

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SONATA FORM (I) THE BAROQUE SONATA

EMANUELA-FABIOLA PRIP¹

SUMMARY. In this short study, we aim to define the typologies of the sonata form in the music of the Baroque period, alongside the perspective of some well-known authors (Charles Rosen, James Webster or William Newman) and to propose two analyses – the Sonata in G minor, K. 450 composed by D. Scarlatti and part I from the Sonata in A major, Wq. 55/4 by C. Ph. E. Bach. An interesting point of this study is the connection and the transition from the monothematic sonata form to the bithematic sonata form.

Keywords: Baroque, Sonata form, analyses, D. Scarlatti, C. Ph. E. Bach

Introduction.

Genre References in the Music of the Baroque Period

The Sonata form prevalingly refers to the structure of the 1st movement² of a multi-movement genre, such as chamber or symphonic (a solo sonata or a duo sonata – the sense of genre, trio, quartet, quintet, sextet etc., symphony or concert), being developed by the compositions of Domenico Scarlatti (related to the dances of the Baroque suite, with a monothematic character, a two-section structure, a transition to bithematism), of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach (bithematism, the delineation of the form in three sections), by the works of the Viennese Classical composers (the crystallisation of the form and of the tonal ratio, the emergence of the third theme and of the atypical sonata forms, as well as the combination with other form principles), of the Romantic composers (the recapitulation with a single theme, the concentration

¹ PhD, Musicologist. E-mail: ema.prip@yahoo.com

² Within the monopartite genres, as regards the music of the Classical and Romantic periods, the structure or the reminiscence (the 20th century) of the sonata form can also be found in the movements III and IV (most often juxtaposed over another principle of form).

of the genre in one single movement, the disappearance or the amplification of the distinct nature between the two themes, the outlying tonal ratio, the chromaticization of the musical language and the introduction of the motifs with national ethos, the programmatic nature), and of the music of the 20th century, when the atonal language gives place to a new view on the musical form.

Starting with the end of the 16th century³, when the verb of Italian origin *sonare*⁴ referred to the instrumental playing of a musical work⁵, then the 17th century, when the sonata was perceived as a piece destined to one or several musical instruments, *the sonata (as genre)* has experienced metamorphoses on a conceptual level (relating to the musical content, the genre vs. the form), on a structural level (monopartite and multipartite sonatas), on a quantitative level (the number of instruments), as a writing – for each era in particular, and on a stylistic level.

The first sonatas represented, clearly, transcriptions of vocal works (motets, madrigals, canzone⁶) for various instruments, being influenced by the counterpoint writing and the technique of imitative polyphony. After 1750 the sonatas become independent works consisting of three or four parts, the genre dividing itself depending on the essence of the category (the destination of the issuing): *sonata da Chiesa* – in four parts (slow – fast – slow – fast; an alternation settled by the works of A. Corelli), for a group of instruments (violins, violoncellos, harpsichord, organ – basso continuo), and a sober, ecclesiastic character, and *sonata da camera* – in three parts (fast – slow – fast) up to six dance parts, often preceded by a prelude, with a secular character and similarities with the suite. In late Baroque, the distinctions between the two types of sonatas would disappear, leaving place to the genre itself.

Also within the genre, in the music of the Baroque period, we can identify the *trio-sonata* (or *the sonata a tre*) for two instruments (violins or woodwind instruments) and basso continuo (harpsichord, organ, viola da gamba), the *sonata solo* for the violin or keyboard instruments – a consequence of the development and improvement of musical instruments (Johann Kuhnau, J. S. Bach) or the *duo-sonata* (J. S. Bach – the sonatas for the violin and clavier).

³ From the 13th century, there have been literary sources, that by the term *sonnade* referred to an instrumental work.

⁴ Unlike *cantare* (for the vocal works). In music literature we also find the expression *da cantare e suonare*, for the works performed both vocally and instrumentally.

⁵ ****Dicționar de Termeni Muzicali (The Dictionary of Musical Terms)*, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2010, p. 516.

