

The Dancing character and its absorption in the Solerian Harpsichord repertoire

Corina IBĂNESCU¹

Abstract: *Padre Antonio Soler, like his compatriots and contemporaries, was inspired by the national dances, bringing their stylized elements into his works. In his sonatas for keyboard instruments, we find certain rhythmic aspects recalling the character of certain folk dances, but in a very nuanced way. Soler's approach of the folk sound frame is an element that we find more in his one-part sonatas while within the multi-parted sonatas, his musical discourse shows a more certain approach to the classical typology of the musical language, which creates a more elastic framework, more suitable for the adoption of classical expressions. In the sonatas of volume 6, constructed in several sections, the references to dances or Iberian dance typologies are much less obvious. We have discovered in Soler tunes of flamenco type of Moorish origin, or the thrill of castanets, or the guitar chords that constitute the dynamic accompaniment of the Spanish dances.*

Keywords: *sonatas, dancing character, harpsichord, Soler*

1. Introduction

In the 120 sonatas for *keyboard instruments* composed by Padre Antonio Soler, the harpsichord voice is evident in the instrumental language used by him in their construction. Within Soler's sonatas, we can notice metronomic rhythms that favor the proximity of certain dance patterns, evident in these works. The composer, just like his compatriots and contemporaries, was inspired by the popular repertoire of national dances, bringing in his works their stylized elements. Of all the characteristics of the musical discourse that manage to render most faithfully the character of a choreographic act, the most eloquent are the rhythm and the metronomic rhythms that preserve its specificity. The specificity of the Iberian dances is representative in Soler's music even though we make a comparison, from this point of view, with the compositional situation of D. Scarlatti.

¹ Transilvania University of Braşov, corinaibanescu@gmail.com

The discovery of folklore would take place in the history of music only with the development of national cultures, the so-called national schools that formed at the beginning of the 19th century and subsequently developed during the same century. An interesting element is the framework in which Father Antonio Soler lived, the monastic environment; however, the influence of folk dances and melodies is felt in his instrumental creation because "there is no Spanish who as a child does not know how to dance" (Gruber, 1963, p. 384). That is why there is a certain separation, stylistically, between the two types of artistic manifestations. In order to imprint an instrumental work with the spirit of popular creations, during the Baroque era, it was necessary, however, for the temporary and partial renunciation to a very strict polyphonic framework, an element that we find in Soler in his one-part sonatas, as a sign of his approach to the folk sound frame. Within the multi-parted sonatas, the musical discourse shows a more certain approach to the classical typology of the musical language, which creates a more elastic framework, more suitable for the adoption of classical expressions. The framework of the musical language used by Soler is also predisposed to making obvious associations with the folk music of his time and his country, even if the general character of his music is included in the general European typology of musical expressiveness.

2. The dancing character reflected in the harpsichord sonatas

Here are some examples that contribute to highlighting certain rhythmic aspects that, implicitly, recall the character of certain dances, but in a very nuanced way. In **sonata no.61** of volume 4 we can distinguish a way of articulating a musical discourse that will capitalize on the components of folk dance.

The castanets are suggested by a harmonic complementary language, in which one of the voices signals only the main pulse, highlighting each beat, and the other voice - the upper one - completes the beat by singing other sixteenth values. (Figure 1).



Fig. 1. P. A. Soler – Sonata no. 61, bars 49-50,
Soler, Sonatas para instrumentos de tecla, vol.IV

The discourse from the beginning of **sonata no. 66** of the fourth volume of sonatas is marked by the strong tendency to decorate the melody in the specific Iberian style. The trill - in a manner characteristic of the space in which Soler lived and created - is associated in this framework: the trill highlights the second value of a formula with unequal values - the longest value, the second of them - thus combining the syncopé with the ornamental trill (Figure 2).



Fig. 2. P. A. Soler – Sonata no. 66, bars 1-2

The discourse is developed in the following measures, so that the elements already mentioned will be combined with the ascending diatonic passage or with the exceptional rhythmic divisions of triolet (Figure 3).



Fig. 3. P. A. Soler – Sonata no. 66, bars 27-28

In the sonatas of volume 6, sonatas constructed in several sections, we cannot observe the same phenomenon; these works are in the orbit of works that are almost more than the classical wish of the moment of their composition. Therefore, the references to dances or Iberian dance typologies are much less obvious. However, we could signal a tendency to ornament the melodic discourse, even at the beginning of **sonata no. 91** in volume 6, in which the ornaments consist of mordents associated with ascending passages, which mainly mark the auftakt for certain musical phrases (Figure 4).



Fig. 4. P. A. Soler – *Sonata no. 91*, bars 5-6 Soler, *Sonatas para instrumentos de tecla*, vol.VI

The cadence that concludes the first section of the sonata reminds of a rather specific Iberian rhythmic approach, which proposes to highlight each half of the beat within the measure, and the associated melodic speech cultivates the ornaments on the fraction of the beat from the beginning of each metric unit (Figure 5).



