

14. GEORG FRIEDRICH HAENDEL - SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND FIGURED BASS OP. 1, NO. 13

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Abstract: *In the field of chamber music, Haendel is known for his six Sonatas for violin and basso continuo op. 1, creations that have kept a well-deserved place in the violin repertoire, being approached mainly for their melodic cantability, the clarity of the formal structures and the moderate technical difficulty. At G. Fr. Handel's sonata genre is distinguished by the characteristic unity of the thematic material, which bears the perfect mark of mastery. His sonatas are characterized by the breadth of the melodic line, the precise construction of the harmony and the generous sonority.*

Key words: *Handel, Sonata, violin, figured bass, analysis*

1. Introduction

The sonata genre occupies an important place in the creation of the composer G. Fr. Handel. Influenced by the creations of his contemporary composers, the violinists A. Vivaldi, A. Corelli, F. M. Veracini or T. A. Vitali, Handel will broadly adopt the Italian model of the monothematic sonata, which he will perfect through the grandeur and clarity of his compositional style. In the field of chamber music, Handel is known for his six *Sonatas for violin and basso continuo op. 1*, creations that have kept a well-deserved place in the violin repertoire, being approached mainly for their melodic cantability, the clarity of the formal structures and the moderate technical difficulty.

Handel's sonatas, considered for many generations to be masterpieces of violin literature, have been the subject of numerous musicological controversies regarding their authenticity. They appeared in various editions in London and Amsterdam between the 1720s and 1730s. In early publishing practice, were also published works for other instruments, such as flute and oboe, but more recent studies have established that the *Sonatas* were originally written for the violin.

In the article *The Violin Sonatas of G. F. Handel: Clarifying the Confusion and Controversy*, violin professor Kiyoshi Tamagawa states that rarely have works by a major composer endured such editorial confusion and fraud, so that four of the six Sonatas published together, almost certainly they do not belong to the composer to whom they were attributed. Unfortunately, the mistakes of Handel's 18th-century copyist, John Walsh, as well as the poor edition of Friedrich Chrysander, the redactor of the first complete volume of the sonatas, are repeated today in popular editions such as G. Schirmer's or three Sonatas included in the repertoire of the Suzuki Violin School.¹⁴³

2. Discussions

Although in our instrumental violinist practice in middle school or high

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¹⁴³ To deepen this topic, we recommend researching the article written by the American violin professor Kiyoshi Tamagawa in the article *The Violin Sonatas of G. F. Händel: Clarifying the Confusion and Controversy* (<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/000313130105100413>), accessed on 29 September 2023.

school education the most used edition of the *Sonatas* is the version edited by professor Ionel Geantă (in which the accompaniment is supported by the piano, thus replacing the harpsichord), for our technical and interpretative analysis of the *Sonata op. 1, no. 13*, I have chosen the score of the Urtext-Bärenreiter edition, in which the accompaniment is supported by the *cello*.

We must specify the fact that in the Baroque period, the writing of various musical creations was organized on a system made up of two staves: the first staff was usually assigned to the soloist instrument, and the second staff, to the accompanying instrument (*cello*, *viola da gamba* or harpsichord), which supported the musical evolution through a ciphered bass, developed most of the time in the key of *F*. This compositional technique, based on the cipher bass, offered freedom of interpretation to the artist, but also required thorough mastery of all the compositional techniques characteristic of the baroque style (variational, harmonic, contrapuntal, ornamental, polyphonic, etc.).

The Violin Sonata in *D major*, consisting of four contrasting movements (*Affetuoso - Allegro - Larghetto - Allegro*), is considered one of the most beautiful musical jewels for the violin. Handel's own manuscript for this sonata has survived for almost three centuries, and this music is undoubtedly authentic. Some questions arise as to Handel's notation for the first movement, as in some editions the term *Affetuoso* (affectionate) appears, while in others it is simply *Adagio*¹⁴⁴.

