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Mozart and Mendelssohn: The *Sonata da chiesa* — a "Phoenix" of Baroque Forms

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Abstract. Scholars studying Mendelssohn's music, in Russia, as well as in other countries, have often noted the manifested features of bringing in stylistic traits of Bach's music in the composer's works, leaving out the phenomenon of bringing in the stylistic peculiarities of Mozart's music in the artistic legacy of the founder of the Leipzig Conservatoire. To fill in this gap, we believe that it is possible to demonstrate through the prism of the *sonata da chiesa* genre precisely the line of succession from Mozart to Mendelssohn. Such a step is justified by the fact that Mozart's church sonatas, as well as Mendelssohn's *Organ Sonatas* op. 65 were types of "phoenixes" (this is how Robert Schumann characterizes Mendelssohn's turn to baroque genres) that burst forth in the composers' works, seemingly, without any prior conditions. At the same time, both Mozart and Mendelssohn show a simultaneous adherence to tradition and experimentation, which each of them brings to the church sonata. It was perhaps Mozart's genius with his interest in the *sonata da chiesa* genre that inspired Mendelssohn to combine further the features of the church sonata with those of the classical solo instrumental sonata, leading to the flourishing of the solo organ sonata that we see with the publication of the *Organ Sonatas* op. 65 (1845) by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy.

Keywords: Church sonata, sonata da chiesa, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, organ, organ sonatas

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Mendelssohn's Incorporation of Bach's Style into His Music

In recent years, more and more researchers are coming to the conclusion that Felix Mendelssohn presents himself as a successor of Johann Sebastian Bach. When presenting argumentation for their position, they refer to the composer's profound knowledge of early music, as well as the music of his great predecessor, which does not contradict the truth. [1; 2] Indeed, Mendelssohn is indebted to several of his teachers for his exposure to the traditions established in the German musical culture, stemming from the Leipzig cantor. One of the most significant of Mendelssohn's instructors, and after a certain period of time, one of his elder colleagues, was Carl Friedrich Zelter, a composer and the head of a singers' cappella in Berlin. Zelter's musical genealogical tree leads through Carl Friedrich Christian Fasch to Johann Sebastian Bach's direct student — Johann Friedrich Fasch, who was Zelter's father. It is significant that the organ was also mastered by Mendelssohn under the tutelage of the musician who pertained to Bach's tradition. It was Bach's namesake, who was of no relation to him — August Wilhelm Bach (1796–1869), a German organist, pedagogue and composer. He studied counterpoint with Zelter, performance on the organ with his father, Gottfried Bach, while the art of piano performance was achieved under the tutelage of Carl Ludwig Heinrich Berger. [3, p. 429–430]

Peter Mercer-Taylor in his article *Mendelssohn and the Institution(s) of German Art Music* writes that, "Basing his teaching firmly on J. P. Kirnberger's pedagogic method, which was based in turn on J. S. Bach's, Zelter led Mendelssohn through a rigorous program of study in figured bass chorale, and co-unterpoint." [4, p. 13]

It is noteworthy that Mendelssohn not only studied the music of the great master, but also popularized the latter's musical heritage. The performance of the *St. Matthew Passion*, the beneficiary concerts in Leipzig for fundraising for establishing a monument to Bach, the organ works combining the Lutheran musical tradition with polyphonic technique, — all of this proves the indisputability of that special role that J.S. Bach played in the formation of Mendelssohn's musical aesthetics.

Mendelssohn's Adherence to Mozart's Musical Style

During Mendelssohn's lifetime, his contemporaries also compared him to another genius, — Mozart. The implicit testimony of the validity of such a comparison may be proved by the following facts:

– Mendelssohn ethereal friendship as a young boy with the celebrated genius — Goethe, for whom Mozart was the etalon of classical music;

– Robert Schumann's exuberant words about Mendelssohn: "Er ist der Mozart des 19. Jahrhunderts, der hellste Musiker, der die Widersprüche der Zeit am klarsten durchschaut und zuerst versöhnt" [He is the Mozart of the 19th century, the brightest musician, the one who most clearly sees through the contradictions of the time and is the first to reconcile them] (Cit. ex: [5, S. 5.]);

– Mendelssohn's early compositions, permeated with the legacy of the Viennese symphonic school and the sonata form as the primary form of thinking.

