

Analysis of Performance Techniques in the First Movement of Haydn's Piano Sonata in B-flat Major

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Abstract. Haydn's compositional career was inseparable from the creation of sonata works, which culminated in 1794 with the completion of his final three sonatas. The "Piano Sonata in B-flat major" (Hob.XVI/52) is the most mature in structure and technically complex of Haydn's sonata works. The first movement is particularly representative. This article analyzes the work's formal structure and performance techniques based on previous research and, in conjunction with performance practice, mainly summarizes and generalizes from the perspectives of performance technique and musicality.

Keywords: Haydn; B-flat major piano sonata; playing techniques.

1. Introduction

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809), an Austrian composer, was a significant figure of the Viennese Classical School and the foremost of the three great composers known as the "Classical Masters." He is acclaimed as the "Father of the String Quartet," "Father of Orchestral Music," and "Father of the Symphony Music." Born during the Baroque period, Haydn's main compositional period was during the Classical era. The piano sonata was an important field of his instrumental works. After 1802, Haydn ceased composing and passed away in Vienna on May 31, 1809.

There are significant differences between Haydn's early and late sonatas. During Haydn's early compositional period (before 1766), which coincided with the transition from Baroque to Classical music, also known as Haydn's youth period, his works were characterized by an elegant style, often referred to as "Divertimento" or "Partita," which were multi-movement works and products of the Sturm und Drang period. However, due to the poor preservation of manuscripts from this time, only eighteen keyboard sonatas have survived intact. Haydn's middle compositional period was from 1767 to 1784, also known as the Esterházy Court period, during which his works became longer and more numerous, focusing primarily on sonatas, string quartets, and symphonies, with structures gradually becoming more elaborate. Haydn's late compositional period was between 1789 and 1794, marking the peak of his creative output. During this time, his works exhibited a mature and refined style, with increased technical difficulty and an emphasis on the importance of playing technique. Most of them display a sense of freedom and are filled with a rich and boundless imagination. The "Piano Sonata in B-flat major" (Hob.XVI/52) was composed during this period and is often referred to as "Haydn's greatest piano sonata."

2. Musical Analysis of Haydn's Piano Sonata in B-flat Major

2.1 The Compositional Background of Haydn's Piano Sonata in B-flat Major

In the latter half of the 18th century, The Enlightenment and the rise of the bourgeoisie weakened the development of Baroque and Rococo styles [4]. From 1760 to 1780, the young urban bourgeoisie in Germany initiated a literary emancipation movement known as the Sturm und Drang (Storm and Stress) movement. This period advocated for "freedom" and "emancipation of individuality," proposing the slogan "return to nature." This phase emphasized the expression of internal conflicts of human emotions and the spirit of striving, suggesting that literary works should reflect people's emotional lives and highlight individuals' emotional needs. Against this backdrop, Haydn composed the "Piano Sonata in B-flat major" (Hob.XVI/52) for Miss Therese Jansen Bartholdy in London in 1794. The "Piano Sonata in B-flat major" features strong contrasts and dramatic elements, with a sonata structure, variation forms, and repetitive techniques, as well as musical motifs, organization,

harmony, and counterpoint methods achieving a high degree of unity. The melody is lofty and free, and the performance techniques and harmonic formal structure are complex and rich.

2.2 Analysis of the Musical Characteristics of Haydn's Piano Sonata in B-flat Major

2.2.1 The formal structure of Haydn's Piano Sonata in B-flat major

The structure of this composition is in sonata form, consisting of three parts: the exposition, development, and recapitulation. The tonality is in E-flat major, the meter is 4/4, and the tempo is allegro. However, from the initial motifs of each part to the overall form, there is a persistent triple-meter rhythmic feel, giving the first movement a sense of dance like lightness as well as serious and grand musical characteristics. The first movement totals measure 116 and is a short, symmetrical form with a square structure, making the presentation of the music more straightforward and clear. The analysis of its formal structure is shown in Figure 1.

