

Second Prize

UNITY AND CONTRAST IN MOZART

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Movements in sonata form provide an interesting dilemma for analysis. On the one hand, we are fascinated by the tension created by the opposing tonal and thematic areas. The exposition generally consists of two contrasting tonal areas, one in the tonic key (the first-theme area), and the second in a new key (the second-theme area). The modulation away from the tonic key area and the arrival of the new key is a dramatic event that a composer often highlights with a new, and contrasting, theme. Thus, by giving the new key area a theme of its own, a composer actually intensifies the tonal tension and in this way divides the exposition into two very distinct units.

On the other hand, we feel that great works of art are unified, despite these apparent contrasts. David Epstein, writing in *Beyond Orpheus*, remarks:

How do we explain the musical as well as psychological feeling of unity sensed in the great works of Mozart, Haydn, Brahms, and Beethoven? Given for example, a sonata-form movement from the piano sonatas of Mozart, why can we not substitute in it themes from other of these sonatas, assuming congruence of tempo, key and meter ... ?¹

One might suggest that movements in sonata form are inherently unified because of the process of recapitulation, by which all of the material of the exposition, including and especially the second-theme area, appears in the tonic key in order to resolve the piece. But this unity only applies to the tonal contrast, for the recapitulation in the tonic presumably relieves only the tonal tension of the exposition (and development). What about the tension created by the two different themes? There is no thematic reconciliation in the recapitulation. Most music theorists agree with David Epstein that recapitulation is

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not necessary to unify thematic material, but that there are inherent similarities between the two themes which combine in a masterwork. In fact, the theorist Rudolph R  ti investigates this issue in his *The Thematic Process in Music*, and advocates the popular view when he writes:

... the different themes of one movement—in fact all its groups and parts—are in the last analysis also but variations of one identical thought . . . they (the first and second themes) are contrasting on the surface but identical in substance. In fact, it is this being 'different on the surface but alike in kernel' in which is centered the inner process of musical structure of the last centuries.²

Thus, herein lies the dilemma. For although we applaud the contrasts that make sonata form so exciting, we are not satisfied that that is all there is to it. While we accept that the form succeeds because of the tonal and thematic contrasts, we also believe that individual masterpieces succeed because of inherent unity. For this reason our analysis of movements in sonata form should include finding the unifying force that is hidden in contrasting material. And, it is precisely because of these clear-cut contrasts that the unity in beautiful pieces is especially noteworthy.

The first movement of Mozart's Piano Sonata in C Major, K. 545, is such a piece. This analysis will demonstrate that Mozart uses a very common compositional technique, the neighbor-note figure, to unify seemingly diverse textures in this sonata-form movement, and will uncover the various and often surprising ways in which Mozart weaves the figure into the fabric of this masterwork.

The analysis begins with the first theme, which, despite its four-measure length, includes the neighbor-note figure on many levels of structure. Mozart articulates the midpoint in measure 2 with the first example of the neighbor-note figure. In this case the figure comprises both the lower and upper neighbor notes of the tonic pitch. Figure 1 demonstrates this relationship and also the nomenclature I have adopted throughout. I will mark the neighbor notes as eighth notes in order to distinguish them from the pitches they embellish; the values have no rhythmic significance. Mozart uses the neighbor-note figure once again to conclude the phrase in measure 4, where 4 turns around 3.

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Figure 1.



Thus Mozart articulates the formal structure of the melodic line by means of the neighbor-note figure around 1 and 3; meanwhile he embellishes the third member of the tonic triad, 5, with its own neighbor figure, in a striking way. We see in Figure 2 that the first two measures of the theme consist of two fundamental figures, namely an arpeggiation of the tonic triad (a) and also the neighbor-note figure mentioned earlier (b). Because the source and the goal of all these motions is the tonic pitch, our attention is focused there, while 5, the climax of the triadic figure, stands alone on top of the texture. However, as soon as the consequent portion of the theme enters in measure 3, Mozart introduces the upper neighbor note to 5, and thereby re-opens the higher register by means of the familiar neighbor-note figure (see Figure 3). And then, as if to reinforce the long-range neighbor-note connection (for these pitches are not adjacent ones), Mozart bends the melodic line back to 5 before the descent to 3.

Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Thus we have seen how Mozart embellishes each member of the tonic triad with its own neighbor-note figure, and does so in a way that

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emphasizes important structural moments; he embellishes not only the breathing points of the phrase by means of the neighbor note, he also uses a neighbor-note figure to establish and embellish a climax and to bridge the two sections of the theme.

