

The Sonatas in B Flat Major KV 454 and KV 378 **by W. A. Mozart**

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Abstract: *Ever since ancient times it has been thought that the tonalities and keys are closely connected to different feelings and colours, being a very important manner of expression each composer has used. Thus, from among the 19 sonatas for piano and violin by W. A. Mozart, 2 are written in the B flat major key, an intense, strong, dynamic, and passionate tonality. Mozart composed 3 sonatas for piano and violin in the B flat major key – KV 378, KV454 and KV 570. From among these 3 only the first two are thought to be more important in the composer’s creation, as they are frequently part of the repertoire of any great violinist.*

Key-words: *tonalities, colors, sonatas, piano, violine*

1. The Sonata KV 454

This sonata was composed in Vienna in April 1784, during a time when the composer wrote many piano concertos (K 449, 450, 451 and 453, 456, 459), but also the quintet with piano KV 452, so the influences and brilliance of the concerto can be felt in this sonata as well (Flothuis 1999, 297).

”It is not possible to describe a work like this one. Both amateurs and connoisseurs will have to play it to understand that I did not exaggerate”, said musicologist Otto Jahn (Cristian 1958, 240).

This sonata differs from all the other sonatas for piano and violin and starts with an extremely slow introduction (largo), quickly followed by an allegro movement that brings equality between the two instruments. ”One cannot conceive of a more perfect alternation between the two instruments than that of the first allegro, which is entered through a largo, like under a triumphal arch” (Einstein 1965, 258-259).

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1.1. Movement I – Largo. Allegro

The solemn character given by strong and imposing chords, intonated both on the piano and violin, contrasts with the *cantabile* intervention of the violin, with imploring intonations, in bars 5-7. "We stand before that antagonism of two principles encompassed in the same theme complex, one of force, the other of gentleness and kindness, of which Beethoven will make the psychological key of his art." (Cristian 1958, 241).

From the performer's perspective, this allegro must be regarded by the two instrumentalists as an extension and a fulfilment of the largo introduction at the same time. The allegro must express a different side of the same character, not launch an entirely new movement. It shall be regarded as a quick movement, but not superficial, dynamic, but not noisy.

This allegro has the form of a sonata, and the exposition follows the natural steps of this form. However, the development is like a free fantasy, where the themes exposed previously are not found anymore. The writing abounds in successive modulations with a lofty character, enchainments of scales and arpeggios, chromatic passages (e.g. bars 75-76, 79-82) with oscillating colours and feelings, sometimes gentle, and sometimes resigned.

Mozart's true composing mastery is revealed in the reprise, where the developed motif appears (as an example: bar 1 of allegro), where its profile suggests the start of a fugue theme (e.g. bars 98-111).

1.2. Movement II - Andante

This Andante shows us a side of Mozart that is full of sincerity, emotion, and personality at the same time. The sound and phrasings require naturalness, elegance, and fluency, without putting a "demanding" virtuosity above these. Mozart wonderfully inserts fragments in which both instruments follow the same type of composing; beyond the requirements for clarity and technical accuracy which an ascension in semiquavers first requires (phrased 2 in legato, followed by 2 in staccato), then the changed texture in sextuplets (with three notes per phrasing), these must be felt and conveyed as moments of "true inspiration" (bars 15-19).

By placing both instruments in the low register, the cadence in the end of this movement expresses both delicacy and a feeling of evoking. Performing this movement of highest expressiveness, the performers are engulfed in emotion when reading Mozart's testimony:

"I cannot write in verse, for I am no poet. I cannot arrange the parts of speech with such art as to produce effects of light and shade, for I am not painter. Even by signs and gestures, I cannot express my thoughts and feelings, for I am no dancer. But I can do so by means of sounds, for I am a musician" (Loft 1991, 277).

1.3. Movement III - Allegretto

Allegretto has the form of a rondo that starts with the same note (b flat) on which the violin closed the andante movement; on this start, repeating the note b flat has the role to launch an octave jump that prepares and directs the listener towards a joyous and exuberant character. This character of the refrain is in permanent contrast with the couplets that are to appear.

The variety of characters is to be noticed, often at a motif level (e.g. bars 18-19). This ongoing dynamic, expressive change offers the performers a chance to use as many colours and express themselves through a great variety of timbres.

The finale of this movement proves the balance and dialogue between piano and violin once more and offers a dynamic and resolute end that matches the whole composition in this movement.

