also maintained the *C Major* tonality and is structured on the *motif α* (presented by the violin), sequenced in different musical registers. The permanent processing of this playful motive determines the dynamic (*pp* to *ff*) and *agogical* (*Prestissimo*, M.M. = 92) evolution of the thematic material in the scores of both instruments.

The Third *Sonata for violin and piano*, op. 45 is distinguished by simplicity and clarity, by its passionate and heroic character, by thematic contrasts particularizing and intensely symphonized, by its own modes of expression with national specificity. In *Edvard Grieg. Study on Life and Work*, Kremlev characterized this masterpiece as: [...] *a work of great artistry, ... very rich in content. The superior simplicity is combined with an extraordinary variation and richness of expression. Nothing is superfluous. From the first page of the sonata to the last, we go a long, attractive road, and at the end of it we feel extremely comforted.*¹⁶²

References

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