But this is not all, for when we turn our attention to the left-hand part that accompanies the melodic line, we find striking instances of the neighbor-note figure here as well. In order to understand the subtle way in which Mozart weaves the neighbor-note figure into the texture here, we can refer to the theoretical concept *compound melody*, which seeks to explain arpeggiated textures in which the individual tones in the chord progressions express certain melodic tendencies by connecting with the other chord tones to form horizontal lines. As Forte, among others, says, "If the individual melodic strands of an arpeggiation are developed in such a way that each has its own continuity and rhythmic activity the result is compound melody."³

Such is the case here; each of the arpeggiation figures consists of three different notes that we can connect, on the basis of registral and temporal placement, to form three horizontal lines. In Figure 4, I represent each arpeggio as a simultaneity, so that the three individual melodic strands become clear. Harmonic analysis of these chords reveals that Mozart chooses a very straightforward progression beneath the melody, but not a straightforward voicing. Instead of using simple root progressions, Mozart instead chooses certain inversions of V and of IV, so that each of the three voices above is built on the neighbor-note figure. The top voice doubles the highest melodic voice (see Figure 5) with the same 5-6-5 neighbor-note figure (a), the middle voice consists of a double neighbor-note motion around 3 (b), and the lowest voice, the bass line, expresses another neighbor-note motion around 1 (c). Thus, by choosing to use V4/3, IV6/4, and V6, Mozart succeeds in saturating the first theme with the neighbor-note figure.

Figure 4.



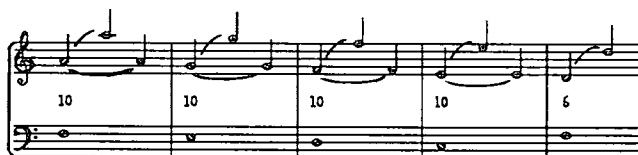
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Figure 5.



The transition section, which begins in measure 5, features a sequential pattern in which the right hand simply elaborates a descending stepwise line that travels from the climactic 6 (the neighbor note to 5) to 2 (the neighbor note to 1) in measure 9; the bass line articulates the melodic line in thirds beneath (see Figure 6). Once the melodic line reaches 2, however, Mozart discontinues the pattern. In measure 10, 6 returns in the melodic line, again supported by its tenth below, but this time that bass note, 4, takes on a special significance. Mozart at first transfers the F up into the melodic line by way of a voice exchange, as shown in Figure 7. The melodic line then continues back down to 2, and meanwhile 4 returns to the bass—this time, however, as sharp 4. With this F-sharp Mozart merely hints at the impending modulation; in fact the ambiguous nature of this modulation will prove to be especially interesting later on. But for now, let us focus on the neighbor-note figure that this F-sharp provides, for we see, by looking ahead to measure 11, that the entire bass line in measure 10 serves as a double neighbor note to G. The F-sharp merely intensifies the motion.

Figure 6.



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Figure 7.



More interesting still is the way that Mozart treats the cadential progression in measure 11. The measure can be divided in half, producing two identical figures, with one important difference: the first note of each figure is not the same. While a lesser composer might have repeated the first four notes in the second half of the measure, Mozart uses this opportunity to introduce the double neighbor-note figure in a very subtle way. This is not an arbitrary change of pattern for, because the two different notes are B and D (7 and 2), they circle around 1 exactly as they did in measure 2. Thus Mozart uses the same double neighbor-note figure to articulate both the first breathing place in the piece, and also the first large formal division between the first- and second-theme areas.

Mozart introduces the neighbor-note figure immediately in the second-theme area, using a C-sharp to intensify the new 5 in the dominant. However, then Mozart quickly introduces C-natural which pushes the bass line away from 5 to 3 in measure 14. At this point the second theme enters with striking correspondences with the first; the second theme also opens with arpeggiation of its tonic triad, and it also cadences with neighbor-note motion, this time around its 7.

The left-hand part of the second theme is even more interesting as it, too, is built upon the neighbor-note motive. Like the left hand in the first theme, this left-hand figure includes multiple melodic lines; in this case, too, 5 sits on top of the texture, while neighbor-note motion goes on below. In measure 15 we find a beautiful double neighbor-note motion which circles around 3 (see Figure 8).

