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PATHS OF ROMANTIC RENEWAL IN CHAMBER MUSIC IN F. SCHUBERT'S VIOLIN SONATINAS

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Abstract

In this article, the author analyzes the transition from Classicism to Romanticism using the example of F. Schubert's early romantic sonatinas for violin and piano, as well as the synthesis of these directions in the works of one composer. The shift of multiple tasks is associated with the performance of chamber music of various styles using new techniques, textures, and sound palettes. As a result, Schubert's unique style is formed – a new direction in music at the transitional moment of the birth of Romanticism.

Keywords: *classicism, romanticism, chamber music, sonata form, exposition, development, reprise, ensemble, violin, piano*

F. Schubert (1797–1828) was the first major representative of musical Romanticism, who, in the words of B. V. Asafyev, expressed “the joys and sorrows of life” as “they are felt and would be wished to be conveyed by most people.” The foundation of his music lies in human inner experiences without dramatic psychologism, but always with a subtle lyrical undertone. In Schubert's music, melody predominates, harmony is colorful, and the sound has a rich tonal hue. His style maintained a close connection with the traditions of the Viennese Classical school, to which he contributed much that was new. In his compositions, the composer used genuine Austrian folk melodies, as well as folklore from the Hungarian and Slavic peoples that were part of the Austrian Empire at that time.

Schubert lived in Vienna, which, even during less favorable creative periods, remained one of the musical capitals of the civilized world. Nevertheless, the mismatch between dream and reality, so apparent at the time, gave rise to feelings of longing and disappointment among creative individuals. Their protest against the rigid and self-satisfied bourgeois lifestyle manifested as an escape from reality and an attempt to create their own world within a small circle of friends, true connoisseurs of the beautiful. This sanctuary, which served the composer, turned out to be the realm of chamber music genres, and it began to take shape early in his creative path in the form of sonatinas for violin and piano, which are the focus of this article. It is precisely from the perspective of

chamber performance, where the transition from Classical to Romantic direction is clearly visible, along with their synthesis and differences.

Having lived a very short life (only thirty-one years), Schubert left behind a vast chamber instrumental legacy. He wrote: for violin and piano-3 sonatas (sonatinas in D major, A minor, and G minor, 1816), a sonata (duo in A major, 1817); an introduction and variations for flute and piano; a sonata for arpeggione and piano; a nocturne for piano trio, 2 piano trios, 2 string trios; string quartets; a piano quintet; an overture for string quintet; a string quintet; an octet for winds and horn; an octet for strings and winds; 6 minuets for wind nonet, and a nonet for winds.

The three sonatinas, Op. 137 (the author called them Sonatas), were written by Schubert in 1816 when he worked as an assistant teacher in his father's school, teaching children literacy and other basic subjects. Although all three sonatinas are very different in character and melodic themes, they are convenient for performance by beginning ensembles. In his treatment of the sonata form, Schubert relied on the principles of form-building established by the Viennese classics: overall cycle composition, genres that comprise it, the presence of intonational connections between movements, thematic development methods, etc. This is manifested in the pursuit of maximum simplicity and clarity of expression, proportionality of parts of the whole. As Schubert lived at the junction of two eras – Classical and Romantic – his sonatinas are interesting in terms of combining Classical features with the Romantic searches of the composer. The traditional, Classical compositional means in the sonata include general structural organization laws: the presence of all required sections, while maintaining the proportions of all form elements, saturating this form with a vast wealth of feelings and emotions of an individual – simplicity, sincerity, soulfulness, and spontaneity (“Volume 2” n.d. StudFiles. <https://studfile.net/preview/5357893/page:3>).

Sonatina No. 1 in D major, written in March 1816, follows the traditional three-movement sonata cycle. The first movement, *Allegro molto*, begins with a lyrical, song-like

theme of the main subject, played in unison by both instruments with a soft dynamic (*p*).

The 12-bar period consists of three sequential motifs, each of which has its own “climax.” These “climaxes” develop both in pitch and dynamics. That is, the performers must lead each motif toward its peak note and shape all three motifs with a gradual increase in dynamics. The theme then undergoes a variation-based development. The same motifs appear in the violin part and, after a measure, are echoed canonically in the bass of the piano, over a steady accompaniment of eighth notes in the middle register. Five such motifs on a crescendo lead to the climax of the exposition – *ff* – where the original song-like theme is transformed into a triumphant apotheosis of the main subject and is performed in unison by both instruments.

