

**Sonata form in the classical concerto:**

**An analysis of Mozart's piano concerto K488, 1<sup>st</sup>  
movement**

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## **Background**

The A major concerto K488 was one of three piano concertos written during the winter of 1785-86, whilst Mozart was also at work on his opera *The Marriage of Figaro*. Set in the usual three-movement form, it is one of his most attractive works, contrasting a genteel opening movement with a pathos-laden second movement and a bubbling, joyous finale. During the late 18<sup>th</sup> century no other composer had such a defining influence on the piano concerto than Mozart; in his works in this genre one finds an outpouring of inventiveness and variety of mood, melody and, importantly, form.

The first movement is set in a modified sonata form, as was typical of Classical concertos. A traditional sonata form poses problems when the idea of a soloist is introduced: how should the thematic material be distributed between soloist and orchestra? Which passages should be played by just the soloist and which by the orchestra alone?

Many solutions to this were found, not the least in the concertos by Mozart himself, but in general one can discern the following basic pattern:

### **Exposition**

In Classical concerto sonata form there is typically a **double exposition**. This means that the thematic material (i.e. first and second subjects) are presented by the orchestra alone, and then by the soloist. The orchestra's exposition presents both subjects in the **tonic key**. The soloist begins their exposition in the tonic key with the first subject, but modulates for the second subject, which is then often followed by a consolidatory passage, to confirm the new key.

### **Development**

As in a solo or symphonic sonata form, thematic material is developed and the sense of tonality is destabilised. This involves both orchestra and soloist, and usually culminates in a **dominant pedal**, bring the tonality back to the original tonic.

### **Recapitulation**

Both orchestra and the soloist participate in recalling the first and second subjects in the **tonic key**. This leads eventually to a paused tonic chord in second inversion, which prompts to the soloist to perform a **cadenza**. This is usually a pre-prepared virtuosic passage, designed to show the technical prowess of the soloist. However, some talented performers (Mozart included amongst them!) have, in the past, preferred to let spontaneity take over and have improvised a cadenza. This is not common practice today. A trill over a dominant seventh chord is traditionally the signal to the orchestra that the cadenza is over, heralding a closing passage to end the movement.

This model can be recognised easily in the first movement of K488, although there are enough interesting anomalies and additions to place it above mere textbook formality. The double exposition in this case is clear enough (see analysis). However, at bar 137 the exposition appears to be coming to a close with a loud *tutti*, confirming the new tonic of E major, when a new theme is suddenly introduced at bar 143, almost as an afterthought to the second subject. In the subsequent development section the surprising aspect is the fact that the first and second subjects are totally ignored and the only thematic material explored is this short theme tagged on to the end of the exposition.

The other role of the development section in sonata form, that of destabilising the tonality, appears as expected. Many keys are briefly visited after the music finally leaves E major in bar 156. There is a noticeable pattern in the keys visited between bars 156 and 169; the tonality repeatedly drops down a third, and alternates from minor to major (e minor at 156, C major at 160, a minor at 164, F major at 166 and d minor at 168). After this, during bars 170-176, the harmonies follow a *cycle of fifths* pattern, a device often found in development sections due to the fact that it can be used to suggest a number of key changes in a short space of time. This ends up in the tonic minor of the movement (a minor), and through an **Italian sixth** chord (F, A and D#) at the end of bar 177, slips onto a long **dominant pedal** in the bass to prepare for the recapitulation and its return to the tonic key of A major.

In the recapitulation, the exposition is condensed as necessary (no need for a 'double recapitulation'!). Mozart refrains from always repeating material exactly, and keeps a feeling of freshness through allowing the piano to add decorations, such as those to the first subject in bars 206-207. The reappearance of the 'tag' theme at bar 261 is again a point of interest, as it sparks off a new section of development, based on the same theme. Sections of extra development within the recapitulation were not unheard of in Classical sonata forms; they certainly became an important part in the expansion of sonata form at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially in large scale symphonic structures such as those by Beethoven.