⁶ *Canzone da sonar* – a vocal work transposed for instruments, later named sonata (Livia Teodorescu-Ciocănea, *Tratat de Forme și Analize Muzicale (Treaty of Musical Forms and Analyses)*, Grafoart, București, 2014, p. 186, quotation from Douglas M. Green, *Form in tonal Music. An introduction to Analysis*, ed. Holt Reinhart, London, 1965, p. 178).

The Genre-Form Division.

The Sonata in the Baroque period (formal references).

In *Dicționarul de Termeni Muzicali (The Dictionary of Musical Terms)*, as a consequence of the disappearance of the distinctions between the *sonata da chiesa* and the *sonata da camera*, the monothematic sonata form is characterized by a schematization such as: theme A (main key) – modulation towards a close key (repetition) – theme A (main key). Among the composers who used this typology there were A. Corelli, D. Scarlatti, J. S. Bach and G. F. Händel⁷.

Livia Teodorescu-Ciocănea, in her treaty of *Musical Forms and Analyses*, offers another perspective – the composer gives the sonata form the due importance in the development of instrumental music, as well as the contribution to the development of the other movements of the genre. As regards the development of the form, the authoress mentions the role of the Italian composers Andrea Gabrieli (1532/1533-1585) and Giovanni Croce (1557-1609) – writers of sonata forms schematized in 5 up to 10 sections⁸.

The well-known musicologist Charles Rosen, in his work entitled *Sonata Forms*, appeals to the Baroque writing – in the creation of the composers Giovanni Battista Sammartini (1700-1775) and D. Scarlatti (1685-1757), preceding the pre-Classical and Classical sonata: the arrangement of phrases in symmetrical times, groups of phrases of three and four measures each, the sequential accompaniment, the harmonic transition from the tonic to the dominant, as well as the modulation elements specific to Scarlatti's sonata⁹.

The musicologist James Webster, the author of the article *Sonata Form*¹⁰ (published in the encyclopaedic dictionary *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*), views the genesis of the sonata form in the context of the stylistic changes of the 18th century and the transition from monothematism towards bithematism (alongside the psychological implications, the development of the musical idea, the accompaniment, the contrasting

⁷ *Op. cit.*, ****Dicționar de termeni muzicali (Dictionary of Musical Terms)*, p. 517.

⁸ Livia Teodorescu-Ciocănea, *Tratat de Forme și Analize Muzicale (Treaty of Musical Forms and Analyses)*, Grafoart, București, 2014, p. 193.

⁹ Charles Rosen, *Sonata Forms*, W. W. Norton & Company (First Edition), New York, London, 1927, p. 127-130.

¹⁰ Electronically-accessed source through The Musical Encyclopaedia *Oxford Music Online*, art. *Sonata form*, by James Webster, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000026197>.

aspects and the tonal ratio). The same author appeals to elements that have influenced the sonata form: the French dances, the formal structuring in two sections, the development of the instrumental music and of the keyboard instruments, the development of the form within the genres (the piano sonatas, the quartets, the symphonies), the innovations brought about by D. Scarlatti and C. Ph. E. Bach, as well as the theoretical aspects of the sonata form customized by the theoretician H. Ch. Koch in the third volume of his composition treaty *Versuch einer Anleitung zur Composition (Attempt at a Guide to Composition, 1793)*¹¹.

Last but not least, the final bibliographical source analysed has been the treatise *The Sonata in the Baroque Era*, where the author William Newman refers to the genre of Baroque sonata in Italy, Austria and Germany, in England, France and the Nordic countries (Holland, Denmark, Sweden), through the perspective of their representative composers, of the genre and writing characteristics, of the influences and compositional techniques, as well as of the representative instruments and the timbre combinations.

To conclude this subchapter, we can state that the first formal references of the sonata have been deduced from the instrumental dances and the musical writing, from the polyphonic technique of the motet (G. Gabrielli), from the contrasting elements, the repetitive sections and the first thematic delineations. Afterwards, in the tradition of the musical Baroque, emerge the forms of monothematic and bithematic sonata – both of them representing a transition towards the Classical sonata.