Fig. 5. P. A. Soler – *Sonata no. 91*, bars 106-108

In addition to the rhythmic formulas made up of unequal, dotted values, we also note the case where exceptional rhythmic divisions are used, superimposed on the normally divided discourse, divisions that strengthen the impression of temperamental impetus. The example belongs to **sonata 92** of the sixth volume (Figure 6).



Fig. 6. P. A. Soler – *Sonata no. 106*, bars 59-61

In **sonata 106** of volume 7 we can find a special mixing between the melodic and the rhythmic aspect, so that a certain asymmetry is created which highlights the second (unstressed) half of beats 2 and 4 of the 4-stroke measure (Figure 7).



Fig. 7. P. A. Soler – *Sonata no. 106*, bars 2-3 Soler, *Sonatas para instrumentos de tecla*, vol.VII

Sonata no. 108 of the seventh volume of sonatas is written in a ternary metric manner, which favors the reproduction of a choreographic movement such as the menuet. The pulse is uneven, the first two values forming a formula with dotted values (Figure 8).

The initial rhythmic writing becomes more complex with the intervention of the second voice, in which the more temperamental dance style, characteristic of Iberian music, can be explicitly observed from this point of view, in the following example (Figure 9).



Fig. 8. P. A. Soler – *Sonata no. 106*, bars 1-2



Fig. 9. P. A. Soler – *Sonata no. 106*, bars 51-53

Sonata no. 110 of volume 7 proposes a central section that is made up precisely based on the support of a denser accompaniment, consisting of the repetition of three chords, which remind the chords of the guitar accompaniment specific to the peninsular sound art (Figure 10).

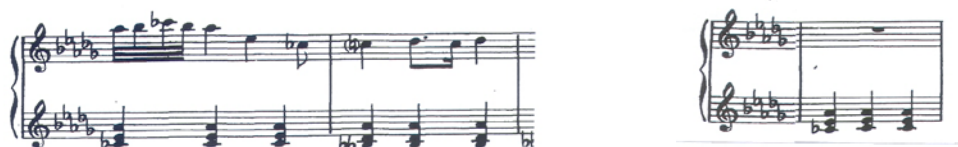


Fig. 10. P. A. Soler – Sonata no. 110, bars 28-30

Iberian characteristic is the melodic aspect that accompanies these metric-rhythmic-harmonic coordinates: the melody is ornamented, articulated on the basis of lesser values, which justifies us to argue a discourse that is claimed directly from the Spanish folk art mode (Figure 11).



Fig. 11. P. A. Soler – Sonata no. 110, bars 31-34

Ornaments also survive in the following, as thematic, motif fragments, which retain the same appearance of temperamental musical discourse, especially as these thirty-two-halves formations are found in the unstressed sections of the unstressed beats within the measure (Figure 12).



Fig. 12. P. A. Soler – Sonata no. 110, bars 41-43

A new dance prototype can also be observed in the same work analyzed above, in which we find fragments that capitalize on the rhythmic resources of the chained

syncofes superimposed with a melodic approach that, in the same way, emphasizes especially the unstressed beats of the 4-stroke measure (Figure 13).



Fig. 13. P. A. Soler – Sonata no. 110, bars 75-77

The last of the sonatas analyzed in volume 7, the one with **no. 116**, contains another type of discourse that may be close to the Iberian folk one. We find the composer's use of a latent polyphony within the accompaniment, a polyphony that highlights, through a longer sound, even the most grave voice, the one responsible for maintaining a pulse during beat 1 of each measure (Figure 14).



Fig. 14. P. A. Soler – Sonata no. 116, bars 35-37

Also, the preference is observed for maintaining an accompaniment reminiscent of the guitar chords, this time the chords being replaced with simple harmonic intervals that outline a discourse with powerful metrical, dancing metro-rhythmic meanings (Figure 15).



Fig. 15. P. A. Soler – Sonata no. 116, bars 21-24

5. Conclusions

We note in the sonatas analyzed, the consistency with regard to maintaining a pulse and the intention of rendering a dancing frame, as one of the most important choreographic features. Among the elements that most frequently recall this ethnic aspect, which Soler "the cheerful and solitary priest" (Encyclopaedia Universalis, 1990, p. 796) has endeavored to highlight in his sonatas, are the ornaments (mordents, trills, placed even on the unstressed beats or parts of the beats, diatonic fast passages, embroidery), the use of exceptional rhythmic divisions, of the accompaniment that sustains a long equal pulse, which gives rise to the creation of a freer melody, in the Iberian style.

We also point out the existence of the tendency to create, at the metro-rhythmic level, a complementarity between the upper and lower layers of the musical discourse, with the intention of invigorating it. Still, there is a restraint when it comes to the incorporation of the folk melos into melodic or rhythmic formulas with direct reference in this regard. However, in the analyzed works we found sporadic, temporary echoes of the Spanish dances, contaminated to a large extent with the elements of the European musical discourse. We have discovered in Soler tunes of flamenco type of Moorish origin, or the thrill of castanets, or the guitar chords that constitute the dynamic accompaniment of the Spanish dances. From this point of view, the composer is a continuator of the tradition of Spanish dances embodied in suites and other chamber or symphonic works, classical, a tradition that Scarlatti has upheld and which was brought to the height by composers such as Granados, Albeniz or De Falla.

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