

An Analysis of the Piano Sonata in F Minor by Sophie Maria Westenholz

The Sonata in F Minor by Sophie Maria Westenholz is cast in a familiar three-movement form, fast-slow-fast. The first movement is in sonata style, the middle movement is in the submediant D-flat major, and the third and final movement is a rondo concluding in F minor. But there are surprising expressive details within this apparent predictability. Firstly, motivic relationships appear across the entire sonata. Secondly, the sonata exploits chromatic mediant and other remote key relationships. Thirdly, there are many unexpected structural features.

Regarding motivic material, the opening phrase of the primary theme features a descending seventh. Its first appearance descends

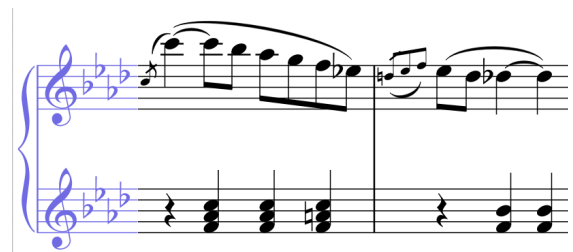


Fig. 1, mm. 3-4 (mvt. I, primary theme)

from scale degree $\hat{5}$ to $\hat{6}$ (Fig. 1). In

its second appearance (Fig. 2) it arpeggiates a descent from the sixth scale degree to the leading tone, the tone relations that will be seen most often in this motive as it appears throughout the work. Notice also that the notes are D-flat and E-natural, tones that will be

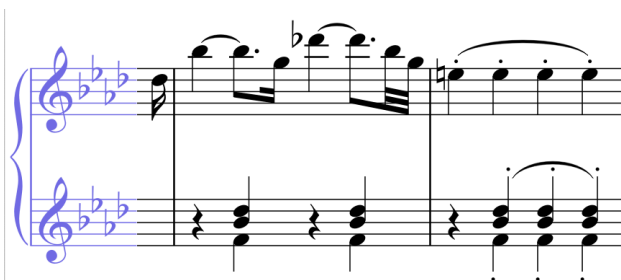


Fig. 2, mm. 5-6 (mvt. I, primary theme)

seen as significant to the sonata's overall tonal design. While a couple of appearances of a descending seventh would be a trivial observation, this descending seventh motive appears throughout all three movements

with such frequency, either filled in or presented as a descending leap, and at such pivotal moments, that it colors the character of the entire work. This author finds more than 25 non-redundant cases of this motive, averaging once every twenty measures. Further

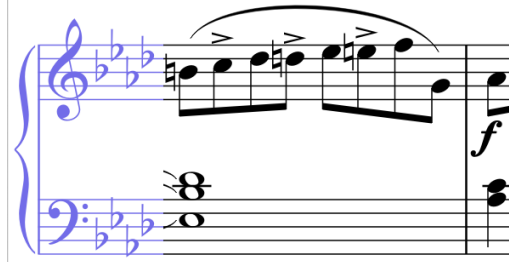


Fig. 3, m. 26 (mvt. I, end of transition)

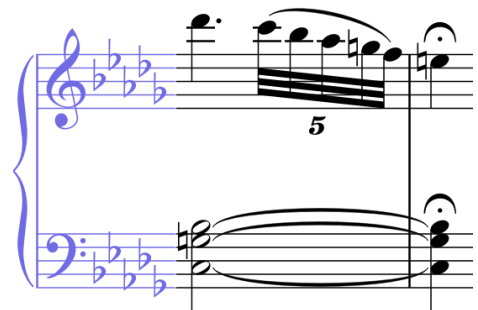
examples will be given here as representative, though not exhaustive. At the end of the exposition's transition section, just before the cadence on A-flat that marks the beginning of the second tonal area, we find a descending leap from $\hat{6}$ to $\hat{7}$ (Fig. 3). At measure 136, at the



Fig. 4, m. 136 (mvt. I, end of development)

very end of the development and just before the first movement's recapitulation, Westenholtz emphasizes the dominant-seventh harmony on C with a quick scalar descent from D-flat to E-natural ($\hat{6}$ down to $\hat{7}$) (Fig. 4). The slow

second movement includes several striking instances of descending sevenths, with perhaps the most significant being the one that concludes the movement (Fig. 5) with a descent from D-flat to E-natural and prepares for the *attacca* continuation into the rondo finale. At measures



478-479 in Fig. 5, m. 261-262 (end of mvt. II.)

