

Edexcel A Level Syllabus – Analysis

Mozart: Piano Sonata in B-flat K333,
first movement.

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Background

There are eighteen surviving sonatas for solo piano by Mozart; a further four have been lost. Considering that Mozart was one of the most famous keyboard virtuosi of his time, it might seem strange that, in comparison with his symphonies, he should write relatively few such works. Part of the reason lies in his renowned ability as an improviser, a skill that was a prerequisite amongst keyboard players at that time (for example, it is worth reading commentaries concerning Bach's abilities in improvisation - see *The New Bach Reader*, WW Norton and Co). Since many composers wrote music for personal performance, there was less need to write down compositions - instead the composer, plucking music from his subconscious, could dazzle audiences. It seems, therefore, that for Mozart the process of formally writing down sonatas was for practical reasons, such as teaching and publication. In a letter written in October 1777, Mozart provides an insight into his abilities as an improviser: commenting on a performance he had given two days previously, he writes of how he 'played...all of a sudden a magnificent sonata in C major, out of my head, with a rondo at the end - full of din and sound'. Its outer movements became the sonata K309.

The Sonata in B-flat major K333 was thought initially to have been composed in 1779, but later scholars have dated the work a year earlier. However, studies by Alan Tyson on Mozart's handwriting and the paper he used have suggested a later date of 1783. It is an interesting sonata in that, despite sounding truly Mozartean, the influence of Johann Christian Bach (1735-1782) is clearly perceivable: they met on two occasions, in London in 1764 (where Bach was one of the leading figures of musical life) and again in Paris in 1778. Mozart's respect for JC Bach was deeply held, and his death in 1782 came as a sad blow. Bach spent time in Germany and Italy before settling in England, and the influence of his travels is clearly seen in a musical language that consists of solid German technique enhanced by Italian grace and melody. The latter is typical of the *galant* style that emerged during the early eighteenth century, of which Bach was an exponent. In a letter of 1778, Mozart's father Leopold encouraged his son to write in Bach's 'natural, flowing and easy style' and the admiration of Mozart is evident by his quoting of several Bach themes in his works. It is precisely this 'flowing and easy style' of a primarily melodic nature that can be found in K333. Furthermore, there is a remarkable similarity between the opening motif of K333 and those of JC Bach's piano sonatas Op.5 no.3 and Op.17 no.4.

Also worthy of note is the influence of the concerto. This can be seen most explicitly in the last movement, which includes a cadenza near its end. This is complemented by the way in which Mozart's textures seem to imitate the *concertante* techniques of a concerto. In the first movement the brilliance of the extended passing 6/4 (Ic-V-I) cadences at bars 57-58 and, more importantly, 159-160, clearly allude to the grander, more extrovert style of concerto forms.

The sonata is a typical example of the genre; the first movement is in a text-book sonata form. Where the *galant* style placed more emphasis on melodic interest, the Classical style of Mozart and Haydn used themes more as functions of tonality in the creation of musical structures. The basic principle of sonata form rests in the contrast and unification of two keys (traditionally the tonic and dominant). The keys are presented in the *exposition*, where they are introduced by two themes known as the *first* and *second subjects* (although in some works, especially those by Haydn, only one principal theme can be found; these works are known as *monothematic*). Once the second key has been firmly established, the tonality is destabilised in the *development* section. Here the motivic material from the exposition is broken into its component parts, which are subjected to musical scrutiny and metamorphosis; this is usually associated with the exploration and transient use of other keys. The *development* section ends with a return to the tonic key for the *recapitulation*, often heralded by a *dominant pedal*. Here the *exposition* material is restated without the shift of key that characterised the exposition, thus harmonically unifying what was previously contrasting material.

This model can be found, hardly surprisingly, in varied forms throughout the repertoire of Classical music; composers did not consider it to be a set of rules to compose by, but more a general principle on which they could base their work. However K333 adheres to the general model of sonata form extremely well, as is demonstrated in the following:

Analysis

Type: Sonata form movement

Key: B-flat major

No. of bars: 165

Time signature: 4/4

Structural outline: 1 - 63: exposition, 64 - 93: development, 94 - 165: recapitulation