Let us name, as an example, the Sonata for Two Pianos in *D major*, discovered by Peter Ward Jones, created prior to the beginning of the studies with Zelter and the implementation of the polyphonic technique into his music. Jones observes that in this work "There is scarcely a hint of counterpoint there." [6, p. 113] This bears witness to the fact that for Mendelssohn not only the contrapuntal technique was important,

but also the logic of sonata form. Whereas the formation of contrapuntal skills was facilitated by his studies with Zelter, the principles of sonata form had been mastered by him earlier — "He had absorbed in four or five years of piano tuition." [Ibid.]

It is illustrative that Mendelssohn, following the paths of Mozart, also turned to the genre of the solo sonata. The latter was manifested in the three violin sonatas: the Sonata op. 4 in *F minor* (1825) and two sonatas without opus numbers, both in *F major* (composed in 1820 and 1838); three piano sonatas: op. 6 in *E major* (1826), op. 105 in *D minor* (1821), and op. 106 in *B-flat major* (1827), as well as the Fantasia in *F-sharp minor* for piano op. 28 and the Scottish Sonata ("Sonate écossaise") (1830); two cello sonatas: op. 45 in *B-flat major* (1843) and op. 58 in *D major* (1843); a sonata for viola in *C minor* (1823–1824); and a sonata for clarinet in *E-flat major* (1824).

It must be noted especially that the German composer broadly applies the sonata form in his chamber works, as well: in his Octet for Strings (op. 20 in *E-flat major* from 1825), the Sextet for piano and strings (op. 110 *D major* from 1824), in the string quintets (op. 18 in *A major* from 1831 and op. 87 in *B-flat major* from 1845), the string quartets (op. 13 in *A minor* from 1827; op. 12 in *E-flat major*, 1829; op. 44 Nos. 1–3 in *D major*, *E minor* and *E-flat major* from 1837; op. 80 in *F minor* from 1847), the piano quartets (op. 1 in *C minor* from 1822; op. 2 in *F minor* from 1823; op. 3 in *B minor* from 1825), and the piano trio (in *C minor* from 1820; op. 49 in *D minor* from 1839; op. 66 in *C minor* from 1845).

Similar to Mozart, Mendelssohn experiments with the number of movements and their forms, importing contrapuntal elements into them. But it is not only the turning itself to the creation of compositions of the sonata-symphonic cycle that brings Mendelssohn and Mozart close to each other.

The genre of the *sonata da chiesa* (*church sonata*) — this is what resonates and finds a response in masters works; moreover, in the case of both masters, their interest in the early genre pertaining to the baroque tradition appears all of a sudden. Likewise, to Mozart, whose sonatas appear, in Ulrich Leisinger's opinion, seemingly without any regional tradition, forming "an important part of the repertoire, without any parallels" ["Mozarts Sonaten bilden damit ein musikalisch gewichtiges Repertoire ohne Parallelen"], [7, S. 2] Mendelssohn also turns to the genre of the organ sonata without any observable precedent.

Let us observe especially that the *sonata da chiesa* (*church sonata*) is juxtaposed to the *sonata da camera* (*secular sonata*). In the opinion of Sandra Mangsen, already at the time of Arcangelo Corelli's life (approximately a hundred year prior to Mozart), the differences between the two types of sonatas (*da chiesa* and *da camera*) begin to erode. Nonetheless, there are some basic tendencies distinguishing the church sonata:

– the presence of figure forms and imitational writing;

– performance by an instrumental ensemble with organ accompaniment (the sonatas appeared in the organ solos);

– performances during liturgy;

– a four-movement structure. [8, p. 687]

