

## 14. WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART - SONATA FOR PIANO AND VIOLIN, K. 378, IN B FLAT MAJOR

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**Abstract:** *From a musical and historical point of view, Classicism represents the orientation of the second half of the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th century, which is characterized by clarity, balance, sense of proportion and moderate spirit. The most concise definition of this term translates both into the idea of satisfying the highest demands of the taste of a certain public and into the concept of antiquity of the antinomy between classic and modern. The sonata for piano and violin in B-flat major, K. 378, is considered by the renowned musicologist Alfred Einstein to be the first important mozartian opus for the repertoire dedicated to the violin-piano couple.*

**Keywords:** *Mozart, Sonata, violin, piano, analysis*

### 1. Introduction

In the "Dictionary of musical forms and genres" by Dumitru Bughici, the term "classicism" is defined as follows: "[...] Classicism was considered as an aesthetic, ideological and artistic conception synonymous with the reflection of trends in art, expressing in the sense wide, both a balance, fully noticeable, as well as a high level of craftsmanship and perfection in the creation of the artistic masterpiece. [...]"<sup>63</sup>

From a musical and historical point of view, Classicism represents the orientation of the second half of the 18th century and the first decades of the 19th century, which is characterized by clarity, balance, sense of proportion and moderate spirit. The most concise definition of this term translates both into the idea of satisfying the highest demands of the taste of a certain public and into the concept of antiquity of the antinomy between classic and modern.

The evolution of Classicism is spectacular in terms of the replacement of the polyphonic process, which dominated the Baroque period, with the homophonic one, which will determine the unity of the tonal system. Homophony (accompanying melody) becomes, in the classical conception, much more suitable for playing this new style. This will not determine, however, a total break with the polyphonic forms of sound discourse.

The form par excellence now becomes the sonata. Its structure is based on the appearance of bitematism, which assumes the existence of two different themes or thematic groups both in terms of tone and character. The abandonment of the ciphered bass will determine the accentuation of homophony, characterized by melodic cantability, thematic richness and harmonic clarity, all of which are clothed in the coat of the tonal system. The modulations have a natural path, without presenting exaggerations.

The crystallization of the sonata genre and form took place during the last four decades of the 18th century through the contribution of the Viennese Classical School, represented by J. Haydn, W. A. Mozart and L. van Beethoven. The classical

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<sup>63</sup> Dumitru Bughici, *Dictionary of musical forms and genres*, Musical Publishing House, Bucharest, 1978, p. 72

sonata represents an instrumental cycle consisting of several contrasting movements. The Viennese composers follow a path of expanding the entire formal pattern, able to express their emotional intentions as clearly and concisely as possible.

## 2. Discussions

The chamber music genre dedicated to the piano-violin couple was preferred by the music-loving public of that time; Mozart was aware of this and for this reason he composed (partly in Mannheim and then in Paris) a volume consisting of a cycle of six sonatas, which were published in 1778, also in the French capital. In the early Mozartian sonatas, the role of the violinist was unimportant; he participated in the construction of the musical discourse only to double the right hand of the piano score, sometimes to accompany the piano, other times he had the role of coloring or sonically completing certain chords.

Alfred Einstein<sup>64</sup> states that Mozart's vision of the role that the violin can have in relation to the piano will change on the way to Mannheim and Paris, when he comes into contact with the six sonatas composed by a certain Schuster (possibly Joseph Schuster, who lived between the years 1748-1812), who was Kapellmeister at the court of the Archbishop of Saxony, since 1772. The renewal of this chamber music genre by adopting the violin as an equal partner of the piano in the construction of the musical discourse will be quickly embraced by Mozart, demonstrating the openness his to musical innovations.

Mozart would compose another cycle of sonatas, entitled "Six Sonatas for Harpsichord or Pianoforte, with Violin Accompaniment", with which he aimed to appeal to both chamber music lovers and those who preferred opera. In fact, from the old type of sonata (in which the piano was the main character and the violin had an accompanying role), only the title remained.

