

22. Mozart

Piano Sonata in B flat, K. 333: movement I

(for Unit 3: Developing Musical Understanding)

Background Information and Performance Circumstances

Biography

- Mozart was born in Austria on the 27th January 1756
- Mozart composed *Piano Sonata in B flat, K.333* in 1783 and it was published in Vienna a year later.
- Piano sonatas like this one were intended mainly as teaching pieces and were published for the amateur market.
- *K.333* refers to the position of the piece in the chronological catalogue of Mozart's works made by the Austrian musicologist, Köchel.
- Mozart died in 1791.

Classical Style

Together with Haydn and Beethoven, Mozart was one of the greatest composers of the Classical period.

Features of Classical Style

- Use of piano (then called a fortepiano) instead of the harpsichord. On this new instrument players could play loudly or softly by varying the pressure of the fingers on the keys, something that wasn't possible on the harpsichord.
- Simple melody-dominated homophony styles.
- Broken chord accompaniment textures, as at the beginning.
- Alberti bass accompaniments – a specialised type of left hand broken chord style, eg. bar 71
- Sonata form. This was the standard structure for the first movements of sonatas and symphonies, and in varied form for concertos. It consisted of Exposition, Development (starting after the central double bar) and Recapitulation. The Exposition opens with the first subject.
- The piece uses functional tonality, modulating mainly to closely related keys, such as F major (dominant) for the 2nd subject (bar 23).

- The harmony uses root, first and second inversion chords.
- The melodic style features balanced phrases, with antecedent and consequent, as in the first four bars.

Performing Forces and Their Handling

- The instrument Mozart wrote for is known today as the fortepiano. It had a much more delicate sound than the modern pianoforte, though it shared the feature which gave the instrument its name – the ability to play softly or loudly depending on the weight of the player’s touch – a feature lacking in the harpsichord, an instrument which rapidly died out towards the end of the eighteenth century.
- The dynamics would have been subtle, there certainly wasn’t the range available to a modern player. Many of the bars have no dynamic marking at all, including the whole of the first page of the anthology score. Nevertheless we can be sure that the players of the time would have performed with frequent slight dynamic changes.
- One of the main advantages of the new instrument was its ability to provide a softer left-hand accompaniment to the right-hand melody. The steady quaver accompaniment from the beginning of the piece would have been played with slightly less weight than the right-hand music.
- A typical feature of the keyboard style of the period was the Alberti bass – strictly speaking a broken chord accompaniment in the order of low–high-middle-high notes, as at bar 71.
- The pitch range of the fortepiano was relatively confined and the range of this piece is particularly narrow. Much of the left hand music is in the treble clef, including the first two bars.

Texture

- The texture is best described as melody-dominated homophony.
- Simple two-part textures abound, as at the beginning of the piece, where a melodic line in the right hand is accompanied by a broken chord texture in the left hand.
- Various Alberti bass textures are used, as in the F minor section (from bar 71) mentioned in the previous section.

- Alberti bass is combined with a dominant pedal towards the end of the Exposition, at bar 57.
- There are occasional passages of monophonic music, often with scalar writing, as at bar 8.
- Occasional fuller chords are used, such as the six-note chord at the beginning of the 2nd subject, at bar 23.

Structure

The music is in Sonata Form. Mozart often included several tunes within a subject group. The second subject in particular has numerous melodic ideas.

Bars 1-63: Exposition

1-10: The 1st subject is in B flat. The short main theme begins on the upbeat and ends with a perfect cadence in the tonic.

10-22: The transition stage uses B flat-F. The transition (or bridge section) modulates (changes key) to the dominant (F major).

23-63: The second subject section is in F (dominant). There are no fewer than four main melodic ideas (bars 23, 39, 50 and 59). The fourth can be described as a codetta.

Bars 63-93: Development

63-93: This section of the piece uses F-Gm-Fm-Cm-Gm. This part of the composition, beginning after the double bar develops earlier material, using a number of different keys, including F major, Gm and Cm.

Bars 93-end: Recapitulation

93-end: This stage is composed in B flat. This section repeats the exposition but with an altered transition leading to a second subject now in the tonic key. This final section could be described as Coda.

Tonality

- The piece uses functional tonality, modulating to closely related keys.
- The music begins in the tonic B flat major and starts modulating during the transition (bars 10-22).
- The second subject is in the dominant key: F major (bars 23-63).
- The Development section (bars 63-93) moves quickly through a number of keys, including G minor – the relative minor (bars 67-8) and the unexpected, dominant minor key of F minor (not one of the 5 closely related keys). It reaches C minor briefly at bar 75, before moving to G minor again at bars 80-86.
- Perfect cadences reinforce the tonality at various points, eg. in the tonic bars 9-10.
- Dominant pedal points add further strength to perfect cadences, eg. bars 57-8.

Harmony

- Functional harmony based on standard tonal progressions, especially perfect cadences, eg. bars 9-10.
- The transition ends on an imperfect cadence, bars 21-2.
- There is an interrupted cadence, bars 83-4.
- Dominant 7th harmonies are used frequently, eg. the left-hand broken chord of bar 3.
- Though Mozart uses mainly root position and first inversion chords (as outlined in bar 1), there are also some 2nd inversion chords, sometimes over dominant pedal points, eg. bar 57.
- There is a short Circle of 5ths in the exposition (bars 47-8) and a longer one in the recapitulation (bars 143-6).
- Appoggiaturas are at the heart of Mozart's harmonic style, eg. the F in bar 2, and the double appoggiatura at the beginning of bar 4.

Melody

- The profusion of Mozart's melodies has already been mentioned, eg. the four main melodic ideas in the second subject group.
- Balanced phrases do occur (eg. the pair of 2 bar phrases at the beginning), with antecedent and consequent.
- Appoggiaturas and accented passing notes are essentially a harmonic feature but they do form an essential characteristic of the melody line. Even the first note is really an appoggiatura.
- Chromatic notes are another essential feature of Mozart's style. There is a chromatic appoggiatura C sharp on the first beat of bar 27.
- Much of the music is conjunct, like the opening scalar group of 6 notes.
- Large leaps are rare, eg. descending minor 7th, bar 43.
- The music is often ornamental in character, even when there is no specific ornamental sign. There are occasional trills, notably the long trills over dominant pedals, eg. bar 58. There is a turn at the end of the exposition (bar 62).

Rhythm and Metre

- The left hand begins with a long series of quavers, omitting the first beat of each bar.
- There are frequent passages of semiquavers, like the rapid scale in bar 8.
- Syncopated rhythm is found occasionally, as in the development (right hand, bar 73)
- Dotted rhythm is sometimes used, eg. near the beginning of the development section (eg. bar 65).
- The music is in Common Time throughout.

Reading List

The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (Macmillan, 2001), Vol. 17, pp. 276-347.

Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven* (Faber, 1997).