

# An Analysis of the Change from Classicism to Romanticism in Piano Music: An Example of Solo Sonata

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**Abstract:** This article mainly discusses the classical period to the romantic period of piano music is probably changing trend. From the classical period to the first half of the 19th century, or the early and middle period of romanticism, is the piano solo sonata golden age. In this period, the piano solo sonata from the establishment of the basic genre form to the development of the old model was broken, its evolution process reflects the classical music to romantic music aesthetic, form, composition style changes, is the best model to demonstrate these changes.

**Keywords:** Classicism; Romanticism; Piano music; Sonata

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Since the Baroque period, instrumental music gradually got rid of its accompaniment status of vocal polyphony and began to develop as an independent musical genre. The sonata “Sonata” originally means “sound” and has the meaning of “sound at the same time”. It generally refers to all instrumental music at first, and then evolves into pure instrumental music with the core principle of “development” and “reproduction”. Around 1700, sonata, a widely diverse genre, became the center of instrumental music. At the same time, German and Italian musicians dominated the initial development of sonata, among which C. P. E. Bach deserved attention. The ideal of contrasting feelings in music has been accepted by people at that time. Musicians began to seek a fusion of different feelings. Sonata became the carrier of this demand.

Bach’s sons, in their respective compositions, have demonstrated the astonishing inclusiveness of the sonata: whether “gorgeous style” or “emotional style”, born out of the former and slightly antagonistic, the sonata shows formal logic — though ultimately captured and established by Haydn, in short, its potential in earlier developments. Haydn, as the founder of classical music school, began his historical work after he came into contact with some works of C. P. E. Bach. He combined tradition, form, style and genre. Thanks to Haydn’s longevity, these 52 sonatas can be seen in the “evolutionary sense” of Haydn’s composition: 1. Changes in tonality: Most of the early sonatas were composed in the same tonality and mostly in major keys. In the middle of his creation, Haydn began to explore and apply minor keys to the sonatas. In his creation, Haydn had noticed the intense emotion and intensity of the minor keys. 2. Exploration of multiple textures: From the small and simple “Alberti” and chord decomposition accompaniment of the early sonatas to the later large-scale sonatas, most of the composers in the same period have become more complex textures and small attempts at inadequate alignment. Although the style of Haydn’s later works returned to the early relaxation and pleasure, these changes reflected in Haydn’s piano sonatas are also the changes of piano music in this period.

The last Viennese master of music, Beethoven, made the piano solo sonata one of his core compositions, and his exploration of sonata composition helped him to complete other genres of large pieces (symphonies and string quartets). Here is a brief analysis of the history of Beethoven’s life and writing in the period of classicism, in order to facilitate readers to better understand Beethoven’s writing ideas and music aesthetics: Classicism is the fifth phase in the history of Western music (Western Classical, 1750 AD - 1820 AD), corresponding to the period from the middle of the eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century, when Europe was undergoing a period of dramatic change. For European society, the establishment of the colonies in the New World had enabled Europe to gain an accumulation of primitive capital, accompanied by the emergence of a large number of middle classes, who insisted on reforming the old system of decadent rule and actively pursuing their own rights and interests, and the trend of democratic thought

gradually arose. As the embodiment of this democratic trend of thought, the supporters pursued equality and freedom, and believed that music should not be exclusively enjoyed by the nobility, but be open to the public. Compared with the Baroque period, the music of the Classicism period advocated rationality, stressed strict artistic norms and standards, followed the example of ancient Greek and Roman literature and art, and truly opened the era of popular music, laying the foundation and premise for the emergence of western romantic style music.

Based on the above historical influence, after Haydn, Beethoven regarded sonata as the most capable of expressing serious emotion. He fused piano music composing skills with serious and profound thoughts. The rational thought and aesthetic appreciation originated from the Enlightenment made the piano sonata really become a highly philosophical music genre in Beethoven's hands. Sonata at this time whether from the genre form or mode, harmony has developed into a highly self-consistent, symmetrical structure, strict logic of the high-level large-scale music genre. If we take the piano solo sonata of the classical period as a window to peep the development of piano music in this period, we will see a magnificent ascending curve: the piano sonata, as a musical genre, has embodied a regular and strict organizational form like a large building. In Beethoven's sonata creation, the micro and minimal motives have grown perfectly into a huge and interlocking whole under various splitting and reorganizing techniques. Although there are suspicions of a lack of emotional embodiment, a lack of melody, and a buildup of stilted techniques, these problems are overcome in Beethoven's five late sonatas, which are truly perfect works, complete in melody, technique, composition technique, and form. Beethoven took a giant step in the creation of his piano sonatas, he comprehensively explored and expanded the depth of the sonatas in the composition style and the possibility of various techniques, and the expansion of the genre scale and the exploration of the piano skill and sound became one of the representative changes of the piano music creation in this period, although the romantic period of the piano music sound effect and harmony color of the creative exploration changed more thoroughly.