The renowned Romanian musicologist and flautist Francisc László specifies that: *Today, a more nuanced chronology of these six masterpieces is known than that established in the last century by knight Kochel. Thus it is known that the sonatas [...], recorded in the Kochel catalog under numbers 376-378, actually represent two different periods. Sonata KV 378 (in the newer, revised editions of the Kochel catalogue: 317 d) was still composed in Salzburg, in the service of the archbishop, in the spring of 1779. Only the other two sonatas KV 376 and 377 (after the new numbering 374 d and 374 e) are Viennese works, composed for their printing in opus cycle 2 of the turning year 1781.*<sup>65</sup>

The beauty of these sonatas and the new Mozartian compositional style will be fully appreciated in an anonymous comment appearing in Cramer's Vienna newspaper of December 8, 1781: *These sonatas are the only one of this kind. Rich in new ideas and in evidences of the great musical genius of their author. Very brilliant and suited to the instrument. At the same time the accompaniment of the violin is so artfully combined with the clavier part that both instruments are kept constantly on the alert; so that these sonatas require just as skillful a player on the*

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<sup>64</sup> One of the foremost music historians and critics, who brought new information about Mozart's life and work in his biography *Mozart, His Character, His life*, Oxford University Press, 1962. For more details, visit the following link: <https://archive.org/details/mozarthischaracter00eins> (accessed 18 August 2024)

<sup>65</sup> <https://discvinil.ro/produs/mozart-sonate-pentru-vioara-si-pian-kv-376-377-378/>, accessed 18 August 2024

violin as on the clavier. But it is not possible to give a complete description of this original work. Music lovers and connoisseurs must play the through themselves, and then they will see that we have not exaggerated.<sup>66</sup>

Sonata for piano and violin in *B-flat major*, K. 378 is considered by Einstein to be the first important Mozartian opus for the repertoire dedicated to the violin-piano couple. This Sonata is supposed to have been composed around 1779 in Salzburg, but various other sources claim that it was completed between 1780 and 1781, before Mozart settled in Vienna. Although we do not find any dedication written in this work, it is Einstein who specifies that the Sonata was undoubtedly composed for Marianne and his father. Sonata K. V. 378 was published in November 1781, together with Sonata K. V. 296 and four other sonatas, in volume II of sonatas for instrumental piano-violin couple, dedicated to the young colleague and pianist Josepha von Aurnhammer, with whom Mozart performed.

### 3. Results

Sonata K. V. 378 consists of three movements: *Allegro moderato*, *Andantino sostenuto e cantabile* and *Rondo*. The first movement, composed in sonata form, is written in *B flat Major*, in the measure of 4/4. The exposition takes place over 82 measures and begins with the main theme (A), which consists of two symmetrical and similar periods from the point of view of the rhythmic-melodic construction: period a = 8 measures, 4 + 4 (m. 1-8) and the period av = 8 measures, 4 + 4 (m. 9-16).

In the first period, the piano presents the main theme in *piano*. The violin and the left hand in the piano score harmonically support this expressive theme through a rhythmic and melodic figuration consisting of repeated eights in simple or twinned thirds, alternating with contrasting dynamic nuances (*forte-piano*), placed on the first eight of first beat of each measure and subordinate to the dynamic plan and general characteristic. The harmony rests on the main degrees of the key *B flat major*:

Ex. no. 1 Sonata K.V. 378, I (m. 1-8)

The intimate aspect of the main theme must be supported by the piano with a fine but articulate touch; the *piano* nuance, present in the scores of both performers, imposes the controlled dosage of the articulation of the sounds, so that the sonority is clear. The violin accompaniment must be played on a single string to avoid swinging of the bow and to preserve the fluidity of the musical phrasing. The violinist takes the leading role in the following period (m. 9-16), but preserves the intimate sonority of the debut and aims to homogenize his characteristic timbre in the harmonic fabric of the piano. The ornaments within the main melody (mordents and trills) must unfold in a balanced rhythmic and dynamic aspect, so that they naturally complement the general character of the musical phrasing.

<sup>66</sup> Dumitru Bughici, op. cit., p. 256

The Bridge (m. 17-28) begins in *forte* and consists of two phrases (7 + 5 measures): the first has a modulating character (m. 17-23) and the second reinforces the harmony of the *F major* tonality, characteristic of the next section. The theme material of the bridge consists of new rhythmic and melodic structures, very little similar to those of the main theme. The violin presents bright and vigorous thematic material, supported by clear left-hand finger articulation and incisive bowing over rhythmic values of dotted eighths. The pianist completes and sustains the development of the phrase and general character of the bridge theme by clearly articulating scalar and arpeggial sixteenths and by pedaling the chords.