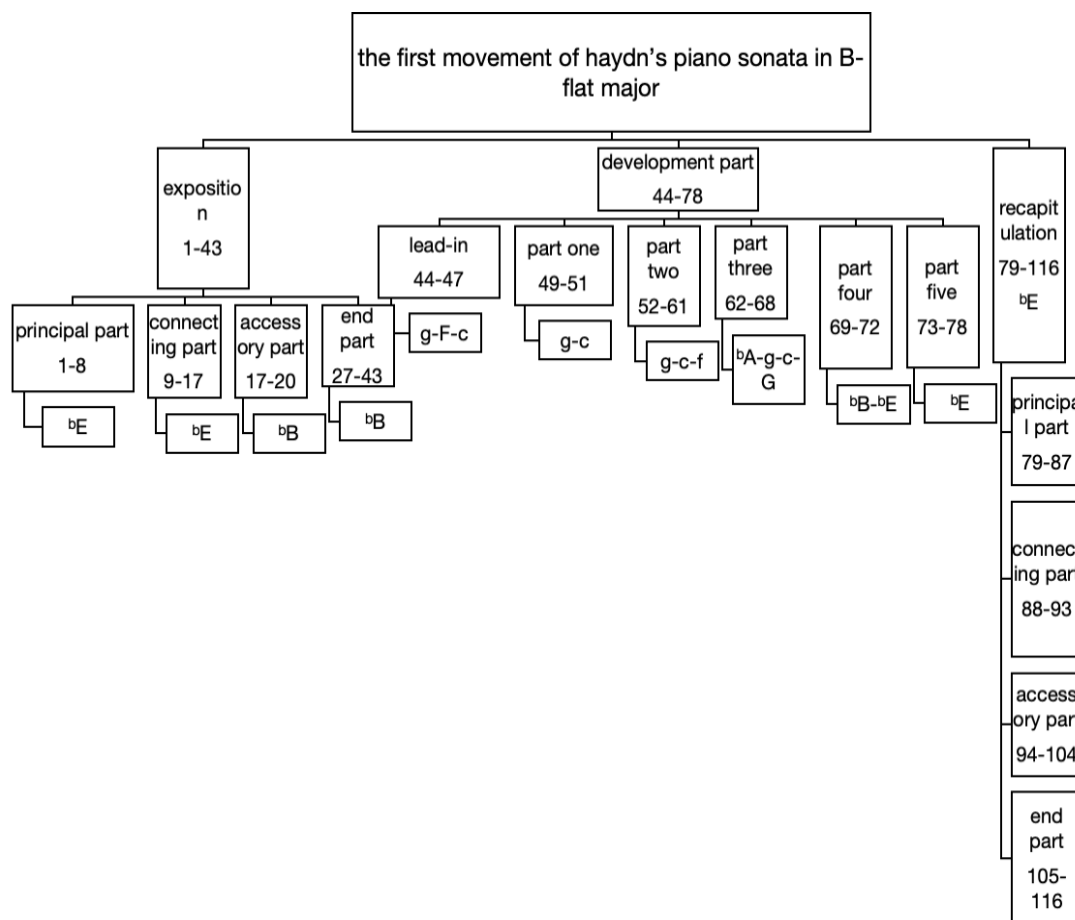


Figure 1. Formal structure analysis of the first movement of Haydn's Piano Sonata in B-flat major

In the exposition (measures 1-43), the main theme is in E-flat major, divided into two phrases: a (measures 1-5) and b (measures 6-10), with the main theme ending in a closed structure. The measures 9-10 in the connecting section are an imitation of the main theme's measures 1-2, transposed up an octave. The right-hand serves as the accompaniment texture, and the left-hand serves as the melodic voice part, progressing downward in steps. Starting from measure 14, the texture uses the dominant sixteenth arpeggio, ending with sextuplets, modulating to the dominant chord of B-flat major before entering the secondary theme. The secondary theme serves to consolidate and develop the original motif, with the tonality being B-flat major.

Exposition (measures 44-78): The constant change of tonality, with the appearance of various tonalities such as C minor, F minor, F major, and bA major, makes the melodic colors more vivid and rich.

