W.A. MOZART – SONATE IN A MINOR K.310 ALLEGRO MAESTRO

Trevor J. Hedrick
MUSC 234-001: Music Theory IV
May 14, 2013
W.A. Mozart – Sonate in a Minor K.310 Allegro Maestro

Introduction

Mozart's famous Piano Sonata No. 8 (K. 310) in A minor was composed in Paris in 1778 and published there a few years later as Opus 4/3. In this work, written at age 22 or so, Mozart tried at the composition of a sonata in the minor mode. The Piano Sonata No. 8 is, in fact, one of just three minor mode instrumental sonatas ever composed by the man. One gets the feeling, listening to the Sonata in A minor, that Mozart had been stocking up on minor mode drama for some time when he wrote it. Written around the time of the death of Mozart's mother, it is one of the darkest of his sonatas. The last movement in particular has an obsessive, haunted quality about it, heightened near the end by the interruption of the relentless drive to the conclusion by repeated and chilling quiet falling passages. A companion piece to this work is Mozart’s Sonata for piano and violin in E minor, k.304. The fact that both of these dark pieces were written around the time of the death of Mozart’s mother lends them to not be a coincidence. A chunk of Mozart’s work is in major keys which makes this a large contrast to the status quo Mozart placed on himself. The drama throughout the development is prominent through the use of terrace dynamics from f to p. There are several interesting things about this sonata in particular compared to others and that is that Mozart indicates piano for the secondary theme in C major, then there are no other dynamic markings for the rest of the exposition. The same applies to the recapitulation in which the secondary theme is in A minor. If we are to follow Mozart’s dynamic markings, both the exposition and recapitulation should be played as piano from the appearance of the secondary theme to the codetta. Pianists almost always introduce some dynamic variation after the secondary theme appears, and the ending is usually played forte. Although this mention is a clear
violation of Mozart’s dynamic markings, it adds variety and might make the piece more
dramatic.

**Exposition**

**First Theme Group**

Measures 1-5 consist of a prolongation of the tonic over a tonic pedal. In my attempt to analyse
the score, what follows is a motion by way of VII and VI to the cadential subdominant of the
opening phrase which is the ii6 in measure 8. Following this is the ii$^{6/4}$ – I in measures 8 to 9.
When it comes to harmonically, in measure one to measure nine is a statement of the I-IV-V-I
idea which is basic and fundamental to cadential structure. Thematically and harmonically
speaking, the second phrase starts out in almost a deceptive way. In measure 9, there happens to
be a strong start in a-minor but by measure 16 a-minor has dissipated into C-major. If you
quickly look ahead into the piece at measure 45-47, we see what happened to a-minor here; it has
become a motion into the subdominant area of C-major. In these few measured there is a full
cadence. Back to measures 9 through 16, there are two partial statements of the cadential idea,
both of which are using a-minor as a motion of the submediant into the subdominant of C-major.
The first partial statement ends at the tonic in measure 14 on the third beat. The C-major tonic in
measure 14 is clearly the goal of motion melodically in the descending line of the bass, and
harmonically as well. The C-major tonic is reduced though by the sudden diminution of the
harmonic rhythm, leading to the arrival at the tonic on the third beat of the measure instead on
the first beat of the next measure. Also this happens through the syncopated chromatic melodic
line which delays resolution on the tonic chord’s median note until after the harmony has moved
to the submediant on the fourth beat. One last means is through approaching the tonic by way of
the $V^{6/5}$ instead of the root position dominant chord. This has all made a great point for the next development to take place.

**Second Theme Group**

Theme II could almost be called a “prolongation of the I$^6$”. The prolongation of the tonic extends from measure 23 to measure 31. The cadential subdominant extends for two measures of measures 32 through measure 33, and the cadential dominant ($I^{6/4}-V$) resolves to the concluding cadential tonic in measures 34 through measure 35. The same process is repeated in measures 35 through 40 and again in measures 40 through 45. Each time, the cadential subdominant is approached from the $I^6$. The codetta recalls the process that established C-major in measures 9 through 16, bringing that original “half-cadence” idea to a full close on the final tonic of the exposition section.

