




# An Interpretive Analysis Of Mozart's Sonata #6

BY DONALD ALFANO

Mozart composed his first six piano sonatas, K. 279-284, between 1774 and 1775 for a concert tour. In a letter to his father dated October 17, 1777, he commented, "Here and in Munich I've played all six of my sonatas by heart and several times. I played the fifth in G [K. 283] at that grand concert in the Stube. The final one in D [K. 284] sounds beautiful on Stein's piano" (*The Letters of Mozart and His Family*, edited by Emily Anderson).

The Sonata in D Major, K. 284, referred to as the Dürnitz, is different from the first five sonatas in structure and character, and poses musical and technical challenges not found in the others. Mozart composed the Dürnitz sonata in 1775 at the request of Baron Thaddeus Freiherr Dürnitz, a music lover and amateur bassoonist from Munich for whom the composer wrote three bassoon concertos. Published in Vienna in 1784, the Dürnitz uses the typical three-movement scheme, however, the sequence is unusual in having a spacious Allegro first movement followed by a Rondeau en Polonoise and a Theme and Variations.

The Allegro is much more symphonic in nature than any of the earlier sonatas and most likely was intended to exploit the Stein piano introduced to Mozart around 1777.

The piece's symphonic character can be attributed to frequent bass octaves that increase the piano's sonority; double notes that are often assigned to one hand; tremolos; complex rhythmic figures, such as  in measure 10; and difficult hand-crossings in the development section.

Measures 10-14

Measure 52-53

In the nine years before the first edition was published, Mozart revised the first movement to make it more symphonic in nature. The early version expresses a thinner texture and there are no hand crossings in the development section. A portion of the original first movement appears in the Bärenreiter edition.

Opening, early version

Development, early version

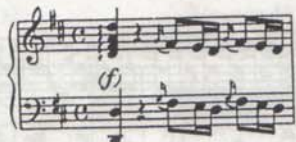
Of the sonatas Mozart wrote in major keys, the Dürnitz is the most like Beethoven. The first movement's symphonic nature calls for the pianist to



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sink into the chords and bass octaves using touches of pedal. By holding the notes of the opening rolled D-major chord with the fingers, the piano produces a fuller sonority than if the chord is held with the pedal.



This sonata uses a variety of rhythmic values not found in the others, including the figure  in measure 10. By establishing a workable tempo at the beginning of the movement, students execute this figure with precision and avoid the tendency to play it as . One way to practice the develop-



ment section, which can pose problems for small hands, is to play the right-hand notes backwards.



Students with small hands should play fingers 4 and 5 together by rotating from the thumb; the hand

should not overly extend or stretch while playing fingers 4 and 5 on G# and A, respectively.



To anticipate the recapitulation, use a slight ritardando and accent the first note of each group of four sixteenths in measure 71. This will ensure that the D-major rolled-chord in measure 72 has a full-bodied sound, not a crash.



As convenient as it might seem, dividing the octaves in measures 122-123 between the hands will decrease their power. In this movement Mozart assigns bass octaves to the left hand for the first time, and they should sound like octaves.



The second movement is an Andante called *Rondeau en Polonoise*, and reflects the French influence on Mozart, a departure from his previous practices. Musicologists generally consider Mozart's sonatas to be Italian in character and his keyboard style to have been influenced by Johann Christian Bach and Franz Joseph Haydn. In *Mozart's Piano Sonatas* Aubyn Raymar writes,

the clue to the source of the peculiarities that distinguish it from its predecessors is furnished by the title of the second movement, which Mozart has written in French – ‘*Rondeau en Polonoise*’ – admitting in this way, his debt to gallant French models for a new plan of construction. For, the work reveals a remarkable contrast with the earlier sonatas by difference in plan, in extent, and in language. In imitation of the principles of French composers who more than others, aimed at wide variety in form and arrangement of the component items of their sonatas, Mozart has here adopted a novel sequence of movements, while retaining their number of three. Among these movements the first preserved the semblance more than the reality of classical tradition. In the second and third, the tradition is wholly abandoned in favour of French innovation.