## Analysis

Key: A major

Form: Sonata

No. of bars: 313 (excluding cadenza)

<b>Bar</b>	<b>What Happens</b>	<b>Comment</b>
1-30	<p>The strings open the work with the <b>first subject</b> in the tonic key of A major. After eight bars the wind take up the same theme and close it in the tonic with a repeated perfect cadence (the strings opening phrase had ended on a dominant chord in bar 8). The repeated quavers of bar 16 are then adapted in the <i>tutti</i> starting at bar 18 and become an important 3-note rhythmic cell. The section ends with loud, alternating tonic and dominant chords over a dominant pedal (E). Ending on a loud dominant (bar 30), the music is left hanging in mid-air, preparing the way for the <b>second subject</b>.</p>	<p>The first subject is in two halves which form an <b>antecedent-consequent</b> pair (i.e. has a 'question and answer' feel). The first part, bars 1-8, ends on a dominant, whereas the second part, bars 9-18.1, starts with the same idea but ends it firmly on a tonic chord.</p> <p>The first subject has harmonic interest from the outset, in that its second note is harmonised by turning the tonic into a dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chord, hinting at the key of D major. However, this is <b>only</b> a hint, and the theme carries on in the original tonic. Despite minor excursions into D major (bars 18-22) and E major bar 23-27), there is no strong move away from the tonic key.</p>
31-45	<p>The second subject is a very grace full theme characterised by its gentle, falling lines. It is also underpinned by a bass line that descends stepwise for the first four bars.</p> <p>The theme is restated at bar 39 with the flute and bassoon joining in, but it deviates after bar 43 to close with a perfect cadence at the beginning of bar 46.</p>	<p>In typical <b>sonata form</b>, the second subject appears in a key other than the tonic. However, here we have something called a <b>double exposition</b>, whereby the orchestra play both first and second subjects, to be followed by the soloist doing the same. In these cases, the modulatory work within the exposition tends to be done mainly by the soloist.</p>
46-66	<p>A passing reference to the subdominant minor (d minor) in bars 46-48 is soon eradicated by the strong, <i>tutti</i> D major chord that starts bar 49, pulling the music back into the key of A major.</p>	

	<p>An interrupted cadence (V-VI) at the beginning of bar 52 allows the music to dwell on the relative minor (fsharp minor). Again, this is temporary, and at bar 56 there is a restatement of 49-51, which is extended and closes with a perfect cadence.</p> <p>A series of perfect cadences (63-64, 65-66) settles the music in the tonic key for the first entry of the soloist.</p>	
67-81	<p>The soloist opens with the first subject, played in the tonic key (A major). The first four bars of the theme are reproduced exactly, but in bars 71-78 the outline of the theme is decorated with scales and broken chord-type figures. The thematic decoration continues and the strings begin to fill out the harmonic progression. Bars 79-81 replace the original bars 13-17, but remain rooted in A major. The soloist ends this first entry with a brief, dashing scalic passage, closing with a perfect cadence.</p>	<p>By introducing melodic decoration and fast scalic figures to the piano part from the outset, Mozart makes it clear that this movement is a vehicle for the soloist's virtuosity.</p>
82-98	<p>An orchestral <i>tutti</i> replicates bars 18-22, after which the soloist joins in, decorating the original melodic shape with rapid semiquavers. The chord progression follows the original until bar 90, after which the piano continues the move into E major (the dominant). At bar 93 there is a B in the bass, which is repeated in virtually every bar until the cut-off in bar 98. Above this, the orchestra play detached, descending chords, which are decorated by the piano with arpeggiated figures. This pattern is repeated in e minor in bars 95-96, but the descending B major scale and repeated B major chords in bars 97-98 pulls the music back away from a minor tonality, ending on V of V (ie the dominant of E major)</p>	<p>The modulation into E major is, of course, the traditional modulation to the dominant for the second subject, a feature typical of most Classical sonata form movements.</p> <p>The repeated B in the bass of bars 93-98 is a form of <b>pedal note</b>, which prepares the arrival of the second subject, this time in the dominant key.</p>
99-113	<p>The soloist resolves the hanging B major chord of the previous bar onto a tonic of E major for the second subject. The theme is transposed faithfully until 106, except for the semiquavers in bar 105. After this the orchestra take over the theme, and the soloist enhances the</p>	