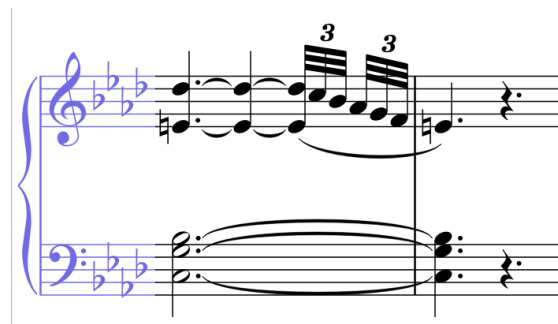


Fig. 6, mm. 478-479

the rondo finale we hear the end of the retransition that carries us from section C back to section A' (and thus back to tonic for the final time). This weighty moment is again marked with

a descending seventh from $\hat{6}$ down to $\hat{7}$ (Fig. 6). And, finally, one last appearance of the descending seventh motive is given just before the final cadence. For this most emphatic final statement of the motive, the interval is expanded dramatically to a compound descending seventh from D-flat 6 down to E 4 (Fig. 7). These and many other instances of the descending seventh motive contribute to the inter-movement coherence of the work.



Fig. 7, mm. 499

The tonal plan of this sonata further reveals a sophisticated architecture. After the first movement's exposition closes in the relative key of A-flat major (as expected), the development begins in E major, creating one of many chromatic mediant relationships in this sonata, before launching into a succession of remote keys related by descending fifth through A, D, and G and then to C minor, the first closely related key heard since the beginning of the development. Tonal motion proceeds to A-flat major and then to D-flat major before the tonal zenith of the first movement appears in the development section with a new theme in the remotest possible key, B minor. Put another way, the development section, which accounts for 80 of the movement's 190 measures, explores eight different keys, five of them far removed from the tonal constellation of F minor. Even the movement's recapitulation offers tonal surprises, as the transition section briefly explores D minor before restoring F minor as tonic (presenting another chromatic mediant relationship). The sonata's two passages in D minor bear additional interesting relationships: in both cases, a common chord modulation from D-flat major to D minor is accomplished via enharmonic reinterpretation of a fully-diminished seventh chord; also, they suggest symmetry across the entire work, as the concluding instance

of D minor is 166 measures from the end, while the first instance is 156 measures from the sonata's beginning.

The slow arioso middle movement in D-flat major is comprised of five phrases. The first phrase, introductory in character, is in two-four meter and leads to an elided perfect authentic cadence in D-flat at which point the meter effectively changes to six-eight (though Westenholz's manuscript has triplets for eight bars before a change is made to the written time signature). The second and third phrases modulate from D-flat to A-flat, supplying two perfect authentic cadences in A-flat, thus far providing the expected foil to the movement's key of D-flat and, more broadly, hewing close to the sonata's tonal center of F. But the fourth phrase modulates by chromatic mediant relationship to B major, an enharmonic spelling of the subtonic key of this movement, and also referring back to use of B minor in the first movement's development section. The lengthy fifth phrase restores simple duple meter and modulates first to the movement's tonic key of D-flat major and ultimately to a half-cadence in F minor that prepares for the rondo finale movement, which begins *attacca*.

