

Aspects in the Evolution of the Sonata Genre and Form in the Piano Creation

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Abstract: *In our approach, we start from the conquests of the Baroque music regarding the architectural pattern of the sonata, following its evolutionary path along with the flowering of keyboard instruments and the creation standard set by Scarlatti who, in his time, named his 555 Exercises of great virtuosity, Sonatas. Starting from the 17th-18th centuries from the two types of sonata - da camera and da chiesa, we reach the time of crystallization of the instrumental sonata genre and form during the Viennese classicism of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. One of the great innovators in the field of sonata form and the setting of the well-known pattern of today is Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach. In his turn, Haydn will approach the sonata from both a standalone and applied to chamber, symphonic and concert music. We follow the architectural changes of the sonata onto new horizons, from Beethoven to Schubert and Liszt. Synthesizing the metamorphoses suffered in the evolution of the sonata genre and form, we observe the tendency of mirroring at its level the distinct elements in the creation of each composer.*

Keywords: *sonata, genre, form, evolution, pianistic creation*

1. Introduction

In the pianistic creation, composers throughout time approached especially the large genres, such as the sonata, this having a privileged place in their preoccupations, which was reflected in the impressive number of works and their exceptional value. The term *sonata* is used in both the definition of a musical form and in that of a musical genre, which is why we consider it important to reveal the evolutionary path of the sonata genre and form, whose decisive impact on the development and evolution of ample instrumental genres such as the concert, symphony and string quartet is essential. Thus, in our approach we must start from the first conquests in the field, during the Baroque period, a successor of the pavana-gagliarda couple that generated the two directions for the assertion of the *sonata - da camera*, meant for the laic environment, and the *da chiesa*, for the church, both reuniting a group of three instruments (hence the name of *a tré*) and a continuous bass – but also the development direction of the instrumental suite. Referring strictly to the architectural

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pattern of the sonata, we distinguish the two terminologies that determine, each separately, a particular aspect in its complex composition: genre and form.

2. History and evolution

In order to follow the evolutionary path of the sonata, we focus on the flowering of keyboard instruments which attracted, through their improvement, the crystallization, development and perfection of the specific instrumental forms. The germs of the classical bi-thematic sonata with development for the piano, a model and creation standard for the classical and post-classical period, are found in the brilliance of Domenico Scarlatti's clavecinist art (1685 – 1757), who names his 555 de *Exercises* of great virtuosity, *Sonatas*. Being a two-part monothematic, this type of sonata (emerged towards the end of the 16th century) involved in the first stage a musical theme exhibited in the basic tonality, framed by a modulating section at a near tonality (dominant in the case of the major base tonalities, or the major relative, in the case of a minor base tonality). Through his works, which naturally combine great melodic expressiveness and interpretative virtuosity, Scarlatti achieves perfection and enriches the pianistic literature, the composer summoning himself "more and more categorically to a single genre, to one species and to one single form of chamber concert instrumental music, namely the sonata in bipartite form, monothematic in essence and plurimotivistic in appearance by the thematic ornamentation, pure arabesque" (Berger, 1985, 260). Here is how Scarlatti opens the premise for the becoming of one of the most approached piano (and not only) instrumental forms, completed through time, to achieve the complexity it enjoys nowadays. Starting from the 17th-18th centuries from the two types of the sonata genre, *da camera* and *da chiesa*, prefigured on the basis of the existence of the tonal level and harmony that will in turn generate the homophone style, taking over the pattern of the bipartite structures of the movements of the preclassical instrumental suite, we reach the time of crystallization of the sonata genre and form during the Viennese classicism of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. An analysis of the form, separating it from the sonata genre is, in our opinion, unsatisfactory, since both genre and form have crystallized in the same way, both aesthetically and philosophically, as well as on the development of musical technique and art.