This movement is a lesson in 18th-century ornamentation, and Mozart varies the rondo theme with each repetition.





As in the first movement the Rondeau en Polonoise uses a more symphonic style than the slow movements of the earlier sonatas. The tempo should be a stately Andante that follows Mozart's indications, including various rhythmic values, quick dynamic changes, accents, and written-out ornamentation. As a result, this movement cannot withstand an excessive amount of rubato, and any noticeable fluctuation in tempo destroys its character as well as the expressive devices and ornamentation. There is an opportunity for judicious rubato in the sonata's second slow movement, the 11th variation of the third movement.

The highlight of the Dürnitz sonata is its third movement, a theme with 12 variations, which Mozart uses for the first time in a piano sonata. Mozart's most expansive use of the form within the genre, the movement is as long as, if not longer than, many of his other complete sonatas, with each variation focusing on such technical problems as octaves, double notes, tremolos, and hand-crossings, all of which already appeared in the first movement.

Mozart's theme is a lyrical Andante with flowing eighth notes in the melody and a simple Alberti bass.

Mozart groups the first four variations into two pairs and divides the theme into progressively smaller rhythmic values for each group. The theme appears in triplets in Variations 1 and 2 and in sixteenth notes in Variations 3 and 4.

Within the pairs, the second variation begins with the same note values as its companion, but in the opposite hand. Through these variations and a dynamic plan that moves from soft to loud, Mozart

builds momentum and brings the movements to a climax.

Variation 1

Variation 2

Variation 3

Variation 4

Variations 5 and 6 also function as a pair, with Variation 5 returning to an eighth-note motion with a simple melody performed piano, whereas Variation 6 contains sixteenth notes marked forte, with hand-crossings reminiscent of the development section of the first movement.

Variation 5

Variation 6

A complete change of character occurs in Variation 7, which is the only one of the 12 in a minor key. It offsets the brilliant character of the other variations and creates a sense of architecture with its placement in the middle of the movement.

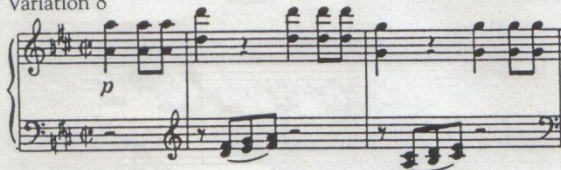
Variation 7



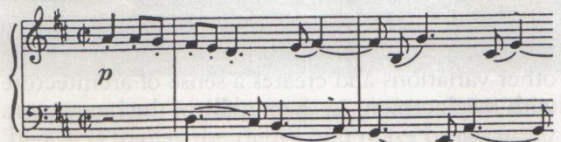


With a return to a major mode, Variations 8, 9, and 10 function as a unit, using the rhythmic and dynamic plan of the opening variations. Variation 8 uses eighth notes in octaves, whereas Variation 9 presents the theme as a canon.

Variation 8

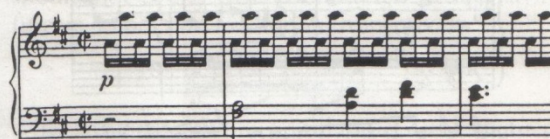


Variation 9



The music reaches another climax at the end of Variation 10, using broken octaves in sixteenth notes in the right hand and a variation of the theme in the left hand. This sets the stage for another unexpected change of events in Variation 11.

Variation 10



Florid and richly ornamented, Variation 11 changes tempo to *adagio cantabile*, and most editions offer the autograph for comparison.

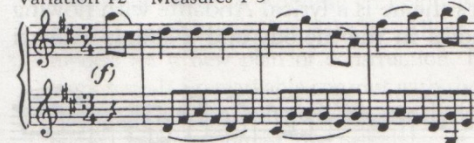
Variation 11



Pianists of Mozart's day could play the quick dynamic changes and accents in the melodic line of the autograph easily with the responsive actions of Stein's pianos. Mozart expressed his appreciation for these instruments' subtleties in a letter dated October 26, 1777: "...his [Stein's] hammers fall back immediately. . . . The keys are struck whether held down or not. . . . The pedal, which is pressed by the knee, is better managed by him than by others. I only just touch it and it acts; when the knee is removed there is not the least vibration" (*Mozart's Piano Sonatas*, Raymar). The elaborate flourishes in Variation 11 are another element absent from the earlier five sonatas and foreshadow some of Mozart's later piano concertos.