3. Results

The first part begins in the key of *D major* (in the measure of 4/4) with a harmonic coloring that emphasizes the sonority and cantability of the violin timbre. The first movement is organized in a small bistrophic form (A + B). The initial stanza consists of two phrases: phrase a = 3 measures (m. 1-3) and phrase b = 9 measures (m. 4-12).

In this work, the author's compositional techniques converge towards the realization of the thematic unity within the whole, starting from an initial motive with a generative character. *The Sonata* debuts in an impressive atmosphere. The violin presents the generating motive (noted with α), based on the sounds that seem to be part of the chord of the main tonality (*D - F # - A - D*), but completed unexpectedly by the composer, by climbing it with an ascending degree to *E*. This ninth interval, repeated often throughout the first movement, creates a surprising harmonic effect as it emerges from the consonant patterns of the harmonic context: Eg. 1, G. Fr. Haendel, *Sonata op. 1, no. 13*, m. I, m. 1 - 3

Next, the initial motif is sequenced on the fifth of *D major* (m. 2). The successive presence of the ninth interval determines a gradual and descending evolution organized on dotted rhythmic formulas, which will cadence on the dominant of the basic tonality. The harmonic relief present in the accompanying

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.laphil.com/musicdb/pieces/6150/violin-sonata-no-4-in-d-op-1-no-13-hwv-371>, accessed on 30 September 2023

instrument score is limited within the tonic key of this movement.

The second phrase (b) is rhythmically more dynamic and has a modulating character. The violin melody unfolds continuously over several measures through various jumps of ninths and sixths, a tension that will constantly and gradually evolve through dynamic accumulation and character that will culminate in the last beat of the seventh measure. The melody has a descending evolution and consists of repetitive rhythmic-melodic structures, enriched with trills, which will be completed on the *a* sound. The melodic line in the *cello* score, made up of values of fourths and eighths, closely follows the musical and rhythmic discourse of the violin and is subordinated to it.

Harmonically, the first stanza is completed with an authentic cadence on *A major* (m. 9-10). The transition to the second stanza is prepared by the accompanying instrument with a short interlude of two measures (m. 11-12). The musical discourse of the second stanza is based on the thematic elements characteristic of the first stanza, the differences between the two sections being noticeable only at the tonal level. The secondary stanza (B) consists of three phrases: phrase av = 3 measures (m. 12-14), phrase bv = 6 measures (m. 15-20) and phrase a1 = 6 measures (m. 20-26). The first phrase of the secondary stanza presents identically the first phrase of stanza A in the dominant major key (*A major*): Eg. 2, G. Fr. Haendel, *Sonata op. 1, no. 13*, m. I, m. 12 - 14



The second phrase (bv) is more dynamic in rhythm and character than the secondary phrase of the first stanza. From a harmonic point of view, the speech of the bass evolves through a series of modulations, which will cadence at the end of the phrase on *A major* IV and *D major* I. The last phrase of the second stanza (marked with c) is organized by the slightly modified sequencing of the initial motif, carried out in three stages, a phenomenon that will create a natural tension of the musical discourse both in terms of dynamics and character: Eg. 3, G. Fr. Haendel, *Sonata op. 1, no. 13*, m. I, m. 20 - 23



The finale of the first movement is prepared by an outward expansion over the last four measures (m. 23-26), which modulates to the key of *A major* (the key of the dominant major of the initial key, *D major*). The constant elaboration of the initial motif and the open character of the first stanza determine the organic unity of the first movement. The second part, marked *Allegro* (4/4), begins in the key of *D major* and is structured tetrastrophically (A - B - C - D). The first stanza (A) consists of a tripodal and asymmetrical period: phrase a = 5 measures (m. 1-5), phrase a1 = 4 measures (m. 6-9) and phrase av = 5 measures (m. 9 -13). The first phrase has a non-modulating character; the violin presents a lively and bright theme made up of a succession of fourths and eighths. The bass supports the musical discourse of the violin through a melody based on syncopation and *contretemps*: Eg. 4, G. Fr.

