

Sonatas by Franz Liszt and Aaron Copland

Jing Yang

School of Music, Nanjing University of the Arts, Nanjing210036, China
1024046711@qq.com

ABSTRACT. *The genre of sonata is unique of forms in piano music, after Beethoven's works of sonatas, the form of sonatas had been changed. Since Romantic time, composers had been created new genre for sonatas, understanding different genres of sonatas are important.*

KEYWORDS: *sonata; sonata form; cyclicism; a single movement sonata; neoclassical sonata*

1. Introduction

The B minor Sonata is, by general consensus, one of the enduring monuments of Liszt's compositional career. Liszt composed it at Weimar, and according to his inscription on the autograph, he finished the B minor Sonata in early February 1853. During 1848- 1861, Liszt composed several of his masterpieces, such as the 'Dante' and 'Faust' Symphonies, the first nine symphonic poems, and the 'Graner' Mass. These were all composed at Weimar, and belonged to his middle period. The middle period of Liszt's composition was the time of full bloom.

Without a doubt the Sonata in B minor marks the zenith of Liszt's piano music; also, it is an important milestone in the history of keyboard literature. Many scholars believe the sonata is autobiographical [the Sonata is in some sense a 'character sketch' of the composer himself]. Other suggested interpretations include a musical version of Milton's Paradise Lost. The B minor Sonata represents the ending of his experiment with sonata form which was moving toward an expanded one-movement sonata form.

2. Creating the new genre

Before Liszt created the single movement sonata, Franz Peter Schubert composed the 'Wanderer Fantasy' and Robert (Alexander) Schumann composed the Fantasy in C major, Op.17. In 1822, Schubert successfully composed the 'Wanderer Fantasy', with the idea of encapsulating elements of four movements in a single movement. He followed a more complex plan, using thematic transformation to link sections together in a scheme of opening [C major], slow interlude [C# minor], scherzo [Ab major] and final [C major, beginning with a fugal expositions]. The Wanderer Fantasy was one of Liszt's favorite concert pieces, which he also arranged for piano and orchestra in 1851. The Wanderer Fantasy considerably expands Beethoven's concept of cyclicism within the framework of the sonata structure by letting the thematic germ permeate every movement. Furthermore, the four-movement sonata structure with the concept of a longer free form, in keeping elements of traditional structure, such as sonata-allegro. For example, there are four varied tempos of Wanderer Fantasy: *Allegro con fuoco ma non troppo*, *Adagio*, *Presto*, and *Allegro*. In the B minor Sonata, there are four varied tempos too: *Allegro*, *Andante Fugato*, *Allegro* and *Coda [Andante]*. The Wanderer Fantasy belongs to the earliest of a series of famous sonata-like fantasies, or fantasy-like sonatas. Liszt succeeded in the B minor Sonata in reconciling Schubert's approach with a balanced sonata structure.

Schumann dedicated the Fantasy, Op.17 to Liszt fifteen years earlier. The original title of The Fantasy in C, Op. 17, was *Obolon auf Beethoven Monument Ruinen, Trophaen, Palmen: Grosse Sonata fur das Pianoforte, fur Beethovens Monument, von Florestan und Eusebius*. Thus, the title indicated that the work was both a sonata and a monument to Beethoven. Thematic links to Beethoven's song cycle *An die ferne Geliebte*. [To the Far away Loved One] and an original dedication to Clara provided double meaning references for Schumann, both historic and personal. By 1838, however, the work had undergone considerable revision, was rededicated to Franz Liszt, and took on the title of Fantasy. Schumann also included subtitles for the three movements: '*Ruinen*' [Ruins], '*Triumphbogen*' [Triumphal Arch], and '*Sternenkranz*' [Ring of Stars] Schumann was good at composing character pieces as well as the C major Fantasy. The second movement is based on two ideas, the exalted choral

theme that opens the movement and a series of thematic episodes all lined by dotted rhythms. In the B minor Sonata, there are varied characters and themes, which Liszt cited from other his pieces, such as Mephisto waltz, plainchant ‘*crux fidelis*’, Faust and Gretchen. Meanwhile, Liszt used different religious ideas and characters, such as the Garden of Eden, with themes symbolizing God, Lucifer, Adam and Eve. Without question, a study of Liszt’s life, especially that part of it devoted to religion, gives many of his works their oxygen. In his personal life, a strong religious impulse mingled with a love of worldly sensation was resolved by him with difficulty. After he was 50 years old, he became a priest; many musicians call him ‘half gypsy, half priest’.

