

Mozart's Sonatas for Piano and Violin in the historical context of the Epoch

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Abstract: *Mozart's work can truly be appreciated when we focus our attention first on the stage of the musical art at the time of Mozart's apparition, and then on the manner and means used by him for expanding the content of musical language. In the sphere of his creative thinking Mozart included all music genres and forms constituted by the collective effort along the centuries, by the effort of countless composers of the 17th and 18th Centuries. A special domain of Mozart's creation is the chamber music; only knowing the aspects of the condition of the chamber genre, starting with the first part of the 18th Century, will we be able to understand the plenitude of Mozart's work.*

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1. Historical development of the Chamber Music genre

Since 1660, the most popular form of chamber music has been the *trio-sonata*. It was composed for two instruments (usually two violins), but sometimes oboes or flutes, too, with a figured base for the harpsichord, sometimes also played by the viola, and later by the cello.

Between 1730-1750 the figured base grows out of fashion and the harpsichord will be gradually eliminated, as it was hard to transport, given that this new form of music, that had become "fashionable" (entertainments, nocturnes, cassations), had started to unfold rather in open-air spaces. A certain pattern of the 3 movements emerged, two in a fast tempo, framing a slow movement. When the menuetto was added, the last form of the string quartet was created. All these conquests were made only after a time of effervescence and experimenting, that also led to new ideas on musical style and expression, while the Baroque tradition was gradually fading. Ever more composers from many corners of Europe brought an important contribution to founding the Classicist chamber music, greatly in centres with big musical progress, like Mannheim and Vienna. „The Mannheim school (the first school with

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performance specifics) represents a point of reference in this respect, through discovering the violin legato and dynamics” (Gavrişiu 2006, 10).

The greatest contribution comes from J. Haydn, whose mature genius will be identified with perfecting the chamber quartet. Mozart owes the most to Haydn regarding his chamber music creation. Without Haydn’s influence, Mozart’s understanding, mastery, and progress especially related to the quartet form would have been slower and more hesitant. „Mozart assimilated the ideas of the other contemporary composers and reshaped and expanded them to convey them the force of his tireless genius” (Hyatt King 1969, 9).

2. Social and cultural circumstances of the emerging of the Duo Ensemble

Initially, the trend was that the chamber music be performed in an intimate space, with a somewhat small audience, as this music genre, especially the duo, represents a form of spending time together, especially for amateur performers. “This concerto genre was in general more entertaining for the performers than for the listeners” (Burney 1969, 257).

To Wolfgang, this new form of making music represented on one hand the opportunity to gain access to high social circles, to make himself known and “heard” by royalty, and on the other hand to self-perfect himself in a genre that was growing. This was due to his father Leopold Mozart, who “quickly perceived the commercial potential of the new form of the amateurs to make music, which had become the favourite music of the rich classes, looking for pleasure and entertainment” (Baragwanath 2012, 25)

Mozart composed the best oeuvres of this genre between 1784-1788, when his fame as a performer and concerto composer was at its highest. The influence of his piano concertos and sonatas style can be seen in most chamber music works with piano and “naturally also produce the terminological mutation of the weight centre from the violin toward the piano” (Gavrişiu 2006, 11). The piano becomes rather a prominent partner than an opposing one.

 <p>Fig. 1a, Piano Sonata K.V. 279 Allegro (m. 1- 15)</p>	 <p>Fig. 1b, Violin Sonata K.V. 380 Allegro (measures 1- 12)</p>
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 <p>Fig. 2a, Piano Concerto K.V. 467. Andante (m. 23- 26)</p>	 <p>Fig. 2b, Piano and Violin Sonata K.V. 378, Andantino sostenuto e cantabile (m. 1- 8)</p>
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Fig. 1 and 2

As we can see in the Fig. 1 and 2, the compositional technique is very similar; the two works were composed in the same maturity stage of creation. The performer must be aware of the significant advancement in the flowing, virtuosic treatment of the piano, of the rich density of the texture. Furthermore, Mozart expanded his vision on virtuosity, from his piano sonatas to piano and violin sonatas.

3. The *Sonatas for Piano and Violin*; chronology, development, stages of the composing style

Mozart composed 26 sonatas for piano and violin, of which 19 sonatas are frequently in the repertoire of chamber music recitals. They are technically difficult and “constitute a challenge for both amateurs and professionals, that of capturing the `delights of Mozart’s musical vocabulary` in the performance, and moreover, to explore the scale of Mozart’s musical temperament, with the pleasant certainty that no one will be able to reach its limits” (Loft 1991, 228).

These sonatas are composed during the various voyages that little Wolfgang made with his family or just with his father Leopold to the big cities with artistic-musical potential; all these voyages, besides increasing his fame and revealing his early genius, ensured him the contact with all new composing trends, brought him in contact with the great contemporary composers, from whom he took over all new musical genres and forms, and then brought these to the top of mastery.