Analyses

The two proposed analyses – the Sonata in *G minor*, K. 450, composed by D. Scarlatti (monopartite opus) and the Sonata in *A major*, Wq. 55/4, by C. Ph. E. Bach (part I), represent a formal example of Baroque and “pre-Classical” sonata. Both sonatas are composed for keyboard instruments – Sonata in *G minor* k. 450 represents an example of one-part genre and form and the Sonata in *A major* Wq. 55/4 is differentiated by the use of a sonata form in both part I and III. We have made both analyses by schematizations and musical examples meant to render a synoptic view over the form. The terminology aspects are correlated with the historical period concerned as well as with the clearest possible delimitation, for the purpose of exemplifying the Baroque sonata form.

¹¹ Idem.

Domenico Scarlatti (1685-1757), Sonata in G minor, K. 450

The Sonata in *G minor* (K¹². 450, L¹³. 338 or P¹⁴. 422) is one of the approximately 555 monopartite Sonatas for the harpsichord or fortepiano, composed by D. Scarlatti between the years 1711-1784. A monopartite opus, with a monothematic form, this sonata is based upon a four-measure theme, which will generate aspects of rhythmic and harmonic writing in the deployment of the sound picture.

E.g. 1



D. Scarlatti, Sonata in G minor, K. 450, Theme (2+2), bars 1-4

The aspects of pianistic writing can be divided by the two sound macro-plans: that of the left hand, which engages an ostinato plan made of eighths, and that of the right hand, based entirely on dactyls. Made of 42 measures (section I, section II and their reprises), in duple meter, the Sonata in *G minor* (*Allegro*) can be defined by its lively nature, the accumulating passages of tension and the average contribution of virtuosity.

At the level of the architectural structure, this sonata is built on a monothematic form, subdivided in two repetitive sections. At the terminology level, based upon the treaties of musical forms, this cataloguing could also be called a bipartite form or a rhyming bipartite form. Section I is made up of

¹² Cataloging made by Ralph Kirkpatrick (1953).

¹³ Cataloging made by Alessandro Longo (1906).

¹⁴ Cataloging made by Giorgio Pestelli (1967).

the theme – in the main key, a modulation subsection (two stages) and a conclusive subsection (*D minor*), while section II consists of a varied theme (*G minor* V ~ *D major*), a modulation subsection (two stages) and a conclusive subsection (*G minor*).

Table 1

D. Scarlatti, Sonata in <i>G minor</i> , K. 450					
Monothematic sonata form					
Section I :			Section II :		
Theme (<i>G minor</i>)	Modulation subsection (bridge)	Conclusive subsection (<i>D major</i>)	Var. theme (<i>G minor</i> V ~ <i>D major</i>)	Modulation subsection	Conclusive subsection (<i>G minor</i>)
bars 1-5	5-16	16-21	22-26	26-37	37-42

Another formal, more detailed interpretation emerges from the characteristic of the monothematic sonata, the forerunner of the bithematic one. In the Sonata in *G minor*, Scarlatti introduces a musical material tangent to the idea of a secondary theme, exposed to the dominant (Section I) and detached from theme I. Thus, the secondary theme (*bars 10-16*) lacks an obvious contrasting ratio, keeping in the same time the rhythmic valences generated from the main theme.

E.g. 2

D. Scarlatti, Sonata in *G minor*, k. 450, Section I, secondary theme, previous phrase, *bars 10-13*.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SONATA FORM (I) THE BAROQUE SONATA

The contrasting aspects are rendered by the setting of the new tonality, by the playing of the octaves by the left hand and by the parallel thirds exposed by the right hand.

The new formal interpretation could be detailed as follows: section I (with repetition), theme I (main key, *G minor*) – the modulation bridge (a single stage) – secondary theme, derived from theme I or the main theme (the dominant tonality) and the cadenza alongside the codetta (a confirmation of the cadenza). Section II brings about a synonymous division ratio, but exposed to the variations of theme I and the new tonal profile *D major – G minor*. As we notice in the table below, the tonal aspects of this sonata and their connection to the segments of form are built in the aspect of a cupola: the main key (*G minor*) – the dominant key (*D minor*) – the homonym of the dominant key (*D major*), and again, the main key.