Haendel, *Sonata op. 1, no. 13*, m. II, m. 1 - 5



In the secondary phrase (m. 6-9), the melodic lines are reversed between the two leading instruments. The musical speech previously presented by the violin is taken up by the bass line with a perfect descendent fifth and the melody based on syncopation and contretemps, is now presented by the violin with a perfect higher fifth. From a harmonic point of view, the second phrase modulates towards the dominant of the initial tonality. The last phrase (m. 9-13) unfolds in the basic tonality and is constructed after the pattern of the first phrase of stanza A, only this time, the melodic lines are exposed in reverse: Eg. 5, G. Fr. Haendel, *Sonata op. 1, no. 13*, m. II, m. 9 - 13



The second stanza (marked B) consists of two periods: period B = 8 measures (m. 13-20) and period B1 = 11 measures (m. 21-31), with an open and modulating character. The first period is organized from two phrases: phrase b = 4 measures (m. 13-16) and phrase bv = 4 measures (m. 17-20). The first phrase consists of two melodic lines: the violin presents a musical development based on figurative arpeggios and the bass exhibits another voice with a contrapuntal character. The imitative repetitions of the thematic motifs characteristic of each protagonist instrument are highlighted in both scores through dynamic evolutions in echo, with the role of avoiding musical monotony. In the second phrase, the two thematic lines are reversed and the musical material is also organized according to the principle of imitation, a compositional procedure frequently used by Haendel: Eg. 6, G. Fr. Haendel, *Sonata op. 1, no. 13*, m. II, m. 13 - 18



From a harmonic point of view, the first period is also completed in the key of *D major*. We notice that during this movement, the initial thematic material is varied by rhythmic diminution, so that the durations of the fourths and eighths of the previous stanza are transformed into sixteenth values, later completed by trills and mordents, a phenomenon that will create a false impression of *tempo* precipitation, although in instrumental practice the interpretation must be carried out constantly.

The second period (B1) unfolds over 6 measures (m. 21-26), organized 3 + 3, in which the thematic material reveals two new melodic lines, which will dialogue

through *stretto* imitations and have motifs in their structure simple ones based on arpeggio sixteenth values. Although the period still proceeds in the basic key, in the end modulates to the key of the dominant to prepare the appearance of the next stanza. Stanza C, made up of 30 measures (m. 27-56), is organized into two periods, each consisting of three phrases: period C (m. 31-40) = phrases av1 (m. 27-31) + c (m. 31-34) + av2 (m. 35-40) and period C1 (m. 40-56) = phrases c1 (m. 40-44) + c2 (m. 45-51) + c3 (m. 52-56).

The first phrase of the third stanza (av1) brings back to the listener's attention the thematic material from the opening of the sonata (m. 27-31), presented this time by the violin with a descending perfect fifth. In the next phrase of period C, the musical unfolding is structured in the form of an uneasy dialogue between the two participating voices. The new thematic motif characteristic of stanza C is introduced first by the violin and then varied by sequencing and *stretto* imitation by the bass voice over the course of two measures. This intersecting rhythmic-melodic design generates the organic interpenetration of the thematic material. In the last phrase, the motif characteristic of stanza A and that characteristic of stanza C are reversed in the melodic fabric so that this time, the main theme is presented by the bass on a descending fifth exactly as in the opening of stanza C. The first period is completed in the key of *G major* on an open cadence that prepares the natural transition to the next period, C1.

The first phrase of period C1 (m. 40-45) is constructed in a slightly varied manner of the first phrase of stanza B, in which the violin presents a motif made up of figurative arpeggiated sixteenths and the bass line brings the same contrapuntal motif, exposed this time a perfect higher fourth, in the key of *D major*. In the next phrase, the thematic material from the bass line begins in the key of *E minor* and brings to our attention the opening motive in incomplete form, processed sequentially and descending during three measures (m. 45-47), following as in the last measures of this phrase, the melodic lines of the two protagonist instruments to be reversed. The last phrase (m. 52-56) again presents the motif characteristic of the first stanza worked sequentially and ascending in both instrumental scores by melodic imitation in *stretto*. The harmonic design of the third stanza is completed in the key of *A major*.