BAR	WHAT HAPPENS	COMMENT
1-10	First subject presented in the tonic key (B-flat major).	
10	Re-statement of opening an octave lower, but soon deviating to introduce an	
12	E-natural in the RH	The E-natural introduces a C major dominant 7th harmony (V of V in B flat). This is the start of the modulation to F major (the dominant) for the second subject.
13.4, 14.4 and 15.4	The RH has a falling group of semiquavers at the end of each bar.	Even before the second subject has arrived, Mozart is developing and playing with the opening shape of the first subject.
17.3	A B-natural occurs in the LH	The B-natural introduces a G major dominant 7th harmony (V of V of V), strengthening the move away from the tonic key.
22	Arpeggio figuration of a C major chord.	This is confirmation of a new dominant chord as preparation for the second subject in F major.
23-30	Second subject, in the new key of F major.	Although this is a new theme there are some links with the first subject; bar 24 is rhythmically identical to bar 1. The offbeat crotchet rhythm from the first subject (RH bar 5) occurs in the second subject (RH bar 5) occurs in the second subject at bars 25 and 29.
31	Repeat of second subject which, after five bars, tries to move away from F major to	

35	G minor, but returns after only one bar.	
38-63	Numerous Ic-V-I cadences in F major, on a small scale such as the end of bar 45, or drawn out to cover two complete bars (57-58).	Extended affirmation of F as the new tonal centre, despite harmonic devices such as the rising sequence in 43-44, the <i>cycle of fifths</i> in 47-48 and the passing V-I cadences in B flat in 50-51 and 54-55. There is little of thematic relevance here, although perhaps the rising RH 3rds in 50-51 and 54-55 relate back to (and develop) bar 12.
64	The development section opens with the first subject motif in F major.	The three-quaver rhythm that ends bar 1 is developed in the RH at the end of bars 66, 67 and 69
71	The expected perfect cadence in F major is replaced by a plunge into f minor.	The use of the dominant minor, together with a rapid <i>Alberti bass</i> , injects drama into the music. This is heightened by the sudden RH leap in bar 73 onto a top F (the highest note on Mozart's piano). The dark colour of the following section is maintained by the transitory use of other minor keys including c minor (bar 75), e-flat minor (bar 76) and g minor (bars 80-86).
71-93	Thematic development of two main ideas; the opening of the first subject and the falling LH shape from bar 30.	The first subject is divided into its component rhythmic cells which are then incorporated into the RH's phrases. For example, the rhythm on the first two beats of bars 75 and 77 show a development of the cell which opens bar 1. Also, the last beat of the RH in bar 80 clearly imitates the falling <i>anacrusis</i> which starts the sonata. A more explicit development of the first subject can be seen in the RH of bar 79, where, apart from transposition of the theme to fit a different harmonic scheme one can observe <i>intervallic augmentation</i> in the stretching of the leap between the 3rd and 4th beats from the original perfect 4th to an octave. The LH falling motif from bar 30 can be seen in the RH of bars 72 and 77, with extended versions occurring in bars 81-82 and 83-84.

		Bars 87-90 develop the <i>appoggiaturas</i> that are found at bars 1.1, 2.1, 3.1 and 4.1
87-90	The music focuses around an F major dominant 7th chord.	Mozart is preparing F as a <i>dominant pedal</i> to herald the recapitulation in the home key of B-flat major (despite a hint at b-flat minor through the use of a D-flat in the RH of bars 90-91).
94	Beginning of recapitulation, which is an exact copy of the exposition until	
105	the introduction of an A-flat in the RH takes the music off briefly in a new direction.	Mozart is still introducing new bits of development, even in the recapitulation. This is necessary because the original move to the dominant key in the exposition must be avoided here if the movement is to retain the traditional tonal balance of a sonata structure. The music veers towards E-flat major (bar 106), c minor (bar 107) and F major (bar 109) before settling back in the tonic of B-flat major in bar 110, from where the recapitulation continues (corresponding to bar 15 of the exposition).
119	The second subject appears in the tonic key.	The following music up to bar 143 is almost an exact transposition of the original except for a few minor details such as the RH in bar 126 (compare to bar 30).
143	Further development over a <i>cycle of fifths</i> harmonic progression. The alternate wide melodic leaps of 6ths and 7th found originally in the second subject at bar 25 are developed in a falling sequence (143-146) and then by <i>intervallic diminution</i> (147-149).	Mozart made no real reference to the second subject throughout the development section, so this is a final opportunity to explore some of its more characteristic shapes, albeit in a fairly subtle manner.
152-165	Coda, in B-flat major, corresponding exactly to that of the exposition (bars 50-63) except for a few changes to the RH semiquaver passagework.	The most interesting deviation from the exposition is in bar 162, where an exact transposed replica would take the RH up to a top G. This note did not exist on Mozart's piano, so the bar had to be re-written to compensate for this.