Table 2

D. Scarlatti, Sonata in <i>G minor</i>, K. 45 (alternative interpretation)			
Section I : 			
theme I (<i>G minor</i>)	bridge	secondary theme (<i>D minor</i>)	Cadenza codetta (<i>D minor</i>)
<i>bars 1-5</i>	<i>5-9</i>	<i>10-16</i>	<i>16-21</i>
Section II : 			
Var. theme I (<i>G minor</i> V ~ <i>D major</i>)	bridge	secondary theme (<i>G minor</i>)	cadenza+codetta (<i>G minor</i>)
<i>22-26</i>	<i>26-31</i>	<i>31-37</i>	<i>37-42</i>

The Sonata in *G minor* K. 450 represents the first example of a Baroque sonata presented in these article, with a formal-thematic and tonal structure. The aspects of formal interpretation (subsection, cadenza subsection vs. bridge, secondary theme, codetta) are revealed from terminology perspectives (and tonal ones for the secondary theme) related to the Baroque sonata form and its contribution to the crystallisation of the Classical sonata.

C. Ph. E. Bach (1714-1788), Sonata in A major, Wq. 55/4

J. S. Bach's second son, C. Ph. E. Bach, stood out in the outline of the sonata genre and form through his compositions and his treaty *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen* (*The True Art of Piano Playing*, in two volumes – 1753 and 1762) that includes examples of six sonatas composed by the author. Among the several dozens of sonatas that he composed, C. Ph. E. Bach shapes the Classical sonata by dividing its form in three sections (exposition, development and recapitulation), by the thematic contrast and the definition of the genre in more parts.

The Sonata in A major, Wq.¹⁵ 55/4 (or H¹⁶. 186) was composed in 1765 and was published during the composer's life in the collection *6 Clavier-Sonaten für Kenner und Liebhaber* (Leipzig, 1779). At the level of the genre, the sonata consists of three parts – *Allegro assai*, *Poco Adagio* and *Allegro*, set between the main key (A major) and the relative key (F minor).

Table 3

C. Ph. E. Bach, Sonata in A minor, Wq. 55/4		
Genre structure		
Part I (<i>Allegro assai</i>)	Part II (<i>Poco Adagio</i>)	Part III (<i>Allegro</i>)
A major	F minor	A major

Part I (*Allegro assai*) is made up of a form specific to the bithematic sonata, part II (*Poco Adagio*) has a tristrophic form of the type A – B – varied A – Finale, and part III (*Allegro*) is also made up of a form specific to the Baroque sonata, enframed by Charles Rosen in the binary typology. In the analytical breakdown, we will insist upon part I – where the two themes are built with the help of a contrasting effect, the second theme being in tight connection with the bridge section.

Theme I consists of 8 measures, and at a morphological level, of two symmetrical phrases with the role of antecedent and consequent. Without generating a specific writing on the course of the movement (except for the dactyl of the left hand, relevant for the bridge), theme I is characteristic by the poignancy of the rhythmic and melodic structure.

¹⁵ Numbering after the catalogue made by Alfred Wotquenne, *Thematisches Verzeichnis der Werke von Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach* (*Thematic List of Works by Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach*), published in 1904.

¹⁶ After the catalogue made by E. Eugene Helm, *Thematic Catalogue of the Works of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach*, published by Yale University Press in 1989.

E.g. 3



C. Ph. E. Bach, Sonata in *A minor*, Wq. 55/4, Exposition, Theme I, antecedent + consequent phr. (4+4), bars 1-8

The bridge can be delineated in three segments: segment I (*bars 9-12*) consists of arpeggios on the transitions I, V, VI, III and IV, segment II (*bars 13-26*) begins with a cell material taken from theme I, continuing with an improvisational writing in sixteenths, whereas segment III consists of four measures, with an introductory role for theme II.

