



PIANO TRIO IN G MINOR, OP. 17, MOVEMENT 1

Clara Wieck-Schumann (1846)



POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Classical vs Romantic features
- Development of the piano trio
- Variation of the sonata form

STRUCTURE:

- Movement 1 in Sonata form
- 3 main sections: Exposition development and recapitulation.

HARMONY AND TONALITY:

- G minor tonality.
- Follows Classical principles of keys used in sonata form.
- Exposition – 1st subject G minor, 2nd subject B \flat major.
- Development- modulates to E \flat /F min/G min/C min/F min
- Recapitulation – 1st subject G minor, 2nd subject G major.
- Coda – returns to G minor
- Tonalities prepared by perfect cadences, strengthened by tonic and dominant pedals.
- Diatonic and functional harmony
- Major and minor chords, mostly in root position and 1st inversion,
- Complex chords: chromatic, diminished 7ths, augmented 6ths, dominant minor 9th
- Suspensions 7-6, 4-3
- Secondary dominant chords
- Cycle of 5th progression

CONTEXT:

- Born in Leipzig, Germany, known in her lifetime as a concert pianist, and now as a composer, as works have recently been rediscovered. Female composers in Europe at the time were not encouraged.
- Married composer Robert Schumann who had been her father's pupil. She was the main breadwinner but household responsibilities increased as she raised 8 children and her husband suffered from mental illness.
- The Piano Trio: one of the most important forms of chamber music from the 18th-19th century. First performed in salons, then in concerts. Style established by Classical composers and further developed in the Romantic Period.
- Op.17: 4 movements: Allegro moderato, Scherzo and trio, Andante, Allegretto

SONORITY:

- Unusually, instruments here have equal weighting, with careful attention to balancing different ranges so none gets masked, none particularly virtuosic, for different performance levels and intimate setting, but writing still typical of Romantic period.
- Double stopping
- Violin plays mainly in the two octaves above its lowest string, and occasionally higher.
- Cello uses both high and low ranges for different roles.
- Piano: used for melody and accompaniment

MELODY:

- Contrasting melodic ideas:
- Subject 1: 8 bar theme with balanced phrasing- antecedent and consequent
- (a) plaintive downward 5th, tied rhythm
- (b) answers with livelier rhythm, rising sequence, upwards 8ve leap.
- 1(c) and (d) short contrasted dotted ideas, falling sequence.
- 2nd subject: two 2-bar ideas:
- (a) Syncopated, descending, stepwise, ends with appoggiatura
- (b) Repeated 'chattering' quavers against diminished 7th melody
- Development focused on first two bars of 1(a). Falling 5th adjusted to harmonic scheme.
- Chromatic writing.

TEXTURE:

- Discursive form= frequently changing texture,
- Homophony, broken chord accompaniment.
- Counter-melodies= polyphonically animated homophony.
- Development: close imitation, at times polyphonic.
- Pedal textures
- Doubled octaves and 6ths
- Block chords
- Rising and falling arpeggio figures
- Rocking quavers
- Light, offbeat chords in the right hand, against left-hand notes on the beat
- Arpeggios

RHYTHM, METRE AND TEMPO:

- Allegro moderato all the way with short poco rit. in the second subject group.
- At times feels like 2/2 although in 4/4, especially noticed in faster harmonic rhythm passages.
- Themes defined by different rhythmic characters.
- 1(c) and (d): anacrusis openings
- Use of ties in some melodic lines.
- Lively rhythms and quaver passages
- Frequent syncopations without losing pulse.