Mozart's "Epistolary" Sonatas

It must be emphasized that Mozart's church sonatas, in their appeal to the historical genre, called "Epistolary" [Epistelsonate], do not entirely confine themselves into the frameworks that are traditional for this genre. The name "epistolary" itself (from the Ancient Greek — an epistle, a letter) is directly connected with the Catholic liturgy, when in the early 7th century, besides readings of the Old Testament or the New Testament, the Epistle of Apostles

are also included. The place of the sonatas was established between the Gloria and the Credo in the service, while their performance began immediately after the reading of the epistle. Of the enumerated parameters, their coinciding to the mass (they were all composed from 1771 to 1780 and meant to be played at the Salzburg Cathedral) is present.

If we perceive Mozart's music not from a Classicist-centric position, but in the context of stylistic changes stemming from strict style counterpoint, then both the researcher and the listener would be aware of the stylistic patterns tracing its roots to Antonio Vivaldi's instrumental music, baroque Italian opera, and Bach's contrapuntal school. Thereby, Mozart, undoubtedly, on the one hand, absorbed the musical aesthetics of the baroque style, and, on the other hand, reevaluated it, having tied it to the aesthetical world of his time — namely, that of Classicism. However, his turning to the genre of the church could hardly have been connected with the sonatas' religious content or applied relevance. Numerous analytical works covering Mozart's 17 masses, his cantatas and oratorios, make it possible to assert his unquestioning adherence to all the traditions of these sacred genres. Moreover, when carrying out his commission of writing music for divine service, Mozart was not limited in his choice of whatever genre of instrumental music he had a predilection for. Correspondingly, his preference for the forgotten and at that time unpopular *sonata da chiesa* was quite conscious, since it was particularly this genre that became for the composer a sort of "scholarly laboratory" providing the opportunity for reevaluation, experiment and artistic search.

The instrumentation of the sonatas also corresponds to the tradition of the *sonata da chiesa*. Mozart's 14 sonatas are written for two violins, organ and the basso continuo group. In certain cases, the part of the bass voice (featuring the cello, possibly, the bassoon, or another, alternate solo bass instrument) is written out separately, as in Sonata No. 14 in *C major* KV 328 and No. 17 in *C major* KV 336. However, in most cases, the score consists of three voices: those of the two violins and the figured bass. Exceptions in the instrumentation are present in three of the Sonatas: No. 10 in *C major* KV 263, No. 12 in *C major* KV 278, and No. 16 in *C major* KV 329.

The divergence from tradition affects even the number of movements and the presence of polyphonic technique. Thereby, all the 17 church sonatas are one-movement works, written in sonata form. As for the contrapuntal elements, these are applied only in several of the sonatas. Let us list them and indicate, in which sections of the forms the implementing of contrapuntal technique occurs. In the subsidiary theme of Sonata No. 2 in *B major* KV 68, a three-voice canon an octave below is present, with the distance of one measure of the entries of the themes; this is also preserved in the recapitulation of the sonata form. In Sonata No. 4 in *D major* KV 144, the canon is brought in by Mozart only in the sonata form recapitulation. A two-voice canon between the first violin and the bass voice at a compound interval of an octave and a sixth below with the distance of two measures between the entrances of the voices occurs in the recapitulation of the primary theme group in the main theme.

