

BAROQUE CONCERT JEWELS

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Abstract: *From among the best works of Baroque concert music stand out the six concertos for two organs, composed by Soler, enriching the chamber music repertoire of the XVIIIth century Spain. Concerto 1 in C Major and Concerto 5 in A Major have many ingenious features one should dwell on, with respect to the discourse development, modulation dynamics, and rhythm. They introduce the sequencing technique and the Minuet - Minué as the second movement, all in a compositional unity revealing once more the composer's great talent.*

Keywords: *Padre Soler, concertos, concerto form, concerto genre.*

1. Introduction

The habit of writing music for two keyboard instruments is deeply rooted, back into the Sixth century. The notation for organ, harpsichord or keyboard instruments hints to an instrumental destination – the use of various instruments being indicated. The presence of the double chorus in the nave of some prestigious Italian churches – San Marco in Venice or San Petronius in Bologna – as well as the numerous and imposing Spanish cathedrals show the popularity of bringing together, in a dialogue, two solo instruments or instrumental groups, like in the past - two vocal ensembles of various sizes and timbres.

Although this antiphonal style stands only for a few sporadic examples in the vocal works Ockeghem or Josquin, it becomes a common procedure of that time, being the foundation for the concerto style. Opposing instrumental groups, which emerges from sacred music, especially liturgical, acquires a new shape in the

following two centuries when, after abandoning the initial goal of stereophony and polyphonic greatness, the instrumental version of this ingenious practice develops according to the taste of time, slowly turning into the gallant style preferred by the music-loving aristocracy.

The most important Spanish musician of the XVIIIth century, Padre Antonio Soler, „*a cheerful yet solitary priest*”[2] was born in Spain, in Olot - province of Catalonia – on December 3rd, 1729.

A virtuoso of keyboard instruments, (the composer being probably irresistibly attracted to them), Soler continues to write numerous works, among which the *six concertos for two organs*, these compositions enriching the chamber music creation of the XVIIIth century.

Originally written to be performed at four hands, the six concertos signed by Padre Antonio Soler were later arranged to be played on two organs. The note to the manuscript found in Braga library in

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Portugal testifies for that. The presence of two opposing organs in the important churches was quite frequent in Spain, this having a strong influence onto the creation of Iberian composers like Jose Blanco, Francisco Olivars and Antonio Soler. The works of the last one, „*Seis conciertos para dos organos obligado*” were dedicated to childe Gabriel de Bourbon, son of King Carlos al III-lea, to whom Padre Antonio Soler reveals the secrets of music through the means of keyboard instruments, from the frail but sensitive manichords and clavichords to the ample and complicated organ. Composed in an elegant style, like a mosaic, with short phrases with frequent repetitions and lavish embellishments, these ingenious works were the delight of court concerts organized for the young prince. The first movement of the two concertos, Concerto no. 1 in C Major and Concerto no. 5 in A Major to which we will refer, has a bipartite form, while the second movement is a “Minué” – the well-known minuet – that develops through variations, following the example of the Iberian “diferencias”.

2. Analysis of Concerto no. 1 in C Major[2]

2.1. Part I-*Andante*

Following these formal schemes, Concerto no. 1 composed in C major, opens with the theme of the *Andante* that sets the pace of the alert dialogue of the two instruments.

Fig. 1 (measures1-5)

The main idea divides the length of the 16 measures in 3 different phrases, both in size and melodic-rhythmic writing, organized inside according to the free, sometimes asymmetrical taste of the gallant style. Thus, while the initial phrase repeatedly displays an isorhythmic motif of eights, shifting from one keyboard to another, the next phrase brings the combination between the ornamentation of the syncopated rhythm and the rigor of the bass ostinato. The idea is taken further by the trills adorning the finely arched melodic lines, here and there embellished by short grace notes and mordent in the third phrase, double in size compared to the previous ones. The passage to the second musical idea is made through a game of echoes in arpeggio, modulating towards the tonality of the dominant. The two phrases of the secondary theme, repeated identically, are linked to the conclusive phrase that ends the exposition. Here we find a third diminution of values, alternating with the rhythm of trills with sixteenths, already used before, but also with the new pointed rhythm of the grace notes. The ornamentation becomes richer due to the presence of trills and mordent, but also because of the shape of melodic lines, with frequent chromaticisms in passage notes and embroideries. The development section comprises 3 distinct phases. The first 4 measures of the main theme, this time in G Major and followed by 2 measures taken from the bridge theme, constitute the passage to the dominant of E minor. The following 8 measures display the motif of the secondary theme, in a changed melodic environment. The downward progress of the line is built on a harmonic pedal – and – that is the dominant of tonalities E Major and E minor, of which the composer chooses the first in order to continue. The isorhythmic motifs that are sequenced in the third phase remind us of the main

theme. Modulation is easily achieved through the dominant-tonic games, and the base tonality is prepared by the perfect cadence. The round brings back to memory only the second theme, which takes exactly the same melodic-rhythmic and harmonic shape as the one displayed in the first section. Regarding the way in which the author values the personality of instrument performers, one can observe the very dynamic nature of the writing, the score proposing fairly to each performer both the display of solo qualities and chamber music ones, in a very uniform work, but also full of temperament.

