

Hypostases of the *Spanish Baroque Sonatas* for keyboard instruments

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Abstract: *In Baroque Europe, the music for keyboard instruments was at its peak. The musical genres were the same as in the past, but with a growing importance of the sonata, also for the piano. The most important defining figure of the Spanish Baroque music is Padre Antonio Soler who, like Domenico Scarlatti, is known almost exclusively through his sonatas for keyboard instruments. It is possible to identify and generalize a few hypostases on which the thematic of Soler's sonata is centered, by enhancing a certain facet. The great majority of Solerian sonatas are monopartite, of Scarlattian influence, like Sonata no. 1, in A Major, that we are analyzing in this article. It illustrates the hypostasis in which Soler (like Scarlatti) aims to set free from the sometimes tyrannical domination of the baroque polyphony. What is mostly original about this work, is the phraseological structure, conceived by the totalization of motifs that can be brought anytime and in any order, due to the exclusive conception on the principle of the quadrature and on the pattern of the authentic V-I cadence.*

Keywords: *sonata, keyboard instruments, Soler, Spanish baroque, hypostases.*

1. Introduction

In the last years of the 16th century, for almost two hundred years, the entire Europe becomes Baroque. Spain will embrace without hesitation the Baroque that manifests itself with a great creative force in music. „European Baroque and harpsichord music were, in the early part of the century, at their peak, the keyboard instruments of the epoch being the organ, harpsichord and clavichord” (Sandu, and Ibanescu 2013, 59). Besides these, the pianoforte - which later on will become a „small Hercules” (Popa A., 1994, 8), built by Bartolomeo Cristofori made its appearance at the beginning of the century. The musical genres were the same as in the past, with one particularity: the growing importance of the sonata, which will undergo a major transformation over the century. This particularity will be felt in the Spanish instrumental music which regains its old time brilliance, mainly due to the sonatas for keyboard instruments. During this period of profound transformation, the most

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important defining figure of the Spanish Baroque music is Padre Antonio Soler (1729-1783), „a cheerful and solitary priest" (Encyclopaedia Universalis 1990, 796).

Spanish composer Padre Antonio Soler's sonatas for keyboard instruments may be considered some of the most valuable masterpieces of the keyboard literature in the 18th century.

2. Hypostases of the Spanish Baroque Sonatas for Keyboard Instruments

Like Domenico Scarlatti, Padre Soler is known almost exclusively through his sonatas for keyboard instruments. „There are in total 120 sonatas - compared to the 555 ones by Scarlatti" (Larousse 2000, 458). Under the generic title *Sonatas*, as well as Scarlatti's corresponding ones, these miniatures depict a polychrome sound universe, closing maximum diversity in a concise expression. In the shape of virtuosity and under the pretext of developing a technique specific to the keyboard instruments, Soler's sonatas enclose the most diverse nuances of inner moods.

Going through the „120 sonatas" (Soler, P. A.: *Sonatas para instrumentos de teclas* 1957-1972), made it possible to identify and generalize a few hypostases on which the thematic of Soler's sonata is centered, by enhancing a certain facet. These may be submitted to the following systematization:

1. Monopartite sonatas, of Scarlattian influence;
2. Pluripartite sonatas (*subject to other influences, distinct from the Scarlattian world*):
 - 2.1. Sonatas in three parts, following the *da chiesa* pattern;
 - 2.2. Sonatas in four parts, following the *da camera* pattern.

The great majority of Solerian sonatas are monopartite, of Scarlattian influence, so we will further analyze Sonata no. 1, in A Major, representative as to illustrating this hypostasis, through which Soler (like Scarlatti) aims to set free from the sometimes tyrannical domination of the baroque polyphony and the annihilation of its „scholar" character. These are two of the intentions that unite the two, Scarlatti and Soler.

3. Analysis of Sonata no. 1, in A Major (vol.1)

Initiating a celebration atmosphere, the sonata starts with a first musical idea (a), revealing the poignancy of a rhythmic-harmonic motif, a *signal-motif* (that is frequently found in Soler's sonatas) (e.g. vol.I / 1, 4, 18, etc), which has the role of determining the base tonality, A Major. (Figure 1)

A developed bridge (transition) (of 16 measures) makes the modulatory step towards the tonality of the second idea, possibly divided into two stages by the structures used:

1. a melodic figurative structure, ornamented with trills, which refers to the clavichord writing of the epoch (5 measures);
2. a repeated and transposable polyphonic structure – E / A - (11 measures).

