



Three Mozart Sonatas in F

BY DONALD ALFANO

Although Mozart lived only 35 years, his 18 piano sonatas represent three distinct compositional styles. The early sonatas were conceived for the harpsichord, and many individual movements resemble the dance movements of baroque suites. In sonatas of the middle style, a bel-canto approach and theatrical juxtaposition of ideas show the influence of opera. The late sonatas combine a return to idiomatic keyboard writing with a new interest in counterpoint and subtle harmonic innovations. Three sonatas in F major illustrate the three styles: No. 2, K. 280, composed in 1774; No. 12, K. 332, composed in 1778; and No. 15, K. 533/494, composed in 1786 and 1788.

Mozart's early compositional career coincided with the shift from baroque complexity to classical simplicity and from the harpsichord to the piano as the principal keyboard instrument. Not surprisingly, the influence of baroque and pre-classic music is especially apparent in the early sonatas.

One baroque carry-over is the element of dance. As Leonard Ratner states, "Dance topics saturate the concert and theatre music of the classic style."¹ Mozart was exposed to dance suites as a youngster; in 1762 Leopold Mozart gave Wolfgang the *Little Music Book*, a compilation of dance suites and dance movements, for his seventh birthday. Mozart's early keyboard sonatas clearly reflect this heritage.

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Mozart at 33

Each movement of the Sonata K. 280 resembles a dance movement. The first adopts the style of a minuet, the most popular dance of the classical era.



A rhythmic pattern of dotted eighth, sixteenth, and eighth notes dominates the second movement, a Siciliano in F minor.



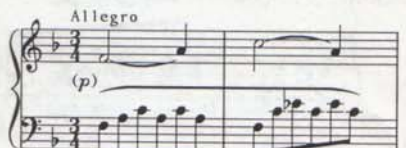
The same pattern contributes to the dance character of the finale, a gigue-like Presto in F major.



This movement accentuates the connection between the sonata and a baroque dance suite, as the gigue is the traditional last movement in such suites.

Another feature K. 280 shares with the dance suite is key scheme: major, parallel minor, major. Unity of key also characterizes the suites of Leopold Mozart's *Little Music Book*; the preface of the Kalmus edition (1950) states, "A further sign of Leopold's sense of tradition is evident in his strict observance of key unity within the individual suite allowing for the major or minor parallel."² This key unity among movements is rare in Mozart's later piano sonatas.

The Sonata K. 332 represents a more classical idiom. The juxtaposition of contrasting ideas creates a theatrical effect reminiscent of Mozart's operas; in the opening 25 measures of K. 332 the lyrical main theme is interrupted by a hunting fanfare, followed by a turbulent transition in D minor.



measure 13



measure 23



Throughout his career Mozart sought to incorporate the bel-canto style into his instrumental works. The opening theme of K. 332 is one example; another is the sonata's second movement, an elaborately ornamented Adagio in B \flat major.

In contrast to the theatrical nature and bel-canto style of the middle-period sonatas, Mozart's final sonatas return to idiomatic keyboard writing and often feature counterpoint, monothematicism, and new textural and harmonic arrangements. For example, Mozart announces the main theme of the Allegro of K. 533 in one voice, like a fugue subject.



An answering statement appropriately enters in the lower voice in measure 8. Mozart proceeds to derive the movement's second and third themes from this main theme, which also dominates the development section.

K. 533 achieves harmonic subtlety through the avoidance of cadences, creating the effect of endless melody. In the second movement the first authentic cadence occurs only after 46 measures, at the end of the exposition.

The Sonata K. 533/494 juxtaposes the polyphonic, monothematic style

of the Allegro and Andante (K. 533) with the homophonic style of the Rondo (K. 494). Mozart composed the first two movements in 1788 to pay a debt to his friend and publisher Hoffmeister; he wrote the Rondo for a pupil in 1786 and later used it as the finale of the Allegro and Andante. Alfred Einstein asserts that in combining the movements, "Mozart paid no attention to unity of style";³ yet Mozart ingeniously modified the Rondo to be compatible with the previous two movements by interpolating a cadenza (measures 143-169) recalling their polyphonic textures.⁴ Particularly striking is the series of chain suspensions beginning at measure 152.



A gradual thinning of texture brings the return to the Rondo theme.

Although these three F major Sonatas were written within a span of only fourteen years, they nevertheless display three distinct styles of keyboard writing. After emulating the baroque dance suite in K. 280 and exploiting classical contrasts in K. 332, Mozart borrowed more subtly from baroque style with the monothematic structures and polyphonic textures of K. 533. □

Footnotes:

1. Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music*, Schirmer Books, 1980, p. 18.
2. Leopold Mozart, ed., *The Little Music Book* (1762), E. Kalmus Publishers, 1950, p. 7.
3. Alfred Einstein, *Mozart: His Character, His Work*, Oxford University Press, 1945, p. 248.
4. For a more detailed discussion see "The Two Versions of Mozart's Rondo in F, K. 494" by Hans Neumann and Carl Schacter, *The Music Forum*, Columbia University Press, 1967.