

Dubravka Tomsic – May 9

ADAGIO IN B MINOR, K. 540

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
1756–1791

Mozart wrote the Adagio in B Minor in the spring of 1788 at a time when his financial condition was indeed desperate, as seen from the numerous begging letters to his fellow Freemason, the merchant Michael Puchberg. Considering its size, the Adagio was probably never intended as a slow movement for a sonata, but rather as an independent work. Mozart apparently sent it later that year to his sister for her use as a pianist.

Mozart was the master of the slow movement; his adagios and andantes contain some of the most emotionally charged music in all of classical music, and none more so than this work. While the Adagio is charged with pathos, it could only be the pathos of a musical genius. Mozart uses every possible resource within the limits of classical harmony and counterpoint to retain the emotional tension, but he does so through a series of stunning harmonic progressions and modulations *tour de force* for the left brain as well as the right. The thematic material consists of only a few short melodic motives, but these fragments are exquisitely combined and reordered to play different roles within the large structure of the work. The Adagio is one of Mozart's most harmonically complex works for solo piano.

KEYBOARD SONATAS

Domenico Scarlatti
1685–1757

K. 159 in C Major
K. 11 in C Minor
K. 125 in G Major
K. 29 in D Major

Relatively little is known about the childhood and early career of Domenico Scarlatti. His father, Alessandro, who was a successful opera composer, was probably Domenico's principal teacher. But Alessandro was also something of a prototype for Leopold Mozart, hauling his talented son around Italy looking for appropriate appointments for him and vetoing most of them as unsuitable for one reason or another. Of Domenico's activities in Rome, for example, we know nothing except that it was there that he met and befriended the young George Frideric Handel (born in the same year) against whom he was pitted in an organ and harpsichord competition. Handel's first biographer, John Mainwaring, attests to the friendship that developed between the two young composers, and to Handel's opinion that Scarlatti had "the sweetest temper and genteelest behavior." For the first part of his career, Domenico assumed several positions in Italy as court musician and *maestro di cappella*, writing religious music and several operas.

Then in 1724, he received the break that put his name on the map, his appointment as *maestro di cappella* at the royal court in Lisbon. Here his duties included teaching the Infanta Maria Barbara, later to become Queen of Spain. Maria Barbara must have been some harpsichordist! Scarlatti wrote hundreds of sonatas for her, many of which require the utmost in technical dexterity and musical virtuosity. Given the seclusion in which she was forced to live in the Spanish court, at least she had her talent to keep her from going mad – like some of her less fortunate forebears.

Although Scarlatti had already composed a considerable number of keyboard sonatas while he was still living in Italy, one of the signatures of his Spanish works has been the inclusion of Iberian folk melodies and harmonies. It has even been suggested that he assimilated local melodies as he moved around the cities of Spain with the Court. He was aware that the inclusion of these popular melodies and the clustered dissonances of Spanish flamenco harmony broke all the classic rules of harmony and counterpoint, but neither he nor his royal patroness seemed even slightly concerned. Scarlatti spent the last part of his life compiling his works for Queen Maria Barbara into fifteen volumes, which the Queen bequeathed to Farinelli, the famous castrato, who in turn left them to Venice's Biblioteca Marciana. While most of Scarlatti's music was not published during his lifetime, soon after his death, "Scarlatti cults" cropped up in England, Paris and Vienna as aficionados collected and disseminated his music.

Most of Scarlatti's sonatas consist of a single movement in two repeated sections (known as binary form), in which the first part moves away from the tonic and the second part returns to it. The second part develops the musical ideas from the first, indulging in limited modulations to other keys, and can often open with new thematic material (harpsichordist Ralph Kirkpatrick (1911–1984), whose "K" numbering system is now the standard in the Scarlatti catalogue, called these "open sonatas.") Both parts, however, always contain a common concluding motive. The binary structure, which takes its structure from dance suite, is the immediate precursor of classical sonata form.

Scarlatti wrote some of the sonatas in pairs in the same key or in major/minor combinations, thereby creating larger two-movement entities. Evidence for this pairing emerged from the relatively recent scholarship of Kirkpatrick. Nevertheless, most performers mix and match sonatas to create their own set of moods and contrasts.

While Scarlatti's sonatas are usually associated with the harpsichord, Maria Barbara is known to have owned some of the earliest fortepianos, and some of the sonatas may have been written specifically for these instruments. Scarlatti's entire oeuvre is now routinely heard on everything from guitar to calliope and even in orchestral arrangements.

As a rule, each of Scarlatti's sonatas raises its own technical challenge. His style calls for fingers capable of great independence. Although the large structure is the same for all the sonatas, Scarlatti employs countless devices to bring variety into a standard template, including dances or all types, fugues and toccatas.

