

# THE DEVELOPMENT SECTION IN MOZART'S PIANO SONATAS<sup>1</sup>

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Sonata form is the great creation of the classical era, and it is the form in which many of the best products of "classical music" have been produced. There are different views among musicologists about the details of the chronology and development of the sonata, as well as about its exact characterization. In particular musicologists have argued that the details of the introduction of the second theme and some features of the development section were the products of intensive and long process of development. Only at the end of this process have they reached the state in which we know them in the "high classical" style, and by which our standard conception of sonata form is shaped. Since my interest here is with Mozart's sonatas – which definitely belong to this mature phase of the high classical style – the details of this historical research need not be at the centre of our attention. This is not to deny that even in Mozart's own career, his conception of the sonata and of sonata-form changed and developed and any strict generalization about what it meant to him is dangerous.

Granted all that, I still think that our standard, somewhat schematized conception of sonata-form as consisting of an exposition, with first and second main subjects (or groups of themes), a development section, and a recapitulation, with the usual harmonic structure associated with it, is a useful and adequate enough framework for my purposes.<sup>2</sup>

Now, what is the particular and characteristic function of the development section in a sonata? Obviously, any sweeping generalization is dangerous and likely to be false here: each sonata and each development section may need a treatment of its own. Nevertheless, some such generalization may help us shape a conception that may prove fruitful in the analysis of particular works.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was written and privately spread in the 1990s, based on a series of private recital-lectures that I gave on the Mozart sonatas. The lack of live demonstration here is a serious limitation, and the reader is strongly advised to read the following with the score. The notes examples were copied from IMSLP site to which we must all be grateful. They are not meant to replace close reading of the score, but to give a general orientation.

<sup>2</sup> I shall not be strict in distinguishing between "theme" and "subject", and use them often interchangeably. As many musicologists have pointed out, in many contexts it is better to talk of first, second and third groups, rather than themes or subjects. I shall not be firm on that either.

It has often been observed that the mature sonata form, with its opposing subjects and the characteristic tonic-dominant structure, is a formal realization of the characteristic polarity of diatonic music. Technically, the development section takes us from the dominant, in which the exposition usually ends, back to the tonic, in which the recapitulation starts. But the tonic-dominant polarity is manifested in many other musical forms and is not specific to the sonata. What is characteristic of sonata form is the particular way in which this polarity is handled and manifests itself in the idea of the development section. What then is this idea?

Perhaps, the most common conception of the problem – one that has been undoubtedly shaped mainly by Beethoven, and which was dominant in the century, is the **dramatic conception**. The idea here, put very roughly, is that some elements that are presented in the main subjects in the exposition are taken up in the development where they are further elaborated, and "worked on" in a way that unfolds their potential, and "meaning". This process is particularly dramatic when the elements in point are stated very briefly, or even embryonically in the exposition, so that unfolding their full power and significance in the development is a real "revelation", which can give a dramatic turn to the whole piece. This is a particular and quite natural way of "making things happen" in music; the dramatic character of this conception often consists of the fact that this process of revealing the hidden power of musical ideas can be naturally incorporated in a structure that builds up a climax at definite points. This conception is very characteristic of many of Beethoven sonata movements and it has become, in one version or another, the standard conception of the development in a sonata. It is not my intention to discuss this conception and the above characterization; it is presented here just by way of giving a general background to an alternative conception I wish to ascribe to Mozart.

It should also be noted that in principle there is nothing in this conception that is intimately connected with the polarity idea. It could be applied, and has been applied to other forms, amongst them "one- theme" forms. Even in Beethoven's own sonatas, it often happens that where two subjects are presented in the exposition only one of them is really dealt with in the development (the other is sometimes "compensated for" in the recapitulation, or in the coda).

Without being rigid about it, it might be helpful, for the following discussion to discern, within this broad conception of the development, various kinds, or models of the development:

- (i) There is, first, the "one-theme" model, where only one theme is really worked on in the development.
- (ii) The "two themes" model, where two main themes or subjects of the exposition are dealt with in the development.