2. The Sonata KV 378

This sonata defines a successful stage in achieving the composition for the two instruments. This sonata is part of the second set of sonatas for piano and violin K.V. 376-380, from the composer's maturity period.

In the sonata's composing a significant evolution occurs regarding the fluency and virtuoso treatment of both the piano and the violin. This sonata also considerably enriches the ornamentation, the dense weaving of voices, and is placed among the masterpieces of this genre.

2.1. Movement I - Allegro moderato

Allegro moderato reveals itself through broadness, and graceful and supple melodic lines, never before encountered in a sonata for piano and violin until Mozart. This lyrical melodic line proves a deep knowledge of Stein's pianoforte, as Mozart composed this sonata bearing in mind the technical and sound possibilities of this instrument.

„What is remarkable in Mozart's music is the rapidity of change of articulations and dynamic levels, especially in Allegro movements where they transpire within a web of shifting textures and topics. In the violin sonatas, such changes call for extremely fine muscle control in striking the keys and guiding the bow. This poised style of execution—shaping local gestures while maintaining the flow of the phrase—is the essence of Mozartean virtuosity. It is music that embodies delicacy of touch, a manifestation of the culture of sensibility from which it emerged” (Breene 2007, 79).

As for the harmonics, the frequent relation tonic-dominant conveys force and a good presence, but the melody's grace counterbalances such an attitude. This first movement is full with ease and nonchalance, and is characterised through an abundance in ideas. The exposition is almost entirely sketched by the violin, although each idea presented is used by the piano, in its turn. It amazes through the close

collaboration and harmonic combination of the two instruments (e.g. the descent that makes up the passage between development and reprise in bars 111-113).

The melodic is enriched through the rich ornamentation, using chromatisms which feminise the discourse (bar 17), accompaniments in the form of a figured pedal of the dominant's harmonics (bars 23-27) and the Alberti bass, ever so present in Mozart's sonatas. The two themes, the first with supple melodic, and the second in F major, built on parallel, well-marked thirds (bars 47- 51), are connected to each other through numerous unique motifs.

The development, with a larger size than in the previous sonata, abounds in modulating inflexions, the melodic is given to the piano, and there is no responsorial style. The indication *calando* (bar 113) written by Mozart himself in his handwriting refers to the dynamics: in an ever softer tone, not more slowly and softer (Loft 1991, 277).

2.2. Movement II - Andantino sostenuto e cantabile

Andantino sostenuto e cantabile is written in E flat major and has the form of a lied, developed with a concentrated reprise and a coda (AA1 BA bA Coda). The presented piano theme is brilliant, and its heroic character is given by the key. The composition is polyrhythmic, on an accompaniment in triplets, while the harmonics level maintains the relation tonic-dominant-tonic from the first movement of the sonata.

The violin has an accompaniment role, while the piano has a dense composition and rich melodies.

2.3. Movement III – Allegro

Allegro is the last movement of this sonata, a classical, large rondo, with a brilliant character through its very tempo, allegro. The theme, brought by the piano, follows an arpeggio drawing, enriched with ornaments above a pedal accompaniment on the tonic. The grouplets (bars 2-4) convey calmness to the melody, and are all played "in a single breath" along the 4 bars of the phrase.

The fast and articulate execution of the allegro (bar 151) must be thought with a certain control and carried out by "taking one's time", and the melodic line, concentrated in two bars. In the forte passages, the music must be conveyed force and brilliance (bars 167, 170). The last cadence requires special control, not only of the hand, but especially of the colour and nuance.

3. Character and Colour in the Key B Flat Major, of Sonatas KV 454 and KV 378

The functional tonal system is the one used in the works of the three great style epochs – Baroque, Classicism, and Romanticism – stages, in which the most grandiose works of music have been composed. This tonal system is, of course, also used by W. A. Mozart.

The (major and minor) keys encountered at the first Baroque composers, Monteverdi and G. Gabrieli, are: **C major**, **F major** and **G major**, **d minor**, **e minor** and **a minor**, to which **B flat major** (the ancient Lydian genus molle) and **g minor** (the Dorian genus molle) are added. The other keys shall be conquered in a process that shall last about two centuries.