The secondary theme is similar in sound and structure to the main theme; the themes in both instruments' parts imitate similar motifs several times and are connected to the closing theme via a scale-like “bridge.” The closing theme has a playful, dance-like character. The marking *p dolce* suggests a soft and delicate sound production. The theme first appears in A major in the violin part, accompanied by piano chords; then the performers switch roles. In Schubert's sonatinas, the secondary theme is not an opposition or contrast, but rather a new song. Schubert's innovation lies in the unusual keys of the secondary themes, the transitions to the closing sections, and the restoration of the traditional key of the secondary theme.

The development section is not a dramatic confrontation of themes as in classical form, but a variation-based elaboration of the main theme. The structure and rhythm of the main motif are preserved, while its intonational coloring changes; the motifs are repeated in various variations and keys, reaching a climax, confirmed by a descending second in the violin part to an accented B-flat. Dissolving from there, the music leads us into the recapitulation. In the recapitulation, the main theme is slightly expanded and dramatized through modulations, first to G minor and then culminating in G major. The secondary theme modulates from A major back to the home key – D major, in which the closing theme is repeated unchanged.

The coda reprises several motifs from the main theme at *pp*, and the first movement concludes with life-affirming chords in *ff*.

According to the observations of N. Goryukhina, as in the sonata forms of other Romantics, F. Schubert's music tends toward narrative, epic, and lyrical expression rather than conflict and drama, as seen in Beethoven's sonatas. The sections of the form do not carry internal conflict or serve the function of developing the musical process. The material most often serves a single purpose – exposition. Schubert moved away from dynamic development and from the moments of initiating a dramatic conflict in the material and in the overall form. Even his development sections are permeated with the stability of expository presentation, lending the sections a sense of self-containment and independence. This applies not only to the formal sections but to the themes as well. The role of variation is significant in Schubert's sonata form, penetrating all levels of composition.

Song plays a major role in Schubert's work; he made this genre capable of expressing deep, meaningful content. In his instrumental works, songfulness often merges with dance, coming into contact with forms of domestic music-making. Thus, the second movement, *Andante*, is reminiscent in character of a *Ländler*. This dance became popular in the second half of the 18th century. Themes resembling the *Ländler* appear in the works of many Austrian and German composers, including Mozart, Bruckner, Mahler, and others. In terms of texture and stylistic presentation, this movement is close to the slow movements of Mozart's sonatas.

It is written in a simple three-part form with a contrasting middle section. Three 10-bar periods make up the opening episode (A major). In them, a graceful, dance-like theme alternates between the piano part and unison with the violin. The theme is filled with ornaments, grace notes, and accents, which give it expressiveness and refinement. The central episode (A minor) has a song-like character and resembles an aria.

The violin theme is captivating in its warmth and elegance. The violinist should play it with a rich, resonant tone “into the string,” while the pianist should accompany it delicately. The theme then passes to the

piano, and the violin fills in with individual exclamations. The sequentially repeating motifs become plaintive, then gradually gain dynamic strength, becoming more insistent and leading to the climax of this section in the final bars of the middle episode. After a brief fermata comes the recapitulation. It largely preserves the form of the first episode, with the return of A major, but in the first two periods, the piano theme is texturally filled in with sixteenth notes in the violin, creating the effect of enlivening the tempo and the general movement of the dance. In the third and final period, the theme returns to the violin. The slightly varied dance theme descends both in pitch and dynamics, fading away in a final “exhalation.”

A second important feature of Schubert's sonata form is the highly pictorial completeness of the thematic material. Schubert's themes are ready-made, finished artistic images that do not require development. It is worth noting that Schubert's thematicism is based on song-like, narrative, balladic, and scherzo-like intonations, which led to defining his compositional thinking as “song symphonism.” This is characterized by the songfulness and lyricism of his melodies, which suggests a comparison of the main themes in sonata form rather than conflict and contrast, as was typical before.