Within this broad second model we can further distinguish three sub- kinds.

- (iia) The "succession" model, where two (or more) themes are developed in succession, one after the other, with no real interconnection between them.
- (iib) The "dialogic" model, where the two themes are played against each other in the development. Here a developed form of one may alternate with a development of the other, or be posed against it, etc.
- (iic) The "synthesis" model, where the development consists of a real synthesis or fusion of the two themes or of various elements of the two themes.

I do not mean this to be a clean and sharp distinction. There are many cases that fall in between these categories and many that fall outside their scope. There are of course various compositional and stylistic considerations for preferring one of these models in each particular context. The point to notice here is that it is mainly the last two kinds – the dialogic and the synthesis models – that are intimately and conceptually related to the very idea of a development in sonata form. It is only here that we make real use of the two themes, of their polarity or of their contrasting character.

Now, these two models, though they may be the typical realization of the essential nature of the dramatic conception of the development in a sonata form, may lead us quite naturally to a totally different conception of the development and its function – a conception I would call the "**unifying synthesis**" conception. This is I believe the typical Mozartean conception, as I shall try to illustrate by numerous examples from his piano sonatas. But before turning into detailed analyses of these, let me add some more general remarks about this unifying conception. In fact, when one looks more carefully into the dialogic model and into the very idea of a dialogue, one realizes that it has some interesting dialectics behind it, which is very important for understanding its realization in music. A dialogue needs

contrast, or opposition; it takes place between two (or more) parties that must retain their character and individuality. But we don't get a real dialogue just by putting two contrasting (or otherwise different) parties side by side, or one after the other. In order to get a dialogue we need some common ground, common subject or element that they both share, or exemplify, or presuppose. Moreover, a real and developed dialogue not only presupposes this common, or shared background; it also has the effect of revealing common elements of the "opposed" parties, elements that might have been hidden, or latent before. In this sense it may have a harmonizing, or unifying effect: it can reveal common features that were not noticed before, or emphasize those that were.

All this may sound wildly metaphorical and hardly relevant to musical understanding. Metaphorical it certainly is (as any talk about music is bound to be, to a lesser or greater extent), but I believe that it is very pertinent to music, and to the understanding of various aspects of structural and compositional considerations in music. In what follows I shall try to exemplify and substantiate these claims, as well as the point of the above distinctions by analyzing some thematic features of the development sections in Mozart sonatas.

In particular I shall try to show that Mozart worked typically (though by no means exclusively) under the unifying conception of the development section in a sonata. The typical model (and again, not the only one) of his developments is the synthesis model, where a sort of fusion and integration is achieved among various constitutive elements of the main "opposing" themes of the exposition. Such developments reveal strong (though sometimes rather abstract and hidden) interconnections between the main elements of the exposition, and thus establish a unified conception of the whole piece. I dare say that I regard this to be a constitutive feature of Mozart's conception of the sonata, and failing to realize this amounts to a failure to perceive an important feature of his compositional thought.

In the following I shall concentrate on the early sonatas, partly because I think that these marvelous pieces have received much less attention than they deserve, and partly because they contain some of the best and most sophisticated examples of the phenomenon I am alluding to.

1) We may begin with the very well known sonata in G, K.283. The development which begins at b.54 consists of two main parts (54-62; 62-72) Here is 54-58 of the first (ex.1):



And here is the beginning of the second (bb.62-66, ex.2):



This "division" within a very short section may appear rather strange, even more so because the second part is a trivial sequence of three descending sixths, which has an obvious relaxing effect. But relaxing from what? – Well, from the compressed tension of the preceding eight bars of which the real essence of the development consists. These eight bars require close attention. At first, they seem to introduce a new element, which is hardly related to what preceded it in the exposition.<sup>3</sup> But on closer inspection it becomes clear that these eight bars are a most sophisticated fusion or synthesis of the constitutive elements of the exposition's two main themes, as the right hand fills-in the rapid descending fourth in the essence of the main motive of the first theme, making the whole a full descending sixth. Here are the opening four bars (ex.3):



