

## **FR. GEMINIANI - SONATA OP. 1 NO. 5 IN B FLAT MAJOR FOR VIOLIN AND CONTINUO**

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**Abstract:** *Sonata op. 1 No. 5 in B flat Major for violin and chipher bass (bass continuo) was composed by the Italian composer Francesco Geminiani in his first period in London (1714-1733). The composer is one of the worthy musicians of the Baroque age Italian composers. In London, Geminiani enjoyed a great success among the aristocracy and even at the Royal Court, where he played the violin to King George I, being accompanied by Georg Friedrich Haendel.*

**Key words:** *Geminiani, sonata, violin, analysis.*

### **1. Introduction**

The Italian composer Francesco Geminiani (Gemignani / Giomignani, Saverio / Xaverio / Zaverio – his first name) - (about 1680-1762) was one of the most gifted Italian violinists (Edmund Van der Straeten, *The History of the Violin*, New York, Da Capo Press, 1968, p. 160) [1, p. 70] of the musical Baroque age. Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713) taught him violin, in Rome, after he had been taught by Carlo Ambrogio Lonati in Milan. Alessandro Scarlatti guided the development of his composition skills. Despite his outstanding instrumental gift, Geminiani was not interested in virtuosity, which explains why he did not compose violin concertos.

For violin and chipher bass, Geminiani composed a reduced number of musical works: two cycles of sonatas op. 1 and op. 4. For violin solo he composed only one sonata, whose manuscript is preserved in

Dresden and published after 1930 [2, p. 83]. Despite the low number of violin and continuo bass works, his contribution is major to setting the standard-form of Baroque sonata related to the four movements of *da chiesa* (*12 Sonatas a violino solo senza basso, 1705*), type -, he also prepared the path of the type consisting in three parts [3, p. 127]; his contemporaries noticed Geminiani's concern for "the artistic cooperation of parts", for which was "justifyingly" admired (John Mainwaring, *Notes on Georg Friedrich Händel's Works*) [3, p. 185].

### **2. Affettuoso – the first part**

The first part (Affettuoso) has a lyrical character, being a preparation for part II of Sonata. The violin develops broadly, in a ternary metric schema (3/4), able both to ensure motility of the sonorous flow and to express the affettuoso asked by the

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composer, substituting the term for character movement, a substitution due to the fact that the expression of an affective status cannot be completed in a rapid tempo.

The thematic idea conveys peace, especially through the trocheic rapport of the initial notes values the initial values, in the first motive of the first period ( $A_1$ ), followed by a motive of tonal relaxation through gradually descending progression.

The contrast is with the second phrase, which is melodically wrought up, through a broken succession of intervals, achieving at the same time the *B flat major* modulation to *F major* tonality - after the inflexion in *E flat major* (bars 5-6), then *F minor* follows through the expansive chromatisation of the accord of the inferior mediant ( $C$ ), briefly, since the completion of the first period is done in *F major* due to the modal minor-major inversion:

E.g. 1, bars 8-14, violin - piano.

Melodically, the first example illustrates the expressive contrast between the gliding ornamented with quavers in the first phrase (bars 1-4) – which also states the basic tonality – and the pronounced, sequential, arpeggios in the second phrase (bars 5-6), through which the intonational climax of the first part is gradually achieved ( $C_3$ ). In general, during the whole part, the quavers are used in cadence moments or, less commonly, to ornament the debut sounds.

The second phrase is uneven, being different from the first, non-melodic and modulante, but also asymmetrical in motivic design, while the first phrase, clear-cut in terms of thematic idea is melodic and symmetric type in the inner structure [4, p. 41, 43].

The debut of the second period ( $A_2$ , bars 11-24) is produced in the new tonality, *F major* (ex. 1, bars 11-14), by varied replay of the two thematic motives so that the first phrase - of the three constituent - presents thematic identity in a different tonal context. The extension of the period  $A_2$  is due to the insertion of a third

phrase (bars 18-24) with an extremely broad intonation profile ( $A-Bb^2$ ), which – bar 20 – even requires the instrument player a broad bariolage, on strings  $G$ ,  $A$  and  $E$ .