The third movement of this sonatina is a brilliant rondo (*Allegro vivace*). The scherzo-like and soaring refrain theme immediately grabs the listener's attention with its cheerfulness. The instruments alternate between soloistic and accompanying roles.

The refrain is followed by an active, technically saturated episode featuring rapid scale-like passages played in unison by both instruments, a wealth of *sforzandi*, octave staccato figures in the piano part, and parallel movement of themes in both parts with sharp articulation in a fast tempo. The episode concludes with relaxed exchanges between the violin and piano at a *p* dynamic. The refrain and episode alternate twice more, and in the final appearance, the refrain serves as a coda and ends with powerful chords at *ff*.

This movement may seem easy during the initial study of the piece, but in fact, it is very difficult to perform. The very fast tempo, presence of technically complex passages, in-

stant changes in articulation, dynamics, and character over a relatively extended duration pose many challenges for performers. The ensemble players must rehearse it together from a slow tempo, carefully aligning all articulations, rhythms, and pauses. Only after achieving unity in a slow tempo can the tempo be gradually increased, but never hastened all the way to the end of the movement.

Franz Schubert's **second sonatina (in A minor)** is a masterpiece of the composer's song-like lyricism, expressed through instrumental performance. The main theme of the first movement (*Allegro moderato*) introduces the listener to a realm of lyrical and dramatic narration.

The pianist faces a challenging task – uniting the two phrases into one long line, carrying it in a single breath toward the highest note, and then suddenly fading into *pp* at the end of the phrase, handing the theme over to the violin. The violin bursts in at *f*, the intervals widen – almost two octaves – and then, after a large *crescendo*, it abruptly drops to *p* and, dissolving, flows into the secondary theme in the piano. The secondary theme – *p dolce* – must be performed with particular expressiveness. The melody seems to strive toward the final note of the motif on its own, and dynamic markings (hairpins) allow it to become more pronounced and three-dimensional.

The closing section has a more agitated character. Initially hesitant, “pleading” intonations appear in the violin part, then in the left hand of the piano; they become more insistent and indignant, repeating in contrasting dynamics. In this episode, the tempo must be kept strict and not allowed to speed up, in order to perform the quick *staccato* exchanges cleanly and precisely.

The second movement, *Andante*, is again associated with rhythms of old classical dances. The 3/4 time signature and the measured, steady motion of the music bring to mind the character of a slow minuet or a sarabande. This movement is written in rondo form and cast in the bright key of F major. Here, the composer extensively uses polyphonic techniques. The piano plays on a *crescendo* from *mf* to accented notes, then descends together with the violin to *p* and repeats the opening refrain theme. To highlight the sound of the violin and vary

the color palette of the piano, the pianist must bring out the upper voice in the right hand during their solo, and when playing together with the violin, lead the lower voice in the left hand, leaving the violin in the foreground.

Motivic variation of the episode's theme (B) modulates through many keys (B-flat major, G major, E-flat major, A-flat major, D-flat major), and is also repeated in contrasting dynamics (*sub. f* – *sub. p*). Such modulations to distant keys are also uncharacteristic of classical form and represent new Romantic tendencies for that time. When repeating the refrains and episode (B1), the ensemble must carefully and thoroughly work out the dynamic nuances, phrasing, and stylistic characteristics of the old dance.

The third movement of this sonata is very compact in structure, written in simple three-part *minuet da capo* form with a contrasting middle section, in *Allegro* tempo. The music of this movement is built on contrasts – both figurative and dynamic. The ensemble participants are completely equal – there is no division into soloist and accompanist roles. Therefore, the *f* dynamic in the piano should be played with a “covered” sound using gathered fingers, maintaining sound balance. In *sub. p* in the third bar of the violin part, the violinist should soften the sound on the final *f* chord and imitate the violin's *p* sound on their own instrument.

In the trio of the third movement, the instruments alternate between solo and accompanying roles. In the first period, the tender theme is presented by the violin. Repeating sequentially, the theme dynamically develops from *p* with a *crescendo* to *mf*. The piano accompanies this theme with soft chords, leaning from the weak second and third beats toward the first, which emphasizes the character of the minuet and creates the impression of “bows” in the dance. In the second period, the instruments switch roles. The solo function passes to the piano, and the violin takes on the accompaniment. At first, the theme is played in the left hand of the piano, imitating the sound of a cello at *mf*, then in the upper register of the right hand, and in the final two bars it returns to the violin. The ensemble must convey the timbral sensation of three different instruments, while maintaining as identical intonation as possible.