The reader is advised to compare bb.1-2 of the primary theme (Ex.3) transposed to the dominant, to 54-5 (Ex.1), and 3-4 of Ex.3 to 60-1, while noticing that the left hand (particularly, the inner voice of bb.58-62) takes up the converse of the descending sixth, which is the essential element of the secondary theme (bb.23-4, ex.4) shown here:

<sup>3</sup> C. Rosen, in his *Sonata Form* (W.W.Norton, 1980) writes of this section, as well as of the sonata in C, K.330: "the developments contain material that makes no direct allusion to the exposition...". This remark is quite typical, and if I am right in what follows, it expresses a deep misunderstanding of an essential feature of Mozart's conception of sonata form and of his achievement in his sonatas.

Ex.4

The simultaneous presentation of these elements of the two main themes in the development presents a "synchronization problem", which Mozart solves by introducing the high D in b.55, which gives the whole rhythmic pattern of 55-9 a beautiful asymmetric turn (this high D, by the way, is itself a reminder of the repeated tonic (G) in bb.4-6 of the main theme of the exposition). For appreciating the affinity of the beginning of the development to the primary motive, one should also note the rhythmic ambivalence between b. 54 and b. 58, where the latter is even closer, in metric terms, to the primary theme.

This is a compressed synthesis of the main elements of the two main themes of the exposition, and Mozart wisely relaxes the tension in the second part of the development (bb.62-72), which does not prevent him from using for that part one of the very same elements he used before in creating the tension – the descending sixth of the secondary theme.

The synthesis of the two main elements of the exposition achieved here has another characteristic feature: **it unfolds a hidden interconnection between these main themes themselves.** The descending sixth of the right hand in the beginning of the development is related not only to the first theme, but also to the descending sixth of the right hand in the beginning of the second theme (ex.4). In fact, one can describe this passage in the development as a **filling-in of the descending sixth of the second theme into the skeletal pattern of the first theme.** It is the second theme compressed, so to speak, into the rhythmic proportion of the first.

This, I believe, is a perfect example of a characteristic recurring feature of Mozart's sophisticated manner of handling the development section in a sonata. Typically, Mozart does not pick up one of the themes and "develop" it, nor does he develop the two themes in succession (there are examples of such developments in Mozart, but they are relatively atypical). What he often does instead is to fuse, synthesize or integrate in the development the essential elements of the main themes in an organic musical unit.

2) The Andante of the sonata in C, K.279 is written in sonata form. Again the development section is relatively short (bb.29-42). On first hearing it is a straightforward development of the first main theme, rich in modulations and harmonic surprises. It is centered on the minor relative key (d), and begins somewhat cunningly on the dominant. It then leads directly to d minor, but when arriving there touches it only "in passing", and turns rather drastically, through a diminished seventh of the second degree (g), to the home key of F.

But rich and clever as this section is in its harmony, its special merit lies in the subtle and sophisticated manner in which a central element of the second theme is integrated into it and becomes the driving force of this progression. It thus synthesizes the constitutive elements of the main themes. We can see this right at the beginning. As I have already said, it starts in what seems to be a straightforward and unproblematic development of the first theme. But right at the second bar of the section (b.30), Mozart turns the subject into a minor second, (firstly, introduced as appoggiatura on G, but later given its full harmonic significance) which is repeated over and over again throughout the development section, and becomes its driving force. Here from b.29 ex.5:



Now, this minor second is the constitutive element of the second theme, where again it is "obsessively" repeated (cf.bb.18-26, Ex.6):



So here again we see the ingenious manner in which Mozart handles the development section as a fusion and synthesis of the constitutive elements of the main themes.

3) The development sections of the first and last movements of the second sonata, in F, K.280, display a similar conception of the development as a unifying synthesis. The

development of the **Presto** (bb.78-106) starts on the dotted motive of the second theme. Here 78-85, ex.7:



But it is immediately combined with the descending fourth of bb.82-5, which is taken from the descending fourth of bb.2-5 of the first theme, shown here (ex.8):



This becomes even more emphatic in the rest of the development, where this fourth is clearly the essence, and more conspicuous in bb.98-101, which are related to 25-8, not only in the common descending fourth, but in the general texture as well.