Except for the first phrase, the second and third phrases are modulante: phrase II modulates at *C minor* (bar 17), and the last one modulates from *G minor* into *D minor* (bar 24), which requires a retransition (bar 24) to the original tonality, with which the third period starts with ( $A_{2v}$ ) and a short replay of the initial thematic idea (bars 25-28). As regards the modulatory aspect, the composer also uses the homonymous relationship *C major* – *c minor*, even if, as a result of the dominant accord of the supratonic, he passes directly to *c minor*, without the moment of the major homonymy. Playing the accord of the tonic *c minor* as an accord of subdominant in *g minor*, Geminiani briefly passes (bar 18) to *g minor*, where - by using the dominant counterdominant – he oscillates between *g minor* and *d minor*. A firm set to *d minor* is brought only by the end of the period.

Transition, reduced to a bar, is as quick and unexpected as the transition from *C minor* to *G minor*. By a simple removal of tonic *D* in favour of *E $\flat$*  (the seventh of the dominant of *B flat major*), the composer brings back the thematic idea to the initial tonality. And the last period (bars 25-40) is also tripodic, the last of the phrases marking a slight modulatory inflection at *F major* (bars 36-38), followed by the two cadence bars (39-40) that bring back the initial tonality in an authentic cadence. However, the first part of *Sonata* does not end here: there is a small *codetta* that follows, which could be rather interpreted as a cadential complement. The real function of this addition is, in fact, to facilitate transition to part II of the piece, *Vivace*, as it stops with *fermata* on the dominant chord of the basic tonality, thus requiring, from a tonal point of view, the continuation of the musical discourse - a procedure often employed by the composers of the era.

## 2.1. *Vivace* – the second part

The second part (*Vivace*) is a polyphonic form of simple fugue, with a single *Subject*, combined with some form of quasimonothematic sonata, where the structure comprises an *Exposition* (bars 1-12), a central *episode*, which has a developing



E.g. 2. bars 4-7, violin

It is worth mentioning that the second entry of the real *Answer* is incomplete and modulatory in the base tonality.

The episode that follows has a considerable length (bars 13-48), having a developing role in the context of the two extreme sections - the expository and the reexpository one, with function of final

function (bars 13-18) and a *final reprise* (bars 48-53).

The *Subject* is extremely dynamic, alert, not only due to the tempo, but also to the rhythmic succession of the eighth notes and the sixteenth notes, forming complex, asymmetric groupings also achieved with the help of the syncopations.

With the exception of the tempo, the violonistic expression is martial, with some solemnity, close to the type of performance of *Gavotta en Rondeau* in *Partita a III-a pentru vioară solo* (1720) – (*Partita III for Solo Violin*), BWV 1006, in *E major*, by J. S. Bach.

The bass line, unlike the first part of *Sonata* is tuned more intensively, even taking the theme (bar 7), which shows the level of complexity of the Italian composer's polyphonic thinking in quite restricted conditions provided by the type of sonata for violin and bass continuo.

The *Exposition* (bars 1-7) covers two exposures of the *Subject*, in *B flat major* (bars 1-4, violin; bars 7-10, bass continuo), and two exposures of real *Answer*, in *F major* (bars 4-7 and 10-12, both the violin); there are also changes as reported to the *Subject* as regards the musical expression due both to the quaver ornamentation and the brighter sound by placing it in the high-pitched register of the violin:

reprise. Its structure is pluriphased:

- phase I (bars 13-16) is transitory and modulatory from a tonal point of view to *G minor*, ending by a process of re-emergence to *B flat major*, on the sextachord of the tonic of the present tonality, with delaying tonic (17-6);