The last stanza (marked D) of the second movement consists of 13 measures (m. 57-69) and is organized in three phrases: phrase av2 = 4 measures (m. 57-60), phrase d = 4 measures (m. 61-64) and the phrase b1v = 6 measures (m. 64-69). In the first phrase, the violin presents again the characteristic thematic material of the first stanza, slightly varied, in the basic tonality. The bass line is built syncopated, according to the original model, only this time the rhythmic values are slightly dynamized. In the second phrase, the thematic material brings new elements: the violin unfolds on a sequence of arpeggio octaves and the bass line is dynamized by sixteenths. The phrase is completed by a semi-cadenza in the key of *D major*, introduced first by the violin and imitatively taken up by the bass.

The last phrase of the final stanza (b1v) brings back the characteristic thematic elements of the second phrase of stanza B, slightly varied from a melodic and rhythmically point of view (in the bass, the melody is exposed this time with a perfect descending octave), taken over by imitation in both instrumental scores. The

last stanza ends with an authentic cadence in the key of *D major*, which will prepare the final section, the Coda (m. 70-77), with the role of reinforcing the basic tonality of this movement.

We note that the thematic material characteristic of this part is not composed for soloist and accompanying instrument. The thematic motifs, built in the form of a simple or imitative dialogue, are intensively processed between the two partners of the instrumental ensemble who participate in the construction of the melodic, rhythmic and harmonic fabric, a fact that leads us to conclude that the two instruments have equal importance in the motif treatment. Taking over and processing certain generative motifs throughout the entire movement leads us to conclude that Haendel thought of the organic unity of the thematic material.

The third movement, *Larghetto*, begins in the key of *E minor*. The violin presents a somber and ceremonial thematic material. The bass line closely follows the expressiveness of the main melodic line. This movement is structured in small bistrophic form: stanza A (m. 1-17) and stanza B (m. 18-40). The first stanza is made up of two phrases: a = 4 measures (m. 1-4) and a1 = 13 measures (m. 4-17). The first phrase of stanza A is closed and brings to our attention a rhythmic and melodic motive made up of different intervals, transposed on the model of a rhythm enriched with dotted rhythmic values. The emotional character of this theme emerges even from the presence of the *a #*: Eg. 7, G. Fr. Haendel, *Sonata op. 1, no. 13*, m. III, m. 1 - 4



The second phrase (marked a1) has larger dimensions (m. 4-17) and starts on the sound of re with the initial motif. The phrase has a modulating character and describes the following tonal path: *B - A V - F # V-I, F # V7 - I*. The open character of the secondary phrase makes the connection to the next section. The bass line prepares the appearance of the second stanza by an outward widening of two measures (m. 16-17).

Stanza B, made up of two phrases, b (m. 18-26) and phrase b1 (m. 27-40), begins by processing the initial generating motive. The instrumental writing in the violin score aims at the gradual accumulation of sonorous fullness and character tension through the thematic-cellular evolutions of the ascending sequences. The bass line describes a melody in ascending or descending intervals, which directly participates in the expressive transformation of the main violin theme. The second articulation (m. 27-40) resumes the previous manner of thematic processing, this time led by ascending sequences, generating a continuous, uninterrupted, wide-breathing sound period, amplified and completed by a cadence on the 5th degree of the tonality *B minor*. The open character of the harmony actually prepares the appearance of the last part of the *Sonata*.