4) The development of the **first movement** of that sonata is characteristic, like the G major sonata discussed above, not only in that it forms a synthesis of elements of the exposition's main themes but also in that the achieved synthesis reveals (and in fact is the result of) an intimate interconnection between the two themes themselves.<sup>4</sup>

The **triad chord** in the bass of b.1, and the **chromatic progression** of b.3, are keys to whatever goes on later. Here bb. 1-6, ex. 9:



They both re-appear in the second part of the first theme: cf. bb.13-17 to 1-2, and 18-22, to 3-4, where the chromatic move is grandly expanded and emphasized.

And again, these two elements are constitutive of the second theme: the basic triad chord in bb.27, 31, (ex.10):

<sup>4</sup> Another typical example of that is the first movement of the B-flat sonata, K.570, which is quite obvious, and I shall not discuss here in detail.



Ex. 10

and the chromatic progression in 35-43, (ex.11):

ex. 11

The listener is reminded of these two elements in the codetta, bb.54-55.

The development is an obvious play with these two elements: the triad chord in bb. 57, 59, 67, 69, 71, 73, and the chromatic theme – in 63-4, 65-6, 75-80.

Although in this movement the affinity between the constitutive elements of the main two main themes is quite clear and open, it is still worth noticing their subtle fusion in the development. Bars 61-66 provide an example of a beautiful synthesis of the two elements, where a subtle use of the same rhythmic pattern serves to unify two appearances of the triad (C-A-F in the bass and D-B-G in the middle voice, 61-2), followed by a double appearance of the chromatic theme in the middle voice of 63-6. Here bb. 61-66 (ex.12):

Ex. 12

5) I shall now turn to some movements in the so-called Mannheim and Paris sonatas. The development section of the sonata in C, K.309 is a magnificent illustration of a transition **from dialogue to real synthesis**. It begins as a beautiful dialogue between a developed first theme (59-62) and a subtle variation on the second theme (63-6), which repeats itself in 67-72. Here 59-64 ex.13:

Ex. 13

The constitutive element of the second theme on which the variation here is built is the minor second F# – G in bb.35-7, (ex.14), etc., which is itself inverted in 49-51, (ex.15) by the suspended high F–E:



Ex.14 . . . . .



Ex.15

Thus relating this minor second of the second theme to the aforementioned passage in the development may seem erroneous, for it occurs in the development as an appoggiatura, whereas in the above place in the second theme it is part of a harmonic dominant progression. Yet, before ruling out this interpretation the reader should pay attention to the following. The main motive of the second theme, of which the minor second in question is the essential element, recurs, in a compressed form, in b.45, within a larger passage, in forte, whose essence consists of high D (43) -high E (44) - G –F# (45), ex.16:



Ex.16

This seems to me to be the source of the above passage in the development (63-4), which is even more persuasive when compared to (71). I think that when these relationships are followed through, the above analysis, which relates the minor second of bb.35-6 to the appoggiatura of b.64 appears more convincing.

This dialogue between the elements of the two main themes turns in the later part of the development (bb.73-82) into a real synthesis of them, where the main motive of the first theme is modulated by emphatic repetitions of the minor seconds: D#–E (74), C#–D (76), B–C (77), G#–A (78) and D#–E (79-81). Here is its beginning, bb. 73-76 (ex.17):



Ex.17

This interpretation is supported by comparing the role the minor second plays in solving the diminished seventh of b.50 of the second theme with its role in the series of diminished chords in the above examples from the development.