Number 12 is the only variation in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time. Announced in eighth notes, the theme soon breaks into sixteenth notes in both hands bringing the Dürnitz sonata to an energetic close.

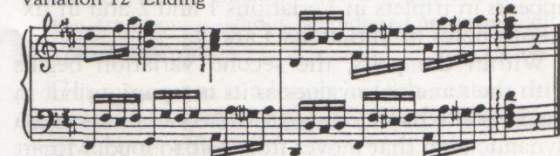
Variation 12 Measures 1-3



Measures 9-11



Variation 12 Ending







One consideration in performing a theme and variations is to decide how much of a pause, if any, should occur between the variations. Obviously, some variations are played *attacca*, indicated by the composer, while others call for a pause. The first four variations function as a unit, so it seems logical to play them without a pause. Variations that have a change of character or are different from previous variations, such as Variation 5, Variation 7 (the only variation in minor), Variation 11 (the richly ornamented variation that has a tempo change to *adagio cantabile*), and Variation 12 (the only variation in triple meter), could be separated by a pause.

The Alberti-bass accompaniment of the theme appears in a loud register on modern pianos. As an experiment, pianists should finger pedal the accompaniment, rather than use the damper pedal, which can obscure the melody and the phrasing, especially the two-note slurs in the melody.

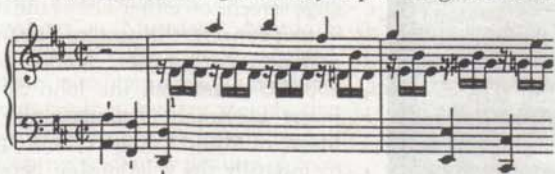
#### Theme



Throughout the variations Mozart includes interplay between the hands. The interval of a third, a common one throughout the entire sonata, appears in both hands in Variation 5. Practicing these as broken thirds, from the bottom note up as well as from the top note down, will ensure a legato melodic line.



Variation 6 should be practiced with the left hand alone, concentrating on the jumps in registration.



The position of the theme and accompaniment in Variation 11 is similar to that of the opening theme, so a pianist should use finger pedaling to

maintain a transparent texture. The Associated Board edition has the indication, *dolce espressivo*.

#### Variation 11



The most vocal-like of all the variations, #11 could withstand more elasticity of tempo so as not to crowd the elaborate flourishes of notes. Use measure 30 to set the tempo as it contains the most notes in one beat.

#### Measure 30



For Variation 12 the *allegro* tempo marking appears in the first edition but not in the autograph, so most editions print it in parentheses. Only slight acceleration of tempo is necessary because of the change of meter and shorter phrase groups. Students should use a sharper finger articulation for this variation than the others and only touches of pedal, or else the movement will sound too dense. Measures 9 and those following in the left hand are related to the right-hand passages of the development section of the first movement and should be practiced in the same way.

#### Measures 8-10



In *Guide to Pianists' Repertoire*, Maurice Hinson classifies the Dürnitz sonata as unusually effective, yet it is infrequently performed, perhaps because of its 25- to 30-minute length. Although it seems exceptionally long for an opening work on a recital, the Dürnitz sonata could effectively end the first half of a program and could be introduced by a shorter work of Mozart. In fact, Mozart intended many of his short compositions to serve as introductions to his larger works. Alfred Einstein believes that the Fantasy in D Minor, K. 394, could serve as an effective introduction to the Dürnitz sonata, stating, "the whole piece [D Minor Fantasy] seems rather an introduction to a D Major Sonata, K. 284 say, or K. 311, or even one of the piano-violin sonatas" (*Mozart His Character, His Work*, Einstein). The Dürnitz is a magnificent work that challenges a pianist's technique and helps one to understand structure and style in Mozart. □