3. Analyzed the form of B minor

The expositions and recapitulation in the B minor can be considered as similar to the first movement and finale of a four-movement sonata, with the slow section and fugal scherzo that take up most of the development supplying the other two assumable movements.

Table 1: The Design of the Sonata in B minor According to William Newman, *Sonata Since Beethoven*, pp373-75

	Allegro	Andante	Fugato	Allegro	Coda	
4mvts.	Incomplete	ABA	Scherzando	Finale:Incomplete	Coda	
	Sonatina		fugue	Sonatina		
1 mvt.	Exposition	Development		Recap.	Coda	

Table 2: The Design of the Sonata in B Minor According to Rey Longyear, *Romanticism in Music*, pp.162-65

	Allegro	Andante	Fugato	Coda
3mvts.	First mvt.	Slow mvt.	Finale	Coda
		AB	Scherzando	
1mvt.	Expo.	Development	Recapitulation	

Table 3: The Design of the Sonata in B Minor According to Alan Walker in *Grove Music Online* accessed March 30, 2008

Exposition	Development	Leadback	Recap. / Coda
I: Allegro	II: Andante	III: Fugato	IV: Allegro—Prestissimo
Bm / DM	F#M	B-flat m	Bm / BM
m.32	m.331	m.459	m.533 / m.682

In music history, for more than a century after its composition, musicians continue to think the Sonata in B Minor is a challenge to analytical understanding. Theorists have described it, pianists have meditated upon it, and scholars have disagreed over it.

There are three themes, A, B, and C, in the B Minor Sonata. The three themes are presented in succession. From the beginning to measure 7, is theme A; measure 8-13, is theme B; and measure 14-17, is theme C. Liszt used variant harmony and other methods to develop his themes, such as inversion, augmentation, diminution, and fragmentation. For instance, at measure 120, the transition is the metamorphosis of theme B. The section beginning at measure 153 is related to the theme C, which is augmentation from eighth notes to quarter notes. At measure 18, the theme B and C are combined. In measure 509, the right hand plays theme B while the left hand plays theme B in inversion.

Sharon Winklhofer described the Sonata as opening with a dramatic statement of three motives [A-B-C]. The first motive consists of ambivalent descending scales suggesting either G minor or C minor, with subsequent alterations. The second motive is distinguished by its profile, which outlines a diminished seventh, and by its rugged, dotted rhythms. The third motive C features a smaller compass, a striking upbeat figure, and a persistent repetition of D.

Three principal materials are presented in the exposition section, and the main key is B minor. This section is mirrored in the recapitulation: the presentation of motives A-B-C occurs first [in a Fugato], and the tonic area returns slightly later. The secondary key area and its *Grandioso* theme provide the greatest degree of tonal stability in the recapitulation. The transformation of the first group theme into a *Grandisos* second subject [in the relative major], although in the latter the *Grandisos* melody is new.

A central slow section [*Andante sostenuto*] consists of three varied statements of a slightly saccharine D-flat

major / F minor theme. Liszt created the dark chromatic sound-world in the Scherzo and March section. James M. Baker commented that this section displays the sound with a hint of diablerie, and makes use of developmental elements of sonata structure in a creative and novel manner. The first Scherzo section is a sonata form with a second group in the dominant minor [D minor –A minor]. The main minor mode contributes the demonic atmosphere. The development treats the themes before they are recapitulated in the tonic minor. The March [in B-flat major] takes the place of the Trio of the Scherzo, which returns in varied form only up to the middle of the exposition. The Coda combines March and Scherzo themes as a whirlwind in D.