6) A few months after this sonata in C was completed, Mozart wrote the sonata in A minor, K.310, and the two are as different as one can imagine. Yet, the handling of the development section in the first movement of this A minor sonata displays, once again, a similar conception of the synthetic model. The bulk of this development consists of bold modulations on the rhythmic motive of the first theme. Closer inspection reveals, however, that a somewhat hidden element of the second theme is integrated into the general pattern of the development and becomes its governing idea. I am referring to the recurring progression C-A-B-G#-A-F#-G# in bb. 59-62, (ex.18), which is sequenced three times in B, E, A:



This is taken from the similar progression: F-D-E-C-D-G(B)-C in the bass of bb.28-31, (ex.19) of the second theme:



It should be also noted that the main steps of the harmonic progression of the development is a sequence of descending fifths: B(58) - E(62) - A(66) - D(70). Now, this is very much like the progression of the descending fifths in the soprano line of the second theme: C(23) - F(24) - B(25) - E(26), which is itself taken from the harmonic progression of bb.6-8 (D-G-C-F-B) of the first theme.

So here again, the development, with all its dramatic force, displays a synthesizing fusion of constitutive elements of the two main themes.

7) The very same idea of the development, where an almost hidden element of one of the themes (the one that, on the surface, does not seem to be treated in the development) becomes the governing principle of the harmonic progression of the development, is found in the other and later minor sonata – the one in C minor, K.457.

Here again, the main bulk of the development consists of bold modulations on the main motive of the first theme. But studying the pattern of these modulations more carefully

reveals a governing idea taken from the secondary theme. The whole progression is of the "increasingly condensed" type, which gives it a dynamic character (a typical Bethovenian move). It begins by four preparatory bars (83-86), where the last two "answer" the first, (ex.20):



And then the real drama begins (87) by a condensed sequence with no balancing answers. Now, the key notes in this sequence are B-flat (87) - B (89) – C (91) – D (93), and these are exactly the notes so much emphasized in the second theme of the exposition (44-5, ex.21):



What we see here is that the constitutive element of the secondary theme - the chromatic line mentioned, which is a manifest expression of the chromatic idea which governs the whole secondary theme (cf. bb. 36-7, 40-41, 48, 57, 59-62) – is integrated into the development (which superficially seems to relate only to the first theme) as the leading idea of the harmonic progression by which the first theme is developed. This, to repeat, is exactly the general pattern of the development we have found in the previous A minor sonata, and both are of course marvelous examples of the unifying synthesis conception, which we claim to be typical of Mozart.

It should be also noticed that this thematic connection between the chromatic line of the harmonic progression in the development and the chromatic motive of the secondary theme, is manifest by a structural affinity. In both cases it is an emphatic and "tensed" figure, which comes immediately after calmer, more tranquil and perfectly symmetrical alternations of the top line and the bass. This structural affinity strengthens our suggestion that the progression of bb.87-93 in the development is derived from the chromatic motive (44-5) of the secondary theme.

8) As another example for our claim I shall consider the first movement of the F-major sonata, K.332. The development section (bb. 94-132) seems, on first hearing, to be related only to the second theme: its beginning (bb.94-7, ex.22) trades on both thematic and rhythmic patterns of the beginning of the second theme (bb.41-4, ex.23 ):

Ex.22

Ex. 23

And its main part (bb.109-123) is an obvious development of the second, syncopated part of the second theme (bb.56-67). The first theme seems to be out of the picture.

But a closer look is again revealing. First, the first four bars of the development are "answered" by the four bars 98-101 (Ex. 22), which are obviously taken from bb. 5-8 (Ex.24) of the first theme:

Ex.24

This much is a subtle "dialogue" of these elements of the main themes. The real secret comes, however, later on. The key element in the harmonic progression of the second, syncopated, part of the development (bb.113-123) is a series of emphasized minor seconds in the bass, which support condensed transitions from diminished sevenths to sextachords of G, D and A. The same pattern, however, is the heart of the second part of the first theme (bb.25-37), where Mozart takes us through emphatic diminished sevenths to the sextachords of D, C, and G.

Moreover, the sequence of minor seconds in the bass of this part in the development is governed by a basic motive, formed from the minor seconds of e.g. A - Bflat - F# - G in bb. 114-117, etc. This basic motive, however, is the structural hidden motive of the very beginning of the first theme. Underlying the flowing and calm melody of the first theme there is a great tension created by a variety of means into which we shall not delve here. Chief amongst them is the "syncopated" minor second F - E of b.4. The resolving F (b.5) is then extended over the whole first part of the theme (5-22). Here the first 5 bars (ex. 25):

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Allegro.