- phase II (bars 16-18) is developing, taking over transpositionally elements of the theme head (the first eight sounds or only the initial cell made of three sounds). It modulates from *B flat major* to *C minor* and then to *D minor*;

- phase III (bars 19-20) is responsible for tonal regulation in *D minor*;

- phase IV (bars 21-22) fulfills a developing function, taking over in a varied manner the thematic head and following the modulatory route: *D minor* ~ *F major* ~ *B flat major* ~ *G minor*;

- phase V is the longest one (bars 23-35), with a toccata rhythmic-melodic in violin display. In its turn, it is modulatory: *G minor* ~ *B flat major* ~ *F major* ~ *C minor* ~ *G minor* ~ *D minor* ~ *B flat major*. This excerpt requires the violin player's velocity and agility, the fast pace of string shifts; everything is framed within a regular pulsation of the sixteenth, with minor emphasis where necessary due to phrasing prerequisites;

- phase VI (bars 36-38) fixes the base tonality;

- phase VII (bars 39-43) has a developing role – with elements in the thematic head –, within a modulatory path: *B flat major* ~ *G minor* ~ *B flat major*;

- phase VIII (bars 44-48) represents the retransitory function, of calming down the thematic turmoil and setting the base tonality, with gliding to the dominant tonality, namely the rebound in *B flat major*, in the composer's abrupt manner so that it is as obvious as possible.

The final *reprise* (bars 48-53) comprises a single exposure of the *Subject* - and this is at the bass - without the emergence of *Answer*, while the violin counterpoints with a secondary melodic line. The conclusion is extended by two further bars, beyond the limits of the theme, so that the feeling of completion is absolute.

In terms of musical language, this part brings some interesting elements, found in the scores of the era, which – beyond their

folkloric perennial character - they make allusions to "new" proceedings in the XXth century language:

1) the melodic configuration of the inverted chromatic formula ( $E^b^2$ - $re^2$ - $E$  *natural*<sup>2</sup> – bar 18, violin); in this case, the source is harmonical, determined by the modulatory requirements (*C minor* ~ *D minor*) not modal-melodical:



E.g.

do I  
re I II V I

3. bar

18, violin and piano

An inverted situation ( $E^2$ - $D^2$ - $E^b^2$ ) occurs previously (bar 7, violin), as an expression of the tonal-modulatory route –  $E^2$  represents the leading tone of *F major* tonality (in usage at the respective time), and  $E^b^2$  is the modulatory element which makes transition to *B flat major*:

In developed melodic formula, the same *inverted chromatic formula* occurs in the violin score at bar 38:



E.g. 4. *inverted chromatic formula*

2) the false relationship (between the backup voices), as a follow up of the modulatory context (*F major* ~ *C major*) by means of the subdominant function in the major and minor accordic state, specific to the harmonic major (IV-IV<sup>3b</sup>), for a deeper dramatization of the musical discourse:



E.g. 5. bars 27-28, violin and piano

3) we also notice the involuntary occurrence of an *alpha* ( $mib \beta$ ) melodic geometric relation in the violin score, as shown in bar 27 ( $mi^1 - mib^2$ ), as a result of the exchange note of the leading tone with the small seventh in the major accord of the subdominant. The composer achieves the same relationship in bar 26, also in the violin exposure.

As regards the dynamics of the modulations, it is sometimes fast, like in bars 17-18 or 21-23.

The type of the polyphonic composition, especially present in the *Exposition* and also in the last four phases of the main episode, just like in the last phases which alternate with a multiplanic melodic line, in latent polyphony.

## 2.2. Grave – the third part

The third part (*Grave*) is, probably, the most interesting one from the point of view of the composition of the whole sonata.

A first observation relates to the very short length, considering the number of bars, which compensates by the length it reaches thanks to tempo; the tempo indication is, at the same time, an indication of character.

The form, consisting of two asymmetric phrases (5+8), directs us to appreciating a possible/accidental proportioning after the *golden section*, with negative sectioning. Inside this division, the motives are rapported to each other asymmetrically too, on the same blockhead, as regards the first phrase (3+2). The second phrase covers three motives (2+2+4).