The recapitulation includes a funeral March transformation of the *Grandioso* theme, and return of the *Andante sostenuto* in the tonic major before a closing peroration based on the *Grandioso*. The tempo of B Minor is *Allegro energico –Grandisos–Andante sostenuto –Allegro energico*.

A fluid chromatic harmony is everywhere; the basic key relationships are deliberative. The second subject is in the traditional relative major, while the slow section is in the dominant. At first, the section is in the Phrygian mode, then in a ‘Gypsy-scale’ G minor. The scherzo has a paradoxical position; at once part of the development and a thematic recapitulation, but in the key of B-flat minor. The return to the tonic B minor is gradually prepared as the scherzo progresses, and the home key is finally confirmed with the passionate combination first heard in the exposition of the two main Allegro subjects.

James M. Baker said:

Liszt’s stylistic eclecticism, in other contexts sometimes found jarring, is seen at its most controlled and personal in the B Minor Sonata. In no other Romantic composer, with the possible exception of Meyerbeer, is there such a range of differing elements—from Germanic chromaticism and thematic development to Italianate lyricism, taking in elements from French Grand Opera and Hungarian Gypsy music along the way. That Liszt was able to weld these into a distinctive personal style was one of his most remarkable achievements. If the cantilena second subject of the Sonata appears Italianate, albeit married to distinctly un-Italian chromatic harmony, then the majestic repeated chords of the *Grandioso* theme recall no less the world of the French Grand Opera chorus—compare the ‘Blessing of the Daggers’ scene from *Les Huguenots*—transfigured by a melody of vastly greater nobility. The opening ‘gypsy’ scale also proclaims Liszt’s Hungarian origins, as does the occasional ornamental turn later in the piece.

Liszt used contrast of tessitura and texture in a symphonic way in the B Minor Sonata, which is unique in the keyboard style. His output related all areas of the instrument and displays an acute ear for piano sonority. Some musicians commented this feeling for tonal colour is not a meretricious overlay on top of the music, but an essential part of the composition.

Liszt used his virtuoso’s insight into extending the capabilities of the piano to the highest level, at the same conveying a strong spiritual quality in his music due to his devout Catholicism.

4. Sonatas were composed in 20th century

Aaron Copland was a pioneer in 20th century American music, and one of the most important and influential American composers. He created a distinctively American style in works for many genres, including ballet, opera and film. He showed the world how to write classical music in an American way. Copland himself was an offspring of Jewish immigrants. In his works, Jewish contexts are one music style and technique. Also, other music influenced Copland’s compositions, including jazz rhythm, American folk music, popular music, and the ragtime of classical counterpoint. Copland was both a pianist and a composer. When he was young, he went France to study composition with Nadia Boulanger. He acquired an extensive knowledge of French literature. Most importantly, he got to know many European composers including Stravinsky, and he followed the Igor Stravinsky’s neoclassicism. For example, Copland’s piano variations [1930], explores classical variational techniques.

In Copland’s mind music was an abstract art, stable, detached, well-made and independent of programmatic elements, thus conforming to an important quality of the neo-classical.

The Piano Sonata recalls the Piano Variations of 1930 in its dramatic strictness. Meanwhile, due in part to its larger size, it is a more expansively dramatic work. When Copland composed the Piano Sonata during 1939-1941, WWII was happening. The work certainly is a wartime work: grim, nervous, elegiac, with bell-like tolling of alarm and mourning.