3. Aspects in the evolution of the genre and form

With the implementation of instrumental art in music and the abandonment of polyphony already speculated in the slightest detail, the homophone style asserts itself, generating new forms and structures on which the melody is woven, one of the great innovators in this field, with major influences on the development of the

sonata form and the setting of the well-known pattern of today, being the successor of the great Bach, is Carl Philipp Emmanuel Bach (1714-1788). In his creative conception, "the bi-thematic sonata became in his compositions the own form of expression for the new content of ideas, which was updated by the last aspect of the "doctrine of affections" and this perfect combination of form and content, due to Bach – is what exerted the strong influence on his descendants, recognized by them, and produced the awarding of the mentioned title, that of father of the modern sonata" (Nicolescu, 1962, -170). Expression and the need for expressing music have become a matter of great interest to new generation musicians, being met by the efforts of refining and perfecting the instrument capable of rendering the composer's intentions as intense as possible. Here's how the two very important poles for the subsequent evolution of the genre (and from here the openings to the affirmation of some new ones) are found in the same stylistic age: "the improvement of the keyboard instruments and [...] Philipp Emmanuel's conception, the human voice as the ideal to which instrumental singing" [integrates] into that sensitive *style* whose influence on Haydn and Mozart is no longer contested by anyone and whose main representative is without doubt the author of the Prussian Sonatas and of the Test upon the true way of playing the piano "(Nicolescu, 1962, 169-170). Thus, "classicism will witness the emergence of a musical genre that will dominate music to this day: the sonata" [...], a precursor to the development of the modern concert, symphony, trio and quartet towards a new peak of structural and expressive refinement. If the Baroque music is highlighted by textural complication, then the classical period is characterized by the obscurity of structural clarity" (Ionescu, 2011, 40). Although the soanata form experienced a monothematic development in the Baroque, starting with the Meinnheim School it will evolve over the bi-thematic line in which it will stabilize to the present day. Haydn will give birth to the first sonatas brought to a higher level by his predecessor Carl Ph. Em. Bach, observing the perfect balance of form and thematic development and approaching the sonata form from both as a standalone and applied to chamber, symphonic and concert music, the consistency of the use of this form marking the importance for the entire instrumental genre.

Knowing and studying the works of the two composers – Carl Philipp and Haydn – led to the evolution of the form and genre of the sonata, rising on a high expressive stage in the creation of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), who cultivated the sonata pattern taking over what he considered more important and according to his inner structure. "*The ease with which the Mozart sound is moving in the form of the sonata*" (Nicolescu, 1962, 175) whose first proof is the clarity and *cleanliness* of his manuscripts, in strong contrast with the manuscripts and sketches of Beethoven that betray the labor of creation, will not go unnoticed in the twentieth century, George Enescu noting in his writings: "I think – perhaps, mistaken – referring him to Beethoven. What is wonderful about Mozart, which totally disparages him from Beethoven, is that he never has experiences,

speculations. He goes straight to the goal, finds it suddenly. He adapts himself without obeying the forms of his age, and I refer to the sonata form, based on traceability of simple tonalities" (Bughici, 1978, 331). Although the study of Mozart's creation of the genre in this sense does not show an intense and direct concern over the renewal or diversification of the architectural and structural plan of the instrumental sonata, Mozart's genius can not be denied, due to the "disturbing originality of the composer for whom music is a natural, spontaneous emanation, to whom the instinct of the form preserves its original character in all achievements. Without ever failing, he manages intervals, melody, harmony or counterpoint with the naturalness of speaking his mother tongue" (Nicolescu, 1962, 174). The relationship with the instrumental suite and its specificity – the alternation of movements and the contrast determined by the specificity of the combined dances, a model of the development of the parts later adapted to the instrumental sonata – is a structural element belonging to the *genre*. Thus, from a variable number of three to five contrasting movements (sometimes having an introductory part) known during the preclassical period, the genre of the instrumental sonata will crystallize in classicism, the musical material being usually arranged in three parts, the slow medium one being framed by two fast sections. However, there are few sonatas in just two parts, a closer look at Joseph Haydn's piano creation (1732-1809), considered to be a true model of structural balance, reveals us the fact that this *exception* is more common than we expected, of the 52 works not less than 10, in their full formula, have two movements. Of the three great Viennese classics, Mozart appears to be the most stable in terms of the number of parts of his sonatas, remaining faithful to the structure in three movements in the piano works. The interpretative practice and the study of the classical works of the genre reveal a certain arrangement of the constituent parts of the sonata. Thus, considering the structure in three parts as the pattern of creation and starting from the natural arrangement of the slow part between two fast parts, we also observe, apart from the fact that each movement has a specific character (their contrasting arrangement having the same common denominator as the instrumental suite) a certain pattern as to the shape of the parts in their arrangement throughout the work: part I – sonata form; part II – lied form, menuet with trio, or sonata form; part III – rondo form (rondo-sonata), sonata form, menuet, lied, or theme with variations. The special character that Beethoven's language gives to his sonatas is supported on the level of the creative conception by the acute need to arrange the movements on a new pattern, subordinated entirely to the musical message. Thus, the structure of the sonata in four parts set by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) is: p. I – sonata form (but also theme with variations; sometimes with introduction), p. II scherzo (innovative element), p. III lied, menuet or sonata without development, and p. IV rondo, rondo-sonata or sonata form. We also note the introduction of the funeral march (p. III of Sonata in B Major op. 26), of the fugue (the end of Sonatas op. 106 and op. 110), as well as the programmatic element of romantic