The violin states a cantilena violin which starts also in an unusual manner, by the reversed, descending exposure of the *incipit* of the rocket-motive, as Valentin Timariu calls this type of configuration [5, p. 83]. A unique aspect consists in the gradual accumulation of sonorous tension on the descending, arpeggiated melodic line, symbolizing the inquiring or tutelary introspection, which imprints the strength of continuing and launching the large jump of ascending third tenth ( $Bb - G^2$ ), from which it could be said that this part actually starts:



E.g. 6. violin minor

The violin plays sounds that chain naturally in a wide blow, supported and at the same time unobtrusive, calm, introverted. The quavers bring elegant waving of the melody's wing, in cadences, to which they bring a delicate expression, dramatising them somehow.

The tonal-harmonic dimension is one that customizes this excerpt from sonata, it gives it uniqueness within the context of the musical work. The composer starts-surprisingly for the tonal sequence of parts-from *F minor*. The interpretation of this relationship may follow the route: a) the two descendant fifths accompanied by a modal shift in minor; or b) the modal

inversion of the dominant, the relationship being a more natural one, due to the custom of the time to slip towards the minor in the harmonic arrangement. The procedure is meant to emphasize the tone full of dramatic gravity of the musical expression:

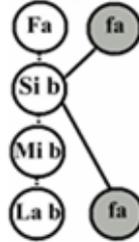


Fig. 1, tonal relationships, *B b major – F*

The diatonic modulation *F minor ~ G minor* is another interesting aspect, which is followed after the dominant of *G minor* – suddenly and unexpectedly – *B flat major*, the basic tonality, in which the second section of the third part develops:

E.g. 7. violin and piano

Both phases stay open functionally-harmonically, the dominant chords have the final accord, which indicates the composer's intention to chain them in a sequence as natural as possible and without hiatuses.

As far as the harmonic arrangement is concerned, we should also note the chromatic gliding of the bass – with corresponding accordic consequences –, by open chromatism *G-G#-A* (bar 4), in quite

a symmetrical proportion in mirror to the descending one *E-Eb-D* (bar 2). In bar 10 there accidentally appears a ninth resulted from the melodic delay of the fundamental of the subdominant accord (*F-Eb*).

In the context of the architectonics *Sonata op. 1 no. 5 in B flat Major* is a transition moment which expressively potentiates the end of the work, developed under an alert tempo.



exposure would prevent us from feeling the existence of a final reprise. However, the *incipits* of the theme seem to mark a vague intention of final reprise (bar 64), which fully sets the basic tonality too. This final pseudoreprise has three phases developed, of baroque style: phrase I (bars 64-72); phrase II (bars 74-82) and phrase III (bars 82-90).

Violonistically, the second section of the piece requires the velocity of the

instrument player as regards the *legato* and *detachées bow* manners on shorter or longer melodic arches. The differentiation between these two manners creates diversity and expressive toning. In some cases, just like in the last bars of the end part, in solo development, the violonist's polyphonic skill is tested to differentiate the two layers – the soloistic and the accompaniment one.



E.g. 9, bars 84-87, violin solo

### 3. Conclusions

The composer shows in *Sonata op.1 no. 5 in B flat Major* the tendency shared by many of his contemporaries: the concatenation of the movements, using in the final cadence emphasis on the dominant accord and not on the tonic, a situation to be found at the end of the slow parts (I and III) of *Sonata*.

The harmonic evolution of the musical discourse is, in Geminiani's violin sonata, quite complex, despite the relatively tonal stability. Modulations are - in general - more frequent, faster and sometimes quite bold, as shown by *Adagio* (part III) of *Sonata op. 1 No. 5 in B flat Major*; in the slow parts, the composer introduces an effective tonal instability, although – despite the abundance of modulatory passages – the tonic is never overshadowed.

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