	texture by doubling it in broken octaves.	
114-136	<p>The piano's left hand drives the texture on with a flurry of semiquavers. The harmonic structure of 114-128 is basically the same as 46-60 (transposed), although the texture is obviously different; the piano's right hand is full of sparkling semiquaver runs. Subtle changes to the orchestration make the passage more interesting than a mere repeat of the original e.g. in 47-48 the wind imitate the strings an octave higher, but in 115-116 it is reversed, with the strings doing the imitating. At 129 the music takes a brief diversion to allow for extended virtuoso passage work by the soloist. The E-sharps in 129-132 hint at the key of f-sharp minor, but this is only local harmonic colouring; at the beginning of 133 the fall onto an E major chord (2<sup>nd</sup> inversion) starts an extended four-bar, Ic-V7-I cadence. This is a strong confirmation of E major as the new tonic key.</p>	<p>Note the use of a trill in the piano part to highlight the cadence in bar 136(-137). Long trills were often used in this way in Classical pieces to emphasise important cadential points.</p>
137-142	<p>The soloist rests as the orchestra recall material originally heard at bar 18, now transposed. A rising sequence in bars 141-142 leaves the music hanging on an unresolved dominant chord.</p>	<p>Whether or not the exposition finishes at the start of bar 137, or later at 142, is ambiguous. The strong cadence at 137 would suggest that it is the closing point, but the <i>tutti</i> that follows (137-142) is basically a restatement of bars 82-86, and feels more like it belongs to the previous section, rather than being the start of a new one. Also, what follows suggests that the exposition may not properly close until the start of bar 149.</p>
143-148	<p>A new theme appears (theme C), played by the strings. It has a gentile character, and the underlying texture includes imitation of the theme, especially the dotted quaver-rhythm in bar 144.</p>	<p>A new theme at this point in a sonata form movement is unexpected. It seems to bear no thematic relationship to either the first or second subjects. However, new themes are occasionally introduced into the closing section of the exposition in classical sonatas. In this way</p>

		the theme acts as a further second subject idea (here we can see that it fits this pattern as it is in E major, the same key as the second subject).
149-155	The soloist has 5 bars on their own, with some two-part counterpoint in E major. The left hand then drops down to play the bass whilst the right hand descend down to the cadence point at the start of bar 156.	
156-163	The wind play a variant of theme C in e minor (the dominant minor). Only two bars of this them are used, and a leap of a perfect 4 <sup>th</sup> is added to the beginning. The smooth lines of this theme are suddenly interrupted by the piam's rattling semiquavers, reinforced by staccato quavers in the strings. These cadence in e minor at the start of bar 160, whereby the winds take over again. The e minor chord at the start of bar 160 is missing a B. The remaining E and G are then reinterpreted as the 3 <sup>rd</sup> and 5 <sup>th</sup> of a C major chord, and thus the tonality is lowered by a third into C major. As previously, the soloist and strings interrupt and then cadence in C major.	Mozart makes great use of textural contrast here by juxtaposing legato winds with staccato strings in segments of two bars each.
164-177	The C and E at the beginning of 164 are reinterpreted as an a minor chord in the orchestra, so the tonality is again lowered by a third. The rising perfect fourth that had been added to the start of the theme in 156 is now inverted, so the theme begins with a falling perfect 5 <sup>th</sup> . At bar 166 the piano takes up the same thematic idea in F major (a third lower), which is echoed a further third lower (in D minor) by the strings in bar 168. This starts a passage of imitation between the flute and clarinet, developing the same motif (theme C). Over this, the piano plays cascades of semiquavers. In bars 170-176 the harmony follows the ' <b>cycle of fifths</b> ', ending on a minor in bar 176. This slips onto an F major chord in the following bar (the submediant).	By now it is clear that Mozart is using theme C as the thematic basis for the development. This is unusual as there is no reference to the principle subjects of the exposition. There is, however, considerable destabilising of the tonality during this development section. Between bars 156 and 168 the key repeatedly drops by a third, then the subsequent cycle of fifths continues this fluid sense of harmonic pace.
178-197	At bar 178 the music slides onto an E major chord, the bass note of which	The bass pedal note of E that underlies this section is known