2. 2. Part II-*Minué*

The Minuet which is the second and last part of Concerto no.1 opens with the graceful, gallant pace of court music. The same principle governs the composition, an elegant dialogue between the protagonists of the musical approach, transforming the stages of the dance in a beautiful adventure of mutual understanding.

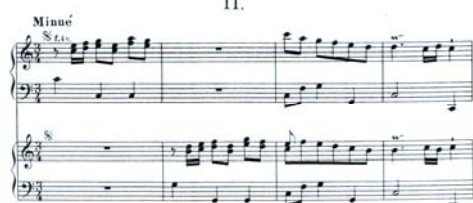


Fig. 2 (measures 1-4)

The Minuet is first presented in the classic form of a bipartite structure that juxtaposes two periods, each of two phrases. Each one of them follows the pattern of the introduction, sequencing and continuation of the musical motif, a scheme that will become so familiar in the epoch of classicism. It is interesting to analyze the inner articulation of the two periods. One can observe the difference between the structures of the two sections. Thus, the two phrases of the first period

both have 4 measures with an identical development type: motif (1 measure), sequencing of motif (1 measure), and continuation of motif (2 measures), while the next period is structured according to double size: motif (2 measures), sequencing of motif (2 measures), and continuation of motif (4 measures). This construction type, supported by the analysis of the harmonic structure, which comprises only 3 perfect cadences instead of 4, may lead to the idea that the author thought, deliberately or not, according to the classic model of the 3 beats, like 3 articulated moments of the same musical idea: phrase 1 (4 measures), phrase 2 (4 measures), phrase 3 (8 measures).

As mentioned before, the minuet is followed by 4 variations composed according to the so-called „diferencias”, which was common practice in the music of the Iberian land. Each variation is intended to adorn in a way as original as possible the initial theme. It is here the case to notice the specificity of Soler’s writing. Compared with the music of classics, one can see the great difference in the way that Soler’s variation processing stays true especially to the harmonic and, of course, formal structure, instead showing ingenuity in finding melodic adornments and comments. The melodic line can no longer be easily found among the arabesques of sound images, the listener being permanently incited and fascinated by the new appearance of the minuet. The return of the theme at the end of this part is meant to remind us of the starting point and reassure our hearing after this adventurous musical journey. The composer’s variation technique uses on the rhythmic level the procedure of value diminutive (thirds of a beat, quarters of a beat), of the ratio between two duration levels (quarters-triplets of eights, eights-sixteenths), of the complementary rhythm. On the melodic level, the variations bring

various adornments, from embroidery of mordent to the repeated notes accompanied by short grace notes (variation I), to ample arpeggios (variations I, III) and formulas of toccata type (variation II). Neither double notes are missing (variation IV), in rapid zigzags that flash from one instrument to another, and which are a beautiful element of virtuosity. The tonal unity of both parts – C Major – alongside the uniformity of the writing that abides by the initial idea of conjugating the solo with the integration in the ensemble, make this first concerto for two organs obbligato an original work, but at the same time strongly rooted in the music of that time.

3. Analysis of the Concerto no. 5 in A Major [2]

3. 1. Part I-*Cantabile*

Concerto no. 5, written in A Major, addresses in a different way the relationship between the two instruments. Part I, *Cantabile* is a two-theme work structured in 3 distinct sections: the exposition of themes and their development is followed by the classical round. Soler aims to a dialogue built in the responsorial style. The instrument performers leisurely introduce each motif, meeting at their starting and finishing points. The main theme consists of two phrases that appear different due to rhythmic ornamentation, but which actually follow the same downward melodic progress.

Fig. 3 (measures 1-3)

The responsorial approach makes each of these two phrases to be repeated, the first one 3 times and the second on 2 times, while playing a game between registers: the first exposition covers the ambitus between A1 and A, the second one spans between A and A2, for the third exposition to decrease the ambitus – C1 – A2. The dialogue repeats itself with the second phrase and will continue throughout the first part of this concerto, constituting a basic composing principle of this. The modulation to the tonality of the dominant – E Major - is done in the next 4 measures and a half, by repeating 3 times each two musical motifs of different sizes, which alternate the functions tonic-dominant. The thematic material of the secondary idea is different. In contrast with the generous melodic and rhythmic balance of the main theme, the secondary theme brings a fine change. Close to the clavichord vibrato, the repeated notes of the sevenths, which we hear 3 times. The second phrase consists of another motif built from melodic embroidery that envelopes a cadence formula and which is also repeated 3 times. These two phrases are repeated identically, certainly following the same game of registers. Regarding the topic of the expositions, one can observe the ingenious construction through which the downward line of themes is compensated by the upward line drawn by the change of register, from the most grave to the most high. Soler thus makes an intrinsic connection between two levels of the composition, the melodic and the timbre.