The first half of the rondo is in F major, and yet the retransition that leads from section B in the dominant back to the rondo theme in the F major tonic travels by way of A-flat and D-flat (supporting the larger minor-mode tonality of the work), as well as D minor. The two parts of section C explore D-flat (referring back to the key of the slow movement) and, more surprisingly, E major. This one last expression of a remote key, the fact that it is specifically E major, and the presence of a local chromatic mediant relationship all recall the instant in the first movement when a chromatic mediant relationship from A-flat to E marks the beginning of the development section and the sonata's first excursion beyond closely related keys.

Thirdly, as observed above, there are structural features of this sonata that contribute to its expressive power. The alternation of simple and compound meter is one structural feature that merits close attention. The



Fig. 8 (thematic transformation in mvt. III)

first movement begins in simple meter but effectively moves to compound meter (via pervasive triplets) with the arrival of the second theme in the exposition. The movement continues with compound meter (or triplets) until the apex of the movement, the theme in B minor, which restores a strict simple meter which remains in effect until the recapitulation of the second theme and closing section, with their triplets. Meter in the slow movement suggests a ternary form, as the movement begins and ends in a simple duple meter with compound meter in the middle. While the first phrase of the slow movement stands as a section in the movement's tonic D-flat, and the middle six-eight section explores other keys, the fact that the return to simple meter is in F minor rather than the movement's tonic key contradicts a simple reading of this movement as a ternary form and presents us with something better understood as through-composed.

The mid-point of the rousing final movement holds the most astonishing structural surprise, as the the rondo theme undergoes thematic transformation from an elegant and jolly F-major theme in simple quadruple meter to an exciting F-minor display of brilliance in six-eight (Fig. 8). Coming as it does in the middle of the central rondo statement of a five-part

design, this thematic transformation effectively overlays a binary structure upon the rondo structure.

The appearance of E major as the first and last remote tonality, the aforementioned appearance of D minor in the first and last movements, the work's three-movement shape with D-flat as central, the constant alternation of simple and compound meter, and the finale's melding of rondo and binary characteristics (reminiscent of sonata form's inherent dual nature) all work together to suggest a magnificent arch shape and a web of relationships between movements. Westenholz's use of: motivic integration; a richly chromatic tonal plan intimated in the very first phrase and its recurring motive and culminating in the antepenultimate and penultimate tonal areas; and daring structural innovations combine to evince a work well worthy of further study and performance.

Table 1. Sophia Westenholz. Piano Sonata in F Minor

OUTLINE OF FORMAL AND TONAL STRUCTURE						
Measure	Mvt	Sec	Sub-Sec	Features	Tonal Ctr	Relation to Tonic
1	I: Sonata style	EXPOSITION	P	simple meter	f	i
19			T		Ab	III
27			S	compound meter	Ab	III
41			K		Ab	III
57		DEVELOPMENT	Intro		E	#VII
63			main body		A	#III
67					D	#VI
73					G	bII
79					c	v
85					Ab	III
89				simple meter	Db	VI
98					b	#iv (TT)
118					Db	VI
129			retrans		f	i
137		RECAPITULATION	P		f	i
155			T		Db	VI
156					d	#vi
160					f	i
172			S	compound meter	f	i
186			K		f	i
190		—	—	—	—	—
192	II: Through- composed			2/4	Db	VI
204				6/8	→ Ab	III
225				6/8	→ B	#IV (TT)
233				6/8	→ Db	VI
243				2/4	→ f:V	^5
262		—	7 of 8	—	—	—

Table 1. Sophia Westenholz. Piano Sonata in F Minor-1

OUTLINE OF FORMAL AND TONAL STRUCTURE						
Measure	Mvt	Sec	Sub-Sec	Features	Tonal Ctr	Relation to Tonic
263	III: Rondo	A		4/4	F	I
281			trans		–	
299		B			C	V
312			retrans		“	
314					Ab	III
332					Db	VI
337					d	#vi
349		A			F	I
372		A'		Presto assai 6/8	f	i
402		C1			Db	VI
432		C2		dolce	E	#VII
454			retrans		→ f:V	i
480		A'		Presto assai 6/8	f	i
515		–	–	–	–	–