

A Level Notes: Mozart's Piano Sonatas

Lesson Aim:

Before setting out to analyse a piece of music, it is important to gain some background information. Use this sheet to help you develop an awareness of Mozart's approach to keyboard works before going to the anthology to analyse the music.

Mozart and keyboard sonatas

Although the music of the sons of Bach is among the earliest to benefit from sympathetic performance on the fortepiano, it is doubtful that any of them ever enjoyed the opportunity of performing on instruments as reliable as those praised by Mozart when he visited Stein's workshop in 1777. Even more than the singing tone, the composer was impressed by the regularity and evenness of the action, with its deceptively simple escapement. Though eventually rendered obsolete by the steadily increasing size of concert halls throughout the 19th century, Stein's design was both perfectly engineered on its own terms and perfectly suited to the world that Mozart was about to enter. In the space of a few years, and in direct response to developments in instrument design, Mozart had succeeded in transforming the easy-going three-movement form inherited from J.C. Bach (whose sonatas he had arranged as keyboard concertos at the age of nine) into a vehicle for considerable display and elaborate working-out. With his final break from the archbishop in May 1781 and the decision to take up permanent residence in Vienna, Mozart inaugurated a series of masterpieces for keyboard dominated by 17 remarkable concertos, in which virtuosity is blended with a superb sense of operatic pacing. Though fewer in number, the ten solo sonatas now known to have been created after the move to Vienna (portions of k330–32/300*h, i, k* may have been composed a few months earlier) afford a unified view of the composer's development.

The group of four sonatas k330–33/300*h, i, k, 315c* demonstrate his sure handling of practically every Classical form: sonata, both with coda (k332 finale) and without (k333 first movement); theme and variations (k331 opening movement); binary (k331 Menuetto and Trio); ternary (k330 Andante); rondo-type (k331 finale) and sonata-rondo (k333 finale). The last-named of these, with its tutti-solo opposition and elaborate cadenzas, offers a prime example of cross-fertilization with the concertos Mozart was composing during the same period.

When the recapitulation of a sonata movement threatened to exceed its compass, his imagination was fused by the limitation, resulting in some of his most adroit touches, as in the opening movements of k333.



Questions

1. What instrument would be produced at Stein's workshops?
2. Explain how Steinberg developed this instrument.
3. At what age did Mozart arrange some of Bach's sonatas?
4. What happened in May 1781.
5. When were the ten solo sonatas composed? Explain the forms used in Sonata K. 333 and define each in turn,
6. What do the terms 'Recapitulation' and 'compass' mean?
7. Using all your knowledge gained so far, create a revision sheet for sonatas. You could also find out about Sonata Form.

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