Figure 8.



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Mozart follows this second theme with a variation of the transition section examined earlier. Here Mozart maintains the descending outer-voice parallel tenths, but this time he constructs the sequence so that lower neighbor notes embellish the tenths. In Figure 9a we see the figure as it appears literally in the score; Figure 9b shows the neighbor-note motion more clearly once the first tone in each measure is brought down an octave.

Figure 9.



In this way, the parallel tenths bring the melodic line from F-sharp, where the second theme leaves off, to A, where the closing theme begins in measure 22 (see Figure 10). We should not be surprised that the neighbor-note figure also structures this closing material, and in fact, this closing theme is very similar to both the first and second themes. As we have seen, A, the original climactic neighbor note in the first theme, and 2 in V, becomes the basis for this new theme which, like the two previous themes, features both arpeggiation and neighbor-note figures. Each note of the rising arpeggiation is embellished by its own lower neighbor note; we know that these are not passing tones because the D is inflected to become D-sharp. Thus, instead of (a), we find (b) (see Figure 11). Mozart emphasizes the high A, the goal of the triadic motion, with a double neighbor-note figure, which extends through half the measure. This A, along with its double neighbor-note elaboration, returns in measure 25 and falls to G (1) in measure 26. While we can agree that this is simply a straightforward cadential motion from 2 to 1, it is possible that Mozart uses these precise pitches

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in this register to refer back to the climactic neighbor-note motion that highlights the first theme. At any rate, Mozart then repeats the double neighbor-note figure, now embellishing 1, to end the exposition in measures 26-27, and 27-28 (see Figure 12). He also doubles the A-G figure below in the left-hand chords.

Figure 10.



Figure 11.



Figure 12.



One more detail of this closing section merits attention. Mozart arpeggiates the tones of the V6/4-5/3 progression in the left hand and recalls the compound melody of the opening measures along with its neighbor-note relationships. There are three voices here as well, as we see in Figure 13. Although these voice-leading connections are standard ones, they are not the only common ones possible. It is perhaps even more common for the seventh of V to result from passing, rather than neighbor-note motion, as pictured in Figure 14. Thus once again Mozart chooses to use neighbor-note relationships to structure each aspect of the texture.

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Figure 13.



Figure 14.



The development section begins with material from the very close of the exposition, first in G minor, and then in D minor. In measure 37, Mozart introduces a new sequential figure that leads into the recapitulation; and as we would expect by now, this passage is similar to the two sequential passages from the exposition in striking ways. Like both of the previous sequential passages, this developmental passage features descending outer voice tenths; like the sequence from the second-theme area, this one also features neighbor-note embellishment of these parallel tenths. As we see in 15a, these neighbor-note embellishments are partially disguised by registral placement, just as before. Figure 15b shows the relationships more clearly.

Figure 15.



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Thus far we have seen how neighbor-note figures play a key role in the structure of both themes and sequential passages; a most interesting use of the neighbor-note relationships occurs in the recapitulation, where some unusual events are found.

When the first theme returns in measure 42, it does so in the subdominant key instead of in the tonic, where we expect it to be. Why would a composer begin the recapitulation in the subdominant? Actually, there is a practical reason for beginning in IV; a composer does not need to recompose any of the exposition in order to end in the tonic key, but can merely transpose the entire section up a fourth. That is, by beginning in IV, and modulating to I for the second-theme area, a composer can duplicate the progression from I to V from the exposition: I-V (Exposition) = IV - I (Recapitulation). When this happens, the recapitulation is more like the exposition in another crucial way; by beginning in IV a modulation is required to bring the piece back to I. This modulation is a crucial dramatic aspect of the exposition that is normally lacking in the recapitulation.

And yet, Mozart does not choose this convenient option. Instead he reintroduces measures 9-12 *literally* (not transposed!) in measures 54-57. Thus the end of the transition section in the recapitulation, because it is exactly the same as that in the exposition, points the piece into V instead of back to I.

Well, maybe it does and maybe it doesn't. We did not discuss the harmonic effect of this transition section in the exposition because we were concentrating on other matters, so we should return to that issue now. On further examination we find that the transition section does not lead us emphatically into the dominant. The usual signpost, the secondary dominant chord, never appears as clearly as might be expected. The only hint of a modulation is the F-sharp in the bass in measure 10, which serves as the neighbor note to G. But when that F-sharp appears we are unsure whether it functions as a secondary dominant, or merely as a chromatically inflected neighbor note; nothing else serves to confirm its role until the second theme itself appears. (It does seem appropriate, in light of the importance that the neighbor-note figure plays in the entire movement, that a neighbor note alone signals the modulation.)