The second idea (10 measures) is contrasting, as a melodic structure of an accompanied monody also repeatable and transposable – which only cadences in the dominant tonality E Major, sequentially passing through the related tonalities: A Major / H Major (Figure 2).

Fig. 1. P. Soler – „Sonata no. 1”, measures 1-9

Fig. 2. P. Soler – „Sonata no. 1”, measures 25-34

The conclusion (10 measures) is derived from the first idea by the signal-motif, realizing the harmonic cadence on the dominant tonality – E Major, concluding the first strophe (A) of the sonata in a melodic-harmonic figuration (Figure 3).

The unifying role of the rhythm is noted, of the dotted rhythmic formula, which links several elements of the sonata under the effigy of the *signal-theme*.

The second stroph develops the signal-motif from the first idea into modulatory sequences towards the upward quint, then solving them in the opposite direction, following a harmonic plan of the transition dominants:

mi → *si* → *fa*# → *do*# → *Fa*# → *si* → *Mi* → *La*.

Very ingenious seems to be the cadence extension of the development, an interlude (11 measures), new and distinct from that of the original drawing, a kind of harmonic rhythmic-like pedal, close to a *tremollo* that seems to be extracted from the Iberian folklore (Figure 4).

Fig. 3. P. Soler – „Sonata no. 1”, measures 35-44

Fig. 4. P. Soler – „Sonata no. 1”, measures 57-68

Also interesting is the modulatory relationship that is established between this fragment and the next one (the bridge), A Major – G Major. The resuming of idea II is done transpositively, here, within the relation G Major / A Major; thus, idea II appears, according to the Scarlattian pattern, in the base tonality.

The same conclusion, now in the base tonality, ends this second strophe too. The plan of the sonata, along with the modulatory plan (perhaps a practical application of the theoretician Soler's beliefs, shown in *Llave de la modulaci3n...*) display balance through symmetrical correspondences between sections – a fact that justifies the name of „bipartite form balanced with rhyme like the Scarlattian sonata” (Teodorescu-Ciocănea 2005, 190). (The highlighting of symmetries and correspondences in the schemes was done using the arrows).

The scheme of the sonata is as follows:

Strophe I - A	Strophe II - B
<p><i>Exposition</i> Idea I (a) 8 measures A Major</p> <hr/> <p>Bridge (transition) 16 measures Idea II (b) + conclusion 20 measures E Major</p>	<p><i>Development and half</i> Idea I (a) 12 measures e / E Major</p> <hr/> <p>Interlude 11 measures Bridge (retransition) 5 measures Idea II (b) + conclusion 21 measures A Major</p>

Through its symmetry, the form is balanced, with the only asymmetric interleaving of the dancing interlude.

The two strophes (A and B) act as complex, asymmetric periodic structures with a concurrent phrasal structure (due to the lack of clear inner cadences, outside the conclusive, end of stroke cadences). Multiple component phrases acquire, from the point of view of tonal stability / instability, expository functions like thematic (idea I), transitive (bridge), or conclusive (idea II). But what is original about this work, is the phraseological structure, conceived by the totalization of motifs that can be brought anytime and in any order, due to the exclusive conception on the principle of the quadrature and on the pattern of the authentic V-I cadence. As in a game or like some fragments from an amphora, they can be combined and recombined. It is known that the austere Soler had a taste for the musical joke (the six concertos for two mandatory organs bear the mention *for the amusement of the Infant of Spain ...*)! Is it the fruit of the inventiveness of either the *musician* or the *mathematician* Soler?

4. Conclusions

Following in the footsteps of Scarlattian sonata, the monothematic bipartite sonata reveals, in Soler, certain constants:

- Stability of idea I which, in a concise formula, has the role of „announcing” the base tonality through several repetitive *signals*.
- Little or even nonexistence of idea I in strophe II, the development processing other elements of the sonata, sometimes completely new, the half focusing on idea II.
- A slightly individualized profiling of the second idea, often as a cadence return of idea I, recognizable only by the tonal criterion (exposition – dominant tonality, half – base tonality). Its pronounced cadence-like profile, turns it into a more extensive *codetta*.
- Interpolation of an ostinato interlude with rhythmic-harmonic Iberian reverberations, usually between the development and half, but also in other sectors of the form.

How right the remarks made by Alexandru Leahu sound here, referring to Scarlatti’s sonata: „Acrobatic virtuosity, technical exhibitionism interfere like an ultimate signification [of the sonatas, n.n.]. Few contemporaries were able to see in [... Soler, n.n.] *the poet*, the artist who hides under the veil of exuberance and humour the most daring innovations, blending the most diverse nuances of inner moods” (Leahu 1966, 20).

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