The final movement of this work, *Allegro*, is a model of Schubert's song-like lyricism, in which a whole range of feelings related to human inner experiences is expressed. The texture of this movement is multi-layered: the violin's resolute theme is accompanied by agitated triplets in the right hand of the piano and octave runs in the left. These triplets then shift to the violin, while chordal patterns appear in the piano; subsequently, this triplet motion alternates between both parts. To achieve a unified articulation, the pianist should approximate the violin's *spiccato* stroke – both in sound intensity and articulation sharpness. Then it's necessary to find a shared motion and tempo in which this articulation can be comfortably executed. Once all textural layers are synchronized, the repeating motifs should be shaped into a long phrase through increasing dynamics on ascending sequential motifs. Schubert then uses the technique of dynamic contrast in varying the same theme: *subito f* alternates with *subito p*.

The third sonatina in G minor, like the second, is written in a four-movement sonata cycle: the first movement is *Allegro*, the second is *Andante*, the third – *Menuet* – acts as a scherzo, and the fourth is the finale, *Allegro moderato* (Analysis of Musical Forms. 2023. Minks BSUKI. https://azbyka.ru/kliros/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/analiz_muzykalnykh_form_kolenko.pdf. (In Russian)). This third sonatina is the most dramatic in character of all three sonatas, yet at the same time, a song-like thematic quality permeates all four movements.

The first movement begins with a four-bar introduction of a heroic-dramatic nature. The theme of the introduction is played in unison by both instruments at *ff*, with the piano part voiced in octaves in both hands.

From the very first bars, ensemble work begins – work on unifying articulation, sound, and temporal perception. It is essential not only to strike the note together but also to sustain it for the same duration and release it simultaneously, as well as to find a common tempo and character that will be preserved throughout the entire movement.

The essence of Schubert's treatment of the development section in the first movement of this sonata differs from that of the

classical composers, which demonstrates the innovative nature of his thinking and his departure from the classical framework. Instead of a dynamic motivic development in the Beethovenian sense, this sonata's form features an episode that thematically evokes associations with the intonations of the exposition. The contrast between elements of sonata form, characteristic of classical sonatas, is replaced by variation-like treatments of themes – some themes are close in intonation. At the beginning of the development section, the composer continues to develop the intonations of the closing theme. However, the character changes – it becomes more anxious, with major giving way to minor ("Volume 2" n.d. StudFiles. <https://studfile.net/preview/5357893/page:3>). Short "questions" sound in octaves in the bass of the piano, echoed by violin chords. And immediately, in contrast, a very gentle "answer" appears at *p* in the violin.

Thus, Schubert's sonatinas for violin and piano represent a combination of classical and romantic traits, of which the latter ultimately predominate. From the perspective of classical principles, Schubert's sonata may seem "incorrect," but within the context of the Romantic era and the composer's own style, it appears organic and logical. One should note the improvisatory, fantasy-like nature of Schubert's sonata form, which slightly undermines the integrity of the structure. Purposeful development is replaced here by the constant addition of "new threads" (in R. Schumann's terminology), which leads to a certain kaleidoscopic character in the form and the absence of a dramatic trajectory toward a climax ("Volume 2" n.d. StudFiles. <https://studfile.net/preview/5357893/page:3>).

When listening to the sonatas, one gets the impression of encountering a kind of "lyrical diary." Whether listening or playing them, we immerse ourselves in a world of intimate emotions, where music flows "from heart to heart." This is also facilitated by the very genre of chamber music, to which the sonatas belong. Performing them does not require a symphony orchestra or grand concert halls. This closeness to the listener and performer helps reveal the emotional fabric, the fusion of hopes and aspirations

of people who lived in a particular era. This special “sensitivity” of the sonatas to human emotion, characteristic of the Romantic period and so valued today, gives rise to their

great popularity. Thus, based on the analyzed works, one can trace the paths of the emergence of Romantic expressive means, which enrich Schubert’s chamber sonatinas.

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