The final movement is an *Allegro* (in $\frac{3}{4}$ measure) with a dancing character, which begins energetically on the violin in the key of *D major* and unfolds on the structure of a bistrophic form: A (m. 1-28) + A1 (m. 29-72). The first stanza, made up of an open bipodic period, begins on the violin with a thematic material marked by a strong dance character. The first phrase (m. 1-10) unfolds on the structure of

the two characteristic rhythmic-melodic motifs: the first has a dotted rhythmic drawing and the second is made up of a sequence of adjacent sounds with simple rhythmic values: Eg. 8, G. Fr. Haendel, *Sonata op. 1, no. 13*, m. IV, m. 1 - 6



The bass line closely follows the violin's thematic progression through sounds simply organized into fourths and eighths. The secondary motive is repeated identically in measures 5-6, according to the pattern of dynamics in echo characteristic of the Baroque style. Next, the secondary motive is sequentially and modulatory transformed to the dominant key of the initial key (*A major*).

The second articulation of the first period (m. 11-21) has a much more dynamic development in relation to the initial phrase, describing a predominantly ascending melodic route that will create waves of tensional accumulation. The bass line continues to follow the thematic development of the violin, emphasizing the developing character through a contrapuntal writing and harmonically reinforcing the key of *A major*. The next section (m. 22-28) is constructed in the same manner as the first period; the changes at the level of the musical content refer to the dynamism of the melodic line of the bass by introducing figural evolutions in sixteenth values. The section is concluded by an authentic composed cadence.

The second stanza (m. 29-72), made up of two larger periods: A1 = 23 measures (m. 29-51) and A2 = 21 measures (m. 52-72), is built according to the pattern of the initial stanza. The thematic material evolves at the level of the musical content through thematic-cellular sequences. The first period (m. 29-51) begins with the same motif based on the dotted rhythmic pattern, presented this time by the violin with a perfect ascending fifth. The secondary motive (m. 34-37) is also processed in the violin score by cellular-sequential transformation: Eg. 9, G. Fr. Handel, *Sonata op. 1, no. 13*, m. IV, m. 41 - 48



The voice of the continuous bass is structured monotonously, evenly and repetitively by perfect octave intervals in an ascending direction. This sequential progression describes the following harmonic path: *A major - D major - b mall - D major*. The first period of the final stanza is completed by a concluding cadence (m. 50-51). The last period (c. 52-72) is similar in terms of thematic construction to the initial period. It is set up on the dotted rhythmic motif, resumed by the violin on *D*, but with a perfect ascending octave. In the next two measures (m. 54-55), the motif is processed sequentially in a descending sense. The upper voice of the musical development is energized by scalar structures of sixteenth with descending and ascending evolution. The accompaniment closely follows the main musical development. The predominantly ascending melodic route creates waves of tensional accumulation.

The dynamized structure of the thematic material is transferred to the accompanying instrument, which, after the sequential-scalar unfolding of the musical development, announces the end of the *Sonata* (through a pedal on *A*), the dominant of the basic tonality, finished with a cadence on the tonic. The two stanzas of the final movement are organically linked thematically through the *ostinato* elaboration of the secondary motive. The differences between the two stanzas relate only to the tonal aspect.

4. Conclusions

At G. Fr. Handel`s sonata genre is distinguished by the characteristic unity of the thematic material, which bears the perfect mark of mastery. This is one of the first composers in whose works we notice that the entire thematic development starts from a unique generative motive. Handel`s sonatas are characterized by the breadth of the melodic line, the precise construction of the harmony and the generous sonority. Handel calls for the use of several technical and artistic procedures, such as: combining motifs and figurations, imitative thematic takeover between the instruments that participate in the melodic construction, unitary and organic structuring of the thematic material through full or partial takeovers of the phrases presented at the beginning or end of the stanzas, using the concept of functional harmony and using neighboring tonalities.

Regarding the forms of this genre, we specify that they oscillate between free forms or imitative polyphony, as well as bi- or tri-strophic forms. These baroque sonatas prepare the way for the crystallization of the sonata itself, which will become one of the most complex musical forms, capable of conveying the most uplifting feelings and experiences through the art of composition.

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