The secondary thematic group (m. 29-76) consists of three themes: B1 = 18 measures, 9 + 9 (29-46), B2 = 18 measures (47-64) and B3 = 12 measures (65-76). The first thematic group, B1, consists of two periods: period b (m. 21-36) and period b1 (m. 37-46). The first period of B1 is characterized by tonal instability, accentuated by the presence of numerous chromatic sounds in both instrumental scores and begins on the violin with an ascending range, executed in *sautille*; the general tone of this section is *piano*. The sparkling character of this theme is completed by the piano through a *fp*, executed by the left hand on the first beat, once in two measures:



Ex. no. 2 Sonata K.V. 378, I (m. 21-24)

In the second period, the harmony stabilizes due to the dominant that will cadence on the new tonality, *C major*. Although the first B is not clearly defined musically and harmonically, B2 opens with a contrasting and well-defined theme, which unfolds over 18 measures (m. 47-64) and is built through the intense and imitative dialogue of the two protagonist instruments. The overall tone of this section is *piano*. The thematic material presented by the violin has an airy character, as the sounds are often shortened by the marks on the notes or by the eighth rests. The violinist will emphasize the characteristic suppleness by slightly detaching the bow from the string. In the last fragment of the secondary thematic group, B3 (m. 65-76), appear the thematic and rhythmic elements characteristic of the bridge. Both instruments have a very well-defined sound emission, supported by a clear articulation even in *legato*. The ornamented sounds will be performed by starting the bow with a fast speed.

The Exposition of the first movement of the Sonata will end in *F major* with a Conclusion of 6 measures (m. 77-82). Although the general tone is *forte* in the scores of both leading instruments, it will be quickly extinguished in the last measure, by a sudden *decrescendo* that unfolds on the value of a half note. To achieve such rapid dynamic contrast, the violinist's right hand must be very supple and flexible in the smallest segments of the palm and fingers. The *vibrato* will also need to be gradually reduced in frequency and amplitude. The Development takes place over 31 measures (83-113) and consists of two stages and a short transition with the role of preparing the Reprise. The first stage, made up of 12 measures, 6 + 6 (m. 83-94) has an expressive character. In the first six measures, the piano presents a lyrical, intimate theme in *F minor* and the violin accompanies closely following

its harmonic evolution:



Ex. no. 3 Sonata K.V. 378, I (m. 83-88)

In the next six measures, the roles of the two instruments are reversed. Dynamically, performers must subtly emphasize thematic constructions without reaching extreme nuances. The harmonic path evolves towards the tonality of *A major*. The thematic material of the secondary stage (m. 95-108) is based on the intense and fast dialogue of the two instruments, built sequentially and imitatively in the form of dominant sequences with the following harmonic path: *A major - D major - G major - C major - F major - E major - F major*. The vast majority of sixteenths in the piano score will be performed in an articulated manner to highlight the brilliant character of the chromatic design, organized in the form of a repetitive sequential embroidery. Piano and violin complement each other in a dizzying dialogue. The embroidery becomes the basic ornament of the rhythmic and melodic processing of this section:



Ex. no. 4 Sonata K.V. 378, I (m. 94-98)

The *forte-piano* alternation requires the violinist to master the right-hand technique and implicitly, the specialty of bow recovery, which involves the controlled dosage of its quantity, pressure and speed. In measures 108-113, the composer brings to the attention of the audience a pedal in *F major* (the dominant of the basic key, *B flat major*), with a mobile character (it unfolds through the repetition of the upper semitone), again creating that embroidery effect. This section serves as a transition to Reprise.

In general, the Reprise (m. 114-193) follows the pattern of the Exposition, with few exceptions (the main theme is restricted to a single period, the Conclusion is slightly expanded). The thematic material and the technical and interpretive possibilities used previously are taken over and adapted to the characteristic harmonic design of the sonata form, where the secondary thematic group must unfold in the basic tonality of the Sonata, in *B flat major*. The Conclusion (m. 184-193) is enriched with a new thematic motif with a vigorous character, which has the role of announcing in an accumulative dynamic (*forte, semper forte*) the end of the first movement.