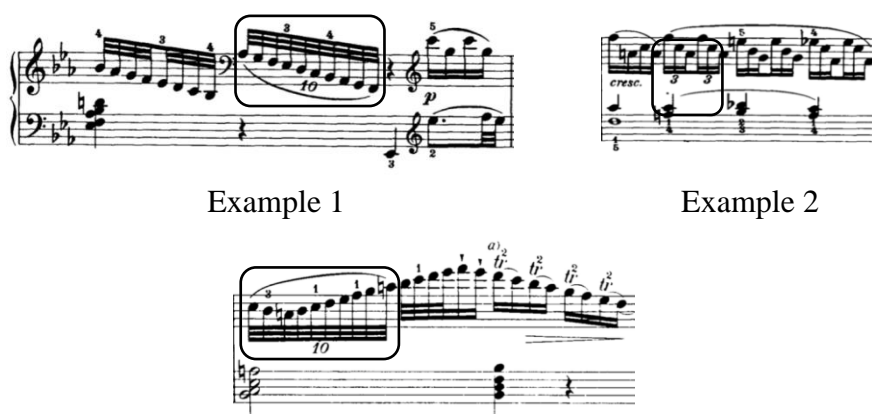
The recapitulation (measures 79-116) is divided into: the main theme (measures 79-87), the transition (measures 88-93), the secondary theme (measures 94-104), and the coda (measures 105-116). The main theme begins in B-flat major, expanding on the material from the exposition, and the subsequent addition becomes a continuous stream of sixteenth notes as the texture. The transition starts at measure 88 with the left hand taking the melodic line, and at measure 91 the melody returns to the right-hand. From measure 98 until the end, it is a decomposition and sequence of the material from the exposition. The coda material is fully recapitulated in the tonic without variation, vividly demonstrating the symphonic character of Haydn's sonata.

2.2.2 The tonal characteristics of Haydn's Piano Sonata in B-flat major

The tonal characteristics of this movement are primarily major, with minor as a secondary feature [5]. The main section of the exposition begins in bE major, the connecting section transitions from bE major at measure 14 to bB major, while the subordinate section consistently remains in bB major. At the end section, there is a brief modulation from bb minor to bB major. In the development section, the tonal changes are intense. It first modulates to F major at measure 47, then to g minor at measure 49, followed by c minor, and at measure 58, it modulates to f minor. At measure 60, there is a tonic and dominant chord alternation, transitioning to bA major. At measure 64, it modulates back to g minor, then to c minor, G major, and at measure 68, material from the end section is used for a sequence, transitioning to bB major. At measure 72, the tonality returns to bE major for the dominant preparation, and the development section ends with a dominant seventh arpeggio in bE major at measure 78. The recapitulation section is in bE major with no tonal changes.

2.2.3 Rhythm change

The movement is in 4/4 time, with a characteristic pattern of strong-weak- secondary strong-weak that propels the music forward, full of fluidity. The piece is largely composed of sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The variations in rhythm are mainly concentrated in the exposition, with a descending ten-note run appearing on the second beat of the measure 10 (Example 1), six consecutive triplets appearing in the measure 16 (Example 2), and a winding ten-note run appearing on the first beat of the measure 19 (Example 3).



Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Figure 2. Music example

2.2.4 Harmony

The harmonic function of this movement is primarily based on "tonic-dominant-tonic," with a clear harmonic texture and alternating tonic-dominant progressions. The harmonic function of the exposition is "tonic-dominant- close relationship modulation." The modulation begins at measure 44, transitioning into g minor, with the left-hand playing an octave descending stepwise, ultimately

landing on the tonic chord of g minor on the fourth beat of measure 45. Immediately following, it enters C major with the intensity of *f*, with the right-hand's prominent melodic line descending to the dominant of C major. At measure 46, the left-hand sustains the tonic of C major with thirty-second notes for a brief moment, and finally, it ends with a cadence on the tonic chord of C major. It then modulates into F major, where the left hand's intervals, octaves, and chords are based on the arpeggio of the tonic of F major as the bass line, enhancing the melodic sense of the modulation. At measure 51, the left hand's bass part sustains for four beats, with the lengthening of the duration creating tension with the consonant or dissonant intervals produced by other voices. The subsequent modulations demonstrate being dominated by the "tonic-dominant" relationship.