Theme II (*bars 31-38*), rendered in *E major* key (Exposition), is representative by its virtuoso character – in opposition with the mainly lyrical character of theme II in the compositions of the Viennese Classical composers. Noticeable in the table below, the secondary theme and the cadenza (*bars 31-42*) could also be included in the typology of theme B (B1 and B2), but, in relation to the stylistic period and the cadenza feature, we chose to delineate them in the following way:

Table 4

C. Ph. E. Bach, Sonata in <i>A major</i> , Wq. 55/4, Part I							
Bithematic sonata form							
Exposition:					Development		
Theme I (<i>A major</i>)	Bridge			Theme II (<i>E major</i>)	Cadenza	St. I	St. II
	Sg. I	Sg. II	Sg. III				
<i>bars 1-8</i>	9-12	13-26	27-30	31-38	39-42	43-63	64-81

Recapitulation:				Finale		
Theme I (A ~ E)	Bridge			Theme II (A major)	Cadenza	
	Sg. I	Sg. II	Sg. III			
82-89	90-93	94-105	106-109	110-117	118-121	122-129

Structured in two stages, the Development develops the motif and thematic material taken from Theme I and the bridge (stage I), theme I and theme II (stage II), and the Recapitulation keeps the schematic alignment of the Exposition, in the same time changing the tonal relation of the thematic plan.

Being contemporary with J. Haydn, C. Ph. E. Bach significantly contributes to the crystallisation of the Classical sonata form, keeping in some sections, parts or genres, the Baroque valences developed by D. Scarlatti. In the Sonata in *A major* Wq. 55/4, the feature of the Baroque sonata form is representative in part III (*Allegro*), whereas the first movement has classical features by the delineation of the three main sections (exposition, development and recapitulation), by the tonal relation and the announcing of the importance given to theme II by the Viennese Classical composers, as well as the structuring (based on the writing) of the linking sections – the bridge and the development.

Conclusions

After defining the sonata form in the Introduction, this short study aimed at outlining the elements that led to the appearance of the monothematic and bithematic Baroque sonata form, alongside the historical and geographical trajectory, and the analyses made. Starting from the disappearance of the distinctions between the *sonata da chiesa* and the *sonata da camera*, the polyphonic technique of the motet, the dances and the development of the instrumental music, the Baroque writing, the contribution of the composers to the development of the form – the sonata, as a genre-form (for the opuses in a single part) and as a form, has known a development in the period of the Baroque music also through the contribution of the composers D. Scarlatti and C. Ph. E. Bach.

The first work analysed, The Sonata in *G minor*, K.450, composed by D. Scarlatti (monopartite opus) is made on the basis of a monothematic form, subdivided in two sections. In the analysis, we have also offered an

alternative formal interpretation, based upon the form structure of two thematic elements (the main theme and the secondary theme). The second analysed piece, the part I of The Sonata in *A major*, Wq.55/4 by C. Ph. E. Bach, gives us the perspective of a bithematic sonata, contrasting within the thematic articulations, the second theme being in tight connection with the bridge section.

*English translation by
Anami Veleşcu and Emanuela Prip*

REFERENCES

- ****Dicționar de Termeni Muzicali (Dictionary of Musical Terms)*, Ediția a III-a, revăzută și adăugită, Editura Enciclopedică, București, 2010.
- Bach Carl Philipp Emanuel, *Harvard Library Bulletin*, Volume 24, Number 3, 2013
[https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:432981704\\$5i](https://iif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:432981704$5i)
- Bughici Dumitru, *Suita și Sonata (The Suite and the Sonata)*, Editura Muzicală, București, 1965.
- Newman S. William, *The Sonata in the Baroque Era* (Third Edition), W. W. Norton & Company, New York.
- Rosen Charles, *Sonata Forms*, W.W. Norton & Company (First Edition), New York, London, 1927.
- Teodorescu-Ciocânea Livia, *Tratat de Forme și Analize Muzicale (Treaty of Musical Forms and Analyses)*, Ediție revizuită, Grafoart, București, 2014.
- Webster James, *Sonata form*, electronically-accessed source through The Musical Encyclopaedia *Oxford Music Online*,
<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000026197>