The second movement, *Andantino sostenuto e cantabile*, is in *E flat Major* in the measure of 4/4 and is constructed in tripartite *lied* form A B Av Bv A + Coda. The first stanza (A), made up of 16 measures, 8 + 8, has a small bipartite form with an interval: period A1, organized into two phrases, phrase a (m. 1-4) and phrase a1 (m. 5-8) and period A2, with phrase a2 (m. 9-12) and phrase a1 (m. 13-16). In the first period, the piano presents in *sotto voce* a cantabile, lyrical theme, which suddenly evolves dynamically (*forte*) in the second half of the measure. This

dynamic effect is achieved by the piano through pedaling. The violin supports the piano theme through partially exposed thematic material, similar in theme content and identical in rhythm, complementing the overall expressiveness through its timbral color. The left hand accompaniment in the piano score is organized as arpeggios in triolett formulas. The binary and ternary rhythmic overlap creates a slight state of weightlessness:



Ex. no. 5 Sonata K.V. 378, II (m. 1-4)

The two performers will aim to achieve the expressive synchronization of the superimposed ornaments at the interval of a third, in order to enhance the thematic cantability within the chosen *tempo*. In the secondary phrase, the main thematic material is ennobled by the contribution of the violin, which this time will nuance alongside the piano by changing the pressure and speed of the bow and by increasing the *vibrato* frequency. The thematic material within the second period follows roughly the same pattern as the first period. The violinist must follow very carefully the interpretive intentions of his partner in order to synchronize the anacrusic attacks of the endings built on sixteenths and eighths.

The following 8 measures (16-24), organized 4 + 4, have the role of transition to the second stanza (B) of the lied form; the harmony evolves from the key of *E flat major* to *B flat major*. This transitional section uses new and simple thematic material: the violin presents a cadential theme, based on the double string repetition of a dotted rhythmic formula and developed over the sounds of the *E flat major chord*; during this time, the piano accompanies the melody with counter-tempo chords. The second stanza (notated B) runs for 6 measures (25-30). The violin presents a melody of great beauty, lightly ornamented with mordants and trills. The piano supports this theme with an accompaniment similar to that of the transient section:



Ex. no. 6 Sonata K.V. 378, II (m. 25-28)

From an interpretive point of view, the thematic material gradually evolves dynamically (from *piano* to *forte*), agogic (through the appearance of the *fermata*) and characteristically towards the tensional climax of the phrase. The harmonic drawing starts from the harmonic *F minor* and cadences on the *B flat major* chord, with the dominant role of the basic tonality, *E flat major*. This climax actually prepares the slightly varied return of the A stanza, which this time is restricted to a single period of 8 measures (31-38), following the pattern of the A2 period. The violin takes the leading role by presenting the main theme and the piano accompanies it through a repetitive sequence of triplets. The superimposition of the theme built in binary rhythm over the accompaniment in ternary rhythm creates the rhythmic variety of this section.

The next stanza (Bv), consisting of 6 measures (39-44), presents almost identically the thematic and harmonic evolution of the previous stanza. The roles of the two instruments are reversed this time. The slight agogic inflections will be closely followed by both performers. After the short climax on the dominant chord, the thematic material of stanza A (m. 45-52) returns, built according to the model of the first period (A1), also in the key of *E flat major*. The Coda (m. 53-62), made up of 10 measures organized 4 + 4 + 2, brings back to the attention of the audience harmonic and characteristic elements similar to those presented in the transitory section, but the dotted rhythmic formulas are omitted this time. To emphasize the conclusive nature of the thematic material, the composer uses a series of dynamic contrasts of the *forte-piano* type, which he will alternate every two measures.

The last movement of the Sonata, the *Rondo* in *Allegro*, is written in *B flat major*, in 3/8. The rondo form in which this movement is written (A B A C A D A) reminds us of the form of the pre-classical rondo, characterized by the alternation of the variational form with the strophic one. The partners must cultivate the sonority specific to the final movements of mozartian concertos (technical virtuosity, agility, vivacity, etc.). The first stanza (A) consists of a period of 16 measures, organized into two symmetrical phrases. The first theme, presented first by the piano and then taken over identically by the violin, is enriched with small groups performed on the first beat of the measure. The execution of the ornaments must not influence the dynamics of the *tempo* and the clarity of the general sound, regardless of the instrument that interprets them:

Ex. no. 7 Sonata K.V. 378, III (m. 1-8)