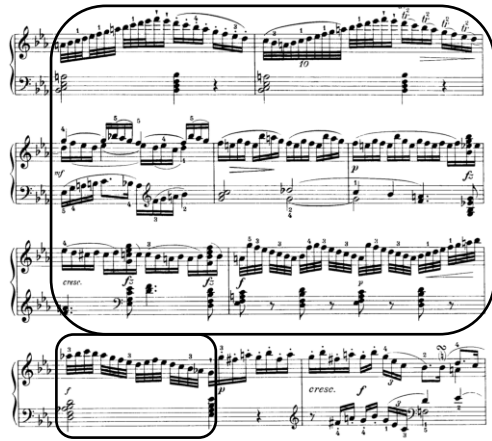
In this work, Haydn employed compositional techniques such as compound melody, compound counterpoint and imitation within the framework of a homophonic texture [6]. For instance, the measures 6-13 of the first movement utilized the technique of compound melody. The musical material, consisting of groups of four notes, created two descending melodies a second apart by combining the first and third notes with the second and fourth, producing a smooth and soothing effect. Double counterpoint was used to create a regular variation in the progression of the two melodies, which alternated between different voices, emphasizing the melody.

The first movement is a moderate allegro, with a structured form and regular rhythm. Haydn utilized the extensive range of the piano, taking advantage of its varied timbres and rich harmonic textures to express his thoughts and emotions, giving the work a certain dramatic tension.

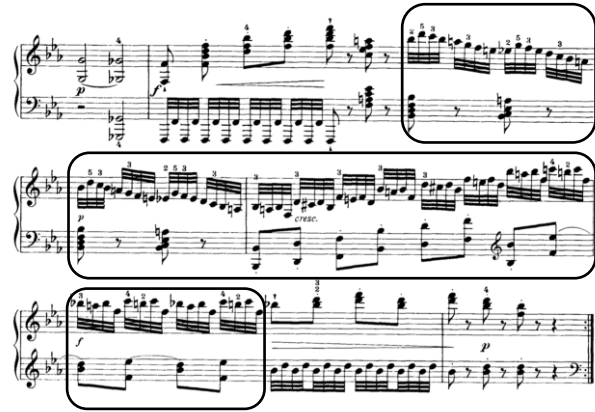
3. Analysis of Performance Techniques in Haydn's Piano Sonata in B-flat Major

3.1 Large-scale running paragraphs and their processing

The piece has several places with running passages, for example, measures 18-25, the right-hand has an 8-measure continuous run (Example 4), with dynamics ranging from strong to weak and back to strong, testing the fingers' control over dynamics. It's advisable to first practice the dynamics control of each small phrase slowly and separately, and once the control is enhanced, then proceed to practice accelerating. Measures 40-42 (Example 5) feature a scale run that goes from top to bottom and then bottom to top, with each note needing to be played evenly, and the speed of the third finger changing position should be fast to ensure the smoothness of the run. Measures 48-57 (Example 6) involve intermittent large-scale runs, with measures 49 and 50 being the arc-shaped runs for the right-hand, measure 51 featuring intermittent pauses that temporarily converge the previous musical phrase, and starting from measure 52, there is a continuous 5-measure run for both hands going downwards, with a special emphasis on the loudest dynamic (*ff*) marked notes in each phrase of both hands to echo the themes. When practicing, pay attention to the continuity of the phrases and appropriately use the wrist to guide the direction of the phrases (the expression needs to be clearer). The continuous runs of the right-hand from measures 61-65 (Example 7) start with scalar movements, followed by stepwise upward and downward runs. From measure 112 onwards, the right-hand performs runs from top to bottom and then bottom to top, ending at measure 114 (Example 8). Large-scale running exercises require the performer to ensure the clarity and granularity of the music, maintaining the smoothness of the melody while making each note clear and vivid, which necessitates enhanced emotional processing. Therefore, playing should maintain the coordination of the arm and wrist and the sensitivity of the fingers' touch. During practice, a method of changing rhythms can be adopted, playing each note clearly before finally practicing at the original tempo.