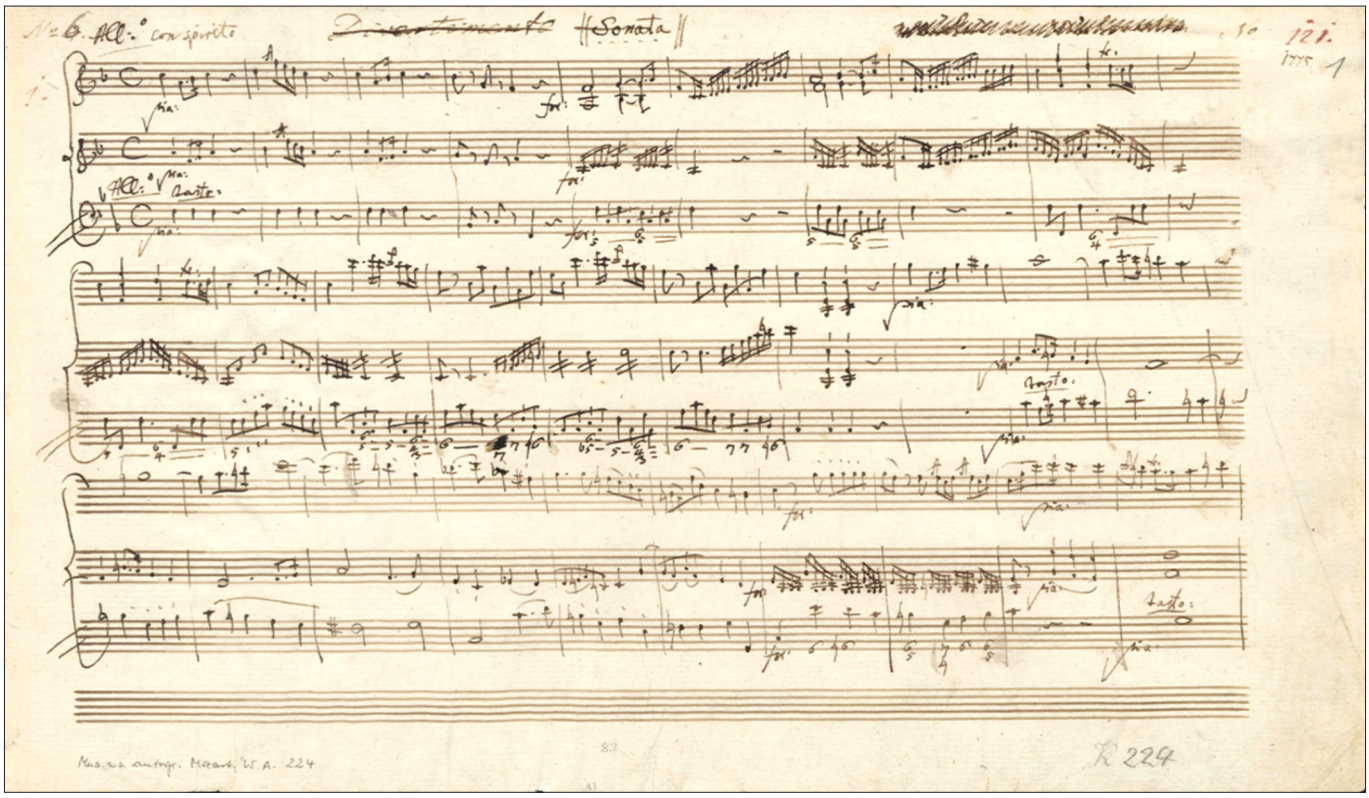
Mozart included two canons at once in his Sonata No. 6 in *B-flat major* KV 212. It is the two-voice canon in the transition theme between the first and second violins with the distance of two measures between the entrances of the voices and the following three-voice canon in the subsidiary theme group an octave below with a one-measure distance between the entering voices. Both canons remain in the recapitulation of the sonata form, as well. It is noteworthy that Mozart brings in the canons in these church sonatas in both the exposition

and the recapitulation, and only in Sonata No. 8 in *A major* KV 225 do we observe a canon in the development section. Its structure corresponds to the two links of a sequence. It is a three-voice canon, with the second voice an octave below and the distance of one measure between the two entering voices.

In his one-movement sonatas, Mozart's desire to experiment with the sonata form can be distinctly observed. Only in a few of the works: Sonata No. 1 in *E-flat major* KV 67, Sonata No. 7 KV 224 (see ill. 1), Sonata No. 10 in *F major* KV 244, and Sonata No. 17 in *C major* KV 336 the development sections are absent, and they are the closest of all to the baroque binary form, the first sections in which end on the dominant harmony of the main tonalities. Some of the works (Sonata No. 3 in *D major* KV 69 and Sonata No. 5 in *F major* KV 145) contain either short development sections, or brief transitions replacing the development sections. Sonatas No. 14 in *C major* KV 278 and No. 15 in *C major* KV 328 have mirror recapitulations, with an absence of repetitions of the expositions and the development sections and recapitulations characteristic of Mozart's time.