That the harmonic outcome of the transition is ambiguous presents Mozart with an interesting opportunity in the recapitulation. Here, Mozart uses the very same passage to lead us, not into V, but back into I, so that the F-sharp now functions as an inflected neighbor note to 5. Once in the tonic, the remainder of the recapitulation is a transposition of the closing of the exposition with a few minor, but interesting, exceptions.

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Comparison of the two closing themes (measures 22+ and measures 67+) reveals that Mozart simplifies the texture by omitting the opening arpeggiation in the recapitulated version, and instead concentrates solely on 2 and its chromatic lower neighbor note. He then highlights 6 with its own chromatic neighbor note in measure 68. These tones, 2 and 6, which are the subject of neighbor-note elaboration here, are themselves important neighbor notes to 1 and 5 on a larger scale. Meanwhile, Mozart also changes the harmonization beneath 6, and chooses a diminished-seventh chord built on F-sharp to replace the II chord of the expository version. In this way, Mozart recalls the important neighbor-note role played by F-sharp one final time.

Now we return to the question of Mozart's irregular recapitulation. While we can only guess at his intentions here, I think it is proper to investigate his decision in terms of the procedures he demonstrates throughout, which means that we might expect to find an answer in the neighbor-note relationships. By returning to IV instead of to I, Mozart allows us to hear the first-theme material in IV, and thereby to make a large-scale connection between the first theme in I and the first theme in IV. Thus, Mozart emphasizes IV in this way. But why? Remember that IV plays an important role on a local level in the first theme itself; in fact, it is the neighbor-note chord that Mozart chooses to harmonize the climactic neighbor-note 6. By saying that IV is a neighbor-note chord, we emphasize the role that it plays in the first theme, for we remember that it appears in the 6/4 position there in order that the neighbor-note connections with I are very clear (see Figure 16).

Figure 16.



When Mozart begins the recapitulation in IV he makes the connection between I and IV on a grand scale, and thus effects the neighbor-note motion at this level of structure. And, when Mozart sets the first theme in IV he emphasizes three very important neighbor-note pitches. The first half of the phrase ends on F, the local tonic, which is the neighbor note to E (3) on the larger scale. The theme itself ends on A and we remember the important neighbor-note role that this

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pitch plays throughout. One other pitch is emphasized in this special setting of the theme: namely D, which embellishes C in measure 44. In this way Mozart highlights the large-scale neighbor-note motion from D to C (2 to 1) as the climactic motion in the theme. Clearly, transposition of the first theme into the subdominant is the only transposition that provides these correspondences.

And so, the neighbor-note figure unifies contrasting material in the first movement of Mozart's Piano Sonata in C Major, K. 545. We have seen how the first theme makes use of the neighbor-note figure in many ways: as a means of articulating phrase structure, as a means of achieving and elaborating a climax, and even within the setting of the accompanimental material. The neighbor note is essential to the transition section, for it is that figure that effects the modulation from I to V. The second and closing themes, like the first theme, feature neighbor notes that articulate phrase structure, climaxes, and also accompanimental material. We have seen that the development section consists primarily of a sequential passage which, like that in the second-theme area, is built on lower neighbor-note elaboration of descending, parallel tenths. The recapitulation makes use of the neighbor-note relationships in both the details, as well as on a large formal scale. We have seen how Mozart makes only a few changes at the note-to-note level in the recapitulation, and that all of these intensify neighbor-note relationships. And finally, we have discussed how Mozart produces a large-scale neighbor-note relationship by beginning the recapitulation section in the subdominant, rather than in the expected tonic.

All of this is striking evidence for the unifying role that the neighbor-note figure plays here. By analyzing a movement in terms of its common denominator, as we have done, we can focus on aspects of unity in sonata-form composition. And in so doing, we may begin to understand the delicate balance of unity and contrast that characterizes masterworks in this form.

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NOTES

¹David Epstein, *Beyond Orpheus: Studies in Musical Structure* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1980), p. 1.

²Rudolph Réti, *The Thematic Process in Music* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951), p. 4.

³Allen Forte, *Tonal Harmony in Concept and Practice* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), p. 207.