Example 4



Example 5



Example 6



Example 7



Example 8

Figure 3. Running passages

3.2 Continuous progression of double sounds

Double notes occur frequently at the beginning and end, for example, starting from the second sixteenth note of the last beat of the measure 3, (Example 9) there are two groups of repeated double notes, and the third group begins a downward progression of double notes in the right-hand for a

measure. It converges to the E note in the next measure, which is the tonic. The E note is the end of the previous measure and the beginning of the next. The measure 80 of the recapitulation also repeat the opening part of the exposition. The measures 34-36 (Example 10) where the hands echo each other, that is, the corresponding part of the recapitulation, also feature three groups of consecutive double notes. When playing double notes, it is easy to have issues such as missing notes, scraping sounds, and uneven rhythm. During the playing process, the fingers should be as close to the keys as possible, minimizing the movement of changing fingers, and accelerating the speed of connection. While playing, the hands should be relaxed yet have a certain amount of support, the fingers should not "bend," and the wrist should shift with the direction of the melody.



Example 9

Example 10

Figure 4. Double notes

In terms of rhythm, due to the work being from the classical period, there are strict requirements for the control of rhythm. One must pay attention to the duration changes of double notes, thirty-second notes, ten-note groups, and dotted rhythms. For example, the rhythm in measures 10-12 (Example 11) transitions from thirty-second notes to a ten-note group and then to sixteenth notes. It is important to note the direction of the musical phrase. In the third beat of measure 10, the previous phrase is concluded and then a stable rhythm of six measures of sixteenth notes begins. When practicing, it is essential to focus on the rhythm change from the first beat to the second beat of measure 10. You can practice the two rhythms separately with a metronome. In the ten-note group, do not delay the subsequent rhythm and maintain the continuity of the phrase without missing notes or glissandi. In measures 27-29 (Example 12), the right-hand plays a post-dot rhythm, requiring a light and agile touch when played. Each post-dot rhythm should be maintained with uniformity, and attention should be paid to the converging progression of each musical phrase.

In terms of dynamics, the first movement features a clear contrast between loud and soft, presenting a process from loud to soft and back to loud overall, mainly using *f* and *p*. The full range of dynamic changes reflects Haydn's symphonic concept during composition. Taking the beginning as an example, the measures 1-2 feature a dynamic transition from *f-p-mf-f-p*. The harmonic effect reaches its climax at the end of the measure 4, and then gradually diminishes in intensity back to *p*. For example, in measures 27-29 (Example 12), the two-note slur is combined with a staccato-legato technique, so the second note should be slightly heavier in dynamics than the first, and the melodic line also falls on the second note. Regarding the use of the pedal, the first movement primarily employs the right pedal, mainly as a synchronized pedal. In handling the pedal, it is important to ensure the continuity of the pedal, with natural and tight connections between releasing and pressing. It is used more often to extend and maintain the connection of single notes, providing a more perfect sound color effect for the work. For example, in the measures 1-2 (Example 9), the short synchronized pedal can be used, changing every beat to present a symphonic sound effect, thereby increasing the richness of the harmony and fully displaying the grand and magnificent atmosphere.



Example 11



Example 12

Figure 5. The dynamic display of melod and use of pedals

4. Summary

Haydn's life left behind fifty-two piano sonatas, and he perfected this genre into one of the most mature and popular genres of the Classical period, with his works having a profound impact on future generations. The "Piano Sonata in B-flat major" features rich harmonic changes, a strict formal structure, and complex playing techniques, reflecting the shift in performance style from the harpsichord to the modern piano and revealing a strong classical aesthetic. This article analyzes the formal structure and playing techniques of the "Piano Sonata in B-flat major".

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