While Schubert's early sonatas followed the ideas of Haydn and Mozart, which were small in size and moderate in speed and reminiscent of 18th-century "flamboyant style" traditions, Schubert's middle sonatas, which were the most typical of Beethoven's middle works, clearly emphasized thematic motivation and strong emotional expression. Schubert's sonatas followed Haydn and Mozart's gorgeous and miniature style, escaped from the lightness of "Italian style", and, like Beethoven, paid attention to the development of motivation, scale and profound personality.... While maintaining the relationship with the creation principles and aesthetic vocal production of the Vienna Music Trio, Schubert took the design of tonality, the excavation of melodic themes and the romantic personal lyric style as his standpoint in sonata creation, and opened up the research and excavation of piano sound and color. Schubert's creative pursuit and style, in Beethoven's late five sonatas can be seen. If we analyze the piano music of this period, we will see that the piano music has completely abandoned the mechanical, granular timbre and timbre structure and turned to the coherent, cantabile timbre and texture to explore its possibility. Let us try to make a few summative sketches of piano music, or instrumental music, from the Baroque period, which was a palace of superb splendor; classical music, which was a symmetrical "temple of giants"; and early romantic music, which became a waterfront cabin: what was exquisite as architecture, but what gave it the value of the former two, was actually the long, coherent, continuous thing that wrapped the building — water, wind, air.

After Schubert, the next leader in piano music was Schumann. In Schumann's piano music creation era is the romantic period in western music history. The artistic style of the Romanticism period was gorgeous, with wild imaginations and extremely exaggerated descriptions. The heroic imagery advocated by classicism is replaced by the emotional expression and "rosy legend" of the absolute reason and loftiness, represented by Schumann's creation. Small characteristic music and piano suite composed by several pieces are popular. Although the sonatas began to decline after Beethoven and Schubert, Schumann wrote three grand piano sonatas. He followed the traditional form and scale, but connected them to the songs. This "fuzziness" is reflected in Schumann's creation, "Schumann's music creation than Schubert and Mendelssohn to be much more complex. Schumann discarded the regular, modern and clear creations and replaced them in a vague way. His insidious treatment of beat overlap, chromatic harmony, prolonged voicing, and unresolved dissonant chords all add to his sense of instability in music (A Brief History of Piano Music Colby, P194), which is reflected in Schumann's preferred characteristic music. Here, combined with Chopin's piano sonata creation, it is not difficult to explore the musicians' piano creation, the focus of the genre is really shifting. Chopin's three piano sonatas show his achievements in traditional large-scale music, but, as an outstanding musician who tapped the potential of various characteristics of music genres, Chopin is consistent with Schumann's treatment in the traditional genre of sonatas, he did not change the form of sonatas, on the contrary, he fully followed the traditional form of writing. In his piano compositions, Chopin simply used the form of the sonata as a nutrient for his other major genres (for example, his First Narrative

in G Minor is widely regarded as a sonata form). The decline of sonata form is proof of this “scale solidification” of creation. This phenomenon can be proved from the side, piano music genre in the early romantic to the middle development, has developed to “characteristic ditty” or a new type of large-scale comprehensive genre. The decline of piano sonata as a traditional genre is the dawn of other instrumental genres and personalized music.

Liszt’s Piano Sonata in B Minor is the last one to be listed in this paper. As a rare untitled work of Liszt, its grim and solemn style is similar to Liszt’s symphonic poem. The dramatic and symphonic nature of this work is the development direction of the piano sonata after Liszt. Based on the birth of the modern grand piano mentioned above, the longer strings and stronger structure make it possible for Liszt to pursue the symphony of the piano sonata. Liszt’s use of the third, sixth and octave double tones and dense multiple chords in his sonatas undoubtedly set the direction for the piano sonatas to move towards more complex sound and music processing.

The style of classical and romantic works is not diametrically opposed, it is like an evolutionary tree, branches become clearer and clearer. The development history of piano sonata is like the echo of historical philosophy. It also reflects the development of piano music: different composers, different times of music style in the development of retrospective, split, opposition and unity.

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