3.1. The First Group –the Youth Sonatas

The youth sonatas (K. 6-7 and K. 8-9) have a simple, melodic, major-minor mode content, based on “gallant” conversation. The piano part is autonomous, without great need of a flute, harp, or violin accompaniment. Mozart was influenced by the

sonatas creation of his contemporaries, J. Schobert, L. Honauer, J.G. Eckard, and Raupach. Mozart even used movements from some sonatas of these as a basis for movements in his concertos (e.g. he takes over movements from the Sonatas op. 1 no. 1, op. 2 no. 2, and op. 3, composed by Leonzi Honauer, and uses them as a basis for the movements in the concertos K. 37 and K. 41).

“All these youth works share common features as to composing style and technique with those of his contemporaries Eckard, Schobert, Honauer, and J.C. Bach: the melody and accompaniment were clearly delimited, the violin plays at a third, sixth or octave from the theme, the cello (when present) doubled the important note in the base” (Carew 1996, 289). Indeed, we often find this similarity in some of Mozart`s first piano and violin sonatas (Fig. 3, Sonata K. 6, measures 1- 5).



Fig. 3. Sonata K. 6 (measures 1- 5)

Also in London, Mozart composes the third set of sonatas for piano with accompaniment for a violin and for an optional cello, K. 10-15, which will be published as op. 3. This opus will be dedicated to the Queen.

In Holland, Mozart composes the sonatas set K. 26-31, dedicates them to the Princess of Nassau-Weilburg. It will be published as op. 4 in Amsterdam in 1766.

3.2. The Middle Group – balancing the Piano–Violin relationship

After an interval of 12 years, in which Mozart`s creation is crowned by masterpieces like the Concerto for piano K. 271 or the Symphonies K. 183 and K. 201, his composing maturity will also be revealed gradually in the creation of the sonatas for piano and violin. We refer to the set of six sonatas K. 301-306, which he composes on a Mannheim-Paris tour in 1778. “The composing maturity is proved from the very beginning, in the details of the theme exposition of the sonata K. 301, as tensions emerge to be solved over a longer unfolding in time, and a closer connection between the melodic design and the structure; Mozart also discovered how to use density as a component of the developing process” (Carew 1996, 290).

The only sonata for piano and violin written in minor (e minor), sonata K. 304, stands out through a melodic that foregoes the early Romanticism, through the pale colours of the theme presentation, of thrilling chromatic chords (in the Reprise), through the form that comes close to the sonata form. (Fig 4a)

 <p>Fig. 4a, Piano & Violin Sonata K.V. 304. Allegro (m. 1- 20)</p>	 <p>Fig. 4b, Piano Sonata K.V. 300. Allegro maestoso (m. 1- 20)</p>
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Fig. 4a, b

Sonata K. 304 is considered as the most taxing from an affective perspective, the prevailing state being Mozart's sadness, restlessness, melancholy, and grief at his mother's death. "... when I think of all that restlessness, fright, and sadness which I bore over the past two weeks...Over the past three days...she has been constantly delusional, and today...the agony of death has begun..." (Anderson 1966, 560) wrote Mozart during the night of his mother's death. Being composed in the same year 1778, Piano Sonata K.V. 310 expresses the same misery and pain like K.V. 304. While the first has a richer texture, the second one brings a dramatic unison in his opening, and a constant dialogue between piano and violin (Fig. 4b)

We can make countless comparisons between Mozart's piano works and his sonatas for piano and violin; we will find that he understood completely the role of the piano in the duo, and he wanted the performers not to make differences between his piano works and chamber music with piano. "...towards the late 18th Century, nobody was aware that the chamber music with piano represented a *category* of music, and Mozart has never separated this part from the rest of his creation" (Burney 1969, 267)

3.3. Third Group –of the Maturity Sonatas

The third set of sonatas, the maturity ones, was published in 1781, shortly after Mozart moved to Vienna and are undoubtedly of crucial importance in the development of the genre. A review of Cramer in *Magazin der Musik* from 1783 draws attention to the "style of composing for instruments in a democratic manner, fitting for the style, requiring skill and talent of both instrumentalists" (Stowel 2012, 70) The set comprises the sonatas K. 296 and K. 376-380 and stands out through the

theme quality of the development, shared by both instruments, the superiority compared to the previous set being acknowledged right after its publishing.

Mozart's chamber music works enters an evolution arch that will inscribe the maturity sonatas for piano and violin amongst masterpieces, with an evidently enriched composing for both instruments, which become handled in an equitable manner. We refer to the last four sonatas, K. 454, K. 481, K. 526, and K. 547, which take a place of honour beside the last three symphonies or beside the string quintets.

4. Conclusions

In the light of the aspects shown above, we can talk of Mozart's music as the one with the highest importance in the evolution of the duo genre, especially the piano and violin Sonata. The 26 sonatas for piano and violin reflects the passage through the most important and intimate periods of Mozart's life; they show us the stages of his musical growing. All his chamber creation has integrated significant moments of his personal and public life, alongside the other genres.

He was great, he was brilliant in every genre he has approached, and he he managed to combine them perfectly.

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