Ex.25

The extension is realized by repeated minor seconds, E-F, "answering" the one of b.4 (bb.8-9, 11-12, 16, 19-20). The repeated dominant cadences of bb.20-22 are thematically immaterial: they are sort of rhythmic preparation of the "shoking" transition to D minor of bb.22-3. Structurally we are left with the skeletal motive of E – F (19-20) – C# - D (22-3), and this is exactly the basic motive we have detected as governing the harmonic progression of the main part of the development.

Thus, what we see here, is that from a subtle "dialogue" (between elements of the first and second themes) in the first part of the development Mozart creates, in the second part, a real synthesis of them, where the general texture is manifestly that of the second theme (second part), but the harmonic progression, which is the substance of this texture, is governed by the basic idea of the first theme.

9) The last example I will mention to illustrate this conception is the first movement of the B-flat sonata, K.333. The very beginning of the development here (bb.63-5, ex.26) consists of a combination of the main motive of the first theme (ex.27) with a dotted variation on the concluding theme of the second group (b.39, ex.28):

Ex.26

Ex.27

ex.28

The middle section of the development displays such a synthesis in an abstract and sophisticated manner. Whereas the fifth descent of b.72 (ex.29) is a subtle minor variation on the main motive of the secondary theme (bb.23-4), it is immediately combined with the syncopated scale of 73-4 (ex.29), which is an expansion of bb.9-10 (ex.30) of the first theme. Here bb. 71-74 (ex. 29) followed by bb.9-10 (ex.30):

Ex.29 *legato*

Ex.30

And again, the splendid syncopated turn of bb.79-80, (ex.31), for instance:

Ex.31

is a perfect synthesis of the soprano line of bb.9-10, (ex.30) of the first theme, with the chromatic middle voice of 54-5, (ex.32) of the conclusion of the second group:

ex.32

(The soprano line in the development here should be also compared to the bass of b.35).

This, I believe, is a marvelous example not only of the way Mozart integrates the constitutive elements of the main themes in the development, but also of the unifying effect achieved by this synthesis. For, although the interconnections between the two main themes are manifest in the exposition itself (the descending sixths of b.1 and of b. 23, the syncopated turns of b.5 and of b.25, 29, etc.) they become more conspicuous and gain special musical significance in the development, where these interrelated elements are integrated in one musical unit.

There are numerous other examples one can bring forth for discussing the issues we have dealt with, but the cases I have brought are sufficient, I hope, for illustrating the main point I wished to establish: that there is a characteristic way in which Mozart handles the development sections in his sonatas (which I have called the synthesis model), and that this way displays a particular conception of the development section and its function in sonata form (what I have called the unifying synthesis conception). This is accomplished, in the

most typical cases, by a subtle and sophisticated integration, in the development section, of the constitutive elements of the exposition's main themes.

Throughout the discussion I used some simplified notions and distinctions: the very standard scheme of the structure of sonata form should not be taken too rigidly, for it sometimes forces a piece into a formal scheme to which it does not naturally fit. Even more arbitrary may be the distinctions between the various models of the development section, which I have roughly sketched and freely used. I am perfectly aware of these limitations, but not too much troubled by them, for my main purpose is to point to a characteristic and important feature of Mozart's musical thought, and for this purpose the above notions and distinctions – be they as rough and inaccurate as they may – seem to me to be harmless.

The unifying synthesis conception to which I have alluded is manifested not only in the particular way in which Mozart handles the development. It is also intimately tied with other features of his compositional thought, such as his use of symmetries, his conception of the relationships between the main themes, features of his codas, and more. This conception of the unifying synthesis gains special significance in light of the specially rich and multifarious character of Mozart's style: very often the richness of multifarious textures, melodies and harmonic turns in one page of Mozart's music is astounding (e.g, the beginning of the F major sonata K. 280 discussed above). And as a result various means of integration and synthesis have special significance for conferring upon it convincing coherence. But all these must await a discussion of their own.