Mendelssohn's Organ Sonatas op. 65

Such a concentration of experiments reminds of one group of sonata works in Mendelssohn's music. We specifically refer to the Organ Sonatas op. 65. Despite the fact that the composer himself did not regard them as church sonatas, they all demonstrate a basis on the tradition of the *sonata da chiesa*. This is testified, among others, by one of the first researchers of Mendelssohn's musical legacy, Joseph Hathaway: "To still further render these sonatas essentially Church compositions,



Il. 1. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Sonata No. 7 in *F major* KV 224. Autograph score

Mendelssohn makes considerable use of chorales which, it must be remembered, are in Germany pre-eminently associated with religious matters, as each chorale conveys to the German mind some particular verse or hymn with which the tune is generally connected, much the same as 'Abide with me' would do to us. With the exception of the fifth, where it is used simply as an introduction, and is not heard in the subsequent movements, he has worked them into his movements as an integral, inseparable part of the whole. In the second and fourth sonatas, the chorale is not used at all. Thus *they are distinctly church sonatas*, and are peculiarly adapted for performance in places of worship (my italics. — *E. P.*)." [9, p. 4]

We also find the assertion of these sonatas belonging to the tradition of *da chiesa* in Glenn Stanley's research: "The idea of a Baroque church sonata — a genre undoubtedly known to Mendelssohn — seems to hover behind the sonatas, in part because they include so many chorale settings and fugues." [10, p. 159] In addition to that, Victoria Gamazova has a research work devoted to the Biblical plotline of these sonatas. [11]

Of all the aforementioned four features of the church sonata present in the Organ Sonatas op. 65, almost all of them meet the requirements of the genre in full or partially. Each of the six sonatas incorporates various types of contrapuntal forms, the sonatas are saturated with various polyphonic techniques (for more detail on this question, see: [12]). Let us demonstrate in the form of a table the presence of all the fugues and fugato sections in the Organ Sonatas op. 65, stipulating in a preliminary manner the following. Due to the fact that not all the sonata-symphonic cycles have four-movement structure, in the cases when a movement is absent, the corresponding cells are colored in gray (Table 1).

We also perceive the fact to be no less important that all the movements of the sonatas are not only performed in concerts, but have also found their application in liturgical

Table 1. The Types of Fugues in Mendelssohn's Organ Sonatas op. 65

Number of Sonata	First Movement	Second Movement	Third Movement	Fourth movement
No. 1	Combination of a fugue with sonata form			Complex binary form; the second section is a fugue
No. 2				Fugue
No. 3	Double contrapuntal fugue			
No. 4	Form combining features of sonata form with a double fugato			Complex ternary form with a shortened recapitulation; the second section is a fugue
No. 5			Combination of sonata form with a fugue	
No. 6		Fugue on a chorale		

practice up to the present day. The following assertion is based on the personal experience of the author of this article, who has worked for 15 years in Lutheran churches in Ingria, Germany, Lithuania and Estonia.

Despite the fact that the instrumentation in Mendelssohn's work is different from that established by tradition, the sonatas being written for solo organ, it is particularly the genre of the *sonata da chiesa* that passes the tradition to this type of music-making. Finally, the number of movements in Mendelssohn's sonatas varies from two to four. Of all the works in the cycle, Sonatas Nos. 1, 2 and 4 are four-movement compositions.

Without any doubt, both Mozart and Mendelssohn, basing themselves on the sonata da chiesa genre, interpret it rather freely, reserving for themselves the right to depart from the baroque tradition by ignoring various particular genre attributes. The summarizing table below indicates which features are observed in the works, and which are subject to experimentation (Table 2).