	<p>remains as a <b>pedal note</b> right through to bar 197.</p> <p>Between 178 and 185 the orchestra further develops theme C in a minor (the tonic minor).</p> <p>Bars 182-185 are a repeat of 178-181. In both of these sections the piano's top line rises up to a top E, highlighting the importance of that note at this point in the movement.</p> <p>Bars 186-191 see the piano pondering on an E major harmony. After this it uses arpeggiated and scalar figures to elaborate on the sustained harmonies in the orchestra (and to once again show off the soloists technique!). In bars 192-193 a dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chord on B major (dominant of the dominant) threatens to pull the tonality away from its intended course, but this is soon quashed in the next bar.</p> <p>The last bar of this section has the pianist's right hand gliding chromatically upwards to an E, the same pitch at which the strings simultaneously begin the recapitulation.</p>	<p>as a <b>dominant pedal</b> preparing the listener for the return of the first subject in the tonic key. This pedal note is not always part of the harmony above it, as in bars 192-193.</p> <p>Between bars 186 and 197 there is no reference to any thematic material – the function of this section is purely harmonic, steering the music back towards A major.</p>
198-212	<p>The recapitulation begins with the orchestra recalling the first subject in the tonic key of A major.</p> <p>Bars 198-205 reproduce the orchestral version of the first subject from bars 1-8. Originally just played by the strings, this time the wind join in and double some of the parts.</p> <p>The pianist then enters with the second half of the theme, but the version originally played by the soloist in bars 75-81. There are, however, several further elaborations on the part of the soloist; the grace notes in bar 206, the falling arpeggiations in bar 207 and the scales a tenth apart in bars 210-212 (the original had only scales in the right hand).</p>	
213-228	<p>The recapitulation continues to be based on the soloist's version of the exposition, reproducing the <i>tutti</i> of 82-86, then the soloist's semiquavers.</p> <p>However, after 3 bars the piano veers away from the original to land on a</p>	<p>The change of direction at bar 221 is for harmonic purposes; the use of a <b>dominant pedal</b> of E throughout 223-228 prevents a modulation to the dominant key (E major) which</p>

	pedal note of E in the bass in bar 223 (the equivalent in the exposition landed on a B in the bass). The subsequent dwelling on an E major harmony in bars 223-228 culminates in a loud cut-off in bar 228. Note that the piano's scales that precede it are <i>ascending</i> here in bar 227, whereas in bar 97 they are <i>descending</i> .	occurred in the exposition, thus preparing for the second subject to arrive in the tonic key.
229-243	The soloist recalls the second subject, transposed up a perfect 4 <sup>th</sup> into the tonic key of A major. The orchestra take over the theme as they did in the exposition (bar 107). The soloist again decorates this with broken RH octaves.	
244-260	Bars 244-258 are basically a straight transposition of 114-128. There is a very slight difference in the shape of the piano's semiquavers at the start of bars 257-8, compared to 127-8.	Bars 129-140 are omitted from the recapitulation because they are unnecessary. In the exposition, they served to reinforce they change of key and confirm E major as the new tonal centre. As there is no equivalent key change in the recapitulation, there is no need to repeat these bars, which contain nothing of thematic interest.
261-283	Bars 129-140 of the exposition are omitted from the recapitulation; instead, the cascading scales that appeared in the orchestra in bars 141-142 are played by the piano (the texture is padded-out by the strings), leaving the music hanging on a dominant chord of E major. The piano alone plays theme C (still in A major). This is followed by a lengthy passage of virtuoso writing in the piano part. Underneath this the orchestra develop theme C further, in an imitative manner similar to that in the development section. This section remains rooted in A major and ends with a strong perfect cadence in bars 283-284. This corresponds to bars 136-137 in the exposition.	Note that the exposition material has been slightly rearranged in the recapitulation, keeping a sense of freshness and adding interest through the avoidance of pure repetition. In the exposition, theme C was a springboard into the development section. Here, Mozart expands the theme C section to include further development of it. This makes this section disproportionately large compared to a traditional sonata form model, in which the first and second subjects have thematic dominance.
284-297	Here we find a repetition of bars 137-148, transposed into the tonic key. After the orchestra have started to play theme C at bar 290, it digresses after 3 bars to slip onto a B major dominant 7 <sup>th</sup> chord (V of V). The bass line slides	

	chromatically from here to land on a tonic chord in second inversion, full of expectancy for the soloist to leap into a virtuosic cadenza.	
298-313	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>(CADENZA)</b></p> <p>With the resolution of the soloist's trill the orchestra take up the music which closed the first half of the exposition (bars 56-66) to end the movement. Five extra bars are added; three bars based entirely on a tonic chord, then two bars containing two perfect cadences. These cadences are played suddenly <i>piano</i>, which after the preceding <i>forte</i> brings the movement to a witty conclusion.</p>	The trill was the device conventionally used in classical concerto cadenzas for the soloist to signal to the orchestra their return.