K. 11 in C and K. 29 in D were included in Scarlatti's first publication, *Esercizi per Gravicembalo*, which he dedicated to his patron, King João V of Portugal, who had conferred a knighthood upon him. Ironically, the *Esercizi* were published in London, thereby becoming Scarlatti's best-known works outside the Iberian peninsula. The serene K. 11 includes neither technical problems nor any of Scarlatti's Spanish harmonies; it appears to be an early work, probably composed while the composer was still in Italy. K. 29, on the other hand, is a musically sophisticated and virtuosic piece that departs in some ways from the composer's standard binary structure. It opens with rapid ascending scalar passage, whose inversion opens the second half of the Sonata. A pounding chordal section follows, which Scarlatti repeats in another key before proceeding onto the toccata-like closing theme. The contrast between the nature and difficulty of these two sonatas is the best evidence that the *Esercizi* cannot be regarded as a selection from a single stylistic period.

K. 125 and K. 159 are found in the Venice manuscripts mentioned above, copied for Maria Barbara in 1752. Given the date of the manuscript towards the end of the composer's life, one finds in this compendium examples of his most sophisticated writing. Yet, the Venice manuscripts also contain sonatas in an easier style, perhaps intended for a student at court of lesser talent than the Queen.

K. 159 is among the most popular of Scarlatti's sonatas with modern audiences, partly because it was included in the Ralph Kirkpatrick edition of 60 Sonatas. In this Sonata Scarlatti creates metrical ambiguity between 6/8 and 3/4 time. It is a "closed" sonata, since a variation of the opening theme is used to begin the second part. Its most forward-looking feature, however, is the appearance of the original version of opening theme to begin a true recapitulation.

K. 125, composed in two-part counterpoint, is an "open" sonata in which the second half introduces new thematic material.

PIANO SONATA No. 3 IN A MINOR, Op. 28

Sergey Prokofiev
1891–1953

Prokofiev was a composer caught between two cultures. Born into an affluent and musical family, he left the Soviet Union almost immediately after the 1917 revolution and World War I. For the next twenty years he toured the United States and lived in Paris, then returned to his native country, never to leave again.

Prokofiev composed the Piano Sonata No. 3 in 1917, in the midst of the upheavals of the revolution, although he distanced himself physically as much as possible from the political turmoil, spending a good part of the summer and fall in the Caucasus. It was an exceptionally fruitful year for the composer, who produced his First ("Classical") Symphony, First Violin Concerto, Piano Sonatas No. 3 and 4, *Visions Fugitives* for piano and the cantata *Seven, They are Seven*.

The Piano Sonata No. 3 bears the subtitle "From old notebooks" and is a reworking of material from one of the composer's childhood sonatas. The single short movement is a study in dramatic contrasts, for which his use of conventional sonata form is certainly fitting: the breathless *Allegro tempestoso* of the opening against dreamy lyric *Moderato* in the second theme. One of the more interesting features of this sonata is Prokofiev's use of long crescendos and diminuendos, plus a gradual thickening and thinning of the musical texture to control tension. The work, written for the composer's own use, is clearly meant to demonstrate his accomplished pianism.

MACEDONIAN DANCES

Alojz Srebotnjak
b. 1931

Slovenian composer and educator Alojz Srebotnjak graduated from the Ljubljana Academy of Music in 1958, followed by additional study in Rome, London, Paris and Siena. He taught composition from 1970 until 2001 at his alma mater in Ljubljana. While he is probably best known in Slovenia for his documentary and feature film scores from the 1960s and 1970s, he also composed in most other genres. He embraced Serialism and also employed aleatoric techniques (music of randomness and chance), as well as the indigenous folk music of Slovenia and other Balkan ethnic groups. Srebotnjak is married to noted Slovenian pianist Dubravka

Tomsic, to whom *Macedonian Dances* was dedicated.

The *Macedonian Dances*, composed in 1976, utilize Macedonia's folk music and dance rhythms. They are reminiscent in their shifting rhythms and meter of Bartók's "Six Dances in Bulgarian Rhythm" from Book VI of *Mikrokósmos*, but they are generally more virtuosic in their demands on the pianist. Srebotnjak transcribed the dances for string orchestra, as well as for the unusual combination of two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons and percussion.

Numbers 1, 3, and 5 are fast, while Nos. 2 and 4 are slow. Srebotnjak's melodic and harmonic language combines the traditional South-Slavic modality with dissonant tone clusters. In form, the dances generally adhere to the ABA-like structure.

The first dance shifts eighth-note time signatures. In the second the melodic line moves in narrow intervals above the syncopated ostinato rhythmic figure intended to evoke the beats of the large Macedonian double-headed *tapan* drum. The third dance also features a pulsating ostinato. It is followed, in No. 4, by a somber dance in which a series of accentuated, repeated figures interlaced with slow polyphonic lines in the low register of the keyboard; it is the most dissonant of the five dances. The final dance combines a variety of tempi and cross-rhythms.