It cannot be denied that we have not discovered up to the present day any written documents in German archives confirming the information about Mendelssohn ever having performed Mozart's church sonatas, or even of his acquaintance with their music. Nonetheless, presumably, Mendelssohn may have familiarized himself with them through his friend Thomas Attwood (1765–1838), with whom he corresponded actively about the prospects of publication of his Organ Sonatas. Thomas Attwood was not only an organist, but also a student of Mozart in Vienna during that period when latter had already composed his church sonatas.

The following fact may serve as an indirect proof that particularly Mozart's Epistolary Sonatas became the source of inspiration for Mendelssohn: the latter apparently had neglected to study the six Organ Trio-Sonatas by J.S. Bach (BWV 525–530), ruling out the opportunity of replicating their forms and turning to their content in his own music, which testifies of the presence of another model

Table 2. Comparison of the Established Features of Church Sonatas with Mozart's Sonatas and Mendelssohn's Organ Sonatas

Genre Features of Church Sonatas	Mozart's Church Sonatas	Mendelssohn's Organ Sonatas
The presence of figure forms and imitational writing	Partially corresponding (contrapuntal techniques are applied in a relatively small number of sonatas)	Fully corresponding
Performance by an instrumental ensemble with organ accompaniment (the sonatas supplanted solo organ passages)	Fully corresponding	A return to the idea of solo passages for the organ
Performance during mass or liturgical service	Fully corresponding	Fully corresponding
Four-movement structure	Lack of correspondence	Partially corresponding

in his compositional reflection, not connected with that of the solo organ sonata.

In addition, the experimentation in the sphere of sonata form and the sonata cycle that op. 65 is permeated with give grounds for thinking that it was important for Mendelssohn to continue Mozart's search in this direction in his own sonatas, symphonies and concertos. It must be emphasized that our point of view does not coincide with the positions of a number of researchers. Thus, Hugo Lepnurm is convinced that op. 65 demonstrates, how soon "…Mendelssohn understand that, in reality, it presents a rather complex task to develop two themes by the means of the organ." [13, p. 113] For this reason, similar to many other composers, as a result, he rejected the idea of "development of a classical sonata form." [Ibid., p. 113] Christian Martin Schmidt also thinks, practically in unison with Hugo Lepnurm, that Mendelssohn does not construct sonata forms in his organ sonatas. [14, p. IX]

Nonetheless, an analysis of these compositions makes it possible to see that these models imbedded by Mozart in his church sonatas undergo development in Mendelssohn's music. The aforementioned arguments may be supplemented with information that the second movement of the Organ Sonata No. 5 is written in sonata form without a development section; the third movement of the selfsame sonata combines features of fugue and sonata form with a mirror recapitulation, etc. Moreover, in his aspiration of achieving a synthesis between sonata form and the fugue, Mendelssohn virtually follows the footsteps of his idol.

In particular, the first movement of his Sonata No. 1, which combines in itself features of the fugue and the sonata, as well as the first movement of Sonata No. 4, combining a double fugato with sonata form, comes close to Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony KV 551. In his op. 65, Mendelssohn also provides several references to Mozart. The third movement of Sonata No. 1 provides a quotation of the theme of the finale of the "Jupiter" Symphony, while the implementation of the variation form into the first movement of Sonata No. 6 refers us to the first movement of Mozart's Sonata in *A major* KV 331.

Conclusion

The emergence of interest towards the genre of the church sonata on the part of Mozart and Mendelssohn were isolated flashes, which in both cases were not followed by revivals. In all fairness, it must be noted that Mendelssohn's 6 Organ Sonatas, which were published in 1845, opened up new possibilities for the modulation of this genre, having aroused the artistic potentials of his fellow composers. It suffices to state that Rudolf Faber's and Philip Hartmann's joint research work analyzes the music of over fifteen German composers who worked in this genre, following Mendelssohn. [15]

Thereby, notwithstanding the differences of their respective religious adherences and belonging to different countries and epochs, it is particularly in these two historical genres do Mozart and Mendelssohn come close in their experimental endeavors, filling them with new content.

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