The sonata consists of three movements: *Molto moderato-Allegro; Vivace; and Andante sostenuto*. The outer two movements are essentially slow, lyrical pieces, while the middle movement is scherzo-like. The first movement is in sonata-allegro form, complete with an exposition of two themes, a development section, and a

recapitulation. The first theme contains two principal ideas, the first highly dramatic, and the second, slightly slower and more intimate. Many intervals of the third are played in the melodic lines, the interval of the third is important, played in all range and in different combinations. The interval of the major or minor third is the basic harmonic building block of the movement. Two thirds can be combined in a consonant way, as seen in the opening notes [B-flat & D-flat] in both hands, or in a dissonant way [D-nature & F; G-flat & B-flat], or in a left hand to right hand. These notes form a four note chord or 'set', containing three major thirds, one minor third, a perfect fourth and a dissonant minor second. This chord is not a conventional four-note chord from traditional tertian harmony. In this composition, Copland uses the third as an independent harmonic unit. The third is important, also, as a melodic interval. The second theme features the melodic interval [B-flat & D-flat] as well and is expanded into an ascending line of thirds [B-flat & D-flat] and [C-flat & E-flat & G-flat & B-flat-F]. The transition [change of key to two flats] features widely spaced counterpoint in thirds between the hands. Jazz-like rhythms are present in the development section of the first movement and the entire second movement.

The second movement is a Scherzo, marked '*delicate, restless*' and is fast with a chorale-like midsection. The 6-note principal motive has often been described as wedge shaped expanding from a second to a fourth to a major sixth, the inversion of the minor third. The rhythms of the Scherzo are striking; through the frequent changes of 5/8, 6/8, 7/8 and other metres. The rhythms are still related in a general way to jazz, specifically 'be-bop' seemingly derived as well from Latin-American music.

The third movement is free in structure and describes folk-like melodies over long pedal points. Material of the first movement is presented in the third movement, so it makes the whole piece like a cycle.

5. Conclusion

Liszt created a single movement sonata in the 19th century, and Copland created the American Neoclassical sonata with multi-cultural elements, especially jazz, in the 20th century. They were both developmentally expanding the scope of the piano as both a lyrical and percussive instrument, which furthered piano repertoire into the 20th century.

Acknowledgement

This article is the periodical achievement of the Jiangsu Province Graduate Innovation Project "Piano Performance in the Field of Vision of Piano Art History-Teaching Reform Program for Graduate Students in Music Majors" (No. JGLX19-094) in 2019.

References

- [1] Berger, Arthur. Aaron Copland New York: Oxford University Press. 1953
- [2] Crist, Elizabeth B. & Shirley, Wayne. Ed. The Selected Correspondence of Aaron Copland. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2006
- [3] Copland, Aaron & Perlis Vivian. Copland 1900 through 1942 St. Martin's / Marek. New York. 1942
- [4] Copland, Aaron. The new music 1900-1960 New York: W.W. Norton 1968
- [5] Copland, Aaron. Music and imagination Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1952
- [6] Gooley, Dana. The Virtuoso Liszt Cambridge: 2004
- [7] Gordon, Stewart. A history of keyboard literature. Schormer: 1996
- [8] Hamburger, Klara. Liszt. Budapest. 1987
- [9] Hamilton, Kenneth. Liszt. Cambridge. 2005
- [10] Kirby, F.E. Music for piano –A short history. Cambridge: Amadeus Press. 1995
- [11] Merrick, Paul. Revolution and religion in the music of Liszt. New York. 1987
- [12] Pollack, Howard Grove Music Online ed. L Macy [Accessed http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.clementi.brandonu.ca/subscriber/article/grove/music/06422?q=aaron+copland&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit April 3, 2008]
- [13] Pollack, Howard. Aaron Copland-The life and work of an uncommon man. Chicago: University of Illinois Press. 2000
- [14] Samson, Jim. Virtuosity and the musical work. The Transcendental Studies of Liszt. Cambridge, 2003
- [15] Walker, Alan. Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed [14 Jan. 2008 of access]) <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

[16] Walker, Alan. Reflections on Liszt. London: 2005

[17] Winklhofer, Sharon. Liszt's Sonata in B Minor A study of Autograph Sources and Documents. UMI 1980