KLAVIERSTÜCKE

Op. 118,	No. 1, Intermezzo in A Minor	Johannes Brahms
	No. 2, Intermezzo in A Major	1833–1897
	No. 6, Intermezzo in E-flat Minor	Op.
119,	No. 4, Rhapsody in E-flat Major	

Late in life Brahms composed a number of short piano pieces, 20 of which he published. But friends and colleagues attest that he destroyed others in his characteristic perfectionist manner. He gave the works, such vague titles as "Intermezzo," "Fantasie," "Ballade," "Romance" or "Rhapsody," which did not demand adherence to any particular formal design – often not deciding on the title until the last minute before publication. He compiled and published them in four sets, Op. 116 through 119.

The six *Klavierstücke*, Op. 118 were published in 1893, together with the four of Op. 119. Brahms's friend and biographer, Max Kalbeck suspected that some of their material had originated years earlier. But Brahms, of course, had destroyed any notes and documents that would have helped us trace the development of his musical ideas. Only the final autograph survived his fireplace. The first public performance of Op. 118 and Op. 119 was given in London in January 1894 by the beautiful and talented Ilona Eibenschütz, a student of Clara Schumann, who may have been the inspiration for some of the works.

The dominant character of the pieces in Op. 118 and 119 is reflective and introspective, with little of the bravura or assertiveness of Brahms's earlier piano music. All of the pieces, except No. 1, are in ABA form, with more or less contrasting middle sections. No. 1 is a fascinating gem with both tonally and metrical ambiguous. No. 2 is a dreamy lullaby, with subtle shifts in mood and expression achieved via *tempo rubato* and the underlying harmonies of the basic motive. Its middle section contains new thematic material but retains the original mood and continues to develop fragments of the main theme.

If Op. 118 had been intended as a set to be played in its entirety, certainly the conservative Brahms would have adhered to the fast and loud tradition of final movements. Instead, a stark unaccompanied theme opens the final piece in the group in a darker more introspective mood than in the rest of the Op. 118 set. Nevertheless, the middle section breaks out of the mood with a passionate Hungarian rhythm only to return to the somber conclusion.

Op. 119, No. 4, harks back to the “heroic” style of the composer’s middle years. He described it to Clara Schumann as “Rough, crude, brutal,” although it has a charming *grazioso* middle section. Perhaps it is the uneven phrasing and resulting unusual rhythms that Brahms regarded as “crude” or “brutal.”

PIANO SONATA No. 23 IN F MINOR, Op. 57
APPASSIONATA

Ludwig van Beethoven
1770–1827

Composed in 1804–05, the Piano Sonata Op. 57 was dedicated to one of Beethoven’s close friends at the time, the Hungarian Count Franz von Brunsvik. With its stormy character and explosive dynamics, this sonata appealed to the Romantics who, searching for a program and not finding any, did not hesitate to invent quite a few themselves. The theme of the Artist as Tragic Hero, which haunted German Romantic literature at the time, seemed in this work to be a reflection of Beethoven’s own heroism in the face of adversity. The title “*Sonata Appassionata*” appeared first ten years after the composer’s death on the title page of an edition of his own four-hand arrangement. While not Beethoven’s, the title has stuck.

Although the Sonata conforms to well established Classical forms in its three movements, that conformity takes nothing away from its unprecedented originality and emotional intensity. The depth of the work is manifested by Beethoven’s exploration of entire range of the keyboard at his disposal, abrupt shifts in texture, dynamics and harmonic organization. Pianists and audiences since Beethoven’s time tend to take for granted the stormy outbursts of the composer’s musical personality, but the musical intensity and pianistic techniques were innovative and disturbing for their time. A possible precedent is Mozart’s *Fantasia in C Minor*, K. 475.

Underneath the storm and stress of the first movement lies a tightly crafted musical structure. The introduction includes fragments of the first theme, particularly the rhythm of the opening notes, which is used again to open the second theme, only inverted melodically. The real fireworks begin with a third theme that takes off in the bass, accompanied by an arpeggio figure that quickly spikes up to the other end of the keyboard.

The slow movement, like the calm eye of a storm, is a set of four variations on a chorale-like theme. The first three variations ascend gradually into the higher piano register, and the fourth presents a repeat of the theme modified harmonically, interrupted suddenly by the bridge to the last movement.

The transition to the finale returns to the intense mood of the first movement. There is more of a sense of perpetual motion in this movement than in the jagged first movement. Except for a few passages, the main theme, an arpeggiated melody that contains within it its own accompaniment, is interrupted with staccato outbursts, frequently using hand crossing. A Presto coda with pounding chords leads into an accelerated reprise of the main theme.

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