The performers will aim to execute the passages in sixteenths clearly and evenly and to synchronize at the moment of the thematic takeover (and implicitly of the leading role) in the development of the musical discourse. Couplet B (m. 17-36) consists of two phrases of 8 measures each, plus an extension of 4 measures. The pianist will follow the equality of the articulation on the small values, especially in the transition from the *legato* to the *non-legato* technique, without influencing the fluidity of the melodic material. The violinist will support the virtuoso character of this fragment on the piano with light accents on the syncopated rhythmic formulas, which will highlight the binary polyrhythmic play in the ternary meter:

Ex. no. 8 Sonata K.V. 378, III (m. 17-24)

In measure 37, the A chorus (m. 37-52) appears again in the basic key of the Sonata (*B flat major*) and will unfold identically to the pattern shown previously. Couplet C (m.53-112), built in a small tripartite form, consists of three periods. The

first period (m. 53-72) unfolds in *G minor* and consists of two phrases (8 + 8 + 4); the theme is presented first by the piano, followed identically by the violin. The second period (m. 73-88) consists of two symmetrical phrases of 8 measures each, in *B flat major*. The first phrase, first exposed by the piano, is enriched with dotted rhythmic formulas, ornamented with trills. The violinist accompanies the theme with rhythmic formulas in sixteenths, executed in a very light *sautille*, but with a clear emission. In the next phrase, the role of the two instruments is reversed.

The last period (m. 89-104) of Couplet C brings back to the attention of the audience the thematic material characteristic of the *G minor* tonality; this time, the theme is introduced first by the violin and then by the piano. A transition fragment follows (m. 105-119) in which the thematic material, enriched with numerous chromatic harmonies, prepares the return of the chorus and implicitly, the tonality of *B flat major*. In the following 15 measures (m. 136-150), the thematic material, built from rhyming-melodic elements characteristic of Couplet B, prepares the appearance of Couplet D (m. 151-182), which is nothing more than an agogical variation (the theme unfolds in *Allegro*, in the measure of 4/4) and rhythmic (the eights are transformed into exceptional rhythmic values of the triolet) of the Chorus.

Couplet D is organized into two symmetrical periods of 16 measures each. The characteristic thematic material of this fragment will demand the violinist's maximum attention to functional intonational accuracy, as the melodic development is constructed in the form of an ingenious parallel twinning between violin and piano, superimposed at the interval of a third over the octave. The voices will be permanently inverted between the violin and piano. From an interpretative point of view, the fragment will be performed by both performers in a light, airy character. Performers will also aim to highlight sudden dynamic contrasts with a more punchy attack.

The next 6 measures (183-188) have a transitional role and prepare the last appearance of Chorus A (m. 189-204), which unfolds according to the pattern presented previously. The only difference in the organization of the thematic material concerns the construction in the canon by which the two instruments present the theme and the leading role of each instrument. The thematic material, built in the form of a dizzying dialogue, maximizes the technical and interpretive potential of both performers.

In the Coda (m. 205-231), the thematic material unfolds in the key of *B flat major* and consists of 3 phrases of 8 measures each + 2 expansion measures; it is based on the rhythmic and melodic elements characteristic of the Chorus and is again constructed in the form of an imitative dialogue, initiated by the piano and continued by the violin. As a timbral novelty, we mention the presence of the *pizzicato* effect in the violinist's score, who will simultaneously pinch the chords of three sounds placed on three different strings, which will vibrate intensely to intensify their sonority. The bright, clear and articulate character of the low values will have to be cultivated by both performers in order to reproduce the specific sonority of Mozartian endings.

#### **4. Conclusions**

W. A. Mozart's *Sonata* registers an aesthetic evolution in relation to Haydn's *Sonata* and is characterized by transparency and melodic clarity, the perfection of

constructions, the unity between part and whole, the rhythm made up of syncopated forms, counter-times, clear harmony, chromatically enriched, widened dynamics within palette of nuances (from *pianissimo* to *forte*). The musical architecture at the level of micro- and macrostructure is balanced. Sound speech is built on the principle of repeatability and unity. The conflict generated by the contrast of the two main themes will determine an intense drama, which will evolve within the middle stanza. The presence of modulations has a role in the dramatic articulation of the sound material, so the temporary resolution of the tension requires the use of the dominant, which plays an essential role.

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