The ground key is considered that in which the work starts and finishes, creating that feeling of beginning and end, specific of human metaphysics. This is how the key B flat major is introduced in each of the two Mozart sonatas:





Sonata	Beginning of the sonata – character and colour	End of the sonata
Sonata KV 378	Lyrical, sweet, melancholy Colour: yellow, blue. <i>Allegro moderato.</i> 	The key is fixed on the sound B, repeated in a ternary rhythmic formula, of triplets: 
Sonata KV 454	Dialogue between two entirely different characters: imposing and determined – sweet, calm, benevolent. <i>Largo.</i> 	The key is fixed on the sound B, repeated in a rhythmic formula: 

Table 1. Comparative table of the beginnings and endings of the two sonatas

As we can notice, Mozart seals the key B flat major in these two sonatas by also intoning it in the left hand on the violin, while the right hand enriches the harmonics by inserting chords in B flat major.

Associating music with the harmony of colours has always been a concern of all artists. It seems Newton and many other physicists tried to achieve a correspondence between the sounds of the music scale and the colour spectrum, thus resulting a harmonics of colours. Likewise, ever since ancient times, the Greek have likened the seven sounds of the diatonic scale with the 7 colours of the rainbow, and the following correspondence resulted:

C	D	E	F	G	A	B
violet	indigo	blue	green	yellow	orange	red

Table 2. *The correspondence between the seven sounds of the diatonic scale and the seven colours of the rainbow*

Regarding the semitones, these were likened to the nuances of these colours. We may consider, for example, **F#** - green-yellowish, **B flat** – orange-reddish etc. Taking into account this manner of associating music with the colour spectrum, we may for instance try and find nuances to some elements that are usually part of Mozart's discourse.



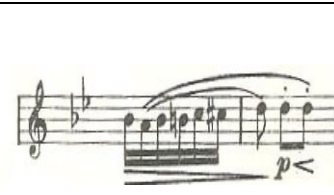

For example: the chromatic or diatonic semitone, which have the role of a sigh and are, through their unique performing manner, like a Mozart emblem:



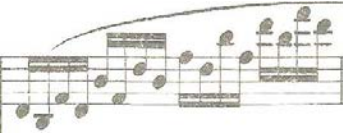









A-B flat – orange-reddish, red (intense, strong, dynamic, passionate).

F-F# – green-yellow (jealousy, hope, vivacity, energy, freshness).

Of course, the performances may vary a lot according to the way every performer associates the colours in his/her own views, yet still, we know there is a certain code of feelings that the colours generate: white-black (contrast; good-evil), red (dynamic, passion, energy), green (nature, prosperity, energy, hope), black (sadness), white (purity), yellow (jealousy, energy, gentleness) etc.

As simple as his means of composition may seem, as complicated they are to achieve. Here are the most important manners of developing the discourse of Mozart, which frequently appear in both sonatas for piano and violin:

Means of composition	Sonata KV 378	Sonata KV 454
Melody sketched through music scales		
Chromatisms		

Means of composition	Sonata KV 378	Sonata KV 454
Accompaniment – Albertin bass		
Ascending and descending suites in thirds and fourths		
Repetition of a sound that is a harmonic pillar		
The Mozart cell, represented by the interval of tone and semitone		
Pedals		
Rhythmic diversity		


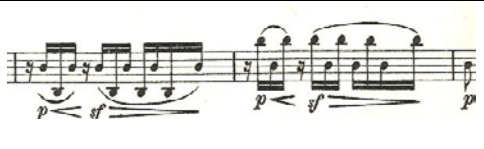
Means of composition	Sonata KV 378	Sonata KV 454
Octaves repetitions		

Table 3. *The principal means of composition in both Mozart's sonatas*

4. Conclusions

In the light of things explained above, we can talk of Mozart's music as one that comprises a very wide range of colours, being energetic and lively, as well as melancholy and sad at the same time.

If we analyse all sonatas for piano and violin more thoroughly, we cannot miss the fact that, in each work, even in the movements that seem joyful and filled with good humour, a trace of mistrust, sadness, and melancholy peeps through.

We might think that a hidden and misunderstood feeling of despondency and the imminence of an untimely death determined Mozart to compose so profoundly and full of wisdom. We might regard his music as a very bright and clear diamond, covered with velvet.

„Each piece... may have in it diverse mixtures of pathetic, flattering, gay, majestic, or jocular ideas. Hence, you must, so to speak, adopt a different sentiment at each bar, so that you can imagine yourself now melancholy, now gay, now serious, etc. Such dissembling is most necessary in music...” (Quantz 1966, 126).

5. References

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