The development, quite short – 10 measures – consists of 2 phases. Built on the function of the dominant, the motif at the beginning of this median section refers to the sounds of Spanish dance, featuring the delay of the third of the chord. In reply, the arpeggio involving both instruments strengthens the impression given by the first motif. This one is sequenced shifting

to D Major, and then making the connection with the cadence motif preparing for the round. It introduces the main theme lacking the second phrase, leaving only the first phrase to move through the registers, from the grave one to the high one. The bridge, of the same size as the one in the exposition, has here the role to keep the tonality, A Major. The secondary theme repeats the same route, ending the first part of the concerto in a delicate, slightly elusive touch.

3. 2. Part II-*Minué*

The second part, the Minuet, brings together the two instruments in an impressive unison through the magnitude of the sonority.



Fig. 4 (measures 1-4)

Its structure is bipartite, built on the same ternary principle that also governed the construction of the first movement. Thus, the two periods consist each of 3 phrases. They fulfill a definite tonal role within the sections. Phrase 1 cadences on the dominant of the tonality, phrase 2 already modulates in the tonality of the dominant, and phrase 3 strengthens the new tonality through a perfect cadence. Phrase 4 returns to A Major so that phrases 5 and 6 are nothing but the repetition of phrases 1 and 3 transposed in the base tonality. In terms of theme, the minuet preserves the specific character of this court dance. The melodic is built on the scheme of gradual progress combined with leaps to the sounds of the main steps. The arching of each melodic

shape is delicately drawn, and the rhythmic highlighted by means of prolonged values, the periodic stresses of the strong beats. The minuet is now followed by a series of 7 variations composed in such a manner as to highlight the interpretive valences of each organist. Variations I, III, V are entrusted to the first organ, the even number ones belong to the second one, and variation VII is the occasion for the dialogue and complementarity of both instruments by means of comments and register insertions, thus throwing a bridge back to the writing of the first part of the concerto. The minuet ends with the re-hearing of its initial form, in that soothing and impressive unison.

The contexture of the variations is based again on many adornments – grace notes, mordent, trills (variations I, II, VI), on the use of passages of different types - scales, arpeggios, melodic figures (variations I, II, III), of repeated notes (variations II, VI), but also on rhythmic activation – syncopated rhythm, pointed rhythm (variations I, II, III, V) as well as the introduction of several passages of little polyphony on three voices (variation V). We should also note the author's care for keeping the thematic configuration of the minuet unlike the first concert where this was merely implied. Here, the composer gives up highlighting the purely instrumental aspect to the benefit of the more rigorous shaping of the gallant character of the work. The two parts that complete this work, in their compositional unity, reveal with poignancy the concert character required by the title. The instruments are treated in a solo manner, each given the possibility to show its value. Soler creates individualized spaces, at the same time directing the dynamic movement between them. The sound development is treated with generosity both in the first part, where motif repetition is the generating element for the

compositional technique, and in the second one, where the gallant character is depicted in all the variations.

4. Conclusions

Alongside the quintets for four string instruments and organ, the concerts for two organs are milestones for the chamber music works of Antonio Soler.

The dynamic writing of the two analyzed concerts starts from the idea that there is complementarity between the two instruments which, through their constantly vivid dialogue, capture the attention of the diligent student, making him understand better and better that the game of questions and answers must keep an utmost rhythmic precision which will not ever break the quadrature of the measure. Concert works – for two, three or four solo instrument were written in the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries, the genre being cultivated especially by the Italian preclassics (Arcangelo Corelli, Giuseppe Torelli, Antonio Vivaldi), as well as by the great German classical composers Johann Sebastian Bach and Georg Friedrich Händel, to mention only a few prominent personalities. The genre approached by Soler (for two organs obligatto) is still extremely rare, in the history of music being known only a few precedents.

Soler (who had studied the most important compositions of Juan Cabanilles, 1644-1712 – the greatest Spanish organist of his time), in his turn becoming a virtuoso and deep expert of the same instrument, the organ, succeeded to create extremely valuable concerts, fully reflecting the epoch of Spanish Baroque. Often, Soler—the master together with his disciple, the childe, may have made these concerts sound at the Escorial, on various keyboard instruments, wide-spread and popular throughout Spain: organ, harpsichord, clavichord. To these probably

adds the pianoforte built at the beginning of the XVIIIth century by Bartolomeo Cristofori, an instrument we believe Soler was familiar with, at the Escorial also existing this new instrument: „It was not long ago discovered that Domenico Scarlatti, (meaning also Soler n.n.) had at his disposal, in the palaces of Aranjuez and Escorial, certain types of pianos and is therefore possible that some of the sonatas (concertos, n.n.) be written for that particular instrument, more modern than the harpsichord.”[1].

In our opinion, whether performed on historic instruments or on modern ones, it is important to penetrate the depth of the work, to decipher and reconstruct these beautiful and original works in a lively and enthusiastic interpretive manner.

References

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