filliation (Sonata op. 81, written in 1805: p. I *Les Adieux*, p. II *L'Absence*, p. III *Le Retour*, where the composer himself recorded in the musical text under the three sounds that generated the entire sonata, the word *Lebewohl – Adieu*). The evolution of the ideology-specific languages that continually metamorphosed the creative consciousness of the composers led, along with the Beethoven developmental principle immersing from the inner dramatism of the generating thematic profiles, to structural metamorphoses, the movements being expanded and amplified to support the entire musical ensemble of great complexity (as in, for instance, Beethoven's piano sonatas – the three sonatas op. 2, sonatas op. 10 no. 3, op. 22, op. 27 no. 1, op. 28, op. 31 no. 3 (with 4 movements), or the impressive last opuses 101-111 – as well as Schubert's sonatas or, on the contrary, under the influence of the symphonic poem and its specific deployment, coming to synthesize several sections in a single movement (Liszt – Sonata in H minor S.178).

4. The aesthetics of the sonata

The aesthetics of the sonata form follows the path of the Hegelian absolute idea, in which are enclosed the moments of thesis, antithesis and synthesis corresponding to the first (main) theme, to the second theme (secondary, or a secondary thematic group) and the result of their antithetic evolution synthesized in the half-section. Here, the two themes originally in tonal (and expressive) contrast are found in full consensus, in a convergent plan determined by tonal unity. As we know, the culmination of the genre will be achieved by Ludwig van Beethoven, the musical expression, harmonic language, variety of musical forms, dramaturgy obtained from the themes of great spiritual depth, as well as the ideological developments underlying the sonata, conferring an new aura of perfection to this genre, anticipating musical romanticism and “putting in balance the classical ideal” (Merișescu, 1968, 10). The clashes of contradictory principles and the founding of music on a struggling interior, caught between reason and feeling, between subjective and objective, between truth and aesthetics, find their externalized expression in large profound works, with an obviously dramatic character where the struggle of principles leads to changes of the architectural balances, that balance in a perfect equability with Haydn and Mozart destabilizing with Beethoven as a result of the inner tumult in favour of one or other of the principles. Just as in the depth of Bachian creation, flicker the germs of the new languages of the 20th century (demonstrated and researched repeatedly, like a painting by Leonardo da Vinci), the Beethoven sonata reveals the horizons of treating the form as a malleable, permissive support for the laying of new sound edifices. At Franz Schubert (1797-1828) - a contemporary of Beethoven, but deeply affiliated with the romantic aesthetics, the instrumental sonata knows elements of the lied (which he raised on the highest peaks of expressivity, being the major and determinant

genre in Schubert's creation) that gives to the melodic lines a particularly charming profile and a broad breath, the form being extended in order not to melt anything of the melodic expression. Franz Liszt (1811-1886), however, innovating in the genre of the symphonic poem by focusing on the three parts characteristic of the genre in one part, will become the precursor of the modern one-part sonata, the composer proving himself an innovator through his searches and variations, also pointing to the principle of the monothematic sonata, a precursor of modernism.

4. Conclusions

Synthesizing the metamorphoses suffered in the evolution of the sonata genre and form, we observe the tendency of mirroring at its level the distinct elements in the creation of each composer. The need to find new forms of expression has led over time to the homophone style domination, the harmonic level reflecting increasingly advanced philosophical, cultural and aesthetic ideas. Having as its source the prototype of the bipartite structure present in the pre-classical suite, the sonata of classical typology is to be considered a peak of instrumental thinking in music, at its basis being, as we have already mentioned, Hegel's philosophical principle of the antithesis and synthesis. The musical thinking of the stylistic periods following the Viennese classical period marks the so-called neoclassicism, most of the composers embracing the tradition of building the form to exploit it in a new light, the issue of the genre reaching out to multiple aspects. Both the genre and the form of the sonata have undergone important changes over time, driven by each composer's search for finding the most appropriate means of expression to render the musical content that defines each and everyone.

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