**Development**

Here we have another “wrong-end-of-the-telescope”. Our “strong” C-major dissolves into the dominant of e-minor. I differ here with Felix Salzer (Structural Hearing, vol. I, pp. 23-25 and examples VIII and IX, vol. II, pp. 4-5), and the difference affects the overall analysis. Harmonically, there is no C-D-E motion (m. 50 to m. 70 to m. 74), as in Salzer’s analysis. The C-D-E is a melodic reality, a surface idea and a nice counterpoint to the underlying harmonic process in this development section. As we see in mm. 57-58, this underlying harmonic process takes quite a different turn. B-major harmony ($V$ of e-minor) is the goal – C-major becoming VI of e-minor (i.e., dissolved) – and the $V$ of e-minor itself is apparently the first stage of an escalator that leads us by way of $V$ of a-minor and $V$ of d-minor to the d-minor tonic in m. 70. In measure 9 through 14, our initial a-minor tonality was dissolved
into being a mere vi in C-major. In measure 50 through 58, the C-major tonality was dissolved into being a mere VI moving into the V of e-minor, which then led to the V of a-minor, which led to the V of d-minor, which led to our current d-minor tonic. So, to catch back up, this d-minor tonic in measure 70 is the only tonic that is currently speaking. With all other tonics dissolved, what will this one do? It’s going to follow the lead of others and resolve quickly.

There’s one part that become almost shocking and that was measure 6 through 7 which consisted of iv\(^{6/5}\) to VII to III\(^{6/5}\) to VI which becomes an interesting diatonic sound in the minor mode. The progression in measures 70 through 72 is very similar, except that the appearance of b-natural kills d-minor as the tonic. The harmonic rhythm of measure 70 through 72 is eight times as fast as measures 58 through 69. It continues to move until it concludes with an a-minor tonic on the first beat of measure 73. The opening a-minor tonality is prolonged to this point. This is the I of a I-IV-V progression. The IV appears in the third and fourth beat of measure 73, and V arrives in measure 74 and is prolonged to measure 79. This may appear to be a bit extreme as it’s a 72 or so long tonic prolongation but it appears that Shanker definitely knew what they were doing in their analysis. Following the 72 measures of tonic prolongation, is 2 beats of subdominant and six measures of dominant. With this prolongation, it’s a wonderful way to “wind-up” for the closing measures of the development section.

**Recapitulation**

**Theme Group I**

The recapitulation could be summarized as a I-IV-V-I with the whole thing being a half cadence from measure 1 through measure 79 followed by a full cadence from measure 80 to measure 133. With the recapitulation starting at measure 79 as an ascending chromatic scale in sixteenth notes,
it leads well into measure 80 stating the a-minor tonic that has shown its face many times throughout the piece. The theme group I is prevalent in measures 79 through measure 87 into measure 88 with a second phrase being stated by the bass voice in a-minor yet again. The right hand is ornamenting the same theme that is familiar to the piece. The second phrase doesn’t last too long, around only 9 measures in length. The transition following the second phrase is from measure 97 through measure 102 then immediately jumps into theme two in measure 103. Theme two on paper appears to be in the relative major key of C-major but it’s deceptively not. Theme two also makes its appearance for no longer than 13 measures before rolling into the closing theme which ties all themes from the entire sonata together.

**Conclusion**

The entire work by Mozart is mere genius material and the fundamental structure that he places on the basic I-IV-V-I chord progression structure that most institutions follow to this date is a legacy gracefully held still to this day. It’s really a great opportunity to have the ability and skills to analyze works such as this one. One topic that was found to be interesting was the idea that Mozart wrote this piece shortly after his mother’s death.