**Bomtempo Sonata Op. 18 n.1 - structural analysis of the 1st movement and some remarks on its themes**

Eixo temático: Interfaces entre teoria, análise e performance musical

Abstract:

In this paper we will focus on a piece written by Portuguese composer João Domingos Bomtempo (1775-1842) that reveals both his deep knowledge of the instrument and his full mastery of composition. Bomtempo’s Sonata Op. 18 n.1 was composed in 1816 (Santos, 1992), a time when the composer, after a ten-year hiatus during which he lived first in Paris (1801-1810) and then in London (1810-1814), was back to Portugal and divided his time between Lisbon, Paris and London. This sonata was “dedicated to his friend W. F. Collard” and was published by Clementi & Comp., a firm in which Collard was a partner. Sonata Op. 18 n.1 in G major, alongside sonatas Op. 1 and Op. 13 is one of the shortest and less virtuosic sonatas that Bomtempo composed, but, despite its simplicity, it is rich in contrasts and structurally ingenious. In this article we will deal not only with the structure of the piece, but also with the relationship between themes, tonal regions, and the contrapuntal structure of the 1st movement of the piece.

Exposition

The 1st theme has the structure of an irregular period of 17 bars (Fig. 1). The piece, in G major, begins with an initial ascent that reaches the Kopfton 3, supported by the Tonic (I) in m. 3, and descends to 2 over V in m. 4. This progression corresponds to the basic idea of the 1st theme (Fig. 2), the first four bars of the antecedent; the second half of the antecedent is a prolongation of the Dominant function, elaborated by means of voice exchange and parallel 10ths until we reach an interruption that corresponds to a HC in m. 8. The consequent starts identically from the antecedent but moves to the submediant (vi) that is preceded by its own Dominant (iii6 [#3]), initiating a cycle of fifths in the bass that prepares the PAC in the second half of the phrase (m. 13-17). The Bridge connecting the first and second tonal areas of the Exposition (I and V) is a sentence built from an ornated variation of the basic idea (Fig. 3) and brings the indication of dolce, referring to its character. Its beginning corresponds to an elision with the resolution of the previous sentence. We agree with Bacovis (2017) that there is no 2nd theme in the Exposition of this sonata. In fact, what we have is a kind of “continuous bridge”, with a first subsection that tonicizes D (V of G) and confirms the new tonal area by means of a break that alludes to a medial caesura in m. 30, but ultimately is best understood as articulating the V of D that arrives at the midpoint of a larger continuous bridge. The structural sketch of the entire exposition shows how it unfolds (Fig. 4). As we can see, the 2 over the V harmony is prolonged by means of a 5th descent from A to D (mm. 27-38) followed by a small coda.

Development

The development section is both structurally and thematically the one that arouses the most interest. After the EEC in D major (m. 41-47), this section begins with an E chord, the V/V of D, followed by a viiº 64 chord that resolves in A, V of D (Fig. 5). The theme is structured as a sentence, the basic idea and its varied repetition spanning from m. 51 to m. 54 and the continuation from m. 55 to m. 59. From mm. 59 to 62 we see a cadential prolongation that draws to the same vii° 64 that preceded the theme (Fig. 6). So, if this sonata doesn’t present a 2nd theme in the Exposition it somehow compensates its absence in the development section. Instead of being supported by the V degree (D) of the original tonality as a 2nd theme should have been, the new theme is supported by the V/V (A). In addition, it receives a special highlight when it is "framed"[[1]](#footnote-1) by the V – vii° chords that precede and follow it (m. 49 and m. 62). This new theme brings a delicate atmosphere, a change of character prepared and followed by a dramatic suspension in musical discourse (the cadential vii° chords). Its underlying structure can be seen in the next sketch (Fig. 7). The theme goes through a liquidation process that leads to a confirmation cadence in C major (mm. 69-71) followed by a coda (mm. 71-75) and a very short retransition (mm. 75-78). In terms of energy, the confirmation cadence in C is the climax of the piece (Fig. 8).

Recapitulation

The Recapitulation doesn’t bring any surprise, recovering the Kopfton 3 and unfolding as expected after the interruption in the end of the development. The whole structure of the 1st movement can be appreciated in the analytical sketch (Fig. 9). For the sake of clarity, a more synthetic sketch of the whole movement can be expressed (Fig. 10).

Conclusions

By way of conclusion, we recognize that the Sonata op. 18 is a good example of simplicity and mastery in Bomtempo's work. Unlike his virtuoso compositions, such as the piano Sonatas Op. 9, here the interest is not motivated mainly by the pianist's technical abilities, but by the subtle means by which he prepares tonal regions, distributes thematic materials, and so balances the work as a whole. The "framing" by diminished seventh chords that highlight the occurrence of the new theme in the development and its presence in a sonata that lacks a clear 2nd theme in the exposition is the main characteristic that we point out in our analysis, a discreet "signature" of this great Portuguese composer.

Keywords: João Domingos Bomtempo; Piano Sonata Op. 18, Nº 1; Schenkerian Analysis; 19th century Sonata; London Pianoforte School.

1. See Cone, 1985. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)